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<http://www.skenejournal.it>

info@skenejournal.it

MAŁGORZATA SUGIERA*

Altered Pasts: Mimesis/Diegesis in Counterfactual Stage Worlds¹

Abstract

The main goal of the article is to investigate the dialogical relationship between mimesis and diegesis in contemporary counterfactual stage worlds since the mid-1980s. It focuses on an extensive analysis of the ways of subverting the spectators' understanding of historical facts and their plausible artistic representation. That, in consequence, affects both the participants' individual experience and its theoretical modelling, which is no longer possible without taking into consideration the corporeality of experience (time, place, and bodies of the audience). To illuminate today's understanding of the intersection of contemporary theatre and performance with counterfactualism, three case studies have been chosen and analyzed as representative examples of different trends in challenging the ability of theatre to plausibly represent the conditions and ramifications of past periods and actions. The article starts with a close look at two contemporary historical plays: Hélène Cixous's *L'Histoire terrible mais inachevée de Norodom Sihanouk, roi du Cambodge* (1985) and Suzan-Lori Parks' *The America Play* (1994). The first one asks the important questions about human agency within history and truth claims of history stage representations based on the assumption of causality, insisting on past's contingency. The second one makes visible and reflects upon the forms through which we engage the past, get access to the specific, material details of historical experience. What follows is an in-depth analysis of *MS 101* (ArtBoom Festival, Cracow 2015), a site-specific performance by the Polish performer and filmmaker Karol Radziszewski, clearly conceived as an experiment with counterfactual and mockumentary strategies. It premiered in the space where the real and the fictional events took place in order to gain a new vantage point on the past through friction between them, one that is inaccessible through other means. This vantage point is, then, used in a broader context of Bruno Latour's concept of circulating references to theoretically access the relation of mimesis and diegesis in counterfactual stage worlds, built upon an active experience of the audience, and to formulate new research questions that arise as a result of this approach.

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* Jagiellonian University, Cracow - malgorzata.sugiera@uj.edu.pl

One of the possible approaches to the problem of how the function of a dialogic mimesis within a diegetic context has changed in the last decades is to investigate contemporary counterfactual stage worlds that subvert the spectator's understanding of historical facts and causality, and refrain from plausible artistic representation. This, in consequence, affects both the individual experience of the viewer, often defined by the artistic event as an active participant or even co-creator, and its theoretical modelling which is no longer possible without taking into consideration the corporeality of experience, its tactile and material aspects. Therefore, performative counterfactuals can and do produce new forms of historical knowledge. As has been convincingly proven by Alison Landsberg in her recent book *Engaging the Past*, the popular, experiential genres of historical representation at best not only satisfy the audience's desire for a personal connection to the past, but must have a self-reflexive component to allow for a reflection on the process of re-enacting the experience. At this juncture counterfactualism meant as a thought-experiment useful for historians meets counterfactualism understood as a set of strategies engaging the past in drama and theatre, or more broadly, in performative arts. In the case of the former the question "what if?" makes visible both the usually occluded contingency of history and the limitations of traditional academic historiography. In the case of the latter the conditional mode is used not only to explore the contours of a historically specific moment, its material, environmental, and cultural constraints, but also to consider the specific formal elements of a given artistic form or genre that help to represent the past. Hence, what is meant by the altered pasts in the title of my article are not only marginalized or intentionally forgotten versions of the near and distant past (post-colonial or representing social minorities). I am primarily interested in alternative, speculative and significantly modified mechanisms of assessing, understanding and representing the past which in turn generated alternative visions of the pasts, the partial and situated knowledges that the performance engages.

In order to prove the value of counterfactualism as a tool for both general public and academic researchers, in his recent book *Other Pasts* British historian Jeremy Black focuses on the vital role of counterfactuals "in demonstrating the part of contingency, and thus human agency, in history" (2015: ix). It is, by no means, a position or school of thought, but rather an instrument that could be used in many contexts and for different purposes because indeterminacy is the most important lesson to learn from the past. For Black, the question 'why' is fundamental to our understanding of history and cannot be properly addressed without making implicitly counterfactual assumptions. Hence, he argues in *Other Pasts*: "A crucial value of counterfactualism is that it returns us to the particular setting of un-

certainty in which decisions are actually confronted, made, and implemented" (2). The questioning of apparent certainties, characteristic for all types of counterfactual approaches, has been in his understanding a crucial part for any historical research. Obviously, Black is not the first to state it openly. It was already Robin G. Collingwood who in *The Idea of History* from the mid-1950s argued that the work of the historian is best understood as historical re-enactment, because he "must re-enact the past in his own mind" (1956: 282). This experiential component was, however, not part and parcel of traditional academic historiography considered as objective, deterministic, and universal in its findings. That the study of history equals the study of causes, presented in a narrative mode, was established already at the end of the eighteenth century in various programmatic treatises such as, for instance, *Vom historischen Plan und der darauf sich gründenden Zusammenfügung der Erzählungen*, published in 1767 by a German historian, Johann Christoph Gatterer. He wrote there quite directly: "Begebenheiten, die nicht zum System gehören, sind jetzt für den Geschichtsschreiber, sozusagen, keine Begebenheiten" [The events that do not belong to the system are now, so to say, no events for the historian] (qtd in Koselleck/Günther 1975: 663, all translations are mine). Therefore, the counterfactual method was now and then criticized as unwelcome relativism, and sharply dismissed by many prominent historians. Clearly, as Simon T. Kaye argued a few years ago, there is more at stake here than just a suspicion of relativism and political issues. In his article "Challenging Certainty", published in 2010, he rightly emphasized that to consider indeterminacy in history poses a challenge to its assumed, deterministic certainty, i.e. its very basis as an academic discipline.

However, on one point I cannot agree with Black and Kaye. Both emphasize that one of the main advantages of the counterfactual method is to bring out the importance of human agency within history. Certainly, the same applies to most of today's historical texts written in the "what if" mode. Yet, what is more interesting for me nowadays is that there are more and more of such research projects that use the conditional in order to offer a new view on history as an outcome of dynamic assemblages of human and nonhuman agencies, working nets of biotic and abiotic elements as described, for instance, in Manuel DeLanda's *War in the Age of Intelligent Machines*. The conditional mode is clearly linked here with an imagined perspective of a robot historian which "would write a different kind of history than would its human counterpart" (1991: 3), and consequently would put a stronger emphasis on the way the machines affected human evolution. This point of view is important for my argument because even if theatre is still believed to be the place where human interactions and agency come to the foreground, the counterfactual stage worlds which I am going to analyze

here uncover and include nonhuman agency not only within history but also on the level of the means of (re)presentation. This perspective does not require any major reformulation of the already cited definition of counterfactualism proposed by Black. However, a crucial value of counterfactualism is that it returns us to a particular setting of uncertainty. In this setting, understood as an assemblage, there is more to be taken into consideration than just the decisions that humans make and the measures that they implement.

From this point of view every historical play has to be identified as counterfactual at its core. Since the turn of the nineteenth century, the main aim of this new dramatic genre, situated by Victor Hugo between the canonical genres of comedy and tragedy, has been to return the audience to the particular setting of uncertainty in the past. Historical playwrights typically chose a traumatic moment or a set of events of great importance to a given nation, which should become the climax of the story presented on stage in order to allow viewers to see their own history in the making. And already in Hugo's plays, as well as in the historical subgenre of melodrama, history was made not only by human decisions, but decisively influenced, for instance, by weather conditions, various coincidences (fortuitous or not) or ghostly appearances as stage metaphors of non-human agencies. Consequently, one of the basic assumptions about mimesis in the ninth chapter of Aristotle's *Poetics* was challenged and, therefore, subverted. Hence, from that moment onwards, a historical playwright's primary objective was to imitate on the stage a factual, rather than universal, reality. And this objective required the introduction and implementation of a new set of rules and conventions that have to mediate between stage representations of counterfactual realities in order to convince the audience that it has been provided with an illusion of plausible historical facts in the making. Thus, theatre started to function as an important producer of historical knowledge in spite – or precisely because – of the fact that it has always drawn on the past with the actual socio-political reality in view. However, every time a historical playwright and the theatre employ historical materials and documents, they have to assume that the audience possesses an understanding of historical processes and rules of causality. Therefore, the plausibility of theatrical representation depended on the audience's participation and collaboration on the cognitive and epistemological level.

And yet, Mikhail Bakhtin was right in *Problems of Dostoyevski's Art* in which he argued that only the novel could be evaluated as truly polyphonic. Traditional dramatic genres, including historical plays, in spite of their seeming multitude of voices, are essentially monophonic, dependent upon the author's point of view. They are able to simulate "the particular setting of uncertainty" (Black 2015: 2), about which Black wrote, only thanks to their clearly defined, formulaic pattern. The structure of the traditional his-

torical play is, therefore, no less systematic than the academic history writing, stigmatizing as no events any events not fitting into its causal logic. No wonder that both the traditional structure of historical play and the academic historiography have been challenged on many levels at least since the beginning of the twentieth century, and especially since the mid-1980s. I would like to illuminate the intersection of contemporary theatre and performance and counterfactualism, taking a closer look at three examples. The first one, H el ene Cixous's *L'Histoire terrible mais inachev ee de Norodom Sihanouk, roi du Cambodge* (1985), poses important questions about human agency within history and truth claims of historical stage representations based on the assumption of causality, insisting on the contingency of the past. The second one, Suzan-Lori Parks' *The America Play* (1994), makes visible and reflects upon the forms through which we engage the past and get access to the specific, material details of historical experience. The close reading of two historical plays, which in different ways engage the audience here and now, is followed by an in-depth analysis of *MS 101* (ArtBoom Festival, Cracow 2015), a site-specific performance by the Polish performer and filmmaker Karol Radziszewski, clearly conceived as an experiment with counterfactual and mockumentary strategies. It premi ered in the same place in which some of the screened fictional events took place in order to gain a new vantage point on the past through friction between them, an interplay between appearance and reality; between a willing suspension of disbelief leading to immersion in illusion and the awareness that the truth is situated and context-bound. Such interplay between cognitive appropriation and epistemological destabilization is one of the characteristic features of many contemporary counterfactuals. In counterfactual stage worlds, however, a similar interplay is often initiated by the way telling and showing coexist, collaborate or conflict with one another.

For this reason, as I argue, the performative approach is one of the most adequate methodologies to answer the question of how to theoretically access the relationship between telling and showing in artistic events built upon the audience's own experience. In this context I am going, then, to introduce Bruno Latour's concept of circulating references to theoretically describe the relationship between mimesis and diegesis in contemporary counterfactual stage worlds, built upon an active experience of the audience, and to formulate new research questions that arise as a result of this approach.

“Nous croyons faire notre Histoire”

Already a century ago, in 1915, D.W. Griffith, cited in *Engaging the Past* by Landsberg, prophesied that history books would be in a not-so-distant fu-

ture replaced by movies. As she explains, Griffith believed that “the technology of film . . . like scientific instruments, would be free of human bias and would therefore offer a perfectly transparent, objective view of the past” (2015: 1). Obviously, he was wrong to believe that historical films will be used in schools to pass historical knowledge onto students. Nevertheless, historical movies are an important factor in a widespread dissemination of images and narratives about the past. These are narratives told through images. It was one of the reasons why theatre, especially in the second half of the twentieth century, progressively renounced images as a decisive mimetic means in representing the past. Since then, playwrights have relied on verbal means as they could be exemplified on the one hand by such plays as Wolfgang Hildesheimer’s *Mary Stuart*, written as an extensive monologue of the eponymous heroine. She tells her life-story retrospectively, at the moment of her approaching death. On the other hand, there are Peter Weiss’s or Rolf Hochhuth’s documentary plays written in the 1960s, presenting historical documents as such on stage or, more recently, Verbatim theatre’s performances in which authentic dialogues are delivered by actors. This kind of theatre, based more on words than images as the main mimetic means, is also represented by Rimini Protokoll’s performance in which the so-called experts from various walks of life in their own words talk about their everyday experience on stage.

This tendency was strengthened in the latter part of the twentieth century when a widespread understanding of the complexity of history-making emerged. It became common knowledge that this process is conditioned by a number of human and non-human factors that influence particular political decisions and practical solutions. As a consequence, many possible and parallel histories came into being, each of which became an instance of situated knowledge. The task for a historical playwright, to a great degree dependent on the audience’s knowledge of historical processes, became increasingly difficult. Moreover, making these processes visible on stage went against the grain of bourgeois theatre and the economy of its artistic means. Historical events could no longer be shown at the moment of a decisive climax or depicted via an individual fate of the protagonist, usually a ruler. Instead the infinitely complex historical process would have to be shown in detail. The difficulty – or even impossibility – of writing a historical play in accordance with the traditional conventions of the genre at the turn of the twentieth century is clearly demonstrated by Hélène Cixous’s *L’Histoire terrible*, directed by Ariane Mnouchkine. The play premiered at Théâtre du Soleil in September 1985, and was published two years later.

In her play, Cixous tries to put on stage twenty-five years of Cambodia’s insistent struggle for independence, from Sihanouk’s decision to stra-

teggally exchange the royal throne for an equal share in power as head of the state, shortly after his father's death in 1960 till the tragic moment when the Khmer Republic fell to the Khmer Rouge in 1975. The ghosts of royal family gather on the stage in the final scene to announce "l'heure du Grand Exile" [the hour of the Grand Exile] (Cixous 1986: 385) and bid farewell to those who have to depart. Cixous not only felt compassion for the tragic fate of the Khmer people, a former French colony, but regarded it as rich material for a play with a true Shakespearian profoundness. Many similarities with Shakespeare's plays are not to be overlooked in *L'Histoire terrible*, for instance, the function of reflexive monologues and the presence of ghosts who recollect the past and provide valuable advice to the living. What has changed, however, is the way contemporary audience understands the plausibility of artistic renderings of recent historical processes in the globalized world. To do justice to the complexity of these processes, Cixous wrote a play that takes up nearly four hundred pages, and divided it in two "époques", five acts each. That requires over forty characters from around the world, some of them speaking in their native languages like, for example, Alexis Kosygin, prime minister of the Soviet Union. The performance based on the play would have to last at least eight hours (as evidenced in the footnotes in the published version, several scenes were either entirely omitted or abbreviated when the play premiered). Since Sihanouk tries to ensure Cambodia's independence by seeking alliances with various countries, his manoeuvring between world's powers entails a change of location in almost every scene in the play: Phnom Penh, Beijing, Washington, Hanoi, Moscow, Paris and many others. In the stage directions preceding each scene Cixous provides only the names of these places, and does not bother describing them in detail. The same can be said about the characters, even the protagonist. Their gestures, movements, rhythm of speech, timbre of voice are rarely described. In other words, a dialogic mimesis, that is, a mimesis of arguments and verbally expressed emotions, is the most prominent here. In an interview Cixous herself addresses the question of the relationship between mimesis and diegesis in her play: "Je n'ai jamais eu, en moi, ni une image de scène ni une image d'espace; je n'ai eu en moi que de l'écriture, c'est-à-dire le bouillonnement des passions. De la langue; ni du visage ni de l'attitude" [I never had an image of the stage nor an image of the space in my mind; I had but the text in my mind, that is the vibrancy of passions. Only language, neither faces nor attitudes] (qtd in Barret 1986: 135). It is neither a fictional world and an appearance of human agency nor theatre stage and actor's craft. Only language provides the privileged way of expressing emotions or putting forward arguments and counterarguments for both the characters and their creator.

“We still believe that we are making history” (Cixous 1987: 170), the words spoken by Sihanouk, used in their original French version as the title of this section of my article, justify the gargantuan volume of the play. *L’Histoire terrible* suggests that the lost world has been found and restored in its fullness for the contemporary audience. Nevertheless, already the title of Cixous’s play emphasizes that the history of Sihanouk has not finished yet (*l’histoire inachevée*). As I posit, it is not only because the eponymous character is still alive when the play ends. His history has to remain unfinished for yet another reason: so many events, human and non-human actors and factors which may or may not have influenced Cambodia’s fate were not included in the play. To prove it, it suffices to take a close look at the prologue to the second part of the play in which the Chorus takes the floor just once in the entire play. In a longer versed passage it addresses not only the fate of Cambodian people, in a manner reminiscent of Greek tragedies, but also speaks about the theatre and its mission, indirectly expressing the agenda of the author:

Cette époque est déchiquetée, cette nation est mise en pièces.
 Le théâtre a mission de les rassembler.
 Puissé-je ne pas en oublier un fragment.
 Quand tout est infidélité,
 Comme il est difficile à un récit d’être fidèle.
 . . .
 Sans vérité, pas de théâtre.
 (Cixous 1987: 184)

[This epoch is torn apart, this nation broken into pieces. / It is theatre’s mission to bring them back together. / Not a single piece should be forgotten. / When infidelity reigns supreme, / It is hardly possible for a story to be truthful. / . . . Without truth, there is no theatre.]

Clearly Cixous, quite unlike Shakespeare, expresses her genuine disbelief in theatre’s ability to represent contemporary times. The final line of the quote, “Without truth, there is no theatre”, acquires an utmost importance in this context. The prologue was entirely omitted when the play was staged at the Théâtre du Soleil. Perhaps in this way the director tried to convince the spectators that they can watch the recent history of Cambodia rendered truthfully on stage. Mnouchkine’s decision to omit the prologue might be dictated by the customary structure of their performances, usually followed by a discussion with the audience. Even if the author in many interviews emphasized that she wanted to remain unbiased, the director tried to immerse the audience in an illusion of historical truth in order to inspire a discussion. What is important in the context of my next

two examples is that in Cixous's play there are several monologues addressed to the audience, but they are of a fairly rhetorical nature. Thus, the discussion after the performance remained the only way to directly engage the audience with the past, its meanings and today's repercussions. In other words, the active participation of the audience was not an inherent part of the play. In this respect the next two examples differ considerably from Cixous's text.

"The Great Hole of History"

Regarding Suzan-Lori Parks' plays, it is possible to repeat what has already been said: the main task of a playwright of historical plays is to demonstrate history in the making. In her case, however, the present participle 'making' should be put into quotation marks, in accordance with Park's own statement: "Since history is a recorded or remembered event, theatre, for me, is the perfect place to 'make' history" (Parks 1995c: 4). The theatre that Parks refers to here is understood as an event of theatrically representing or mediating in another way the history shown on the – most often bare – theatre stage to foster a cognitive or intellectual awareness of how we engage the past. A historical play that tried to subvert established views on the past and the way it has been mediated by academic historiography, highbrow arts, mass culture and imagination was brought forth in the late 1980s and early 1990s. This type of historical drama emphasized the inability of theatre to truthfully render the conditions and ramifications of historical periods and actions, which would have changed the stage into a privileged place to reflect upon history. Many important rewritings of classical historical plays and narratives were authored by feminists, such as Liz Lochhead or Caryl Churchill, as well as by playwrights and activists representing racial or sexual minorities, as in the case of Tony Kushner's play *Angels in America*. However, I have deliberately chosen the less known *America Play*, written at the same time by Suzan-Lori Parks, because in this play the ways of engaging the past come to the foreground. Moreover, a novel type of interrelations between the mimetic and diegetic instances, caused by the choice of the topic, is clearly visible here. Significantly, the play already comprises an experiential or embodied engagement with mediated history that, for instance, in the analyzed Cixous' play was made part of its staging. Therefore, I will not take into consideration any staging of Park's *The America Play*, and limit my close reading to the written text.

Undoubtedly, the author has learned her lesson from Hayden White and other scholars who had demonstrated a vital difference between the past events in the making and their recorded or remembered versions, usually

called history. The apparently documentary character of history, its 'factness', has to be subverted on many levels in order to prove that linking together means that an interpretation is imposed on discrete events (White 1975). This is why William B. Worthen is right to state: "In their complex representation of the past, Suzan-Lori Parks' plays interrogate not only history but also how we have access to it, engage it, understand it" (2009: 162-3). The past, as written or oral history, equals the past repeated, revisited and revised, rearranged, un-remembered, re-remembered and dis-membered, always creatively re-enacted or at best cited and recycled that at the same time is deprived of its own 'original' materiality and, as a consequence, its 'genuine' meaning. Even if in the quoted interview Cixous underscores that her only rights as a playwright are the rights of a storyteller ("du contour"), she rarely relies on a diegetic narrative. Most often she chooses dialogic mimesis, typical of drama as a genre. Contrary to that, Parks stages the recovery and interpretation of the past as a mainly diegetic event, and in so doing, she severely undermines the conventional expectations, pertinent especially in the American context, that in performance words will have their own agency. Suffice it to quote just one sentence: "A play is a blueprint of an event: a way of creating and rewriting history through the medium of literature" (Parks 1995b: 4). Quite obviously 'literature' means 'narration', 'storytelling' or 'telling stories', as opposed to the typical theatrical illusion, usually created by means of a dialogic mimesis. For the same reason Parks claims that in her texts there is no place for traditionally designed characters. Her plays are peopled only by stage figures, pure figments of imagination. If a historical event takes place here, it is announced straightforwardly as a re-presentation and re-staging of something to which we have lost direct access, and which can only be mediated as a theatre piece presented on stage.

It is clearly the case of Abraham Lincoln's assassination in *The America Play* which should be shown on the theatre stage as an action repeated many times by members of the audience on the stage of "a dark box" owned by the play's main figure, The Foundling Father as Abraham Lincoln. To tell the one from the other, I will refer to the first one as the theatre and to the second as "the dark box". The name of the main figure is as ironic as the cover of the volume *The America Play*. Lincoln has been depicted with all his characteristic attributes: white shirt, black frock-coat, black top hat and black beard. Only the face is missing. On the volume's back cover the blank space is filled, but Abraham Lincoln's face is replaced by the face of an Afro-American: the founding father of the American nation has literally become a foundling father. That is true, in a performance the main character could be played just as well by a white actor. However, it will not change the status of the character within the stage world of

The America Play, because it has been well taken care of by the author. Although his name and costume suggest role-playing, The Foundling Father never impersonates Abraham Lincoln in the theatre as he might have done on the stage of the bourgeois theatre. He does not even impersonate The Lesser Known who is said to bear a resemblance to Lincoln. He only recounts the story of The Lesser Known and his invention, “the dark box”. To underline that, Parks resorts to a well-known metatheatrical device: two repeated gestures of The Lesser Known, “a wink to Mr. Lincolns pasteboard cutout” and “a nod to Mr. Lincolns bust”, are at the same time executed and named, and once the words are said, the gestures are missing (which resembles the final scene of Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*).

The story told in the theatre is about The Lesser Known, an ex-grave digger, who once went to a theme park, called A Big Hole of History, where historical parades were staged, and he got passionately interested in the past. His “dark box”, in which Lincoln’s assassination is infinitely enacted and repeated, and shown in the theatre as a performance on the “dark box” stage, has been made as an exact replica of that theme park. This, however, is not the only repetition: the theatre stage on which the action of Parks’ play, the storytelling performance by The Lesser Known, should take place is another Big Hole of History where the past can be explored and altered through repetition and embodiment. Worthen is, however, most probably right in saying: “In performance, dramatic writing is prosthetic, one of several instruments enabling the playing to do the work of embodiment, play. *The America Play* is richly attentive to this prosthetic dimension of performance, performance as a means to inspecting a finally inaccessible historical past through the ‘properties’ – actors, words, costumes, objects – of the stage” (2009: 173). To demonstrate that, Parks makes The Lesser Known speak directly to the intended theatre audience about the material prosthetics of the performance, mostly about different kinds of beards as instruments of Lincoln’s impersonation on the “dark box” stage. In *The America Play* the past is thus intentionally demonstrated as produced by material theatrical means and in accordance with theatrical conventions: it is not history in the making, but in the ‘making’, not history to be experienced directly, but as manifestly mediated. The Great Hole as a theatre stage “is a replica both of the fullness (whole) of history and of its undoing, its absence (hole) in representation” (178). In this context the notion of “unfinished history” gains a different meaning than in the case of Cixous’s play. It provides ground for the fundamental authorial gesture of creating history here and now, for a particular audience.

This is clearly visible in the second part of the play, where Lucy and Brazil, most likely The Lesser Known’s wife and son, find themselves “in the middle of nowhere” (Parks 1995: 174), that is, on a bare theatre stage

as, for instance, in a number of Beckett's plays. The Lesser Known vanished (died?) as did his "dark box". It is not by chance that Lucy and Brazil commemorate him while digging up the materials of American history and attentively listening to echoes of gunshots and echoes of echoes. Listening to voices and sounds, not only on the stage, but also in the intended, 'real' auditorium, plays an important part in Parks' theatre. The voice as a privileged site of embodiment fulfils an affective, engaging function. If everything in the essentially fake Big Hole of the theatre is real in its materiality, the actor's voice is the only prosthesis of performance which can directly reach the audience. It does not mean, however, that there were no real voices and bodies on the stage in Mnouchkine's *L'Histoire terrible*. I would like to emphasize, however, that they were to a large extent independent of what Cixous had written in her play, because she was mainly interested in language, not in the spoken word. Contrary to that, Parks repeats: "Language is a physical act" (1995b: 11). She tries in many ways, mostly by an ingenious spelling, to influence the pace of delivery, expressed through and by the body in performance: "I am most interested in words and how they impact on actors and directors and how those folks physicalize those verbal aberrations" (10). In *The America Play* spoken language holds together the rhetoric of narrative and the rhetoric of performance, and it provides a link between the performance and its audience. Each time in an entirely different way it shapes the agency of both actors and viewers. However, in Radziszewski's *MS 101* not only the rhetoric of narrative and the rhetoric of performance go apart, but also the spoken words are clearly marked as quoted. Surprisingly enough, this solution ensures a heightened participation of the audience members, who thus become co-creators.

"By Means of the Double Negative the Liar Is Forced to Tell the Truth"

The fifty-minute video *MS 101*, commissioned by Krakow's ArtBoom Festival in 2012, premièred as a part of a site-specific performance. Radziszewski not only "returns us to the particular setting of uncertainty" (Black 2015: 2), but goes even a step further. He stages a missed, imaginary encounter between two giants of twentieth-century Austrian culture: the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, who worked primarily on logic and philosophy of language, and the poet Georg Trakl. Both volunteered as soldiers when the Great War had broken out. After being lightly wounded in a battle, Trakl experienced a nervous breakdown and ended up in Krakow's garrison hospital (by that time the city was still part of the Austro-Hungarian empire).

There he impatiently waited for his first meeting with Wittgenstein who was quartered in Krakow and helped Trakl with a scholarship for a young gifted poet some years before. When the philosopher ultimately arrived, he had to learn that Trakl had committed suicide three days earlier. Hence, the awaited meeting had to remain a pure figment of Wittgenstein's imagination. What Radziszewski presents in his video is therefore a study of homosexual desire in which that which could have happened is visualized simultaneously with what had already happened, that is, Wittgenstein's (platonically) love affair with the British mathematician David Hume Pinsent during his study years in Cambridge. However, Pinsent, also a soldier-volunteer, is fighting on the other side of the war front and they have to exchange their letters via neutral Switzerland, hoping for a better time after the war. Thus, both the lived-through past and the imagined future provide material for a tragic gay love story, explicitly arranged as fictional in a theatrical manner.

What is particularly important in the context of the two previous examples is that the script of *MS 101*, written by the art historian Wojciech Szymanski, is based on thoroughly researched archival materials. The title itself refers to the notebooks that Wittgenstein kept in 1914, entitled *MS 101* and *MS 102*. They include the only sentence written by the philosopher after he had got the news of Trakl's death: "He was the one and only person with which I could speak frankly" (qtd in the script, Szymanski 2012: 8). Other materials are gathered from Wittgenstein's letters to Trakl and Pinsent, their letters to him as well as excerpts from Trakl's poems. These elements gained significance in comparison with Parks' play. In *The America Play* the opening scene consists of easily identifiable quotations – the well-known examples of chiasmus – that should alert the audience to the primarily quotational nature of the written and oral history. Citations are also sentences shouted out by those who voluntarily enact Lincoln's assassination on the stage of the "dark box", each of them painstakingly referred to in the footnotes to the published version of the play. However, the rest of the play is written in Parks' idiolect. Contrary to that, in *MS 101* every single word of the scenario had been recycled and, therefore, may be identified by a careful listener: beside the notebooks, letters and Trakl's poems, the text includes citations from Roland Barthes, Johann Wolfgang Goethe, Alfred Chamisso, Thomas Mann, Sigmund Freud, Otto Weininger and many others. Some quotes come from well-known writings by the prominent Polish literary figures Adam Mickiewicz and Witold Gombrowicz. Obviously, the audience will be able to recognize only a part of that specific landscape of citations and, depending on how much they identify, the landscape will change its shape and look differently for each of the viewers. Obviously, this will influence their emotional engagement and, in end-effect, their understanding of the performance.

It is not by accident that I have chosen the metaphor of the shape-changing landscape of citations that make up the script of *MS 101*. Even if the text is distributed between three figures, and the language flow is divided into sections by stage directions, the video splits the images and the spoken text apart. The three men are visible on the screen, most of the time close-ups of their faces are shown, their lips not moving, but their lines are spoken by a single female voice. However, this is not a typical instance of a film with a distant and objective voice-over. The female speaker in *MS 101* provides an actor's highly emotional interpretation of the text, whereas the male faces on the screen are rather emotionless, almost lifeless as if they were seen in a dream or hallucination. Only at a few moments is it possible to have an impression that the text is more realistically linked to what is shown on the screen. However, as in the case of the citations and their identifiability, these links will appear at different moments for each audience member, differently shaping the co-created fictional world. Perhaps this strange disjunction of words and images can be explained with reference to documentaries with a typical voice-over: in most cases an objective male voice assures about the plausibility of the commentary (Rosco and Hight). Contrary to that, in *MS 101* the audience listens to a female voice, fully engaged in what she is speaking about. That, as a consequence, additionally emphasizes the prominent and inexplicable disjunction between words and images that usually conspire to create a fictional world in a historical performance, endowing it with plausibility.

The visual aspect of Radziszewski's video is no less complex. As indicated by almost all reviewers, *MS 101* demonstratively recycles not only verbal but also visual discourses. Derek Jarman's queer biographies and his film *Blue*, Andy Warhol's artistic documentaries *Blowjob* and *Sleep*, Yves Klein's monochromes from the Blue Epoch were mentioned most often. Radziszewski used not only the already vintage technique of blue box (which is why I prefer to call his work a video, not a film), but he also laid bare this technique many times on the screen, when he showed his characters to belong to a realistically depicted world, although set against an intensely blue background. The imagined and recollected events are, in other words, shown here as materializing with the help of cinematic and theatre prosthetics. It is particularly strongly emphasized in the final scene when we can see the whole set with the film crew, cameras, and a small TV-screen, showing the last scene of the video. One could say that this is the Big Blue Hole of the video-movie. But any analogy with Parks' play may turn out misleading, because Radziszewski does not try to draw a clear line dividing that which is material and real from that which is fake and simulated. On the contrary, his main aim is to conspicuously blur this divide.

The first scenes of *MS 101* show snapshots of Vienna. Buildings, sculptures and a park, most probably Prater. It appears to be today's Vienna, because we can see several joggers running. However, the two men in a fellatio scene are dressed in clothes belonging to a past epoch. Soon afterwards, one of them is shown in a rich palace room, reading a leather-bound book. This succession of scenes can be interpreted as a typical progression of imagination: from material reality to hallucinated images, a build-up of elements from the former. However, there is a catch. What we strongly believed to be 'real' images of Vienna was actually filmed elsewhere, as the artist himself elucidated in a private e-mail exchange: "Palace's interior was filmed in a neo-baroque palace in a Polish town Pszczyna", "a park in which the scene of fellatio took place is located in Krakow's district Podgórze, in reality, it is Bednarski's Park but it fakes Vienna's Prater", "hospital scenes were shot in a deserted vodka factory that we had rented as a film studio" (qtd in Sajewska 2016: 190). The room in a deserted factory that imitated a hospital room in which the bed of the wounded Trakl is located has a significant function. We can see it in the last scene of *MS 101* in a double role, as both fake and supposedly real. When the film crew and the blue sheet that functions as the background for Pinsent who has just committed suicide appears, the white tiles of the factory recall the white tiles that we saw in the hospital scene a minute earlier. It is enough to make us notice that, contrary to *The America Play*, in the case of the video not only could the material props be used for creating illusion of a lost world, but also that which seems to belong to the fictional world may reveal itself as no less 'real'. The medium of video is, therefore, much better suited for such an exercise in cognition than the theatre stage because on the screen both the 'real' and the 'fake' have the same ontological status. Consequently, the famous Wittgenstein's double negative seems to be in full force here.

MS 101 alludes to the double negative with the help of a citation from Werner Herzog's well-known film *The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser*. The reference is to the story of a traveller who meets a man at the crossroads of two villages. One of them is inhabited by liars, the other by truth-tellers. To learn from which village the man comes, the traveller has only one question at his disposal. In the title of this section I have already made use of the lesson this story teaches: "By means of the double negative the liar is forced to tell the truth". In Radziszewski's video it is the artistic representation of the past that seems to be the liar of the story forced to tell the truth, to reveal that there is no truth in both mimesis and diegesis as both are only unfaithful copies of the copies of what once was lived and/or imagined.

Let us take a closer look at the last scene and the text that accompanies it. On the screen we can see an almost naked David Pinsent, reclin-

ing on an antique couch and wearing two different socks. Most probably, he is the person to whom the last lines of the script can be attributed. He knows a much better question that will help to reveal the identity of the man met at the crossroads. He should be asked if he is a tree-frog. If he says “yes”, everybody can see that he is a liar since a man cannot be a tree-frog. Hence, the person who is supposedly Pinsent continues, addressing Wittgenstein (or maybe the audience as well): “Is it not a good question? You cannot accept it. It has nothing to do with logic. Logic is deduction, not description. Understanding is secondary? Reasoning is the thing? You have not been taught understanding as a professor of logic and mathematics. You cannot accept this question. You are a tree-frog” (Szymanski 2012: 10). Then the last image of Pinsent appears. He is reclining on the same couch, but half-naked in military pants and boots, with a big wound in his breast. The wound seems to be a telling trace of the suicide he committed, shooting in his heart in response to the ultimate logic of Wittgenstein’s argument and his lack of understanding of what common experience is. Yet, according to Pinsent’s biography, he did not commit suicide but died in a plane crash in May 1918. Which of the sources is to be believed? The official biography? Or the gay love story? As the last line of the *MS 101* text suggests, everyone has a choice between logic and understanding, deduction and description.

The choice that is forced on viewers of the video was even clearer when *MS 101* premièred at the ArtBoom Festival, as it was shown in a military hospital in Krakow, the same facility in which Trakl committed suicide almost a century ago. Hence, the viewers not only watched the video, but also participated in a site-specific performance that I define here differently from Mike Pearson and Michael Shanks in *Theatre/Archaeology* or Cathy Turner in her article “Palimpsest or Potential Space?”. These authors concentrated on the complex relations between the ‘found’ space and the performance scenography, ‘found’ and deliberately introduced discourses. What counts for me is first of all an experiential or embodied engagement of the audience with both the ‘found’ and ‘screened’ spaces, ‘found’ and introduced discourses. They were not conspiring to create the one and only reality, an immersive reality typical of the kind of reenactments fathered by the site-specific theatre of yesterday, but made the interplay between cognitive appropriation and epistemological destabilization even more complex. For example, *MS 101* does not rely so much, if at all, on the place where it is screened, does not feed on its specific materiality. Moreover, the mimetic dialogue is not impersonated here, nor framed by the diegetic context. The two develop side by side but separately, without creating an illusion of a fictional world. Their clash impedes any attempts of creating illusion. And yet the fact that the audience found themselves in the same

space where Trakl spent his last days worked a miracle, forcing an emotional identification with the story; forcing understanding against logic, description against deduction. The counterfactual world was there because of the reality of the space in which it was confined together with the audience. The reality was, however, felt by the viewers, not preconceived by the video. Contrary to what the Chorus says in *L'Histoire terrible*, in *MS 101* it is not the theatre (art), but the audience which is the source of truth. What is more, it is actually the situated truth. A truth.

Altered Pasts

In *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence* Bruno Latour convincingly demonstrates how since the mid-1600 such different modes of existences as, for example, science, politics, technology, and what he calls “beings of fiction” have been established and in the process of modernization increasingly separated from each other on the basis of conditions of felicity specific for only one mode. He explains: “Conditions of felicity and infelicity do not refer simply to manners of speaking, as in speech act theory, but also to modes of being that involve decisively, but differently in each case, one of the identifiable differences between what is true and what is false” (2013: 21). It is in this context that I would like to look once again at the already cited statements of the Chorus in Cixous’s play: “Without the truth, there is no theatre”. What is clearly visible here is that not only does each mode of existence consist of rules allowing to recognize what is true and what is false, but each of them also pretends that a truth for a specific mode is the one and only truth, whereas there are at least several types of truth and falsity, each dependent on specific sets of practices and experiences. Over one decade earlier in *Pandora’s Hope*, primarily in the essay entitled “Circulating reference”, Latour identified and analyzed in detail one of the mechanisms which help to sustain this pretence. Citing as an example a scientific expedition into the Amazon Forest in which he took part as an observer, he describes step by step the progression from samples of the soil to various diagrams and maps, tracing a transition between forest and savanna in The Boa Vista region. He shapes the progression as a chain of consecutive transformations of verified references that circulate through constant substitutions, forfeiting resemblances that never existed. “Constructing a phenomenon in successive layers renders it more and more real within a network traced by the displacements (in both senses) of researchers, samples, graphics, specimens, maps, reports, and funding requests” (Latour 1999: 76). Neither this pedologic expedition nor science as such is an exception. As Latour himself admits, he used science as a touchstone “because any dis-

ruption in the way the sciences were conceived threatened the entire apparatus of modernization” (2013: 9). As I posit, it is possible to look at arts, theatre and performative arts among others, as specific fields of circulating reference that through a chain of substitutions forfeit resemblance between reality and its artistic renderings, traditionally categorized in different genres. A binary pair, mimesis/diegesis plays an important role in this chain, helping references to circulate between successive layers. At the same time, it enhances the plausibility of an artwork, stressing its difference from and resemblance to the reality of audience’s lives.

One of the consequences of vital divisions between the modes of existence, defined by Latour, are specific felicity conditions, still in force, for fictional renderings of the past in arts and counterfactual speculation about alternative pasts in history as science. In the last few decades, as illustrated by my examples, not only has the dividing line between historical playwriting and counterfactual worlds been blurred, though. The whole field of circulating references in the traditional theatre, together with a specifically defined concept of aesthetic experience, has been dismantled and set piece by piece, device by device by many artists, as clearly shown in the case of *MS 101*. Back in the 1990s the avant-garde theatre was essentially autothematic, demonstrating the ways it used to create plausible, fictional worlds on stage. But today’s theatre and performative arts are researching social and cultural practices and phenomena of dynamic assemblages of humans and non-humans and their specific conditions of felicity. It is also the disrupted circulation of reference and the significantly changed mechanisms of assessing, understanding and representing the past which in turn have become the past, situated knowledges. Historical facts and citations together with the fictional love story provided a required framework to both engage the audience and make each of its members aware of the mediation of the past, stressing a personal stake in knowledge about the past. As a consequence, not only a hidden, partial perspective of the conventional historical writing and its status as only one of possible narrative representations of the past was made visible. In this respect contemporary performances are not only firmly rooted in the theoretical context of alternative histories, but are also clearly linked to the current trends in popular culture which increasingly uses self-reflexive devices to disrupt the typical conventions of historical fiction. In contemporary counterfactual performances the audience is often also asked to reflect on the artistic process of re-enactment and the role of both diegetic narratives and dialogic mimesis in creating its immersion effects.

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