

NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

DRAMATURGIES OF EXCESS AND HETEROLOGICAL THEATRES: THE PHYSICAL AND PERFORMATIVE SPACE OF REPRESENTATION*

289

Anxo Abuín González

Universidade de Santiago de Compostela

The body moves spasmodically, contracts and relaxes, folds and twists, jumps as though shocked, shakes, shudders, trembles; experiences erections, nausea, convulsions. The body rises, opens, chaps, is pierced, comes apart, decays, spatters and bleeds; wets or oozes, grunts, moans, sighs, agonizes.... There are no neutral or original bodies, only bodies transformed, marked, technologized, and subordinated by the biopoliticization of illness, punishment or pain. There are only ritualized and sacrificed bodies, containers of stories in which we can glimpse the unavoidable remains of violence and routine. There is no neutral or natural body, only bodies-for-death (accidents, catastrophes, war, AIDS...). The individual moves disorientedly between abject, deformed, fragmented, mutilated, grotesque figures without understanding the logic of this representation. Bodies reduced to their organs, substances, fluids (feces, semen, saliva, blood, milk...), excessive and abysmal bodies. The body is objectified, animalized, and finally covered in marks and wounds.

The body is above all a sign of its times. As indicated by Michel Foucault:

historians have long been interested in writing the history of the body, not only from

a demographic or pathological perspective but as part of historical and biopolitical processes: The body is also directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs. This political investment of the body is bound up, in accordance with complex reciprocal relations, with its economic use; it is largely as a force of production that the body is invested with relations of power and domination.... That is to say, there may be a 'knowledge' of the body that is not exactly the science of its functioning, and a mastery of its forces that is more than the ability to conquer them: this knowledge and this mastery constitute what might be called the political technology of the body. (25-26; see Nancy § 52 and Bleeke 1-10)

290 The performative is an ideal field for uncovering these relations of power and domination that are established between the subject and the Other, between the individual and society, between the player and the audience. This occurs when, in *Rythm 0* (Galleria Studio Morra, Naples, 1974), Marina Abramovic stands before the audience for six hours, transformed into just one more of the seventy-three objects that the audience is to use; time passes and the spectators become more daring: they tear her clothing, touch her private parts, become violent and sadistic to the point of brandishing a pistol... In the performance *The Lips of Thomas* (1975, revived in 2005), Abramovic insists on the transgression of bodily boundaries. After consuming a kilo of honey and a litre of red wine, she mutilates herself, drawing a five-pointed star on her stomach with a razor blade. Later, she lies on a cross of ice, bleeding, until the audience decides to remove her from the room. The idea, here as in many more of Abramovic's performances, is to question the gaze of the subject and its ethical relationship with physical pain, to create a space of non-knowledge where nothing can be explained rationally, down to the very title, which defies the spectator's understanding. In all the cited examples, we as spectators (audience or visitors) experience the disconcerting feeling of not knowing what to do. Should we go or stay, respond or remain silent, intervene or hide and allow events to occur, though the outcome might be unbearable or irresponsible; if we intervene, does that ruin the experiment or make it work better? We do not understand what is happening, and we just accept it. We get no story, no narration or representation, there is no connection between the actions, they are hiding something from us and we know it, there is a special feeling of worry and uncertainty among the companions, who will not soon forget what has happened in that room, that exercise of violence and aggression (see Graver 62-63).

But what is it that we have seen? It is hard to give it a name. It is clear that we find ourselves in front of a "threshold experience", an experience on the border, a destabilizing, liminal, dehierarchizing experience, an experience against any authority or centre, that questions life as the object of study, that can be managed by power structures, and that, as Foucault might say, tries to reflect on the "anatomization" of the bodies, that is, the wish to produce docile and fragmented bodies.

And I certainly recall *Body Art* and its emphasis on the materiality of the body (physicality, vitality, sensuality), on the use of the body not as a medium to represent stories or people, but rather to reveal the first person of the artist as a physical and

mental human being, on the attention to the visceral experiences that connect to the audience, more accomplices than detached observers; on the conception of the body as a receptacle of authenticity, truth, identity and self-knowledge; on the vision of the body as a social and sexual place (the body as gender); on the (re)presentation of transformative experiences of great emotional intensity; on looking towards autobiography, the private, the intimate, the secret; on art as a revelation of the “I” (*mise en je*), of its hidden desires, its memory (pleasure and pain). It is in this way that Günther Berghaus describes the work of other artists such as Carole Schneemann, Vito Acconci or the members of Viennese actionism, who managed to figure out that the bio-political mechanisms that control the population are exerted, above all, on the corporeality of their citizens/inhabitants.¹

DRAMATURGIES OF EXCESS

291

Between 1964 and 1970, a group of young Austrian artists (Günther Brus, Otto Muehl, Hermann Nitsch and Rudolf Schwarzkogler), conditioned by existentialism, Freud’s psychoanalysis, a particular reinterpretation of secessionist painters like Egon Schiele and Gustav Klimt and a certain romantic idea of destruction, death and renewal, clashed with the established order and any concept of authority from the position of a radical conception of *pathos*, of the conversion of the body simultaneously into weapon and wound, a field of battle for the practice of the obscene, the repugnant and the scatological. The actionists’ sacrificial liturgies and visceral and sadomasochistic ceremonies are, according to Piedad Solans (57), the greatest example of a “dramaturgy of the excess”, playing with death but claiming the healing of the collective consciousness and of its fears, almost like a *cathartic stylization* where the body loses its value, that is, it is brought to its limit and all limits are exceeded. We can trace excess as a keyword in many of the group’s manifestos, like in “On the Roots of Tragedy” (1963) by Hermann Nitsch, where we read: “When we push aside the intellectual and conscious control of our basic life energies, we gain an insight into our subconscious, unbridled, chaotic libido. At once these vital forces have been contacted, they break free and rise to the surface, where they provide extreme satisfaction, ecstasy, joyful cruelty, sadomasochistic reactions, and excess. In Greek mythology it was Dionysus who provoked excess. He descended into animality and chaos, sacrificed himself and was torn apart. That’s why tragedy is the starting point of excess” (quoted in Berghaus 156). We must give the action of being political back to the individual, incorporate him into the political struggle through a return to our mythological roots. According to the actionists’ position, any traditional society is founded on the principle of the prohibition of mixing, of hybridization of food and sex, on the interdiction of the transgression of the limits of life and death. Going beyond those limits brings us back to original experiences of excess.

Excess is, according to a standard dictionary, that which exceeds or goes further

than what is prudent or normal, that which in any way goes past the limits of the ordinary or the licit; abuse, offense or crime; insanity and loss of faculties. And I find within its synonyms the terms *overflow*, *license*, *lack of restraint*, *orgy*, *saturation*, *overload*... Omar Calabrese (1992) bases part of the *neo-baroque* esthetic in the notion of excess as a destabilizing surpassing of a limit and a confine, which claims to put into question or even destroy a certain order. Calabrese distinguishes excess represented as content (monsters, sexuality or brutality), excess as a structure of representation (the monumentalism or gigantism of some artistic offerings) and excess as the pleasure of a representation. From these parameters we can better understand the development of a performative theatre (Calabrese cites as examples Magazzini Criminali or the Studio Azzurro's video-theatrical installations) rooted in the esthetic of the ugly, a theatre which presents to the spectator physical and moral monsters, obscenities, scenes of stultification to the *limit*. Reception also varies from the obsessive (*cult status* or *fan culture*) to displacement, to the unacceptable, by way of the compulsive pleasure that the staging of disorder and chaos provokes, the pleasure of debauchery and enigma.

292

We can see many of these characteristics in the definition of postdramatic theatre (Lehmann): absence of the principles of narration and acting, like the order of a fable; language becoming autonomous and self-referentiality; ambiguity, heterogeneity, celebration of art as a process, anti-mimesis, anti-signification, anti-interpretation, un-textuality, the actor as central subject (-object), subversion, multiple location, overthrown synthesis (there is no community), dehierarchization (parataxis), chaotic accumulation (plethora), corporeality (pain and the performer as victim), the real bursting in, events (doing, executing). All fits into the so-called *performative turn* (Fischer-Lichte 18-23), which dominates the arts, and which of course has affected the field of theatre, as Patrice Pavis, reticent before this type of practice, has seen: performance becomes theatrical, theatre becomes performative (55). Thus, excess occupies an important place in energetic theatre (Lyotard), an expression usually associated with the postdramatic, that is, the theatre of intensities, the theatre of beats, which Antonin Artaud's theory explained so well.

Let us take as an example the Italian theatre company Societas Raffaello Sanzio (SRS). Founded in 1981 in Cesena, and run collaboratively by Romeo and Claudia Castellucci, and Chiara and Paolo Guidi, its tradition is widely recognized these days for its use of fragmented worlds, audible sets in which artificial silences alternate with the most disturbing noises or mysterious music, and for its onstage incorporation of animals starting with *Alla bellezza tanto antica* (For Such Ancient Beauty, 1987), of child actors, elderly or ill actors (the actor with a laryngectomy who plays Marc Anthony in *Giulio Cesare*, the woman with a mastectomy in *Genesi* [1999] or the autistic actors in *Amleto* [1992]). Clara and Romeo Castellucci have also developed a theoretical reflection that is highly representative of what we have here called *performative theatre*. We could start with the "dissolution of representation", associated with the idea of "impersonality" as a way of interpreting the world from a universal

perspective. Of course we see in SRS the emancipation of the language of the audience and of language itself, in the abandonment of any attempt to place its characters in communicative situations. We also see an emancipation of the audience, because it rejects any possibility of coming together or meeting, or of interpretation: “The spectators are always beyond my horizon. I know that they exist and that I will go seek them, but they are always beyond my horizon, and I cannot, I do not wish to, see them, and even less, to imagine them. They are sub-fundamental; they do not appear, nor can they appear without unbalancing the artistic roof amid the influential forces of dramatic creation” (Claudia Castellucci, in SRS, 2001, 176-177). The set layout is constructed in defense of what the Castelluccis call *Il Teatro del Murati* (‘the Theatre of the Walled’): between the theatre and the stage is *the Big Separation* between ‘inside’ and ‘outside’. The shows are fragmented to the maximum into discrete units, or units connected in ways that the spectator must discover for himself in a sort of multilineal narrative. The theatre is alchemy and labyrinth, its own autonomous temporality that is outside the world:

293

Theatre is not something that needs to be recognized. ‘I-go-to-the-theatre-to-recognize-Shakespeare-my-studies-what-I’ve-done’: it is not so. It is a voyage in the unknown, to the unknown. We cannot calculate the conjunctions of the elements of the possible. The final stone of this alchemy is time. All these transformations are here for no other reason but to modify time, to discover another time. The journey—if the occupation, the preoccupation, is geographical—the goal of this geographical voyage is time. It is the experience of another time, theatre. By that I mean time passing. I am not alluding to a chronology, but to the *quality* of time. (Romeo Castellucci, in SRS 118)

As Adrian Heathfield has noted (6-13), the performance aims to create a parallel world rooted in an autonomous temporality alien to the spectator’s usual range of perception, and this is why the SRS so often has all types of repetitions or a widespread convergence on the stage from an absolutely hyperrealist perspective. Gabriella Calchi Novati speaks of “multicontemporaneity” as a fundamental characteristic of SRS stagings, “a continuous presence of the whole time into the same time” (55).

The result leads us more than ever to a density of signs that settles into the intensification of the sensible; because we find ourselves before a *trop-à-voir* that irritates the senses, because, as Gilles Deleuze would say, “sensation is what is transmitted directly, avoiding detour or the boredom of a story to be told” (*Francis Bacon* 28). The spectators find themselves drawn to a type of reception that defies the senses more than it does rational understanding, with an anti-interpretative dynamic somewhat related to what Susan Sontag calls Erotic of art. The complexity of these artistic offerings rests in the challenge to linear reason and in the recognition of the impossibility of comprehension, but also in the defense that “the fundamental thing is the emotive weave, the sensitive shock” (Romeo Castellucci, quoted by Giannachi and Kaye 139). It is a question of creating a theatre of images “shockingly beautiful and seductively repellent,” to paraphrase Castellucci, that “lead audiences into atmospheres and trance-like states that cannot be properly analyzed, but that take possession of their

physical senses” (Decreus 274).

HETEROLOGICAL THEATRE

294 But the play of excess is seen in the use of an exhibited corporeality (*expeausition*, Jean-Luc Nancy would say) that is violent and visceral, deregulatory, shapeless and heterological, in Georges Bataille’s sense of the word. *Heterology* is the “science of that which is completely other” and as such, it is opposed to any monological and homogeneous representation of the world; it is the science of garbage (the discards of science, the scatological, but also of the sacred). The heterological here means what cannot be reduced to speech, confusion, the unbearable, that which goes beyond the limits of reason, like the scatological forms of orgies, sexual perversions, fluids, excrements, mutilations or corpses. It is in excess that we learn who we are, in the extremes of the possible, at the edge, at the outer limits, but for that we need to open ourselves to violence by ecstasy, sexual excesses, approaching death, which allows us to “access the secret of being” (*L’Érotisme* 10; see Sasso 177-182). Next to the homogeneous, which is the guarantor of the balance of the system, the heterogeneous is impure, incomprehensible and useless, and, associated with the fictions of transgression, it has shock value (*Visions of Excess* 91-104, 137-160; see Noys 33-ff.). The science of the heterological deals with radical forms of the heterogeneous, faces the unrepresentable and inhuman, focuses on the shock that makes the spirit waver and suspends the possibility of thought and knowledge.

We are naturally facing the performative place that eliminates stable elements and situates everything in perpetual variation, like Carmelo Bene, as studied by Deleuze. This endless variability is forged in Deleuze’s *Body without Organs* (BwO) (*A Thousand Plateaus* 37-38 and 149-166). The term is borrowed from Antonin Artaud’s radio play *To Have Done with the Judgment of God* (1947). In Deleuze’s work, BwO refers not only to the destratification of the individual subject, but to a collection of potentials and free flows, and to the destabilization and dislocation of normative structures (Cull 1-21 and Shee 37-53). It is also the pathological and iconoclastic exacerbation of perpetual variation, the multiple, anomalous and uncontrolled body, subject to the whims of chance, as Romeo Castellucci states: “I believe it is a theatre where dialectic does not occur. Even the extreme elements of the beginning and end are not part of a dialectic, but (they are) juxtaposed, tangled even violently. Only a chemical conversion can set off reactions that escape control. These reactions can trigger fate, chance. Chance is a fundamental element in every problem of beauty” (SRS 113). Bodies undertake their special pilgrimage to face the chaos of brute matter, its primordial strength and its absolute truth. It is a non-intellectual, affective and violent action in which chaos is not the point of departure but rather the final destination of the voyage, understood as the experience of the abyss. Theatre is hieroglyphic in the etymological sense of the word (writing of the sacred), a return to origins, an

apocatastasis through which we will again be one with matter in the return to chaos.

SRS's theatrical practice is a very good example of these theoretical postulates. The *Tragedia Endogonidia* (2002-2004), whose creative process is documented in a book by the Castelluccis, Joe Kelleher and Nicholas Ridout, is an open and hypertextual network in which the spectator's audiovisual memory collapses before the superimposition of instants, a network in which each spectator is responsible for moving within a structure of ultimately indecipherable links: to wit, the role of sound, of the images that emblematically open the episodes, of the curtains, of the recurring characters.² The game extends to contradiction, even in the title itself, which Romeo Castellucci has explained repeatedly:

Endogonidia: the word is adapted from the vocabulary of microbiology; it refers to those simple living beings with two sets of sexual organs inside themselves that are able to reproduce continually, without need of another, according to what amounts, effectively, to a system of immortality. The price they have to pay is their continual division and separation from themselves. The word 'endogonidia' is altogether antithetical to the word 'tragedy'; the letter presupposes the inevitable ruin of whoever comes up against the splendor of the hero's solitude, which, soon enough, has its own death for an horizon. (quoted in SRS, 2001, 31-32)

295

Performative theatre moves easily into the territory of rhizomatics, deploying with pleasure the logic of the principles set out by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (7-12): the possibility of multiple connection between each point, the heterogeneity of the components of the system, multiplicity without a generating unit (the rhizome is *anti-memory*), a-significant rupture (a-centered language, segmentation, displacement) or cartography (opening or *performance*). No single organising principle predetermines the consistencies and compatibilities between the network of the elements. The rhizome is placed as an image of liberation and freedom, energetically disposed against the sedimentation of reality into taxonomic orders and declining routines of representational thought. Behind the rhizome also lurks the esthetic principle of vagabond or nomadic creation, which has *suspension* or *unpronounceability* for an event horizon. We are right to describe the SRS's theatre as *nomadic* (Decreus), not so much for its use of metamorphosis and unexpected transformations, of polymorphous figures like the old man who, in Br#04, changes his clothes and becomes a Jewish prophet or a Belgian policeman before being beaten to death, but more for its creation of an in-between reality in this kaleidoscopic theatre in which all sense is suspended or displaced towards the mythical.

The *Tragedia Endogonidia* is a visual cycle on sexuality and death, of an imaginary world where everything is born and dies, without logic, following its own laws, perhaps those of a dream. We are in the kingdom of inconsequence and transgression, of the *mélange* of the human and the monstrous, of the harmonious coexistence of the beautiful and the ugly. The search for indeterminacy is concretized in some of the episodes of the *Tragedia* through the use of plots full of holes, discontinuous tales which sometimes employ the "noise" or "snow" technique typical of cinema, a type

of artificial snow that spreads over the stage, which is achieved with nearly transparent cloths that obscure the spectator's vision or with profoundly strange lighting. This effect symbolizes to some extent the desperate search for a meaning that constantly evades the gaze of the spectator. This occurs in B#03 and in BN#05, where said atmosphere is accompanied by animals on stage, noise-music (composed by Scott Gibbons), and the use of illness, old age, blood and milk (fluids), the scatological. Corporeality becomes physical and instinctive, precarious and fragile, violent and savage, like in some of Robert Mapplethorpe's photographs. The theatre explores other forms of the experience of being a spectator, in which it is not a question of making the spectators live a dramatic story, but rather of provoking in them an experience of the senses and of pushing aside the traditional notions of comprehension and feeling, as may occur in the works of Paul McCarthy, Aaron Williamson or Meg Stuart (see Kerstin Mey, 2006, 19-26, 64-65). Consider Jan Fabre's recent *Orgy of Tolerance* (2009) and the competition of masturbator-slaves of the first painting or

296 the sequence in which two men penetrate a woman with a sofa... All of these would also fit into what Stephen Di Benedetto, speaking of Franko B, calls *fluid dramaturgy*, that in which the body is used as a dramatic medium: "The fluidity of the substances that live artists employ with their bodies as expressive media are useful to describe the way in which images presented in a theatricalized space can be a form of dramaturgical composition. Bodies and fluids, especially bodily fluids, carry their own history of meaning" ("The Body" 11).

Di Benedetto (*The Provocation of Senses* 186-201) has pointed out how the performance design in la tragedia is at the disposal of the collaborative game with the audience/attendants, who enriched the theatrical experience in each of the episodes like "an organism in continual flux" (Valentini and Marranca 17). The performance moves itself among various levels of reception, from the purely sensorial (that is, the creation of an atmosphere through light, sound and movement, as a blast of stimuli) to the dissection of form and content in search for a more rational answer, although in the end the only achievement is the blurring of sensation and response.

THE STAGING OF THE *HOMINES SACRI*

Few philosophers can help us understand the SRS's path better than Giorgio Agamben. We might start by accepting his definition of contemporaneity as being particularly apt as regards the Italian company: "The contemporary is the person who perceives the darkness of his time as something that concerns him. Darkness is something that—more than any light—turns directly and singularly toward him. The contemporary is the one whose eyes are struck by the beam of darkness that come from his own time" (*What is Apparatus?* 45). But *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* is Agamben's book that best illuminates this theatrical movement. In it the Italian philosopher develops the logic of exclusion as a dominant force in

Western socio-political thinking. If we analyze the history of savagery, individuals live in a state of “bare life”, through which they become excludable, eliminable, exterminable... It is not freedom that defines us as human beings but the logic of exclusion (the concentration camp as a biopolitical paradigm of modernity), which sets the tenuous limits between life and death, between value and void: the *sacer* is killable (“uccidibile”), but his inexplicable condition makes his death not murder, nor, due to his impure character, ritual sacrifice, as he exists only “at the intersection of the capacity to be killed but not sacrificed, outside human and divine law” (73). In the case of the *homines sacri*, the sacred converges with excrescence and repugnance, and individuals thus live permanently on the threshold of violence and death. The theatre of the SRS engages critically with this conception of the human being as something disposable, eradicable and impure, through the presence of children or the insane, as Matthew Causey has shown in his analysis of *Genesis*: “Castellucci stages the *bare life* of the sacred human through the non-matrixed performance of children whose re-enactment of the Holocaust indicates the current un-sacrificeable and expendable status of the subjects of late-capitalist and bio-political systems” (123). In this show, the SRS puts into action the esthetic of the dis-human (the machine, the child and the animal) and the dis-real in a three-act structure (*At The Beginning, Auschwitz and Cain and Abel*) in which the world is presented through the Viewpoint of death and destruction. In the case of the *Tragedia Endogonidia*, which Causey also analyzes, the suspension of time in each of the five sequences that comprise the eleven episodes and the use of claustrophobic spaces fit very well with the conversion of the actor into a sort of hybrid between machine and animal because of his inhumanity, caught in the interchangeable dialectic of victim and executioner.

297

This is also the case of *La Divina Comedia*, a triptych with an excessive theatrical syntax, first presented at the Avignon Festival in 2008 (and released on DVD by ARTE a year later, produced by Don Kent). The first piece, *Inferno*, opens with dogs cornering, knocking down and biting Romeo Castellucci himself; the sequences closes with the director on the ground, covered by the supposed skin of one of those dogs, until a nearly naked actor uses it to cover himself and begins to climb the walls of the Papal Palace. A child appears on the stage, picks up the dog pelt from the floor and tries it on, on all fours. The climber watches him, swinging from the top of the wall. The child spray paints the lowest stones: “Jean”, perhaps his name. He looks up smiling and the climber passes him a basketball. Darkness falls, broken only by the light of some lanterns, while the menacing noise of distorted sounds begins to invade the theatre. A multicolored group of men and women appears from one wing; as they advance, they fall to the ground as if massacred. But the prostrate bodies still move, creeping toward the back of the stage like a wave. The lights move, projected on the walls, and the noise becomes deafening. The child gives the ball to an old man who has separated himself from the group and gotten up. The old man gives it to a girl, and she to a man, while the human tide continues its syncopated motion, until an old woman grabs the ball and attempts to bite it avidly. The group rises and some begin

to kick the wall. They place a sign in lights on the proscenium, with the title, which the spectator sees backwards (“onrefni”). When they remove the neon, we see hidden under a sheet some three- or four-year-old children playing carefree in a glass box. A semi-inflated black balloon is above them as they slowly disappear into the darkness. The men reappear, launching into a strange, slow-motion choreography of coming together, affectionate contact (kisses and hugs) and separation. In this strange rite, the children are picked up and shown to the spectators. Finally, they line up and theatrically rehearse the phrase “Je t’aime”, but all ends in an unbearable cry of pain. Above the stage, the phrase “Je m’appelle Andy Warhol” is projected (followed by the titles of some of Warhol’s photos, always accompanied by their dates), while the men climb on top of the box and then let go and fall on their backs. A curtain between white and gray, which is drawn over the spectators, begins to cover the theatre. When it disappears, a piano is burning on stage. The following text is projected: “À vous, acteurs de la SRS qui n’êtes plus.” The men, spread out two by two, carry out the action of slitting their partner’s throat, who pretends to fall dead. The floor is covered with blood and corpses, only one survives, the old man, who exclaims: “Où es-tu? Je t’implore.” The child returns to the stage and hugs the old man, only to slit his throat. A white horse arrives and the group rises, retreating before it; it remains alone in the dark. Three nurses place a wrecked car on stage left. From inside it comes Andy Warhol with his Polaroid camera. He photographs the audience and then bathes himself in the blood of the dead, as though he were dancing with his camera (in the backdrop we see the corpses’ feet piled up). From the windows, the lighted signs, which say “Étoiles”, fall and break against the floor, leaving just three letters in the end: “Toi”. Warhol wraps himself in the dog pelt and gets back into the car. Lights out.

298

Darkness as a symbol is highlighted in the installation *Paradiso*, in which the spectator is invited to enter a shady, aquatic universe. The third frame of the triptych, *Purgatory*, the most narrative of the three (although its narrativity is first contained and then transgressed), is, in my opinion, the most intense and the best achieved. Against a hyperrealist set, a family carries out an apparent daily routine, behind which we find an underworld of absolute terror; we intuit an imminent catastrophe that the super contained silence of the show transmits to the public. In the first scene, the Mother (called “First Star” in the didascalia projected on the transparent curtain that separates the stage from the theatre) and the Son (“Second Star”) almost wordlessly prepares and share dinner in the kitchen; the child takes a pill because he has a fever. The second scene takes place in the child’s enormous bedroom as he watches television, plays, and hides in the closet. Third scene (the didascalia indicate “fifteen minutes later”): the child, lantern in hand, comes down the stairs to a very spacious living room (piano, sofa, television), where he gets hold of a giant doll and brings it back to his room, as we hear the sound of a car engine approaching. In the fourth scene, which is longer, Father (“Third Star”) and Mother are talking, almost whispering, in the Living Room. The conversation is trivial and the projected didascalia

redundant (“The Third Star will look tired”). The Father attempts to hug his wife, who is crying and who rejects him without show. The child comes down to greet his father. They go upstairs to play cowboys in his room. The living room is empty before our eyes. We hear from offstage the child’s attempts at resistance: “Stop, father, please....” Sobs break the silence of the theatre. The Father comes back down, but he is not the same: he is wearing a mask that disfigures him. The Son follows him, shirt off, broken, and consoles him. The next two scenes take us right inside the nightmare. The child is looking at abundant vegetation inside a black sphere, full of poppies and irises, first beautiful, then malevolent: the harmony is shattered with the menacing arrival of the father. In the living room, the Father shakes convulsively, and the Son, transformed into a tall, thin man, watches him and then jumps on him, to dominate him, like in a crazed dance. A giant circle descends from the rafters that appear to be filled with a dark, viscous liquid.

There is something in the animality of these offerings from the SRS that goes back to Deleuze and to Agamben. It looks to Deleuze (*A Thousand Plateaus*) in its insistence on metamorphosis, on self-destruction, on the impersonal, and, most of all, on the break with meaningful projects and subjective feelings. Non-human sexuality and the deterritorialization of the body are also present. It looks to Agamben (*The Open*), sometimes in dialogue with Bataille, we might owe the non-hierarchical consideration of man and animal as two sides of the same coin, which, in the case of the SRS, is expressed in the disappearance of human language and the deconstruction of that *anthropological machine*, which restitutes the individual to the sphere of *homo ferus*. To use Linnaeus’ expression: “it is *tetrapus* (walks on all fours), *mutus* (without language), and *hirsutus* (covered with hair)” (43). Or it restitutes the individual to the sphere of infancy as composed of pre-linguistic subjects (*in-fans*), as a mystery (from the Greek *mu*, “to be with the mouth closed”, “to not be able to say”), as origin of the human (*Infancy and History*; see Ridout 110-114). In this sense, infancy represents the mythological anteriority to which the possibility of experience and of the truth of language refers. The unstable borders between animality and humanity become evident in Romeo Castellucci’s theoretical reflection, for example, in the article “The Animal Being on Stage”, in which, after insisting that his aim is “to communicate as little as possible” (23), he defines the function of an animal as “a phantom, which permeates matter and takes me away with it” (23), connecting it, based on the idea of a pre-tragic theatre, with “an infantility, an infantile theatre, in which ‘infantility’ refers to a condition beyond language” (24). In the conception of the actor, both animals and children support the struggle against the non-natural of the actor and against the command of technique. Every living being is an “actor”; animal and man are the same magma. The animal “is his shadow, obstacle, dream, desire, tongue, body, his pathos, ethos, *ruthmos*” (26-27). If we accept Steven Baker’s argument (18), Castellucci belongs to the postmodern tradition, since animality is simultaneously a questioning of identity and a dehierarchizing and liberating creative strategy.

EXCESS AND THE ABJECT

In the analysis of new dramaturgies, the notion of *excess* is used to describe a type of writing that annuls the process of communication through a *deconstruction effect* which forces the spectator to look everywhere—unsuccessfully—for a sliver of meaning that is lost in fragments or contradictions. The works of Spanish-Argentinian author Rodrigo García also share in the poetics of the abject that once again is inscribed in an excessive corporeality that enters into the “universe of evil”, the exact opposite of the real. The real, as Julia Kristeva and Hal Foster have noted, leads, through dirtiness and a mistreated body, via fear and anxiety, to the disruption of identity, of order and of the system, and to the collapse of the signified: “A massive, and sudden emergence of uncanniness, which, familiar as it might have been in an opaque and forgotten life, now harries me as radically separate, loathsome. Not me. Not that. But not nothing, either. A ‘something’ that I do not recognize as a thing. A weight of meaninglessness, about which there is nothing insignificant, and which crushes me. On the edge of nonexistence and hallucination, of a reality that, if I acknowledge it, annihilates me. There, abject and abjection are my safeguards. The primers of my culture” (Kristeva 2). Kristeva also identifies infancy as the traumatic period of non-recognition of the abject, which only later, as part of a child’s socialization, will be taught by its mother. The abject, of course, brings us into the territory of Agamben’s *naked life* because of its sanction of humiliation and torture.

The abject affects the symbolic order, confronts us with the fragility of “human” beings, with the way they border on animality. The shape of the body is difficult to trace and the notion of identity becomes evanescent and changing, due to the modification of the relationship between the internal and external worlds: the body, far from being a closed system, has been dismembered and has lost its unity. Its borders have been attacked and destroyed. The identity of the “I” is constantly threatened by the symbolism of the dirty and the shapeless as a social and cultural realization of fragility. We all tend to build ourselves a stable world in which objects and people are recognizable and have a permanent character. We ignore, or pretend to, anything that does not fit into our patterns, or we marginalize it or hide it, because we recognize that it could be destabilizing or dangerous. The concepts of *danger*, *contamination* and/or *impurity* affect the definition and delineation of the *common good*. We accept and socially embed them in order to perpetuate the nullification of differences and to impose onto reality the homogenization of what is hierarchically diverse. Society rejects inappropriate elements (the heterological) and monstrous creatures would be manifestations of what is repressed, silenced, not said by the dominant culture.

It is not difficult to find examples in the course of Rodrigo García and La Carnicería Teatro. García and Castellucci share, in addition to the singularity of their poetics, the rejection of linear narrativity, disdain for the subjection to the rational or mimetic conception of the stage, and, of course, the supremacy given to the heterological in their theatre. The actors’ bodies are subjected to a visceral and

scatological drift accentuated by the very intense use of silence, which is associated with the mute experience of a child, theorized by Agamben. In *After Sun* (2000), the bodies of Patricia Lamas and Juan Oriente faint and fall, hit and crawl, perform acrobatic twists, strip naked, leave their tracks on a floor covered with french fries, dance madly with a pair of rabbits. The violence to the body, the mistreatment and pain, the abject nakedness, do not submit to the idea of representation, but rather to a real depreciation of human life in postcapitalist consumer society (see Orozco). In *La historia de Ronald el payaso de McDonalds* (*The Story of Ronald the Clown from McDonald's*, 2002), in the darkness of the almost empty stage (there are only references to consumer products, like hamburgers and soft drinks, a few fish tanks with fish and excrement on the shelves), the protagonist relates his first experience in these fast food restaurants, associated with an autobiographical moment of pain or sorrow, but this anecdote is no more than a possible beginning for the show: the actor strips naked and begins a series of compulsive or spasmodic movements on the ground, dousing himself, before others, with a viscous liquid while a strident sound fills the air. The schema is repeated soon after with the addition of a stray dog, various samples of excrement and a vacuum cleaner with which they clean their bodies, but the important point is to realize that nothing that comes next is justified from a causal or conflictual point of view. In fact, *La historia...* progresses little by little towards milder tacks, like in the dance under the shower of a hosepipe or in the interactions with the audience: an actor presents his partner and children on the stage; another speaks of his obsessions as he projects an amusing video; a musical group enters and plays one of its songs; a third man recalls his childhood with the aid of slides containing images of cartoons or of the Italian singer Raffaella Carrá in an open series of “wordy” monologues. Then comes a simulation of a “brainwashing” session, in which all of the elements are offered as a destructive cultural weight on the development of the individual (the actor’s head becomes a sort of garbage can). Finally, a playful interaction with the audience takes place, in which they have to pull on a rope to move the backdrop... In this sense, Rodrigo García’s theatre seems to seek to capture life in progress (without meaning), in continual metamorphosis, as a multiplicity of the grotesque, synthesis of opposites. In the grotesque there is no room for fixation or invariability, nor for authoritative truth; there can only be the activation of a destructive and liberating mechanism. The grotesque sustains itself in a system of images which, due to the influence of the popular, refer to material and corporeal existence, the *low*, the protuding, the digestive and sexual, death. The principle of deformation leads to the monstrous as a symptom of the chaos that holds us tight in a forever inharmonious society.

Food remains very present in *Compré una pala en Ikea para cavar mi propia tumba* (*I Bought a Spade in Ikea to Dig My Own Grave*, 2002), from the original opening of a container of frozen lasagna to its crucifixion smothered in mustard and ketchup, à la Paul McCarthy, or the construction of little junk food “altars”. Animals also have their place in this incoherent universe, like in *Accidens. Matar para comer* (2005),

an enactment in which Juan Lorienté cooks a live lobster for twenty minutes: first he hangs it from a hook, after putting microphones on it, through which we hear its resistance to death; then it is chopped up and placed on a grill, while the actor calmly opens a bottle of wine and prepares to eat it in front of the audience. In *Arrojad mis cenizas en Eurodisney (Throw My Ashes over Disney, 2006)* hamsters are thrown into a fish tank, from which they anxiously try to escape, until Lorienté and Núria Lloansi attempt to turn their heads into a penetrating and penetrated sexual organ. Then frogs are tied with string to Jorge Horno's exhausted and filthy body. Finally, in *Versus (2008)*, a rabbit is placed in a (fake) microwave and cooked by the actors. In all the examples cited, the goal is to test the spectator's resistance to violence and death. For García, showing violence, even when it may seem gratuitous, is more important than hiding it. The awareness of the tragedy and pain of life assists in enduring reality. At the same time, it alerts us to the individual's impassivity when faced with the cruelty of daily life, with death televised live in our homes (the immigrant or the abused woman). It is interesting, of course, for its implications about minorities in relation to the cultural anthropocentrism of Western theatre (the change from *bios* to *zoe*, as Agamben would say).

302

The term *excess* is intimately linked with that of *transgression* as the experience of limits and taboos. Transgression is a dynamic force in cultural products, a reflexive questioning that involves hybridization and the mixing of theatrical categories. For Bataille, the experience of transgression creates an explosion of power and energy, an outburst of creative violence that engenders some kind of beauty. Violence and cruelty are some of its forms, as Artaud, who was allergic to any notion of harmonious integration, no doubt knew. Castellucci and García, among others, did as well: their fascinating work is theatre against illusion and representation; it is also theatre without ends, theatre without respect. There is a much greater emphasis on the body in this new theatre: the body shocks, risks and endangers. This move to corporeality does not signal an anti-intellectualism. They are exploring ideas entering 'the mind through the body', with the understanding that "above all, cruelty is very lucid, a kind of strict control and submission to necessity. There is no cruelty without consciousness, without the application of consciousness, for the latter gives practicing any act of life a blood red tinge, its cruel overtones, since it is understood that being alive always means the death of someone else" (Artaud 80). To recall Paul Klee's maxim that Deleuze found so much to his liking, it is also a question "not of reproducing the visible, but of making visible": theatre is an attempt to make visible and audible forces that are not, to capture the non given in a world in continual transformation. From an ordained world, we step into sheer anarchy through a process of transgression and orgy that opens the door to the exaltation of vertigo, to the breach of boundaries, to the metamorphosis of the world, in which the players seek to destroy the stability of perception and the logic of existence by means of an intense and transient excitement.

NOTES

- * This paper is included in the research project *Narrativas Cruzadas: Hibridación, Transmedia y Performatividad en la Era Digital* (FFI2012-35296), funded by Spain's Ministerio de Economía y Competitividad and directed by Anxo Abuín González.
1. "Schneemann challenged accepted art practices of the mainstream, of the avant-garde and in women's movement. She soon came to realize that people responded to her images of flesh and nude bodies with their emotional rather than intellectual faculties....Schneemann's performances explored the body as a source of emotive power and sought to redress the tradition that made women the object rather than the subject of creative activity. Adopting a male position of authority with regard to her own body and its visual representation was a revolutionary step not acceptable to the art world of the time: 'I was permitted to be an image / but not the image maker creating her own self image'" (Berghaus 144). Critics such as Amelia Jones have insisted on the ironic exaggeration of masculine power in Acconci's works and have accused them of a certain ideological ambiguity. See Vergine (2000).
 2. Each of the eleven episodes was played in a different city, except the first and last, which were staged at the company's headquarters in Cesena: Cesena, January 2002; Avignon, July 2002; Berlin, January 2003; Brussels, May 2003; Bergen, May 2003; Paris, October 2003; Rome, November 2003; Strasbourg, February 2004; London, May 2004; Marseille, September 2004; Cesena, December 2004. A DVD version exists, which we have consulted during the writing of this article (Rarovideo, 2007). We can reconstruct the creative process of this macro-show thanks to the materials collected in the aforementioned book by Claudia Castellucci, Joe Kelleher, Nicholas Ridout and Romeo Castellucci. See Pitozzi and Sachi.

WORKS CITED

- Agamben, Giorgio. *Infancy and History*. London: Versus, 1993.
- _____. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1998.
- _____. *The Open: Man and Animal*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2004.
- _____. *What is Apparatus? And Other Essays*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2009.
- Artaud, Antonin. *The Theatre and Its Doubles*. London: Calder, 1976.
- Baker, Steven. *The Postmodern Animal*. London: Reaktion Books, 2008.
- Bataille, Georges. *L'Érotisme*. Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1957.
- _____. *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings 1927-1939*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1985.
- Berghaus, Günther. *Avant-Garde Performance*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.
- Bleeke, Maaïke, ed. *Bodycheck: Relocating the Body in Contemporary Performing Arts*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002.
- Calabrese, Omar. *Neo-baroque: The Sign of the Times*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1992.
- Calchi Novati, Gabriella. "Language Under Attack: The Iconoclastic Theatre of

SRS." *Theatre Research International* 34 (2009): 50-65.

Castellucci, Romeo. "The Animal Being in Stage." *Performance Research* 5.2 (2000): 23-28.

Castellucci, Claudia, Joe Kelleher, Nicholas Ridout and Romeo Castellucci. *The Theatre of SRS*. London: Routledge, 2007.

Causey, Matthew. *Theatre and Performance in Digital Culture: From Simulation to Embeddedness*. London: Routledge, 2006.

Cull, Laura. "Introduction." *Deleuze and Performance*. Ed. Laura Cull. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2009. 1-21.

Decreus, Freddy. "The Nomadic Theatre of SRS: A Case of Postdramatic Reworking of (the Classical) Tragedy." *A Companion to Classical Receptions*. Eds. Lorna Hardwick and Christopher Stray. Oxford: Blackwell, 2008. 274-286.

304 Deleuze, Gilles. *Francis Bacon: Logique de la sensation*. Vol. I. Paris: Éditions de la Différence, 2002.

Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1987.

Di Benedetto, Stephen. "The Body as Fluid Dramaturgy: Live Art, Corporeality, and Perception." *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* 16.2 (2002): 4-16.

_____. *The Provocation of the Senses in Contemporary Theatre*. London: Routledge, 2010.

Fischer-Lichte, Erika. *The Transformative Power of Theatre. A New Aesthetics*. London: Routledge, 2008.

Foster, Hal. *The Return of the Real: Art and Theory at the End of the Century*. Cambridge: MIT P, 1996.

Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Vintage Books, 1995.

Giannachi, Gabriella, and Nick Kaye. *Staging the Post-Avant-garde: Italian Experimental Theatre After 1970*. Berne: Peter Lang, 2004. 137-168.

Graver, David. "Violent Theatricality: Displayed Enactments of Aggression and Pain." *Theatre Journal* 47.1 (1995): 43-64.

Kristeva, Julia. *The Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. New York: Columbia UP, 1982.

Heathfield, Adrian, ed. *Live: Art and Performance*. New York: Routledge, 2004.

Lehmann, Hans-Thies. *Postdramatic Theatre*. London: Routledge, 2006.

Liotard, Jean-François. *Des dispositifs pulsionnels*. Paris: Galilée, 1994.

Mey, Kerstin. *Art and Obscenity*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2006.

Nancy, Jean-Luc. *58 indices sur le corps et Extension de l'âme*. Québec: Nota Bene,

2004.

- Noys, Benjamin. *Georges Bataille: A Critical Introduction*. London: Pluto Books, 2000.
- Orozco, Lourdes. "Approaching Mistrust: Rodrigo García Rehearses La Carnicería Teatro in *Une façon d'aborder l'idée de méfiance* (One Way to Approach the Idea of Mistrust)." *Making Contemporary Theatre: International Rehearsal Processes*. Eds. Jen Harvie and Andy Lavender. Manchester: Manchester UP, 2010. 121-139.
- Pavis, Patrice. *La Mise en scène contemporaine*. Paris: Armand Colin, 2008.
- Pitozzi, Enrico, and Annalisa Sachi. *Itinera. Trajectoires de la forme. 'Tragedia Endogonidia'*. Arles: Actes Sud, 2008.
- Ridout, Nicholas. *Stage Fright: Animals and Other Theatrical Problems*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006.
- Sasso, Robert. *Georges Bataille: Le système du non-savoir. Une ontologie du jeu*. Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1978.
- Shee, Edward. "I Artaud BwO: The Uses of Artaud's *To Have Done with the Judgement of God*." *Deleuze and Performance*. Ed. Laura Cull. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2009. 37-53.
- Solans, Piedad. *Accionismo vienés*. San Sebastián: Nerea, 2007.
- Societas Raffaello Sanzio. *Les Pélérins de la matière*. Arles: Actes Sud, 2001.
- Valentini, Valeria, and Bonnie Marranca. "The Universal: The Simple Place Possible." *PAJ* 77 (2004): 16-25.
- Vergine, Lea. *Body Art and Performance: The Body as Language*. Milan: Skira, 2000.