

Neuro-Aesthetics – Representing the Mind on Stage

Marius-Alexandru TEODORESCU*

Abstract: This article analyses the challenges of representing the mind on stage, through stage design and acting techniques. To address this particular difficulty, we used our practice as research at Craiova National Theatre in 2019, with the play *Under (re)Construction*, written by Marco Tesei, and also various examples in both theatre literature and theatre practice, focusing on relevant renditions of the mind on stage in modern theatre. Our conclusions highlight the difficulties, from a director's point of view, of making the audience understand that a specific section of a play takes part in a character's mind. Moreover, the study shows that representing the mind on stage equally poses problems to the team of artists involved in the creation of the show.

Keywords: Psychology, Theatre, Stage design, Acting, Aesthetics

We, as a society, are fascinated by the human mind, because it is one of the final frontiers that has not been completely conquered by science yet. It is a fascination that has been constantly growing over the past 150 years, both in science and in theatre. Movements that once began as marginal breaches in psychology and psychiatry, such as the likes of Freud, Jung, Ferenczy, and Piaget, to name just a few, have shifted to essential parts of contemporary scientific thought, working as the central core of today's medicine and education. One good indicator of this is the rise in popularity of psychology in college curricula.¹ Similarly, in the field of arts, the somehow marginal ideas and means of symbolists like Baudelaire and Maeterlinck, or surrealists like Dali and Artaud, all preoccupied with the depths of human unconsciousness, have prolonged their existence in contemporary theatre practices, becoming

* Associate Assistant Teacher at the Theatre and Film Faculty of Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca.

¹ Regan Gurung et. al. "Strengthening introductory psychology: A new model for teaching the introductory course." *American Psychologist*, 2016, p. 112.

THEATRICAL COLLOQUIA

crucial features of directors such as Silviu Purcărete, Robert Wilson or Ariane Mnouchkine.

Although wonderful, this ubiquitous fascination with the human mind poses some real difficulties for us, theatre practitioners. Our pedagogical experience has shown, too many times, that illogical actions on stage are imputed to first-year directing students by their professors. The students' explanations for the apparent lack of logic are the following: a. the action seems illogical because it takes place in the character's mind; b. the action takes place in a character's dream; c. the scene depicts what the character is thinking. The professors, myself included, are invariably amused, and for good reason, because they know very well how difficult it is to show on stage what a character is thinking, dreaming, imagining. The same scenarios are considerably easier to illustrate in the movies, due to specific techniques: a slight change of image saturation, a smart sound effect, a nice blurring of the image, or a spectacular CGI effect. In order to discuss the difficulties of representing the mind on a theatre stage, the article will explore to the topic of the mind and what constitutes it.

First, we will present two plays used as examples for this study. The first one is *Under (re)Construction*, written by contemporary Italian playwright Marco Tesei. We directed this play in 2019 for the „Marin Sorescu” National Theatre in Craiova, Romania. Therefore, from a methodological point of view, this article will use a double perspective, combining practice-as-research with the traditional objective analysis of a directed play. We believe that using this mixed methodology will permit a unique perspective that emphasizes the process and the artistic result equally. *Under (re)Construction* was centred around the idea of trauma and how it subjectively affects every one of us. Also, it aimed to highlight how one can get over a traumatic moment by integrating oneself in a new 'normal' paradigm, reflecting one's perception of normality.

The plot is set to start in 2015, when a woman was found wandering at the edge of Torino, Italy, with no memories whatsoever about her personal history. She did not seem hurt in any way. She had no identification documents, no mobile phone, no handbag, and nothing that could help the police in establishing details about her or her past. Nobody had declared her missing. The play then continues with her now living with psychiatrist Gianni

THEATRICAL COLLOQUIA

Cusich, whose patient she had become on her way to recovery. From this day onward, she starts the battle of regaining her old life, because she now feels unempowered, bereft of human value and lacking a purpose. She will eventually find out that her odyssey was caused by her dysfunctional relationship with her daughter. The end portrays a woman reconciled with herself and with her past. Our choice, as directors of the play, was to show on stage all the events unfolding in the mind of the main character. The strategy was implemented in order to accomplish two goals: to truly capture the impact of emotional events in the character's life and to point out how this character changed and evolved throughout the show.

Ubu Roy It carries the signature of Cheek by Jowl, and is a co-production with the Barbican, London, Les Gêmeaux/Sceaux/Scène Nationale and La Comédie de Béthune – Centre Dramatique National du Nord-Pas-de-Calais. The production will be the focus of the more traditional, academic and objective point of view in the paper. We deem that the risk of practice-as-research is a lack of scientific credibility of the resulting materials. We chose to use these two complementary means of analysis in order to present a cohesive view of the topic. Because the nature of representing the mind on stage is a creative issue inasmuch as a spectatorship one, our chosen methodology wants to adopt a dual perspective.

The play opens with Ubu, who is convinced by his wife to stage a revolution and take over the throne of Poland. After gaining the power he had desired for so long, he betrays his former allies. He is, therefore, hunted down by them and also by the rightful ruler of Poland, now allied with the Tsar. In addition to that, Ubu is hated by the people, whom he heavily and unjustly taxed in the past. In the end, Ubu and his wife escape both the war and the uprising and manage to go to France. The main staging innovation consists of the fact that the whole action of Jarry's play is happening in the mind of one of the characters, a teenager, whose family hosts a dinner. Bored and unwilling to participate, he imagines that the hosts and the guests alike become entangled in a strange series of actions converting into... *Ubu Roi*.

Our paper focuses these two shows as they use very different means of both representing the mind on stage and making the public aware that it is witnessing either imaginary events or subjectively perceived events. In this light, a key question arises: what is the mind? This is where the debate begins.

THEATRICAL COLLOQUIA

Our approach will integrate various perspectives conducive to a definition of the mind and its contents.

From a neurological point of view, the mind is “a dynamic mix of integrated neural processes, centred on representing the living body, which finds its expression through a dynamic mix of integrated mental processes”, as shown by Antonio Damasio in his reference book *Self comes to mind*.² This definition may be in line with scientific research, but it seems of little use to artists, thus nurturing the gap between research and representation. It is widely believed that research will provide the postmodern artist with efficient means of representing certain contents, but this is, in many cases, only a myth. Consequently, selecting research materials that are actually of use is an integrated part of a contemporary director’s work.

The main issue with Damasio’s definition of the mind is that the audience will not relate to it in any way, even when the director manages to convert it into stageable images. Theatre is limited by the very fact that it must be understood by a large number of people attending the performance. It cannot use the paravane of niche knowledge as visual arts do, for example. In visual arts, which can be distributed in a more focused manner and over longer periods of time, artists have a greater freedom to assume that their audience is familiar with the same topics as the artist. Also, in visual arts, audiences are more diligent with consulting additional materials with regard to the work of art, usually in form of descriptions displayed alongside the art piece. On the contrary, theatre directors are sometimes forced to renounce or, best case scenario, to veer around scientific truths to make their shows (more) accessible and understandable. This is one of the main challenges of staging the mind: what the mind truly, neurologically and psychologically is, still remains largely unknown to the average person. Even in the case of those who know a decent amount of information about the mind, myths about how the brain and perception function are still wide-spread. A study of Dutch parents found that 79,8% of the respondents showed neuroscience literacy, but also believed

² Antonio Damasio. *Sinele. Construirea creierului conștient*. Traducere de Doina Lica. Bucharest: Nemira Publishing House, 2016, p.18.

THEATRICAL COLLOQUIA

44,7% of the neuromyths presented to them.³ This being said, is there something that art producers can use from Damasio's definition? Yes. One of the mental processes that he describes is the idea of Self, seen as "the phenomenal capacity of having a mind endowed with and owner, with a protagonist of one's existence."⁴

Inspired by the concept of Self, we revisited *Under (re)Construction*, a show designed to unfold the action as happening in the mind of the main character. A revelation struck us: the pattern used in the majority of classical plays (centred around a protagonist who takes part in most of the dramatic conflicts or events and who is connected with all the other characters) was insufficient. Traditionally, the audience only sees the persona of a character, the image that the character wants to project. However, having a play in which the main conflict happens inside the mind of the main character, having a character who overcomes trauma, we needed to make the audience understand what is really going on in that character's self. To reach our purpose, the main character in our show had to become more: an integrated part of everything happening on stage, even in those scenes in which she did not participate directly. What actually happened became less and less relevant. What the main character believed and felt about the events around her became central. This is why we needed to work with the self, not with the persona: to have a subjective view of everything that happens. A subjective view is one that imposes feelings upon the world around:

*"The apparent self emerges as the feeling of a feeling. When the story is first told, spontaneously, without it ever having been requested, and forevermore after that when the story is repeated, knowledge about what the organism is living through automatically emerges as the answer to a question never asked. From that moment on, we begin to know."*⁵

³ Ilona M. B. Benneker et al. "The reported effects of neuroscience literacy and belief in neuromyths among parents of adolescents." *Journal of Science Communication*, 2023, p. 1.

⁴ Antonio Damasio. *Sinele. Construirea creierului conștient. Op. cit.*, p. 11.

⁵ Antonio Damasio. *The feeling of what happens*. New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1999, p.31.

THEATRICAL COLLOQUIA

In light of Damasio's insights, even the idea of dramatic action must be reconsidered. In a traditional view of dramatic action, what is represented on stage is the clash of two opposing interests. The performers adopt a quasi-objective view of the events from the perspective of the narrator, to an audience that is behind a fourth wall. Of course, many aesthetic changes have been brought to this classical view in time and it might be argued that it is no longer in vogue. However, for us, it remains the benchmark, simply because *Under (re)Construction* is classically designed, with the characters unaware of the presence of the audience. Still, it comes with a key twist: everything is shown from the perspective of the main character.

A certain part of the performance is representative for this procedure. The scene depicts Elisabeta and Gianni having a dialogue that does not necessarily have a purpose. It seems more like a naturalistic dialogue that a couple would have. Our option was to stage it as a movie, recorded on stage. We used an old-style camera, damaged here and there, that was recording the scene. As for the clichés, we inserted some images from classical movies, because we wanted to convey the following message: for the main character, this simple dialogue with her partner had a romantic halo. This moment was meant to make her feel like part of the old movies she had once watched in cinemas. This specific strategy of adopting the main character's point of view as a way of displaying the dramatic events was used throughout the entire show. Coming back to Damasio's work:

“Wordless storytelling is natural. The imagetic representation of sequences of brain events, which occurs in brains simpler than ours, is the stuff of which stories are made. A natural preverbal occurrence of storytelling may well be the reason why we ended up creating drama and eventually books, and why a good part of humanity is currently hooked on movie theatres and television screens. Movies are the closest external representation of the prevailing storytelling that goes on in our minds.”⁶

⁶ *Ibidem.*, p. 188.

THEATRICAL COLLOQUIA

The idea of a self that is a continuous narrator of the events in one's life also brought another key change to the performance. We combined two different approaches. First, we wanted to bluntly point out the feelings of the main character as she experienced the healing trauma. Nevertheless, we used a Brechtian style of performing, with the actors revealing that they were acting. We deliberately chose this strategy to *warn* the spectators that all things happening on stage were not events, but stories of events, the character's view of the events. Neurologically, the subjective view comes into mind from the way the stories, the events that continuously unfold in our lives, are finally stored and retold. "The mind does not only refer to the images that are naturally part of its processing. It also refers to the cinematographic-type editing options which were promoted by our all-encompassing system of biological value."⁷

It should also be pointed out that in the above-mentioned part of the play, two mimes were directing and filming the scene. We used them for different purposes, some discussed below and others in later sections of this paper.

One purpose was directly linked to another concept borrowed from neurology and intensively used in our show, the idea of *meta-self*:

"The self, as described above, cannot know. However, a process we could call «meta-self» might know, provided (1) the brain would create some kind of description of the perturbation of the state of the organism that resulted from the brain's responses to the presence of an image; (2) the description would generate an image of the process of perturbation, and (3) the image of the self-perturbed would be displayed together or in rapid interpolation with the image that triggered the perturbation."⁸

The mimes in our show represent a form of meta-self, fulfilling different roles such as recording, altering, and narrating events. They are permanent shadow witnesses. But the core issue with staging a neuroscientifically accurate

⁷ Antonio Damasio. *Sinele. Construirea creierului conștient. Op. cit.*, p. 86.

⁸ Antonio Damasio, *Descarte's Error*. New York: Avon Books, 1994, p. 241.

THEATRICAL COLLOQUIA

version of the mind rests on two main reasons. The first reason is the reductionist neurological view of the mind that we currently hold. Svend Brinkmann, in his book *Persons and their Minds. Towards an Integrative Theory of the Mediated Mind*,⁹ makes this very clear: the mind is not identical to the brain. The brain is a mere instrument that enables the mind to exist. The mind is a psychological construct that is, in itself, subjective, and cannot be superposed on the neural matrix that creates it. Also, a limitation of the neurological view of the mind is related to the notion of consciousness. ‘Mind’ and ‘consciousness’ are closely related concepts, but not interchangeable, because not all processes performed by our mind are conscious.

The second reason why we argue that a neurological representation of the mind on stage is partially unfeasible is the general lack of knowledge concerning neurology. Unlike concepts from the psychoanalytical field, such as the unconscious or the self, which have become more and more familiar to the common man, ideas from the field of neurological science have not yet permeated the general ideas we have of the mind. This is due, in part, to the fact that neurology is still a young science and quite an elitist one, accessible only to certain parts of the population. A study in Brazil found that knowledge about neuroscience is correlated with age and with the profession, without clear indications of a link with the level of education of the individual. The study also found that most of the participants endorsed widely-spread myths about the mind.¹⁰ In addition to that, we, as a society, are more familiar with the classical views of the mind, such as the one proposed by French philosopher René Descartes.

The Cartesian view of the mind, also known as the mentalistic approach,

“says that the mind is a world in its own right and that it can be studied independently from the brain, body and culture. Mentalism is the view that there are self-contained mental states

⁹ Svend Brinkman, *Persons and their minds. Towards an Integrative Theory of the Mediated Mind*. New York: Routledge, 2017, p. 3-10.

¹⁰ Analía Arévalo et al., "What Does the General Public Know (or Not) About Neuroscience? Effects of Age, Region and Profession in Brazil." *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, 2022, p. 1.

THEATRICAL COLLOQUIA

*(e.g. beliefs or emotions) that underlie human actions – that there is a dualism between the mind and the world, and that there is an external relation between mental states and observable actions, such that private mental states cause the actions that other people can see.*¹¹

This perspective is very close to everybody's own experience of the mind, perceived as that particular place where each sees their life unfold, like a movie. People need to imagine objects and scenes that we spatially operate with, which is key to efficiently process the phenomena around us. This can be seen by comparing healthy individuals with people who suffer from congenital aphantasia, a condition in which people lack any visual imagery in their minds.¹² Another famous example is Henri Bergson's theory of how we develop our ability to count. Bergson says that we can count because we can imagine objects in space and time. Attributing quantity to those objects only comes with moving them in space and time.¹³ The objects in our minds are exactly like set elements on a stage, freely moved by unseen stage helpers, according to our desire. However, it is exactly this view of the mind as Cartesian theatre that is currently rejected in most of the fields that study the mind. It is rejected by neurologists, Antonio Damasio included, who argue that it is a false intuition because the mind cannot be a different object from the body. It cannot be a world separated from the physical world, precisely because the mind is born from the interaction between the body and the world.¹⁴

This theory is also rejected by several humanist writers preoccupied with the subject of the mind, such as Svend Brinkman. His main argument¹⁵ is that

¹¹ Svend Brinkman, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

¹² Jianghao Liu and Paolo Bartolomeo, "Probing the unimaginable: The impact of aphantasia on distinct domains of visual mental imagery and visual perception." *Cortex*, 2023, p. 338.

¹³ Henri Bergson, *Eseu asupra datelor imediate ale conștiinței*. Translated by Diana Morărașu. Bucharest: European Institute Publishing House, 1992, *passim*.

¹⁴ Antonio Damasio, *Descartes's error*, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

¹⁵ Svend Brinkman, *op. cit.*: *passim*.

THEATRICAL COLLOQUIA

our intuition of the mind as a world in itself is misleading. The mind is not a world, but a means of constructing worlds. In fact, Brinkman submits the idea that the world(s) created by our imagination are only one of the processes that the mind is capable of. Hence, our perception of living inside our own minds is in itself a construct created by our own mind. As contested as it may be, the Cartesian view still remains the closest to the general population's configuration of the mind. Therefore, we cannot abandon it, in spite of the scientific progress in the area. It is exactly this perception that enables neuro-aesthetics in theatre, the leverage that makes the mind representable on stage: if we imagine the mind as a stage than it can easily be represented in theatre. In the light of the Cartesian view, the mind is not only a series of processes, of rules, of bodily functions. It is an internal world in which miniature-self resides. It is an image that can be staged without much difficulty.

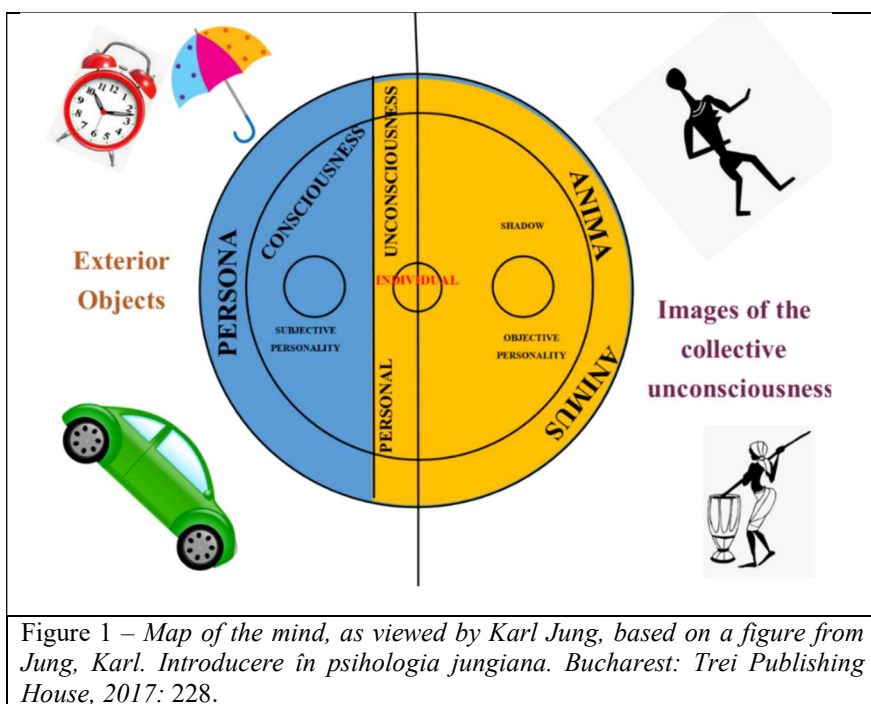
In the production of *Under (re)Construction* we used Brechtian techniques to point out the above-mentioned idea: the events on stage are a representation of their own. It is also a key element in Declan Donnellan's *Ubu Roi*, where the effect is even more striking, with a clear distinction between the moments that happen 'in reality' and those which happen in the character's mind. On the one hand, the distinction becomes clear due to some plain effects such as a change in lighting and a specific soundtrack for the moments that are imaginary. On the other hand, the distinction is created through different acting methods: the 'real' scenes are acted in a naturalistic style, even with low-voices that cannot be heard well by the audience, while the imaginary scenes are acted in a Meyerholdian manner, with altered gestures and voices that emphasize the eeriness of the staging.

As seen in Donnellan's staging, the character imagining the scenes can freely move on the stage. He is the owner of a Cartesian theatre. As a director/audience member with absolute power, he can roam freely, without being seen by others. It is very much different from our production because in *Ubu Roi* we have a third-person, not a first-person point of view. This enables the audience to see the interactions between the Self and objects. At the beginning of the show, when the guests arrive, the Self stops the 'reality' scene, which is the psychological equivalent of an attention shift, and rewinds the action. Then, without touching anybody, the Self begins acting like a puppeteer, making the characters move and talk. People and objects alike can

THEATRICAL COLLOQUIA

become anything in the mind of the character, just as tin foil becomes money and kitchen utensils weapons. In this Cartesian theatre pattern, what Peter Brook calls *rough theatre*¹⁶ becomes reality, precisely because inside the mind events are unbound by rules of logic and each person is omnipotent.

A third key perspective of the mind is the psychoanalytic one. This paper proposes a fusion of Freudian and Jungian views in accordance with contemporary popular views of the mind. However, the following idea must be reiterated: no matter how much a show is inspired by science, it will only be understood in the light of the non-objective collective knowledge on a given subject. Below, is a map of the mind as viewed by Karl Jung:



This map of the human mind served us as a guide for the way we shaped our scenography in *Under (re)Construction*. The backdrop of our stage design acted like a limit between the unconscious and the conscious mind. This membrane was sometimes opaque, sometimes transparent, making

¹⁶ *The empty space*. London: Scribner publishing, 1968: *passim*.

THEATRICAL COLLOQUIA

unconscious materials visible as shadows. There are points in the show where the spectators can see faces and hands pushing this elastic membrane as if trying to get through. This representation is rooted in Freud's differentiation between multiple kinds of unconsciousness:

*"We can see two kinds of unconsciousness, one that is easily transformed, in frequently met circumstances, into consciousness; another for which this transposition happens difficultly, only with the condition of considerable effort, possibly never. [...] We call pre-consciousness that unconsciousness which is only dormant and becomes easily conscious and we use the name unconsciousness for the other. We now have three terms: consciousness, pre-consciousness and unconsciousness."*¹⁷

In our show, we used all the three parts of the mind described by Freud. Obviously, all elements explicitly shown to the audience are part of the consciousness. The multiple characters and objects that easily slide forward and backward, in front of and behind the backdrop represent the *coming to mind*, an equivalent to the process of shifting our attention. Gianni is a relevant example. Whenever Elisabeta thinks of him or interacts with him, he is present on stage, but when he is not implicated in her train of thought, he is absent. Elisabeta's daughter, in contrast, has a gradual interaction with her mother, because she acts as a blocked-out content of the mind. Due to the traumatic situation between them, she has become part of her unconsciousness and the whole dramatic action is centred around making the daughter part of the mother's consciousness again.

The main character played the role of subjective personality, interacting with both objects and characters that slide in and out of consciousness. Her position on stage is fixed at the beginning of the show, as a metaphor for the limitations brought on by her trauma, and she is freed at the end of the play, after coming to terms with her past. The two mimes coming from behind this membrane act both as representatives of the animus/anima, but also as forms of what Freud called the Superego. They create changes on

¹⁷ Sigmund Freud, *Introducere în psihanaliză*. Translated by Ondine Dascălița and Roxana Melnicu. Bucharest: Trei Publishing House, 2010, p. 593.

THEATRICAL COLLOQUIA

stage, in the section assigned to consciousness, fulfilling purposes like hiding, redirecting, and protecting. The mimes are an obscure force that the main character needs to negotiate with regularly, becoming at times enemies and at times friends.

The creative team is, of course, well aware that it is a cultural reference that will not be understood by all the audience. In this case, the scientific material was used only as a possible model that would make sense on its own. *Ubu Roi* is a counter-example, where this mechanism of conscious-unconscious is not used in any way, because of the different conflicts in each staging. In our staging, the conflict takes place between the main character and other characters from her past/present, all acting as psychological entities. In Donnellan's staging, the main conflict is between the character's need for entertainment and the adults' need for social order. Thus, in *Ubu Roi*, there is no requirement for a dramaturgical construction around the idea of consciousness, but around the idea of presence and perception.

The audience can observe that another key aspect of the aestheticization of the mind is the author's intention. Unlike scientific material, which tries to achieve a quasi-objective quality, regardless of the scientific field covered (neurology or psychology), the artistic material is subjected to the artist's interests. This becomes especially relevant in theatre, where two wills act simultaneously: the will of the play and the will of a director. In the case of *Under (re)Construction*, we tried to create, through our staging, an environment that would make the play possible. Declan Donnellan, in contrast, used *Ubu Roi* as a pretext and chose the conflict of his show from the exterior. It is a conflict that does not spring from the play but from the outside. Consequently, it is not the characters from the play that move the stage action forward, but the need for excitement of the main character. This approach, very much different from our own, explains the possibility of having such divergent, almost contradicting representations of the mind on stage.

Freud argued that "The ego cannot take itself as object and treat itself as it does with other objects, to observe itself, to criticise itself and God knows what else to do with itself. All this can be possible through the confrontation of one part of the Ego with another. The Ego is, therefore, splittable."¹⁸ This

¹⁸ *Idem*, p. 579.

THEATRICAL COLLOQUIA

characteristic of the ego was extremely inspirational to us. We created characters such as the mimes in order to fulfil the functions of these ego sections. We, therefore, had two kinds of characters: on one hand, ‘real’ characters, such as Gianni or the psychiatrist, and on the other hand, characters like the mimes, which were not imaginary, but had a function in this representation of the mind. They were in no way implicated in the conflicts inside Elisabeta’s mind and they had no purpose of their own.

In contrast, this distinction does not happen in *Ubu Roi*. Donnellan employs ‘real characters’ as well, like the guests at the dinner hosted by the adults. He also uses imaginary characters, but they are part of a story created in the mind of the main character. They are framed by the story and have interests and desires that drive the action forward. It is this precise strategy that creates a key difference in the material represented on stage. In *Under (re)Construction* the audience becomes a witness to what happens in someone’s mind. In *Ubu Roi*, the audience sees what the main character imagines. They are not transposed inside that person’s mind, but have access to some of the contents of that mind.

A further comparison of the two shows from the point of view of some of the functions of the mind follows below. One of the key parts of the mind according to Freud is the Superego, which he believed to be “prudent to maintain as self-existent and to consider that the moral conscience is one of its functions, and self-observation, indispensable for the activity of judge of the moral conscience, is another.”¹⁹ As was previously underlined, in *Under (re)Construction* we used the two mimes in order to fulfil these functions. They supervised almost all the dramatic action visible to the audience, be it from the stage, or from behind the backdrop, through/as a result of their shadows.

When talking about the Superego, Freud says that

“it makes use of a certain autonomy, follows its own intentions and is independent from the Ego in the regard of energy possession. We are captivated by a morbid landscape that strongly highlights the severity, even

¹⁹ *Idem*, p. 580.

THEATRICAL COLLOQUIA

the cruelty of this instance and the transformations in its relationship with the Ego."²⁰

Our goal, in *Under (re)Construction*, was to create a distinction between these two mimes and the description given by Freud. The Superego is said to be generally modelled upon the father figure in one's life. It was therefore extremely important for us to highlight the protectiveness of this father figure in our show. Again, one of the great challenges for representing the mind on stage is exactly the freedom that the artist has to change scientific information and to adapt it to his or her own vision, while still making it recognizable. For us, it was more important that the average audience feels the contrast between the severity and the protectiveness of these characters than that the educated audience to recognize the Superego in them.

The Superego is not explicitly present in *Ubu Roi*, because we are faced with an unrestricted imagination that makes the action of the play possible. In a sense, the function of the Superego is externalized. It becomes part of the 'real' world and everything that the main character imagines is a form of revolt in the face of this instance. Donnellan was able to make visible another instance of the mind, which Freud called the *Se*.

„It is the obscure part of our personality; the little we know about it we found out by studying the dream-work and the forming of the neurotic symptoms, and here the greatest part is negative, it can only be described as an opposite of the Ego. We get closer to the Se through comparisons, we call it chaos, a cauldron full of chaotic excitations."²¹

The *Se* is actually what makes Donnellan's show possible. He uses this free part of ourselves to justify the existence of the grotesque characters in Jarry's world. He did not need to find directorial solutions for the play anymore. He did not need to justify the actions of the characters in a

²⁰ *Idem*, p. 581.

²¹ *Idem*, p. 595.

THEATRICAL COLLOQUIA

Stanislavskian manner or in a Brechtian one. Everything was justified because the *Se*:

*„Has no organization it does not mobilize a general will, only by the striving to fulfil its own impulsive needs, in the conditions of respecting the principle of pleasure. The logical laws of thinking do not apply to the processes from the *Se*, especially in the case of the theorem of contradiction. Opposing forces coexist without cancelling each other out or diminishing each other, in the best case they ally themselves in compromises to let energy loose under the dominant economic constraint.”²²*

What Donnellan achieves is a great contrast between this world of chaos and the orderly social world of the French couples depicted on stage. The couples live in a world with fine food, with social norms, with polite people who speak almost in a whisper, but which is a faded world compared to the unrestrainable forces in the boy's imagination. In our show, in contrast, all things belonging to the *Se* were hidden behind the backdrop. They were only hinted at, with the exception of one scene, where we depicted a dream, and in which the line between the hidden and the revealed, the sane and the disturbed became significantly blurrier.

Reaching the end of our paper, we must confess that there are many aspects of representing the mind on stage that were not touched upon due to practical restraints. These aspects, that we intend to pursue in future papers or presentations, include: the way in which feelings are shown on stage from within the mind, where everything is being projected as subjective; portraying different degrees of consciousness on stage and different sections of the mind; stage representations of trauma, psychological symptoms and pathologies; the collective unconsciousness and how to show archetypes on stage while avoiding the use of clichés; the different types of memory with means and challenges of showing them on stage. God and religious/spiritual experiences are additional themes that we would like to explore but that can prove to be especially difficult to stage. Mental views of playing, seen as a fundamental

²² *Ibidem*, p. 596.

THEATRICAL COLLOQUIA

human endeavour, and linked to the theatricality of contemporary performance art aesthetics are also topics worth analysing.

However, it should be pointed out once more why such discussions are relevant in the first place: because theatre and the mind work in similar ways. We construct meaning by building metaphors with objects from real life. It is one of the ideas promoted by linguists like George Lakoff and mind-researchers such as Svend Brinkman.

“It is above all metaphors that enable us as bodily beings to go from meanings, which are in an immediate sense bodily based, to abstract thought. Johnson’s theory, which he developed in collaboration with the linguist George Lakoff in particular, involves the very strong and radical thesis that all theories and abstract concepts are metaphorically defined. The mind in this sense is a bodily process that enables recognition of the world based on the metaphors it creates.”²³

Theatre does not represent things in the same manner as visual arts do. We use real-life objects to enact real-life events, even if those objects and those actions are pretend ones. Theatre is performed by living creatures and this is what places it in the realm of metaphor. Following the writings of Umberto Eco and Paul Ricoeur, the ostensiveness of the stage seems very much similar to our minds.

In conclusion, the science of the mind, be it neurology or psychology, is extremely relevant for both art in general and theatre in particular. It is clear from meta-studies that art and neuroscience become more and more entangled and influence each-other.²⁴ The same objective material can be used to give rise to extremely different artistic worlds and aesthetics, depending on the views of the authors and artists involved in the process of creation. The main limitation in this field is the general population’s lack of knowledge with

²³ Svend Brinkman, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

²⁴ Cebal-Loureda et al., “One hundred years of neurosciences in the arts and humanities, a bibliometric review.” *Philosophy, Ethics, and Humanities in Medicine*, 2023, p. 5.

THEATRICAL COLLOQUIA

regard to contemporary developments in the science of the mind. However, there is vast array of influences, coming from philosophy, art, medicine, and psychiatry that have shaped our present perceptions and images of the mind. Building upon these, artists can create worlds in which dreams, fears, internal conflicts and much more can come to life. The creation of this imaginary toolkit was a long process, shaped through different eras: from the symbolists and the surrealists, passing through post-modernism and now reaching the present day. Along with contemporary developments in science and increased attention to mental health in today's society,²⁵ further growth in this direction is to be expected, with more and more complex representations of the mind on stage.

This paper aimed not only to underline the limitations of representing the mind on stage, but to also outline a cohesive approach in this regard. Thus, the main sources identified as useful by the paper for staging the mind are the neurological perspective, the philosophical (Cartesian) perspective and the psychoanalytical perspective. None of these models proves to be a suitable sole-source for staging the mind, therefore the article outlines how these views intersect and interact in two different case-studies: one which is practice-as-research (*Under (re)Construction*, by Marco Tesei) and one which is a classical performance analysis (*Ubu Roi*, directed by Declan Donnellan). The double-perspective adopted by the paper offers an advantageous methodological standpoint as it links together the creator-oriented and the audience-oriented perspectives. Also, the choice of performances made it possible to point out different approaches to staging the mind: one subjective, in which reality is shown from inside a character's mind; and one objective, that presents figments of a character's mind in contrast to a realist environment.

Representing the mind on stage is not only a matter of building a set design or costumes that show the audience that the action unfolds inside someone's Ego. It is more than showing through light and sound effects that there is transition from a 'real world' to an imaginary one or a dream-like state or a state of altered consciousness. As was demonstrated throughout this paper, staging the mind means creating a world in which certain functions of

²⁵ Saha, Kostuv et. al., "A computational study of mental health awareness campaigns on social media." *Translational Behavioural Medicine* 9, no. 6 (December 2019), p. 1197.

THEATRICAL COLLOQUIA

the mind become possible, be it the abstractness of the *Se*, the subjectiveness of the Ego or the severity of the Superego. In this spirit, we would like to end with a quote from Svend Brinkman's book, *Persons and their minds*, to clarify this mixed view of the mind:

„In the tradition of Aristotle and Wittgenstein, the mind is, in short, something normative. The mind is not a «thing» that can be comprehensively understood as an element in the chain of mechanical causes and effects in the physical world, nor is it a «consciousness principle», as Descartes believed. The mind is «a distinctive range of capacities of intellect and will, in particular the conceptual capacities of a language-user which make self-awareness and self-reflection possible». In other words, the mind is an array of rational faculties, a widely ubiquitous term for our abilities and dispositions.»²⁶

Bibliography

Analia Arévalo et al. "What Does the General Public Know (or Not) About Neuroscience? Effects of Age, Region and Profession in Brazil." *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, 2022.

Bergson, Henri. *Eseu asupra datelor imediate ale conștiinței*. Translated by Diana Morărașu. Bucharest: European Institute Publishing House, 1992.

Brinkman, Svend. *Persons and their minds. Towards an Integrative Theory of the Mediated Mind*. New York: Routledge, 2017.

Brook, Peter. *The empty space*. London: Scribner publishing, 1968.

Cebral Loureda et al. "One hundred years of neurosciences in the arts and humanities, a bibliometric review." *Philosophy, Ethics, and Humanities in Medicine*, 2023.

Damasio, Antonio. *Descarte's Error*. New York: Avon Books, 1994.

—. *Sinele. Construirea creierului conștient*. Traducere de Doina Lica. Bucharest: Nemira Publishing House, 2016.

²⁶ Svend Brinkman, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

THEATRICAL COLLOQUIA

—. The feeling of what happens. New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1999.

Freud, Sigmund. Introducere în psihanaliză. Translated by Ondine Dascălița and Roxana Melnicu. Bucharest: Trei Publishing House, 2010.

Gurung, Regan et. al. "Strengthening introductory psychology: A new model for teaching the introductory course." *American Psychologist*, 2016: 112-124.

Ilona M. B. Benneker et al. "The reported effects of neuroscience literacy and belief in neuromyths among parents of adolescents." *Journal of Science Communication*, 2023.

Jianghao Liu and Paolo Bartolomeo. "Probing the unimaginable: The impact of aphantasia on distinct domains of visual mental imagery and visual perception." *Cortex*, 2023: 338-348.

Jung, Karl. Introducere în psihologia jungiana. Bucharest: Trei Publishing House, 2017.

Saha, Kostuv et. al. "A computational study of mental health awareness campaigns on social media." *Translational Behavioural Medicine* 9, no. 6 (December 2019): 1197-1207.