

## **The importance of meaning in the act of creation**

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**Abstract:** The article addresses the notion of "meaning" and its forgotten necessity in the act of creation, both of the actor and of the director, with the aim of redefining the responsibility they have in front of the spectator, so that their act would become a creating one again. Meaning, not just something that was created, but that continues to create, so that theatre does not remain a mere tool, but that it restores its function. For this, it is necessary that the act of creation does not remain the unconsciously narcissistically manifestation of the one who makes it, but that the manifestation would become a consciously revealing one towards the one who is meant for it. Using the impossible exhaustive knowledge of the field of abyssal psychology - itself not being an exact science -, the article appeals to empiricism as the only way by which "meaning" can be researched, and confronts the weakness of the authors to have forgotten their responsibility, by giving into the need to generate pleasure at the expense of meaning.

**Keywords:** Meaning, art, creator, culture, change

### **Why have we come to shy away from the big questions?**

Why did meaning of existence or motivation for making art become taboo questions? Or worse, ridiculous? Why do we feel inadequate when we approach these dimensions, or why when someone else does do they seem inadequate? Is it because we are so? Inadequate to talk about it? Are we uninitiated in the love of knowledge, but still retaining a trace of the good sense of reality, which warns us that we have nothing to seek in the abyssal space of great thought? Or is it fear? Is it the initiation of our ancestors, and ours through them, that taught us to be cautious, because knowing is nothing but a valley of tears which through the process of awareness will return us irremediably to the nothingness from which we emerged? Or, should it be hope? The hope that we have not yet lost Paradise, so we preserve the ingenuity of ignorance, drugging ourselves with the opium of ignorance, so that we can unconsciously create artificial paradises?

Can we still talk about beauty today? Or did the author of artificial paradises inoculated us with the truth of the Flowers of Evil and then, to avenge his inability to control beauty, he sold it to Satan without the Christian promise of a coming back? It

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has become improbable to speak of beauty without invoking, even in complete ignorance, Baudelaire. Guilty of having loved the demon from which beauty draws its sap, Baudelaire creates modernity. He reinvents humanity, returning it to its original truth. He integrates sin into being human and tells the human being that it cannot be freed from it. He wrote about everything, without discriminating anything: drugs, interracial love, homosexual love. Baudelaire raised damnation to the rank of beauty of being. And, for that, he was judged, condemned, and banned. He bequeathed to us a more lucid conscience, and all the more painful: that in human being beauty is not born from morality, but from its fecundation with truth. But only if she allows herself to be fertilized. Because morality feels more often than not damaged by the truth. And the meeting between those two is very rarely a love story. Morality will seek to suppress truth, because truth has no obligation to be either aesthetic or ethical, whereas morality has imposed itself to be so. The paternity of beauty being the truth, beauty - unlike aesthetics, which is the artificial birth of morality -, is not guilty of conscience. It is the responsibility of morality to recognize beauty that "you govern all, and answer no man's call... you are a candle where the mayfly dies in flames, blessing this fire deadly bloom... What difference, then, from heaven or from hell, O Beauty, monstrous in simplicity?... as long as... o my queen, can make the world less dreadful, and the time less dead"<sup>1</sup>, and then to admit to herself: "I know that they are eyes, most melancholy ones, in which no precious secrets lie hidden... cases... emptier and deeper than you are, O Heavens!... What matter your obtuseness or your indifference? Mask or ornament, hail! I adore your beauty!"<sup>2</sup>

### **Why do we make theater?**

It has become necessary to ask why we do it. It has always been necessary, but it just turned out to be easier to do it when you stop wondering about why one does it. But to do it without seeking to understand why, without opposing the personal need the necessity of the act and its relevance, makes us guilty of what C.G. Jung denounced as the greatest passion of the human being: inertia. "If there were no mobility and flashes of the soul, man would have stagnated because of his greatest passion - inertia."<sup>3</sup> We make theater and go to the theater out of inertia. Personal need has many valences, from the pecuniary ones to the highest, that connects us to the very making of the world, such as meaning. But what legitimizes us, those of us who find our meaning on stage, to get on it, in front of the spectator to whom perhaps the

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Baudelaire – „Hymn to beauty”, source: <https://internetpoem.com/charles-baudelaire/hymn-to-beauty-poem/>

<sup>2</sup> Charles Baudelaire – „The love of lies”, source: <https://www.poetryverse.com/charles-baudelaire-poems/the-love-of-lies>

<sup>3</sup> Carl Gustav Jung – „Opere, Vol. 1, Despre arhetipurile inconștientului colectiv”, Editura Trei, 2014, page 36

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same demon whispers loudly that he doesn't have it? Were we really chosen? If we believe that, then it justifies why most actors and directors need God: it justifies them, without having to investigate and doubt, why they are there. Faith absolves them of responsibility. But can we be absolved? If the actor finds his meaning on stage, because the spectator is looking at him - that's just the etymology of the word "theatre" - it means that the actor's responsibility is to help the one looking at him to find it too. That would be the only legitimacy that can save the stage act from remaining a simple act of narcissism.

But the experience as a spectator, with very rare exceptions, always brings me to the same question: should that be all? The exhibited narcissism of the actors, subject to the manipulative one of the director, in front of the gregarious one of the audience: the three parts inexorably linked, which, as in a symbiosis, desperately seek recognition? Is this the only need that justifies the existence of this phenomenon? Do we really think that if they fill the hall, laugh, applaud us, and stand up at the end, they are doing it for us, for our artistic, and intrinsically human value? And, if so, what is the value that is confirmed to us, thespians? What is the value of an artist measured in? How willing is the theater creator (actor or director) to accept that applause can be confirmation of the mediocrity of what he does, and not of value? The answer is quite simple: about as much as he is willing to step out of himself and discover his limits. The limit of any artist is himself. Where his consciousness cannot penetrate, where he gets stuck in approximate understandings and limiting beliefs, that is where his art ends. Not just his, but the very concept of art. Only the human being remains on the stage, using the pretext called art to validate his limits and to be able to continue to preserve itself between them.

To what extent, if the audience agrees and feels validated by you, the theater creator, does it mean that you, the creator, really are the creator and not just a mirror adjusting its reflection to flatter the one being reflected? The spectators applauds because they are moved, or because they have been brought up to do so. They don't know how to be true either. And this is the role, the point, and the meaning of the theater: to mediate the encounter between the spectator and his own Shadow. Emotion, story, atmosphere, image, they are all mechanisms by which authors seek to impress the audience, appealing to their emotions and sensitivity. What about consciousness? To what extent do theater creators in Romania still ask the question of public consciousness? To disturb the spectator, because he sees himself exposed in what he does not know, does not accept, or cannot? Isn't that what art is all about? But does the theater creator still search for meaning? Or is he slightly uncomfortable with this word? What about aesthetics? Does the theater creator still understand what aesthetics is? Or, has the misuse of this word, its vulgarization, succeeded in paralyzing any of its functions? Is the aesthetic still a necessary function of being human? The demystification of the concept of aesthetics leaves room for amoral

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beauty, that beauty that everyone can define as they like, so that banality and vulgarity can be considered beautiful and even aesthetic, since too few creators are aware of the meaning of the words and concepts they make use of.

Almost imperceptibly, a reversal of roles happened. It is no longer the theatre-maker who decides to which revelation he leads his spectator, but the spectator who dictates to the creator what to do, in such a way as to please both. And the creator, unconsciously, allows himself to be seduced by the mirage of this drug. But does the theater creator admit the possibility of this truth? Maybe just about other creators, trapped in the belief that he is not guilty of doing it too. But it can be checked by asking: why does he do it? What is the meaning of what he does? What is the metatext of the text they are working on? Since "narcissism is a curse only for those who, by seeing, want to fix their image, to stick to themselves because they are perfect"<sup>4</sup>, the mandatory condition to be able to accept this perspective is to be able to accept that, since gods also die from time to time, maybe it is time to let their inner one be next.

### **Change or conservation?**

In the evolution of existence, the two opposites - that of conservation and that of change - are inescapable conditions. Whether it was intentional or accidental, evolution happened because something changed. And there are two kinds of change. The first is the constant becoming of the something into something else. The nuance, the maturing of that something, sometimes to the point of a total metamorphosis, where the original form is no longer recognizable. The second kind is fracture, the exchange of something that exists, with something else, which may be more, less, or perhaps not at all similar to what existed. There is apparently also a third: that of the spontaneous appearance of something that did not exist until then. I say apparently, because there is nothing that does not already have a history that necessitated its appearance. Which means that what seems to have appeared spontaneously, and that is completely new, is in fact something that was born, so something that already existed preceded the new existence. Emergence of life, in either accepted meaning, requires the existence of something that made life possible. Because the creation of the world retains its mystery, human consciousness cannot free itself from the neuralgia of the unspeakable, nor from the prolixity that comes from the inability to know it all. Because nothingness is enough, the human being has created the expectation of the world to come, where it aspires that everything will be made known. In the apparently opposite sense, evolutionists accept the reality of not knowing yet. They hope that one day they will get to the end of knowledge through science. And that is also a form of faith. Evolutionist or creationist, one still cannot explain how, from nothing, something came into existence. It had to be brought up because to

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<sup>4</sup> Constantin Noica – „Jurnal filosofic”, 1944, paperback version, pag. 30, (Iulia Lumanare Trans.)

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dispute change and its necessity, it is necessary to remember that first change: of nothing, which, from nothing, changed into something.

Reading Mario Vargas Llosa's "Civilization of the Spectacle", I found myself in full regression, facing of a prematurely aged demon and, therefore, blasé: my rupture of the theater. I've felt the unbearable taste of disappointment ever since I was too young to put it into reason. I had completed my acting studies, studying for my Master degree, I was playing at the Comedy Theatre, the Act Theater, and in unconventional venues in Bucharest. I was, as one might think, on the right track. But what I felt was not that. I didn't feel it to be right. What I felt was described in my books (because, once read, the books became mine) as an acute senselessness. I was nowhere near "artistic and literary creations, philosophical ideas, civic ideals, values and, in short, that whole spiritual dimension called culture, that ancient culture which, even if it was mainly the prerogative of an elite, reached the whole social community and an influence, giving meaning to life and *raison d'être* to existence - which went beyond simple material well-being"<sup>5</sup>. I had, ever since, the feeling that "never have we been more confused about such basic questions as what we are looking for on this heavenly body without its own light that was given to us, or whether mere survival justifies life, if words like spirit, ideals, pleasure, love, solidarity, art, creation, beauty, soul, transcendence still mean something, and if so, what is valid in them and what is not. The *raison d'être* of culture was to provide an answer to such questions."<sup>6</sup>

A loving relationship is not possible without idealization, projection, or the imaginary that fills the significant other giving him meaning. Otherwise, it remains a rational, transactional decision where only gains that can be calculated and estimated matter. I idealized the theater. I projected onto it my own possibility of adding myself, as a tributary stream, to the making of the world through culture. I put my whole imagination at its disposal, aspiring that together we would achieve a long series of cathartic experiences. But none came. As I was to discover, my belief that "culture's *raison d'être* was to answer such questions" was outdated, because "today it is absolved of such responsibility, for we have made of it something much more superficial and capricious: a form of entertainment for the general public or a rhetorical, esoteric, and obscurantist game intended for the vain little groups of academics and intellectuals who have turned their backs on society."<sup>7</sup>

During the performance, the actors and the audience are on either side of a mirror. But it was forgotten that the mirror is, in fact, our conscience. That we reflect by looking for each other into each other at the same time, in the same consciousness, which we create together. Conscience is the sum of our beliefs, and to experience

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<sup>5</sup> Mario Vargas Llosa – „Civilizația spectacolului”, Humanitas 2018 Publishing, page 174 (Iulia Lumânare Trans.)

<sup>6</sup> Ibidem

<sup>7</sup> Ibidem

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ourselves in theatre's mirroring requires believing. The belief through which we examine our own conscience, the most beautiful attribute of being, the only one that can define itself by giving itself meaning. If the convention of the mirror is forgotten, and if the two sides meet by repudiating it, then we can no longer speak of consciousness. As long as neither the actor nor the spectator questions the meaning, all that remains is for them to congratulate each other for the little they know, for their consciousness, as much as they have it. This is when it becomes necessary for the actor to make jokes, so that the audience laughs, forgetting the convention and, therefore, the meaning of their meeting. Laughter annihilates the meaning, and the stage becomes the space where savior narcissism is performed. There is no longer a mirror between them, but they all identify in an amorphous pseudo-consciousness in which the actors prefer the mirror of the audience's applause and laughter, and the audience that of the actors' reckless histrionic fits. Excited with the recognition, they go home thankful that nothing has changed.

### **Exacerbating the comic**

"After all, the fact that society has lost all interest in intellectuals is the direct consequence of the insignificant role thinking plays in the civilization of the spectacle."<sup>8</sup> This is why the theater today and its creators are guilty of. At almost any show you go to, you are struck by the need of its creators to make the audience have fun. All performances are interwoven with jokes and games (actions, looks, gestures, lines added or changed), which often end up defying and even permuting the meaning and necessity of the moment in the story's development. And the public loves it. Enjoys that theater goes down to the level of its need to be entertained, so that they can play together. That theatre pays them attention and validates them. But the unconscious motivation of this behavior, which seized the stage like an epidemic, and has become the new form of overacting, often so rude, is the actors' need to be loved. Actors beg for the audience's affection and approval too. Not just the audience. Out of a desire to belong, the actors pander to the audience's primal need to laugh.

The jokes, the punchlines, the desire of the actors (as well as of the directors) to winkle at the public have become the new aside lines. It's just that the actor no longer stops and addresses the audience, deliberately breaking convention, like back in the day when asides were legitimate. Today, although they despise the old mechanism of aside lines, actors still leave the stage convention, but only in their minds. And fellow actors, who should react to these over-comments, don't. They all tolerate it, because they wait their turn to do it too. Even if the relationship and the stage situation fracture, any accumulation is broken, and no one knows where it was going. Or, better said, it becomes obvious that there was no direction to begin with.

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<sup>8</sup> Idem, page 40

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In the absence of meaning, the immediate purpose of entertainment fills that absence and suppresses the fear that meaninglessness generates.

The convention that legitimized the concept of the aside line was that of being a thought of the character, a thought that, like the audience, existed only in the mind of the one who whispered it loudly, so that the spectators in the last row could hear it. And it wasn't always meant to provoke laughter. The most profound dramatic texts contain asides. Today, their atavism is a childish mechanism by which actors want to stand out by egotistically demonstrating their intelligence and histrionic seduction, stepping out of their role as in the circus, where the clown sticks out his tongue, so that the audience laughs. Because all the funny inserts, with which the actors (and directors) think they make the play funnier, only drag the theater on a leash and ask it to imitate the circus, so that the uninitiated audience feels that it belongs to this space. If we did an exercise of imagination, where we anthropomorphized the concept of theater and made it take on the form of a human, imagine what he would feel and think when he had to do this - imitate the circus. Just to make the audience feel good and stay in the hall, just like in the circus, clowns stick out their tongues at children to keep them interested, because children have not yet developed the psychological mechanisms necessary to accept and endure a convention longer than their interest dictates.

Humor is an absolutely necessary defense and adaptation mechanism, and the necessity of comedy and genre shows is indisputable. They are not the subject of this article. But humor doesn't belong everywhere. Not to mention that humor is as complex as wine. It can take many tastes and colors. Unfortunately, just like wine, humor can get users drunk, up to the point where they forget where they are and why they came there in the first place. This is only the invitation to become aware of the unconscious, narcissistic, and devoid of any artistic stake that imperiously dictate to theater creators to amuse the audience. It exposes the egotism of theater creators, or, in the Stendhal version of the definition of egotism, invites to it. Because, "when the taste of the great public determines the value of a cultural product, it inevitably happens that writers, thinkers and artists that are mediocre or downright nonexistent, but exotic, provocative, and skilled in advertising and self-promotion, or skillfully praising the most reprehensible instincts of the public, to reach high levels of popularity and to seem, to the uneducated majority, the best, and their works to be the best rated"<sup>9</sup>. The disease has not only touched the boulevard theater, of which purpose is exactly that: to be accessible, easy, funny. It has insinuated itself for years and continues to proliferate on the stages of theaters that still maintain their claim to be culturally relevant. Llosa accuses culture of being responsible for the impossibility of eradicating evil and, moreover, for helping to propagate it "in all layers of society. The root of the phenomenon lies in culture. Better to say, in the banalization through

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<sup>9</sup> Idem, page 157

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play of the dominant culture, where the ultimate value is now to have fun and be entertained, leaving aside any other form of knowledge and any ideal"<sup>10</sup>.

### **What is the director's role in this phenomenology?**

If the first forms of theater were religious rituals, where the priest officiated, playing both the role of the actor and that of the director, the dichotomy produced in the secularization process of the theater led to the distribution of the two roles separately. With few exceptions, when making a show, two distinct entities participate: the actor and the director. From a logistical point of view, the director is usually the one who chooses the text, the space, the cast, the scenographer, the music, makes the *mise-en-scène*, the lighting. And all this is circumscribed to one goal: the show and how it reaches the viewer. But what is missing for the director's descent from the fifth-century Greek priest to be legitimate? It should first be understood why the priest was necessary. The priest must first of all believe. God, in his omnipotence, may not even exist. Faith is what makes the god exist. As good connoisseur of the one to whom the god is to be revealed the priest is, as convincing, in his existence, will the god become. The question arises: why does the human being needs faith? What essential dimension of being finds in faith the solace of the turbulence which, in its absence, can lead it to self-destruction? The answer, the ephemeris that is guilty of the Sisyphean turmoil of being is the sense of meaning. From the conflict of helplessness with necessity, between the inability to know how, why, and what for it exists and the need to know the answer, the conscience of human being gave birth to faith. People need to believe, because consciousness, being able to know it exists, it also needs to know what made it possible to exist. And when they can't believe in anything, existence becomes unbearable, and they can even cease to be human. If so, then the hidden meaning of the first forms of theater, of religious rituals, was to end this conflict. To give materiality and response to the need for the sense of existence. To give people the sense of meaning, suppressing questions, doubts, and the suffering of existing, to anesthetize the feeling of nonsense that existence, when it cannot fertilize consciousness, leaves as an heir to the human being.

Returning to the series of activities and actions that the director must orchestrate, having to, on top of that, seem to know what he is doing, that he is in control, in order not to lose his essential authority, it is no wonder that so many things to be done leave him little room to concern himself with something so volatile as the sense of meaning. And when I say space, I mean the inner one, the crucible of consciousness, systematically assaulted both by the outer world that he has to recreate and manage on stage, and by the inner one of personal shadows, which come to claim their right to exist in the world he creates. In defining the director's role is not included the obligation to find or to give meaning. No contractual obligation can compel the

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<sup>10</sup> Idem, page 117

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director to generate meaning through his creative act. If it concerns him, he will pass it further. If not, he will settle for the strength he finds in playing the role of a director, and find meaning in that. We live in a reality that is content with having goals, to which meaning is often mistakenly subsumed. Therefore, the director does not have the obligation to ask himself the question of meaning. Goals are enough. Personal ethics is the only one that can decide in favor of the importance of meaning.

At the end of the 70s, the Italian psychiatrist Graziela Magherini named the Stendhal Syndrome, by which she defined the severe psychological response that a work of art can cause. The name is a tribute to Henry-Marie Beyle, who described in "Rome, Naples, and Firenze" the ecstatic experience he had while visiting the Basilica of Santo Croce in Florence (the syndrome is also known as the Florence Syndrome), where Niccolò Machiavelli, Michelangelo Buonarroti and Galileo Galilei are buried. Although he describes it as an astonishing experience, Stendhal wished he could forget it. The intensity of the emotion had been psychologically unbearable, and he could barely walk out of fear. Similar experiences happened to Fyodor Dostoevsky contemplating the work of Hans Holbein, "The Dead Christ", to Marcel Proust in front of Johann Vermeer's "View from Delft", to Sigmund Freud at the Acropolis in Athens, but also to many tourists while visiting Florence, tourists who became Magherini's subjects for the book "La sindrome di Stendhal", which she published in 1989. The symptoms of the syndrome are fatigue (up to the feeling of exhaustion), dizziness, palpitations, confusion (identity ones included), anxiety, and even hallucinations. There is a famous case of this psychosomatic response: in 1845, a man suffered a heart attack while contemplating Botticelli's canvas "Birth of Venus".

So, it's not just great artists and thinkers who can become subjects of this disproportionate emotional response. Which means that in humans carry in them the possibility of this response, an organic predisposition to be impressed by the sublimation that art can do, like an unconscious recognition of the truth that was sublimated in the creation of that work of art. Instead, "*light art*" leaves the spectator with the comfortable impression that he is cultured, revolutionary, modern and that he is in the vanguard, with a minimum of intellectual effort. Thus, this culture that claims to be advanced and innovative actually propagates conformity through its most harmful manifestations: complacency and self-satisfaction."<sup>11</sup>

If theatre's authors are not guilty of *big culture*, they will not be able to create theater, they will only make it, just like the shoemaker makes boots. And this is the risk to which young directors are exposed, who can cling to the actuality they live, with all its truths, if they do not ensure their access to the sequence of past actualities and truths. But even in the case of established directors, who do not adapt to the changes taking place in the big culture - who preserve their immunity in the face of its updating forms and truths -, and stubbornly remain tributary to their own outdated

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<sup>11</sup> Idem, page 32

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understandings, there is a risk that the theater will remain the profane experience of the director's God-Complex, and of the actor's narcissism that pushes him to exhibit himself on stage.

The Creator will make the world in his own image and likeness. If the actor's instrument is himself, with everything that constitutes him as a being, the director has even less freedom to deceive, because he can only use his thoughts. The only thing he can do, to perfect his art to sublimation, is to sculpt his mind. To transform it into a mechanism perfectly connected to everything that exists. All his inabilities, all his ignorance, all his resistances, all his limits will become those of his show. Or of his film. The creation will take the form of the thought of its creator. The more facets his mind is shaped into, the more intense the viewer's experience will be. The director cannot do without any of the fifteen types of thinking: critical, analytical, conceptual, deductive, inductive, synthesis, divergent, convergent, synvergent, investigative, systematic, interrogative, metaphorical, traditional, or creative. Not by chance, I placed the creative one at the end. Just so that the defense mechanisms don't have the chance to intervene, and the director or his defender could think that having this one, that means he's safe. If we investigate, one by one, the particularities of each of them, we find that none of them can be excluded from what the creative process means for a director. Either of them is not functional, the shriveled thinking of the creator will cast its shadow over the misshapen world it has created. Because he is the only creative authority who is asked to recreate life. All other forms of art can sublimate life to the point of abolition. But the director does not have this freedom.

He has, instead, the dangerous freedom to become part of what Mario Vargas Llosa defines as the *civilization of the spectacle*: "the civilization of a world where the first place on the scale of values is occupied by entertainment and where, having fun, getting rid of boredom, is the general passion. This ideal of life is perfectly legitimate, of course. Only a fanatical Puritan could reproach the members of a society for wanting to add a little color, amusement, humor and fun to lives usually locked in a depressing and sometimes brutal routine. But making the natural tendency to feel good a supreme value has unexpected consequences: the trivialization of culture, the generalization of frivolity."<sup>12</sup>

### **Conclusions:**

For something to change, someone has to be dissatisfied. It is the *sine qua non* condition of change, thereby ensuring evolution. For evolution to occur, it is also necessary that the changes can be preserved, left to macerate in the internal structures of the system, to reach fullness, maturity, to give their full measure to the entire system. The system can be understood as an individual, a society, or the whole world.

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<sup>12</sup> Idem, page 30

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As nothing can be only what it is, but also the opposite of it, every good thing will give into the measure of the evil it undeniably contains.

The force that a change can generate needs a counterweight to keep it from getting there. And as one never knows how great the recoil of this force may be, the system must be prepared with an equally great capacity of conservation, to oppose a possible destruction. It is why it's absolutely necessary that the system partitions responsible with change to be narrower, and the ones that preserve to be more extensive. In human society it is neither surprising nor desirable that there are too many seekers, spirits who refuse to be anchored in conformity, whose vital role is to preserve, to hold and perpetuate what has been proven beneficial for the whole system. Provided that the benefit does not mean stagnation, because in this hypothesis, rebellion becomes vital. And the theater, through its creators, who have forgotten why they do it, or never knew it at all, has reached that point.

Theatre is a society, and creators that once did good to it, today might prove to harm him. Because their understanding of the world is old and tributary to beliefs that today the wide world considers to be ludicrous and even abusive. Gods still die from time to time and they don't know how to do it gracefully. Most of the time, they want to drag the whole world after them. Newly arrived can also harm the theatre. Not every change moves the system forward, some can even destroy it. Theatre needs great minds to awake its spirit, and restore its meaning to awaken and bind consciences.

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