

Emotion in theatre as abuse, excess and acting technique

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Abstract: The present paper starts from the idea of abuse that is generated by emotionality that is not properly managed either by spectators or stage professionals. Taking into consideration the psychological aspects of emotion and the way emotion is used in stage expression, it is emphasized that the idea of controlling emotion is as pernicious as the idea of letting oneself fall prey to emotion. It is noted that emotion, seen as a process of survival of the self, should not be automatically dismissed as series of micro-actions devoid of reason. Emotions can, however, be interchanged and transformed until they exhaust their energy. It also examines how, from a theatrical perspective, emotion is not only seen in facial expressions, but practically resides in the actor's entire stage behaviour. At the same time, it is discussed that emotion, from a scenic point of view, is not exhibited, communicated by the actor, but is perceived by the spectator in a detectivist way.

Keywords: emotion, abuse, excess, mask, voice

We often consider theatre itself as being an *abuse*. Whether as occupants of the seats in the auditorium or as ephemeral entertainers on the stage. And we are not just talking about performance abuse. Excess or violence, lack of restraint or judgment, impulsivity or passion, lust or greed do not manifest themselves otherwise than as avatars of abuse. Abuse of power, abuse of trust, abuse of the law are always demanding theatrical redefinitions. In the shadow of the theatre, the abuser is tempted by the belief that he could escape. For if abuse is theatre and theatre keeps us from boredom, then abuse should be rewarded. At the same time, theatre will be all the more valuable the greater the abuse. And how unbearable theatre can be without abuse.

If we rethink theatrical abuse as a play, we might unwittingly invest it with some exchange value. This can set off an avalanche of transactional activities that always end lamentably in the sham of victimization. The victim of abuse seems to enjoy many social benefits once the abuse has stopped and has been publicly exposed. It doesn't matter whether the abuse is real or just played out. Who has the patience to

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tell the difference anymore? And yet the sham is clearly seen on stage. The stilted acting, the inadequate gesticulation, the apathy of the interpretation, the director's arrogance, the aural disharmony, the inauthentic, sought-after naturalness of the scenic situations, the egocentricity of the collective of stage creators, the proliferation of scenographic elements (and the list goes on) make the difference between a *deadly* performance, in Brook's terminology, and the naturalness of the scenic reality. The naturalness which is different from the everyday naturalness and even from the backstage naturalness. But victimization will not succeed in using abuse as a tool for social positioning, especially in theatre. Take, for example, when one of the actors in a national theatre in Romania was deeply offended, presenting himself as a victim of abuse because "... two spectators in the front row decided to eat shawarma right in the middle of the performance"¹. The performance that was invoked was *Hamlet*, and we should behave like civilized spectators in the auditorium, shouldn't we? Probably. But what if the key to the staging of the *Hamlet* performance witnessed by the two spectators and even the interpretation of the actor who victimized himself were those which belong to the *rough* theatre, to use again Brook's terminology? In this case, the spectators cannot be blamed. Rough theatre invites you to what is contingent, to the annulment of the distance between actor and character, between performance and spectator, between the ordinary and the extraordinary time of the performance. The spectators of the rough theatre can eat seeds, drink beer, scream, stamp their feet, laugh loudly. We cannot ask the spectators, as performance organizers, to *sit still* under any conditions. If we incite them to a rough performance, they will indulge in shawarmas and even pints of beer. As actors, performing in the manner of rough, Brechtian theatre, even a Shakespeare play, we cannot present ourselves as a victim of abuse because there is a close but not obvious connection between the way a performance is presented and the spectators who attend the performance.

There is clearly an increase in spectator abuse during performances. It is as if the special, extra-ordinary time of the performance extends to the actions that spectators might take, in a space of libertinism, far from the restrictions of legal regulations or even far from what some might perceive as the constraints of common sense. So bizarre reports are appearing in the UK press: "UK theatre staff have been attacked, sexually harassed and abused by drunken audience members during performances, a new survey has revealed. Front of house staff facing violent assaults,

1 Cluj.ro *Incident culinar la Teatrul din Cluj: Două femei surprinse mâncând shaorma în timpul unei piese de teatru* în Cluj.ro, published: 05.01.2024, accessed: 08.04.2025 la <https://cluj.ro/incident-culinar-la-teatrul-din-cluj/>

theatre-goers urinating in fire exits and mass brawls breaking out in auditoriums were among the incidents uncovered by the report from the Broadcasting, Entertainment, Communications and Theatre Union (Bectu)”². Such behaviour is not just an isolated incident but widespread: “... assaults and abuse are a common occurrence”³. While in Shakespeare’s time, at his performances such attitudes were somewhat normal and universally accepted, today they are perceived as a failure of education and defined as unacceptable abuse. And yet, what if we are not dealing with an unpleasant consequence of a precarious education? Or, at least, not exclusively. What if the behaviour of the spectators is determined by exposure to the aesthetic abuse practiced on stage? Or, more than that, what if the abusive behaviour manifests itself as a psychological virus that is transmitted indirectly? That is, the abuses that are committed by the creators of the performance during rehearsals or even in the backstage somehow find a form of expression in the acting, of which neither the actor nor the other members of the artistic collective are aware. What if this kind of performance, which we might call abusive or unnatural, stirs in spectators an unbridled desire to behave abusively? Of one thing we can be sure, namely that the abuses of the spectators are not generated by the abuses contained in the text of the performance. The dramaturgical universe can be understood, according to Ionesco, as a study of abuse precisely in order to cure us of the desire to engage in abuse, which is nothing other than an artistic study of abuse made in a detective manner. So, if we exclude the dramaturgical universe as an influence, what are we left with? We are left with an unpleasant reality: “... during rehearsals and performances of many, many shows I’ve worked on both in college and professionally have had issues with actors, directors, producers, etc. committing physical, verbal, and sexual assault against each other. Both onstage and off. The amount of sexual and physical assault reported by actors and technicians is WILDLY out of proportion to the amount reported at the professional full-time jobs I’ve had”⁴. After all, we should be aware of the fact that theatre is a dangerous occupation. Theatre as a mass phenomenon will inevitably lead

2 Tom Ambrose, ‘I’ve been spat at’: half of UK theatre staff consider quitting over audience behaviour, at <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2023/mar/28/uk-theatre-staff-audience-behaviour-abuse-drunken-theatre-goers>, published: 03.28. 2023, accessed: 04.03.2025

3 Katie Spencer and Jayson Mansaray, *Fights, vomiting and abuse: Theatre-goers have forgotten how to behave, staff say*, at <https://news.sky.com/story/fights-vomiting-and-abuse-theatre-goers-have-forgotten-how-to-behave-staff-say-13026111>, published: 12.09.2023, accessed: 04.03. 2025

4 uffda1990, *Are Theatre People more prone to commit assault? Serious question...*, at https://www.reddit.com/r/Theatre/comments/apmm9l/are_theatre_people_more_prone_to_commit_as_sault/?rdt=37621, accessed: 04.03.2025

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to such exhibitions that are not allowed and that we cannot afford in everyday life. Perhaps it is precisely the faulty handling of the suspension of the diurnal and prosaic dimensions that leads to the full manifestation of abuse. The stage should be understood not in its architectural dimension, but in its psychic-instrumental dimension as a tool for safely studying the abuse. The moment the stage loses this condition of existence, it becomes theatrically inoperative. Thus placed into everyday life, the stage is lost in familiarity. Distances are annihilated. And the theatrical perspective can no longer be established. The abuse no longer takes place on stage, but in proximity, even in intimacy: “I think because of the close proximity between actors (not just physically but emotionally) as well as the frequency and intensity of the vulnerability actors must exhibit, the opportunity for people to take advantage of others increases. I am currently in a college theatre program and I am friends with multiple people within our small department who have experienced abuse and assault”⁵. Theatre should not be practiced by people who are vulnerable in this respect. Those people for whom proximity is only an opportunity to fulfill their crass desires. Proximity should not be such an opportunity. Physical proximity, the collective work on the development of a scenic behaviour, as the actor’s role could be understood, is not a laboratory for revaluing the ethical aspects of human inter-subjective behaviour. The theatre is not that building under whose roof abuses can take place freely because some consider this to be the definition of theatre as art. This is not the definition of theatre. It is only a way of to escape the consequences of our actions. However, we should be aware that the practitioners of the stage really engage in psychic closeness before the physical-bodily closeness. Besides the abuses of the spectators and stage practitioners, we also have to deal with the abuses of the theatre critics. Their abuses are, of course, less carnal, less violent, but perhaps much more dangerous. The theatre critic falsifies his testimony about the performance in which he participated under the pretext of freedom of interpretation. But, according to the testimony of a theatre critic who had the courage to put his finger on the wound, he no longer has the honesty to write about the spectacular product he has attended and completely ignores the performance. The critic is contriving his text many a time taking into account extra-scenic elements that are not related to the performance. The critic only pursues “... a

⁵ j_palmtree, *Are Theatre People more prone to commit assault? Serious question...*, at https://www.reddit.com/r/Theatre/comments/apmm9l/are_theatre_people_more_prone_to_commit_assault/?rdt=37621, accessed: 04.03.2025

PR agenda where the only outcome is a star rating”⁶. Thus, even if the performance is a failure, he will praise it or not depending on the PR agenda. Thus the theatre critic presents himself as eviscerated of all emotion. He doesn’t feel anything anymore. He only pursues his own interest, outside of any professional ethics.

Could it be possible that the abuses are caused by the incorrect management of the psychic closeness? Isn’t giving free rein to emotion the sure recipe for inviting abuse into our lives? It is. And that is why we should discern that not every form of abuse is theatre. The abuse thus comes from a channeling of the gaze. An emotion given by the very action of looking. A primal emotion. Theatre negotiates the distance between exteriorization and interiorization. The fact that we can look both inside and outside through the scenic illusion creates this emotion of the act of looking itself. It is a gaze that incorporates, that incarnates. And from this emotion it seems that the multitude of other emotions under whose pressure abuse is nothing more than an attempt to survive derives. But what if the very attempt to hold on, to control emotion is wrong? What if this is where the abuse begins?

There are several perspectives from which we can approach the issue of emotions: “Emotions are associated with impulsive or automatic response tendencies, and the traditional view is that emotion and self-control are antagonists. We review evidence supporting this view. Another view is that negative emotions, more so than positive emotions, are likely to undermine self-control, and we also review evidence for that contention. A third view is more nuanced still in recognizing that both positive and negative emotions can impair or improve self-control under the right circumstances, and there’s growing evidence for that position (...). We considered but quickly abandoned a fourth possibility—that emotions have little or no influence on self-control—because few theorists have championed this view, and the relevant published findings usually indicate that emotions have a significant impact on self-control”⁷. But beyond these four ways of seeing emotions and their role, we can say that emotion is linked to self-control. We thus call *emotion* the moments when self-control is no longer effective, it is suspended or interrupted, for a while. Emotion as a

6 Jake Orr, *Theatre Thought: Melanie Wilson’s Autobiographer Reconsidered* at <http://www.ayoungentheatre.com/theatre-thought-melanie-wilsons-autobiographer-reconsidered>, published: 21.04.2012, accessed: 11.04.2025

7 Brandon J. Schmeichel, Michael Inzlicht, “Incidental and Integral Effects of Emotions on Self-Control” in *Handbook of Cognition and Emotion*, Edited by Michael D. Robinson, Edward R. Watkins, Eddie Harmon-Jones, New York & London, The Guilford Press, 2013, pp. 272-290, p. 272

discontinuity of self-control should not be automatically understood as a fall into brutality, animality, irrationality. Can we consider self-control as the fruit of rationality and emotion as a manifestation of irrationality? Does the actor manage to regain self-control through moderation? Can we actually stifle emotion? To answer these questions we need to re-examine the understanding of emotion. Sometimes the emotion is similar to a disorder. It involves the loss of temper. This brings with it the manifestation of behaviours inappropriate to the assumed identity. Taking the argument to the extreme, it could be said that emotion can *make you bark when you are a cat*. Emotion allows the appropriation of a behaviour of otherness being of many kinds. So, emotions can be divided, according to their nature, into sudden and progressive emotions, common and personal emotions, singular and palindromic emotions, current and relived emotions, light and overwhelming emotions, overcome and insurmountable emotions, persistent and passing emotions, clear and confused emotions, primary and secondary emotions, authentic and played emotions. These are emotions that do not have a name. They do not have precise, identifiable manifestations either. They are intertwined sensations that can manifest together, in large or small numbers, but never alone. For example, common emotions are those we experience in the case of closeness to the other/others, whereas personal emotions are those we experience in the absence of the other/others. It is not a single emotion, but a spectrum of feelings. They have a protean presence and it is difficult for them to assume a distinctive form. In contrast to these imprecise and blurred emotions, we can consider the existence of another set of emotions. This second set of emotions are easy to identify by name, for example, “The six emotions [...] happiness, sadness, surprise, fear, anger, and disgust”⁸. These can be divided into positive, negative and ambivalent emotions. Happiness can be categorized as a positive emotion, sadness, anger, disgust as negative emotions and surprise as an ambivalent emotion. This type of emotion, denominated emotion, is not reduced to these six emotions. We identify here other sets of emotions: exciting, depressing and affectionate emotions. *Curiosity* can be assimilated as an exciting emotion. At the same time, it is noted that “We see also the influence of habit in all the emotions and sensations which are called exciting; for they have assumed this character from having habitually led to energetic action; and action affects, in an indirect manner, the respiratory and circulatory system; and the

⁸ Paul Ekman and Wallace V. Friesen, *Unmasking the Face – A guide to recognizing emotion from facial expression*, Los Altos, CA, Malor Books, 2003, p. 22

latter reacts on the brain”⁹. *Loneliness* can be assimilated as a depressing emotion. *Enchantment* can be assimilated as an emotion of affection. But many of the ones we consider to be emotions are not. Thus, for example, we reject the idea that *pain*, even *extreme pain* can be considered emotion. Nor is it feeling in the sense of sensitivity, affectivity. The pain is felt, it triggers an automatic organic response, but it does not remove the living presence of consciousness as long as it is bearable. When the pain becomes extreme, unbearable, we are dealing with the loss of consciousness or even the end of life. Pain is, beyond emotion, an alarm signal that warns us not only of the danger of altering the self, but of that of losing life. Pain is more than just an emotion. And in this regard we should take into account that emotion arouses an immediate organic reaction or a bodily action such as blushing or that “The earliest and almost sole expression seen during the first days of infancy, and then often exhibited, is that displayed during the act of screaming; and screaming is excited, both at first and for some time afterwards, by every distressing or displeasing sensation and emotion, - by hunger, pain, anger, jealousy, fear, etc.”¹⁰. The identification of the appearance of an emotion can be ascertained by: “distinctive universal signals; presence in other primates; distinctive physiology; distinctive universals in antecedent events; coherence among emotional response; quick onset; brief duration; automatic appraisal; unbidden occurrence”¹¹. In this context, we could discuss the criterion of *brief duration* provided above. Some emotions do not manifest themselves only in a brief duration. They last being so dominant that the action they generate is actually inaction, inactivity, paralysis. For example, fear or overwhelming emotions are capable of generating such behaviour. Fear is not included among the overwhelming emotions because it does not generate only the paralyzing response, but also many other various responses. We notice here that emotion generates an organic reaction such as intense sweating or vertigo, continuing with a whole series of subsequent actions. Basically, the unconscious bodily reaction determines or arouses as a necessity the engagement in a series of organic acts. The human body’s response to emotion is not actually an excitement or entering into a dialogue. In fact, the term ‘response’ may not be the most appropriate to describe what is happening. It is as if

9 Charles Darwin, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, New York & London, D. Appleton and Company, 1915, p. 248

10 Ibidem, p. 223

11 Paul Ekman, “An Argument for Basis Emotions”, in *Nature Critical Concepts in the Social Sciences*, Edited by David Inglis, John Bone and Rhoda Wilkie, London & New York, Routledge, 2005, p. 299

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emotion wears a garment which is our own body. Once installed, emotion takes over the decision-making capacity of the consciousness and replaces it. But it is not entirely an automatic, conditioned reaction or predetermined series of neuro-vegetative organic reactions. It seems to be the visible part of a survival process. It is as if we were suspending, for a relatively short time, our self-awareness, renouncing the space occupied by the self in our psyche in order to find our way through an impossible situation, which endangers or perhaps even alters the self. Once this depression is crossed, being transported by the vehicle called *emotion*, once on the other bank, the self is restored, the ego is recomposed, the consciousness returns to its own capacity of perceiving itself in the environment. But what if emotion can be a *second consciousness*? Consciousness that manifests itself in a reality other than the common reality, a reality of crisis, out of the ordinary. Or, what if, on the contrary, it is only a *substitute for consciousness*? A substitute which appears in a moment of crisis and helps the self to get through the crisis without suffering major damage. We cannot state beyond any doubt whether emotion is another kind of consciousness or a substitute for it. However, what we can note here is that the emotion which appears when we lose self-control has an internal structure that makes it capable of manifesting itself somehow autonomously towards the self of the person in the emotional process and even towards the person himself. Of course, it does not manifest itself completely separately from the person involved in the process.

Nonetheless, we can consider that “If emotions are viewed as having evolved to deal with fundamental life tasks in ways which have been adaptive phylogenetically, then it is logically consistent to expect that there will be some common elements in the contexts in which emotions are found to occur”¹². Understood as the result of an evolution, emotion can be related to survival. But we know that it is not a survival mechanism. It seems more like a collaborative process, similar, for example, to the collaboration between humans and, say, *bifidobacterium lactis*, an intestinal bacterium beneficial to humans. Emotion has a presence of its own, separate from the personal and typological traits of the one who experiences the emotion. Emotion happens to us. It seems that we have no contribution to its development. From this we find that emotion can be identified regardless of the somatic and behavioural variations that different individuals may experience. We can recognize *horror* regardless of who experiences it. This aspect allowed Paul Ekman

¹² Paul Ekman, *Basic Emotion* in *Handbook of Cognition and Emotion*, Edited by Tim Dalgleish and Mick J. Power, Chichester & New York, John Wiley & Sons, 1999, pp. 45-60, p. 53

to advance the hypothesis that emotions can be deciphered in facial expressions. Starting from the observation that “if we do become emotional, our face probably will show it to others”¹³, taking into account, however, the fact that “The face more often than the voice gives false emotional messages, although it can never be totally turned off. Even when listening and not speaking, a subtle sign of an expression may leak out”¹⁴, the physiognomy of the face can betray the existence of an emotion. Of course, sometimes emotion can only be guessed in a movement of a facial muscle, other times, on the entire face. What is noteworthy here is that “it is the voice, not the face, that provides the signals that distinguish one [...] emotion from another”¹⁵. In fact, if we think from the perspective of stage interpretation, for the spectator, the acting in its emotional dimension lies in the tension between utterance and facial expression. On stage, not a text is spoken, but an emotion is betrayed through verbalization. And this is a fact that is often forgotten. Perhaps, from this point of view, many directors, set designers, teatrologists and actors who fight against the text actually fight against the display of emotion. We may deal here with the killing of emotion and consequently with a theatrical performance subdued to rationality. Yet, by excessive rationalization, by renouncing any emotion, by refusing textocentrism, aren't we giving up theatre? Shouldn't we give this type of performance a different name? The existence of emotion on the actor's face and in his voice is a fundamental feature of the theatre performance. On stage, we do not treat with a text, but with a speech, with the spoken word. The emotion is in the intonation and in the expressions of the face. In this respect, we might advance the idea that the voice-face couple works similarly to the voice-mask couple. We know that in the ancient Greek theatre, “The mask was displaying a static facial expression, largely functioning as a screen for the audience to project their own emotional state”¹⁶. Thus, being aware that the spectator sees and imagines at the same time, we can notice that it is not the emotion that the character display through facial expressions that matters. The facial expression, like the mask, being above all a support for the spectator's emotion, works in conjunction with the intonation of the actor's voice that is individualized in the scenic aurality. We often neglect the fact that, in ancient Greek theatre, “it was found that the masks amplified

13 Paul Ekman, *Emotion Revealed – Recognizing Faces and Feelings to improve Communication and Emotional Life*, New York, Times Books, 2003, p. 34

14 Ibidem, p. 60

15 Ibidem, p. 204

16 Fotios Kontomichos, Charalampos Papadakos, Eleftheria Georganti, Thanos Vovolis, John N. Mourjopoulos, “The Sound Effect of Ancient Greek Theatrical Masks” in *International Conference on Mathematics and Computing*, Atena, 2014, p. 1451

the spectral region up to 1000 Hz. This effect was found to be stronger around the male speech fundamental frequency. Given that the theatre responses present a significant peak around the mid 1000 Hz region, the ‘mask-filter’ effect appears somehow to smooth the overall spectral profile of the ‘theatre filter’. Furthermore, the masks would alter the actor’s voice by boosting the low-mid region of speech reaching the audience. In addition to that, the masks were found to enhance directivity for the side of the actor’s head and hence amplify significantly such low-mid speech frequency region, for listeners located beyond the central positions and especially at the sides of the *cavea*. This radiation property of the masks would improve reception at these more problematic audience positions, especially under noisy conditions”¹⁷. Thus, the mask did not have the function of hiding the face. The mask had several functions of a pragmatic as well as psychological nature.

At the same time, in Asian theatre, the masks are “always so popular and are loved even though people don’t know their meaning. They are so universal because they are archetypes”¹⁸. Functioning as archetypes, models for projecting the spectators’ emotions, masks are built on simple plastic principles. The way the lines are drawn on the three-dimensional surface of the mask articulates its functionality. “Such lines of expression are artistically processed based on the characteristics of the mask produced. As an illustration, the lines which curve downwards give impression of sadness, being old and scared. The lines which curve upwards give impression of happiness and smiling”¹⁹. In the case of the mask, emotions are reduced to their archetypal appearance. A downward curved line supports the projection of the emotion called *fright*, while its opposite, an upward curved line supports the projection of the emotion called *happiness*. We ask ourselves: can emotion be contained in the expression of the mask? In fact, the attempt of some psychologists to establish a relationship between the inner unfolding of an emotion and its facial expression can be understood as a *mask of a particular emotion*. Nevertheless, as we have seen so far, the emotion itself is not betrayed either at the facial level or at the level of the mask. Even if in Balinese theatre, for example, there can be masks like Topeng Bues that emotionally is “a bullying, aggressive coward, a kind of comic

¹⁷ Ibidem, p. 1445

¹⁸ Margaret Coldiron, Carmencita Palermo and Tiffany Strawson, “Women in Balinese *Topeng*: Voices, Reflections, and Interactions” in *Asian Theatre Journal*, vol. 32, no. 2, 2015, pp. 464-492, p. 480

¹⁹ I Wayan Sukarya, “Form of Modern Mask Created by Ida Bagus Anom” in *Mudra – Journal of Art and Culture*, vol. 26, no. 2, 2011, pp. 314-330, p. 318

thug”²⁰, we note that its emotional character is the result of a complex process of reception in which the dimensions of the plastic image of the mask, of the actor’s dance, of his vocal tones, of the plastic image of the costume of the actor in motion and of the aural dimension manifest themselves during the performance. In reality, by what we call today emotion was meant, in their theatrical dimension, the following feelings: “The eight Sentiments (rasa) recognised in drama are as follows: Erotic (śrngāra), Comic (hāsyā), Pathetic (karuna), Furious (raudra), Heroic (vira), Terrible (bhayānaka), Odious (bibhatsa) and Marvellous (adbhuta). This eight are the Sentiments named by Brahman; I shall now speak of the Dominant, The Transitory and the Temperamental States. The Dominant States (sthāyibhāra) are known to be the following: love, mirth, sorrow, anger, energy, terror, disgust and astonishment. The thirtythree Transitory States (vyabhicāribhāva) are known to be the following: discouragement, weakness, apprehension, envy, intoxication, weariness, indolence, depression, anxiety, distraction, recollection, contentment, shame, inconstancy, joy, agitation, stupor, arrogance, despair, impatience, sleep, epilepsy, dreaming, awakening, indignation, dissimulation, cruelty, assurance, sickness, insanity, death, fright and deliberation. These are defined by their names”²¹. This allows us to advance the idea that, like in the old Indian theatre, the *dominant emotions* or states - as it seems that no emotion arises in a pure way, we can speak of a bundle of emotional elements from which one imposes itself, is prevalent - coagulate into something superior to them that the ancient Indians called *feelings*. So the feeling, in its quality of *affect*, is also an emotion, but it is somehow superior to the simple fleeting emotion. It is a persistent emotion that comes to characterize a person’s presence. In theatre these feelings are explored through excess, abuse. And even if it is said that “Theatre is in the extreme exaggeration of feelings, an exaggeration that dislocates the banal everyday reality”²², this abuse is welcome to get out of the everyday routine. Theatre can only be found beyond the familiar, in the archetype. But this procedure must be done with theatrical means of expression precisely so as not to confuse the levels of reality and commit impermissible abuses. That is why the *hunt* for emotions is an important theatrical tool. The emotion is not displayed, but hidden by the actor. That is why we consider the spectator a pursuer or a detective and the actor’s performance

20 Margaret Coldiron, op. cit., p. 472

21 Bharata-Muni, *The Nāṭyaśāstra*, translated into English by Manomohan Ghosh, Calcutta, Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1951, p. 102

22 Eugène Ionesco, *Note și contranote*, trad. și cuvânt înainte de Ion Pop, București, Humanitas, 1992, p. 54

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as hunting or fishing. The spectator must make a perceptual and conceptual effort to decipher the emotion that the character is experiencing. The spectator will never be a lazy presence. Beneath his apparent placidity there is his determination to understand what is happening on stage, what he is witnessing. For the spectator, emotion is the whip that chases away boredom. He is eager to perceive the emotions on the face and in the voice of the actor-character and when he is denied access to this spectacular dimension, he closes himself to reception. Thus he comes to look for the *extraordinary* elsewhere than in the stage narration, comforting himself with the thought that even though the performance didn't tell him anything, at least, he participated in a social event. Going to theatre can be satisfying as a personal experience, a secular ritual. When nothing happens on stage, what happens to me as spectator becomes important.

All this work on emotions must be guided by the director. The actor, even the experienced one, can easily get lost in the web of emotions and end up in a daily experience in which he does nothing but display his own emotions that do nothing but bore the spectator: "As for the last objection, I claim that the director, having become a kind of demiurge, at the back of whose head is this idea of implacable purity and of its consummation whatever the cost, if he truly wants to be a director, i.e., a man versed in the nature of matter and objects, must conduct in the physical domain an exploration of intense movement and precise emotional gesture which is equivalent on the psychological level to the most absolute and complete moral discipline and on the cosmic level to the unchaining of certain blind forces which activate what they must activate and crush and burn on their way what they must crush and burn"²³. And that is because "emotions do not depend upon our will"²⁴. They dominate us. We cannot control them. They control us. And if "Every sudden emotion, including astonishment, quickens the action of the heart, and with it the respiration"²⁵, in theatre, "It is certain that for every feeling, every mental action, every leap of human emotion there is a corresponding breath which is appropriate to it"²⁶. Therefore, we notice that both Artaud and Darwin associate emotion with breathing, respectively with changing

23 Antonin Artaud, "Third Letter to J. Po, Paris, November 9, 1932" in Antonin Artaud, *The Theater and Its Double*, translated from the French by Mary Caroline Richards, New York, Grove Press, 1958, p. 114-115

24 Jerzy Grotowski in Richard Schechner and Theodore Hoffman, *American Encounter in Jerzy Grotowski Towards a Poor Theatre*, edited by Eugenio Barba, preface by Peter Brook, New York, Routledge, 2002, p. 246

25 Darwin, Charles, op. cit., p. 283

26 Antonin Artaud, *The Theater and Its Double*, 1958, op. cit., p. 134

the tempo of breathing. This reveals the idea that emotion cannot be reduced to a mask which hides a physiognomy. But does emotion cause the transformation of breathing, or does breathing determine emotion? Grotowski describes this process of exploring emotion as a process of *self-penetration*. He insists on the fact that “One must resort to a metaphorical language to say that the decisive factor in this process is humility, a spiritual predisposition: not to do something, but to refrain from doing something, otherwise the excess becomes impudence instead of sacrifice. This means that the actor must act in a state of trance. Trance, as I understand it, is the ability to concentrate in a particular theatrical way and can be attained with a minimum of good will”²⁷. The excess that Grotowski refers to is that of sacrifice in which emotions are sacrificed on stage. This is not a killing of emotion. It is not about being overwhelmed by emotion. Nor is it a blind submission to emotion. It is a *negotiation* with emotion.

In conclusion, “assumptions that rigorous content requires work, while play is frivolous”²⁸ are not verifiable in reality. But, at least, as far as the actor is concerned, the frivolity of the play, paradoxically, does not exclude effort, work. The play is rigorous in itself. Adding rigour to the rigour of the play, we do nothing but transform the vitality of the play into something fixed, immobile, inflexible, into something from which life has been extracted. The emotion is objectified. Rigour is not what can control emotion. In fact, any attempt to control emotion fails in non-subjectivation. At least, on stage, emotion should never be subjected to control, but to metamorphosis. Emotion, through a series of permutations, can be transformed. For example, we could do the exercise of passing from anger to irritation, from irritation to indignation, from indignation to tension, from tension to impatience, from impatience to amazement, from amazement to jubilation, from jubilation to joy, and from joy to calmness. We thus notice that “Thinking the theatre performance in series of actions generates transcendences of the first levels of meanings, opening up countless possibilities for exploring ways of telling the story of the performance”²⁹. In fact, the emotional permutations weave the thread of an emotional narrative. And in this narrative, emotions are not suppressed, but given the opportunity to manifest themselves fully

27 Jerzy Grotowski in Eugenio Barba *The Theatre's New Testament* in Jerzy Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, 2002, op. cit., p. 37

28 Karen Wohlwend and Kylie Pepler “All rigor and no play is no way to improve learning” in *Phi Delta Kappan International*, Arlington, VA, vol. 96, issue 8, pp. 22-26, p. 22

29 Diana Cozma, “Reflection and Action in the Actor's Work” in *Theatrical Colloquia*, Iași, no. 14, issue 2, pp.5-13, p. 7

and thus to exhaust themselves without causing damage to the one having the emotional experience. And this can be done if we understand that emotion has a reason for its existence. It does nothing but act as a protocol, not a mechanism, of survival. Because of this, the rigour placed on emotion prevents the survival protocol from activating.

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