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# The Polyvocal Era

## Gianluca Iumiento

Actors and actresses are presently surrounded by unique narratives in which different elements of the story are constantly in conflict with each other. They play roles and characters full of contradictions. It's becoming increasingly difficult for actors and actresses to grasp the essence of the human beings they play by searching for the 'core' of the role. Writing for film and theater is increasingly reflecting a world that is complex and paradoxical.

How does an actor or actress work to represent humanity in such a complex scenario?

The 2018 edition of the Oslo International Acting Festival will explore the effect on an actor or actress when theater and film writing experiments with form, continuity and character. A human being, as a fictional figure, can be understood today as a polyvocal construct – the role speaks from different places inside itself. The role possesses different goals, often in opposition with each other. The role consists of different themes.

The festival will investigate: How classic text work can be used in relation to new contemporary drama, how actors and directors can discover new reading strategies when the classics strategies stop working, how an actor or actress can act as a dramaturg on stage, and what tools the stage performer has for developing new text.

The festival has gathered some of the most prominent teachers in the field of polyvocality.

This was the text Øystein Stene and I used to present the IV edition of Oslo International Acting Festival, that took place at KHiO, Oslo during June 2018.

The festival was inspired by the several artistic experiences developed through the European funded project EU COLLECTIVE PLAYS! and functioned as a platform for research and discussion concerning the themes and techniques of polyvocal theater.

In order to conclude our four-year project, I asked some of the colleagues that shared this artistic journey to write a series of articles about Polyvocality.

This Magazine is the result of this final effort, and the articles explore several themes touched upon during the development of the project.

They offer considerations about the aspects of collective writing, about the new reading strategies developed during these years, about their experiences at Oslo International Acting Festival, about

fiction novel writing and about acting and directing in the time of polyvocal theater.

EU COLLECTIVE PLAYS! started as an artistic project on experimental theater writing based on the theories organized by Paul C. Castagno in his book *"New Playwriting Strategies, language and media in the 21st century"* (Routledge 2012); and inspired by Bakhtin's literary theories, but it rapidly transformed and became much more than a project where group of writers develops new plays.

EU COLLECTIVE PLAYS! became a wave that moved across the theater field from Scandinavia through the UK and Germany to the South of Europe and the Balkans.

It gave rise to questions about acting training, theater aesthetics, directing methods and text reading strategies. Each professional approaching the work of the EU COLLECTIVE PLAYS! ended up reconsidering the way their profession has been done and the established theater vocabulary they had used to that point in their careers.

The question seemed obvious: If writing is changing, how do those that make theater respond? And if those that make theater are changing their practices as a consequence of it, how aware are they about it? Do we still own the terminology we use in our practice?

This is probably the greatest achievement of EU COLLECTIVE PLAYS! Together, of course, with the production and publication of nine unique new plays.

It has initiated a collective conversation and discourse about the theater of the future that will continue to grow and develop beyond the borders of the four years of this EU funded artistic project.

It will continue in the conversations between colleagues both inside the institutions that produced this experiment, but also in the everyday practice of each artist involved in the activities of EU COLLECTIVE PLAYS!

As Artistic Curator of Oslo International Acting Festival and Project Leader of the Nordic group of EU COLLECTIVE PLAYS! I am proud and happy to present this volume *Zero* of what I hope will in the future be a periodic magazine about experimental theater and artistic research.

Thank you for reading!

Sincerely  
Gianluca Iumiento  
Associate Professor  
Director, Actor, Writer  
Festival Curator

THE

ORY

# Drama For a New Millennium

## Øystein Stene

New ways of writing dramatic texts are always emerging, and new forms of language for stage productions are developing. Since the 1990s, many people have described the situation as *postdramatic*. The German theatre scholar Hans-Thies Lehman, in his book *Postdramatic Theatre* (1999), claims that we find ourselves in a situation in which we can no longer take it for granted that a given text is the starting point for a theatre production.

Sometimes the text is shaped by the theatre group itself during the rehearsal process, other times the starting point is a director's concept, a choreographed sequence, or music. The text is often non-authoritative; it is just one of many elements, none of which have more value than the other.

Some will claim that theatre texts themselves have become post- or non-dramatic. Many of the parameters that defined classic and modern dramas are gone. Examples can be the absence of clear characters or obvious conflicts. Theatre texts can sometimes be paragraphs devoid of directions as to who should say what, and they can lack what we recognize as a situation or event in the classic dramatic sense.

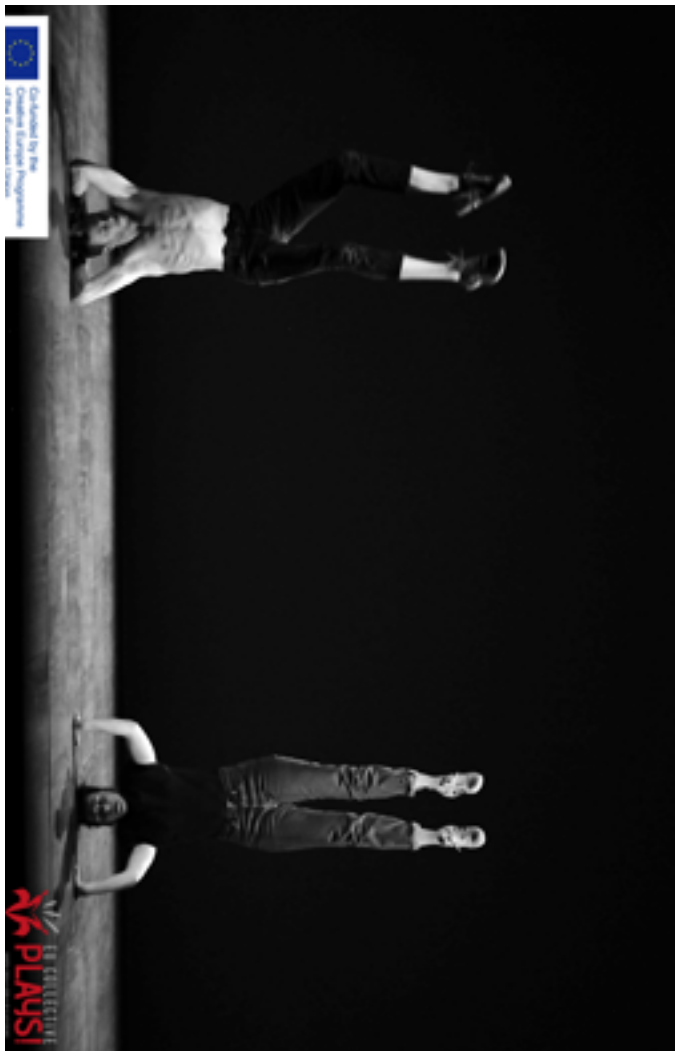
It can seem as though the very understanding of what a drama is, is changing. Manuscripts for theatre plays and films have also changed from containing dramatic sequences to increasingly reflecting on what a drama is—not simply by commenting on earlier dramas, but just as much by exploring the fundamental problems related to conflicts, situations and characters or roles.

This trend began in earnest in the 1960s. In the play *Offending the Audience* (1966), by the Austrian playwright Peter Handke, the actors speak directly to the public, about theatre, and about the public themselves, in the form of insults. The text has no

clear action and no clear characters. At its premier in Frankfurt, the public reacted by answering back, returning insults or leaving the theatre altogether. At other performances of this work, the public have come on stage and participated directly in the work. All this led to the director's and actors' surprise and dismay: they had broken the contracts which the theatre-going public were used to, and the public reacted spontaneously.

Members of the audience tried to find out what their role was in this new context devoid of any apparently recognizable fiction, and where the actors appeared to be speaking directly to them. They understood their role in a new way. And this new aspect—the public's relation to the piece that is presented—has increasingly become part of drama.

The aspect that creates drive and progression in this type of performance is quite different from that found in classic dramaturgical models. According



1 Who the hell started all this (The hurtling stillness) by Agate Øksendal Kaupang based on Dejan Dukovski performed at Piccolo Teatro di Milano, September 2016”

to the classic thinking, such as one finds in Robert McKee's work *Story* (1998), there is often a distinction between three types of conflict: inner conflict, in which the character is in conflict with him/herself (the novel is a typical genre for this type of conflict); personal conflict, in which the characters are in conflict with each other (soap operas are typical examples); and extra-personal conflict, that is, when the character is in conflict with the world, in the form of an institution, a physical limitation, or something similar (this is typically found in action films). McKee states that the perfect drama contains all three layers of conflict simultaneously.

Such a categorization does not take into account what I would call metaconflict: when the story is in conflict with itself or its public. Peter Handke's play was part of the avantgarde and new experimental theatre, but today we can just as easily find examples in mainstream TV and films. In a series like *Mr. Robot*, the main character's relation to the viewer, which he often describes as his imaginary friend while he looks into the camera, is a device that drives the story forward. Another example is Tarrantino's *Kill Bill*, which changes genres repeatedly, making us once again aware that we are watching a movie. When something becomes too egregious and violent, he jumps to an animation sequence or introduces comedy.

In such ways, dramatic texts often express an awareness of themselves as dramas. The characters can also go into and out of different roles, into and out of dramatic situations, or they can comment on situations or figures. More than in the past, dramatic texts tend to have narrators or commentators who make us aware of the whole theatrical or fictional situation. This we can see in well-known and frequently performed works by authors such as Sarah Kane, Elfriede Jelinek and Heiner Müller. We can also find the tendency in works by film directors and screenwriters such as Lars von Trier and Michael Haneke.

Obviously, a theatre text that relates self-reflectively and critically to the idea of playing a character can no longer be staged in a classical modernistic fourth-wall based aesthetic. Whereas in the past, the actor's most important task was to identify emotionally, mentally, behaviourally, and so forth, with a text and a role, the task is more complex today.

The tremendous increase in documentary theatre or types of theatre that require public participation on different levels entails that the actor must also present text as would a lecturer, as a facilitator. To take into account that we actually find ourselves in a theatre, that an audience is sitting there, and that they should be talked to—not as a fictive element, but as what they actually are—is become a more sought-after skill in theatrical performances.

Turning the audience into actors is another tendency first seen in the 1960s. American theatre groups such as The Living Theatre and Performance Group created productions such as *Paradise Now* and *Dionysus in 69* in 1968, in which the public's participation and intervention were a planned and necessary part of the stage play. In the performance artist Marina Abramović's work *Lips of Thomas* (1975), the public intervened and stopped the action after the artist had cut herself and then laid down on ice while continuing to bleed. Today, happening can just as easily be a concept used by people organizing a party as by experimental art theatre.

In the humanities and theatre science, there has long been talk of a performative turn. This means that the very setting and situation in which a drama

is played out has become an important part of the way we think about drama. Rather than writing a piece with a theatre troupe in mind, a dramatist will now be more prone to write it for a specific context. The performative situation is thus already imbedded in the dramatist's work.

Traditionally, the dramatic text has suggested a battle and a conflict, and the actors have tried to recreate it, but in the last few decades, many people involved in theatre have put greater emphasis on the deeply human aspect of sharing. We want to share experiences, stories, life, information and perspectives. It is also possible to see this as offering new opportunities in the field of drama and acting: there does not primarily need to be a character involved in a battle, but someone who facilitates, who hosts, who enables experiences—who creates opportunities for joint exploration. We today have a completely different tolerance for new performative contracts and roleplay; LARP (live action role playing) has become something that people with no theatrical background or interest in acting participate in.

Much new drama also pays a lot of attention to language. The characters are created through slang, dialects or sociolects much more than before—a tendency especially notable in Anglo-American dramas. While in the past, dramas were often performed in normalized language, now there is increasing variation. If we turn again to mainstream film and TV, it is more and more common for actors to perfect sociolects and dialects, as for instance in the series *Wire*. Even constructed languages or so-called 'conlangs' are becoming more common, as in *Harry Potter* and *Game of Thrones*.

In theatrical drama, seemingly naturalistic works can suddenly have a monologue that breaks with the form—much like singing can do in a musical. When working with such texts that are linguistically and formally aware, an intense emphasis on rhythm, harmony and poetry is needed. We can therefore say that many of the more theatrical skills in an actor's work with text and romantic drama have gained renewed importance.

The tendency is described as polyvocality by the American dramatist and professor Paul C. Castagno, in his book *New Playwriting Strategies* (2001). Polyvocal means there is more than one voice, in contrast to monovocal, only one voice. Even though older dramas could have many characters that said conflicting things, the ideal was that the theatre text should be aesthetically unified and have the same form of language.

Today, claims Castagno, theatre texts can contain multiple meanings, layers of language and more contradictions than before. This we can also see through the recirculation of text, that is, text which was originally created for a different context, but now used on stage. The practice is a bit like that of using ready-mades in visual art: objects that were not originally meant to be art, become art when they are mounted in a gallery and given an art context.

Postdramatic theatre, the culture of sharing, metaconflict, the role of facilitator, the use of multiple forms of language, polyvocality—all these concepts and perspectives require that stage art and the public must orient themselves in new ways. At the same time, the old dramatic theatre with classic character development also has a central place, as in TV and Internet-based film series.

We can of course ask ourselves whether these are new tendencies in theatre texts, or whether there are new ways of reading that have caused us

to notice other elements in the texts. Many will probably argue that Shakespeare was also polyvocal, or that the function of the chorus in Greek tragedy plays a spectator's role and creates metaconflict.

But whether or not today's texts have completely different qualities than in the past, or whether we read dramas in new ways—or simply have a different language for discussing the texts and readings—we cannot get around this conversation and all the consequences it has for the theatre and the linguistic forms of drama. This does not mean the old methods and techniques are irrelevant, but that dramatists and actors must explore new strategies and fine more approaches to theatre.

# Art and Polyvocality

## Tomi Janezic

Polyvocality has to do with (the inclusion of) multiple voices, maybe a range of different voices. In thinking of polyvocality “diversity” comes to mind: an integration of different views, opinions, and streams of discourse. Polyvocality is in contrast with univocality, and with grand, “authoritative”, “totalitarian” narratives.

Polyvocality in literature has to do with a work having f. e. multiple narrators, or following varied narrative voices, and perspectives from different characters. It doesn’t provide a single, monological, authorial vision. It provokes contrasts, differences, or even contradictions, paradoxes, and doesn’t necessarily (try to) resolve them. It encourages diverse readings.

Bakhtin’s term polyphony refers to simultaneity of different (independent, unmerged, fully valid) voices/styles/references/assumptions/consciousnesses etc., which are not a speaker’s “own”. He saw the linguistic energy of the novel arising from conflict of such voices, representing distinct points of view of the world, and understood the diversity of voice as defining characteristic of the novel, which should not only function through heteroglossia (“the other(s)’ word”), but also promote it. (In his view, even the main unit of meaning: a word - is embedded in a history of expressions by others, and it is formed through speaker’s relation to Otherness.) He understood the role of the novel in drawing the authoritative into question.

We associate polyvocality to perspectivism, or eclecticism, or even syncretism, or to the interdisciplinary and multicultural, or to pluralism: philosophical, logical, epistemological, metaphysical, ontological, cosmic pluralism, pluralism as a political philosophy (as recognition and affirmation of diversity within a political body), value pluralism, religious pluralism, clinical pluralism (in psychotherapy), pluralist theory of truth. If there’s so called pluralistic ignorance, there might also be polyvocal intelligence/knowledge (found f. e. in groups that know how to give space to diversity and use its creative potentials).

We think of heterogeneity, or polystylism, or bricolage, and of postmodernism, intertextuality etc. when we think of polyvocal art. We connect polyvocality to simultaneous presence of multiple, to different ways of being and knowing, to different (interlinked) individual/temporal/spatial/conceptual/contextual perspectives/realities (that not only co-exist, but inform and shape one another) to capture complexity.

In theatre and performing arts polyvocal would probably fall into the category of post-dramatic.

Collectivism stands (surprisingly?) in opposition to polyvocality. It implies subscription to a collectivistic worldview and prioritization of the group over self. (Sense of self is in this case defined in relation to others.) There’s even a relationship between collectivism and cognition (s. c. holistic cognitive style reflected in memory, visual perception, attributional style, categorization schemas etc.) manifested f. e. in East Asian societies.

We could argue that polyvocality (on the other hand) has its roots in a context that values individualism.

It could be interpreted politically and/or ideologically. It is not just about many voices. It is about different voices. It seems to stand for (the idea of) diversity. How is this diversity organized? There are different types of organized collectivity according to (promotion of) values/ideas that it puts above others. Pluralistic polyvocality seems to stand against authoritarian, totalitarian, hierarchical etc. Is it anarchical or under certain rule? Polycracy or monocracy? Ideocracy or idiocracy?

It is complex but easier to answer in an individual artist case. The topic becomes challenging in a collective creative process.

Anyway, the artistic question – or should we say compositional – when we deal with polyvocality is not the question of diversity but of what is framing it, or better - the question of coherence.

Art is composing from (something) existing (elements, material). It is putting together. It is artificial (it wants to be seen and understood as something distinct from nature), and what is artificial about it is exactly the composing. It creates something that hasn’t existed, composed earlier.

1



The elements were already there. What's new is the new combination/form/structure/sequence that hasn't existed earlier. It is the new connection/association (of diverse, distinctive parts) (= new polyvocality?) that provokes new meaning(s). Art creates new realities by composing - these compositions are realities, that hasn't existed earlier.

The need to do art might come from the urge to create new stories, new solutions, new fictions, new meanings that will give us comfort. They are new interpretations of our existence. Such new views of the world in a contemporary context (or should we say since modernity) can't be absolute anymore. They're (created and understood as) temporary, provisory, and relative (= in relation or in proportion to something else). This means they're also polyvocal or at least aware of a polyvocal context.

Art doesn't imitate, but rather stands for something. (In fact we are impressed in art by specific and surprising distortions/alterations of objects/sounds/actions etc. that we know from life. Our curiosity and imagination are turned on by the unusual, the unpredictable. Elements (people, things etc.) that we recognize in a piece of art are changed, different, other, they are a new, different entity of a different material, which gives them a status of (simultaneously) being and not being what/who we think they are. They are imaginations.) Art substitutes someone or something. It is not a copy. It is an altered presence. In being an altered presence, it is also a variant, a version, and a (polyvocal) potentiality.

A work of art is in the midst of other works of art and can't escape interrelation, it finds itself in a contextual polyvocality. We perceive and value a work in a polyvocal context. A work might not be read/understood without other works. We might think of it as something isolated, but actually it's always a relation (and we can't avoid experiencing it in relation).

With some imagination we could find a seed of polyvocality in every act of artistic creativity. Composition is (by definition) a play of different voices, a relation/drama/tension/contrast/conflict/friction/dynamic/movement/compliance/rhythm/matching/echo/balance/proportion/pattern/harmony/connection/unity etc. of different parts. One (piece of art) is created from many (parts), which have different functions/roles/voices in the whole. Art (always) creates with/from "diverse," because in nature "identical" doesn't exist, it is an idea, a name.

What about the coherence of this diversity? A polyvocal work doesn't want to be uniform. (It's essential quality has to do with various, different, disparate, nonidentical, unlike, distinctive or divergent, alternative...) Uniformity is the quality of being consistent. And consistency in logic means freedom from contradiction. But polyvocal art wants to create contradictions. Its intentions might be just the opposite of firmness, durability, and persistency: ephemerality, instability, change, fragility,

solubility, etc. Polyvocality seems to play with (in) consistency in order to give space (and promote) numerous different (interpretative) possibilities of holding the work together (and making it meaningful). Meaning is being created when something apparently inconsistent becomes consistent through interpretation and associative understanding, through links that are being established between elements/voices. A polyvocal work can play with dissociating (deconstructing) such links (meanings) and establish possibilities of new ones.

The strategy of polyvocality is to destabilize. It addresses our need/ability to (separate and) name, and to (re)connect/link/associate, and contextualize/comprehend, and predict/visualize/experience something new (more complex). It addresses the need for coherence (meaning) and the ability to create/imagine it.

Coherence is the quality of cohering, of working together, it is internal consistency, the quality of forming a unified (but not necessarily uniform or authoritative) whole, a meaningful arrangement of parts – in linguistics it is a semantic relationship between different parts of the same text, in other words – what makes a text semantically meaningful. Coherence has to do with cohesion – unity, togetherness, solidarity, bond, connection, linkage, interrelatedness. In chemistry it means various forces (f. e. intermolecular) that hold solids and liquids together. But it refers to the tendency of similar or identical particles/surfaces to cling to one another; on the other hand adhesion is the tendency of dissimilar particles or surfaces to cling to each other.

Cohesion or adhesion – there's probably an (invisible) process of adhering going on in experiencing/reading a polyvocal work of art in terms of (associative/cognitive) linking, but even more so in the impression of two or more things becoming glued together (becoming symbolic = that which is cast together). One can't perceive/experience/read/understand them separately anymore. It is a glued new entity/(un)reality, or an impression of such new (un)reality/symbol. (Impression literally means to press into, to print or stamp. It is a pressing on the mind. The work literally makes a new mark, prints a new connection into our brain.) What makes it coherent is our inability to experience it out of this context (imprint): fragmented, deconstructed into its primal elements.

There's a correspondence going on: a relationship of (surprisingly inconsistent) elements of a work of art (as things or facts) on one hand, and the meaning(s) that are being projected through the created/imagined/fantasized interrelatedness/connections (of and to those elements) on the other. A relationship of voices and the invisible glue that we call coherence. Correspondence – or in other words – a (meaningful) experience of a polyvocal work of art.

# Language at Play

## Tale Næss

### A short essay on Arne Lygres *Let You be* and others language-based plays

In his book *New Playwriting Strategies*, Paul C. Castagno states: As such, language prevails as the dominant force in the shaping of characters, action and theme. The playwright orchestrates the voices in the text, entering into a kind of dialogue with character and language. The playwright is open to language in the widest sense... While "writing through" the other (often multiple) voices, the playwright remains the creative and orchestrating force behind the text.

In Norwegian playwriting several writing strategies has been living happily side by side for the last 40-50 years. Some plot based, or character-based traditional strategies, some so called post-dramatic and therefore language-based strategies. As I see them, many of the language-based playwrights in Norwegian performative writing have belonged to a late modernist tradition, like Jon Fosse, Maria Tryti Wennerød and Arne Lygre.

During the last ten years both Wennerøds and Lygre has taken different directions with their writing. Wennerøds exploring more theatrical and baroque strategies, like in her latest play *Goliath* (2018), while Lygre's playwriting has almost gone in the opposite direction. Slowly thinning out all theatrics, all excesses, ploys etc, leaving language itself to do the work.

#### A Language based event

In Lygre's plays, action is a language-based event. The orchestration is founded in the act of discovery. It's all about dialogism as its most fundamental level. (Paul C. Castagno, *New Playwriting Strategies*).

In Lygre's play, *Let You be*, the dialogue goes like this:

- We are married, she said.

Or:

- It is me you love, I said.

So, Lygre uses language works as a frame. As a place for the events themselves to be played out. The actual acts, or events: getting married, questioning somebodies love – comes to the surface through the framing of the added statement: I said, that leads to an indirect, not a direct way of addressing. The characters point to themselves, as well as to the event. And, maybe most importantly, to the act of addressing in itself. There is a doubling here. It's both the act that is important, addressing it, and involving the audience in the fact that it has been addressed. Through organizing the elements, or the language act like this, Lygre lets the act of addressing itself step into the foreground. It is neither the marriage, nor the questioning of the love that creates the actions, - it is the framing that goes

on. The fact that "I" said it.

It is language that constitutes and brings Lygre's events and characters to life. They exist there, in language, and as language. In *let You be*, the language acts instigate and take on the form of fragments, of sub-plots. These events resemble real life changing events: Two women gets killed by an accidental stranger. A man knows he is dying and befriends another, promises him that he will inherit everything he owns, as long as he takes care of him on his deathbed. Another character, a woman, wants a divorce and confides in a friend, but rather than letting these events fully take center stage, or being played out – they more often than not fizzle out, or get replaced by seemingly other sub-plots, or stories. In themselves, these sub-plots or stories constitutes tiny tragedies, or unambitious miniature comedies, but they are never at the core of what is really going on in the text. The main events continue to be the fact that somebody is pointing to them, addresses them and it is this fact that gives them, or takes away – their values. It is as if Lygre constantly insists on it doing that. On language ability to give or take away meaning and value. In this way, it's the act of addressing in itself, that gives any of this importance or real meaning. A meaning that can be taken away from it, as fast and as easy as it was given. And as the focus shifts, the characters shift. One turning into another, a boy becoming a man, a man becoming a woman. Nothing is ever stable, only language. Language is the creator of this universe, and the form that holds it all. It is both the space and the event. The giver of time and place. The creator and the destroyer. It gives the play its drive and its rhythm. It contextualizes and emotes the characters, becoming the what which takes place between them.

GO. GO. GO.

- We are married, I said, it's me you love, I said,  
give me another chance, I said -

These are the opening lines in *let You be*.

- We are married - is a condition.

- It's me you love, - is an outcry, a supplication.

- Give me a chance.

These addresses kick-start the play, and the relationship that constantly develops between the condition, the outcry and the supplication triggers both feelings and responses. The triggering of feelings and responses happens in three parallel spaces at the same time: in the text itself, with the actors on stage, and in the audience. This creates a feeling of urgency. Something must solve this situation! And this urgency does not just belong to the story, the character or the plot, - it is just as much placed in the audience. After all, they are the ones who are being addressed, who are getting involved in this. This continuous addressing of the audience is one of the main conditioning structures in the play. These simple addresses immediately generate a feeling of progress and offers the text a certain dynamic. It makes us entangled in it. It makes us ask: What has happened here? What makes her tell us this? And why is she telling us this right now? Did he leave her? Did he stay? And if he stayed, did everything work out for them in the end?

Lygre's play ends in an imperative:

- Go.

- Go.

- Go.

It is never clear whether this is an order, a challenge or just a fact. This is the only thing the characters can do at this point. Go on. Continue. And as

long as the text is being played out, as long as we are there in the theatre, in our lives – as long as we have a language we can go on.

There is a bit of Becket in this. An echo of End-game maybe, or a way to get away from it, that places Lygre in line with the modernists. Until there is nowhere left to go. Until we have reached the end. Until we cease to breathe, cease to be human. Until we are merely a rotting body. Matter. Mud. Earth.

### Language as Action

When we refer to actions or events, to cause and effect, like in this Arne Lygre's play – we are talking about language-acts acted out by physical bodies and voices, in a given space at a given time. This might sound abstract and feeble, but language is a powerful tool. If one uses the terms from Aristoteles rhetoric, addresses creates feelings of anger and joy, interest and disinterest.

The way Lygre frames his character within the language makes us relate to them, or empathize with them, but in this sudden unstable shifting world, a character that one moment ago could make you cry, could the next moment leave you cold or indifferent.

Through varied artistry of addressing, the new language based playwright, has re-theatricalized the play and given the actor a new set of tools. This theater re-theatricalization comes from the generic and transformative qualities that language brings to the stage. Language is both real, and totally manufactured. Through insisting on the statements or addresses in a here and now, it frames the situations. It can make things come alive, and at the same time, it has the potential of dissolving or transforming them or letting them disappear altogether.

The act of addressing belongs to drama, states Aristoteles in his book on rhetoric. These acts of addressing influences the audience through ethos

or through pathos.

In a play, characters address both each other and themselves through dialogues and monologues. They can address the audience and leave the narrative, and the combinations and types of addresses are endless. There are outbursts, confessions, and information shared. There are witness-statements, curses, attacks and seductions. In the address, and in addressing - language becomes action.

### The Baroque of the hybrid versus language as form

In Lygre's plays, language takes on an almost sculptural quality. His works are the opposite of the hybrid. Although it entails potential of the hybrid in its language-based focus, it stays true to its path. Morphing and exploring, even language as dead matter, but staying almost surgically inside its own genre. Its own language universe.

In Wennerød's latest play Goliath, small scenes are being played out in a block like structure. Each with its own headline. Some resembling poetry, others in the form of monologues addressing the audience directly. And some as dialogue sequences, verging on the affective, the satirical, or a kind of hyper state of reality insisting on a theatrical, even gestic quality both in the text and in the way it presents itself to a potential interpreter, being a performer or a director.

The kings and queens of Lygre's plays are the language-based characters. Quoting the modernist Mac Wellman, he says that in modernist literature: The actor, rather than "representing" as character, is the "plastic material" that can become whatever ... Language is the playwrights' primary material, and their characters are configurations of language rather than vice versa.

The text plays on the myth, as does the title, and it derives from realism. Here the dead can come alive, an unborn foetus can talk, and life is as staged as it is real.

Wennerød's world has always had a touch of the burlesque. But never before has the hybrid form been so outspoken as in Goliath.

Paul C. Castagno states, that in the play, one makes up new realities, realities that enters in dialogue with the real world. This is true both for Lygre and Wennerød's plays. Both represent an independent will to create theatricality through language. Worlds that needs no defending because they are based on an intrinsic inbuilt dialogism. Lygre through his addressing, and how the addresses pull the audience into the chore of the play. Wennerød through her composition, and through her will to interact with a landscape beyond her text. A mythical landscape. And a sort of theatre pre modernism. Theatre as we knew it when Shakespeare wrote it, maybe even in classical times. When one could talk to the Gods, and even summon them down to earth.

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# Interaction Technique and Polyvocal Theater

## Gianluca Iumiento

THE EU COLLECTIVE PLAYS! aims at promoting the creation of plays that are the result of a collaboration of playwrights of different nationalities.

The playwrights meet and cooperate to create a narrative structure which is organic but at the same time incorporates different perspectives, styles, languages and idioms.

The play's final draft is entrusted to one playwright who rejects the homogenization of the different styles, but rather, tries to highlight their contrasts by creating a collective narrative structure which resembles a cubist painting.

### Objectives

Promoting international cooperation between playwrights and theatre organizations of different nationalities in the creation and staging of collective plays in order to internationalize and/or strengthen their international reputation, careers and activities at a European and global level.

Testing an enlargement of theatre audience by the diffusion of narratives characterized by "internal dialogism".

Stimulating the interest of audiences in European creative works by expanding the idea of European citizenship through polyphonic plays.

Testing new forms of manageable transnational theatre groups and productions.

Staging showcase of Collective Plays within important European Festivals.

These are just some of the goals that EU COLLECTIVE PLAYS! had set for its four-year activity. However, it quickly became clear that such a project would have a deeper impact on the theater world. An impact that would be difficult to confine to the experiences of writing and staging experimental plays.

The ideas that Paul Castagno precisely articulates in his book *New Playwriting Strategies*, open a wider discussion and range of experimentation that touch the very foundations of modern acting training and the common classical ideas of theater directing.

For years, the conversation between the modern and the post-modern has animated the creators of theater throughout Europe and America. This contraposition has been going on for decades on all fronts, including: Aesthetic, ethic, economic, productive, and finally, pedagogic.

Free groups in opposition to National and Regional Theaters, state-financed theaters confront privately developed ones, new branches of theater studies such as Performance Studies at NYU in contrast to classical Stanislavsky based National Academies.

New books constantly are published supporting each side of the debate, including the groundbreaking book *Post Dramatic Theater* of German scholar Hans-Thies Lehmann or Professor Sharon Carnicke's *Stanislavski in Focus*.

In this complex territory of theory and practice, Paul Castagno's ideas create an involuntary

bridge between modern and post-modern theater thinking.

*New Playwriting Strategies* -- inspired by literary theories of scholar Michail Bakhtin -- is a practical and pragmatic book that presents, organizes and puts in practice innovative ideas under the term Polyvocality.

Polyvocality means opening up to the complexity of our globalized and fragmented world where art is no longer the result of the creation of an individual, single, brilliant mind but the result of a complex interaction of elements already existing and intelligently assembled to create constantly new forms by groups of artists.

Polyvocality opens up the complexity of meetings and dialogues that generates theater art and performance in the 21st century. It explains concretely and effectively how old and new strategies coexist in a complex network of experiences and dialogic conversations. It's a way of explaining that theater art contains, within itself, different voices that coexist; sometimes in conflict, and sometimes in discourse.

With this article, I would like to explore two aspects that were the focus of my artistic research the last four years: Acting training and text analysis.

In 2007, I started researching acting methods and approaches in order to frame a new way of working for actors that would respond the needs and complexity of performance art in the 21st century.

My starting point was the classical approach of Stanislavsky which provides the basis for the techniques of Meisner and Michael Chekov. I eventually combined these methods with those coming from the tradition of improv theater such as Viola Spolin (known as the mother of American improv theater) and English Clive Barker (*Theater Games*). Finally, I incorporated the ideas on theater performance developed in German Theater by groundbreaking directors such as Frank Castorf and René Pollesch.

Using this approach, I taught to actors and directors for over a decade using the name: Interaction Technique. This technique focuses on the study of human interaction in order to expand the possibilities of transformation and creation of each actor.

Working as a playwright in the EU Collective Plays! and reading about polyvocality in Castagno's book I realized that Interaction Technique was in its essence a polyvocal approach to acting.

I realized that the training I had developed aimed to create a dialogic practice between all sources of creation within the performer, without necessarily dominating them or fully comprehending them, but instead and more precisely, by creating the space for these different sources to meet, exchange, crash and collapse into one another.

The actor I tried to train was what I now call the Polyvocal Actor. A performer cable of shifting focus from one source of imagination to the other in an increasingly rapid way.

In Interaction Technique, creation comes from a new form of listening while facilitating the different potentiality of action to develop the performative space. An actor using this approach does not worry about the coherence of interpretation nor the justification for each action at any given time.

Within this way of thinking, acting creativity appears spontaneously, forming links that create different possibilities for interpretation and new meaning in the space. The actor's creativity consists with listening to these possibilities and transforming them into active stage choices.

Classical acting training usually has neutrality has its goal.

It aims to bring each actor to a state of zero, an artistic place where the actor can develop himself/herself from the choices demanded by the truth of the play. Usually, actors work to understand each aspect of the character. They try to psychologically justify each decision or action. They work to find a sort of core essence of the character that will manifest itself through a series of physical and psychological actions during the performance.

The character in classical acting is recognizable. It usually has a precise and specific will, a back story and a narrative purpose.

In Interaction Technique, such as in polyvocal writing, the character is paradoxical and the result of the crash of language and different impulses/voices of creation in the space. The actor is not dominating his/her creation on stage or understanding each and every deep secret of his/her performance, but instead is in dialogue with all the possibilities of interpretation that are given in any moment, creating active links between potentialities of human interaction.

In Interaction Technique, the character is a point of view on reality -- A fragmented reality that is created by language and behavior, not necessary by an active will or purpose.

In Interaction Technique, the actor is constantly trying to create links in real-time between himself/herself as a private person on stage (the Private I), the professional person on stage doing his/her job (the Professional I), and the resulting creation of the interaction with the artistic material, including: the text, costumes, lights, body language, makeup and so on... (the I as Artistic Creation).

These different selves can agree with each other. They can oppose each other. They can fight each other. They can try to dominate each other. But eventually, in polyvocal acting techniques, they will end up in a dialogic form of exchange, acknowledging each other's existence in time and space.

For examples, an actor's Private I could be feeling sick while on stage playing Kostja in Anton Chekov's 'The Seagull'. The Private I could then be shaking with fever and looking for a way to warm up on stage, contracting all muscles of the body and manifesting this in body language. At the same time, the actor's Professional I could be intent in catching the mark of the light and hitting the key words that would give his/her speech a vivid rhythm as agreed during rehearsals with the director. And while doing this, the actor's I as Artistic Creation (Kostja of Chekov) could be intent in winning the love of Nina while convincing her that she will perform amazingly in the coming amateurial play stages at Kostja's mother's summer house.

This contradictory clash of elements would be present at the same time in front of the eyes of the audience. The audience would actively witness this ongoing conflict between the different roles and voices of the actor. The audience could at this point

actively choose to focus on some of these voices within the actor or even more on the interaction between them, interpreting this complex network of behaviors as part of the play, or as disturbing for the development of the show. A classical reaction from the actor would try to control these voices within himself/herself in order to censor the ones that are not immediately appropriate to the idea of the play.

This form of artistic censorship or need to control on the part of the actor, is the outcome of a very typical, classical idea of acting and it is the consequence of the training of Stanislavsky derived techniques.

What often happens intuitively with performers that are not trained in a classical way, is that they let go on this need for control, becoming often very spontaneous on stage and unpredictable. This quality is often described as non-acting. The audience would see that the actor is not trying to control some of the impulses or voices he/she has on stage in favor of others.

With the polyvocal way of thinking and through Interaction Technique, the actor is trained to facilitate the dialogue between these three sources of impulse in any given moment, opening for spontaneity, complexity of behavior and unpredictability.

The Private I, the Professional I and the I as Artistic Creation would then be in a constant exchange, giving to the stage action a form of paradoxical development that would help the material of the play to interact with the spectators in a way that would give space for the audience to interpret the play and create personal meaning.

Interaction Technique trains actors to remain in contact with the whole of the creation, developing in the actor a form for polyvocal dramaturgical awareness, so that they can continuously contextualize their choices in dialogue with the universe of the play and in dialogue with the interpretation of the viewers. This gives focus to the theatrical event, the live aspect of performing, as the moment when audience and actors together understand the deeper artistic, human, ethical, moral, aesthetical implications of the material that is performed.

All of the exercises of the technique focus on this dramaturgical awareness. They make the actors understand stage action as a dramaturgical choice. In any given moment, plenty of impulses are in motion, and both audience and actors are sensitive to a vast potentiality of things that could become actions. The polyvocal actor acknowledges these potentialities in active dialogue with the audience, transforming actions in the constant contraction of a wider range of possibilities. Making the audience feel the presence of everything that is not happening but that could



happen in the room, emphasizes the danger and the emotional cost of each action and decision.

In this way, the focus of the performance can constantly shift between the text, the physical behavior, the power of the aesthetic image, as it shifts between the choices of the Private I, the Professional I and the I as Artistic Creation.

Each time the show plays and meet a new audience, the actor can find new focuses, new pauses, new forms for interaction between the different voices of the play and of his/her creation.

The actor is polyvocal and so is the play, but furthermore, polyvocality becomes an active presence from the part of the audience. In this way, an actor can use classical acting skills in a totally post-dramatic context, becoming aware on a dramaturgical level of the choices he/she makes in the universe of the play.

At the same time, a post-dramatic performer can learn classical acting techniques without being afraid of losing spontaneity and intuition on stage.

The other conflict animating the debate between modern and postmodern concerns text analysis and reading strategies. Lately, more and more contemporary writers are protesting against the techniques used by directors to read and interpret newly written plays.

The writing experimentation often crashes into a wall of consolidated old fashion reading patterns. New, groundbreaking writing usually has one element in common: It challenges the reader and the reader's ability to understand.

A new, interesting play usually presents a new and interesting idea about what it means to be human and how we see the world and communicate about it.

It's obvious that when the writing takes a new form, it requires a new form of reading.

What does this mean? It means that the parameters we have known and used to recognize and describe quality are no longer usable. It means that a good reader is a reader that can understand the premises of the play and give voice to the indicators of quality that the new writing demands.

Directors usually read plays with the goal of making them fit a certain idea of directing, a certain aesthetical vision, and a certain idea of acting.

If you take a classically trained Stanislavski director, he/she will try to break the play into events that start and are driven by an action. The action would generally be carried by a character and the character would be motivated by a goal.

This legitimate and well-functioning strategy not always can be applied to every form of writing.

Many contemporary playwrights complain about the fact that directors read new plays with quality parameters that are no longer functional or that often appear to be quite obsolete.

The other aspect I became aware of while working on the ideas of Castagno, is that with Interaction Technique, I had been trying to create a form of text analysis that would interact with new writing from the premise of the writer and not necessarily from the premise of the director.

With Interaction Technique, I try to teach actors and directors a series of questions that can be used to interact with the play and find elements that can translate concretely in stage action.

The difference of reading from a theoretic point of view and reading as text analysis is that the goal of the reading is different.

Theater makers approach the text with the concrete goal of transforming the text into live sound and behavior. They usually have the goal to find

ideas that can lead to interpretation and manifest physically in a performance.

An intellectual understanding is not enough for theater practice, reading must open itself to stage creation. The question is: How can we bring the text alive on stage in front of an audience?

Writing is concretely a suggestion of space and time. There is one thing that is common in every play ever written: It has a start and an end. This does not mean that it develops through three acts, but it means that it presents a suggestion on how time is structure and created.

Physically, some words precede others until eventually the last word is written. And while doing this the play is dealing with the concept of space. Where does this happen? How does the play talks about space? What is the space between the words?

I usually teach actors and directors that drama can be described as the ability to postpone the end, and that drama is movement in space.

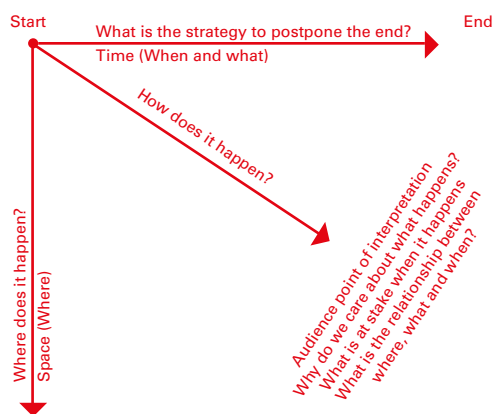
In this way, we can approach a play by asking ourselves a series of questions that can open an interpretation of the material, an interpretation that can be tested with actors in the space.

In this schema you can observe some of the questions that I use to help directors and actors to find the soul of the play.

On the timeline, a writer can use several strategies to create events. In a classical structure, it could be a character that will have to go through a series of adventures in order to achieve his/her goal or in order to complete a task or resolve a problem.

And while moving in time, these events will probably change the character in a way which is irreversible.

Meanwhile, in a postmodern play like in Heiner Müller's work, it could be the rhythm of the language and the structure of the sentence that could make the drama move forward in time and space.



And in a polyvocal play, it could be the shift in language styles or even the use of foreign words that could function as an engine to drive the play forward in time.

For an actor and a director, it is important to deconstruct a play in order to deeply understand what kind of acting aesthetic a text requires and what kind of human interaction is required to give body to the words of the text.

To approach a play from Ionesco in the same way that you would approach Tennessee Williams would be a mistake, because the role of time, events and the way language is originated is completely different.

In Williams, the language is strongly connected to the secrets of the characters. It reveals the



## 2 Da saltet ikke var den eneste krystallen by Joele Anastasi based on Lillestrogen by Jesper Halle – performed at KHiO, October 2016”

internal struggles and the conflict between society and personal will.

In Ionesco, the language is the tool we use to give meaning to something which is deeply without meaning. Language is a cage we must become aware of in order to free ourselves from the roles and the hierarchies of society.

In Williams, the behavior is realistic, at times operatic and often connected socially to the Southern Regions of The United States of America, while in Ionesco, the characters often free themselves, through nonsense language, from the status and the realistic social codes expected from them.

In Interaction Technique, I try to give actors and directors a series of questions they can use to dive deep into the construction of the play and find ideas they can actively test on the floor.

In this sense, Castagno’s idea of polyvocality presents not only a new strategy to write plays but also a new strategy to read plays and create work with actors.

Reading in a polyvocal way means reading in a way that deconstructs and explores each voice within a play, even those in contrast with each

other, or that do not match with the main understanding of the play.

In conclusion, during these four years of work, experiments with texts, research and performances, I have implemented the ideas of polyvocality of Paul Castagno in the work on Interaction Technique with the attempt to find a practical link between modern and postmodern acting and directing.

# Polyvocality and Jon Fosse Gian Maria Cervo

Jon Fosse, whose style is generally regarded as highly personal and idiosyncratic, is frequently associated with the playwrights who spurred the rebirth of text-based theater in the mid 1990s.

For at least the previous thirty years, he had been wary, even suspicious of writing for the theater. Beckett was thought to have been a high point in a landscape in crisis where, after *Waiting for Godot*, the playwright's role no longer had much meaning (this was a reading of Beckett that gave rise to the development and powerful affirmation of director-based theater).

In the 90s, a group of playwrights of various nationalities took up the topic of the Death of Man – central to Beckett's theater – with a focus on physical illness. This gave rise to a number of plays far more ambiguous than Beckett's own. Obviously, these may involve death as a construct, but also, in a more positive sense, a relocation of humankind on the same, natural level as animals and objects. (This more optimistic reading is also on display in the memorable paragraph on the post-human, in the essay *Empire of Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt* written from the 90s through the early 2000s.) One need only to consider the case of Sarah Kane, the playwright whose *Phaedra's Love* presents a death that has already happened but is still, at the same time, yet to come. Here, physical death is the sole, brief moment of excitement for Hippolytus, whose body now feels nothing, experiences nothing, and whose mind is on the verge of disintegration (after suffering a lynching, and after a great bird of prey has swooped down to eat his innards, he cries out "You hyenas! If only there had been more such moments!"). Even the suicide presaged in *4.48 Psychosis*, and later carried out, can be read as an act of self-healing from the same perspective as *Phaedra's Love*.

The ambiguity of works that restore the spotlight onto text-based theater during the debate of the mid-1990s explains the renaissance of dramaturgy, not in any one particular vein, but in all the colors of its spectrum. From that time forward, the debate went on not only in the great national theaters and major international festivals; the revolutionary aspect of the performances – compared by some critics to the forces behind Renaissance Humanism – focused fresh attention on text-based theater. There is even much debate about playwrights of more traditional orientation, who nonetheless offered new sociological analyses or innovations in content. At the same time, there was new talk of highly experimental writers who had previously been virtually ignored, a group that includes Martin Crimp and Jon Fosse who simultaneously came to be regarded as the driving forces behind the revolution embodied in the text-based theater of the 90s, albeit they did not necessarily take an in yer face or blood and sperm approach of sexual sensationalism that distinguishes the work of Sarah Kane or Mark Ravenhill, for example. Crimp and Fosse achieve this level of import via very specific motifs: Martin Crimp is catapulted onto the international market by London's Royal Court Theatre in the mid-90s (with his *Attempts on Her Life* of 1997, the work that introduced him to the global public) through a shrewd communication strategy that associated him with the likes of Kane and Ravenhill – but the Royal Court's plan here was not without foundation: Martin Crimp was virtually Kane's mentor. At least two of her plays, *Crave* and *4.48 Psychosis*, owe a serious debt to Crimp's own dramaturgical innovations. (One need only recall the discussions about persona and plot they occasioned.) Jon Fosse came to the attention of the international theatre public towards the end of the 90s as one of a group of major figures chosen to direct the Schaubühne in Berlin (Thomas Ostermeier, Marius von Mayenburg, and Roland Schimmelpfennig among them). To understand Fosse's role and position in the new-writing revolution, it is worth taking a close look at the details of its emergence.

We need to return to the mid-1980s, the years in which the United States were the western country most affected by the AIDS epidemic. Reagan and the Republicans decided not to fund scientific research to put an end to the illness. The LGBT community (called the gay community at the time), one of the populations most shattered by the immune deficiency syndrome, began to organize a political response to the inhuman attitudes

of Reagan and his adherents. It was during this confrontation that Tony Kushner began to construct his masterpiece *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes*, which reached the stage in 1991. Indeed, up to and including *Angels*, in the 80s and early 90s a number of powerfully political texts emerged from the gay community in America. It is worth mentioning Larry Kramer's *The Destiny of Me and The Normal Heart*, Harvey Fierstein's *Safe Sex*, and Lanford Wilson's *A Poster of the Cosmos*. But these plays have a strongly community-based feel, even if the gay community had become very open and inclusive by then. *Angels in America*, on the other hand, is quite different. Tony Kushner manages to create a meditation on the concept of being a citizen in the broadest sense, in a political work bestowing equal importance on illness and social injustice. We can frame *Angels* as a Medieval mystery play, as Benilde Montgomery (U. of Toronto) does in the illuminating article *Angels in America as Medieval Mystery* (*Modern Drama* 41, 4, Winter 1998):

"...the ordered relationships among events and characters in the cycles [Medieval Mysteries – ed.] preserve the principle of analogy: their similarity-in-difference is maintained each achieving significance from a common relationship to some prime analogue...If in the *Corpus Christi* plays the prime analogue is the suffering body of Christ, in *Angels in America* the prime analogue is the suffering body of Prior Walter [the protagonist AIDS patient – ed.]. Both bodies dominate their plays not simply as graphic images of physical pain and suffering but primarily as interpretive paradigms. Positing the wounded body of Christ as an analogue for, among other things, the woundedness of the social body, of the body politic, and of the individual physical body, the cycles teach that the destinies of these separate bodies are, in fact, interconnected. As each of these bodies (social, political, individual) suffers in its own way, its suffering also participates in Christ's suffering and in that participation achieves a significance inaccessible to the same suffering considered in isolation... As the analogical design of the medieval plays redefined their own new social order, so the similar design of *Angels in America* helps to redefine whatever sense of order Kushner sees emerging not only from the AIDS pandemic but also from the collapse of modernism itself." *Angels in America* arrives in



3 Fritiden er mørke eller lys by Jovana Bojovic based on Il tempo libero by Gian Maria Cervo – performed at KHiO, October 2016”

Great Britain during the waning days of Thatcherism, when there are broadly shared values of intolerance of social injustice and the discrimination that created it. Authors like Sarah Kane and Mark Ravenhill absorb Kushner's themes, with particular interest in physical illness. The topic of social injustice has expanded beyond the physical to become a cause in its own right, indeed a metaphor to explain the physical. If you're in love, you're in Dachau, is the sentiment of Roland Barthes that inspires Kane's *Cleansed*.

A further Barthesian element influenced the composition process of *M.E.Z.- Mitteleuropäische Zeit*, a monologue by Roland Schimmelpfennig, author-in-residence at the Bracke/Schaubühne in Berlin (the theater which disseminated Fosse's work in Europe) – the first great theater in continental Europe to present the new auteurs of the Royal Court. How can one measure a loss in love? wonders Schimmelpfennig. This monologue's opening lines bear examination:

"Twig, twig sat on the edge of the sidewalk, staring straight ahead.

Beautiful bird, I've been thinking, you see, beautiful bird? By then it was gone, and there were maybe six inches of empty curb. Things might have occurred to you, it could have occurred to you to turn on the radio, or kiss me and then, outside, you pretend that nothing had happened. Those are things. Or or.

It was nothing to you – that was the nice part. No one stood at the window whistling in Central European time, no, never.

You could easily have kissed me one more time, in secret and then, outside, pretend that nothing had happened. I'll never be passing by that door again, not one single inch, and I won't be going to the bar to have a cry. Things were still working out with you, but only barely:

You order something, and I set to it. Then you start speaking to me in a low voice, and in about ten minutes the thing comes to a provisional end. Ten minutes – that's the international standard for phase one, the international standard for phase one, phase 2."

The playwrights of the Schaubühne also devote attention, as we see above, to the theme of illness, which will become fundamental for

Thomas Ostermeier's first seasons at the Berlin theater. When Roland Schimmelpfennig visited me at the Festival Quartieri dell'Arte (QdA) in June of 2000 to take part in a double bill of his and my plays, directed by Werner Waas (*Nihil* and *M.E.Z.*), we had already been friends for a year. Quartieri dell'Arte is the first Italian festival to stage a new author from Ostermeier's Schaubühne. Roland's next engagement with QdA was at Salzburg, where Schimmelpfennig would be the dramaturg (literary consultant) for a production of the Schaubühne directed by Thomas Ostermeier, with a text of Jon Fosse – a self-effacing novelist and poet from Bergen, Norway – who had begun writing for the theater several years earlier. Schimmelpfennig's work as dramaturg in Salzburg became a major turning point in his relationship with the Schaubühne. In the summer of 2000, Schimmelpfennig enthusiastically recommended that I read Fosse's texts for the theater.

Why did the Schaubühne's artistic directorship consider Jon Fosse's scripts so significant to this phase of the Berlin theater's existence?

One need only consider certain distinctive traits of Fosse's writing for the theater. These works are characterized by a very dry vocabulary, a mere few hundred words, and marked by a skillful use of repetition and sentence divisions designed to create new meanings. Indeed, it is these very attributes that paradoxically make Fosse's work a theater of language and idiom, a dramaturgy of linguistic invention.

Jon Fosse is neither a playwright in the strict sense nor a post-dramatic writer. He is polyvocal (an insight that emerges after the fact, of course, as no serious playwright would announce, before the fact, the intention to write a text that is dramatic, post-dramatic, or polyvocal). In his theater, the character exists, is there somewhere, but is led on his own evolutionary path, whether vast or small, by linguistic invention, rather than by plot.

As Paul Castagno (UNC Wilmington) says in his seminal essay on polyvocal dramaturgy *New Playwriting Strategies*. Language and Media in the 21st Century, in traditional, Aristotelian plays language is perceived as a component of a character – that is, a manner of speech belonging to a character alone, a coherency of verbal expression. In polyvocal dramaturgy, on the other hand, the relationship between character and language is inverted: now the characters become a function of their language. Character

exists in some form but does not dominate the manner of speech. Rather, it is driven by linguistic invention, by clash, by juxtapositions of language registers or perspectives that manifest themselves therein. "It is as though the language eclipses or transcends characterization as the playwright pursues some residual essence or defining moment" says Castagno. Furthermore the playwright orchestrates the voices in the text, entering into a kind of dialogue with characters and language...The term dialogism describes how the interactive relation between voices in the playtext shapes the play as an act of discovery." Language becomes structure.

Take the opening of *Someone is Going to Come*, the first work of Fosse's to be performed in Italy, in August of 2001 at the Stables of the Palazzo Farnese of Caprarola, by the dell'Arte company, directed by Sandro Mabellini:

SHE happy  
Soon we shall be in our own house  
HE Our own house  
SHE A lovely old house  
Far from other houses  
and from other people  
HE You and I alone  
SHE Not only alone  
but alone together  
you and I  
alone together  
HE And no one will ever come

They stop, gazing at the house.

SHE Here we are, in front of our house.  
HE And what a delightful house it is.  
SHE Here we are in front of our house  
In front of our house  
where we shall be together  
you and I alone  
in front of our house  
where you and I shall be  
alone together  
Far from all others  
The house where we shall be together  
One inside the other  
HE Our house  
SHE The house is ours  
HE The house is ours  
The house where no one will come  
Here we are in front of our house  
The house where we shall be together  
alone, one inside the other.

In Fosse's theatrical works, language is a mysterious force that transforms the lives of these

characters. And of the audience.

As he prepares to write a text, Jon Fosse does not draw up a biography of his characters or design a narrative structure; instead, he empties his head. More than once Jon has described to me his need to clear out his mind before writing. Sometimes he achieves this sense of void by continuous listening to a piece of music. For *Death Variations*, for example, he listened extensively to the *Goldberg Variations*. This mind-emptying underlies the idea that Fosse's theatrical writing is comparable to the work of a musical virtuoso. Fosse depends on the word, on its ability to create rhythm, tempo, and variations. In his work, form is content. Using a deliberately limited vocabulary, repetition, and a disorienting breakup of sentence structure does not prevent him from creating new meanings with the same words. Indeed, it allows for much more, as it produces a hypnotic rhythm, and a dimension of healing. Clearly it is this very healing function of Fosse's work that interested Thomas Ostermeier, whose work as director, and as the *Schaubühne's* artistic head, focused on physical illness.

Given that the healing aspect of Fosse's writing derives from analysis of mood, rhythm, and time in his texts – all elements independent of Fosse the man – it is inevitable that we find traits of the shamanistic in Jon. His approach, whether reflecting on the creative process, or addressing the ensembles that enact it on-stage, or speaking, for example, of parent-child relationships, is unequivocal. As mentioned above, I rely on memories and feelings relating to Jon in order to offer a portrait, a sketch of the man, rather than to confirm a theory after the fact. Anyone who witnessed *Quartiere dell'Arte's* poetry recital at the *Tempietto di Santa Maria della Salute* in Viterbo in 2003 will recall him stamping the floor with his foot to bring out the shamanistic rhythm in his words. One remark of his, about the importance for theaters to generously pay writers from whom they commission works, tells us that "Writing is a voyage to discover the unknown. To undertake it, you must feel protected." There was a stretch where Jon and I did not manage to see each other for two or three years. When we did reconnect at a dinner in Rome, he recalled my father, with whom Jon had discussed tobacco when he came to Italy for the premiere of *Someone is Going to Come*. Instead of asking me "How is your father," Jon inquired "Is your father still alive?"

Even now, in 2014, Fosse is very widely performed in Europe. Still, in

recent years there has been a flagging of interest in his plays among the theaters of Germany. In Great Britain, on the other hand, a number of productions, spaced a few years apart, have attempted to establish this great and original playwright in the Anglo-Saxon world, where at least initially he had a somewhat tepid reception (one might recall a few important productions at the Royal Court, and more recently performances directed by the late Patrice Chéreau at London's *Young Vic*). Such is the usual nature of the theater – but this is explained more clearly in regards to the phenomenology of the *New Writing* of the last twenty years.

Beyond what we have explored above it must be said that, in giving rise to this great diversity of productions over the last two decades, the textual revolution comes in an era when communication has become pervasive on a global level thanks to new forms of media. The effect of this pervasiveness on cultural phenomena is clear: it shortens their life. Consequently, not only have dramatic, post-dramatic, and polyvocal strategies of performance coexisted in equilibrium from the 90s to this day, but these have also been shaped by constant evolutions of trends among themselves, or adopted by single playwrights during the evolution of their careers. Many of the authors involved in this revolution of text-based theater have shown rapid evolution of personal style, given the exigencies of communication that sometimes involve biographical events (one need only think how the life and writings of Mark Ravenhill changed after the suicide of Sarah Kane), or that playwrights understand the importance of tying content not only to form and structure, but also to a clear dramaturgical strategy in composition (as is the case with Martin Crimp, whose work is dramatic in some works, and post-dramatic in others). Even currents in playwriting have evolved on a broader level: the political theater of the so-called politics of desire of the mid-90s tends today to take stances on these problems, despite a certain ambiguity in the texts. Political theater of more recent years, rather than taking positions on a given issue, has tended to stimulate discussion and debate (as with Dennis Kelly's *The Ritual Slaughter of Gorge Mastromas*, or his televised thriller *Utopia* – or of *Call Me God*, which I wrote in conjunction with Marius von Mayenburg, Albert Ostermaier, and Rafael Spregelburd, or of *Young Jean Lee's Church*).

Further issues regarding the performance of Fosse's work arise in conjunction with Germany's theater

system: there, theater productions are given budgets that in other countries might be granted only to opera productions: instead of going on tour, they are invested with a primary importance in both information and innovation. To be innovative in its productions, a theater must constantly confront other theaters, at least those it considers the most advanced. Production are often representatives of cultural intelligence, and the German system today finds itself enjoying a series of events, from the *Theatertruffen* and the *Autorentheatertage* in Berlin to the *Stückemarkt* in Heidelberg, to name a few, in which theaters seek a common language on the one hand, and solidify their level of excellence on the other – always with an almost obsessive intention to monitor and affirm new trends, new phenomena that are authentic echoes of our time. Clearly there is sometimes a risk of generating passwords and, in the worst cases, even taboos. Some such passwords can lead to the overvaluing of certain phenomena, even of ignoring authors as great as Jon Fosse. This, perhaps, is the price that the world's most advanced system of theatrical undertaking must pay for its level of complexity, based as it is on a coexistence of communication and cultural intelligence.

The relationship between Fosse and English theater, by contrast, owes much to the way Jon develops his discourse on the care and healing of self, and to the fact that this discourse was introduced in Great Britain at a time when the new in yer face dramaturgy monopolized theatrical debate, primarily in the wake of attacks from some conservative critics.

But Fosse, probably together with Martin Crimp (but for very different reasons) remains the most important living exponent of text-based theater in Europe over the past twenty years. If Martin Crimp uses ingredients of the poison of contemporary society in order to produce various antidotes, Jon Fosse holds to the path of his writing with unwavering rigor, making him – particularly for young playwrights – a shining example of esthetic integrity.

Translated from the Italian by Jim Tucker

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# Introverted Polyvocality

## Øystein Stene

The basic idea of polyvocality in EU Collective Plays! has been to create well-functioning plays through collaboration with various authors from different cultural contexts and different language backgrounds. As we can read in the presentation of the project: "The playwrights meet and cooperate to create a narrative structure which is organic but at the same time incorporates different perspectives, styles, languages and idioms."

A presupposition for the project is that an artwork can be inconsistent in form, that it can be non-homogeneous, incohesive, filled with contrasts and engage in a deliberate dialogue with itself and the world. The polyvocal focus thus stands in sharp contrast to artistic development during the periods of Romanticism and Modernism. According to the notion of polyvocality, a work of art is not an authoritative expression composed by a god-inspired or dictatorial and omnipotent artist; rather, it is embroiled in an anarchistic chaos of voices battling to be heard. It contains paradoxes from which we cannot free ourselves, and contradictions we cannot overcome.

These are ideals and ideas I recognize myself as being inspired by. For too long and too often, art has been a narcissist who enters a room and demands to be seen and heard while we keep our mouths shut and admire it in silence. No, give me instead a pack of squabblers who all talk at the same time, and with those of us in the audience. Give me something that relates to me. Art that primarily wants to look good, that only seeks acknowledgement of its status as art, has little to give me. Not because I don't like things and people that look good, but because contact and dialogue seem more urgent. This is the case in both my mental-psychological and physical-external life, but also for mankind and the planet as such.

My problem is that I'm extremely introverted. I like being with people, but only in very limited amounts. I even like working with people, but only by exception, and then only with people I know well. The field of theatre is full of people with well-developed competence to enter into collective creative processes and then leave again. That's not where I am at all. I need air and time alone in order to create. I become creative by being alone. I think much more freely and better when I don't need to relate to people, when I go for a long jog in silence, when I'm out in the woods without another soul around, when it's just me and the piece of paper. Or the computer. This isn't the way I want things to be, it's not what I necessarily want. It has to do with my temperament; I've learned that this is how I function and do my best work.

My most important contribution to this project

has been to try to assimilate the strategies and ideals in working with my own text, primarily my own prose. In other words, to examine whether the thinking and strategies related to polyvocality could be integrated into me as an individual, to absorb the strategies, in one way or another, by producing several contrary voices and perspectives; to make text surfaces and linguistic aesthetics that are discordant, and to do it all myself. It is, I must admit, an omnipotent idea to think that one person can be more than one person.

The novel I worked with in connection with EU Collective Plays! was *De opplyste* (The Enlightened Ones). I started writing it in autumn 2015 and finished it in May 2018. The writing therefore took place over two and a half years, and much of the time, as part of the EU project. I relied on Tale Næss and Jesper Halle as primary readers and consultants, and they also helped me with the thinking related to the polyvocal aspect of the project.

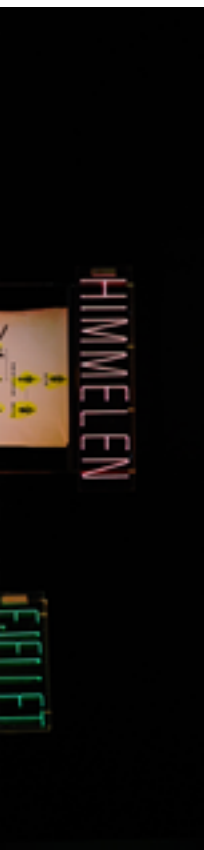
*De opplyste* was initially a kind of sci-fi novel in which we find ourselves living at a time when the modern world has collapsed. Control of the planet is divided between 'the religious people', who call their domain 'the Kingdom', and 'the godless people', who live in 'the Union'. The Kingdom contains all peoples of whatever religious persuasion, and the Union is the place where secular humanists try to recreate a secular and liberal democracy. This situation has emerged after a catastrophe that the religious people interpret as God's intervention, and the secular humanists see as a natural phenomenon. We learn about this world through constant rupture: the novel's world unfolds through 21 narrators. Each is allotted 10–20 pages, and all the characters relate their story in first-person singular form.

Books like this, with many narrators, normally use one or another strategy to create contrasts between the different narrator voices. They often hop forward or backward in time, some speak only in present tense, others in past tense. We often move back and forth between the different voices. It is also common to find a shifting between the 'I' narrator's voice and a more distanced narrator's voice. In ways such as these, greater contrasts are created in the text and there are more opportunities for textual aesthetic rupture.

I felt early on that this was a bit too simplistic a solution. Instead, I wanted all the characters to

4 Det er Ales stage adaptation of Maria Sand based on the novel *Det er Ales* by Jon Fosse, directed by Gianluca Iumiento. Performed at Piccolo Teatro di Milan and Det Norske Teatret, September 2016 and spring 2017





be 'I' narrators who only speak in present tense, and when one voice leaves off, we never meet the person again. In this way, I wanted to force readers to relate to the unity of voices, the cacophony, the polyvocalism, rather than drowning in empathy. In each story there had to be a now, and the now in the one story had to take us into the next story. This meant that a side character in the one story became the main character in the next. And the narrators were very different, in every way: the youngest was about ten years of age, the oldest about 90, some were very intellectual, others more spontaneous, men and women in all possible phases of life – Muslims, Christians, a few Sikhs, a Jew, plus different types of atheists. All in all, huge diversity.

I've written several novels with 'I' characters far different from myself, so that in itself didn't worry me. At the same time: to find a narrator voice I could believe in and to find the place he or she

speaks from have always been the greatest challenge in my writing. As soon as I know how a character feels, thinks, senses and experiences the world, it's also much easier to write from that person's perspective. Half the task, and also often the most challenging part, has been to find this voice. The work to calibrate the style, the voice, has, in most of my novels, taken half a year in itself. So how could I write this novel with 21 narrators, without using ten years?

In the beginning the different stories and characters resembled each other a lot. I tried to make some aesthetic choices in the language, to change writing styles, rhythm, vocabulary, sentence length, and so forth. And several of the stories gained their distinctiveness through purely stylistic choices, for instance oral versus written style, intellectuals versus active doers, people who engage with the world through their feelings versus the types who dwell or reflect on things, performative sentences versus descriptive sentences. All these parameters change something and contribute to creating the impression of distinctly different voices. These are tools of the trade that are relatively simple to use if you're a somewhat driven author.

Nevertheless, I lacked a feeling of credibility, of authenticity. I needed to know, in one way or another, that these characters existed. I can't fully explain when it happens, but there comes a point when they begin to say things, discover things or think things I myself wouldn't have said, discovered or thought. And oftentimes I wasn't fully convinced, not even when other readers were. I didn't feel it was possible to create a character I believe in simply through making language-related choices. From a polyvocal perspective, language is often character, and this may well be the case for a dramatic text. But for prose, I experience, for one reason or another, that something different is required. This was my experience: you come a long way, you achieve the calculated result – but the character doesn't begin to think, talk or write things

that aren't you; no unpredictable details or sensory information emerge. Because that's of course what you want. Create a character that isn't you yourself. This, in any case, is what I want. To write like someone other than myself. And how is it possible to find a language that isn't my own?

I tried different strategies. Earlier, I always found it disruptive to read while I wrote. As if reading another author's novel at the same time, or just the day before I was going to write, would disturb the work, almost 'pollute' the language. But now I discovered that this pollution could be very effective. I started opening up to its influence. One of the most successful texts, at least as far as language is concerned, is one that deals with a Muslim girl who has just entered puberty. It's a text that came into being after I read Emile Ajar's novel *The Life Before Us*.

I think that for those who compare the texts, there are obvious differences, perhaps with the exception of the way both texts use adult adages in a slightly precocious way. But what Ajar's novel primarily helped me with was to achieve a certain way of being in the world, a way of looking at the world that isn't easily accessible to me: that the world is composed of lots of phenomena, and the connection between them is something we invent in the blink of an eye. This sounds like an intellectualization of the situation, but it really wasn't at all. This is something I say now, afterwards, and which I didn't discover while I was writing. I simply received the particular way of seeing, and it wasn't until the end that I started understanding what it involved.

And to my amazement, the feeling of being in this person, this girl with a pubertal body, the movements, the slightly prosaic and responsible level of reflection combined with so little experience and so much wonderment, became absolutely real to me. Every time I worked on the text, it became easier to enter into that kind of body, to sense the world through it. But it was Ajar's language and tone that helped me get into it.

I repeated this strategy with several texts. Especially effective was to use my friends' texts. I read texts by Tale Næss, Merete Morken Andersen, Marco Demian Vitanza, Linda Gabrielsen, Jesper Halle and Maria Sand. Friction-free, I let myself be swept away by the language. Since I also know these authors very well, I could even go as far as to imagine that I was them. I wrote one text as Maria Sand, with a kind of convinced sensation that this is Øystein Stene as Maria Sand: yes, this is how she writes, this is Maria as an author through my body.

One could almost say that I was driven by a kind of spiritism; it felt as if I had kidnapped their souls, or at least secretly borrowed them, even if for only a moment. And allowed them to write through me. Over time I was also able to use other people in my environment, think of them as authors, and try to imagine how it would look. In a sense, to find ways to capture other people's feelings, thoughts and life project within me, and to filter it out through my body, my language.

This strategy proved surprisingly effective. Not only did I feel that I wrote about people other than myself, but I wrote like people other than myself. And since the authors were people I knew in detail,



I could quickly go into and out of these secretly borrowed linguistic garments without the process being too exhausting or demanding.

I have, moreover, a very precise memory for the way people walk and move. There's something I don't do while others are present, for some reason or another, but only when I'm alone: I mimic the way others walk. I know very well the difference between the way my colleagues and friends Tale Næss and Jesper Halle walk. Tale rolls at the hips, she swings like a pendulum as she moves down the corridor, disappears almost into herself, until she inadvertently bumps into something. While Jesper, who bounces along, lifts his feet almost disproportionately high. I can easily imagine that he has bumped his head on many door lintels in Norwegian alpine cabins in his life – not just because he's tall, but because he has a bouncy walk.

What I started to do when I was going to write like these colleagues was to enter into a warm-up phase of moving like them, walking like them, making a cup of tea like them, blowing my nose like them. Not in any caricatured way, no, for the more precise, the better. And when I turned to writing, their spirit of writing came to dwell in my body, and it was almost just a matter of listening to what this spirit wanted to say. The greatest challenge was to listen to the things I myself would never have written, especially if I thought it was a silly metaphor, an unfamiliar word, a too flowery phrase, or, the worst for me: to write sentimentally or emotionally. My distaste for sentimental and emotional writing is perhaps my greatest hindrance as an author, for in practice, of course, this means I try to castrate the reader emotionally. Since my first novel, I've tried to castrate the reader emotionally. I don't say this with pride, no, I say it with the greatest shame. It's surely because I think feelings in art are overrated, and that I myself cry in the strangest places in books and movies, and absolutely never at the moment when the author wants me to cry. Nevertheless, that wasn't the point: the point is that when I

write like a person other than myself, it's much easier to be sentimental and emotional.

What I did was probably not any more advanced than what we all do all the time: we internalize voices. We have a continual dialogue with mom, dad, our siblings, teachers and friends. It's probably very full inside us. In therapy with a counsellor or psychologist, we learn to live with these voices, to try to understand from where they come, to live at peace with them, to take responsibility for them.

Just through the technical procedure of writing, I discovered a better strategy: rather than trying to be at peace with them, let them live as independent units. It's easy to imagine that for people who are susceptible to schizophrenia, this is a very unhealthy method, but for me, it gave me distinctly different places from which to write. Maybe I could have ended up with much the same result by just applying the tools of the playwright's trade. But I don't think so. What is more, I got to spend lots of time with my friends, yet without them being present. A win-win situation for an introverted author who likes polyvocality.

Translated by Arlyne Moi

# Playwriting and Polyvocality

## Eselet 2015–2019

### Jesper Halle

#### I.

Since autumn 2015 I've worked with a theatre text called *Eselet* (The Donkey).

It started with just one voice that wanted to disappear at all costs. Then another voice came along and said: "*I can help you*"; and I started writing dialogues between the two, quite freely and without action or chronology. It wasn't so much scenes as a series of confrontations. The two were at first more like opposing attitudes than characters. The one wanting to disappear was sometimes a woman with a biography, other times one or more men with a different biography. The voice that answered was—well, first and foremost a voice. Nor did the text point to any defined external world, even though it pointed to certain contemporary phenomena. Maybe it just described a mental process in a person at odds with herself (or himself). The scenes developed at high speed and helter-skelter. I wrote them down in a little grey book. The work method wasn't my usual one, and I was aware, from early on, that the text was about to become different than my plays tend to be.

#### II.

Paul Castagno's book *New Playwriting Strategies* uses as its starting point a number of newer American dramas that represent a formal breach with a very strong Anglo-American, Aristotelian, and often-realistic tradition in drama and theatre. In the book, he establishes a set of concepts that can be used to understand and analyse such texts. His book is practically oriented and offers tools and exercises for those who want to write plays in the form he describes.

Three characteristics of this new form of drama are the position or status of language, hybridization, and polyvocality – a concept borrowed from the literary theorist Bakhtin.

He describes the way these plays are written as *language playwriting*. One hallmark is that the language itself has a more important structuring function than in traditional realistic plays: "New playwriting [...] exploits the nature of language as a modelling system for the nature of existence. In this sense language not only serves to shape the play's universe and fabricate character, but also provides the primary building blocks of the play itself." In this dramaturgy, the language often doesn't come *from* a character, but is free and shifting in form. Neither do the characters need to be fixed personalities, for they can transform themselves simultaneously as the language is transformed. Highly divergent forms of language can also exist side by side in the same text.

Castagno characterizes a hybrid play as a "mixing or clashing of different genres, cultural or historical period styles, and techniques".

This means that the work can combine elements that conflict with each other formally, perhaps because they belong to different genres or theatrical or literary traditions.

In the book's introduction, Castagno describes polyvocality when writing about Bakhtin:

[...] These hybrid novels juxtaposed sophisticated literary techniques with storytelling elements drawn from folk culture, while other texts featured an array of linguistic styles, dialects, neologisms, and slang. Bakhtin used the term polyvocal to describe the divergent source materials that made up the text. [...] Each part reacted with or against other parts in the text to create a dynamic sense of meaning and interest, which could not be distilled into a simple statement or unified arc.

I understand this to mean that Bakhtin – in any case Castagno – thinks that a synthetic, conflict-filled, complex, non-unified form communicates in a different way than does a homogeneous form. It creates no unified meaning/message ('statement').

There where Bakhtin talks about the dialogical novel (which is polyvocal), Castagno uses the concept *the dialogical play*. As he puts it: "The essence of the play is its staging of different voices or discourses and, thus, of the clash of social perspectives and points of view."

This was a bit confusing to me at first, because isn't it precisely this that happens in a traditional drama in which the different characters represent different views, values and social perspectives in dialogue with each other (literally speaking)? But for Castagno, the polyvocality doesn't emerge because the characters in a play are different and in conflict, but because there's antagonism between the complex formal elements themselves, which constitute the play.

From June 2015 to spring 2019, the Academy of Theatre in Oslo was a key collaborative partner in the EU-supported project EU Collective Plays! As part of this project, Tale Næss (research fellow), Gianluca Lumiento (head of studies, acting department), Øystein Stene (docent in theatre theory), and myself formed a group to discuss our texts. Eventually Paul Castagno's book became important for us, as a means for understanding the texts we were writing. We therefore called ourselves the Polyvocal Group.

*Eselet*, which I didn't understand as far as what it was or where it wanted to go, was the text I brought into the group. In the last three years or so, we've had five meetings where we discussed *Eselet* and the other texts written by group members. I've also received good feedback from friends and colleagues. Due to all the responses to *Eselet*, I've also written far more versions than I normally do. By autumn 2017, I was up to nine, and then the project stood on hold for almost a year.

In the last few months, the *Esel Group*, consisting of Jon Tombre (director, master student), Liv Heløe (actor and dramatist), Marius Lien (actor) and myself have worked with the text on stage, to see what opportunities and challenges it offers. We've

presented the work to four different audiences. Even though I considered the text to be good and quite finished, I ended up making two revisions during this period. The last revision in particular was far more than cosmetic.

I'm not sure whether all the revisions have served the text well, but they've at least given me many opportunities to understand my own work while I do it.

### III.

In the first two or three versions of *Eselet*, the characters weren't clearly defined. That said, the conflict between the characters was clear enough. Based on my work with the text and its form, I made a Castagno-inspired model for understanding it, using something I called a two-pole drama. My idea, roughly speaking, was that even though I renounced fixed or well-defined characters, I didn't need to renounce a conflict, turning points and the conflict's development, because I knew I needed something to hold things together.

Instead of the dynamic that is created between two antagonists, I wanted to find out whether a two-pole dynamic could give me a more open, freer form, at the same time as I preserved a kind of tension. The aim was that the text should be structured around an antagonism or polarization that was continuously developing and changing.

When I presented my text and thoughts about the two-pole drama, my readers were very much in agreement: they saw primarily the character who wanted to disappear as a woman with a certain biography and life. The notion that she could be many people, perhaps at times a man, they saw as derailments. They wanted my text to be as good as possible, and with that aim, they thought the woman needed to be a clearer character. I listened to their arguments, took account of my gut feeling and agreed that they were right. I gave up the idea of a two-pole drama.

In continuing the project, I no longer wrote based on a fixed principle for how I wanted to form the text, but through having a dialogue with the text and learning what it wanted from me. This also meant that Castagno's concepts weren't used to write the play, but to examine and discuss it.

Now, after more than four years, I see how a series of elements that fit well in Castagno's descriptions of new playwriting actually disappeared in my writing process. In particular, the "mixing or clashing of different genres, cultural or historical period styles, and techniques." The woman became one and was furnished with a biography and a name, albeit the most common Norwegian female name I could find – 'Kari'. The saint who suddenly appeared and blessed Kari disappeared just as suddenly, so also some prose passages that described a bus trip and a beggar in the shadows. The ironic attacks on the audience also disappeared. The demonic figure of Mr. Smoking never was quite in the text anyway.

In short, I chose to cut everything that gave the text the marks of being a collage with clearly differentiated layers of language and action. They were experienced as derailments that drained the text of energy and caused concentration to lapse.

Having said this, there's something crucial about the status of language in *Eselet* that is well described by Castagno. In *Eselet*, there's no scenic universe outside what is conjured by language.

When Kari describes a new place, it's there. When the Voice says "...a well-ordered bed, fine flowers, and a white bench", it exists. When Kari says "the bench you're talking about doesn't exist", it disappears. When Kari describes herself as a wolf, she becomes a wolf. There's no objective world undergirding what's said, neither is there any sharp distinction between words and thoughts, since the dialogue takes place in a universe that arises simultaneously as it is verbalized.

The world in which Kari and the Voice find themselves in is a bit like in a dream. When the story needs a stone bridge, it's described. Then the bridge is there, and it's sufficiently concrete. But as soon as Kari and the Voice become preoccupied with something else, it's as if the bridge never was there.

### IV.

Castagno reminded me that the room in a play is open. It's possible to write theatre texts in which the language is more important than the characters, where time and space aren't constant, and where the action doesn't necessarily have any logical progression or movement or move through scenically necessary turning points. It's even possible to write texts with a heterogeneous and conflicting form. But with this, a challenge also arises. The moment a play's form is very open, whatever it is that closes it becomes crucial in order to create friction.

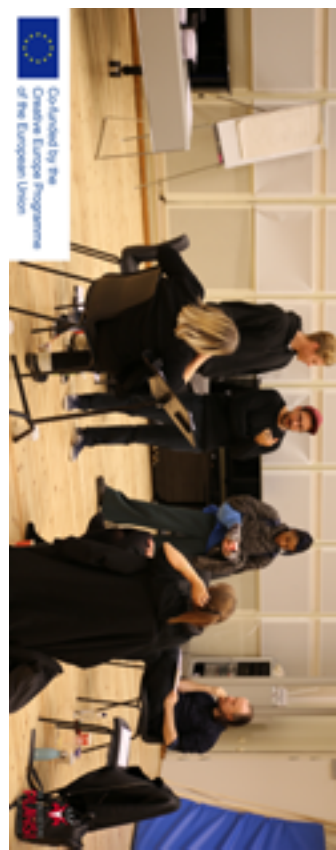
If I combine 100 small pictures to create one face, a tension emerges because each picture has its own form and expression simultaneously as all the pictures together create one face. The moment the face dissolves and we're left with a montage of 100 pictures, the conflicting dynamism disappears.

In a traditional drama, which includes characters, situations, environments and actions, the friction is there immediately. Put a weak character in a difficult situation – that is, a situation that offers the character resistance – and it immediately becomes interesting to see how the resistance is handled. If two characters have opposite desires and wills, the one will offer resistance to the other. Resistance creates friction, friction creates energy. But if one renounces all this, how is it possible to avoid the text becoming so open that there's no resistance, thus no energy, and the consequence of total indifference?

This, for me, is a practical question, not a theoretical one. I've read stage texts that opened up and opened up until they disappeared in a linguistic fibrillation before my very eyes, and others that, from the start, were so associatively open that they never quite managed to be visible either to themselves or to readers. Some of them have been my own.

I sensed the problem of openness to a very

5 *Reading of Darkness – The enemy inside by Tale Næss, Gianluca Iumiento, Kristin Eriksdottir, Sigbjørn Skåden and Albert Ostermaier at KHiO, November 2017*



great extent when working with *Ese/et*. I hope the text responds to it. I think it happens like this:

The world is created by language, but the language comes from a character. It is Kari's language that describes things and thus makes them visible. When Kari experiences that she is in another place, she sees something different, and then it comes into view. We see with Kari. And Kari is a person, not just language.

The other character in the play, the Voice, is far more ambiguous. Always changing, not in language, but in character. He (it?) can be understood as a helper, tempter, psychologist, super ego, and sometimes as the evil voice we have inside us that insists and insists that we aren't good enough. The Voice seems to be borrowed from Castagno.

But the Voice is this way because it also emanates from Kari. The Voice begins to talk when Kari has prayed for help long enough. When, in the end, Kari cuts all contact with the Voice, Kari is the only one left; the Voice is gone.

The story alternates between different genres. Initially between relatively realistic descriptions of lived life and a mythic interpretation of the same life. Eventually, what's described in mythic language is not just a picture of something, but something that's happened. When Kari says she's a wolf, maybe she becomes a wolf, and the wolf kills a child, as if we're in a magical story about werewolves. When she, in the end, completely immerses herself in the fairy tale, the story becomes a fairy tale.

Once again; it's language that allows this to happen, but that language is the language of the character Kari. It is Kari who describes herself as, and eventually becomes, a figure in a fairy tale. Everything comes from her.

So, to my own question: If language creates the world, the characters, the universe and actions, and if everything can mutate, what can hold things together and cause conflict, friction and energy in the text?

For me, the solution is to ensure that there's a psychologically-based character there, written as a complex yet convincing individual.

## V.

Is my text polyvocal, and if so, in what way? This is a question I've thought a lot about.

When those of us in the *Ese/ Group* worked with the play on stage, we soon discovered that it was 'playable'. The external action was graspable, there was an interesting dynamic between the characters, the scenic universe functioned well, and the composition of the material felt right.

But whereas other plays I've written have largely pointed in one direction, it was as if this one pointed in several. When we analysed the text as a group, to find a fixed point that could give the work direction, it wasn't obvious what it was. It seemed as though it was possible to work scene-by-scene with *Ese/et*, based on four or five very different

interpretations. We had to make interpretive decisions ourselves in order to proceed.

Maybe this sounds more abstract than it actually is. The challenge was quite concrete: Is the play fundamentally a drama about people who live together, is it a fable about social control in a society such as Norway, is it a therapeutic story about liberation, a mythic Jungian story about self-realization, or is it perhaps a drama about suicide? When I wrote the text, I thought that in the actual performance, it could be possible to retain the ambiguity. Experience on stage causes me to see it differently. If one is to get something out of the text, interpretive choices must be made.

In a worst-case scenario, I've created a text that is too open. In the best-case scenario, I've created a text that activates those who work with it in a somewhat different way than a play often does. They are compelled to make choices, not so much based on what they read out of the text, as what they read into it.

I assume this means *Ese/et* is a polyvocal text.

Translated by Arlyne Moi



# Voices in Maltese literature

## Joyce Grech

A few years ago, I was approached by FOPSIM (Foundation for the Promotion of Social Inclusion in Malta), the Maltese partner in the EU collective plays! project to contribute to the initiative. The abstract of the project was enough to spark my imagination and I was positively intrigued from the get-go by polyvocality in general. The more I read about it, the more I was interested in this new wave of writers joining forces, writing collectively, challenging each other along the way into uncharted territory, experimenting with creating hybrid plays and using polyvocal techniques to give a more layered multi-dimensional texture to their plays.

Instantly, I wondered if the techniques employed in polyvocal theatre were completely new to Maltese literature. The first step was a natural one where I looked into local writers, both contemporary and from the past, to find out if there were playwrights who were, purposely or coincidentally, employing polyvocal techniques and how these were received by local audiences.

Most playwrights I spoke to told me that collective writing is a completely novel concept with writers for the theatre and very few writers ever had the opportunity to explore the pros and cons of collective writing in other literary forms. At first glance, the notion of polyvocal writing seemed to be undiscovered to most. Whilst most literature is written in the standard Maltese language, a few of our most prominent writers have created characters whose colourful attractiveness is heightened with the particular dialect or language register their speech is adorned with.

Take for example, Kilin's masterpiece *Fuq l-Għajnejn ta' San Bastjan*, written during the author's upbringing in Malta's sister island Gozo, or other characters he created who speak a specific dialect *Xlukkajr*, which is the dialect used by Marsaxlokk fishermen. But probably the most prominent use of dialect is Juann Mamo's classic *Ulied in-Nanna Venut fl-Amerka* (Grandma Venut's children in

America), where the author takes us to early 20th century Malta and includes various characters who speak constantly in dialect. Mamo not only uses dialect, but also highlights the realities of the characters who had very limited education, were struggling to communicate in English and created their own mesh of English-Maltese vocabulary. Interestingly enough, Mamo as the writer takes a rather cynical slant towards these characters, mocking them for the way they communicated. I found it interesting that there are specific scenes that are actually language-driven rather than plot-driven.

Here is a quote from the English translation that is currently underway by Dr Albert Gatt, Senior Lecturer and Director of the Department of Linguistics and Language Technology at the University of Malta, courtesy of the Spreading Words funding scheme by Arts Council Malta.

'Hooo! ... De Amelicas, dat's where we'll go! Let's take off to de Amelicas! Dere we'll get rich quicker den you can cross yerself, we'll become respectable folk, fill up de munneybags and den turn tail and come beck: buy ourselves a dozen houses, rent dem out at de rate dey're going at dese days and lay back, mind at rest, pipe in mouth, on de steps of dis forecourt here and chetter about de going rate for clover and about last year's crop, else we'll go to Saqqajja Hill and look down over de whole of Molta; what sey?'

In contemporary literature, the concept of code-switching and the usage of both the Maltese and English language in the same sentence, which is a widespread phenomenon in today's Malta is particularly explored in Alex Vella Gera's *Is-Sriep regghu saru velenuzi*, (*The snakes have become poisonous again*).

I spoke to Chris Gruppetta, one of Malta's leading publishers about the novelty of having manuscripts cross his desk with language which might not be standard but is definitely contemporary for a portion of the population and the additional risk of

not choosing the easy way out.

"It's a tricky one, code-switching in Maltese literature," Chris quips. "On the one hand, that's how the vast majority of the population speaks - switching constantly and casually between languages, even mid-sentence - and there's an argument to be made for literature reflecting the beating reality of a living language. On the other hand, though, written literature should aspire to show the best of the language, and not necessarily pander to the verbal mangling that many of us subject it to on a spoken basis.

Vella Gera's *Is-Sriep reġghu saru velenużi* and the short stories by Clare Azzopardi and Mark Vella in *Awguri, Giovanni Bonello!* are perfect examples of how code-switching can be worked brilliantly, intelligently without compromising the beauty of the written language. Maltese and English (in Vella Gera's case), and Maltese and Italian (in Azzopardi and Vella's case), are kneaded together to present an achingly accurate sound of dialogue in present-day and historic Malta respectively.

In a different format, code-switching between Maltese and English is applied as a narrative and character-profiling tool in Wayne Flask's *Kapitali*, where class and societal distinctions in modern-day Malta are presented through the prism of language."

During the course of the EU collective project, our focus was to work with writers and directors and introduce polyvocal techniques gradually. During our initial discussions in creating the commissioned play *Moving Mountains*, the concept of polyvocality was central to creating the speech patterns in the play. Playwright Vincent Vella creates an ensemble that co-exist in groups, almost clique-like; with the characters of Ralph and Rose who speak in a dialect that is common for their middle class British family, Reverend Whitmore and his congregation in religious rhetoric, the doctors that speak in technical jargon and younger characters Amira and Emma using expressions and buzzwords associated with people their age.

Vella creates an ensemble cast of characters that clash due to their social class, upbringing, moral beliefs, nationalities and their understanding of the role of church and state when dealing with medical issues. The play gives moments of pathos to each character, eliciting a reaction of empathy to all characters irrespective of the audience's own beliefs throughout the course of the play. There are specific scenes when one character, mainly to communicate with another who uses a different communication code, makes a conscious effort to speak in the other person's code. Some manage to do so successfully, but the play offers a moment when Dr Mertens is trying to communicate with Ralph Mallory and loses control in frustration since there is an obvious block in effective communication.

Throughout the many events organised for the project, it was interesting to analyse how the technique of polyvocality is perceived by audiences and experimenting with various techniques. During our collaboration with *B'tal-linja jaqbillek żgur*, a performance that toured various locations around Malta and Gozo. Spearheaded by the Malta Arts Festival, during pre-production, discussions on how to put the 'found object' technique in practice resulted in employing a fusion of music from the traditional *ghana* (traditional Maltese music)

by Maltese *ghannej* Il-Bamboċċu to popular music used for promotional spots on the media that the general public who attended these performances knew very well. During workshops held with children and youth, the topic of dialect was delved into with various reactions. Some thought that it made characters more realistic whilst others saying it made characters more comic – depending on the background of the audience themselves. Whatever the reaction, the addition of dialect and speech patterns created a more rounded, interesting character. Another interesting aspect is the classicism that is associated with a specific language pattern.

The project was also an attempt at a hybrid play, blending of genres and stock characters from each genre – the Roman soldier from the religious dramas, the drag queen from pantomime, the clown and stilt walker from the circus-theatre, the over-the-top singer from cabaret and musical theatre and the mute characters from mime-theatre to name a few. The production itself also was a mixture of scenes that remind the audience of the theatrical aspects of the village feast, pantomime and the passion play, three of the genres which are most ingrained into Maltese popular theatre. The production was very well-received by audiences and the performance was enjoyed repeated performances than the initial run during the festival.

Through the research, networking events, workshops and meetings organised for the project, it has become apparent that writers are very keen on experimenting with new language techniques that reflect the cosmopolitan environments that we live in, the mobility of our writers and audiences and how our world view and therefore, cognitive and linguistic expression is evolving.

5



# Interrogating Polyvocality; Explorations into the Evolving Actor

Paul C. Castagno

The 2018 KHiO Oslo International Acting Festival emphasis on new trends in polyvocality in the theatre and on the discipline of acting was groundbreaking in both design and execution. The conference itself was meticulously planned and curated, constituting a hybrid of interviews and lectures, creation of new work and modes of working, and play readings and discussions, all of which occurred literally around the clock for seven consecutive days.

I felt honored to have my work showcased at the festival, largely based on my 2012 book *New Playwriting Strategies: Language and Media in the 21st Century* (Routledge). While I had published an earlier edition in 2001 that influenced theatre and playwriting in America, I was delighted that the second edition has clearly had an impact more globally and has given rise to a vocabulary for expressing hybrid plays, collective playwriting, and the importance of multivocal language. In brief, polyvocality defines a hybrid play that is constructed from disparate sources, genres or dramaturgies. Collective playwriting (as witnessed in the EU Collective Plays! Project) provides another application of polyvocality, whereby a cohort of playwrights deals with a theme or subject from multiple and often clashing perspectives. In practice, polyvocality is often evidenced in the juxtaposition of live performance with various media. Multivocality pertains specifically to the character's ability to change techniques, levels of language, and alter personation within performance. In the festival, we contrasted polyvocality with traditional, Aristotelian based dramatic structure, genres, and by extension, to the context of orthodoxy in actor training and methods.

The festival explored how this dramaturgical evolution might be incorporated in the actor who now must switch voices or characters in mid-stream, integrate and respond to media in performance, and to what extent various types of actor training would allow this to happen, fluidly. Under the confident tutelage of organizers, Øystein Stene and Gianluca Iumiento, these questions were explored in daily forums and interviews. I participated in many of these forums, which covered an array of viewpoints across the disciplines of theatre, film, video and solo performance with media. Each session was videotaped for international dissemination, available either by visiting the KHiO website or broad social media platforms like [YouTube](#).

The progression from the morning forums into the afternoon workshops demonstrated the organizers' commitment to mixing theory with praxis. This applied knowledge involved the participants of the festival each seeking out an area of discovery that triggered their own artistic development.

The emergence of the polyvocal actor seems ineluctable in contemporary theatre as playwrights,

directors, and devisors increasingly celebrate hybrid or postdramatic forms that require a juxtaposition of performance techniques. The polyvocal actor responds to these markers in the script or at times, in relation to other media in the mise-en-scene, and shapes a performance accordingly. Thus, a traditional Meisner approach can be buttressed with techniques ranging from Kabuki to rap. In essence, the move from the psychological to the performative increases an actor's range significantly and can suggest virtuosic theatricality combined with dramatic sensibility. As such, the polyvocal actor is a transforming actor pointing a new path forward in approaching new work. Further, juxtapositions between the actor and media allow for instant changes in mise-en-scene that underscore a potential clash in style and content. In the multiple morning panels over the week, it became clear that the polyvocal actor will transform our thinking about what the actor does and how we must resist pigeonholing an actor into one encompassing technique. It seems clear, however, that current actor training or standard traditional practices will fall short of fully realizing the actor's polyvocal potential. In other words, a polyvocal play has to be mined for its performative potential and not simply be addressed as if it was written by Arthur Miller. This will require breaks from comfortable ways of working, thereby challenging orthodoxy through experimental praxis. In raising this awareness the OIAF interrogated the status quo and greatly advanced the project of what polyvocal acting means, and how to attain it.

I found one of the most exciting and fruitful aspects of the program was the afternoon playwriting workshops with about 15 playwrights from around Europe in each group. (Other groups were expertly led by Tale Næss, Fredrik Høyer, Lars Erik Holte, Tomi Janezi, Mi Elfverson, and Mariken Halle.) The multilingual backgrounds of the participants allowed each playwright to use the language suited to his/her own work and growth. I had spent several weeks prior to the Festival planning out a strategy of exercises that could engage polyvocality while concurrently encouraging each writer's creativity; the key was to focus on the participants' writing versus pedantic arguments and theorizing. To create trust and ensure creative spontaneity I wanted to dissuade the opinion that they were going to be judged on how good or bad they were at polyvocal playwriting. This no fail approach led to a strong and supportive bond among this talented cohort as everyone was excited to read and hear their work, while commenting on each other's work. Most of the playwrights were in attendance the full seven days and the growth and outcomes were often revelatory as they wrote a blend of monologues and dialogues scenes. Readings were in Norwegian, Sami, Italian and English; some chose to write in Norwegian and read it back in English. As the focus was on language

and different strategies of dramaturgy this polyvocal approach proved most effective. Specifically, the monologue work was deeply personal and emotionally engaging and as many in the group were actors, the readings often adeptly indicated shifts in performance style; conversely, in dialogue scenes (often written in pairs), the rapid shifting levels of multivocal language led to some hysterically comic scenes that explored a performative range. Writers were able to identify how language can shape and transform characters. We explored various levels polyvocality playwriting as writers worked in teams, duets, and individually. Each day brought forth a different strategy: equivocal character, for example, explored how the actor can switch persona on a dime with various trigger devices. Thus, the exercises tied into the main theme of the conference: the polyvocal actor. On the final day of the seminar, we shared work with Tale Næss's workshop and the reception was most gratifying for the playwrights. Although the workshop extended for seven days, each session promoted different

energies and levels of creative engagement—always at a high level of intensity and dedication.

Since 2015 I have been involved with the EU Collective Plays! (EUCP) Project, and introducing these hybrid plays in the evening sessions was the perfect follow through: theory and ideas in the morning; practical workshops exploring creativity and praxis in the afternoon; and viewing and responding to new collective plays in the evening. KHiO has been

an instrumental partner with the EUCP. Indeed, Tale Næss and Gianluca Iumiento are authors of *Darkness*, which has been largely developed in Oslo. In October 2017, Gianluca and KHiO had hosted the reading of *Freetime* by Gian Cervo and the Presnyakov Brothers, after which Gianluca spearheaded a very perceptive talkback session. Currently serving as author of the EU Collective Plays! Anthology, I was delighted to witness a number of the new works each evening as we gathered for readings of *Darkness*, *Freetime*, *Moving Mountains*, *Leaves*, and a collective work from Northern Ireland. I had previously presented an earlier version of *Darkness* at the Translation in Theatre Conference held in June 2017 at Oxford University, and it was evident that the reading in Oslo was the result of an updated and improved draft. Characters like Julian were fleshed out, there was more emphasis on the landscape as a peninsula breaking away, and we saw more attention paid to the children, and their imminent danger from the hunters. At the festival, I also

met with two Oslo videographers about collaborating with our American premiere production, which I will direct at the University of North Carolina in Wilmington in November 2019 with collaborators, head writer Tale Næss, and videographer, Sabrina Johannsen, from Oslo.

*Darkness* is typical of the EUCP with multiple playwrights from Nordic countries and northern Germany working together—each voice distinct, yet reaching various takes on the enemy within—the common theme underlying the piece. The polyvocal dramaturgy probes this question from a clash of viewpoints that interrogates both urbane and rustic perspectives while embodying a sense of a looming Norwegian landscape.

One outstanding feature of the conference was the close bond developed among all of the mentors and practitioners. The playwrights were all committed to producing new work, and over the seven days there was continuing discussion and integration of ideas among participants. Rose Aker was superb as the coordinator and liaison making sure everything ran smoothly and facilities and events were arranged without a hitch. Gianluca and Øystein kept the atmosphere relaxed, yet professional, and discussion continued over dinner, at arranged dinners or events, and (of course) over drinks. Celebrating and reading from Øystein's new book added to the Festival's celebration of achievements.

While the conference left little time for outside activities I was delighted on the day of departure to meet with KHiO's acting Dean and the head of playwriting. We discussed the potential for future exchanges, which is very exciting. I had the opportunity to visit the Ibsen house, and as I had just directed *Hedda Gabler* in April 2018 at my university, it was a profound experience to get the inside picture of such a complex, influential playwright. Since I had used Edvard Munch as my visual and psychological inspiration for that production, I took the opportunity to visit the Munch Museum, which exceeded my furthest expectations as all his major works are housed there. Instead of flying back immediately after the festival, I took about a week to travel up the coast from Bergen toward Trondheim on the *Hurtigruten* cruise seeing the fjords and beauty of the coastline. The drive from Oslo to Bergen was truly breathtaking as the scenery is a spectacular mix of soaring landscapes, waterfalls, fjords, and mountains.

The highlight for me personally was certainly being honored with the OIAF award for outstanding life achievement in the pedagogy of playwriting. I was delighted to meet artistic director, Line Rosvoll, who hosted the event at Dramatikens Hus (the Center for New Playwriting in Oslo) and is a strong advocate and promoter of new playwriting in Norway. The award is beautifully ensconced in marble and I will of course treasure it always, not only for its mark on my career, but most of all for the memories of all the wonderful theatre people I met at KHiO and for the deeply felt engagement and joy we had at the Festival.

Paul C. Castagno, Ph.D.  
Professor of Theatre



# Darkness

## – the enemy inside, a collective writing endeavour

Tale Næss

Language constitutes the text. The text is a laboratory. In it, we can do what we want. Change the rules and change the perspective. As long as the universe holds. As long as the game is sound. As long as the reader or the audience wants to *play*.

### To write together

In today's reality, writing together has become just one of many ways to write a play. Writers pair up. Theatres involves teams in the development of new plays, theatre groups write together using devising techniques or other tools, etc.

The collaborations can come about for various reasons, also artistic – and include playwrights, actors, dramaturgs, directors, researchers and so on.

Paul C. Castagno writes in his book *New Playwriting Strategies, language and media in the 21st century* (Routledge 2012): *The rigid paradigm of the playwright as the sole creative source has become less the mantra ...*

Together with this trend comes a merging of traditional and new poetics, and with that a re-theatralization of the play. This produces, states Castagno, the most prevalent form of plays today – the hybrid.

The development of the play *Darkness – the Enemy Inside* was a collaboration between five different playwrights and the goal was to produce a hybrid play.

The project was a part of the main project EU Collective Plays! Called *the collective plays!* aiming at promoting the creation of plays which are the result of a collaboration between playwrights of different nationalities. The playwrights meet and cooperate to create a narrative structure, which is organic but at the same time incorporates different perspectives, styles, languages and idioms.

Oslo National Academy of the Arts is one of seven partners in this project, with Gianluca Iumiento as the one holding it.

In 2015, Iumiento invited me, as a playwright, dramaturge and PhD fellow in playwriting, into the project as a dramaturge and head writer. My project PhD-project, *from 1:100 – the performative hybrid text as a feedbackloop*, offers many overlapping focus points with the EU project, and as I took on the job, I had already a wide experience from other collective writing endeavours.

Together, and with the assistance of Gian Maria Cervo, we put together a team consisting of five interesting writers from different northern European countries: Sigbjørn Skåden from Sapmi and Norway, Kristin Eiríksdóttir from Iceland, Albert Ostermaier from Germany, as well as Iumiento and myself.

The project was directly inspired by new playwriting strategies, as unveiled by Paul C. Castagno in his book. The task was to produce a final play that never tries to homologate the different styles, but, on the contrary, tries to highlight their contrasts by creating a collective narrative structure, which resembles a cubist painting.

### Readings and context

In the proximity of this collective writing project, the theatre department at Oslo National Academy of the Arts established a research group consisting of head of acting Iumiento, of pedagogue and writer Øystein Stene, of professor in playwriting Jesper Halle, and of myself. This research-group came together developing and discussing their own writing projects, reading relevant literature, and also followed the project as it developed. They read various drafts, adding valuable comments and reflections as it progressed. The master students in theatre were also introduced to the work, and through this gained insight into the project and the ideas and techniques it explores. On the 16th of June 2017, there was a reading of 30 pages of material at the conference for Translation into theatre and the Social Sciences in Oxford. The reading was the performative part of Professor Paul C. Castagno's presentation at the conference, and it was specially assembled by Paul C. Castagno and I. Preparing a text for this reading was the first step towards piecing together a performative text from the various material. I called it *Darkness – a bric-a-brac version*, trying to take care of the differences in the material, not the overlapping qualities of the writing. The reading showed that there was obvious potential in the material.

Through the three years period of development, the Academy has also done different readings and staged readings of the play. These readings have been directed by Iumiento. In the second reading

7 *Darkness – The enemy inside (Øya)*  
by Tale Næss, Gianluca Iumiento, Kristin  
Eiríksdóttir, Sigbjørn Skåden and Albert  
Ostermaier, directed by Jakob Schokking,  
performed at KHiO by 3rd year students,  
November 2018



of the play in November 2017, we invited five experienced actors to do a stripped down, staged reading of the material almost in its full length. The research group, former and current master students in playwriting, and colleagues at the Academy constituted the audience. Again, the material showed promise, and a new version was developed for a staged reading at Oslo International Acting Festival in June 2018. Iumiento directed the reading that also introduced video and live filming as a part of the artistic components.

In October of 2018, the third-year students in BA in acting at the Academy performed parts of the text in a shorter performance version of the play, under the title *the Island*. The performance was directed by Belgian director Jacob Schokking. Video was also used in this version, and Jan Tariq Rui-Rahman composed music for the play. In November 2019, Paul C. Castagno is going to direct a full length, two-act version of the material at North-Carolina University.

Today, the material consists of scenes, stage directions, monologues and dialogues. The different components function as a set of building blocks that can be combined in different sequels. As the head writer, I compose a whole from these building blocks.

As Paul C. Castagno writes in his book *New Playwriting Strategies: In the polyvocal play, structure is a product of the relational patterns between the building blocks while style is determined by the nature of sequence and transitions. The process of determining the best pattern is a major component in the revision* (Routledge 2012). This has also been the case in the revision of the various versions of this collective endeavour.

### A hybrid-play

The task the five writers were given was to write a *hybrid play*.

According to Paul C. Castagno and his new playwriting techniques – *a hybrid play is a play of hybridization*.

*Hybridization is the mixing or clashing of different genres, cultural or historical period styles, and techniques. For example, the farcical mixes with the serious, the high-toned with the vulgar, the sophisticated literary with traditional folktales; Eastern performance traditions exist side by side with Western approaches* (Paul C. Castagno in *New Playwriting techniques*).

The writers did not know each other and had no obvious overlapping interests, so the goal was to find a framework for them to write within that would create connection points for the writers, but that wouldn't unify their writing in a plot or an overall aesthetics. We wanted to avoid developing a particular language or one consistent way of seeing the world, and we were striving for a form that offered itself to polyvocality.

Talking together, discussing theme, form, and characters – but writing separately – became the main method applied.

### The play

Inspired by the new playwriting strategies, as unveiled by Paul C. Castagno, I, as the head writer, introduced landscape as a potential *dancing partner* early on in the project. Maybe geography could be the structuring force of the play. It could be a frame to place events, scenes and characters

within, and that would give space to different narrative strategies and a potential for polyvocality into the writings. As the work progressed, the setting and the dramaturgy of the landscape where the events took place became formative for the process and the form of the play.

*Darkness – the Enemy Inside, or the Island*, as the shorter version of the play is called – is set on a peninsula somewhere in near future Scandinavia. Modelled on the idyllic suburbia of Nesodden, outside the capital of Norway.

Every day the ferry takes the people living here, back and forth to the city.

The backdrop of this suburbia is a wooded mainland with rivers, ponds, hills and forests.

Living in this suburbia setting is *Julian*, a successful performance artist in an existential crisis, his wife *Kate*, a levelheaded architect, and their children. We also meet their neurotic neighbour *Lina*, and her newfound friend *Emil*, whom awakes a passion in her for target shooting.

In the wooded hinterland, *two hunters* are hunting, revisiting the landscape of their childhood. And as the suburban life plays out as normal, taking out the trash, arguing, doing art, doing nothing – the children go missing. Taking on the figures of animals – a squirrel, a crocodile, a badger and a fox – they leave suburbia. Disappear into the woods and deep into the mainland where the hunters are hunting for their prey. And as this happens, the world cracks open and the peninsula literally starts shaking itself loose from the mainland, leaving an island adrift.

Bye bye mainland. Bye bye hunters. Bye bye children ...

*Darkness – the Enemy Inside* explores how living in an egalitarian and harmonious society can bring forth an inner darkness, what Gianluca Iumiento calls *the enemy inside*. While *catered* for by the state, depression, angst, even the thought of suicide floats to the surface. It is as if being protected from outer danger and stress produces a narcissistic angst in the people. This was the premise that was given as we started the project, but as the work progressed, another perspective surfaced. Maybe this angst is not at all narcissistic and irrational. Maybe the harmonious state of things might just be thin glaze covering up a deeper crisis. A real and existing threat. A feeling of that all that has been won, could unravel. That the angst and depression the characters experience are not signs of narcissism, but the results of a real and reasonable fear, a growing knowledge of the fact that the society, as we know it, might not survive the resent global developments, and that the natural forces no longer are under our control. We might be facing a hard and unknown future, and in these ongoing ecological and economic crises, even the Scandinavian model of the welfare state might fall. These two ways of perceiving, the connection between personal angst and the nature of the society we are living in, are both present in the play. The dramaturgy does not try to unify or harmonise these two perspectives, but have them co-exist, scene for scene and inside the play as a whole. In this way the play portraits both a sense of inner, narcissistic angst stemming from lack of outer tension – AND a real sense of foreboding and fear. It is the tension between these two perspectives that produces both humour and horror.

I would even say, that as a hybrid, the play does not only thematise the presence of a crisis, it is in

itself in a state of crisis, and as the events unfolds and the world unravels, things become clearer as the characters gets plunged into an ever deeper darkness. This is the result of the clashes between different world views, genres and forms inside the play. And the end goal of these compositional tools of hybridization is to turn the play into an event itself.

### The team

As I mentioned earlier, the writers were hand-picked for the task.

The idea was to gather a team of skilled Northern European writers, and we were interested in writers from regions that had experienced some kind of polyvocal state, or that had lived through an economical crisis. That's why we especially wanted to have a Sami writer in the mix – and a writer from Iceland.

Sigbjørn Skåden is a prizewinning Norwegian and Sami author. His Norwegian breakthrough was with the novel *Våke over den som sover* (my English translation: *Watch over the one that sleeps*), an intense piece of writing about suppressed sexuality, self-loathing and self-preservation in the Sami community.

The novel follows a young artists exploration into his sexuality and art – and into the history of his family and the Sami people as the main character researches a case of sexual abuse in a large town in Finnmark for an art project. It explores the borders between the private and public, and between art, crime, tenderness and betrayal in a community where language has been politicized. Where people praxis and choice of Norwegian or Sami languages never can be truly neutral.

Skåden has also worked with several performative projects, like the play *Vidas Extremas* and the project *Golden Aja Casino and Motel*. This was our first collaboration. A collaboration undertaken together with the visual artist Joar Nango in 2015. We found our Icelandic writer in Kristín Eiríksdóttir. Iceland recently went through a dramatic economic crisis and a real political turmoil, a process that influenced every citizen in this small island community. We wanted to have someone that had experience with such a real crises in the mix.

Kristín Eiríksdóttir's playwriting is as dark as it is funny. She is an author and a playwright with a B.A. in Fine Arts from the Icelandic Academy of the Arts. She has written novels, poetry, and a short story collection, and her last novel was published in Iceland the autumn of 2017.

She has written several plays and radio plays and she has gained a lot of experience with writing collaboratively. She wrote the play: *Karma fyrir fugla* (my English translation *Karma for Birds*) together with Kari Ösk Grétudóttir.

Her plays are deeply theatrical, as Eiríksdóttir lets her characters continuously evolve and transform. Her writing turns society inside out and often pushes the subtext to the forefront without ever being ironic. There is a baroque-ness in her playwriting style that immediately lends itself to the hybrid form.

Albert Ostermaier came into the project later, but his contribution became vital in many ways. He was born in Munich in 1967. In 1990, he was awarded the Munich literary scholarship. During the theatrical season 1996-1997 he was playwright-in-residence at the Nationaltheater Mannheim and he was commissioned to write a play for the Bayerisches Staatsschauspiel on the occasion of the 100th

anniversary of Bertolt Brecht's birth. During the 1999-2000 season, he was playwright-in-residence at the Bayerisches Staatsschauspiel.

Ostermaier has won several literary prizes – both for his plays and for his poetry. The dark AND the poetic is his trademark, and as an experienced writer he offered the project both vital energy and resistance, that made us sharpen our ideas and our knowledge about the form we were trying to explore.

Gianluca Iumiento was the one holding the project as the writers came together. He has also been responsible for the readings and the staged readings of the play during the project.

Iumiento is a director, actor and pedagogue. He graduated from the Italian national film school, Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia in Rome, and was for a long period teaching at Oslo National Academy of the Arts, the Theatre Department.

Since 2000, Iumiento has worked as both an actor and a director in several ensemble theaters, festivals, film and TV, while concurrently creating and then curating two acting festivals: the Metodi Festival in Italy and the Oslo International Acting Festival in Norway.

For me, it was important to have the director as a part of the team. So that he himself could follow our discussions, our goals and our challenges as the work progressed.

I myself, Tale Næss (Norway), has functioned as the dramaturge and the head writer for the project. I have also coordinated the artistic process. As a playwright, dramaturge and author I write novels, poetry, librettos, radio plays and make dramatic installations. I hold a Master -degree in film-science and I have been working across the field nationally and internationally for the last 20 years. Often in interdisciplinary constellations.

In my PhD in playwriting, I especially investigate collective writing processes and the different composition tools and techniques involved in creating a performative hybrid text.

Together we started these two and a half years collective writing-endeavor the spring 2016.

### The process

During the writing process, the writers has continuously read and commented each other's work. Choosing a landscape or a geography rather than a plot as a guideline for the events in the play, we have worked individually, producing characters, settings and scenes to explore the theme and the inner and external landscapes we ourselves wanted to portray, and that we created together. Eiríksdóttir added the characters Lina and Emil to the mix, Skåden the hunters. Iumiento worked on texts involving the dilemmas of Kate and Julian, and I myself introduced the runaway children. After having established these characters and their place in the geography, we both together and individually started to cross-feed and further elaborate on our characters, events and settings.

The team has also met five times, in Oslo and Reykjavik. Here we have been discussing the theme and the texts between ourselves. Notations from these conversations have been included as dialogue into the play itself by me as the head writer, constituting both a deepening perspective of the underlying theme and adding a meta element to the text.

The writers has also been given tasks between the different meetings. Sometimes these tasks led directly to fruitful text production, other times the

writers themselves derailed from the tasks, inspired by current affairs or by other writing projects, that took the writing process in new directions.

During the process, an overrunning composition was slowly carved out for the piece – and at the end of the process, final sequences and scenes were added. A vital contribution to the process and the play was when the performative stage directions in this piece started to evolve. As soon as they evolved, I recognised a potential for an extra layer of text, and when elaborated on they soon developed a “will of their own”. As such the stage direction begun to take on the role of a performative element inside the play itself. These texts took shape through contributions from the writers but was given its final form by me as the head writer at the end of the project. This commenting text, both epic and gestic in its character – now played its own role inside the play, introduced a new layer of *language* to the whole. A language situated outside of the language of the characters at play. It was even able to address them and direct them, to address the audience and to change and influence the course of events. This was made possible by what Paul C. Castagno calls language-based playwriting techniques. Utilizing these techniques, it is about the journey of the language as much as the voyage of the character, and it rests on the fact that the play in itself is a system of language. Castagno states: It is not about mirroring or representing the visible world; rather the playwright of today establishes a parallel theatrical world. A world with its own ontology and conventions – and this inimitable

world enters into a dialogical relationship with the *real* world. This leaves the playwright free to pursue the theatricality of the play, a component that realism tends to downplay (New Playwriting Strategies, Routledge 2012).

Through the added layer of these performative stage directions, the polyvocality in *Darkness – the Enemy Inside* was not only there in its scenes and situations, but it manifested itself at the structuring chore of the play itself.

### Challenges

The writing process was a culminating and fast running process where one text continuously added to the other, but it was not effortless. Writing together is never just easy. There were many challenges on the way.

In this quote is from Castagno’s article Collective Playwriting: A European Experience in the Magazine Theatre Times, I try to outline both the task and those challenges.

We want to *show* – or lay open the hybrid forms, the different ways of using language – maybe even different languages in the composition itself. I ask myself: How can this play *come together* while the differences continue to be present and vibrant. There is a force in the composition. I am looking for tensions and shifts, for the baroque and the theatrical. It is a challenge to think of this as real experimentation. To make something that can only happen with us, with this theme – at this particular time and space – in this historical momentum with this project, – and not think about: will the theatres like it, who would possibly want to play the roles, etc. I think we have a real chance to produce what you call a *hybrid* play. And a real chance to make this something from which we can learn. <https://thetheatretimes.com/collective-playwriting-european-experience/>

Half way into the process, there was a body of text and a need for structure occurred. This was also when Ostermaier entered the group. As a strong and experienced writer, it was a privilege that he was able to join the team, and during an intense and interesting three days in Oslo, we discussed the various possibilities for a final

structuring of the play.

I myself wanted to continue working by creating buildingblocks of scenes and sequences connected by a geography, but there was also other options. Choosing a main character was one, and then using the dilemmas of this character as the engine for the play.

Ostermaier was interested in the character Julian.

Could Julian’s art-production be a starting point?

Maybe the whole play could, on a meta-level, be one of his artworks? Or maybe we, the audience, could be inside or a part of this artwork? Or maybe the whole play could constitute a discussion of the various consequences such artworks as Julian makes, produces?

The thought was intriguing, but also worrying. The character Julian is a conceptual performance artist. With that comes strong aesthetics, and with those kind of aesthetics come a way of seeing art-production in society, and with that again a view on what role artistic production and audience involvement plays in the arts. Would we manage to choose this path and still produce a polyvocal play? Was it possible to stay close to Julian, and at the same time include our different languages, writing styles, ethics, characters and scenes around the Julian characters artworks, or would he, or they, start to dominate, and influence the way every other perspective that was introduced into the mix played out? The discussions were heated, complicated – even hostile at times, but also fun. Some of the members of the team fell silent, and at the end of this three-day period all was up in the air – what would the outcome be? Other consequences of this idea that was discussed: Did we want to choose a white male as the main character? Was it in our interest to have a main character at all? If we were looking for a multitude of languages, voices and perspectives – introducing a strong main character could also introduce a kind of hierarchy in the text, were all the different voices was seen through or experienced by, and thereby already unified in one interpretation by the leading male of the play.

### Writing the polyvocal

For me as head writer, keeping the polyvocal quality of our work was of the essence.

Castagno writes: *Polyvocality resists the notion of a single or dominant point of view in a narrative, thereby supplanting the single or privileged authorial voice* (Routledge 2012). He also writes: *Multiple language strategies coexist in the play. Characters*



and narratives within the script may contain diverse interests or objectives, expressed in different speech forms. It was especially this pull away from the single or privileged authorial voice that I was after.

I also wanted to keep a multitude of perspectives and different types of material flowing through the text, from dialogues, songs, found material, virtuoso monologues, jokes and games. When each of the members of the team returned to their lives, and new material started to float in from the writers, I soon discovered that it was all as versatile and as rebellious as before.

Ostermaier produced a virtuous monologue for Julian, a powerful piece of writing. And all though this monstrous and deeply beautiful text could have been a tipping point forcing the rest of the text to the periphery, as the work found its form, it found its place. To not work around this text, but to push through, accepting also the place of this language and this voice in the play has been demanding, but interesting. And today I think that in sum it adds both beauty and tension to the play. Through these discussions some new territory was gained, as we resumed to develop the play inside the structure of its geography with a deeper knowledge, both of what we were doing and what was at stake. And about the things and perspectives we agreed on, and where we disagreed. My main concern all through the process was how could we produce a strong hybrid play, a play where social perspectives and social views could clash and co-exist within the same text.

The job of strengthening the female characters continued all through the process.

#### A deliberation – THE SPATIAL TURN

We all inhabit the same space. This earth is where we sleep, eat, live and die – and although some very few prepare for a space-shuttle travel to Mars, the rest of us has to stay here, no matter what comes our way.

We live in Anthropocene times. This home of ours is shaped by human actions. Soon, not a corner of this planet remains untouched by man. Silent as it is, the world still has its voice. Its winds and droughts and earthquakes and floods.

Some say the earth has become heavy by our hands, but still it reacts at its own will, not really paying attention to whether it suits us or not. In their book *Land/Scape/Theatre*, Elinor Fuchs and Una Chaudhuri writes about what they call the spatial turn in theatre. Theatre has been associated with culture, not nature, they state. By art entering the will of the landscape they state, one can offer a fresh framework for thinking on modern theatre. As the theatre of the last century has challenged the Aristotelian hierarchy, it has been undermined by a flux of dramatic structures and a gallery of fractured subjectivities. A pervasive new spatiality, of which scenography is only the most obvious site, has turned the Aristotelian hierarchy on its head, now spectacle may be the *soul* of the dramatic enterprise (Elinor Fuchs and Una Chaudhuri, *Land/Scape/Theatre*. The University of Michigan Press 2002). This has been especially experienced through theatre makers like Robert Wilson, but it can also be seen in text. From Gertrude Stein's *Steinscapes*, and Beckett's *Endgame*, central modernist writings for the stage, have taken steps towards giving dramatic form to the natural and built environment of the non-human order. Although landscape has always played a part in

classic theatre, King Lear's storm-lashed heath, Segismundo's desolate cave, something changed with modernism. Theatre begun to manifest a new spatial dimension. For the first time, landscape held itself apart from the character and became a character of its own.

One can ask what Fuchs and Chaudhuri means by this, as they take on deliberating on landscape in the case of American drama, looking at writers like Arthur Miller, Sam Shephard and David Hancock as well as examples of sonic landscape and the idea of the de-colonization of the gaze that goes on among feminist and post-colonial writers of today. But one can feel the turn, not only in the work they relate to, but in the thoughts of young artists today.

When we started our collective work, Sigbjørn Skåden early stated that what he was interested in, was landscape as drama. He was interested in the language of landscape and its place in our lives. He was also interested in portraying the effect that loss of landscape has on us, and how it leads to loss of language. How it develops blank spaces in our minds. There is an ecological awareness in these thoughts, and a knowledge about what industrialisation and human colonization of nature has meant to all of us, but especially to people living with and close to nature. Like the Sami people, or the traditional fishing and farming communities of pre-industrial Norway.

As cultures moves away from their heritage and their way of life, landscape and language are forgotten. This constitutes a drama. And letting this drama play out, like Skåden does in his scenes with the hunters in *Darkness – the Enemy Inside* shows how space, self-understanding, knowledge and language are deeply interlinked. Skåden's hunters are walking in a landscape that they know, or they used to know. It is there, but at the same time it is disappearing, as a way of life, a way of being in this landscape is disappearing. Praxes and activities that used to take place in it no longer goes on there, and with the loss of them, a form of active naming that belonged to it is also gone. This produces both numbness and pain in the character, as the familiar landscape produces both confusion and solace.

#### Landscape as the primary mover

In European writers like Roland Schimmelpfennig's writing, setting plays up. It is not just what it is: A Chinese restaurant is not just a Chinese restaurant in the Golden Dragon, and in Arabian Nights the apartment block is not just an apartment block.

In *Darkness – the Enemy Inside* the landscape takes on a will of its own. It does not care about the humans living in it. It has its own agenda and this agenda speaks through actions. As writers we have given it a voice, or a narrator through the stage directions. In this way the stage directions become *gestic*. In sum, I would say that *Darkness – the Enemy Inside* is as much a result of a spatial as of a theatrical investigation. It is definitely about exploring composition, polyvocality and the hybrid form, but it is also a gaze at the relationship between nature and man. To make it possible for the text to do both at the same time, we have worked for a maximization of flexibility in the structure. Due to its buildingblock-based form, the material resembles a Deleuzian assemblage where the parts, combined in various ways, feeds back meaning and references to each other, using riffing, rhythm and

repetition as central tools. - *Riffing is a way of using repetition as a tool that embellishes variations derived from a word or phrase of dialogue* (Paul C. Castagno, *New Playwriting Strategies*, Routledge 2012) - The version that is in the final publication is just one of many possible versions, but at the base of each of them is a celebration of the theatres potential for transformation, the joy of theatricalization, and the praxis of presenting parallel scenes and multiple perspectives in one text. Through the various tools and strategies of the five different playwrights, it investigates how language can change the landscape, but also how the landscape influences the language, or the languages we use. How it changes us.

#### The name of the game

*The Squirrels looks at the Badger who looks at the Crocodile*

The Squirrel  
The ground's shaking!

The Crocodile  
My belly is shaking!

The Squirrel  
My tail is shaking!

The Squirrel  
I don't like this anymore

Emil  
We better call somebody

Lina  
Who do we call?

*And as rocks starts rolling down the steep  
and as the rumbling grows higher  
and as the river starts to spill its water onto the marshes  
and the lake rips open like a ripe fruit  
pouring its sweet water into the ocean as the  
hunters picks up their guns in that dark interior far  
away from danger  
as the rivers ripple -  
as the Badger clings to the Crocodile  
as the Squirrel clings to the Badger  
and the Crocodile keeps slamming its tail in the  
mud shouting to see if her voice is bigger than the*

*rumble*

- *the peninsula starts tearing itself away from the mainland as if it had a will of its own*  
(Darkness, the Enemy Inside, June 2018)

#### Language constitutes the text.

The text is a laboratory. In it, we do what we want. We change rules and we change perspective. In it, we can tear the world wide open. As long as the universe holds. As long as the game is sound. As long as the audience wants to "play".

Language playwrights have been particularly effective in creating shifting scenes, usually in the form of landscape altered and formulated by language. The seemingly desultory relationship between scenes is mitigated because the language provides a structural linkage, Paul C. Castagno states (Routledge 2012).

Believing in this mitigation, in language being able to provide a structural linkage between the parts, *Darkness – the Enemy Inside* places itself in the school of language-based plays. Using psychology, plot points, poetic passages, commentary and readymades as bits and pieces, it combines; language and a common geography ties the elements together. The plat constitutes an interactive system in which each element is in dialogue or dialogize with the other elements.

By language becoming the arbiter of character and mis-en-scene, a potential for dialogical processes and polyvocal texts arises, Castagno states. In this play, we have tried to create our own unique theatrical world. A world that contains contradictions, different voices or discourses, and thus can function as a place for clashes of perspectives and point of views.

In the hybrid form, the playwright is flexible to juxtapose, deconstruct, or reassemble space and time, and open for clashes and tensions inside the play itself: When language alters space and time, established moorings are loosened, as conventions are interrupted or replaced (Paul C. Castagno *New Playwriting Strategies*).

*Darkness – the Enemy Inside* is a playful text. It is a dark text. And it is still, in all its form, a bric-a-brac. Or maybe even an assemblage, as an equivalent to the hybrid. Seen in this perspective, collective playwriting can be experienced as a kind of machine assemblage, where the whole process functions as a generic feedbackloop – a text-producing *machine* both generating and transforming material in a constant polyvocal, dialogical process, moving in several directions at the same time.

Every time I look at this material, it continues to amaze me and entertain me. It is as obvious as it escapes me. This is the magic of play-making. For in the play, everything still goes on: The hunters are still hunting while Lina enjoys her guns. And the children, who knows where they are? Deep in the woods, at a filling station, ordering a pizza? Already grown-ups maybe – or skinny-dipping in an icy creek. Happy as ants, as a squirrel, as a baby bear finishing a mouthful of honey.

*Darkness – the Enemy Inside* is a part of the larger project EU Collective Plays!  
<http://www.eucollectiveplays.eu/>

You can read more about the Norwegian/KHiO contribution to the project here:  
<http://www.khio.no/artistic-research/kunstnerisk-utviklingsarbeid-og-forskning/>

eu-collective-plays

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8 *The Cruellest man* by Gian Maria Cervo, directed by Gianluca Iumiento, performed at Palazzo Orsini - Bomarzo,





Tale Næss is an award-winning author and playwright with a long history of experience. Her texts have been staged in multiple theaters where they enjoyed long theatrical runs. She just finished her PhD at the National Academy of Theater in Oslo, where she researched the possibilities of writing and talking from the perspective of “we” and not “I”. Her newest play is currently being selected in the upcoming edition of Dramatikkfestivalen in Oslo.



Jesper Halle (1956) is a Norwegian playwright, and a professor of playwriting at the Academy of Theatre, Oslo National Academy of the Arts. Since his debut as a playwright in 1984 he has written close to thirty dramatic works for theatre, puppet theatre, radio and television. Among his most well-known plays are Dagenes Lys (Light of the days) The National Ibsen award for playwriting 1996, and Lilleskogen (The Littlewoods) The Hedda award 2004. He has also worked as a dramaturge and as a mentor for younger playwrights.



Gianluca Iumiento is an Italian theater and film director, actor and acting coach. After having studied Philosophy at the University of Pisa, he graduated from the Italian National Film School, Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia in Rome under the supervision of Academy Award Nominated Actor Giancarlo Giannini.

From January 2012 to August 2018 he has acted as Head of Acting at the National Academy of the Arts of Oslo (KHiO) where he also taught classes on acting and directing.

He led the group of pedagogues that developed the plan of studies for the acting department in 2012.

Iumiento has worked since 2000 as both an actor and a director in several ensemble theaters, festivals, film and TV, while concurrently creating and then curating two acting festivals: the Metodi Festival in Italy and the Oslo International Acting Festival in Norway.



Øystein Stene has written and directed stage plays and a feature movie. As a professor at The Oslo Academy of Theatre he wrote the introduction book to the history and philosophy of acting, *The Art of Acting*. (2016). He has published five novels, the latest *Zombie Nation* (2015) and *De Opplyste* (2018). Stene’s work is translated into several languages.



Joyce Grech studied at the University of Malta and holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Theatre Studies and Communications, a Post Graduate diploma in Education and a Masters degree in Communications, with a specialization in Journalism. Joyce worked in the media business for over 20 years and previous posts include Head of Education 22, Head of the Malta Drama Centre, Executive Director of the National Book Council and Executive Producer of The Malta Short Film Festival. Currently she is contributing to EU collective plays project as consultant with FOPSIM.



Paul C. Castagno is a professor at the University of North Carolina in Wilmington, and the author of the book, *New Playwright Strategies: Language and Media of the 21st Century*. Castagno claims that new drama can withstand a greater degree of contradiction and paradox, and that the text may originate from many places. He focuses on language, rhythm and character. He is the editor of forthcoming anthology *Collaborative Playwriting: Polyvocal approaches from the EU Collective Plays project*. London Routledge 2019.



Gian Maria Cervo (Naples 1970) is an Italian playwright, curator, artistic director of QdA Festival Viterbo and Teatro Stabile delle Arti Medioevali of Viterbo, Italy.

He is one of Italy's most internationally staged playwrights and his work as a playwright includes: Call Me God written in collaboration with Marius von Mayenburg, Albert Ostermaier and Rafael Spregelburd (2012 Teatro Argentina-Teatro di Roma/Rome National Theatre, Residenz Theater Munich, Deutsches Theater Berlin, Heidelberger Stückemarkt, Museumsquartier Vienna, ARD Alpha television, Meyerhold Center Moscow), and The Cruellest Man (2006-2007 Piccolo Teatro Milan, Teatro Eliseo Rome, Burgtheater Vienna, 2017 Royal Theatre Zetski Dom Montenegro, turned into a graphic novel by cartoonist Enrico D'Elia). He is a member of the Curatorium of the Prigov Foundation and of the Advisory Board of the MIT Festival Montenegro.

In 2018 he curated the exhibition "Reginald Pole between Michelangelo and Shakespeare" featuring works by Titian and by Marcello Venusti and Daniele da Volterra the two most important pupils of Michelangelo's.

He taught screenwriting and playwriting at the CSC, the Italian National Film School.



Tomi Janežič is a theatre director, university professor and psychodrama psychotherapist (ECP). He obtained his degrees in theatre directing from the Academy of Theatre, Radio, Film and Television in Ljubljana, and was additionally educated through a period of twenty-five years in Slovenia and abroad, particularly in the field of numerous acting techniques, psychodrama and group analysis. Janežič is one of the most recognized Slovenian theatre directors abroad and an internationally recognized expert in the field of acting. He has lectured and collaborated as an invited artist in several countries (Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Macedonia, Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Italy, Austria, France, Belgium, Norway, Portugal, Russia and USA). His performances toured on dozens of festivals in the countries of ex-Yugoslavia, around whole Europe, in Russia and USA. Janežič has received over thirty international prizes and awards for his artistic work. He has directed Studio for Research on the Art of Acting within the framework of which - and in collaboration with parallel foreign organizations and experts - he has done research projects in the field of acting since 1996.

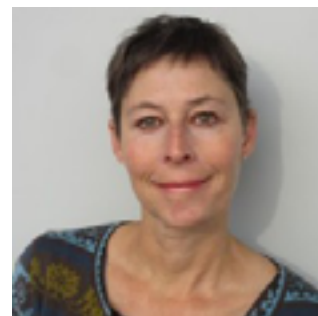


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