

• Audronė Žukauskaitė

GILLES DELEUZE AND THE THEATRE OF THE REAL

THE INVENTION OF THE REAL

In discussing the phenomenon of the theatre, we are used to think about it in terms of imagination, symbolisation and signification. The theatre always had this privilege of escaping the Real and replacing our uncanny everyday with the help of rhetorical and imaginative devices. But what if there is nowhere to escape? What if this obscenity and banality of our everydayness is the only place we can arrive? Here we can reconsider the so-called 'antinomy of post-modern reason': on the one hand, we have the ideology of realism, directly appealing to reality, and, on the other hand, we have discursive ideology, insisting that reality is a set of discursive practices. The direct appeal to reality hardly can be considered as a philosophical solution — it is the position of common sense. The discursive ideology also seems inappropriate, but for different reasons: isn't it somehow too easy to assume that everything is of a discursive nature? Instead of this controversy, we can choose a 'third way': the conviction that our post-modern, discursive reality presents itself as the Real.

Why the Real? Slavoj Žižek, invoking Alain Badiou, insists that the key feature of the 20th century is the 'passion for the Real' [*la passion du réel*]. "The ultimate and defining moment of the 20th century," according to Žižek, "was the direct

experience of the Real as opposed to everyday social reality — the real in its extreme violence as the price to be paid for peeling off the deceptive layers of reality."¹ In this context we are reminded of such phenomena as Georges Bataille's notion of excess, Nagisa Oshima's film *In the Realm of the Senses*, and finally, the World Trade Centre attacks. Although the 20th century always seeks for the Real, the Real never appears as such, but is always twisted with its opposite — spectacle or illusion, which somehow enables the experience of the Real. "The fundamental paradox of the 'passion for the Real'", Žižek says, "is that it culminates in its apparent opposite, in a *theatrical spectacle*... If, then, the passion for the Real ends up in the pure semblance of the spectacular *effect of the Real*, then, in an exact inversion, the 'post-modern' passion for the semblance ends up in a violent return to the passion for the Real."²

It seems that the Real cannot appear without the help of the spectacle, and, on the contrary, spectacular simulation creates *the effect of the Real*. Jacques Lacan was the first to mention the proximity between the Real, which is actually never available to us as such, and imaginary or symbolic reality, which is discursively constructed. As Lacan points out, the Real is what is missing from reality; on the other hand, reality is the only way to get access to the Real. Jean Baudrillard formulated the same paradox speaking about the

asymptotic proximity between cinema and the Real: cinema is trying to get closer and closer to the Real, but the problem is that the Real is totally absorbed by cinematographic reality, so that our everyday experience is totally virtualised and conceived as unreal. And as Gilles Deleuze tells it, we no longer believe in the world, because the whole world simply looks like a bad film.

This is why artwork is an exceptional place for the encounter with the Real. To paraphrase Jean-François Lyotard, the 'invention' of the Real is the key feature of post-modern art. According to him, "modernity, whenever it appears, does not occur without a shattering of belief, without a discovery of the *lack of reality* — a discovery linked to the invention of other realities".³ Lyotard describes as modern the art that devotes its 'trivial technique' to presenting the existence of something unrepresentable.⁴ "The post-modern, on the contrary, would be that which in the modern invokes the unrepresentable in presentation itself, that which refuses the consolation of correct forms, refuses the consensus of taste permitting a common experience of nostalgia for the impossible, and inquires into new presentations."⁵ To put it in Lacanian terms, modernism operates referring to the lack or absence of reality (the lack of the Real in reality), while post-modernism 'presents the unrepresentable', or installs the Real into the framework of reality.

Žižek distinguishes between modernism and post-modernism by relying on the same distinction between the absence and presence of the Real. He describes modern art as 'the game without an object,' presenting the central absence around which the action is organised. The greatest examples of modern art — Michelangelo Antonioni's film *Blow Up* or Samuel Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot* — work without the object, but refer to it in a negative way. Post-modernism for Žižek "is the exact reverse of this process. It consists not in demonstrating that the game works without an object, that the play is set in motion by a central absence, but rather in displaying the object directly, allowing it to make visible its own indifferent and arbitrary character".⁶ So if we prefer to rewrite Beckett's play in a 'post-modernist' way, we should have put Godot himself on the stage: "he would be someone exactly like us, someone who lives the same futile, boring life that we do, who enjoys the same stupid pleasures".⁷

PRODUCING THE REAL

Is the concept of the Real relevant for discussing the phenomenon of theatre? In interpreting theatrical phenomena, the concept of the Real can be

used in different aspects — Lacanian and Deleuzian. From the perspective of Lacanian psychoanalysis, the stage is conceived as the place that presents the otherwise hidden reality of some traumatic event. This event is either the trauma of incest (Oedipal drama), or the trauma of (social or sexual) antagonism (presented in the form of social criticism and obscenity dramas). According to Jacques Lacan, trauma is not a 'thing in itself,' but something, which is created by a leap of time, applying a new network of signification. The traumatic event is never 'original,' but is always created retroactively: trauma becomes what it is only by inventing new signification and interpretation. In some sense this false event of trauma leads to the invention of a new reality, where this traumatic antagonism is resolved at an imaginary or symbolic level. That means that the Real is constituted in relation to representation, and thus appears as the 'innermost core' of the imaginary (or symbolic) itself.

The concept of trauma has already found its place in contemporary critical discourse. For example, Mark Seltzer generally describes contemporary culture as 'wound culture,' reflecting the Greek etymology of the term.⁸ Hal Foster coined a term 'traumatic realism,'⁹ which became very popular in Lithuanian art-critical discourse, because it helps to come to terms with some extraordinary or obscene art events. The theatre of Oskaras Koršunovas can be interpreted as one of the examples of such a 'traumatic realism'. His theatre performances are always tied to the same 'nodal points': Oedipal trauma, the trauma of capitalism, and the trauma of sexual difference. The artworks of S & P Stanikas, which represented Lithuania in the Venice Biennial of 2003, could be considered as another example of such a 'traumatic realism'. Their ceramic sculptures and drawings are very close to pornography, and the photos they make usually portray their own bodies in images that simulate violence, wounds, and disease.

Although 'traumatic realism' puts the Real on the stage, the Real, as I already suggested, is constituted in relation to imaginary (in S & P Stanikas's case) or symbolic (in Koršunovas's case) representation. As far as an 'original event' of trauma is beyond cognition, and the interpretation of trauma creates the new, subjective, i.e. distorted, reality, the 'original event' of trauma disappears, never appearing as such. On these grounds, 'traumatic realism' should be interpreted as a purely modernist procedure, while it doubles reality, seeking for a new signification and interpretation. Another point is that the notion of the trauma in one or another way reconstructs the subject of the trauma. As Foster points out, "in art and theory, trauma discourse continues the

poststructuralist critique of the subject by other means, for again, in a psychoanalytical register; there is no subject of trauma... On the other hand, in popular culture, trauma is treated as an event that guarantees the subject, and in this psychological register the subject, however disturbed, rushes back as witness, testifier, and survivor. *In trauma discourse, then, the subject is evacuated and elevated at once.*¹⁰ It seems that 'traumatic realism' is still too modernist, too subjective, and too confined to private fantasy.

Another interpretation of the Real could be provided in terms conveyed by two French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. Deleuze and Guattari start their critique of psychoanalysis saying that it is stuck in the analyst's couch: "A schizophrenic out for a walk is a better model than a neurotic lying on the analyst's couch. A breath of fresh air, a relationship with the outside world."¹¹ Deleuze and Guattari deny the dualism between the hidden, latent unconscious and its explicit symptoms that are revealed in psychoanalysis. What they are proposing is a flat, one-dimensional universe, which doesn't need interpreting, revealing or explaining, because everything is on the same plane. "For the unconscious itself is no more structural than personal, it does not symbolise any more than it imagines or represents; it engineers, it is machinic. Neither imaginary nor symbolic, it is the Real in itself, the 'impossible real' and its production."¹² Comparing these two models of the unconscious, psychoanalytical and Deleuzian, we can draw a conclusion that the psychoanalytical model (Freud/Lacan) still belongs to modernity, while it operates, on the one hand, on the absence or the unrepresentability, and, on the other hand, on the process of interpretation/signification. The Deleuzian model operates in the flat universe of the 'body without organs', which is the plateau distributing different intensities. If the modernist version of the Real doubled the Real in imaginary or symbolic representations, the post-modern version of the Real simply presents the Real as a process of mutually existent variations.

Another important consequence, which follows from the Deleuzian position, is that the unconscious does not refer to any individual or defined subject. "We attack psychoanalysis on the following points, which relate to its practice as well as its theory: its cult of Oedipus, the way it reduces everything to the libido and domestic investments, even when these are transposed and generalised into structuralist and symbolic forms."¹³ Deleuze/Guattari propose a project that they entitle schizoanalysis, which implies fluid subjectivity without any stable identity forms. "We are

proposing schizoanalysis as opposed to psychoanalysis: just look at the two things psychoanalysis can't deal with: it never gets through to anyone's desiring machines, because it's stuck in oedipal figures or structures; it never gets through to the social investments of the libido, because it's stuck in its domestic investigations."¹⁴ So how can we imagine a subject, devoid of all domestic investigations, Oedipus complexes, and social and sexual traumas? We already have the answer — s/he would be someone who is exactly like us, living the same futile life we do, enjoying the same stupid pleasures.

The most recent example of such a subject is presented in Rodrigo García's performance *The Story of Ronaldo, The Clown of McDonald's (La Carnicería Theatre, Spain)*¹⁵. García's performances always arouse controversy because they consciously aim to destroy the representational model of theatre and the limits between the imaginary or symbolic representation and the Real. Another important point is that García's performances try to withdraw from the model of psychoanalysis and interpret the subject not in terms of fantasy or trauma, but in terms of social production. One of the characters of the play says: "There are no reasons to approve any mania: if you were abused in childhood, I'm very sorry. But keep silent about that". García presents the post-modern Deleuzian subject, which has no inner depth, no secrets: everything is simply put on the stage. You want to know something about the hero's family — here they are, sitting, eating chips and drinking Coca-cola. You want to know his genealogy — here you see the pieces of shit, which 'represent' familial relationships.

Coincidentally or not, García's character recovers from all his personal traumas (such as the death of the father or the surgery of phimosis) after visiting the local McDonalds, as if saying that subjective desire, subjective fears and traumas are transformed into the incessant flow of consumption of capitalist goods. The stage is overloaded with food in a literal sense, showing that the entity called 'subject' is just a phase in the process of production and consumption; it is a machine, determined not by 'inner' fears, but by desire, which is by nature social and materialistic. "If desire is repressed," according to Deleuze/Guattari, "this is not because it is desire for the mother and for the death of the father. If desire is repressed, it is because every position of desire, no matter how small, is capable of calling into question the established order of a society; not that desire is asocial, on the contrary. But it is *explosive*; there is no desiring-machine capable of being assembled without demolishing entire social sectors."¹⁶

BODY WITHOUT ORGANS

Returning to Garcia's performances, we can ask what they aim to destroy. The first answer, of course, is capitalism. The revolting amount of food on the stage, and the bodies of the actors, sliding in the oil or ketchup, directly demonstrate the functioning of the capitalist machine. The spectator is bombarded by this food flow as if saying that there is no safe position for the observer, there is no place outside of capitalism. Another answer is that Garcia's performances aim to destroy the psychic depth of the subject — and this point is somehow very painful for art critics. When it was performed here, Lithuanian reviewers accused the performance of infantilism, for fucking everything around: it seems that everyone agrees that the capitalism in which we are immersed is wrong, but nobody is ready to admit that we are also a part of this meat-grinder and we choose it with our 'free will'. Rodrigo Garcia depicts the uncanny materiality of our existence and our desire, absolutely neglecting any idealism behind it. In fact he destroys the possibility of private fantasy and, in the words of Deleuze/Guattari, shows that "there is no such thing as the social production of reality on the one hand, and a desiring-production that is mere fantasy on the other. There is only desire and the social, and nothing else."¹⁷

From this point follows the third conclusion that Garcia's performances call into question the representational model of theatre in general. What it aims at is a one-dimensional plateau, the 'body without organs,' which is the keyword in the Deleuze/Guattari system, marking a withdrawal from the framework of representation. What does the 'body without organs' mean for Deleuze and Guattari? Let me quote: "The BwO is what remains when you take everything away. What you take away is precisely the phantasy, and *signifiances* and subjectifications as a whole. Psychoanalysis does the opposite: it translates everything into phantasies, it converts everything into phantasy, and it retains the phantasy. It royally botches the real because it botches the BwO."¹⁸ Deleuze and Guattari say that the BwO is not at all the opposite of the organs. "The organs are not its enemies. The enemy is the organism. [...] It is true that Artaud wages a struggle against the organs, but at the same time what he is going after, what he has it in for, is the organism: *The body is the body. Alone it stands. And in no need of organs. Organism it never is. Organisms are the enemies of the body.*"¹⁹

Deleuze/Guattari point out that "the BwO is not a scene, a place, or even a support upon which something comes to pass. It has nothing to do with fantasy, there is nothing to interpret. [...] It

is not space, nor is it in space; it is matter that occupies space to a given degree — to the degree corresponding to the intensities produced."²⁰ In fact the BwO is opposed to three strata: 1) the organism, 2) *signifiante* (the model of signification and interpretation), and 3) subjectification. "To the strata as a whole, the BwO opposes disarticulation (or *n* articulations) as the property of the plane of consistency, experimentation as the operation on that plane (no signifier, never interpret!), and nomadism as the movement (keep moving, even in place, never stop moving, motionless voyage, desubjectification). What does it mean to disarticulate, to cease to be an organism? How can we convey how easy it is, and the extent to which we do it every day?"²¹

This challenging excerpt from the text of Deleuze/Guattari provides several helpful suggestions for interpreting Garcia's performances. These performances operate on the plateau of BwO, denying any principles or the organisation of meaning, of any models of signification and interpretation. It confronts us with the fact that in our everydayness we are the BwO, experiencing and producing different intensities, experiencing and producing the Real. The BwO invokes a conception of the body that is disinvested of fantasy, images, projections, representations, and a body, which has no psychic or secret interior, but is in constant relationship with social reality. Here we can say that Deleuze and Guattari replace the psychic with the social, the interior with the political. "Desire produces reality, or stated another way; desiring-production is one and the same thing as social production. It is not possible to attribute a special form of existence to desire, a mental or psychic reality that is presumably different from the material reality of social production."²²

From this follows that the post-modernist art event is not only a metaphor for society, simply doubling reality on a rhetorical level, but also a metamorphosis of society, producing and distributing new states. Metamorphosis, according to Deleuze, is the contrary of metaphor: "There is no longer any proper sense or figurative sense, but only a distribution of states that is part of the range of the word."²³ Metamorphosis is describing the body in terms of what it can do, the effects it is capable of, in passion as in action. Metamorphosis places the human body in direct relation with the flows or particles of other bodies and things. Deleuze/Guattari "refer to Spinoza's conception of the univocity of being, in which all things, regardless of their type, have the same ontological status. The BwO refers indistinguishably to human, animal, textual, socio-cultural, and psychical bodies".²⁴

Xavier le Roy's dance performance *Self Unfinished* (1998)²⁵ could be considered as a beautiful example of such a metamorphosis. Xavier le Roy studied molecular biology and after a long research of a few genes decided to express his scientific interests in dance. Le Roy is a choreographer and philosopher at the same time, and his dance performances are often considered as a way to express theoretical ideas and critique. The dancer's body is transformed in a real-time series of morphological aberrations, which represent human, inhuman, mechanical or even dead bodies. Xavier le Roy's performances intervene into a new field where scientific and social data is transferred and imprinted on the body. There is no longer any distinction between the man and the machine, the man and the animal, since each deterritorialises the other in an incessant flow.

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Audronė Žukauskaitė

GILLES'IS DELEUZE'AS IR TIKROVĖS TEATRAS

S a n t r a u k a

Apie teatrą dažniausiai kalbama pasitelkus vaizduotės, simbolizavimo ir reikšmės sampratas. Teatras visuomet naudojosi privilegija pabėgti nuo Tikrovės, retorikos ir vaizduotės priemonėmis pakeisti ir

perdaryti siaubą keliančią kasdienybę. Tačiau kas vyksta, jei bėgti tiesiog nėra kur? Kas, jei atstumianti ir banali kasdienybė yra vienintelė mums pasiekiamą vietą? Čia galima prisiminti *postmodernaus proto antinomiją*: viena vertus, esama realizmo ideologijos, kuri tiesiogiai nurodo realybę, kita vertus, esama diskurso ideologijos, teigiančios, kad realybė tėra diskursyvių praktikų rinkinys. Tiesioginė nuoroda į realybę vargu ar gali būti laikoma filosofiniu sprendimu – tai sveikam protui būdinga pozicija. Diskurso ideologija taip pat atrodo nepakankama, bet dėl kitos priežasties: ar ne per daug paprasta teigti, jog visi reiškiniai yra diskursyvos prigimties? Atmetę šiuos priešingus požiūrius, galime pasirinkti trečiąjį kelią, pagrįstą įsitikinimu, kad mūsų postmoderni, diskursyvi realybė pasirodo kaip Tikrovė.

Skirtingai nei įsitvirtinę reprezentaciniai teatro modeliai, Gilles'io Deleuze'o teorija siūlo interpretuoti teatrą kaip *Tikrovės teatrą*. Postmodernus meno kūrinys yra ne tik visuomenės metafora, paprasčiausiai pakartojanti realybę retorinėje plotmėje, bet ir visuomenės metamorfozė, kurianti ir skleidžianti naujas būkles. Šiuo požiūriu metamorfozė yra metaforos priešingybė, nes ją apibūdina ne tiesioginė ar perkeltinė prasmė, o nuolatinis skverbimasis į Tikrovę, jos patyrimas ir kūrimas. *Tikrovės teatro* samprata paneigia latentinės reikšmės ir interpretacijos, vidinės gelmės ir socialinės erdvės dualizmą bei įgalina interpretuoti teatro reiškinius socialinėje ir politinėje plotmėje. Tikrovės teatro idėja detalizuojama analizuojant Rodrigo Garcia'os režisuotą spektaklį *Ronaldo, McDonaldo klauno istorija* ir choreografo Xavier'o le Roy šokio spektaklį *Self Unfinished*. Šių kūrinių analizė atskleidžia, jog metamorfozė ne dvigubina realybę, bet tiesiogiai skverbiasi į Tikrovę, kuria skirtingas jos būklės ir transformacijos. Kartais šios transformacijos mus šokiruoja ir kelia siaubą; tačiau tai yra kaina, kurią reikia sumokėti už Tikrovės patirtį: negalime tikėtis, jog patirsime Tikrovę, patys išlikdami nepalieti šių pokyčių.

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