Philosophy and Theatre: Cornelius Castoriadis on the Imaginary Structure of Meanings in Theatre and Performance

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In the context of theatre studies, Greek philosophical thought has been mostly represented by the ancient philosophers, namely by Plato and Aristotle. Nevertheless, the study of Cornelius Castoriadis’s thought about social imaginary and the function of art will be probably very fruitful in focusing on the creative character of theatre performance. This paper is an essay of formatting an intelligible dialogue between Castoriadis, Lehmann and Gilles Deleuze-Felix Guattari, concerning the structure and the constructive character of meanings in the theatre (text and performance)—an era where “there is no image that does not have a minimum meaning and there is no meaning that is not borne by an image”—as well as the role of social imaginary with regard to the postmodern or to the so-called postdramatic theatre.

“What holds a society together is the holding-together of its world of significations”¹

Contemplating on the meanders of theory of the last decades of the 20th century the notion of something constantly dying becomes apparent. It is a feeling that a socio-historical world is losing some of its organic parts. After the death of God (Nietzsche), of the father (Freud), follow the death of the man (Foucault), of the writer, of the subject, the end of history and ideologies, even the end of theory.²

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² Stathis Gourgouris (2006: 500) believes that those who preach the end of ideologies (or the end of history) are like children who invent an incoherent language of their own to fill their inner emptiness. The real end implied—although evident to all of us—is the worst nightmare of liberalism, the end of the search for happiness. Gourgouris Stathis, (2006) *Does Literature Think? Literature as Theory For an Antimythical Era*. Athens: Nefeli.
In the theories of theatre “deaths” are imported from other cognitive fields. It is the shift of the paradigm that is preferred, the epistemological turns to point out the deconstruction of some canonistic entities or even the “crises”—a mild term that does not name death but the abolition of a basic principal or of a structural relation: the crisis of the myth, of the dramatis personae or the character, of the dialogue and the relation between the audience and the stage. But what is really dying?

What is subject to crisis? From a general point of view it is the representation as a way of conceiving and expressing the world of men that is in crisis, at least in these actions and phenomena that are subject to theatricality. What is re-presented on stage is presupposed off stage and conducts a possibility of reproducing itself. The crisis of representation could therefore mean the crisis of the priority—in terms of ontology—of the represented subject to the action of re-presentation, of the text to the action on stage, of the dramatis personae to the actor impersonating it. From the point of view of the theatre and philosophical problematic, a closer reading of some texts by Cornelius Castoriadis and a focus on basic points of his thinking on imaginary meanings and social creation would be interesting.

Castoriadis (1922–1997), a multidimensional and pivotal figure in the fields of philosophy, epistemology, psychoanalysis and political thinking is closely related to the opening of the scene, the breaking of the established ways of thinking and acting, the creation of new ways of instituting society. The notion of creation runs through his entire work. At the bedrock of this notion a thought on art is developed, sometimes on theatre in particular, deriving from the mythos and philosophical problematic, a closer reading of some texts by Cornelius Castoriadis and a focus on basic points of his thinking on imaginary meanings and social creation would be interesting.

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