

The Responsible Hands of Theatre. Minor and Major Forces on the Stage of Metanoia Artopédia

VERA KÉRCHY

Abstract: In this study, I analyze the 2013 performance of Metanoia Artopédia, *Ice Doctrines. Variations on Nazi Rhetoric* in the context of the history of the Hungarian independent theatre group. Using Judith Butler's thoughts on hate speech and Gilles Deleuze's minor/major use of language, I try to show that the shift to "major" forms and topics (the power of representation and the representation of power) from an Artaud-ian "minor" theatre does not mean a radical change in the group's history, and the theatre of "kings and princes" gets necessarily deconstructed on the stage of Metanoia. After 20 years of owning a minor perspective – the world of the "saint idiots" – the group takes the perpetrator's point of view and stages the *Lingua Tertii Imperii* (the language of the Third Reich). Still, *Ice Doctrines* remains "minor" as it finds the "lines of escape" within representation.

Judith Butler begins her book on hate speech by recalling the anecdote from Toni Morrison's lecture she gave after getting the Nobel Prize in 1993.¹ The story is about an old blind woman, whose wisdom is challenged by young people who are trying to trick her. One of them asks: "Old woman, I hold in my hand a bird. Tell me whether it is living or dead." After a long silence the woman answers: "I don't know whether the bird you are holding is dead or alive, but what I do know

is that it is in your hands. It is in your hands." Morrison gives an explanation by identifying the bird with language and the hands with the usage of language and points out that "the blind woman shifts attention away from assertions of power to the instrument through which that power is exercised". Butler uses the story to unfold her theory about the performative power of language, how we can do things *by words*², how words themselves can hurt (kill the bird or keep it alive), and what the tools are of resisting this power, how we can distract the effect of the speech act by pointing at the hands of the speaker, in other words at the rhetoric aspect of language. This is exactly what happens on the stage of *Ice-Doctrines*, Metanoia Artopédia's current performance, which aims to stage the Nazi rhetoric as we learn from the subtitle: *Variations on Nazi Rhetoric*.³ The play is staging

¹ Judith BUTLER, *Excitable Speech. A Politics of the Performative* (New York – London: Routledge, 1997). Morrison's speech can be fully read here: Toni MORRISON – Nobel Lecture. NobelPrize.org. Nobel Prize Outreach AB 2022. Thu. 9 Jun 2022.

<https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1993/morrison/lecture/>

² In the first chapter – „Burning Acts, Injurious Speech” – Butler analyse J. L. Austin's famous book of speech act theory, *How to Do Things With Words* (1962) suggesting that *How to Do Things by Words* would be a better title to express the specificity of the illocutionary speech act, its capability „to perform itself, producing a strange enactment of linguistic immanence”. BUTLER, *Excitable Speech*, 44.

³ Participants: Andrea Erdély Perovics, Hermina G. Erdély, Ágnes Diószegi, Szilárd Szokol, Péter Varga, Zoltán Lengyel, Zoltán Perovics. Photographer: Balázs Zoltán Tóth. Costume Designer: Anna Csúri. Creator of Cardboard Figures: Attila Etele Kiss. Sound Designer and Live Narration: Zoltán Lengyel. Director's / Editor's Contributor: Andrea Erdély Perovics. Director / Visual Design: Zoltán Perovics. Special thanks to Gyula Lencsés

the hands, which are not just responsible tools of fatal acts (can be covered in blood or can stay clean in a Poncius Pilatus way), but also the corporeal expression of speech, therefore the source of instability (considering that “the unknowing body marks the limit if intentionality in the speech act”),⁴ hence the tool of deconstruction. By enhancing the performance aspect of theatre (amplifying the bodily acts, the physical presence, and the voices instead of the meaning or message), *Ice-Doctrines* follows the tradition of Metanoia performances and deconstructs the mechanism of representation, while – for the first time in the group’s history – it also puts representation in the focus in terms of content.

Problematizing the relationship between representation, violence, and sovereign identity has always defined the aesthetics of the now 32-year-old Metanoia Artopédia, independent theatre group from Szeged. In the manner of the neo-avant-garde icons – Jerzy Grotowski, Tadeusz Kantor or Robert Wilson – the group holds an Artaud-ian view of imitation being injurious, therefore Western theatre has to be reformed. As per Derrida, “theological” theatre is the emblem of logocentrism, “more than any other art, it has been marked by the labor of total representation”⁵. A theatre performance based on a dramatic text pretends to convey the meaning, from the author through the director and the actor to the audience, following the chain of representations, supposing that there is a “layout of a primary logos which does not belong to the theatrical site and governs it from a distance”.⁶ This kind of direct transfer of meaning, in other words the ideology

and the staff of Grad Café. Date premiered: 2013.

⁴ BUTLER, *Excitable Speech*, 10.

⁵ Jacques DERRIDA, “The Theatre of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation”, in Jacques DERRIDA, *Writing and Differance*, trans. by Alan BASS, 232–250 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 234.

⁶ *Ibid.* 235.

of transparency, gives the illusion of sovereignty connecting the stage with the discourse of power, or what Deleuze calls the ‘major’ usage of language:⁷ as the manifestation of the essential Cartesian ego, who guarantees the meaning by his presence and his speech “the traditional actor enters into an ancient complicity with princes and kings, while the theatre is complicitous with power... The actual power of theatre is inseparable from a representation of power in theatre...”⁸

In this kind of theological theatre a play is constituted “as a spectacle that denies its audience the ability either to look away from

⁷ Deleuze defines major and minor languages as follows: „We could define major languages even when they have little international importance: these would be languages with a strong homogeneous structure (standardization) and centered on invariables, constants, or universals of a phonological, syntactical, or semantic nature. [...] major languages are languages of power...”, while „one must define minor languages as languages of continuous variability... A minor language is comprised of only a minimum of structural constancy and homogeneity.” Gilles DELEUZE, „One Less Manifesto”, trans. by Eliane dal MOLIN and Timothy MURRAY, in *Mimesis, Masochism, and Mime. The Politics of Theatricality in Contemporary French Thought*, ed. by Timothy MURREY, 239–258 (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1997), 243–244. Later on he prefers to talk about major and minor usages of languages instead of the languages themselves being major or minor, he writes: „there is no imperial language that is not hallowed out, swept away by these lines of inherent and continuous variation, that is, by these minor usages. Major and minor languages, therefore, qualify less as different languages than as different usages of the same language.” DELEUZE, „One Less Manifesto”, 240.

⁸ DELEUZE, „One Less Manifesto”, 241.

it or equally to intervene in it".⁹ This function does not depend on the actual content. It is the representational structure itself that does the positioning even in the case of the most "innocent" topic. We cry or we laugh because we identify with a perspective from which the *mise en scène* seems readable, without questioning the implied ethos on which the fictional world is based. Since the codes of the construction are hidden, everything seems to be natural and necessary, thus we reassert our (often offensive) cultural clichés without noticing. The power dynamics of theatrical illusion can not be disrupted by explicit criticism. If a play criticises an oppressive system by following the logic of representation, it uses the same power discourse it tries to subvert. So critical discourse has to start with aiming at the representation itself, and not the content.

The two main paths of subverting representation is well known from theatre history. On one hand, there is the Artaud-ian way (radicalized by the performances of the 60s): replacing language with the bodily act, meaning action. And on the other, there is the Brechtian way (improved by postmodern theatre): reflecting on the mechanism of representation by staging the illusion, and unveiling it as a construction. For the first 20 years (from the formation in 1990 to 2011, when Andrea Erdély, professional actress from the Serbian theatre, Kosztolányi Dezső Színház, joined the group) Metanoia (first „Metanoia Commando”, then „Metanoia Theatre”, later „Metanoia Artopédia”) followed the Artaud-ian path. There were very few textual parts in the plays, and if there were any, language did not function as the conveyor of meaning. The fragments, intertextual collages, were recited in extreme slowness, by sluttering or with breathing backwards. The actual cast –

⁹ Andrew PARKER – Eve Kosofsky SEDGWICK, „Introduction. Performativity and Performance”, in *Performativity and Performance*, ed. by Andrew PARKER – Eve Kosofsky SEDGWICK, 1–18 (New York – London: Routledge, 1995), 11.

changing from time to time depending on the actual personal encounters – was mostly of non-professionals (“actors, fine artists, literary professionals, musicians, university students and teachers, unemployed and even disadvantaged people”¹⁰ – as we learn from the website). Pero – Zoltán Perovics, the founder and director of the group – especially liked working with people with slight speech defects (similarly to András Jeles, well-known neo-avant-garde director, with whom Pero cooperated several times in different productions, mostly as stage designer). He treated speech as an exciting instrument of music, as a wealth of possibilities of special sound effects. The “assignifying *intensive utilization* of language”¹¹ and the immobility or the very slow, not “natural” motion deprived the character of its anthropomorphic modality, therefore the speaking actor was no longer a model of the Cartesian subject bearing “an ancient complicity with princes and kings”.

The actor was not in the focus in the Metanoia productions anyway, at least not in the anthropocentric sense. It is telling that any time Pero is asked about the early times, he starts to speak about the installations he made for the performances. The objects he created for the actual production were as important as the human participants, which does not mean that the human participants were devaluated. It was more about exploring the objects’ liveliness, transgressing the binary opposition of human/non human. The objects – which were also exhibited in independent events – are usually very small, such as figures made of toilette paper, cradles and rifles hanging on thin strings swaying rhythmically, little light cores floating in the dark, thin automatic pendulums clicking grace-

¹⁰ <http://www.metanoiaartopedia.hu/>

¹¹ Gilles DELEUZE – Félix GUATTARI, „What is a Minor Literature?” in Gilles DELEUZE – Félix GUATTARI, *Kafka. Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. by Dana Polan, 16-27 (Minneapolis – London: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 22.

fully, tiny universes unfolding in tiny spaces, depending on where the group had the opportunity to play, in an apartment, in a small cinema, or in a basement. A black box, the setting of the 1999 production, *Protected Animals* (Védett állatok), serves as an emblem of the Metanoia style, since all the performances operate with black and white, with darkness and narrow spaces. Sometimes there are even veils and obscure screens covering the view, leaving only silhouettes behind, in the manner of shadow theatre. Human participants merge with two-dimensional cardboard figures. Everything is very slow and delicately choreographed. The visual opera rhymes on the symphony of breath, creak and rustle.

We are extremely far from realist theatre here, from the aesthetic of transparency, of clearly showing and telling the one and only true meaning of the play. We are dealing with traces, absences, and uncertainties, close to what Deleuze calls a 'minor' theatre:

"That is, to eliminate the constants and invariants not only in language and gesture but also even in theatrical representation and what is represented on the stage. Thus to eliminate every occurrence of power: the power of what theatre represents (the King, the Princes, the Masters, the System), but also the power of theatre itself (the Text, the Dialogue, the Actor, the Director, the Structure)."¹²

The aim of the "amputation" is to give "free reign to a different theatrical matter and to a different theatrical form",¹³ "a new potentiality of theatre, an always unbalanced, non-representative force...",¹⁴ "to impose a minor treatment or a treatment of minoration to extract becomings against History, lives against culture, thoughts against doctrine,

¹² DELEUZE, „One Less Manifesto”, 251.

¹³ Ibid. 241.

¹⁴ Ibid. 242.

graces or disgraces against dogma."¹⁵ Deleuze talks about the Italian director, Carmelo Bene who eliminates the represented power by excluding the kings and the generals from Shakespeare's plays, but in Pero's case – who does not work with dramatic base – there are no such characters in the first place. If we just take a look at the titles, we find subordinated figures in the center of the plays: *Garden of Fools* (Balgák kertje, 1992), *Damned Story* (Átkozott történet, 1994), *Nursing Home* (Öregek otthona, 1996), *Protected Animals* (Védett állatok, 1997) as if they – the fools, the damned, the old people, and the animals – were an assembly of the „saint idiots”¹⁶. Kata Demcsák, former member of the group, recalls the mise en scène of *Idea Time* (Eszme-idő, 1991), the very first performance of the group:

"For example, the world of *Idea Time* put figures from different times next to each other, sometimes as a collage, other times side by side. Kaspar, the Alchemist Poet, the Bride, the Prisoner, the Renaissance and the Baroque Fellow, the Old Man Feeding the Pigeon, the Traffic Inspector, or the Bride... this Bride limping in orthopedic shoes existed as a single, concrete, tangible figure free of stereotypes... as she listened to the cricket chirping in the middle of the greatest chaos..."¹⁷

Or remembering the rehearsals of *Damned Story* (Átkozott történet, 1993), in which she played Fool Terka, she writes (citing from her own diary entries, she wrote at the time):

¹⁵ Ibid. 243.

¹⁶ Ibid. 250.

¹⁷ DEMCSÁK Katalin, „Világ-nyelv-töredék(ek). A Metanoia Különítmény korai előadásai”, in *Alternatív színháztörténetek. Alternatívok és alternatívák*, szerk. IMRE Zoltán, 508–527 (Budapest: Balassi Kiadó, 2008), 520–521.

"The KZ [Konzentrationslager] inmate wearing boots and clothes with stripes is dragging hack hammers, an iron wedge tied to his wrist, and stones tied to the hack hammers. A thick rope is stretched around the back of the man's neck, who has become genderless in women's clothing. The other end of the rope, on which small white clothes are hang out, is around Terka's neck. Terka tries to free herself as she slowly backs into the space. This is the most difficult scene, we should live together completely, as if the rope were an umbilical cord, while the rhythms, the pace, and the action are opposite."¹⁸

The recurring title of the exhibitions, "Metanoia Lumber Room" and of Pero's writings (published mostly on the homepage), "Collection of Unnecessary Texts" also refer to the oppressed, to the marginalized, to the useless. The black and white costumes in the performances, the hat and the suit with a mid-twentieth design evoke Kafka's world of minorities: the immigrants, the children, the animals, who are (opposite to the powerful, totalized, sovereign identities) open to metamorphosis, to becoming ("the becoming-dog of the man and the becoming-man of the dog, the becoming-ape or the becoming-beetle of the man and *vica vesra*"¹⁹). The opening page of the Metanoia website starts with Braille writing. But even the name of the group refers to a kind of physical disability: 'artopédia' is a portmanteau of the words 'art' and 'orthopedy'. Since 'metanoia' means 'turn' in Greek with the connotation of religious turns like the one of Saint Paul, the name itself defines the *ars poetica* of the sublime oppressed.²⁰

¹⁸ Ibid. 519.

¹⁹ DELEUZE – GUATTARI, „What is a Minor Literature?“, 22.

²⁰ Pero talks about the name of the group here:

It is clear that in this first period, Metanoia performances owned a minor perspective. The 2010 production, *Thirteen Months (in House Arrest)* (Tizenhárom hónap [házi őrizetben]) can be considered the closure of the era. This is the first time Pero works directly with the theme of the Nazi persecution of the Jews.²¹ The performance is inspired by the life of the Hungarian rabbi, scholar, botanist, and politician, Immanuel Löw, who was imprisoned during the white terror in 1920–21. During his captivity he wrote his main work, *Die Flora der Juden*, the taxonomy of Old Testament plant names. As such, the perspective of the play is still minor, and the style of the performance is still postdramatic for resisting the language of signs, and „amputating“ the components of power. There is no actor in the center, the texts are fragmented and not emphasized in a natural, communicative way. There are screens concealing the clear view, the motion is static or very slow, and there are some tiny lighting objects in the back, moving mechanically, invoking a surreal mini cosmos in the narrow space.

Interestingly, the next performance continues the topic of persecution, but changes the perspective from minor to major by switching from the victim's to the perpetrator's point of view. And this is the moment we can talk about Metanoia's turn (meaning 'the turn of the turn'), even though – and this is the most exciting aspect of it – the group has never stopped being minor, never broke up with the Artaud-ian critic of logocentrism. It is only the method that changes: instead of „amputating“ the major elements, they

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5s_z8wFkeLI

²¹ The play was preceeded by a performance in 2007: *Preparations, Boards, Pallets* was defined as „preparations for a performance that aims to get informed/to inform about the life and work of Immanuel Löw – using archival documents“

(<http://www.metanoiaartopedia.hu/>).

are amplifying them to the level where they explode (or in the words of Miklós Erdély, another inspiring predecessor of Pero's work, to the level of „extinction of meaning”²².)

Ice-Doctrine stages the Nazis, the “Kings”, and the “Masters”, with a professional actress in the center, reciting a large amount of texts, which – according to Deleuze's description – makes her appear as their collaborator. Andrea Erdély (after her marriage with Pero: Andrea Erdély Perovics) joins the group in 2011, and immediately gets into the center of the productions. She is not just the leading actor, but also Pero's creative companion, the co-author of the productions. This can be due to her talent and their fruitful encounter, but also the way Pero has always worked: relying on and inspired by the current conditions. So far *Ice-Doctrine* has been the most important performance of this period, still running at the time of writing this paper, already past the 40th show.²³ The title comes from Hans Hörbiger's world ice theory (Welteislehre, WEL), which became the official cosmology of the Third Reich, “according to which the explanation of astronomical phenomena lies in the supremacy of ice”²⁴. The textual fragments are from Hitler, Himmler, Eichmann, Horthy, archives from the Nazi regime, and today's media release: manifestations of far-right politics and events, neo-Nazi pop songs, manipulating TV programs, and everyday chat full of “innocent”, unconscious racism (Gipsy

²² ERDÉLY Miklós, „Marly tézisek”, <https://artpool.hu/kontextus/mono/nullpont6b2.html>

²³ Just take a look at the title of some other productions of the period: *I am perfect* (Én tökéletes vagyok, 2015) or *I'm Fine, Thanks!* (Köszönöm jól! 2011) seems to mirror a major point of view in contrast with the stupid's, the elders' and the cursed' minor word.

²⁴ SIRBIK Attila, „A gonosz banalitása. Interjú Pervics Zoltán rendezővel”, *Tiszatáj*, 2018. dec. 1. <https://tiszatajonline.hu/szinhaz/a-gonosz-banalitasa/>

and Jewish jokes). Standing in the middle of the small stage, Erdély is shouting sentences like “Each animal only mates within its own breed. The stronger must rule over the weaker and must not merge with the weaker, as this would mean the sacrifice his own greatness.”²⁵ Or lines from the Hungarian Numerus Clausus Laws: “Members of the Chamber of the Press, as well as the Chamber of Actors and Cinematographers, Lawyers, Engineers, and Medicine, were allowed for Jews only in proportions where their number did not exceed twenty percent of the total number of members of the Chamber.” As if the whole performance staged “the radicalization of evil linked to the fall into the language of communication, representation, information”.²⁶ By connecting the content to the oppressive power of logocentrism *Ice-Doctrine* shows that

“Nazism has indeed been the most pervasive figure of media violence and of political exploitation of the modern techniques of communicative language, of industrial language and of the language of industry, of scientific objectification to which is linked the logic of the conventional sign and of formalizing registration...”²⁷

But how does this all turn into its own criticism? What makes the direct staging of majority irony, and from which point of view would the “fall into a language of mediate communication” actually appear as the “origi-

²⁵ Here I would like to thank Zoltán Perovics and Andrea Erdély Perovics for making the script available to me. Every translation of the citations are mine.

²⁶ Jacques DERRIDA, „Force of Law: The »Mystical Foundation of Authority«”, in *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*, ed. by Drucilla CORNELL – Michel ROSENFELD – David Gray CARLSON, 3–67 (New York – London: Routledge, 1992), 58.

²⁷ Ibid. 58.

nal sin" itself?²⁸ How can we talk about minority in the case of *Ice-Doctrines*? Here I refer to another part of the subtitle: "variations". It is not just about the theatrical cliché that every performance changes from night to night (this time accompanied by the direct aim to utilize the spectator's responses on the questionnaire filled out at the beginning of the play), but about shifting the meaning, diversifying the cited lines in one and the same production, re-reading "at the outset",²⁹ making the text differ from itself. This is what Roland Barthes calls "critical difference" as the object of all deconstructive criticism: "The deconstruction of a text does not proceed by random doubt or arbitrary subversion, but by the careful teasing out of warring forces of signification within the text itself."³⁰ *Ice-Doctrine* aims to show the inner difference of every kind of text, even the one that gives the illusion that it is "irreversible, 'natural', decidable, continuous, totalizable, and unified into a coherent whole based on the signified."³¹ Therefore it returns to the major topics and forms of logocentric theatre, and demystifies the ideology of totalization by revealing the "lines of escape"³² within its representation. Since "there is no imperial language that is not hallowed out, swept away by these lines of inherent and continuous variation"³³, even the most iconic major language, the Nazi rhetoric can be deconstructed, or to be more precise, it deconstructs itself. We only have to reveal its inner vulnerability; point at the "hands" holding the bird.

The main tool of this task is resignification. Breaking with the prior context, citing

²⁸ Ibid. 50.

²⁹ Roland BARTHES, *S/Z*, trans. by Richard MILLER (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), 16.

³⁰ Barbara JOHNSON, "The Critical Difference", *Diacritics* 8, No. 2. (Summer, 1978): 2–9, 3.

³¹ Ibid. 4.

³² DELEUZE – GUATTARI, "What is a Minor Literature?", 26.

³³ DELEUZE, "One Less Manifesto", 244.

with difference opens up the essential iterability of any text: its independence of intention and dependency of social rituals. Racist speech, like all performative act, "works through the invocation of convention".³⁴ It appears as if the speaker is the source of the speech act, though he only cites and maintains a social convention. Following Althusser's idea on interpellation and Derrida's conception of iterability, Butler takes the example of the judge to show how performativity precedes and creates the subject at the same time:

"it is through the citation of the law that the figure of the judge's 'will' is produced and that the 'priority' of a textual authority is established. Indeed, it is through the invocation of convention that the speech act of the judge derives its binding power; that binding power is to be found neither in the subject of the judge nor in his will, but in the citational legacy by which a contemporary 'act' emerges in the context of a chain of binding conventions."³⁵

Pointing at the gap between intention and effect, citing with difference reveals that "the force of the speech act is not a sovereign force"³⁶; the subject is not the source of hate speech. At this point hate speech turns against itself, going against its original purposes.

Though we can speak about a professional actress and articulated speech in the case of *Ice-Doctrines*, there are no centralized roles, lineal dramaturgy, or mimetic scenery in the play. Erdély is dressed like a weird clown in a tight black costume with a hood and a ruff collar; she is masked as a burlesque actor, a carnival figure. Taking on multiple roles during the performance, Er-

³⁴ BUTLER, *Excitable Speech*, 34.

³⁵ Judith BUTLER, "Critically Queer", *GLQ*, Vol. 1. (1993): 17–32, 17–18.

³⁶ BUTLER, *Excitable Speech*, 38.

dély – just like Carmelo Bene’s actor in Deleuze’s description – “make[s] [herself], or rather unmake[s] [herself], according to a line of continuous variation”.³⁷ “The play initially involves itself with the fabrication of the character, its preparation, its birth, its stammerings, its variations, its developments”.³⁸ The setting around her is more like a monochromatic diorama than a realistic environment, with life-size cardboard silhouettes and small two-dimensional figures: well dressed ladies from the golden times of peace of the early twentieth century, a melancholic cemetery angel, and the sleeping lion from Dürer’s painting of Saint Jerome. There is a sheer veil in the middle and a pulpit in the back which Erdély can bring into play during the show. The shifts between the roles are undisguised; no mimetic props are used to build realistic characters. Most of the time the actress’s gender does not fit to the role. Thus, no transparency is created, the fragments remain citations, and the happening unveils itself as a theatrical construction.

This does not mean that the play would turn into a parody, or the cited texts would be deactivated and neutralized. Erdély precisely works with the performative power of hate speech, which makes the performance extremely disturbing. As “there is no way to invoke examples of racist speech, for instance, in a classroom without invoking the sensibility of racism, the trauma and, for some, the excitement”³⁹, the theatrical stage – in spite of its critical aspiration – “becomes precisely the instrument of their perpetration.”⁴⁰ This already starts with the questionnaire, which shocks the respondent with its explicitness. The option to rate on a scale of 1 to 5 your approval of statements such as “Gypsies are inherently more prone to crime”, “Above all, Jews are the reasons for the existence of anti-Semitism”, or the Arendt-ian

idea of relentless conformity: “in an environment where participants equally share the same xenophobic view, we cannot talk about incitement, but rather about the agreement of the participants” makes us nervous. The audience gets a taste of how oppressive language is, even in this conditional form; always already being violence itself, not merely a representation of it. “[T]he threat begins the performance of that which it threatens to perform”.⁴¹ What follows next is more explicit: Erdély uses the power of physical performance to invoke the effect of hate speech. The “roles” she occupies for a minute are always very intense, she uses her whole body, her physical and psychic energy to shock the audience by switching between different tones of insulting, e.g.

“[t]he demand to ban infected people from giving birth to infected offspring is a requirement of common sense... are you seriously not gonna stop with this fucking whistling, you gay immigrant! Do you know what you are? You are blonde, you are gypsy and you are gay. [...] We need to create a new man so that our people are not destroyed by the typical degenerative phenomena of the new times.”

So even though the theatrical construction is unconcealed (by the undisguised role changing and the explicit intertextuality), the experience of verbal threat is real.⁴²

But it is also the body that invokes another important aspect of hate speech, which, contrary to its unavoidable efficiency, is related to the failure of the performative act.

⁴¹ Ibid. 9.

⁴² Here we have to mention that Andrea Erdély has participated in international workshops led by famous performance artists such as Min Tanaka and Richard Nieoczym several times. The intensive use of physical energy on the stage may come from these experiences.

³⁷ DELEUZE, „One Less Manifesto”, 240.

³⁸ Ibid. 239.

³⁹ BUTLER, *Excitable Speech*, 37.

⁴⁰ Ibid. 38.

Butler refers to Felman to remind us that “the speaking is itself a bodily act”⁴³, which means that language cannot be completely controlled. Since body and language are both unseparable and irreconcilable, “the act of a speaking body, is always to some extent unknowing about what it performs, that it always says something that it does not intend.”⁴⁴ This is precisely the condition of a critical response to hate speech: to call attention to the hands of the bully means to call attention to the bodily instrument, in other words to the vulnerability of the speech act. The violent behavior Erdély summons relies on the ideology of representation, transparency, hiding the medium (the body) behind the message. Hate speech is a ritual of subordinating others, constructing the subject “through a violating interpellation”.⁴⁵ To unveil this process as constructive (“not descriptive, but inaugurative”)⁴⁶ is to expose that “interpellation is an address that regularly misses its mark.”⁴⁷ So the intensive corporeality of Erdély’s performance not only invokes the effect of hate speech, but subverts it at the same time, since it reveals the performative basis of representation. This is how the inner tension of language is staged in the play, completed by other variations of incongruity. For example, as Erdély keeps shouting louder and louder, with applying all her physical and psychical energy: “Fulfil the commandment to annihilate others!”, tears begin to roll down her face, giving the impression that she is embodying the perpetrator and the suffering victim in one and the

same performance.⁴⁸ Or when one of the versions took place in the Old Synagoge of Szeged, the remains of the altar became part of the setting, which generated insoluble tension within the play, in connection with the anti-Semitic message.

We have to talk about the other characters of the stage, who at first glance seem more like figures of the earlier minor period, but later on it turns out that they are also variations of Erdély’s “major” character in a way. There is the patient’s and the nurse’s unified symbiosis in the front, and the silent drummer in the back, who is more like a machine with his smeared sad clown face and rigid appearance. The patient sits on the nurse’s lap covered by worn-out ruffles and ribbons (her costume is like an old woman’s nightgown, but also like a swaddle of an oversized baby). As the nurse holds the patient’s trembling elbows, we are confused whether the old arms are moving independently or are controlled by their supporter. These two characters seem to be inseparable, like a hybrid rag doll, a union of puppet, and the puppeteer. They are all pegged down in the same spot during the play, making minimal movements, slight unnatural gestures. While the drummer is like an automatic toy, an object from “Metanoia Lumber Room”, the patient-nurse hybrid is definitely a living, contagious creature. We learn from their lines that the patient is an old lady with far-right commitment, shouting incoherent sentences, mixtures of racist statements and obscene everyday swearing:

⁴³ BUTLER, *Excitable Speech*, 10. Butler’s reference: Shoshana FELMAN, *The Literary Speech Act: Don Juan with J. L. Austin, or Seduction in Two Languages*, trans. by Catherine PORTER (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983).

⁴⁴ BUTLER, *Excitable Speech*, 10.

⁴⁵ Ibid. 49.

⁴⁶ Ibid. 33.

⁴⁷ Ibid. 33.

⁴⁸ Mikola Gyöngyi put this scene in the center of her study on Ice-Doctrines: MIKOLA Gyöngyi, „A kegyetlenség evangéliuma, mint kulturális örökség”, *Tiszatáj* 2014. július 16. <https://tiszatajonline.hu/szinhaz/a-kegyetlenseg-evangeliuma-mint-kulturalis-orokseg/>. She also performed her paper in English at „THEATRE an Crises” conference in 2018, which can be watched here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lyhN5R77HXY>.

"Our official state cosmology is the Doctrine of the Eternal Ice .../ that little piece of shit.../ the doctrine of the re-birth of our people./ What is that little piece of shit barking about/ Monumental icebergs on the milking parlor,/ a huge mass of icy archipelagos hit the Sun.../ 'I can't hear you, come here, I can't hear you'/ As a consequence of the universe/ the dicks just stick out of her ass at oo4/ We come from the land of snow and ice./ Beautiful, glorious,/ hard and white/ strong and good.../ the icebergs, the icebergs/ ice is our origin ..."

Her head is trembling, her voice is squeaking as she wiggles restlessly on the nurse's lap, who is Hanna Arendt at the same time, according to the script. In this context the mechanical drummer can be seen as an allegory of the everyday man who got involved in the Nazi machinery as a faceless cog, like Eichmann, the icon of the banality of evil, the "guilty everyman", the "scary normal", who blindly follows all orders of the totalitarian system.⁴⁹

The crackling archive recordings, the whining of the patient-nurse hybrid, Erdély's shouting and the musical fragments (from classic compositions through Hungarian folk-songs to pop hits) assemble a weird opera. The restaging and resignification of Nazi rhetoric results in an avant-garde symphony, in which language falls apart, as we have already seen it in the case of the patient. But even Erdély's monologue on Numerus Clausus ends up in nonsense: "They are selling the ...! Who are selling it? ... strangers... To whom? To strangers... this and that... alo-pex, lopex, pex, pix, pax, puchs, fuchs..." The separation of intention and utterance, the exploitation of the vulnerability of hate speech makes "all totalization of the identity

⁴⁹ Hanna ARENDT, *Eichmann in Jerusalem. A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: The Viking Press, 1963).

of the self or the meaning of a text impossible".⁵⁰ Metanoia encounters *Lingua Tertii Imperii* (the language of the Third Reich) by opening up representation, unleashing inner difference, and finding the "lines of escape" in major discourse. It melts the ice of the Ice-Doctrines by pointing at the (warm) body, at the squeezing hand, so it manages to rescue the bird and keep language alive (considering that "language remains alive when it refuses to 'encapsulate' or 'capture' the events and lives it describes."⁵¹) *Ice-Doctrine* clearly shows the ethical stake of deconstruction; its effort

„not to remain enclosed in purely speculative, theoretical, academic discourses but rather [...] to aspire to something more consequential, to *change* things and to intervene in an efficient and responsible, though always, of course, very mediated way, not only in the profession but in what one calls the *cit *, the *polis* and more generally the world."⁵²

Bibliography

- ARENDR, Hanna. *Eichmann in Jerusalem. A Report on the Banality of Evil*. New York: The Viking Press, 1963.
- BARTHES, Roland. *S/Z*. Translated by Richard MILLER. New York: Hill and Wang, 1974.
- BUTLER, Judith. *Excitable Speech. A Politics of the Performative*. New York – London: Routledge, 1997.
- BUTLER, Judith. „Critically Queer”. *GLQ*, Vol. 1. (1993): 17–32.
- DELEUZE, Gilles. „One Less Manifesto”. Translated by Eliane dal MOLIN and Timothy MURRAY. In *Mimesis, Masochism, and Mime. The Politics of Theatricality in Contemporary French Thought*, ed. Timothy MURREY, 239–258. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1997.

⁵⁰ JOHNSON, „The Critical Difference”, 3.

⁵¹ BUTLER, *Excitable Speech*, 9.

⁵² DERRIDA, „Force of Law”, 8-9.

- DELEUZE, Gilles – GUATTARI, Félix. „What is a Minor Literature?” In Gilles DELEUZE – Félix GUATTARI. *Kafka. Toward a Minor Literature*. Translated by Dana POLAN, 16–27. Minneapolis – London: University of Minnesota Press, 1986.
- DEMCSÁK Katalin. „Világ-nyelv-töredék(ek). A Metanoia Különítmény korai előadásai”. In *Alternatív színháztörténetek. Alternatívok és alternatívák*. Szerkesztette IMRE Zoltán, 508–527. Budapest: Balassi Kiadó, 2008.
- DERRIDA, Jacques. „The Theatre of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation”. In DERRIDA, Jacques. *Writing and Difference*. Translated by Alan BASS, 232–250. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978.
- DERRIDA, Jacques. „Force of Law: The »Mystical Foundation of Authority«”. In *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*. Edited by Drucilla CORNELL – Michel ROSENFELD – David Gray CARLSON, 3–67. New York – London: Routledge, 1992.
- ERDÉLY Miklós. „Marly tézisek”. <https://artpool.hu/kontextus/mono/nullpont6b2.html>
- JOHNSON, Barbara. „The Critical Difference”. *Diacritics* 8, No. 2. (Summer, 1978): 2–9.
- KELEMEN Zoltán, ARTNER Szilvia, PEROVICS Zoltán, JÁSZAY Tamás, „Hasonló a hasonlóknak – Metanoia Artopédia”, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5s_z8wFkeLI
- MIKOLA Gyöngyi. „A kegyetlenség evangéliuma, mint kulturális örökség”. *Tiszatáj*, 2014. július 16. <https://tiszatajonline.hu/szinhaz/a-kegyetlenseg-evangeliuma-mint-kulturalis-orokseg/>
- METANOIA Artopédia Homepage, <http://www.metanoiaartopedia.hu/>
- MORRISON, Toni. „Nobel Lecture”. NobelPrize.org. Nobel Prize Outreach AB 2022. Thu. 9 Jun 2022. <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1993/morrison/lecture/>
- PARKER, Andrew – SEDGWICK, Eve Kosofsky. „Introduction. Performativity and Performance”. In *Performativity and Performance*. Edited by Andrew PARKER – Eve Kosofsky SEDGWICK, 1–18. New York – London: Routledge, 1995.
- SIRBIK Attila. „A gonosz banalitása. Interjú Perovics Zoltán rendezővel”. *Tiszatáj*, 2018. december 1. <https://tiszatajonline.hu/szinhaz/a-gonosz-banalitasa/>