

Performance in Philosophy: One Man Play or a Living Personified Thought*

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Abstract—The paper investigates the problems of convergence of philosophy and theatre, the amount of actors' contribution to creating or performing oral philosophical text, to analyze the professional philosopher's (or a teacher of philosophy) methods that are used to "vividly reproduce" the philosophical views in the minds of the listening audience, which brings together the art of philosopher's speech and performing arts. The analysis of K. Stanislavski, M. Chekhov, Jerzy Grotowski's works on the art of acting, along with the works on the phenomenon of theatre (namely, of A. Badiou), and a range of classical philosophical works, that are analyzed in terms of their performing potential, could contribute to highlighting the central issue: what really makes oral philosophical text expressive. A possible answer is the image of the thought that has its specific space or stage for performance, set by philosopher himself by "drama" means. The unity of philosophy and theatre has a bright future ahead. It is already obvious that the process of thinking alongside acting and happening will become a central point of a public thinker's activity.

Keywords—*theatre; culture; philosophical performances; Jerzy Grotowski; A. Badiou; K. Stanislavski*

*And there is no other way for us to express ourselves,
rather than through a great obedience,
"dignity in concentration."*

Jerzy Grotowski

I. INTRODUCTION

It has emerged, that presence of the developed, independent philosophical tradition in this or that culture is closely related to the existence of performing art of no less developed kind, and sometimes to the theory of it. If one takes three philosophical cultures as the basis on which a German existentialist Karl Jaspers created the notion "axial period" – Greece, India and China - in his work "The Origin and Goal of History" [1], they can see that it is in those cultures (though not only in them) independent and professional forms of performing art are emerging (yet in China, unlike in Greece and India, it took that culture much longer to emerge). As far as we can see, that is not accidental, as both philosophy and theatre were part of the divine. Thus, according to Aristotle, divine knowledge is a philosophical-theoretical feature. In ancient India theory and methodology of performing art was called the fifth veda, that is a divine, sacred treasure, while systematic dictionaries drama terms could be found in the very sections as both names and

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attributes of Gods, time measurements and astronomy terms and that is in heavens. One can suppose, that worked the same way as both philosophical reasoning and drama imagery are too much for wellbeing and adequacy in this world, they are imposing on it. The same is true of the first philosopher Thales, who had to show his ability to use his brain for humble people's needs (a well-known story about olive harvest). In Ancient Greek philosophy "drama" is found both in early Greek philosophers' images (e.g. Empedocles, Pythagoras, Diogenes, etc.) and in the philosophical works themselves (particularly, in the philosophical poem by Parmenidas "On Nature" or in Plato's dialogues, namely in "Pirrus"[2]), which are created in adherence with certain rules of drama plot composition. On the Eastern outskirts of Ellinistic cultural world, in Indo-Greek kingdom, Plato's dialogues were performed on stage. So if in later cultural Western history philosophical texts were thoroughly "dried" by Aristotle's logics and for many centuries theatre was represented only latently in philosophical activity, things changed in late 19th century when their convergence becomes more expressive and at times rather tragic. The well-known early work "The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music" [3], by which F. Nietzsche said his farewell to the career of ellinist, tells us about two starts of Greek culture – Dionysial and Apollonian. In it Nietzsche exposes the harmful nature of the rational in European culture and philosophy. In a way, he is a philosopher, who brought Western philosophy a great degree of eccentricity, which earlier was more inherent in drama action, and now, along with Schopenhauer and Kjerkegor, it heralds a new era in European philosophy, a modern period of its development.

In performing arts, it is the 20th century that happens to be the most interesting in terms of philosophy getting into theatre. Thus, even the classical figure heads of performing arts, such as K.S. Stanislavski (1863-1938) and our contemporary A.A. Vasilyev, who emigrated to France, both focus more on the philosophical contents of drama form. Vasilyev, who set up School of Drama Art in Moscow, is also the author of several stage versions, some of which are striking in terms of their philosophical contents.

Even the theatre building itself is all about defining the philosophical concept of theatre, and that is theatre is a temple of art and the audience is there not to relax or get entertained, but to co-create with actors, who are performing a ritual on the stage. It is the 20th century that saw the most interesting philosophical works on theatre ("Rhapsody for the Theatre" by A. Badiou, works by Jerzy Grotowski and others), the stages witness philosophical plays (one the most recent is "The Tao Gardener", in which the actress is weekly performing the fragments from Tao Te Ching Laozi¹).

In connection with that it could be of interest to try and analyze the ways of convergence of philosophy and theatre, the amount of actors' contribution to creating or performing

¹ The actress, who is the sole performer in this play acts dispassionately, and sometimes the only thing featured on the stage is the Lotus pose she is in, with her eyes closed. It a dispassionate performance without actual performance, a passing meaning without representation.

oral philosophical text, to analyze the professional philosopher's (or a teacher of philosophy) methods that are used to "vividly reproduce" the philosophical views in the minds of the listening audience, which brings together the art of philosopher's speech and performing arts. The analysis of K.S. Stanislavski, M.A. Chekhov, Jerzy Grotowski's works on the art of acting, along with the works on the phenomenon of theatre (namely, of A. Badiou), and a range of classical philosophical works, that are analyzed in terms of their performing potential, could contribute to highlighting the central issue: what really makes oral philosophical text expressive. That is why the tempting answer to that could be the image of the idea that possesses its own special space/stage of its "performance". It is the analysis of this matter that the given essay focuses on.

II. PERFORMING ARTS AND THEIR GOALS ACCORDING TO K. S. STANISLAVSKI, M. A. CHEKHOV, JERZY GROTOWSKI, A. BADIOU: THE MORAL POTENTIAL OF PERFORMING ARTS

Let us roughly outline the basic principles of performing arts, as they are seen by the outstanding theorists of the 20th century, namely by K. S. Stanislavski, M. A. Chekhov, Jerzy Grotowski. It is also noteworthy to analyze the way theatre is presented in the work of one of the philosophers of postmodernism Alan Badiou.

The most well-known theorist of drama art is rightfully believed to be Konstantin Sergeevich Stanislavski, who worked out a famous acting system that is named after him. In his book "An Actor's Work on Himself" (1938) Stanislavski elaborates the process of realizing how the role is created or the way in which an actor can transform himself into some stage image [4]. When eventually realizing that, an actor is able to achieve a maximum psychologically credible reproduction of his acting. The latter involves three technological elements. Primarily, it is the craft that is the use of ready-made clichés and acting molds. The craft helps the audience to see what emotions the actor performs on the stage, and then goes the art of presentation, based on numerous rehearsals, when actor experiences true feelings analogues of his role, which can help him to automatize certain forms of expressing these experiences. Finally, the last element is the art of actor's experiencing his role, which is behind creating the stage image analogue.

What is more the key point of this system remains what Stanislavski calls "fact of life", that is the correlation between every actor's "gestures" with life facts. In this sense the word "theatrical" loses its primary meaning as something artificial and impressive. Real theatre is always alive and natural. But not all that is alive and natural can be allowed on the stage. To tell what is really necessary from what is secondary; one needs an ultimate goal that is what master wants to get across to people, some supreme ideal and an ultimate value. In this respect an actor is not a puppet in director or dramatist's hands. He does not passively and somewhat indifferently performs what the creator made for him, on the contrary, he is an idea-maker, and he takes part in the process and acquires all that is valuable and important and what he really believes in, and what he really

experienced himself. An actor does not perform; he acts "in images and passions of the role". That excludes any mechanical drill or stage performance. In other words, an actor must really feel what he is trying to portray. His transformation must get others to believe him, so he could "change but be himself". Thus, in terms of performing arts (as well as in terms of philosophy), among the key principles of Stanislavski's system (life facts, the ultimate goal, transformation, etc.) the crucial point is the ultimate goal, that moral ideal or value that the actor is trying to get to the audience. It is the ultimate goal principle that, in our mind, unites theatre (according to Stanislavski) with the fundamental function of philosophy.

K.S. Stanislavski's follower, M. A. Chekhov (1891-1955) is also a founder of drama school, which has much in common with Stanislavski's system. The principle difference between the two systems is that according to Stanislavski's system the image is created while an actor is working on himself, he is feeling through it, creating and transforming in the course of numerous rehearsals and in the end, acquiring and telling himself but in the character's voice. According to this system, the image is what an actor comes to. Whereas according to M. Chekhov, the image is a starting point for an actor. Thus, if this actor has enough talent, his own style, taste and knows the limits, then the image will be right at its core from the start. Further the actor is already is working on the details [5]. This approach can be compared with gestalt psychology that says that you have to embrace the whole picture, the entire image you are to live out at once, otherwise all the images, created by the actor, will be like caricature and flouncing around.

A polish drama theorist Jerzy Grotowski (1933-1999) is next to Stanislavski in importance. He had the best insight into the acting nature phenomenon. This accounts for him calling the theatre The Laboratory, meaning that theatre is the main object of research, a certain mode of life. In this respect if, according to Stanislavski's view of theatre, the audience is vital (it is for the audience that several actors reveal the acquired sacred truth), then for Grotowski the audience is needed only occasionally. Performing art is understood as a form of serving by him. In his article 'To the Poor Theatre' (1965), answering the question what the sources for his theatre experiments were, Grotowski says that the very word 'experiment', that is applicable to the theatre, is wrong, as it demonstrates the accidental nature of success that is based on stereotypes and clichés [6]. "We work in a different direction. Firstly, we are anxious to break free from eclecticism, from looking at the theatre as at the unity of different arts. We aspire to the exact definition of what makes the peculiarity of the theatre and cannot have other performed doublets. Secondly, we focus on a detailed research into the actor-audience relations. This is what we consider to be the core of the theatre as an art form – the spiritual and stage actor's method... At the grass roots of our method is that we do not teach an actor certain skills to create "an arsenal of expressive means"... We focus on the spiritual process of the actor that is characterized by an ultimate openness that reveals the most sacred things that an actor possesses... This is a "trance" and all the physical and

moral potential technique of an actor who rises from the intimately instinctive to "epiphany" [7]. The traditional view of theatre as a symbiosis of literature, play of light, acting, etc. (so-called The Rich Theatre, "an art representation of kleptomania") Grotowski opposes to The Poor Theatre, which is able to exist without stage make-up, the stage itself, the play of light, etc.

The only thing it cannot do without is the "actor-public" link. Theatre has no need to compete with either television or cinema, as theatre is always technically inferior. That is why this fact must be acknowledged and accepted. "The idea is to find the right balance in the "actor-public" scheme for every type of performance and determine the space of the play in accordance with that" [8], but since a modern viewer is guided by the rational, the theatre is not apt enough to shake the deepest layers of his psychic.

In his work "Rhapsody for the Theatre", based on the articles for the journal "L'art du theatre", the French post-modernist philosopher Alain Badiou enumerates seven indispensable elements of the theatre (place, text, director, actors, decor, costumes and public). At the same time the language of the theatre has the markers that define important philosophical concepts [9]. Let us analyze some basic terms, in which Badiou expresses his view on theatre: 1) Theatre and "theatre". Badiou defines theatre as something that exists when you have public, actors, referent, that a performance helps to represent [10]. He introduces the difference between "theatre", that he calls pulp (as box-office is a miserable goal), and The Theatre as something to tell about itself and the world, this theatre requires its own Spectator, it wants the public to interpret the interpretation on their own, as "nothing can be caught up with or justify that you failed to become The Spectator." 2) Spectator and Public. Badiou draws a line between the public (that is the primary target for the cinema) and spectator (theatre relies on him) [11]. 3) Laziness and Idea. As Badiou says, in every society, that is mad about productivity, there is always some intellectual laziness or aversion to idea. The Theatre brings discomfort by revealing a lazy one that is a person, who is unable to become a Spectator. 4) Imitation, Singularity and Originality. The key actor's virtue is not technical parameters, but the ethical grounds, that shun effects and are always about singularity. Singularity is viewed as an ethical readiness, aimed against all the conventional conceptions. 5) Eternity, Meeting, Present Moment or Instant. The main effect The Theatre aims at is the eternity effect. Evidently it is up to the production to get ready to meet its Spectator with what text carries into the eternity. The moment in which he experiences a thought is the present in which this meeting takes place [12].

Thus, we see that the discussed theories on performing arts place philosophical component at the core. Let us then discuss the presence of "theatre component" in some philosophical performances.

III. PECULIARITIES OF PHILOSOPHICAL PERFORMANCES
OF A. M. PYATIGORSKI, G.P. SHCHEDROVITSKI AND M.K.
MAMARDASHVILI

The ruthless theatre invasion of the calm existence of philosophy and merging of acting elements with public presentation of the philosophical contents is a phenomenon which is not quite a novelty for European philosophy. But one is quite safe supposing that until the 60-70th of the previous century it was limited to university halls, teaching occasions, and was entirely dependent on personal and inherent qualities of readers. According to the recollections of Heinrich Heine, though Hegel's lectures in the University of Berlin were a success, it was down mostly to their contents rather than presentation, which left much to be desired. The lecturer was leafing through his notes, sniffed tobacco, and sneezed, coughed and hardly paid attention to the listeners, not knowing and not willing to establish a direct contact with it. On the contrary, choleric Fichte was an excellent reader. It is easy to imagine the actor's expressiveness with which he suggested his listeners get from a trivial experience of contemplating (staring at) the wall of the lecture hall down to reflection: "And now, contemplate the wall!" but this supposition is based largely on our impression of Fichte's style and manner of his works, aimed at larger audiences, that urge the reader to think over, rather than on his contemporaries' reviews. Thus, these two examples get us closer to understanding of the unity of an individual philosophical style, which can either call for something theatrical or be alien to that. One can add to that that a philosopher who has some actors' skills was prone to become an eccentric in the eyes of academic circles.

Thus, a great degree of novelty in the contents and the professional style of writing, as well as in the individual way of the philosopher, improves his creative potential. Thus, as we can see, Martin Heidegger, who tried to bring philosophy closer to the art of speech, poetry in everyday life, had manners, typical of a plain person. On the contrary, Wittgenstein had an eccentric lifestyle but adhered to the traditional when it concerned the functional aspect of his texts.

Yet, as not every outstanding philosopher could make the grade as a good lecturer, so is not every notable lecturer of philosophy bound to be an unconventional thinker. We can compare such lecturer with a performing artist, such as a pianist or a speaker, or finally with actor playing, whereas a philosopher whose outlook and conception are the foundation of the lecture becomes a composer or a dramatist accordingly.

New perspectives for public character of philosophy that resorts to drama means and devices are believed to appear at the latest stage of modernism and the transition to post-modernism in terms of culture. Technically they are supported by a wide range of accessible video and on-line devices. This link was behind the notion of performance and happening that goes back to the 50th of the XX century. It was behind the revival and spreading, at first sporadically (in Russian Avant garde), of such practice. As it is often the case, cultural novelties can appear either simultaneously in arts

and belles-lettres, on the one hand, and in philosophy, on the other. Or it can be philosophy that follows art lagging behind a bit.

Thus the upsurge in word making, that resorts to mixing words and word derivational models, is observed in the English nonsense poetry at the end of the XIX century (L. Carroll, E. Lear), and in the 20th of the XX century M. Heidegger resorts to similar models in philosophy. But let us recollect what performance and happening are. They involve an aspect of unexpectedness that is the unplanned course of action and the result, as well as mixing the role with the performer. The person who makes the performance or happening is playing himself to a larger extent. By getting these features into the domain of philosophy, we arrive at a supposition about the public mind being alive and being created on the spot. But this is a crucial feature of a philosophical mind. It is bound to be individual, one's own, and not reproduce (perform, dub) alien thoughts; it should often turn to reviewing its means of putting things through; it makes, unlike in student or ideological adjustment, based on a reasoning-value approach, to a much predicted result, a thinking person is always unaware what he will arrive at. He can wonder at his own conclusion.

It would be enough to recall what image of Socrates Plato had. In Russian philosophical culture the first notable figures, who positioned themselves in a new field happened to be people not only obviously talented but marginal in a way for the official philosophy. Such was M.K. Mamardashvili with his numerous public lectures and teaching philosophy to non-philosophers; the same was true of G.P. Shchedrovitski, the founder and opinion leader of the "System-thought-action methodology", and finally A.M. Pyatigorski, a philosopher, a man of letters and an orientalist. They knew each other and when young, belonged to one circle. They all made speeches in front different audiences and only a small part of their ideas, presented in that form of philosophical performance, were made into articles or books during their lifetime.

Actors' self-images, created by the mentioned public thinkers, express their different intellectual and creative individuality. In his public lectures Mamardashvili is obviously taking time, picking the exact expression. He speaks clearly, but calm and in a low voice, making the listeners to be all ears, catching his every word. His word production and presentation is evidently aimed at inveigling his listeners into the inner space of the lecturer's thought; he inveigles, and seemingly charms. A. A. Zinoviev's reasoning may not be well-meant, but it hits the mark: "Mamardashvili – is a shaman for intelligentsia." When one reads shorthand version of his lectures there is a feeling of disappointment when compared to his own voice. This is what proves the importance of philosophical performance in M.K. Mamardashvili's creative activity.

G. P. Shchedrovitski is in some way his antipode. We see a charismatic leader, and the sticklers of his methodology will see an intellectual leader. With his voice and intonation, he shakes the audience out of their usual, ignorant existence, wins over them – their attention and mind – and holds them

firmly. He manages to combine the control of the contents of his thought and his audience, what adheres to the notion of “two planks”, informative and active, that he introduced.

M. Piatigorski is a philosopher-actor to a greater extent; sometimes an urge for expression forces him to play down the contents of his thought a little with a bright image or voice effects: by tone, intonation, loudness [23]. Yet, as a rule, an understanding of the unity benefits from such moves, so unconventional in philosophical circles. Piatigorski became famous as an original mind, an eccentric, not very flattering qualities, but they did not affect either the value of his thought or the effectiveness of means he used to get to the audience. Actually, he seems to be not so much about telling philosophy on a selected topic (which is no doubt quite philosophical), rather than performing as a philosopher.

This seems quite unexpected and way too non-academic, but in fact A.M. Piatigorski is in accordance with the ancient tradition.

IV. CONCLUSION

So, what makes philosophical speech expressive? A possible answer is the image of the thought that has its specific space or stage for performance, set by philosopher himself by “drama” means.

Performance as an art form is devoid of any difference between the author and the performer. In some samples of public presentation of philosophical way of thinking one can expect this very sort of performance. This means the author does not produce a well-thought idea but creates it on the go. The same is true of a good teacher of philosophy, who performs somebody’s thought just like an actor, who has learned his role that he devised himself.

The unity of philosophy and theatre has a bright future ahead. It is already obvious that the process of thinking alongside acting and happening will become a central point of a public thinker’s activity. There are examples to set among our contemporaries. They are Slavoj Žižek, Noah Homski abroad, and A.K. Seratski and P.G. Shchedrovitski in Russia.

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