“[…] to hold, as ’twere, the mirror up to nature; to show Virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure”.

Hamlet

I want to begin with a family anecdote about my maternal grandfather, Solomon Roman Jakozov Ajzikov Lazer, born 1875 in Mitau (Jelgava), south of Riga. He was usually called Roman in memory of an older brother who had died before he was born. As a young man he moved to St. Petersburg and established a modest tailor’s shop on Nevsky Prospect – in a building that has become a fancy shopping center after the fall of the Soviet Union – just opposite Hotel Europe, a few blocks from the Alexandrinsky theatre. There he made fur hats for the officers of the Tsarist army.

In 1911 he married Feiga Itsakovna Vulfson from Vindau (Ventspils), 180 km west of Riga. During the World War I, in early 1916, after being cautioned by his customers that the Tsarist regime was soon going to crumble under the revolutionary energies and the general unrest, Roman left for Stockholm (in Sweden) – on the other side of the Baltic – and set up a new fur shop in the center of that city. And a little more than a year later – according to the family records, on 1 May 1917 – his wife and their two sons, who were born in St. Petersburg, arrived in Stockholm, where, after a little more than a year, my mother was born. This is also where I was born approximately thirty years later. Even if Roman died when I was about 2 ½ years old I have some very vivid memories of him. I did however never meet my maternal grandmother.

The specific anecdote I want to tell goes back to the time when Roman was a bachelor in St. Petersburg. He was a great lover of music and had a special passion for the opera. He not only went to the opera as a spectator but – as the story goes – frequently also participated actively as an extra, on-stage. He used to be a stand-in for the famous male singers after their characters had died, lying motionless on the stage, wearing the same clothes as the heroes had been wearing when they “died”. Roman would lie on the stage like this until the dead character he was impersonating was carried off the stage or until the act ended. And, according to the anecdote, there were two reasons why he enjoyed the role of playing dead so much. First he became an integral part of the kind of musical event which he loved, listening to the music and the voices on the stage from beyond his fictional death (and the opera has always been fascinated by the connection between the singing voice and dying); and at the same time, from his unique perspective, lying “dead” on the stage floor he could supposedly get a much closer view of the legs of the beautiful young women in the ballet and the chorus.

The fact that he got his name from his dead brother adds an additional dimension to the image I have of my grandfather lying there on the dusty and
probably also quite chilly and draughty stage floor in a St. Petersburg opera house before the World War I, watching the events on the stage from the perspective of the dead. I even like to think of this anecdote as one of the “reasons” why I have become engaged with the theatre. It may even have influenced my research, writing the book called Performing History, published more than ten years ago, in 2000, as well as my being here today (at this conference).

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In the second act of Beckett’s Waiting for Godot, Estragon (Gogo) draws Vladimir’s (Didi’s) attention to the fact that they are, as Gogo says “incapable of keeping silent”, because then they do not have to listen to “All the dead voices”. Apparently – because they do hear something – these voices have angelic qualities because Didi answers that “They make a noise like wings”. To this Gogo answers that they sound “Like leaves … They rustle”. And to this Didi in turn responds that the dead voices sound like sand while Gogo again insists that they sound like leaves. After a moment of silence they continue to disagree about what it is that they are hearing:

“Vladimir: They all speak at once.  
Estragon: Each one to itself.  
Silence.
Vladimir: Rather they whisper.  
Estragon: They rustle.
Vladimir: They murmur.  
Estragon: They rustle.
Silence.
Vladimir: What do they say?  
Estragon: They talk about their lives.
Vladimir: To have lived is not enough for them.
Estragon: They have to talk about it.
Vladimir: To be dead is not enough for them.
Estragon: It is not sufficient.
Silence.
Vladimir: They make a noise like feathers.  
Estragon: Like leaves.
Vladimir: Like ashes.  
Estragon: Like leaves.
Long silence”.

Didi and Gogo agree that to have lived is not enough for the dead. “They have to talk about it […] To be dead is not enough for them”. This is not like in Stephen Greenblatt’s often quoted opening line of his Shakespearean Negotiations, where he says that “I began with the desire to speak with the dead”. It is rather we who are listening to the voices of the dead. Didi’s and Gogo’s first impulse is to listen to them. But with regard to what sound the dead make when they are talking about their lives, they obviously disagree. Is it like the rustle of the leaves, the noise of something like feathers or sand, or of the ashes that they hear (whatever the ashes of the dead sound like)?

A few lines further on, when they are trying to remember what they have been talking about the whole day, Gogo claims that he is “not a historian”, apparently meaning not in the strict, more academic sense. But just before making this claim he has already insisted that there is a liminal temporality as well as a liminal space where it not only becomes possible, but sometimes necessary and even extremely urgent, to listen to the voices of the dead who are communicating about the lives that they have lived. “They talk about their lives.” It is this kind of urgency, when the present moment connects with an event in the past and when the past literally speaks again – and speaks to us – which enables us to “perform history”.

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In his posthumously published On the Concept of History composed in 1940, just a few months before taking his own life, Walter Benjamin formulated how such a situation is experienced. Here Benjamin – in effect addressing us from beyond his own death – says in the 6th thesis for example, that,

“Articulating the past historically [which I also read as “performing” the past – F. R.] does not mean recognizing it “the way it really was”. It means appropriating a memory as it flashes up in a moment of danger. Historical materialism wishes to hold fast to that image of the past which unexpectedly appears to the historical subject in a moment of danger. The
danger threatens both the content of the tradition and those who inherit it”.7

In the 8th thesis Benjamin talks more explicitly about the “state of emergency” – in German the *Ausnahmezustand* – which is actually not the exception but the rule, adding that “we must attain to a conception of history that accords with this insight”.8

According to the 6th thesis this “state of emergency”, or this danger, makes images from the past emerge as unexpected and even uncontrolled memory flashes, suddenly reappearing like ghosts. Trying to understand the “sounds” and the “noises” of the dead is paradoxically an attempt to reconstruct what they remember. And according to Benjamin, to articulate this past, or in our case even to perform it, recognizing its urgency in the present moment is a way “to hold fast to that image”, trying to master its memories. The last sentences of the 8th thesis are quite explicit in this respect: “The astonishment [amazement or horror] that the things we are experiencing are “still” possible in the 20th century is not philosophical. This amazement is not at the beginning of a cognition [knowledge or insight] – unless it is the cognition that the view of history that gives rise to it is untenable”.9 This perspective on the past is always, both because of that past as well as the present, governed by a sense of failure, because (as Didi says) “To have lived is not enough for them”.

The sense of urgency that I want to introduce into our discourse regarding performances as well as other artistic forms of representing history is closely related both to the “state of emergency” as well as to the amazement or astonishment that the certain things are still possible. This expression of urgency is located at the juncture between a publicly constituted “state of emergency” and our private astonishment, creating a dialectics between a public and a private sphere; a situation at a certain point in time and our reactions to such a situation. In a performance (as well as in any form of artistic expression) the dialectics between the public and the private even challenges the truism that the only thing we learn from history is that we do not learn anything from history. When performed and aesthetically framed, history can actually teach us a lesson, even if this form of understanding cannot always be directly formulated. Therefore we first need to ask under which circumstances a performance results in such a Benjaminian perception based on amazement, and what the relationship between this amazement and the sense of urgency with which a work of art reacts to a state of emergency is.

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To explore how this issue of urgency has been aesthetically framed, I will now turn to Hamlet’s famous speech to the players quoted as my epigraph. It can, I believe, be interpreted as saying that at the same time as “the purpose of playing […] was and is, to hold, as ’twere, the mirror up to nature”, it is also possible to get a glimpse of history in this mirror. Since the theatre can re-enact fateful and disastrous events from the past, Hamlet continues, it can also confront moral issues, showing “virtue her own feature, scorn her own image and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure”. But what does this enigmatic formulation – to show “the very age and body of the time his form and pressure” – actually mean?

Hamlet has a keen awareness of temporality, and having previously claimed that “the time is out of joint” – a phrase which needs a separate examination – he now says that “the very age and body of the time” – which could be both now and in the past – carries form as well as pressure for the players on stage. The form is the specific shape or design of the images as they are reflected through the rear mirror of the performance, enabling us to get a glimpse of the past, and the pressure is not only the mark made through the use of some weight – like in minting a coin with an image – but also the sense of urgency with which these images are presented and what their significance within the public context of the theatre is. The etymology of urgency is the Latin verb *urgere*, meaning to press, drive and compel.

The word “pressure” is used once more in the play, after the ghost of Hamlet’s father has told his son about his death through poisoning, finally asking Hamlet to “Remember me”. Hamlet’s response
epitomizes the sense of urgency that originates from having heard the dead father speaking to him, creating a reaction that is much more forceful and panicking than Beckett’s characters. Hamlet says:

“Remember thee?
Ay, thou poor ghost, while memory holds a seat
In this distracted globe. Remember thee?
Yea, from the table of my memory
I’ll wipe away all trivial fond records,
All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past
That youth and observation copied there,
And thy commandment all alone shall live
Within the book and volume of my brain,
Unmix’d with baser matter”.

(1.5.95-104; my emphasis – F. R.)

The meaning of “pressure” given by OED for these two instances in Hamlet is “A form produced by pressing; an image, impression, or stamp” but Hamlet definitely also refers to a situation of pressing urgency where the past invades the present moment. This is what the expression that “The time is out of joint” means; time has become dislocated through memories from the past suddenly invading the present, flashing up in a moment of present danger.

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Shakespeare’s Hamlet is a play about how to remember and commemorate the past, enabling the dead to speak again. It even contains a disturbingly ambiguous “model” for listening to the voices of the dead who tell their story which no doubt has formed the ways in which we understand such forms of listening, like in Beckett’s Waiting for Godot. Ambiguous, because just before dying, Hamlet commands Horatio “To tell my story” while the last words that “the rest is silence” seem to contradict the former plea that Horatio must go on telling his story. And just before the arrival of Fortinbras, Horatio says:

“No now cracks a noble heart. Good night, sweet prince,
And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest!”

In a final gesture of mourning before the more cynical and utilitarian forces of history and politics represented by Fortinbras and his army will obviously take over, there is a short moment for the song of the angels. These are the angels that for Benjamin will eventually become the angel of history in his well-known meditation on the drawing by Klee, the Angelus Novus, in the 9th Thesis on the Philosophy of History, who sees the wreckage of history piling up in front of him. For Didi in Waiting for Godot only the “noise” of their wings remains.

The wars initiated by young Fortinbras have been briefly mentioned in the first act of the play and they remain a potential threat to the stability of the kingdom throughout. But Fortinbras belongs to the world of politics and his wars and conquests only serve as the backdrop for the tragedy of prince Hamlet. These wars are obviously not the tragedy itself. They are “history” and “politics” in their crudest, most cynical and most violent form. Only in the last scene of the play, after Hamlet has announced his own death as well as the silence that accompanies it, does the explicit historical/political presence embodied by Fortinbras actually cross the threshold of the stage, invading its core. And when Horatio, after Hamlet’s death, says that he wants to “speak” about the things that have taken place in order to tell “th’yet unknowing world / How these things came about”, Fortinbras nonchalantly responds: “Let us haste to hear it” (5.2.365), but he is neither capable of listening nor of reflecting on the events that we as well as Horatio have just witnessed. Fortinbras does not pay attention to the details of the tragedy that has just come to a close with Hamlet’s death and instead he briskly commands: “Take up the bodies […] Go bid the soldiers shoot” (5.2.380/382). Horatio on the other hand has requested to put the bodies “high on a stage” (3.5.357, my emphasis – F. R.) in order to transform the grim spectacle we have witnessed into some form of theatre, requiring a stage.

Shakespeare’s Hamlet presents a caesura or even a radical rupture between tragedy and history. The public world of politics represented by Fortinbras frames the play while its core, focusing on the young generation represented by Hamlet, Ofelia, Laertes and Horatio, but in particular focusing on Hamlet himself, is an expression of the introspective, private
melancholy and the metaphysical gestures of tragedy. Horatio and Fortinbras clearly have two quite different formulations of what must be done after the many deaths in the last act of the play. While Fortinbras is busy continuing his successful military campaigns, Horatio primarily sees Hamlet's private tragedy, but is not able to formulate its broader historical context, only his own personal grief.

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The private, isolating world of tragedy, on the one hand, and the public world of politics and warfare, on the other, perceived through two almost totally separated perspectives represented by Fortinbras and Horatio. These two perspectives are fully integrated in the figure that most clearly views the world of Shakespeare’s play from the perspective of the dead: the ghost of Hamlet’s father. The ghost gives rise to a much more pressing urgency than the threats of Fortinbras to invade the borders of Denmark. The ghost, besides activating the revenge plot, constitutes a constant threat not only to Hamlet's mental strength but also to the political stability of the kingdom, or what is left of it. The ghost represents the historical forces that invade the tragic, more private core of the play.

The complex dialectics between tragedy and history, making room for both, while at the same time showing them as separate, has become a major mark of modernity, and in particular I would argue, of postmodernity. The ghost appears in a strange mixture of very private and completely public places. The closet – which is basically a private space, though not the bedroom itself – has an interesting history which today has become the site through which, by “coming out of the closet”, the private becomes public. In the closet scene where Hamlet kills Polonius while Gertrude watches, the ghost is also present. The ghost signals a collapse of the private sphere while at the same time also transforming it into a site which is both public and political.

The first encounter between Hamlet and the ghost of his father ends with Hamlet begging his two companions, Horatio and Marcellus to swear, “Never make known what you have seen tonight” (1.5.144). And after the final demand from the ghost to swear, Hamlet addresses the ghost in the cellarage once more:

“Well said, old mole! Canst work I’ th’ earth so fast?
A worthy pioneer! Once more remove, good friends”.

The ghost of Hamlet’s father is that “worthy pioneer” representing the re-appearance of the past, demanding Hamlet to take revenge and to his companions to take an oath. But this “worthy pioneer”, primarily representing the past, has also been perceived as a figure (figura) for a utopian future.

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In Specters of Marx, based on a series of lectures from 1993, Jacques Derrida explored the complex intertextual dialogue between the Communist Manifesto and Shakespeare’s Hamlet, asking: “How can one be late for the end of history?” And he immediately answered with the kind of enigmatic certainty that he was capable of, claiming that this is a “question for today”:

“because it obliges one to reflect again, as we have been doing since Hegel, on what happens and deserves the name of event, after history; it obliges one to wonder if the end of history is but the end to a certain concept of history.”

Is it utopia that comes after what Derrida termed “a certain concept of history”? What does it mean to reflect again as Derrida urges us to do? And is it possible after Hamlet’s supplication that “the rest is silence” to “speak”, as Horatio proposes? Does it still make sense to tell “th’yet unknowing world / How these things came about”? I hope it still does, and that we still care about the “cause” (to use Hamlet’s own term) for his own untimely death, which he wants Horatio to “report”.

The primary meaning of “pioneer” in Shakespeare’s time was of a military nature, referring to someone who was a member of an infantry group going ahead of the army or the regiment to dig trenches,
repair roads, and clear the terrain for the main body of troops. But “pioneer” had at the time also received a more abstract meaning, referring to a person who goes before the others to prepare or open up the way, beginning a new enterprise or course of action. The term “avant-garde” entered the French aesthetic discourse in the mid-19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, when it became synonymous in English with innovator, particularly in the arts. The ghost of Hamlet’s father is finally a pioneer in all of these senses. The military attributes of this ghost are mentioned explicitly by Horatio, emphasizing that when he saw the ghost for the first time it was wearing full military uniform, from head to foot. The notion of urgency must be considered as a means of accompanying an emerging utopia.

But letting the ghosts from the past enter the stage is not sufficient for this forward look into a utopian future to be realized. However, Derrida’s reading of the Communist Manifesto from 1848, in particular of its now proverbial opening sentence: “Ein Gespenst geht um in Europa – das Gespenst des Kommunismus”. (“A spectre [or ghost] is haunting Europe – the spectre of Communism.”)\(^\text{11}\), points directly at such a possibility. In The Eighteenth Brumaire (from 1851-1852) Marx was even more explicit, saying that

“the revolution is thoroughgoing. It is still travelling through purgatory. It does its work methodically. By December 2, 1851, it had completed half of its preparatory work; now it is completing the other half. […] And when it has accomplished this second half of its preparatory work, Europe will leap from its seat and exult: Well burrowed [grubbed or dug; Brav gewühlt], old mole!”\(^\text{12}\)

And in a speech from 1856 Marx even claimed that “the old mole that can work in the earth so fast, that worthy pioneer [is] the Revolution.”\(^\text{13}\)

At the same time as the ghost in Hamlet for Marx pointed towards his own utopian visions, they also echoed Hegel’s explication of the ghost of Hamlet’s father in his Lectures on the History of Philosophy.

Here the ghost figures as the transformation of poetry into pure spirit, which according to Hegel is like a volcanic eruption or even like an earthquake:

“It [the old mole/the ghost] always comes forward and to the fore, because spirit alone is progression. Often it seems to have forgotten who it is, to have gotten lost. But, internally divided, it works its way forward – as Hamlet says of his father’s spirit, “Well done, old mole” – until, having gathered strength, it pushes through the crust of earth that has separated it from its sun, its concept, and the crust collapses. When the crust collapses, like a rundown, abandoned building, spirit takes on new youthful form and dons seven-league boots. This labour of spirit to know itself, find itself, this activity is spirit, the life of spirit itself. Its result is the concept that it grasps of itself; the history of spirit yields the clear insight that spirit willed all of this in its history.”\(^\text{14}\)

Margareta de Grazia has argued that in their readings of Hamlet Hegel and Marx “release history from an encumbering and restrictive past and set it on an advancing trajectory toward an emancipatory end. And in this process, subjects come closer to attaining the freedom Hegel identifies with self-determination and Marx with self-activity.”\(^\text{15}\) But can we still, in the 21st century, naively accept these utopian readings of the ghost? Do we still actually ask it to speak to us, as Hamlet does?

In our critique of such utopian visions we need to reconsider Derrida’s question, after what concept of history we now find ourselves now. One way to begin such a project is to pay attention to the fact that both Hegel and Marx are misquoting Shakespeare. Instead of Hamlet’s original “well said, old mole”, Marx quoted Hamlet as saying “Brav gewühlt, alter Maulwurf” which basically means “well dug”. And before him Hegel had shifted to the more abstract “Brav gearbeitet, wackerer Maulwurf” which translates as “well done or labored, old mole”. The shift of emphasis from saying to forms of doing, like digging or laboring, needs to be explored in a broader context than can be done here. Let me just draw attention to 20th century philosophers of language
like Austin and Searle, but also to Judith Butler, who have made important comparisons as well as distinctions between saying and doing. But among them, in particular Austin, was very hostile to the complex combination of saying and doing on which the theatre is based.

According to Austin the hypothetical modes of expression of the theatre, just like the utopian discourses, disregard the common sense criteria for sincerity, authenticity and truth, like for example that someone saying “I do” during a wedding ceremony really means what he or she says. Without these sincerity criteria, Austin argued, the performativity of uttering this phrase is void. In her book Antigone’s *Claim*, however, Butler – following Hegel – has made great efforts to bridge the paradoxical gap between saying and doing within the legal contexts activated by Sophocles’ play. Butler has focused on the question of what it means to make a *claim*, creating another possible juncture between the theatrical and the social, public sphere and the private sphere, where an additional form of *urgency* is formed.

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Before concluding I want to introduce a “worthy pioneer” from the canon of Yiddish/Hebrew/Israeli theatre, appearing in Anski’s play *The Dybbuk: Between Two Worlds*. Here the metaphysical and the utopian forces have fully merged and the return to the past is crucial for understanding the *urgency* of the present. A dybbuk is the unruly and restless spirit of a dead person, who because he or she has not been properly buried or has not received the proper ceremonies of mourning, continues to interfere with the affairs of the living just like the ghost of Hamlet’s father does. In *The Dybbuk* – probably most known for its famous Habimah-production directed by Evgeny Vakhtangov, which premiered in Moscow in 1922 in the wake of the Bolshevik Revolution – the young student Hanan dies mysteriously when he learns that Leah – his beloved – is going to marry someone else. During her wedding to this other man, Hanan returns as a dybbuk and enters her body, speaking through her mouth, declaring that her wedding with another man is null and void. Under the wedding canopy, instead of the Jewish version of “I do”, affirming the act of getting married, the bride speaking with the male voice of Hanan announces that “You are not my groom!”

As a result of the aborted wedding ceremony Leah is brought to the Rabbi. He discovers that before their respective children were born the fathers of Leah and Hanan, who had studied together, had made a holy vow to marry them to each other, provided they were a boy and a girl. When this performative vow was broken the supernatural forces took over, revealing how closely related both wedding-ceremonies and vows are to the utopian imagination, as well as testing the boundaries of performative language and the theatrical potential of aborted performatives. When the breach of the vow has been discovered it is possible to exorcise the dybbuk from Leah’s body by letting her step out of a circle on the floor. But instead of being freed from the dybbuk of Hanan, Leah joins him in death, and they become unified in the next world, in a utopian otherworldly realm.

The play opens with a collective incantation of the community in the synagogue:

“For what cause, for what cause, does the soul descend?
From the high abode to the deep abyss.
The fall is necessary for the ascent.”

This mystical text points at the subtitle of Anski’s play – *Between two Worlds* – reflecting the constant movement between the material world and a higher, metaphysical sphere, where the public and the private have become integrated. When Leah and Hanan are finally unified in marriage, as the vow between their fathers had stipulated, they are already in the next world, somewhat like Romeo and Juliet in Shakespeare’s play.

But the incantation opening Anski’s play is not only about this world and the next. It also has an allegorical Zionist subtext. The last line of the initial incantation – “The fall is necessary for the ascent” – in Hebrew: “רבייה עליהOMICRON אהל הוהי” – where the word *Aliyah*, meaning ascent also refers to the return of the Jews to their ancient homeland. In view of the
extermination of the Jews during the World War II the allegorical dimensions of this melodramatic ending, pointing at an implicit identification between the Zionist utopian ideal and the form of ghostly afterlife with which Anski ended his play becomes both prophetic and even uncanny. After the Shoah (the Holocaust) there were six million Jewish Souls who had not been properly buried. These ghostly dybbuks continue to haunt the Jewish and Israeli imagination as well as its theatres, constantly talking to us from beyond their death. These ghostly dybbuks have become closely integrated within the ideological fabric of today's Israel and they are frequently also appearing on the political arena, where they become manipulated and misused.

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In *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, published in 1928, Benjamin opens one of his many discussions of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* by quoting Hamlet's last soliloquy, "How all occasions do inform against me", where Hamlet asks again, with an almost direct reference to Sophocles' *Antigone*:

> What is a man,
> If his chief good and market of his time
> Be but to sleep and feed? A beast, no more.
> Sure he that made us with such large discourse,
> Looking before and after, gave us not
> That capability and godlike reason
> To fust in us unus'd". (4.4.33-39, my emphasis – F. R.)

Here Benjamin perceived something new, which he called an "empty world" which beyond Nietzsche's introspective, personal reading of *Hamlet* in *The Birth of Tragedy* also problematized larger historical developments. For Benjamin

> "The idea of death fills it [the play and Hamlet's world] with profound terror. Mourning is the state of mind in which feeling revives the empty world in the form of a mask, and derives an enigmatic satisfaction in contemplating it. Every feeling is bound to an *a priori* object, and the representation of this object is its phenomenology. Accordingly the theory of mourning, which emerged unmistakably as a *pendant* to the theory of tragedy, can only be developed in the description of that world which is revealed under the gaze of the melancholy man".17

In Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, the unique dramatic language that Benjamin had also found in Plato's *Symposium* has disintegrated, leaving us with the "melancholy" man who

> “alone is a spectator by the grace of God; but [... who] cannot find satisfaction in what he sees enacted, only in his own fate. His life, the exemplary object of his mourning, points, before its extinction, to the Christian providence in whose bosom his mournful images are transformed into a blessed existence. Only in a princely life such as this is melancholy redeemed, by being confronted with itself. The rest is silence".18

For this melancholy man the redemptive dimension which Nietzsche had abandoned can still be retrieved. Or as Socrates himself says in the *Phaedo*, that "those who apply themselves in the right way to philosophy are directly and of their own accord preparing themselves for dying and death".19

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How can we approach the relationships between theatre and performance about an historical event, on the one hand, and a given historical reality, on the other? What are the challenges we have to confront when trying to assess the possibilities and potentials of the arts not only to in order to understand the past, but possibly even to change it, as the organizers of this conference have suggested by proposing the title *The Past is Still to Change* for this conference? Is it only the gradually growing distance to certain events that brings about such a change? Or are other factors at play when we are "performing history", reviving and recreating aspects of the past within an aesthetic context? Clearly – and this is stating the obvious – it is necessary to understand the past in order to shape the future.
In view of these general questions I have raised a cluster of issues which I believe are crucial and even urgent at this very moment not only for theatre and performance but also for the arts in general. No matter what conclusions we reach, we must no doubt still begin with Aristotle’s formulations from his *Poetics*:

“The poet and the historian differ not by writing in verse or in prose. The work of Herodotus might be put into verse, and it would still be a species of history, with meter no less than without it. The true difference is that one relates what has happened, the other what may happen. Poetry, therefore, is a more philosophical and a higher thing than history: for poetry tends to express the universal, history the particular.”

*Spoudaioteron* means either “a better thing” or something “to be taken more seriously”. Or perhaps even something that is more urgent in the senses I have pointed at here.

Trying to provide some preliminary answers to these questions, I have indicated how we relate to history when imagining and representing utopias in the theatre or on the stage as a form of listening to the dead, or the “rustle of the leaves”. As Didi and Gogo agree, to have lived is not enough for the dead: “They have to talk about it”. And the theatre remains a site where this can be done without the risks that Hamlet runs, having to feign madness, or perhaps even actually being insane or believing that he is. At the same time, relying on interpretations of *Hamlet* as a model, the utopias of the 20th century, including the Zionist utopia (as expressed allegorically in *The Dybbuk*), have been based on multileveled combinations and linkages between the past and the future through the reappearance of the dead. The hoped for utopian condition has, on the one hand, been perceived as a corrective or even a form of healing of the painful failures of the past. But at the same time it has also been viewed nostalgically, depicting the return to an idyllic past (in our Israeli case by returning to the “Biblical homeland”) with its obvious associations of retrieving or even, some claim, re-establishing a lost (national) paradise.

The appearance of the supernatural on the stage constitutes the concrete and simultaneous link between the now of the theatrical event and the historical or mythological past, but also as a harbinger of the future. And on the stage, in stark opposition to what Hamlet claims before he dies, the rest is usually not silence. Instead, the dead do not only appear again, as ghosts and dybbuks, they are also constantly talking, even presenting demands and threats to the survivors. In this sense the theatre itself has become a ghost or a dybbuk, uncannily and paradoxically bridging the past and the future. The past can only change if we are willing and able to listen to those voices and to “the rustle of the leaves”.

**Notes**

3. This paper was prepared as a key-note presentation at the conference *The Past is Still to Change: Performing History from 1945 to the Present*, Vytautas Magnus University, Kaunas, 21-23 October, 2009.
8. Ibid., p. 392.
13. Karl Marx, ‘Speech at the Anniversary of the People’s
Freddie ROKEM
Tel Avivio universitetas, Tel Avivas

Apie būtinybę: mirusiųjų balsai ir „lapų šlamesys“

Reikšminiai žodžiai: spektaklis, istorija, vaiduokliai, balsai.

Santrauka


Straipsnis pradedamas asmeniniu pasakojimu, susijusiu su šia tema: tai pasakojimas apie mano senelį, kuris prieš bolševikų revoliuciją „vaidindavo“ mirusius personažus Sankt Peterburgo operose.

Gauta 2010-05-12
Parengta spaudui 2010-09-21