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Thinking/Tragedy/Thinking Tragedy: Remarks on the Fate of Theory on Stage

<https://doi.org/10.1515/ang-2018-0009>

Abstract: The article thematizes the uniquely complex relation between theory and theatre by focusing on the specific case of theory presented on stage. Part One exposes an aporia of classical aesthetics: the aesthetic object is conceived as different from thought but at the same time it is demanded that its nucleus is thought. Commenting on a particularly telling example of theory on stage: *Karl Marx: Das Kapital, Erster Band* von Rimini Protokoll (2006), it is argued that the power of the performance is able to uncover under the surface of a seemingly well-known and well-ordered theory a mostly overlooked element of madness. Part Two deals with the Aristotelian gesture of thinking tragedy as a para-logical reality. The ‘logification’ of the aesthetic overlooks (or ‘forgets’) that all theoretical positing loses necessarily its earnest when appearing on stage. The paper concludes with a reflection on the enduring ‘unconscious’ Aristotelianism of the discourse on theatre and tragedy. Drawing on the research of Ulf Schmidt, the irreconcilable contradictoriness of the concepts of *nous* and *fantasia* is exposed which leads time and again to the hatred for the unruly playfulness of theatre in the classic tradition. The nobilitation of tragedy by Aristotle as more ‘philosophical’ than historiography must be unmasked as a ‘Trojan horse’ which serves the subordination of the tragic play to the jurisdiction of the philosophical discourse. Resisting theory’s attempt to transform the theatrical play into a mere double of a conceptual contradiction, theatre must insist on its moment of opaqueness, sheer materiality, defiant unreasonability.

The often heard truism that theatre provides food for thought is just as popular as the inverse polemic against ‘theoretical’ theatre that thinks too much. “Selten so gelacht!”¹ was critic Benjamin Henrich’s title for his critique of a truly or supposedly overly intellectual evening at the theatre. How close the relationship

1 A pun on the proverbial sarcastic “selten so gelacht”, “I’ve rarely laughed so hard”.

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between theatre and theory, performance and thought really is, however, is seldom considered in the collective consciousness. The liaison between theatre and theory is complicated; a close, although hardly ever unstrained correlation always existed between art and concepts, study and aesthetic experience. A simple formula does not exist to explain the exact nature of this relationship. The etymological kinship between *theoria* and *theatron* is a popular point of reference; both derive from a word in ancient Greek for 'viewing' (*OED* s.v. *theoria* n.¹; *OED* s.v. *theatre* n.). Yet, few inquire into the deeper foundations, gulfs and abysses of this complicated and confusing relationship. In order to question it more thoroughly, I have chosen as my starting point a surprising and significant phenomenon: the appearance of theory on the contemporary postdramatic stage.

For some time now – at least since the decline of 'drama' as the normative value of theatre – attempts have been granted an asylum status, to present texts on stage which are not primarily dialogically structured speech of fictional characters; but are rather of lyrical, narrative, or documentary nature. And, coming as a surprise given the general attitude I just referred to, even *theoria* pure and simple, theoretical discourse. Theatre has allowance now to realize theoretical discourse scenically on the stage, to quote, to read, to shout or to sing theoretical statements and reflections. This phenomenon is new insofar as the presentation of theory is un-mediated. That philosophy, theory, thought, are *indirectly* an element, even an important, an essential element of what is articulated in serious theatre, this fact was always so clearly evident that entire libraries are dedicated to the thoughts and the way of thinking set down in the dramas of, say, Sophocles, Shakespeare, Kleist, Büchner, or Ibsen. But presenting Marx or Nietzsche directly is different from, say, Brecht writing *Saint Joan of the Stockyards* or Ibsen writing *An Enemy of the People*. The theories of Marx and Nietzsche play an important role in these texts, Marx's analysis of the capitalist crisis and Nietzsche's philosophy of the right of the exceptional individual are more or less directly quoted – but the discourse of philosophy is scrupulously integrated in the epic respectively dramatic dramaturgy. But now, we observe the direct presence of theoretical discourse of, to name only a few examples, Foucault, Baudrillard, Fanon or Artaud. Surprisingly enough, the adaptation of theory for the stage is not as rare as it may have seemed beforehand. 'Thinking' theatre since Brecht, a broad range of documentary theatre brought theory and theatre closer together. At the beginning of the twentieth century, one of the founding figures of the historical theatre avant-garde, Edward Gordon Craig, pursued in all earnest the plan (ultimately not realized) to present Plato's dialogues as open-air performances. A few years ago, Christof Nel created a project on Sigmund Freud's book *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*; in a 1992 performance in the Theater am Turm, John Berger appeared onstage with his own critical texts. General

theatrical theory can be found as theatre: Peter Brook staged an entire evening in the Bouffes du Nord, *Qui est là?* (Who's There?), in which the performers presented texts of acting theory. Brecht's *Messingkauf* (Buying Brass) is theatre theory adapted for the stage. In a variety of ways, postdramatic contemporary theatre has given rise to verbal forms in which theoretical discourse paradoxically appears in alienated form as the speech of characters. The texts of René Pollesch largely function in this way: sociological theory is transformed into seemingly subjective statements. In this way, the theory loses its discursive character, and theatre – which “theatricalizes” everything, as Brecht said (Brecht 1989–2000: XXIV, 58) – drags the concepts, recognizably distanced and interrupted, into the unsecured play of voices and speech of the ‘collective subjects’ that populate the stage of Pollesch. One could also point to a string of further examples, in which scholarship and scholars find themselves adapted for the stage in one way or another: Jean-François Peyret and Darwin, Christoph Marthaler's “The Fruit Fly”, or Jean Jourdheuil's projects about the death of natural scientists. The German theatergoer will probably remember first of all the last impressive appearance of Einar Schleef: he recited, shouted, whispered, literally conjured up texts from Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo* – a philosophical text in spite of all its highly idiosyncratic passion and subjectivity. One could feel reminded of Foucault's intuition that philosophy existed as a novel (Hegel, Sartre); as meditation (Descartes, Heidegger); and that after *Zarathustra* philosophy returned as theatre. Not as reflection upon theatre or as theatre filled with meaning. But “as a philosophy, which turned into a stage with persons and signs: staging of a singular unrepeatable event” (Foucault 1977: 8, my translation). These and many other examples pose the question what the relationship between theatre and theory really is.

However, before I pursue the subject all the way back to the early meeting point between theatre and philosophy in Antiquity (a meeting that has profoundly shaped the Western understanding of theatre, of aesthetics in general, and particularly of tragedy), I want to focus on one particularly instructive example: the 2006 production *Karl Marx: Das Kapital, Erster Band* (*Karl Marx: Capital, Volume One*) by Helgard Haug and Daniel Wetzlar of Rimini Protokoll.

Rimini's principle is famously theatre with real “specialists of everyday life” (see Dreyse and Malzacher 2007) as opposed to specialists at playing a role. Laypeople constitute the driving force, the principle means, and the attraction in the work of Rimini Protokoll. For a number of years, the group has realized alternatives to play acting and its burden of drama, and the term ‘postdramatic’ appears frequently on its homepage. Now, a book is the titular character! Granted, what a book. More than almost any other, it has generated everyday realities and shaped, even created world realities. Now it is a plaything on a relatively colorful stage, with a wall of shelves, red and blue light, and a slot machine. For *Das*

Kapital, they once again found peculiar, quirky people – people for whose lives Marx’s work has had a special significance. Onstage, they recount episodes from their lives. There is, for example, the electronics engineer Ralph Warnholz who for years was addicted to gambling; or Ulf Mailänder, co-author of the autobiography of a famous credit fraudster; Jochen Noth, who used to be a Maoist activist;² Sascha Wernecke, an idealistic young man from Düsseldorf who protests in front of McDonald’s against the exploitation of child labor; and Thomas Kuczynski, the son of Jürgen Kuczynski, author of a bulky volume of economic history which most of my generation fellows who were politically interested had studied. One of the strongest moments of the evening came from the Latvian Talivaldis Margevics who related how his mother, in the post-war chaos, in the most extreme despair and misery, amidst the fray of people in a Polish train station wavered for a moment, whether she should indeed accept the offer of a woman to trade him in for food, with the possibility that he would have a better chance of surviving. Should she hand over her son to another woman in exchange for material assistance? “So, once in my life I was a commodity” (Lehmann 2007: n. pag., my translation). Mounted parallel to this story, passages from the analysis of the ‘value-form’ in *Das Kapital* were referenced onstage.

At one point during the evening, while the academic comments on editorial problems in *Das Kapital* with a torturous philological meticulousness, everyone in the audience is given a copy in their hand; distributed by assistants, hundreds of copies of the famous blue Volume 23 of the *Marx/Engels Collected Works* are suddenly in the auditorium. We all have *Das Kapital* in our laps; we read along with the sentences (marked red) within. But as in real life – we note it not without some disappointment – the books have only been lent. In the end, we must turn them in. Nothing is gifted away. We live in the commodity society, which *Das Kapital* describes.

In this staging, the act of exchange and its absurdity is contemplated theatrically, not primarily according to economic theory. Instead, the theatrical images and scenes delve into the bottomless depths of exchange. At one point, the sighted Kuczynski and Christian Spremberg, who was born blind, each hold a copy of *Das Kapital* in their hands; the sighted man has one in Braille/embossed printing while the blind man has an edition (Moscow 1932) in a normal typeface. For the latter, the economist explains, the copy has no ‘use value’ which is the same for Kuczynski himself with regard to the book in Braille/embossed printing.

² In fact on the occasion of a long conversation about Marx’s theory of exchange value the author was asked by Daniel Wetzel and Helgard Haug to become a protagonist in the performance. With deep regret he had to decline the offer.

And therefore – they exchange books. This is, however, *not* an exchange of goods that is regulated by value; it is immediate social, human conduct, in which the books (products of labor) are not treated as goods by both. The human actors interact with each other by mediating their common dimension of need. During this act of exchange, text from *Das Kapital*'s analysis of 'value-form' is cited as commentary.

What Marx is giving us is the analysis of bourgeois economy as the anatomy of the 'madness' of a society that transforms everything into an object for exchange, even human 'life-activity', even the human body, and even its mind. The evening moves in this sense along a fascinating dramaturgical line, from a beginning, which is still more or less within the logical sphere, over into the increasingly strange and grotesque everyday madness of moneyed society. Thus, behind the logic of the world of money emerges ever more drastically, the madness of gambling and of chance, a madness of fraud where entire empires and immense fortunes can be founded upon deceit and illusion. This theatrical 'deep structure' of an evening of entertainment, which leaves behind a strong impression, is theoretically quite convincing, even though such an underlying 'logic' may not have been intended. Marxist teaching reveals on this stage its essential truth, which is often passed over in its reception as purely theoretical analysis of capital. Marx is not driven by the intention to render a better description of capitalism and its laws. Instead, his theory cuts through a certain mania, a real madness of our everyday behavior: it is madness that human sociality (*Gesellschaftlichkeit*) absurdly can only be realized and become real and visible for the other in the moment when the products of the individual labor and even the human activity itself are exchanged as commodities, when labor power is bought and sold as a commodity among others. According to Marx, within the "system of exchange" we appear as social beings to ourselves and to others only *ex post*. We are not "directly social" in our actions (Marx 1953: 912, my translation). This structure of the entire commonplace world in which we work and live is quite literally 'insane'. Under capitalist conditions, it is systematically 'forgotten' that all work has always been, from the very beginning and in advance, socially mediated. It would be impossible, even inconceivable without the preceding as well as the concurrent work of others. Instead, each subject appears on the market, in the mask of a merely "self-reflective individual interest" (Marx 1953: 912, my translation), occupied with 'private work', producing goods which can prove themselves as existing socially, as being useful for society, only belatedly: through the exchange, when they are really sold. Marx's intent entails depicting the enormity, the absurdity, the literal 'insanity' of this form of human exchange. It is precisely this genuine theoretical-philosophical impulse of *Das Kapital* – which almost completely floundered in the broad current of positivist,

economistic, and authoritarian interpretations of the book – that finds its way, if not in theoretical articulation but as sensory experience, onto the stage of Rimini Protokoll.

It is exactly here that the specific quality of theory on stage appears. The seriousness of theory is revealed as insufficient to explain the deeper grotesqueness in the structure of human conduct under capitalist conditions. This impulse corresponds to the evening's quirky humor, endowed with a sense of the absurd. Thus, it is completely logical, that during the course of the evening the performances increasingly hit upon the utter madness of financial fraud in which games of chance, jokes, deceit, naïveté, and criminality can hardly be separated.

To begin with, the principle of gambling inherent within 'exchange society' appears here in the extreme. A former gambling addict tells about his life, gambling, debt, ruin, and his work in a support group for those addicted to gambling. The rule of monetary value, which Marxist theory describes, is reflected in gambling, as Walter Benjamin already pointed out in his analysis of the nineteenth century (see Benjamin 2013: 129–133). And at the end the impression of the long account by the famed credit fraudster from Hamburg, Jürgen Harsen, remains. Not having learned anything, Harsen began work as an investment consultant and, having a knack for gaining the trust of others, swindled millions, operated using illicit earnings, paid off credit with credit, until he was finally caught and sentenced to six years and nine months in prison – the same amount of time as Jürgen Schneider from Frankfurt. However, they are not considered typical representatives of capital; rather, they are set apart as 'dissidents'. Anywhere that exchange becomes radical, it transforms into something other than rational calculation.

In this manner, the evening is more reminiscent, in some places, of the totally irrational and simultaneously regulated razzle-dazzle world of Brecht's *Mahagonny*, of which one is directly reminded by the sandwich boards inscribed with slogans carried about by the performers towards the end. It is a world and a representation in which every simple, moral observation finds itself convicted for its inadequacies. And thus, one has come full circle, inasmuch as it was Brecht who went particularly far in an attempt to bring the spheres of theatre and theory closer together, and one can see Rimini Protokoll as progressing in his wake.

II

During the modern era, the great philosophical reflections on serious theatre, namely tragedy, have always emphasized the deep connection between tragedy and thought. However, this occurred in such a way that beauty was conceived of

as the “sensual appearance of the *idea*” (Hegel 1965: I, 117, my translation). The formula is, you know it, Hegel’s, but it holds true for the bulk of theory in Europe. The ‘idea’ is for Hegel ‘reality’ as it has been penetrated conceptually, thus idea = reality, its concept and the unity of both. As long as it is not an ideal, in art, it is not allowed to appear but as sensualized, not in the milieu of conceptual thought. This really is a double-bind: First position: The ideal of beauty requires something theoretical as the core of beauty. (For Kant, beauty is the symbol of morality, “Symbol des Sittlichen” [Kant 2006: 253]). Second position, equally demanding: beauty must always *avoid* the appearance of thought, even – more broadly formulated – all conscious thought and intentionality, of the mechanisms which make up beauty. Beauty presents itself to the gaze, according to Schiller, “schlank und leicht, wie aus dem Nichts gesprungen” (Schiller 1943–2006: II, 114; “slender and weightless, as if sprung from nothing”).

According to this classical thought, theatre at its core is philosophy, and precisely for this reason must always be re-translatable back into the concept which it illustrates. It is exactly here, that we can pin down the fundamental, we may say, the founding inconsequence of classical aesthetics. It suppresses what it knows, namely that thought radically alters its character, its discursive status, and its consistence within the reality of the stage, as, indeed, within the frame of any aesthetic context. Stating whatsoever on the stage is always radically different from just posing facts. As a rule, onstage it appears as an intended effect, as, say, a justification, a dubious construction based on what the other does not know, an attempt to win over, to seduce etc. This aspect, rather than any attempt at presenting a truth, is dominant. If all language is at the same time expression of the speaking subject and posing of facts, then the rule of theatre says: on stage the dimension of expression systematically supersedes the dimension of posing.

What happens to thought is the same fading that befalls every serious element upon the stage. From the start, thought is undermined here; each inherent value crumbles or falters. Thought is enveloped by the stage and the statement holds: “Die Sinnlichkeit der Bühne ist von Hause aus dem Sinn nicht wohlbesonnen” (Lehmann 1999/2001: 366). Let me remark here that it is not necessary to be familiar with philosophical deconstruction in order to gain this insight. Stephen Greenblatt demonstrated in his *Shakespearean Negotiations* how all those social energies to which theatre refers (coronations, church rites, formal acts of reconciliation, etc.) are already hollowed out, chiseled out of their seriousness and truth, opened for critique by the simple fact of becoming part of the playful presentation on stage.

A further aspect of the fate of thinking on the stage of theatre should be emphasized, because it is easily underrated due to the fixation upon text, even when the consideration focuses on the way of viewing the theatrical situation. It

is the specific temporality of the theatre as such which decisively modulates everything that is said. The time of a dramatic event metamorphoses all determined, fixed statements into a momentary event. But what comes to light clearly in the agonal, dramaturgical displacement that the statement experiences in the fascination we must understand as already given in the structural eventfulness of theatre as such which has as consequence the theatrical removal of seriousness from every truth. We noted before that each statement expressed on the stage, even if it is accepted as the most profound truth, is at the same time always laden with the possibility of being repudiated in the next instant. This questionable status of the statement is directly connected to the condition of theatre or performance being a 'live art', inasmuch as the temporality of the theatre unifies the time of the spectators with the time of the work (the performance) as a whole. Each utterance, and therefore each thought reveals itself as 'speech-act', but a speech-act whose context – and therefore whose meaning – is not, and cannot be, completed. It is radically dependent on the reality of the theatre situation: this incompleteness of context = meaning need not be imputed as a theoretical truth. It is already inscribed in the aesthetic condition of theatre as simultaneously being an aesthetic and a real process. This condition which is unique to theatre is responsible for the curious fact that, the acts on stage, including the speech-acts, are witnessed as being open to the future as real acts, as they are going on in the real life of spectators.

Let us pause here and assure ourselves of the double result of our inquiry: in all thinking about theatre – and all this applies *a fortiori* to thinking about tragedy – a peculiar ambivalence is visible. For one – and this is a legacy from Antiquity – it is claimed that as the basis of theatre, its core must contain, illustrate, and manifest a thought. At the same time, however, thought is also viewed as an area of taboo, as a 'red light district', a forbidden land upon which theatre may not set foot without losing its purity as art. (It is this problem which created famously for Kant the utmost difficulty to define beauty in such a way that he had not to exclude practically all the great works from it because of their after all unmistakable relation to concept and understanding.)

We should remember at this point for a moment the interesting circumstance that philosophy and theory themselves always found their undertaking beset by a dimension of rhetoric, mise-en-scène, and theatricality which they could never shake off. What is drastically manifest in the dialogic character of many philosophical texts from Plato to the Renaissance, to Diderot and onwards, only helps to reveal a much further reaching problem with theoretical discourse: its fundamental, innate theatricality – essentially, the constant scenic presentation of thinking – which Foucault may have had in mind in his remark about philosophy as theatre.

For Aristotle, who had a profound effect upon European discourse on art, tragedy is essentially a *para-logical* reality. Admittedly, it cannot be pure *logos*, but its value arises from its proximity to *logos*. All the categories belonging to the structure of tragedy – *peripeteia*, *metabole*, *anagnorisis*, proper magnitude, etc. – can be read as being parasitic upon concepts of logic. The theory of dramatic progression, as it is found in the *Poetics*, is in the service of the logical. The narration of tragedy stands under the law of the law: the law of revealing a logical structure. Following Aristotle, one can say, tragedy reveals a hidden order of things, a *logos* of necessity or probability, which would not appear in a simple account, in information given, in the tale, in the mythical ‘story telling’, despite the latter’s not at all *a-logical* nature. Rather, this *logos* of necessity or probability can only appear in the *mythos* – as Aristotle baptizes the plot – of tragedy. It articulates an order of thinking and is, in this way, the cause and already the formation of *mathesis*, of learning. It does, by the way, not only guide the spectator to such *mathesis*. With the term ‘recognition’ (*anagnorisis*), Aristotle also constitutes the subject of tragedy, the *heros* himself, his fate, essentially as a moment of insight. Tragedy, again, is – at its core – theory, shaped on the model of theory.

It is easy to discern today from the modern and postmodern perspective that the Aristotelian laudatory gesture extended towards art, and particularly towards tragedy, amounts in many ways to a ‘Trojan horse’. One knows the famed assertion of the *Poetics* that tragedy is “more philosophical” (Aristotle 1987: 41) than historiography. According to Aristotle, this is so because history only retains what really happened; while tragedy retains what always happens – or what happens as a rule – according to necessity or probability (Aristotle 1987: 41). That is to say, tragedy does not retain the merely empirical; it retains a logical order. “Thank you, philosopher!”, we might expect tragedy to call out full of joy. However, this gesture subordinates tragedy all the more irresistibly to the jurisdiction of the abstract general concept by seemingly elevating it. Ultimately, the worth of tragedy can only be appreciated by the primary and superior discourse of philosophy. Dramaturgy, the ordering, arrangement, construction of events (*systasis pragmaton*), *mythos* (as Aristotle understands the term in his *Poetics*), has the function to render visible the law and the logic of the events and to offer them for contemplation. It is a matter of the ‘logification’ of aesthetics, which for art as a *para-phenomenon* of *logos*. Secondly, this praise works as an obligation for tragedy to live up to its more philosophical nature. Thirdly, the paradoxical consequence – which is only paradoxical at first glance – that in the *Poetics* the theatre, which represents tragedy, is literally purged from the notion of tragic art. The famed catharsis occurs, as Aristotle expressly noted, completely without performance, reading a tragedy is enough (Aristotle 1987: 38–39). The perfor-

mance itself (*opsis*) – that is to say, that which is theatrical about theatre, that which is not textual in it – pertains, in fact, for the author of the *Poetics* to the artless and worthless aspects of tragedy. Theatre is nice, many of us still today believe, but there is something disturbing about it: the theatre. Theatre is superfluous, and Aristotle is quite straightforward in saying (1987: 34–36) that one only actually needs theatre for the less smart citizens. They will be seduced into thinking, as it were, by the childish fun in recognition, while a philosopher is in no need of such stimuli and will think on his own.

III

I hope I have made clear that we have not undertaken an idle stroll through the garden of knowledge in the history of aesthetics. Rather, I tried to draw to our attention the notion that although recent history may be read as a chain of revolts and shifts that reinterpret these thoughts on tragedy common knowledge about art is nevertheless still acutely bound to this Aristotelian logic. The force of this way of reasoning may be measured in the difficulties every attempt at performance – even today – must fight against to dismantle the precedence of logical order as the paradigm for aesthetic form. These attempts must fight to secure the right to exist of play, chance, the sheer materiality, that which in all thinking remains un-thought. In other words, one could say that it is still an unfinished task to concede a theatrical playing space to another way of thinking, to the thinking of the other, of the other of thinking in thinking itself. But if we do not allow ourselves to be led astray by the polemics, which demand assiduously from theatre the beautiful costuming of what is actually only the duplication of everyday thought, then we find that in the light of postmodernism it is more often the reverse: that the function of art is rather to disorient seemingly ordered thinking, to disturb abstract categories, regulations, and classifications. In *Minima Moralia*, Adorno writes that it is the function of art to introduce chaos into order (2001: 428). This naturally does not mean advocating a non-thinking theatre but rather a theatre that traces the dialectical adventures and the aberrations of ‘logification’. Adorno has in mind a kind of thinking which consists essentially in depotentializing the concept, not in its negation.

For Aristotle, theatre is not only superfluous, it is also harmful. Although this is not as clear in Aristotle as it had previously been in Plato, this second gesture (alongside the *para-logical* figure of beauty) is also of the utmost importance for the contradictory relationship and conflict between theory and theatre. Once again, I will take a step back, this time to Plato, and in doing so I make reference to Ulf Schmidt’s research (Schmidt 2006). Interestingly, Plato already speaks of an old

quarrel, *palaia diaphora*, between philosophy and tragedy. Tragedy must be barred from the truly righteous city, that is to say a city guided by *logos*. With beautiful candor, Plato explains – not in the *Republic* but in *Book VII* of the *Laws* (1926: 817ff.) – that the righteous and good political constitution must itself be the “most truthful tragedy”, that the citizens, by shaping the life of the *polis*, are themselves poets and must look upon the tragedians as rivals and antagonists, as competitors for the prize for the most beautiful drama. This peculiar rivalry between politics and theatre is no mere punch line or metaphor. Much more, it reflects a basic problem of Platonic philosophy and, subsequently, the European theoretical tradition. Already in Plato, in the work where one attempted to think about the cognitive process itself, theory becomes entangled in a perhaps insurmountable problem. Plato categorically separated *opsis* (viewing) from *nous* (cognitive understanding); this is in contrast to the belief during the Homeric Age, when seeing and thinking were treated more as two parts of a continuum. Whereas *opsis* is fundamentally subject to errors, *nous* – with its inner logic – is the site of possible truth. It is with this, however, that the problem arises that a certain amount of activity of and capability for envisioning, contemplating something in one’s mind, *phantasia*, imagination, is nevertheless indispensable for knowing something. How can the relation between the two still come ‘into view’? For its part, theatre is, of course, an ‘arrangement for viewing’, a ‘Schauanordnung’ to quote Ulrike Haß (2005). But inasmuch as theory and cognition have essentially been thought of since Plato, as lying beyond the act of viewing, beyond the image, as noematic, as purely logical, etc., the history of the tense rivalry, parallel nature, and reciprocal denunciation between theory and theatre may indeed find its origins in the unresolved question of how one should actually ‘see’ in theory the act of seeing.

Ancient Greeks possessed a wide array of words, denoting the act of seeing under varying aspects (amongst them *blepein*, *horan*, and *skeptomai*) and included the verb *theorein*, *theasthai*. Paradoxically, this is the act of seeing most distant from philosophy, although it gave its name to ‘theory’. Schmidt cites Bruno Snell: “*Theasthai* is, as it were, looking with one’s mouth wide open, such as ‘gawking’” (qtd. in 2006: 176, my translation). One is quasi ‘all eyes’, raptly gazing rather than clearly distinguishing (which is, for example, denoted by *skeptomai*, from which ‘skepticism’ derives). Thus, the mode of ‘seeing’, which is found in the word ‘*theoria*’ as well as in ‘theatre’, is in effect, on one level, marveling entirely removed from making sense; it is ecstatic viewing, staring without understanding.³ How-

3 As with many terms in Greek philosophy, the word *theoria* not only denotes its subjective side, as it were, the intellectual construct, but also its object. *Theoria* also means a viewing framework and even a festival procession.

ever, with Plato, the word recurs quasi at the other end of the spectrum; and there, *theoria* denotes the highest point in thought, the divine contemplation of truth. In order to spare ourselves what would be a necessary comprehensive reading on the issue, I confine myself to just putting forth the assertion that philosophy is necessarily imprinted with some kind of *opsis*, a necessary moment of marveling before a performance, a 'spectacle'. This 'theatre' already makes ambiguity insurmountable within the process of understanding itself. The moment of fantasy, sensory contemplation, the imagined concept of that which is absent is in principle doomed to err. And at the same time, it is absolutely necessary to enable the perceiving of truth. This has the consequence that the perception of truth can never wholly detach itself from the deceptive appearance of theatre. *Theoria* can never be separated from *theatron*. The performative character of thinking translates into the dramaturgy of philosophical discourses and also – consistently since Plato – in an explicitly scenic and dialogic depiction of philosophy, ultimately in the rhetorical nature of the language itself that can never be shaken off. Theory remains, in its attempts to stage an *a-sensual* theatre of the mind, always bound to a certain theatricality of contemplation. And this being the case, the thesis may be justified that it is precisely the intrinsic theatricality of thought itself – or more precisely, thought's attempt to shake off this theatricality – which in European theatre discourse only admits the sensory as the double of *logos*: and usually a deficient double, at that. The theatre is the scapegoat of theory. The old and new quarrel between theory and theatre thus also gives the basis for the grand history described by Jonas Barish as the 'antitheatrical prejudice' (cf. Barish 1985). Hatred of the theatre is woven in as a common thread throughout European theatre theory from the philosophers of antiquity's and Plato's fury against the *theatrokratia*, from the Church Fathers up to Rousseau and into the present day. Philosophy (or theology) recognize their own distorted image in theatre, which they must chase out of the *polis* of *logos* (or out of the Church) in order to save thought, order, morality, propriety, or faith.

On the other side the proximity of theatre to philosophy is likewise a difficult problem. Indeed, tragedy in Antiquity – and the majority of the leading theatre afterwards – has always been concerned with essential questions of the *polis* (often in the medium of mythological tradition); with fundamental questions of society, of politics (from which philosophy cannot really be separated). From its very beginning, theatre is a kind of thinking on the stage. However, if tragedy were to take the Aristotelian praise too much to heart, that it is so very philosophical, it would tragically disappear as theatre. What would tragedy be, would it be nothing more than an illustrated theoretical paradox? If it posed as a mere double? With good reasons, much theory of tragedy has taken pride in finding pointed dialectical and other contradictions in tragedies, contradictions

pushed to the limit of paradox. But would it not be completely redundant just to heave an intellectual problem up to the stage? With that said, is it not rather a certain ‘stupid’ materiality, as it were – an element of circus and gawking, of aimless curiosity and sensation – which protects tragedy from being a mere poor relative of philosophical discourse, which theory has long wanted to make theatre into? Theatre feeds on the element of purposeless and poorly controlled affects, on the dull material that thought will not ‘*aufheben*’. This theatrical reality or ‘theatReality’ (to which I refer in *Postdramatisches Theater*; cf. Lehmann 1999/2001: 370) proves itself as precisely that dimension which prevents – or which may potentially prevent – that thought reduces tragedy to being an insignificant, theoretical ‘glass bead game’. The social, political dimension is tied to this moment of *a-significant* materiality. In the Renaissance, when the subject discovered itself as the potential creator of his/her own history and in the same moment as history’s powerless victim, and when the connection between tragedy and theatre was again re-constructed, tragedy was regarded with good reason as a kind of historiography. Thus, Shakespeare’s plays are not at all called by the names by which they are commonly known – *Hamlet* and *King Lear*. They are rather, *The Tragical History of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*. In our age, Heiner Müller stated that tragedy only exists upon the basis of historical material which must also be present in the consciousness of the spectator or reader. The ‘opaqueness’ of this material is actually the site upon which tragedy takes place. That is to say, it takes place precisely in a suspension of thought, in its dimming, not in recognition, only in a *moment* of insight but in – as it were – an unreasonable truculence.

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