

UTRECHT UNIVERSITY
Theatre Studies Department

**Postdramatic Theatre
and the Dissolution of the Unitary Self**
Towards a Theory of the Postdramatic Character

- Thesis submitted for MA degree in Theatre Studies -

Supervisor
Sigrid Merx

Student
Oana Tarce
310338

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1. Introduction

For decades now, critical theories under the names of deconstruction and poststructuralism have undermined essentialist and traditionalist notions of personal identity. The stage appears to reflect this by the so called “death of character”, and the associated “death of the author”. Since their beginning, as their names indicate, theory and theatre have been constantly disputing the right to dominate the “place of seeing”¹, and so it comes as no surprise that they simultaneously undergo similar movements. For this reason, any examination of the current theatre practice and theory can be illuminated by the contemporary critical and philosophical theories – one of the basis on which lays my methodological approach.

Thesis

In my paper, I will focus on a particular concept from the postdramatic stage and discourse, namely the dissolution of the unity of character. Through various mechanisms, such as doubling, multiplication, and fragmentation of the characters that the actor embodies, the unity and cohesion of the stage character is overthrown. The lack of narratives, dramatic action and psychologically fashioned individuals has enforced the move towards a non-representational mode in which human figures appear on stage. In place of the old dramatic shaping devices, like dialogue, conflict, and plot, new elements, like intermediality, intertextuality, self-referentiality, theatricality, and visuality, prevail on the postdramatic stage. And instead of univocal representations of human individuals, they lead to ambiguous, multilevel and multivocal figures that lack a coherent identity.

The scope of my thesis is to examine in a broad sense the nature, signification and implications of the death of the dramatic character. For this purpose, I will draw from both the postmodernist theories of the last decades, and the developments performed at the level of the dramatic character during the last century, and I will show that far from the real death of the character, the postdramatic stage has witnessed a complex reconfiguration of the nature of character.

Furthermore, I will argue against Lehmann's contention that pure physicality and the

1 Elinor Fuchs, *The Death of Character: Perspectives on Theater after Modernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996) 146.

intensification of the performer's² presence have replaced the actual role playing of the actor³. Although a frequently employed dramaturgical strategy nowadays, the presence of the actor in the fictional world of the stage doesn't cancel, but extends his role playing and the scope of his acting. And in the course of this, character becomes an intricate game of masks carried between the selves of the actor and the embodied figures. It is this hybrid creature, with multiple personalities and a dilated, multifunctional self that dramatic character has transfigured into⁴.

Structure

In the *second chapter*, I will start by expounding Elinor Fuchs' insights into the 20th century's theatre. At the level of character, she differentiates three orientations that, stirred by the symbolist movement and paralleling the historical avant-garde, informed modern theatre. She coins them the allegorical, the critical and the theatricalist orientation, and argues that their seeds have been planted in the writings and practice of Strindberg, Brecht, and, respectively, Pirandello⁵. According to her, the climax of these developments prepared the way for the death of the dramatic person as it is reflected in the prevalence of a new type of staging mirrored by the notion of landscape theatre. This concept refers to performances in which the human figure doesn't function as a structuring focal point any longer, and "is treated as an element in what might be described as a theatrical landscape"⁶. She argues that it was after Beckett that theatre makers and writers noticed that they are in "a new kind of world in which there is no longer anything <out there> or anyone <in here> to imitate (in Aristotle's term) or to represent"⁷.

Considering that the characters, however non-dramatic they were, often play constitutive positions on the postdramatic stage,⁸ Fuchs' concept of landscape theatre cannot account

2 Except when I will be referring to Lehmann's theory of the postdramatic theatre, I will use the terms "performer" and "actor" rather interchangeably. Because my objection to his theory relies in a great measure on disposing of the claims he makes based on his clear cut differentiation between performer and actor (that the former replaced the latter), I will dismiss it. Instead, I will use the term "performer" as to include the wider class of the artistic bodies, including those in dance, musical, opera, live art, and also theatre. According to this usage, the performer in theatre is precisely the actor that embodies postdramatic characters.

3 Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre* (London: Routledge, 2006) 57.

4 Which I will term the *postdramatic character*.

5 Elinor Fuchs, *The Death of Character: Perspectives on Theater after Modernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996) 31-32.

6 *Ibid.* 92.

7 *Ibid.* 170.

8 As it is the case for the general postdramatic theatrical stage, as well as for the case studies I will look at, most of the performances cannot be integrally examined through the notion of landscape theatre. On one hand, the characters in Rodrigo García's *Golgota Picnic* do figure as highly vocal elements, with an interchangeable position, in a visually powerful theatrical landscape. But, on another hand, both the multiplication and the fragmentation of the characters' identities represent structuring factors in Elizabeth LeCompte's *Hamlet*. Secondly, Fabian Hinrichs' acting, presence and physicality are fore-fronting elements in the authentic (postdramatic) *one-man* show, *Ich schau dir in die Augen*.

comprehensively for the contemporary theatrical stage. For this reason, I will look at Lehmann's insights into the postdramatic theatre and his subversion of role playing and character. As an intermission, I will examine some of Beckett's exemplary characters, in search of the characteristics that prompt Fuchs and many other theorists to regard his work as a fundamental break in the tradition of the last century theatre. I will both show how he expanded the dramaturgical strategies of character presented before, and highlight his original breakthrough – the exploration of the failure of the character's dramatic shaping devices. As I will argue later, this breakthrough is among the central elements that has been informing these new, non-dramatic manners of representation of stage characters.

For Lehmann, in postdramatic theatre, there is a clear cut move of the theatrical body towards the de-realization of “a reality and meaning” and towards pure physicality, which is “most clearly visible” in dance”.⁹ In this third section, I will point out the manner in which he reduces the complex functioning of the body, with its equivocal masks and manifold presence still extant on the theatre stage, to the functioning of the body on the dance stage. Physicality has indeed pervaded the postdramatic stage, but far from replacing the actor's role playing, has instead emphasized and intensified his multi-layered presence, highlighting the ambiguities of the human self and of the stage characters. I will hence present an alternative position to Lehmann's views on both the functioning of the body, and the nature of the embodiment on the postdramatic stage.

In the *third chapter*, by drawing from some of postmodernist theories and concepts that I found stimulating, I will build a theoretical framework that will support my main argumentation. In the first place, I will expand on Călinescu's postmodernism, Foucault's “death of man”, Lyotard's “incredulity towards meta-narratives”, and Peter Sloterdijk's “critique of cynical reason”. I will use the implications of their theories (the scepticism towards universal ideas, anthropocentric modes of conceptualization, the authority of reason; the propensity for self-reflexivity, multiple-coding, historical self consciousness; and tolerance of ambiguities) to examine, from another standpoint, the transformations that led to and make up the postdramatic stage. For this end, I will delineate how the dissolution of the unity of character is mirrored by each of their modes of conceiving and relating to the human subject, the notion of identity and the world at large.

For instance, several of these postmodernist insights point towards schizophrenic modes of being and acting in the world. Not only they undermine the existence of a unitary self, revealing its multilayer and fractured nature, but they also expose human identity as a construct on which are

Thirdly, the identity, individuality, and presence of the main figure on the stage function as constitutive items in Petrus' *Robo a Gogo*.

9 Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre* (London: Routledge, 2006) 163.

written and attached narratives, actions, beliefs, will or the sense of belonging to a community. The postdramatic theatre reflects these by unmasking dramatic character as an artefact beyond the illusions of unity, conventions, and theatrical framing.

In the *fourth concluding chapter*, I will bring together the observations about the postdramatic characters that I arrived at in the previous two chapters. I will highlight again the main elements that inform them, namely the dramaturgical strategies that configure non-realist, non-individualistic and non-unitary characters, the innovations of the acting techniques, and the prevalence of non-dramatic shaping devices and means. Additionally, I will put forward some other lines of thought that could be pursued for the examination of the nature and workings of the postdramatic characters.

Remarks

My research work, as well as my methodological approach, relies very much on the idea of continuity. Rather than a break in tradition, I interpret postdramatic theatre in terms of a strong continuity with the previous forms. Similarly, in my paper, I try to show that the death of the dramatic character is far from being a real death and amounts instead to a restructuring of character, of its nature, performing and workings. This restructuring is the effect, on one hand, of the expansion of the dramaturgical strategies of character brought about by the anti-realist movements (which have been propelled by symbolism at the end of 19th century). On another hand, it is as much the effect of the acute disturbance and break up of the unity of character. The dissolution of unity has been mutually dependent on the postmodernist subversion of identity, unity, and grand narratives, and on the move towards uncertainty, plurality and hybridity (which have been exacerbated starting from the second half of the 20th century). Hence, in my paper, I will highlight both the elements of continuity at the level of character, and the elements of discontinuity. I will present the latter as being informed by both the multiple innovations performed by the theatre and drama reformers, and by the changes in our modes of conceptualization and relating to the world.

Additionally, my research aligns to Erika Fischer-Lichte's theory of the history of European theatre and drama. According to her, the manner in which characters appear in theatre is mutually inspired by both the culture in which they are created in writing, and the culture in which they are personified on the stage. Characters stand either as idealisations or illustrations of human types, either as reflections of the general questions on the human nature and identity, both particular to the historical period which gave life to them. Henceforth, the present paper can be taken as a

contribution to her project of writing the history of theatre as a history of identity¹⁰. Specifically, by following her interpretation of the 20th century's theatre as the theatre of the "new" man, I will attempt to catch the sight of his latest face, of the 21st century's "new" man, as he shows it on the stage of postdramatic theatre.

Case studies

Throughout my paper, I reference four postdramatic performances, namely *Hamlet* - directed by Elizabeth LeCompte (premiered in 2007); *Ich schau dir in die Augen: gesellschaftlicher Verblendungszusammenhang!* - written and directed by René Pollesch (premiered in 2010); *Golgota Picnic* - written and directed by Rodrigo García (premiered in 2010); and *Robo a Gogo* - written and directed by Petrus/Wayn Traub (premiered in 2011). The dramaturgical strategies employed by these prominent Western theatre makers subvert traditional constructions of character, undercutting psychological traits, individuality, and unitary identity. The images of the humans and figures they create have served me to reinforce my views on the nature of postdramatic theatre, and my analysis of the postdramatic characters.

10 Erika Fischer-Lichte, *History of European Drama and Theatre* (London: Routledge, 2002) 6.

2. Stage Character - Old and New Developments

From its beginning in the 5th century BC, Western theatre has experienced different phases of developments, with dominant elements and characteristic features for each particular historical period. Similarly, if we look at stage character, the main focus of this paper, we come across to an extremely varied range of shapes and colours. For instance, it has been noted that while the essence and identity of Greek tragedy's characters lie in the actions they perform, Shakespeare's characters have acquired a life of their own. While the former are defined through the plot and narrative they belong to, lacking actual psychological and material grounding, the latter seem to exist independently of the dramatic story they spring from. Similarly, if the conflict in classical tragedy lies predominantly between the characters, the conflict in romantic tragedy lies primarily within the character. While in commedia dell'arte, the characters represent types of people that function on an extreme aesthetic of exaggeration, in the realist drama the characters are highly individualised people, with a true to life inner and outer constitution. If for the former, the characters are essentially and almost mathematically configured through the physicality of the actors (including voice, gesture, rhythm), for the latter, it is the lifelike synthesis and correspondence of all the stage elements, such as décor, costume design, mise-en-scène, gesture, voice, dialogue and actions that bring characters to life.

The veracious representation of human individuals and depiction of reality as experienced in the everyday living have been the major features and driving forces of the 19th century realist and naturalist theatres. This until the symbolism movement came forth with its "de-individualizing impulse"¹¹ and shattered the pillars of realism. And as it is in painting, where symbolism influenced and propelled the movements and innovations from the turn of the century, including impressionism, expressionism, and surrealism, the theatrical symbolism had a similar profound impact on the subsequent development of theatre. The main advancements and innovations of the 20th century avant-garde and neo-avantgarde theatre can all be traced, in one way or another, back to symbolism.

In this chapter, I will map some of the closest ancestors of the creators of postdramatic

11 Elinor Fuchs, *The Death of Character: Perspectives on Theater after Modernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996) 10.

character (such as Beckett, Pirandello, Maeterlink, Brecht, the avantgarde and the stage reformers of the last century). To this effect, I will outline, following Elinor Fuchs, the main characteristics of the dramatic character's representations as they appear in three radical currents of 20th century theatre, the allegorical, critical and theatricalist orientations. Later I will argue that these three directions have been preserved, and still function as dramaturgical strategies on the postdramatic stage. In the second section, I will examine the most representative characters of Samuel Beckett and search for those elements that can account for the climax of 20th century character, as the critical point of the “death” of the dramatic character. In the third section, I will investigate Lehmann's notion of the postdramatic theatre and the claims made over the dissolution character. I will argue against his undercutting of character and set up one conceptual setting that can frame the new language of the embodiment of the stage figures.

2.1. Modern orientations

During the symbolism movement, inwardness and inner conflicts, the cardinal elements for the post-Shakespearean stage, and especially for the Romantic theatre, have been dispersed. The symbolists put abstract patterning at the centre of their theatre. Their medium, the mystery plays, like their medieval counterparts, are metaphysical pieces that symbolically depict an eschatological journey with cosmic and existential values. Devoid of plot and linear narrative, the event at the core is the transubstantiation of the protagonist, achieved by shedding of the coat of concrete individuality and reaching for a greater plane of reality. Impregnated with symbols, abstract images and myths, the symbolist dramas are highly static, distant and poetical in nature.¹²

The dehumanising and de-individualising impulse in support of the “Idea”, was among the chief characteristics of this wave. As the Symbolist poet and critic Gustave Kahn said, “The essential aim of our art is to objectivize the subjective (the exteriorization of the Idea) instead of subjectivizing the objective (nature seen through an individual’s temperament)”.¹³ Instead of representing human individuality and concrete situations, writers focused on representing types, patterns and symbols of humanity. The plane of concrete and immediate reality would be doubled and shadowed by the more significant plane - the metaphysical and mythical reality – the former

¹² Ibid. 44-49.

¹³ Cited in *The Death of Char.* 29.

functioning just as a pretext or material for the articulation of the greater truths at the heart of existence. In the hands of the symbolists, the concrete planes were moulded into abstractions, symbols, and suggestive and mythical images far away from the illusionistic and realistic manner of representation. That there is a greater and truer reality than that which meets the eyes was in fact the underlying principle of the symbolists. The return to mysticism, spirituality, imagination and the unconsciousness in the late 19th century and early 20th century was in a great part due to the symbolists and their underlying philosophies, artistic practices, and ways of life. These spiritual and mystical forces pervaded the 20th century avant-gardes, including the revolutionary work of Meyerhold, Craig, Brecht, Artaud, Kantor, Grotowski, Brook.

According to the symbolists, the materially and psychologically well-built individual is an obstacle in achieving the goal of their art, for it could easily mislead the eye from the real plane of significance. For instance, Maeterlinck, one of the major theatre symbolists, believed that the corporeality of the actor hinders the portrayal of the symbolic figures which are substantially far richer in meaning than actual physical individuals. “There is a continual discord between the forces of a symbol and the forces of a man; the symbol of a poem is a centre, the rays of which stretch into infinity; and these rays... have an importance that is limited only by the might of an eye following them. But an actor’s eye oversteps the sphere of the symbol.... If man enters on the stage with all his faculties and his whole freedom, if his voice, gestures, attitude are not veiled by a great number of synthetic conditions, if even for a moment the human being appears such as he is, there is not a poem in this world which could stand that event.”¹⁴

The symbolist disbelief in the expressive powers of individual characters and concrete human images¹⁵ led to the decline of the individual character. If after Shakespeare, character came to occupy the structural and central place in theatre writing and representation, from the symbolist movement on, it lost ground to the game played between the philosophical and ideological layering of the play. The realistic depiction, individuality and materiality of human figures were losing their place as the dramaturgical engine and basic signifiers of the stage. According to Fuchs, this undercutting of the autonomy of the dramatic character was taken further into the 20th century by three particular playwrights and makers. She coins the three manners in which Strindberg, Brecht, and Pirandello subverted the individualistic and illusionary representation of the human figure the allegorical, critical and theatricalist orientations. And to achieve this, they all played and took

14 Cited in *The Death of Char.* 30.

15 Ibid. 31. Although not officially part of the symbolism movement, Anton Chekhov often signalled the symbolist problem of human representation. For instance, in Act 1 of *The Seagull*, when Nina bemoans the fact that it is hard to act in the play within the play for it doesn’t have living characters, Treplev retorts “Living characters! We don’t have to show life as it is, even as it ought to be, but as we see it in our dreams!”

farther from the realist horizons, the symbolist multiple interplaying between the concrete/material and abstract/metaphysical levels.

For example, Part 1 of Strindberg's *To Damascus*, which marks the "beginning of the modernist tradition of allegorical mystery play",¹⁶ depicts the journey of its protagonist, the Stranger. It is imbued with biblical and mythical stories, symbols and patterns that mould the Stranger's character development. On another hand, figments of his inner self are projected outside upon the figures that he encounters on his journey. Due to the circular and allegorical nature of the play, the character doesn't have a coherent unitary self, with corresponding inner and outer traits. Instead he represents a multidimensional entity whose journey towards redemption gives itself to a metaphysical and ideological exegesis. He can be read both horizontally, through the variety of concrete aspects and patterns that he follows, and vertically, through the multitude of implications and interpretations inscribed in his journey. Brecht, on another hand, operates a split between the character and the actor impersonating it, by transforming character breaking into a focal dramaturgical strategy. The disconnection between the mask and the person behind the mask enables the audience to perceive human identity as a construct determined by a variety of socio-political relationships. This fictive separation between the actor and the character represents as well a direct denouncement of psychology and the belief in an inherent, permanent human nature.¹⁷ Through this particular alienating device, Brecht not only questions individual autonomy and identity, but he also ironically undermines the concrete, anecdotal level exposing it as a conceptual and theatrical artefact.

The third direction, theatricalism, emerged foremost with Luigi Pirandello's meta-theatrical plays. His works deconstruct the theatrical act, and explore its conventionality, and framing power. For instance, in *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, he cuts right into the basic human structure of the stage, by separating the characters from the actors. And contrary to Brecht, he provides the former pair, the characters, the bigger consciousness. "In place of the illusion of definability, substantiality, continuity – all springing from the illusion of unmediated and spontaneous life – character here is split into two unsatisfactory halves, each being granted one or another of these essential traits. The six characters are definable, substantial, and continuous, but become strangely truncated aesthetic objects through their very exaggeration of these traits. The others, the actors, seem to have the attributes of unmediated and spontaneous life, but at the same

16 The allegorical strain is also called the metaphysical/idealist strain of modernism, due to the existential and ontological implications, along with the metaphorical methods of expression, so characteristic for this type of dramaturgy.

17 Ibid. 32-33.

time are undefined and insubstantial.”¹⁸ While the characters are attributed too much substance and seek to escape the particular narratives that circumscribe them, the actors, on the other hand, feeble and under-imagined, are in the search for a text that can provide them substantial materiality. And theatre, the only space where they both come into being, becomes a space of impossibility. Pirandello’s meta-theatre subverts the idea of unitary identity on the stage, pointing as well to the inherent paradox of the stage – it is a liminal space where two fundamentally different planes crush directly into each other. He points in this way to the inherent discord between the playwright’s imagination and the textual representation of the dramatic characters, on one hand, and between the actor’s role playing and the embodiment of the dramatic characters.

Through the imaginary coupling of the character and the actor, Pirandello points to the impossibility of their complete encounter. The actors cannot adequately personify the characters, as they only produce a deformed, false mask in which the characters cannot recognize themselves and which they cannot accept as their own. The unembodied, real self of the character cannot fully harmonize itself with the embodied, false self of the actors. The problem of the six characters is caused by the basic mismatch between one’s actions and one’s identity, or, differently put, between appearance and being, role and actor. Both the belief in the intimate interconnection between what one does and what one is, and the idea that the identity of the character can be realised or achieved through the role of the actor pertain to the line of thought that can be traced all the way back to Aristotle. These tenets, which have been standing at the basis of the theatrical act itself and associated dramatic construction, are heavily disturbed here.¹⁹

Every actor plays differently the same character, and so talking about the uniqueness or even the identity of the character is highly questionable. The multitude of roles and deformed masks as different expressions of the same character brings forth the question of self identity and the illusionary nature of individuality²⁰. Pirandello challenges the idea of individual identity, exposing it as multiple and relative, by giving dramatic expression to the incongruous contact between being and performing, and between being and writing a character. He opens up the theatrical act, by reiterating the conventions and framing at work in the process of representation.²¹ This allows him

18 Cited in *The Death of Char.* 34.

19 Erika Fischer-Lichte, *History of European Drama and Theatre* (London: Routledge, 2002) 311-312.

20 “So we have this illusion of being one person for all, of having a personality that is unique in all our acts. But it isn’t true. We perceive this when, tragically perhaps, in something we do, we are as it were, suspended, caught up in the air on a kind of hook. We perceive that all of us was not in that act, and that it would be an atrocious injustice to judge us by that action alone, as if all our existence were summed up in that one deed” complains The Father from *Six Characters in Search of an Author*.

21 “Yes, but haven’t you perceived that it isn’t possible to live in front of a mirror which not only freezes us with the image of ourselves, but throws our likeness back at us with a horrible grimace?” protests The Son from the same play.

to expose the paradoxes and thin layers on which the theatrical act stands, as well as the puzzles at the core of human identity.

A reason for which I chose to follow Elinor Fuchs' tripartite division of the modern theatre is precisely the fact that it aptly covers an entire range of types of changes undergone by character. The metaphysical strain depicts very well the transformations performed on the character with regard to the horizontal axis of the stage world so to speak. It expanded character's signifying powers, changing the focus from concrete individuals to human types and patterns of humanity. The theatricalist orientation accounts for the developments performed on the vertical axis of the stage, self-reflectively opening up the theatrical act itself. It not only literally brought the drama's character on the stage, but it also metaphorically de-masked the actors of the stage. Finally, the critical orientation accounts for the changes performed with regard to the relationship between stage and auditorium. If the unitary, emphatic identification of the spectators with the characters on stage has been mostly taken for granted until Artaud and Brecht, the critical orientation inaugurated a whole new range of viewing positions and modes of looking, more critical, engaged, and active. These have been made possible and correspond precisely to the splitting of the human unit of the stage in multiple moments of subjectivity and identity.

These orientations demonstrate that the symbolist undercutting of the individuality, and materiality of the character has not been a "one-time" solitary gesture, but it was taken further into the 20th century theatre, in the most unusual and provocative ways. By foregrounding these innovative developments and dramaturgical strategies that the stage witnessed during the last century, we can frame the discussion of the postdramatic theatre in terms of continuity, extension and expansion of the former. Correspondingly, what is regarded as the death of the dramatic character can as well be rethought in terms of innovative transformations and transfigurations. Particularly, these latter transformations are due to the multiple expansions, disruptions, and interventions performed at the level of theatre's human unit. On the level of writing, these are comprehensively accounted by the allegorical, theatricalist, and critical orientations of character. Initiated in the first half of the 20th century, they continued to influence the subsequent forms of theatre, prominently the absurd dramatists, and later the postdramatic theatre. In the next section, I will show how these directions have not only lived on, but also how paired with another innovation – the subversion of the dramatic shaping devices – informed other developments of character as displayed by Samuel Beckett's figures.

2.2. Beckett's empty figures

The individuality, materiality, identity and coherency of the character were gradually dissolved on the 20th avant-garde theatrical scene. No doubt, inspired by them, Beckett went even further adding a new dimension to the subversions of character - the dismantling of the character's dramatic shaping devices. In this section, I will underscore the mode in which he undermines the individuality and coherency of character, by looking briefly at four of his exemplary figures. For this, I will forefront the manner in which he disposed of even more of the conventionalism of dramatic character by exploring the failure of language, plot, dialogue, speech, and action. Simultaneously, I will highlight some of the aspects that bring his characters closer to the previous directions, particularly in terms of usage of the allegorical, critical and theatricalist dramaturgical strategies.

The paragons of the Absurd Theatre, Vladimir and Estragon, are frequently regarded as the “journeying Everyman”²². They are not individual characters, but rather figures, symbols, whose iconic nature is often directly appointed in the replies of the dramatic persons. When Pozzo asks who are they, Vladimir answers “We are men”, and Estragon replies before with “Adam” at the same question. “He’s all humanity” retorts Estragon referring to Pozzo, after the latter lost all his possessions, his illusionary reason to be. Although sometimes interchangeable, Didi and Gogo function as two halves of a single “theatrical dynamic”²³, standing as complementary aspects of the human being. If Vladimir represents the intellectual side, Estragon represents the physical part (one has a problem with his hat, the other has a problem with his shoes; one has stinking breath, the other stinking shoes; one is always hungry for meaning and discussions, the other for food).²⁴

Instead of plot, *Waiting for Godot*'s narrative is reduced to the experience of waiting, an experience shared live with the audience. Thus, while the subject of the play is not a particular event, but a human basic situation, similarly, the characters are not individuals, but attitudes, states of being. Such is that the characters show in its most elementary state, what it is to exist, to “be there”.²⁵ On the verge of disintegration, they cling to games, routines and small chatter. “We always find something, eh Didi, to give us the impression that we exist” observes Gogo. They fill the

22 Elinor Fuchs, *The Death of Character: Perspectives on Theater after Modernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996) 46.

23 Eugene Webb, *The Plays of Samuel Beckett* (London: Peter Owen, 1972) 26.

24 Ibid. 26-28.

25 David Bradby, *Beckett: Waiting for Godot* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) 25.

emptiness, and void resorting to pure play and elementary theatrical devices – gesture, movements, words – that give them a hint of identity, or the impression of living. Their pasts and their relationships are dubious and uncertain, their memory is dysfunctional, and their dialogue impersonal and mostly abstract.²⁶ In this manner, Beckett not only explores the failure of language, as it is so often acknowledged, but the failure of the dramatic shaping devices as well.

In the universe of Vladimir and Estragon, all the patterns that used to give a meaning and structure to experience, such as time, space, memory, action, speech, and thought, fall apart²⁷. This reflects the world of the modern man, conscious of the failure of all systems of thought that tried to explain the human being and the universe (the “corpses” to which alludes Vladimir in Act II). The world of the absurd is this modern world at the limit, at the apex of its own awareness of the lack or failure of values, certainties, meaning, and universal ideas. The characters are confronted with the only choice left: to accept the illusory meaning of the universe, or to embrace the vision of a meaningless, absurd universe. In a world torn with shattered beliefs, the impulse for action crumbles, while insecurity and desolation prevail. In such a cosmos, life leads to paralysis, time comes to a standstill, and man is suspended in an endless, aimless act of waiting.

As Fuchs remarks, with *Waiting for Godot*, Beckett pushed the panoramic type of staging to its parodistic limit. With *Endgame*, and later plays, he pushed the concentrated model – the alternative dominant type of staging particular to the Western theatre – to its extreme limit²⁸. Instead of an endless and timeless world, in *Endgame*²⁹ we deal with an imploded universe. Here, the four dramatic persons are the sole survivors of an unknown catastrophe which destroyed the entire world. In a closed space of pure isolation, they are blocked in a universe consisting of their own ways of thinking and deadening routines. Their empty space functions as both their shelter and their prison, and completely cuts them off from the reality outside and life itself.³⁰

In her analysis of the play, Fischer-Lichte distinguishes the principle of fragmentation as

26 Ibid. 29.

27 Eugene Webb, *The Plays of Samuel Beckett* (London: Peter Owen, 1972) 31-36.

28 Elinor Fuchs, *The Death of Character: Perspectives on Theater after Modernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996) 92

29 Erika Fischer-Lichte, *History of European Drama and Theatre* (London: Routledge, 2002) 324-325. While for Fuchs *Waiting for Godot* marks the end of modern dramaturgy, for Fischer-Lichte it is *Endgame* that holds the fatidic position. She inscribes this play in the tradition of “apocalyptic plays” which mark and dramatize historical moments of transition. According to her, among these end plays stands Euripides’ *The Bacchae* which marks the end of the Greek tragedy and polis – the last remains on stage, the wrecked corpse of Pentheus, symbolize the dead “body” of the human community from which sprang the polis and tragedy. Shakespeare’s *King Lear* marks another moment of transition through the apocalyptic imagery of the natural relationships which, until then, had been the underlying pillars of family, society and the state. Strindberg’s *Dance of Death I* points to the end of bourgeois family and society by depicting family as lying on biological, but illusionary power struggles which can only lead in the end either to inhumane suffering or to death.

30 Eugene Webb, *The Plays of Samuel Beckett* (London: Peter Owen, 1972) 55.

the core device of all the dramatic structures of the play. Not only the names and bodies of the figures are made up of broken, deteriorating pieces, but also the traditional dramatic devices, particularly speech and action, that normally shape the identity of the characters are completely malfunctioning. The dialogue amounts to a series of questions and answers that are senselessly repeated over and over again, and, at times, indifferently exchanged between the characters. Moreover, while these clichéd sentences might have had some meaning once, now they ring empty and shallow. Language and communication fail and do not convey nor the feelings, nor the thoughts of characters. The actions performed which are as simple, fragmented, and devoid of significance, are also repeated over and over again. Hamm's identity, which is made up of allusive shards of tragic figures, such as Oedipus, Lear, Hamlet, Richard III, or of romantic figures that rebel against their fathers or God, constitutes a parodic subversion of the dramatic hero. Clov, in its turn, is also made up of pieces and allusions to circus clowns, and comedians, or to different servant characters from commedia dell'arte, Spanish theatre, Shakespeare, and Molière. Fragmented on all levels of identification, the characters from *Endgame* lie on the verge of the death of modern character.³¹

In *Endgame* and other similar plays, such as *Krapp's Last Tape*, *Play, Not I*, and *Happy Days*, the characters are solipsistic figures totally drawn into them selves who put their own history in place of the world. And the condition of their existence is the audience – the personal history must be heard by someone, and the subject must be perceived by someone. In *Endgame*, as well as in *Waiting for Godot*, not only that the characters are aware of the theatrical conventions and the rules of performances, but also representation comes very closely on the same plane as presentation, of the absolute here and now of the performance. Moreover, as Fuchs notes, by blurring the boundaries between human and the universe, the inner and the outer world, foreground and background, Beckett put groundlessness in the centre of his stage. His worlds thrive on the lack or impossibility of definition and perspectivism, on the spatial and temporal levels alike. She associates these absurd worlds with Bob Wilson's landscapes, and Richard Foreman's hyperspaces which "are performing worlds, elsewhere without elsewhere, imaginative spaces still shrewdly aware of their life in the theatre".³²

Beckett's characters mark an important point in the evolution of character. Their memory and individual, personal traits are either highly dysfunctional, either absent. The lack of real plot and action is the sign of their inability to undertake any actions. The dialogue, repetitive and stereotypical, is devoid of meaning and fails to be a vehicle for communication, ideas, or social

31 Erika Fischer-Lichte, *History of European Drama and Theatre* (London: Routledge, 2002) 327-329.

32 Elinor Fuchs, *The Death of Character: Perspectives on Theater after Modernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996) 93.

relations. All the conventional dramaturgical devices that shape individual and psychological characters fail on Beckett's stage. The characters, lacking an authentic personal identity, they represent patterns, states of mind, psychological forces, figments of human consciousness (as experienced at the limits of human existence). "But at this place, at this moment of time, all mankind is us, whether we like it or not" plainly reveals Vladimir.

The symbolist influence on Beckett's work lies in his creating and presenting a whole, poetic imagery of being in the world instead of representing a progressive succession of actions based on linearity and causality. His plays are heirs to the allegorical orientation, because their meanings are allusive, multifaceted and ambiguous, and they are infused with philosophical and existential values (including and foremost on the level of characters). He is heir to the critical orientation, in that he confronts the audience with disconcerting and shocking pictures of the present day reality. His tragicomedies critically point not only to the failure of communication and of language, but to the collapse of an entire society whose relativism and uncertainties crush the individual and his strivings towards a meaningful life. By making the familiar – the pure act of living, of being in the world – strange, and the strange – the irrational feeling of absurdity – familiar, Beckett pursues the Brechtian direction as well. And because of his exploration of the dramatic means, as well as the blurring of the boundary between representation and presentation, highlighting the here and now of the performance, he is nonetheless also heir to the theatrical orientation.

In this way, the theatricalist, allegorical, and critical directions have been carried further all together in one of the most prominent playwrights of the last century. But what distinguishes Beckett's work from these previous innovators is the high degree of manipulation and exploration of the dramatic character's shaping devices. If in the latter dramatists' plays one can still distinguish a plot and definite actions, coherent thoughts and functional dialogue, it is precisely their failure, along with the breakup of language, that configure the worlds and characters of Beckett.

Moreover, I chose the term "empty figure" for these characters to highlight these two distinct and overlapping transformations of the character. In one sense, his works perform an emptying of the dramatic meaning, by representing elementary states of mind instead of individual persons. Secondly, his plays perform an emptying of the dramatic signs and means, through methods of fragmentation, concentration and a type of minimalistic asynchronous usage of the dramatic devices. For these aspects, Beckett stands among the most important ancestors of postdramatic theatre – a theatre on which not only the traditional shaping devices are fragmentarily employed (away from the old diachronic, coherent and causal manners), but a theatre on which the

devices are foregrounded as conventions. In the next section, I will investigate the theory of the postdramatic theatre, and frame the postdramatic character in terms of continuity with the developments presented until now. Moreover, in the next chapter I will forefront the main element that informs the difference between the dramatic and the postdramatic characters, namely the unity of character. However subverted was in the plays of Brecht, Pirandello and Beckett, the unity of character has been demolished on the postdramatic stage.

2.3. Postdramatic theatre

Fuchs, referring to the post-Beckettian theatre, maintains that Thought, “shadowed by the slighted Aristotelian category of Spectacle”, took the place of Character as the dominant dramaturgical principle and main signifier of the stage. She disregards thus the possibility that this new interest for “the abstract play of philosophical and ideological levels”³³ that pervaded the 20th century theatre might have been in fact fostered in great measure by the developments performed at the level of character. The non-dramatic modes in which human figures appear on the stage have opened up a new range of signification for theatrical representation³⁴. My position, which I will argue for in this section, is that the expansion of the dramaturgical possibilities and mechanisms (especially those belonging to stage character), and not character’s losing its structural position, is among the major reasons for the turn of focus from the conceptual to the narrative plane³⁵.

In his seminal study of postdramatic theatre, Lehmann argues for a somewhat similar position as Fuchs does. Nevertheless, he justly binds the theatre’s emancipation from the domination of the dramatic text with the departure from all traditional dramatic conventions, including the dissolution of all the three fundamental unities (i.e. the unity of time, space, and action). Although the avant-garde and neo-avangarde theatre had already challenged them, the postdramatic theatre undertakes a step further, by overthrowing the unity still very much at work until the 1970s - the one between the play text and the theatrical act itself. If the (written) drama has been the original material for theatre, and the dramatisation of the play text the basic procedure for

33 Ibid. 31.

34 On the basis of which one might alternatively argue for an even stronger position – that the philosophical and conceptual interplaying is not only fostered by the developments performed at the level of character, but it also functions prominently at precisely the level of the stage character.

35 It is worth noting that the focus put on “Thought” influenced not only the subsequent developments of theatre, but of dance too. Maybe it would be interesting to trace back the roots and influences of the contemporary conceptual dance and see if there are any points that lead back to the theatricalist and metaphysical strategies.

the creation of theatre performances, now the art of the stage has overthrown the authority of the written text and the hierarchical structure that it carried along. And along with the primacy of the play text and the principle of dramatisation of the written text, the interest in a holistic method of representation, based on unity and synthesis, has greatly diminished as well.³⁶

While it is hard to overlook the fact that in the present theatre practice the art of staging has taken precedence over the art of dramatic writing, play texts³⁷ are still written and very much relevant for the process of theatrical representation. The major difference is that the text is no longer the originating, primordial entity, but represents just another element of the working process.³⁸ And there is no doubt that the linguistic turn, along with the scepticism and doubts about language, had a powerful impulse including on the de-literalisation of the arts, the transformation of the relationship between theatre and drama being one such instance.³⁹

Fischer-Lichte translates the move towards de-literalisation as the move towards the “re-theatricalisation” of the theatre. And she associates it with two interrelated developments: on one hand, the recuperation or the search for theatre’s own proper language doubled by the return to the ritual origins⁴⁰, and, on the other hand, the negation of the individual and the search for a “new man”. While the former developments led to the clear cut offensive to realism and the subsequent abandonment of the mimetic intentions in favour of the desire to create and evoke new worlds, whether invisible or imaginary, the latter developments led to the replacement of the individual figure with human types and patterns, transindividuals, and transpersonal forces that act through the individuals. Moreover, this latter orientation functioned on two levels – in theatrical writing and production. On the level of writing, she distinguishes O’Neill’s trans-individual figures, Pirandello’s multiple personality figures, Brecht’s characters with their too excessively exchangeable personalities, and Beckett’s disintegrating or solipsistic figures. And on the level of actual practice, the art of acting was taken further by Meyerhold’s biomechanical actor, Artaud’s hieroglyphic actor,

36 Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre* (London: Routledge, 2006) 56-57.

37 Which give themselves to a more monological and lyrical form, rather than the traditional dialogue-based form.

38 The common practice of the postdramatic theatre maker is either to write the text prior to the production, either to work it out together with the actors before or during the production. Thus, at least in some cases, postdramatic theatre reconnects to its roots from Ancient Greece, where the principle of *l’auteur* stood at the basis of theatre practice. By assuming the role of the writer too (and sometimes also that of the performer), the director becomes the principle master of ceremonies.

39 It is Nietzsche who introduced the problem of the language by condemning it as „the sickness of our civilisation”. Later, Wittgenstein’s systematic critique of the limits of language and his disconcerting sentence of keeping one’s silence on all the matters which cannot be properly said/transmitted through language, enforced significantly the doubts about propositional language. From then onwards, the scepticism towards language become so embedded in the philosophical practice and the world at large, that, after the middle of 20th century, philosophy of language and linguistics have established themselves as widespread, valuable and highly esteemed theoretical fields and academical departments.

40 Which both account for the move towards visibility, musicalisation, and a certain de-semanticisation of the language in favour of the semanticisation of the body and objects onstage.

Grotowsky's holy actor, Brecht's new man of the epic theatre, and even Craig's Über-Marrionette (which, despite the many distrusts towards the actual actor, underscores precisely his search for the ideal actor of the Theatre of the Future - a theatre capable of making visible the invisible powers of Movement).⁴¹

Not surprisingly, Fischer-Lichte distinguishes the same dramatists that Fuchs does as prominent representative for the search of the new man. Besides, she underlines the innovative orientations at the level of stage practice, emphasising thus the other half of the stage human unit – the performer. Doubtlessly, this second line of development – the actor in relation to the character – would be worthy of pursuing for a greater understanding of the transfiguration of the postdramatic character out of the dramatic forms. For instance, Artaud's hieroglyph actor was meant to completely turn the individualistic, logocentric, psychologist representational body of the actor into a pure moving sign. To this effect, he professed the move away from a word-centred language to a poetry of the space which would make use of all physical means of the stage - music, sound, intonation, gesture, dance, mime – prominently sound and movement in all its forms. The postdramatic turn away from physicality as a means to an end to pure physicality (and physicality as an end in itself) certainly is greatly owed to this Artaudian struggles of turning the actor into a pure hieroglyph, a physically moving sign. Moreover, the essence of Grotowski's holy actor is found in the strive for self-revelation, total presence, complete control of one's body, and the uncovering of everything that is natural while shedding of everything that is artificial and superfluous. Undoubtedly, Grotowski's innovative and highly experimented methods have extensively influenced at least one aspect of the postdramatic figure, namely the intensification of the presence of the performer.

Lehmann, on another hand, foregrounds precisely these two avant-gardist aspects of the performer/actor. But according to him, the *actor's* role playing has been replaced by the intensification of the *performer's* presence and physicality, both central aspects of the postdramatic theatre.⁴² By rendering pure physicality and the absolutization of the body as central theatrical means of the postdramatic stage, he substitutes any discussions about the disruption of the unity of character, or the negation of the individual. Particularly, he reduces the meaning and reality of the play of masks and embodiments to the “auto-sufficient physicality, which is exhibited in its intensity, gestic potential, auratic presence and transmitted tensions”.⁴³ This seems to apply more to contemporary dance where the human bodies are completely disconnected from any meaning,

41 Erika Fischer-Lichte, *History of European Drama and Theatre* (London: Routledge, 2002) 283-351.

42 Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre* (London: Routledge, 2006) 57.

43 *Ibid.* 95.

narrative, psychology and human representations – a matter that he recognizes repeatedly.

Later he concedes that the de-semanticisation of the human body on the theatrical stage leads to a paradox: “As the body no longer demonstrates anything but itself, the turn away from a body of signification and towards a body of unmeaning gesture turns out as the most extreme charging of the body with significance concerning the social reality. The body becomes the *only subject matter*.”⁴⁴ This paradoxical reversal process has been often pointed out on the stage of contemporary dance. And with good reasons, it has been noted, for instance, that the human body can hardly ever function as a gender, cultural, or political neutral body. This happens as the performer’s presence always carries a remainder, a trace. In other words, any presentation involves a certain degree of representation.

The intensification of presence and the move away from the mimetic intentions don’t amount to the complete purgation of meaning, fiction, embodiment, and human representation. At the level of character, the intensification of the actor’s presence doesn’t eliminate his actual acting and playing with and among identities, or embodiments of human figures, states and patterns, modes of being in the world. What it does instead is to demonstrate and present the intricacies of the theatrical act, the subject, and the fluid boundaries between facts and fiction, reality and illusion, representation and presentation. And it is precisely the synchronous use of overlapping means and devices (such as voice, sound, gesture, mime, physicality, intensive presence, and embodiment) that constructs the postdramatic character and informs its inflated, fractured, and schizophrenic identity.

Furthermore, very often as spectators of a postdramatic performance, we find ourselves in deep ambiguity, not being able to discern if the man on the stage is the actual/“real” actor, or an assumed/embodied figure, if what happens is real or staged, fact or fiction. On the postdramatic stage, these function very often as an intended effect, pointing precisely to the problem of representation, of the intertwining of the planes between original and copy, facts and fiction, reality and illusion. Instead of the real presence of the performer on the stage damaging the illusion of character, as Lehmann holds,⁴⁵ it rather enforces the ambiguities of representation, reality and identity, acknowledged so sharply by the avant-garde playwrights, directors and theorists.

For instance, facts and fiction, presence and embodiment intertwine thoroughly in René Pollesch’s *Ich schau dir in die Augen*. In this intensively physical one-man show, Fabian Hinrichs constantly moves from one acting style to another, creating a complex interplay between the

44 Ibid. 96.

45 Catherine Bouko, *The Musicality of Post-Dramatic Theatre: Hans-Thies Lehmann's Theory of the Independent Auditory Semiotics*. 32-33. <http://www.enl.auth.gr/gramma/gramma09/bouko.pdf>

character on stage, the actor, and the man behind. On the verbal level, he emphatically acknowledges the here and now of the performance, while (from a distance) he critically tackles dogmas about the body, soul, and our need for society. Through this game of simultaneity and collage he completely parodies the participatory type of theatre. His very direct invitations to the audience to participate are constantly undermined and proved to be a mere illusion, a joke played by the performer on the audience. Nevertheless, when the next “joke” happens, the audience is confronted with the same puzzle: “should we respond or not? is this staged or real?”. And as he moves from one type of embodiment to another, the audience cannot really tell who he “really” is from one moment to the next. The multifarious qualities of presence, the philosophical extensive monologues, the ironic addresses to the public, and the subversive range of embodiments undermine altogether any sense of the unity and identity of his character.

Petrus' *Robo a Gogo* is another example of how the fluid boundaries between illusion and reality, presence and embodiment collapse directly into each other. Here, Peter, an advanced robot with real gestural and dancing skills, figures as the main character in the multiple theatrical frames, which are sequenced non-causally throughout the performance. For instance, the epic dimension is composed of the scenes in which Peter addresses the public directly, recounting from Petrus' point of view the voyage that took him all the way from Europe to Philippine and back, in his quest of the actual making of the performance. Themes, such as patriarchy, contemporary Western colonialism, and sexuality intricately invade this level, rendering Peter' stories, Petrus' morality and, in the end, the here and now of the performance highly questionable and relative. The juxtaposition of the presence of the robot with his embodiment of Petrus, and the voice over of the theatre maker destabilizes any sense of unity and individuality of this character. The other major frame of the performance is the allegorical plane, which consists in scenes in which Peter plays Jesus, re-enacting stories from the Bible. In this frame, the robots are multiplied, and their presence is coupled with manneristic acting styles, and ritualistic masks and costumes. Because the interplaying of these elements trace back to the meanings of the epic dimension, the identity of the characters (on the allegorical level) is multiplied, and fractured, and the sense of its reality and actuality is subverted.

The intertwining between the epic and the allegorical planes, and between presentation and representation structures in another manner Rodrigo García's *Golgota Picnic*. The allegorical plane of character is informed primarily by visuality, through the figurative and gestural dimensions of the figures on the stage which are underscored by their live video projections. This plane is simultaneously doubled by the epic plane – which is informed by the series of soliloquies and the

intermissions in which the actors openly prepare their next moving-sculpture type of figuration (by moving props and changing costumes openly on the stage). The former plane of figuration ironically explores biblical stories and myths, and the latter critically plays with the current myths of our society. Moreover, these planes constantly address each other, and they both aggressively invade the here and now of the performance (the former on a visual level, and the latter on the mental level). And in the end, these multiple games of simultaneity disrupt the unity and identity of character, as the performers non-linearly move from one role to another, changing positions, appearances, embodiments, figurations, and qualities of presence. One moment, the actors figure as impersonal forces that speak through the power of visibility, next moment they stand as mere performers, and the next they represent carriers and embodiments of the critical reason.

Given these, my central claim is that some scholars, including Lehmann, profess a too radical reading of the de-literalisation and retheatricalisation of theatre. While they give too much to visibility and musicality⁴⁶ of theatre, they take too much from literature and language (the language of the embodiment of figures including), by overly undermining precisely those elements that have been associated with the dramatic play text. From my point of view, when we say, in a too literal manner, that on the postdramatic stage there is no dialogue, plot or character, we overlook what is genuinely happening on the stage. Instead, a more accurate description would be to say that there isn't any longer *traditional* dialogue, *traditional* plot or *traditional* character. Instead of the prevalence of dialogue we have a profusion of monologues, language games, dysfunctional replies between the persons on stage, and direct speeches addressed to the audience. Instead of a clearly defined plot, woven by external and internal conflicts, or arranged in a causal manner, we have a non-hierarchical sequence or collage of actions, events, situations or occurrences. Instead of individual and unitary characters, we have ambiguous figures, with inflated, multiple, and fractured selves. Considering the reconfiguration of the connection between theatre and drama, and the transformation of the nature of the play text, the transfiguration of the elements carried along by the traditional dramatic text is not surprising. But to deem them extinct is an oversimplification.

Moreover, the entire history of the theatre could be conceived as a manipulation, distortion and playing with theatrical conventions, means and elements. For instance, the Greek Old Comedy not only displayed a high degree of musicality (by a movements-based structure) as so often exhibited in postdramatic theatre, but also made extensive use of character breaking, a strategy

46 By musicality I mean to include at least two different aspects of the postdramatic theatre: firstly, the preference for presentation over representation (as music has been often regarded as the most non-representational form of art), and secondly, to the non-linear, very often open, structure of the performance, where themes, motifs, movements, and variations are repeated, blended and sequenced very much like in a musical arrangement.

similar to those Brecht “first” explored in his epic theatre. Needless to remember that the core and structural element of *commedia dell'arte* was physicality, and its other associated aspects such as being a site-specific type of performance, as well as consisting of improvisations upon scenarios, are all features included on the postdramatic stage. Furthermore, one could also go as far as to say that the entire history of theatre consists, on another hand, in the explorations of the boundaries between reality and fiction, presence and illusion, materiality and imagination. It is at their many meeting points that the core nature of the theatrical act – the Movement, the transfiguration of reality, and man in the pure act of transformation – lies.

In dramatic performance, fiction presides over reality, illusion over presence, and representation over presentation. In the previous section, I highlighted the manner in which the metaphysical, critical, and theatrical directions explored and played out exactly the boundaries of these multiple planes. The metaphysical plays, along with the plays of Brecht, Pirandello and Beckett emphasised and explored “first” the fluidity and conventionality of these boundaries. In this section, I highlighted some ways in which these boundaries confront and collapse right into each other on the postdramatic stage. And this encounter and intertwining of the planes between reality and fiction, presentation and representation, presence and illusion, render postdramatic theatre, all at once, an essentially critical, theatricalist and metaphysical type of theatre. In this way, I have also underscored the main elements of continuity between the innovations carried by the three radical dramatists' new orientations⁴⁷ and the new forms of the stage (that came under the name of postdramatic theatre under the wedge of Lehmann). On another hand, among the main elements that convey the differences between the forerunner forms of character and the postdramatic character stands the unity of character. However unstable, subverted, and emptied out appeared in the works of Brecht, Pirandello, or Beckett, the unity of character and of identity hovers over the postdramatic stage in intricately dissolved forms. In the next chapter, I will highlight further precisely the nature of the dissolution of the unity of character. For this, I will firstly highlight the wider cultural settings that informed it – namely the multiple subversion of human identity on the philosophical and discursive levels. And secondly, I will analyse some examples of the modes in which the dissolution of the unity of character configures the present day postdramatic characters.

⁴⁷ coupled of course with the practice of the stage reformists such as Meyerhold, Craig, Artaud, Grotowski (a direction which, although often referenced and implied in my overall argumentation, I didn't pursue at large in my paper)

3. The Dissolution of the Unitary Self

Notwithstanding the conceptual profuseness and explanatory power of Lehmann's theory of the postdramatic theatre, it involves a faulty reductive view of the post-dramatic character. It not only fails to comprehensively account for the contemporary Western theatre by completely disregarding role playing and the art of acting still prevalent on the present day scene, but it also does injustice to the major theatre makers and writers of the 20th century, who developed and enriched the art of the stage, inclusively by bringing the man of stage in new and exciting directions. It is in the framework set up by Jarry, Maeterlinck, Pirandello, Beckett, Meyerhold, Craig, Artaud, Grotowski, Brecht, Brook that contemporary theatre makers and performers live and create. More or less consciously, and more or less conspicuously, nowadays-theatrical work carries their legacy. To pronounce the theatrical character dead and replace it with a somewhat neutral human figure that allegedly breaks the illusionary spell of the mask amount as well to undermining our understanding of the retheatricalisation of theatre and the search for the new man initiated at the turn of the last century.

In the second chapter, I outlined some of the developments performed at the level of character in order to set the inner context useful for understanding postdramatic character. In this chapter, I want to set the coordinates of the larger context which will serve for making out the face of the postdramatic character. For this purpose, I chose to focus on several theories of and about postmodernism, mainly for two reasons. Firstly, controversial as it may be, postmodernism has proved to be a productive framework through which to look at a variety of fields, such as philosophy, cultural studies, art history, and aesthetics. The variety of its application renders postmodernism a productive concept in multidisciplinary fields of studies, theatre studies including. Secondly, among the principal features and notions associated with postmodernism stand hybridity, the attack on authority and unity, the dismantling of long held concepts, such as reality, truth, self-identity, rationality, universality. These notions can set an alternative conceptual frame through which to look at postdramatic character.

Hence, in the next two sections, I will present several postmodernist insights as explanatory references that can support the main thesis of my paper: the subversion of the dramatic character, its associated metamorphosis and the dissolution of the unity of character reflect as much

the mentioned stage innovators and innovations, as they do the larger socio-cultural developments and the shifts in perception and conceptualization. Afterwards, I will use the concepts that underline these changes in perception and conceptualization of the human being, and the subject to analyse aspects of instances of postdramatic characters.

3.1. Cultural condition, social phenomenon and artistic style

Postmodernism escapes definition and lends itself to a varied usage. It has been conceived and employed in multiple ways: as a strategy or a way of thinking, as a series of cultural and social conditions or phenomena, as artistic style or practice. For instance, Matei Călinescu identifies two principal conceptual levels on which postmodernism manifested itself especially from 1940 until 1980. One is the philosophical level, encompassing diverse areas such as epistemology, hermeneutics, poststructuralism, the philosophy and history of science, and the other pertains to the cultural field, particularly to the dispute around modernism and avant-garde. According to him, although these two major usages of postmodernism haven't turned postmodernism neither into an epistemic structure, nor into a *Weltanschauung*, they present nonetheless distinguishable „family resemblances” that could be used to draft the physiognomy of this conceptual entity.⁴⁸

In philosophy, the postmodernist issues have been primarily associated with epistemological problems and notions, continues Călinescu. These have been informed, on one hand, by the numerous 20th century scientific revolutions and innovations, and, on the other, by the undermining of the Enlightenment project. These include issues such as indeterminacy, undecidability, relativism, Popper’s falsifiability, Kuhn’s paradigms and scientific revolutions. Such philosophical questions underscore both the deep crisis of the theoretical sciences and the subsequent self- reassessment of their identity and methodological legitimacy. Associated with this auto-reflexive character, stands another facet of postmodernism: the shift of focus from epistemology to hermeneutics – from the proclivity for transhistorical, universal notions and eternal laws, to a more historically self-conscious one.⁴⁹ For instance, Gianni Vattimo translates this move as the turn from the modern „strong thought” – a mode of thinking that is „domineering, imposing, universalist, atemporal, aggressively self-centred, intolerant in regard to whatever appears to

48 Matei Călinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987) 268-269.

49 Ibid. 269-271.

contradict it” – to its direct opposite, the postmodern „weak thought”.⁵⁰

Regarding the second conceptual setting, the cultural and art criticism, postmodernism overruns the discussion regarding the avant-garde and the contemporary practice. As Călinescu highlights, the historical avant-garde functions doubly: firstly and most importantly, it destroys, demystifies and rejects everything that has to do with the past, and, secondly, it invents, innovates the utterly new. Postmodernism, on the other hand, challenges the destructive double of the avant-garde and assumes accordingly an alternative position - the revisitation and reinterpretation of the past, and not in any way, but with irony, playfulness, parody, nostalgia, and even downright irreverence, impudence, and hostility.⁵¹ By reinterpreting the past, the newly found „dialogic space of understanding and self-understanding”, in a numerous way, postmodernism adopts a deeply pluralistic historicism.⁵²

Associated with this hermeneutical function, the multiple coding represents one of the most characteristic features of postmodernism.⁵³ The principle of multiple coding functions at least on three levels: firstly, it involves hybridity, as the work of art becomes a heterogeneous mix of styles, currents, forms and signs; secondly, the work of art can be read from a multitude of standpoints (for instance, Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose* can be read either on a philosophical, cultural, or semiotic plane); thirdly, while the work of art is intended for the complex reading of the small literate circle of artistic practice, it is nonetheless also intended for the pure enjoyment and simple understanding of the masses. Actual literary devices of multiple coding include „allusions and allusive commentary, citation, playful distorted or invented reference, recasting, transposition, deliberate anachronism, the mixing of two or more historical or stylistic modes”.⁵⁴

Furthermore, while the avant-garde used the principle of „showing, rather than concealing, the conventions and devices used in constructing a work of art”, postmodernism is focused on showing conventionality itself. „The device continues to show itself for the contrivance it is, but in doing so it also states that everything else is a contrivance too and that there is simply no escape from this”. Hence, artistic postmodernism challenges „not only the <reality> behind the image but

50 Cited in *Five Faces*. 272.

51 Ibid. 275-277.

52 Ibid. 282.

53 Ibid. 283. Multiple-coding is a concept he adopts from Charles Jencks, who introduced the idea of double coding in the theory of postmodern architecture. According to Jencks, „A Post-Modern building is doubly coded – part Modern and part something else: vernacular, revivalist, local, commercial, metaphorical, or contextual... It is also double coded in the sense that it seeks to speak on two levels at once: to a concerned minority of architects, an elite who recognize the subtle distinctions of a fast changing language, and to the inhabitants, users, passerby, who want only to understand to enjoy it”.

54 Ibid. 285.

also the reality, aesthetic or otherwise, of the image itself". Among the most frequent postmodern devices are: "a new existential or <ontological> use of narrative perspectivism, different from the mainly psychological one found in modernism[.]; the parodic thematization of the author[.]; the no less parodic but more puzzling thematization of the reader[.]; the treatment on an equal footing of fact and fiction, reality and myth, truth and lying, original and imitation, as a means to emphasize undecidability; self-referentiality and <metafiction> as means to dramatize inescapable circularity".⁵⁵ With these, conventionality is made into „an existential paradox" while reality is impeached as „a composite of construals and fictions".⁵⁶

As the art theorist maintains, postmodernism amounts rather to a series of frameworks that can both throw light on old issues and inspire new insights, or questions. These distinct conceptual settings carry nonetheless a family of similitude, which I will be highlighting more clearly in the next sections. Simultaneously to this, in the section below, I will survey more closely several of the philosophical questionings that postmodernist thinking set forth and construe their corresponding nuances in the field of theatre.

3.2. Postmodernist subversions of identity

As pointed before, among the postmodernist main features stands the subversion of concepts, such as presence, identity, rationality, representation. This is done by undermining the justification of the belief in their reality, unveiling them as constructions produced by our thinking or by the conditions and needs imposed by the mode and morphology of our existence. One of the prominent postmodernist undertakings has been the overthrowing of the philosophical debate about the nature of human identity, by exposing self identity as a construct in terms of either power relations, or cultural, social and linguistic practices. Similarly, on the theatrical stage, the unity of character has been disrupted by fore-fronting the conventions behind it, and unmasking individual character as a construction that fails to represent intelligibly the human subject. In this section, I will expound some of the main theories that have subverted the idea of a unitary identity. My position is that, however unsettling some of their implications and however formally disputed their

⁵⁵ Ibid 303-304. While Călinescu lists these as literary devices, one can unmistakably find corresponding strategies in other art fields as well in postdramatic theatre, as I will highlight later. Moreover, such literary devices are frequently used by Beckett as well, as the art theorist also acknowledges.

⁵⁶ Ibid. 305.

arguments are⁵⁷, their ideas have actually influenced contemporary thinking and artistic practice alike.

In *The Order of Things*, Foucault argues that 20th century marks the beginning of the **death of man**, as the basic conceptual unity, as the primary trade and engine of most areas of knowledge and activity. According to him, the end of the domination of humanist philosophy will eventually lead to a new epistemic paradigm in which the rational, modern man loses his authority and centrality. Among these subversions, stand as well the undercutting of humanist beliefs about the human subject. As Farrell notes, from a radical reading stance, Foucault's anti-humanism boils down to the rejection of human free will, autonomy, and self-consciousness. According to this standpoint, it is a web of mutually dependent relations of power and knowledge that determines the forms of human subjectivity and subverts the autonomy of the human subject.⁵⁸ The weak reading of his anti-humanist insights holds that, despite these multiple determinations of subjectivity, the human agent can actively manipulate this relational determinants in his strive for self-development, freedom and self-consciousness.⁵⁹

Foucault's idea that we are far from consciously self-constructing selves is highly dramatized on the postmodern stage. The manipulation and the foregrounding of the dramatic conventions of character lead to the break of the spell of the autonomy and unity. Through the intensification of the multilayer presence of the figures on the stage, their coherence is subverted. On the stage, the human subject becomes a multifaced and ambivalent element, with a multifarious nature, at times created through socio-cultural or mental conditions, at others self-created, at times performed, at others self-performed.

For instance, in Elizabeth LeCompte's *Hamlet*, the identity and unity of character are foregrounded, as the game of re-mixing copy with original, embodiment with presence physically stands out on stage. LeCompte deconstructs *Hamlet* - the film version of the live performance directed by John Gielgud in 1964 - and recomposes it live on stage through the multiple embodiments of the performers and the intricate dialogue with the past and the present day media

57 I will overlook the debate about the truthfulness or justification of the postmodernist theories that I will employ, and I will rather take their validity for granted. Hereby, I assume a „postmodernist” stance, which „theoretically” represents a tolerant and playful position conscious of the fragmentary, partial and temporary nature of theories. For example, it is well known that one can use the implications of Foucault's theory of the epistemic structures (on which relies the concept of the death of man) to de-legitimize it. And Lyotard's theory of the metanarratives is as well susceptible to a similar objection raised by the problem of self-reference. On another hand, several of these theories stand as generalisations that depict only particular communities or structures of the human society. For instance, it has been noted that Sloterdijk's critique of the cynical reasons applies only to the upper, so called intellectual class of the post-industrial societies.

58 Frank Farrell, *Subjectivity, Realism and Postmodernism: The Recovery of the World in Recent Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 272.

59 Ibid. 275.

society. Scenes from Gielgud's Hamlet are projected and remixed on the huge background of the stage, while, live on stage, the actors reproduce in minute details what happens on the screen. Moreover, Scott Shepherd's embodiment of the projected Richard Burton's embodiment of Hamlet, however outstanding and meticulous was on its own, is constantly and incoherently interrupted. This is the result, on one hand, of Shepherd's spontaneous and violent physical rearrangements - as he keeps on changing the positions of the body in order to represent the projected image as truthfully as possible. On another hand, the interruptions are informed by Shepherd's moving back and forth between the position of the performer to that of the director - as he constantly communicates with the projectionists when to push the forward button or when to skip to the next scene on the screen. In this way, Hamlet becomes an interplay of media images, copies, presence and multiple embodiments, whose identity constantly slides, and unity is deconstructed.

Another vision of the groundlessness of our age is offered by Lyotard's **incredulity towards meta-narratives**. According to him, the faith in completeness, universality, or totality underlying our meta-narratives has greatly faded and the idealistic stories of modernity have been replaced by a variety of local and heterogeneous "petits récits", or language games. This lack of a continuous meta-narrative and the compartmentalisation of knowledge give way to the collision between a multitude of localised, incommensurable language games. This, in turn, leads to a multiplication of perspectives that are partial, fluid, temporary. Moreover, because within each language game the human subject assumes different roles at different times, the break of the epistemic coherence gives way as well to the break of the subject in distinct, variegated moments of subjectivity. But as Lyotard stresses, we are developing a particular dexterity and mobility that can allow us to play with and within these fragmented, overlapping linguistic games.⁶⁰

This ability is typified for him by paralogy, the movement beyond or against logos. Going against established ways of thinking and reasoning norms amounts precisely to finding our way within the conglomeration of the linguistic games. This can be done either by finding and undertaking new moves within the web of games, either by manipulating, altering or changing the rules of the games, and inventing new ones.⁶¹ His view ultimately endorses the paradoxes, tensions and instabilities that belong not only to our view of the world, but to the world itself⁶². And this in

60 Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Manchester University Press, 1984) 15.

61 Ibid. 66.

62 While Călinescu holds that postmodernism can be understood in terms of a change of paradigm from the logic of *Or/And* binary to the logic of *Both/And* binary, we could understand Lyotard as professing an even more intricate change of paradigm, one that gives the go-by to the principles of the *bivalent logic* in favour of those of the *fuzzy*

turn leads to the multiplication of identity as to the multiplication of the heterogeneous moments of subjectivity - the temporary positions in the web of games.

On the stage, the incredulity towards meta-narrative is exceptionally mirrored by the departure from the trenchant authority of the text. While the theatrical performance stops being the univocal representation of its own meta-narrative - the text -, as well character stops being the univocal representation of one unique dramatic person. Instead of the grand (that is the individual, definable, or idealised⁶³) identity and the unitary character, we have a multitude of small identities and character as a complex interplaying between different levels of the selves, such as those of the actor, dramatic persons, or those standing for human patterns and imposing dramatic figures. Moreover, by revisiting the past, old models are thoroughly undermined, and idealised identities are rethought and critically redefined. One such example is Elizabeth LeCompte's interventions and deconstruction performed in *Hamlet*. In the end, her reconstruction of Hamlet live on stage leads to precisely a multitude of small identities, character becoming a paralogical interplay of images and embodiments.

Furthermore, among the tactics of the subversion of the authoritative unity of character stands radical re-theatricalisations by means of self-referentiality, intermediality and visuality (all fore-fronting devices in Elizabeth LeCompte's *Hamlet*). Another such strategy is the exposure of the theatrical framing power. This tactic has close affinities with the unveiling of the myths and stories that lie at the base of our belief, and the foregrounding of the frame systems that inform our values, judgements, and attitudes. For instance, such a strategy is centrally employed in René Pollesch's *Ich schau dir in die Augen*. Here, Fabian Hinrichs' multiple style acting informs a postdramatic character whose unity acts as a subversive element that structures the whole theatrical act. The character, on the level of identity, is constituted as much by Pollesch's critical and speculative text (emphatically informed in its turn by both Pollesch's identity as a theatre maker and by the inquisitive type of man who ponders on contemporary society's idiosyncrasies), as it is by Hinrichs' own identity and background. These all lead to a multitude of temporary, overlapping, but distinct identities that subverts the unity of character. And in its turn this dismembered unity discloses the metanarratives at work in theatrical representation and participatory type of theatre. It is in great

logic.

63 I use the term „idealised identity” in the following manner: if we contend that play texts display either historical representations or idealisations of the man of the epoch, we can refer to the characters embodying the visions of the hero of a particular historical period as carrying an „idealised identity”. For instance, in Greek tragedies this idealised figure (corresponding to the man of the Classical age of the Ancient Greek) appears to be the human being who confronts and fights with the higher forces of the world, profane and sacred alike, in the strive for spiritual and knowledge growth. In our very fluid and fragmented times, of moral relativism and scepticism towards universal ideas, we seem to have lost not only our heroes and models, but also the ability of believing or envisioning such spiritual models.

measure Hinrichs' paralogical embodiment of a non-unitary type of character that, on and on, subverts the audience's response and reception. His nimble moving from one type of acting and embodiment to another, throws the audience in the puzzlements of “is this real or staged?”, “am I supposed to participate or not?”, and awakens expectations, beliefs and ideas associated with theatrical representation and community. These constantly deterred and played out suspensions, performed by this postdramatic character, are what renders this intensive one-man show a parody of the participatory theatre (and implicitly a parody of our need for social communion and communication as it is also highlighted especially by the textual dimension).

In *Critique of Cynical Reason*, Peter Sloterdijk explores another facet of the postmodern world – our state of being given the manner in which we respond to the contemporary Western principles. He terms **Cynicism** the mode of consciousness generated by the shattering of the beliefs in universal values and objective ideas, including in the infallibility of human reason. Nowadays, the cynic knows that given any set of arguments, one can build counter-arguments and objections to it. And by living in a society and belonging to different social structures which all function according to some accepted ideologies, the cynic has to stick to principles that he cannot fully adhere to because of reason's incapacity to consistently justify them. This turns into a source of uneasiness, discontent, and even pessimism and life-denying attitude, claims Sloterdijk. In our society, the society of cynics, one is forced to act without the ability of being completely committed to one's actions. This lack of cohesion between reason and action makes the cynical consciousness an essentially schizoid one.⁶⁴

As an alternative to the cynic reasoning, Sloterdijk puts forward **Kynicism**. This mode of being revives the forgotten Ancient Greek agreement between theory and practice, between one's philosophy and life. Kynicism represents the rejection of the fallen idealist and universal beliefs by means of sarcasm, parody and irony. Instead of relying exclusively on reason, the kynic acts and reacts with every means he has against the falling universal values, be them low-brow strategies, such as banality, vulgarity and spontaneous bodily reactions⁶⁵. Rather than “speak against idealism, it lives against it”⁶⁶. Cheeky, optimistic and life-affirming, kynicism is nonetheless a subversive attitude that confronts power, order and the institutionalisation of the social structures, not just by the means of human reasoning, but with the whole body.⁶⁷

64 Sorgner, Stefan Lorenz. "In Search of Lost Cheekiness, An Introduction to Peter Sloterdijk's "Critique of Cynical Reason"." *Tabula Rasa* 15 Apr. 2011. <http://www.tabvlarasa.de/20/sorgner.php>

65 For instance, the way Diogenes Sinope did in Ancient Greece.

66 Cited in *In Search of Lost*.

67 Ibid.

In postdramatic theatre, one can find illustrations of both the cynical and the kynical modes of being. The lack of cohesion between the thoughts and actions of a character is the quintessential representation of cynicism. Postdramatic characters are seldom structured through the coherent use of dialogue/thoughts or plot/actions. By disconnecting the humans on stage from narrative, actions and dialogue, or by divorcing voice from the physical body or gesture, the figures on stage no longer function as entities with a consistent and unitary self, but as dis-harmonic entities trapped in a space of inaction and all-consuming critique.

For instance, in Rodrigo García's *Golgota Picnic*, the actors perform on two successive and sometimes overlapping levels: the epic-mental dimension, and the visual-gestural dimension. On the former level, they are trapped on Golgota, the death place par excellence, foremost figuring through their extended philosophical monologues which come one after another (addressed either to the audience, either to the other performers). On this level, which stands out as a place of inaction and autism, the figures verbally address and criticize our contemporary excesses, lack of values, greediness, egoism that we self-destructively perpetrate through the capitalist ideology. On this plane, the figures are foregrounded as the human cynical reason, which is trapped in its own self-awareness and all-consuming critique, and which paralyses action and real social interaction. The cynical consciousness is enforced on the visual-gestural level of the characters as well. On this plane, the postdramatic entities function as moving images, and, through the visceral force of visuality, they critically distort mythical and biblical images (re-claiming thus their critical commentaries on the ideologies and dogmas embedded in our contemporary society). Moreover, the sequence of the moving sculptures unrolls dis-harmonically, and fragmentarily, as they are openly constructed and deconstructed by the performers (through their naked presence as mere performers/constructors). In this way, once again the cynicism's lack of harmony between reason and real, coherent actions is fore-fronted.

On one hand, paradigmatic representations of the kynical attitude include the increased and emphatic use of physicality on stage, including the notorious blurring of the boundaries between human and animal, human and non-human. On another hand, kynicism covers the whole range of subversive attitudes, typical of postmodernism, that thrive on parody, irreverence, provocation, and outrage in their most direct, and physical forms. For example, Petrus' *Robo a Gogo* tackles also with the critique of Western ideologies, its excesses, loss of values and innocence, employing instead a type of kynical consciousness. Peter, the robot, personifies successively Petrus – acting as the theatre maker in search of his total theatre and transcendence – and Jesus – acting as the salvation figure that fights against the forces of evil. And while the character's speech critically deals with the

destructive nature of Western society, the postdramatic entity is enveloped in a thorough subversive atmosphere through the usage of strong imagery of sexuality, nakedness, and domination. And because, in the end, the figures representing the forces of good win over the forces of evil, the postdramatic entity carries a life-affirming and optimistic attitude. Notwithstanding, there is a peculiarity to this present form of cheeky cynicism. In order for this postdramatic character as the cynical consciousness to function and fully live against ideology, it has to transcend human physicality - as the human body of the actor is replaced by a form of Über-Marionette, the technological body of the robot.

4. Conclusion

For a start, it might be useful to clarify some terms whose meaning I implied, more or less evidently, in the previous chapters. By *stage character* I refer to the mask, the figure that the actor or performer wears and carries along during a theatrical performance. This includes not only the whole range of elements pertaining to the fiction, embodiment, presentation or representation of human modes of being, of actions, behaviours, thoughts, feelings, and emotions (even when these include the actor's "own"), but also the whole range of states of presence and qualities of energy and physicality that the actor plays with while on the stage⁶⁸.

It is worth noting also that for the dramatic theatre (i.e. the type of theatre based on traditional dramatic text), the stage character was invariably the representation, the more or less unitary embodiment, of the *dramatic character* of the play. Because the process of bringing the dramatic character to life was achieved through the construction and playing of a role, each particular dramatic character was represented differently by different actors. As such, for every unique identity of the dramatic character construed by the text and the playwright's imagination there emerged a series of different variations upon it – corresponding to the series of identities as displayed by their actual embodiment on the stage, through the qualitatively different roles of the actual actors.

In the case of postdramatic theatre, on the other hand, things appear completely different, as the written representation of the character, when present, is very much connected to the performance. By fore-fronting the presence of the actor and author in the theatrical act itself, the identity of the *postdramatic character* becomes very much determined by the here and now of the performance and the identity of the participants. For instance, in the play texts of René Pollesch's *Ich schau dir in die Augen*, Rodrigo García's *Golgota Picnic*, as well as Petrus's *Robo a Gogo*, the characters bear or refer to the names of the actors and makers that participated in their creation. Allegedly, if different performance groups tried a future production of these performances, they would bring essential transformations to the play-texts, bringing as well their own personal background, transforming the text's meaning. In other words, if every dramatic character issues a

⁶⁸ While the latter elements dominate on the dance stage, the former ones take precedence over the theatre stage. And this doesn't mean that on the theatre stage they exclude each other, nor that the latter series doesn't sometimes dominate, like it does, for example, in several of Romeo Castellucci's pieces.

multitude of stage characters through the distinct role playings, the postdramatic character is committed to the here and now, and so the multiplication of its actual production on the stage would invite the multiplication, and the reconfiguration of its written version as well. In other words, in postdramatic theatre, the metanarratives are negated as carriers of „universal truths”, and the text is negated as a carrier of unique identities.

Hence, among the most important differences between the dramatic character and postdramatic character of the stage stands the the turn away from a textual perspective to a performative perspective. Without the authority of the text, the character turns from a “given”, an inscribed entity, into a performed, created and self-created entity. This paradigmatic change is accounted as well by the acute intrusions of the voice of the author at the level of character. These very direct penetrations take a variety of forms, such as the intensification of the performers' presence, pure physicality of the performers in favour of physicality as a means, the inclusion of the creators (director/performer)'s backgrounds and identities in the universe of the theatrical act, self-referentiality, and the emphatic here and now of the performance.

This change of paradigm is associated as well with the move from a transhistorical paradigm to a historically, culturally, artistically self-conscious one, which foregrounds the awareness that every position carries its own trace, and is framed by its historical and cultural underlying identifiers. And thus, instead of a determinate, stable entity that is “there” and can be represented, postdramatic characters stand out as unstable, multilevel, and schizophrenic entities that are created and self-created in the very act of theatrical representation. On another hand, this performative quality of character is often directly appointed on the postdramatic stage by unmasking character as a relative entity, a construct informed by the conventionalism of theatrical means, devices and dramatic construction itself.

Another possible line of thought that could be further pursued and developed elsewhere to elucidate the nature of postdramatic characters is the relation between the new theatrical devices that prevail on the stage, such as intertextuality, self-referentiality, visuality, musicality. These don't exclude the use of the old dramatic shaping devices, such as speech, dialogue, action, gesture, even if nowadays these are used in very distinct and fragmentary manners (inspired, among others, by the fragmentary and concentrated usage brought about by Beckett)

For instance, intertextuality and intratextuality are devices very often used in the postdramatic theatre. Moreover, they can take a myriad of forms, such as the reinterpretation or

rescoring of master pieces, and disfigurement of historical determinate artistic styles (Elizabeth LeCompte's *Hamlet*); commentaries upon philosophical writings or dogmas (René Pollesch's *Ich schau dir in die Augen*); allusions to the current myths and underlying meta-narratives of our society (René Pollesch's *Ich schau dir in die Augen*, Rodrigo García's *Golgota Picnic*, Petrus's *Robo a Gogo*); critical contortions of historical, biblical or mythical stories (Rodrigo García's *Golgota Picnic*, Petrus's *Robo a Gogo*); playful or ironic references to and distortions of the audience's beliefs and expectations (René Pollesch's *Ich schau dir in Die Augen*).

Because of such devices, and the lack of traditional dramatic narratives – long fables based on causality and linearity – postdramatic characters raises above individuality and personal nature. While their memory becomes inflated by these myriads of references, their individual narrative becomes suffused by the archetypes of our collective subconscious, and the associated meta-narratives of our society, all referenced in the theatrical construction. And even when the presence of the performers or the creators' own voices penetrate the universe of the theatrical act, their personal memories and narratives (which are anyway aesthetically distorted) get intermingled with the actual textuality of the performance, and integrate into the collective memory and consciousness through the incorporation of the audience in the universe of the performance.

The move of focus from the individual memory and personal narrative to the collective memory and subconscious, mirrors several aspects of our society. In the age of information and communication, an age in which we are connected as never before, and an age that floods us with information, everything that is personal carries and extends in a way into the collective and impersonal. And the boundaries between the private and the public, personal and trans-personal, individual and collective, become as well very fluid.

Moreover, Beckett made as well extensive use of intertextuality, through the multitude of references, and manipulative insertions of the fragments of the “dead” texts from Western literature, as well as through the multiple allusions to dramatic types, such as the tragic figures or the servants. And this 'collective memory and subconscious' quality is one of the many reasons for which Didi and Gogo, Lucky and Pozzo, Hamm and Clov rather than represent individuals, personify mental states, and elementary modes of being in the world. This enforces my arguments from the second chapter, in which I tried to show that, to some extent, it is the modern, avant-garde and neo-avantgarde reformers that implanted the seeds of postdramatic characters.

Another example is self-referentiality, which is another postdramatic device that is often employed in performances, and that both multiplies the personalities of the character, by disrupting

their unitary and individual identities. I use self-referentiality as to include a diversity of modes in which performance pieces reference themselves, such as the intensification of the here and now of the performance, of the performers' presence and of the awareness of the audience as being the audience (René Pollesch's *Ich schau dir in die Augen*, Petrus's *Robo a Gogo*); the foregrounding or showing of the elements that have to do with the construction of the theatrical act (Elizabeth LeCompte's *Hamlet*, René Pollesch's *Ich schau dir in die Augen*, Rodrigo García's *Golgota Picnic*); inquisitive retheatricalisations, and self-thematisations (Pollesch's *Ich schau dir in die Augen*, Elizabeth LeCompte's *Hamlet*).

Through these strategies, the paradox of the actor is deconstructed, and the human unit of the stage is split in multiple moments of subjectivity. Figuring subsequently on several plane of embodiment, presence and signification, the character's identity is split in a multitude of small, overlapping and temporary identities. This could also be regarded as the effect of theatricalising live on stage the paradoxes of the theatre, which have been floating over the dramatic theatre for hundreds of years. These paradoxes – as the basic tensions that underlie the relationship between the dramatic character and its embodiment by the actor - have been noted throughout the history of Western theatre in a variety of forms by different theorists and playwrights. For instance, Diderot distinguished under the concept of the paradox of the actor the peculiar fact that the less natural the actor's embodiment is, the more natural the stage character will appear. Another instance are Prospero's words⁶⁹ from Shakespeare's *The Tempest* which point, among many other things, as well to the characters as existing in a liminal space, at the boundary between imagination and materiality, between illusion and reality. Later on, the Pirandellian character personifies this tension, through his acute self-awareness of his life on the stage and of theatre as the condition of its existence, of its coming to life. Thus, another point of continuity between dramatic character and postdramatic character are offered by these paradoxes which still prevail in theatre, even if under completely different forms. While on the dramatic stage these are only hinted and underscored as tensions, in postdramatic theatre they are openly presented as critical issues and their embodiment splits the theatrical human unit in multiple levels of identities.

All in all, it is due to this observed variety of points of continuity that I framed the examination of the postdramatic character in terms of a continuous line of development. To this

69 „Our revels now are ended. These our actors/ As I foretold you, were all spirits, and/ Are melted into air, into thin air:/ And like the baseless fabric of this vision,/ The cloud-capp'd tow'rs, the gorgeous palaces,/ The solemn temples, the great globe itself,/ Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,/ And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,/ Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff/ As dreams are made on; and our little life/ Is rounded with a sleep.”

effect, in the second chapter, I distinguished the metaphysical, critical and theatricalist types of strategies as important innovations brought about by the anti-realist types of theatres and the de-individualising symbolist impulse. These strategies - which negate the individual through the exploration of the boundaries between reality and illusion, presence and embodiment, presentation and representation - have been taken further, at the level of writing, most prominently by the Absurd Theatre. At the level of character, illustrious examples of such strategies include character breaking, the Pirandellian type of character, or the allegorical doubling of character.

Considered by most scholars on the verge of the dramatic death, Beckett's characters carry nonetheless metaphysical, critical and theatricalist traits. Further, I showed that the central innovation brought by Beckett, which accounts for the fatalist views, is his dismantling of the character's dramatic shaping devices through a fragmented and concentrated use of speech, dialogue, actions and plot. Nowadays on the postdramatic stage, these old dramatic shaping devices (dialogue, speech, voice, actions, gesture, conflicts, thoughts) when they are present, stand on their own. Their place as main shaping devices have been taken by new postdramatic ones, such as intertextuality, self-referentiality, visuality, intermediality.

Furthermore, the transformation of the dramatic character is due, on another hand, to the avant-gardist expansions of the art of acting. To this effect, I showed how Lehmann, by foregrounding these innovations – particularly the intensification of the presence and physicality of the actors – reduces the functioning of the body in theatre to that of dance. I argued that his theory of the theatrical body unjustly imposes an extreme scepticism towards meaning and reality making. I argued that these avant-gardist strategies, rather than dispel the characters and the play of masks on the postdramatic stage, lead to a richer and more complicated nature of character, as an interplay between its multiple dimensions. These levels of the character can take, in their turn a myriad of forms, such as the gestural, vocal, physical, mental, emotional, figurative, allegorical, critical, epic, metaphysical level. Hence, the game between the distinct levels of character are informed not only by the theatricalist, critical and allegorical strategies, but also by the expansion of the actor techniques which turned the performer's acting into an agile move between total presence, distancing, and substitution. Subsequently, I argued that the essential difference between the dramatic forms and the postdramatic characters is the dissolution of the unity of character.

In the third chapter, I framed the dissolution of the character against the wider setting that informed it – the multiple subversions of a unitary and autonomous self, coupled with the doubts about language and the authority of the text. The postmodernist notions have served me to look at four case studies and examine the nature of several postdramatic characters. I showed how through

extensive use of physicality and meta-theatrical strategies, the autonomy and unity of the subject is exposed. On the post-dramatic stage, instead of autonomous and unitary representations of people, we have characters as multi-layered schizophrenic entities that inhabit the stage. The unity of character has been deconstructed and replaced by a new texture made out of a combinatorial game played between the selves of the dramatic persons, the actor, and the man behind.

Although now de-masked and without a unitary and univocal guise, the actor's playing with and among roles still remains one of the constitutive elements of performance, as character remains one of the central theatrical elements in terms of meaning, focalization, internal and external theatrical communication. And it is the innovative strategies of the revolutionary playwrights and the avant-garde and neo-avantgarde reformers along with the dissolution of the unity of character and the unity between text and performance that led to the transfiguration of the dramatic characters into the postdramatic characters.

As a *future research project* that could continue the ideas hereby tackled, I have presently two distinct topics in mind. The first one would be a more in-depth investigation of the present paper's many threads. I would like to continue further the investigation of the many connections between on stage and off-stage human identity, the self and man in general. For this purpose, I would delve more into the continental philosophy of the last century, as well as into the work (practice and theory alike) of the most notorious representatives of the post-dramatic theatre, Romeo Castellucci and Bob Wilson. Moreover, I would refine my attempt of a theory of the postdramatic character by marking out more the connection between theory and practice.

A second future research thread that I have in mind is a focalization of the present research on a more historico-cultural determinate area. I would very much like to investigate the constructions of identity and human representations in the "post-communist" Romanian culture. For this, I would start my investigation by delving into post communist studies, sociological and anthropological studies, as well as into several of the postmodernist's theories relevant for reading the Romanian culture of the last century. I would connect this to the artistic constructions of identities, by mapping and analysing at large the Romanian postdramatic theatre of the last 23 years. Moreover, I would as well investigate theatre's relationship to film, inclusively by mapping also the artistic practice of writing the postcomunist identity within the "Romanian New Wave" of cinema.

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APPENDIX

Hamlet - Elizabeth LeCompte



Golgota Picnic - Rodrigo García



Robo a Gogo - Petrus



Ich schau dir in die Augen - René Pollesch

