

## OPINION

by

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on the Dissertation Paper

by Yavor Gardev Stefanov

### ***Power, Sovereignty and Directing. Experiments on the Performative Power, the Interpretative Freedom, and the Creative Autonomy***

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In Professional Field 8.4 THEATRE AND FILM ARTS

The proposed dissertation deals with the power relations to which the director is subjected or initiates themselves in the various contexts of modern and postmodern, as well as contemporary theatre in general. The years of professional experience as a director, which Yavor Gardev has behind him, have led him to study, research and analyse a topic that is commonly debated and exploited, both within the professional theatre field and in society in general, namely that of the power status of the director in modern theatre, where this figure historically appeared. However, he puts it in a vastly different, interesting, and productive perspective. He draws it out from both the historical theatre discourse and from the directors' methodological efforts to reflect and theoretically systematize their relations (especially) with the actors in the process of making the artifact emerge. Furthermore, he does not just replace one perspective with another, that is, to put the problem in a narrowly defined perspective, e.g. the philosophical one; he places it in an interdisciplinary explanatory conceptual network, trapping it in this network, in which, while building it, he practically constantly changes the point of view. This shift, when viewed from the point of view of its system of operation, is entirely in a gameplay form. It is light. I would even say that in this "gameplay" he experiences and puts interdisciplinary pressure on the chosen topic with curiosity, as if to test the extent to which it can withstand this pressure. And in the end, it turns out that yes, it can not only withstand interdisciplinary pressure, but also, the author is very productive in making sense of it. In this respect, I find the proven productivity of this approach to the topic to be an outstanding merit of the dissertation.

From the very beginning, I would also say that for me his productivity is mostly in highlighting, making sense, and in general, reflecting on the justification of the deep connection(s) between the processes,

respectively the conditions in society, and the way theatre functions as a social and symbolic practice, due to him being part of it, building himself up in the process. In this respect, despite not operating in the logic of the narrowly theatrical approach, theatrical practice as an overall discourse, is viewed with solemnity and deep respect. This is what it undoubtedly deserves in my opinion, but what it rarely indulges in. This connection is shown very precisely through the power relations to which the director is subjected and which they initiate.

As far as this approach to the topic is new, that is, given the absence of such a study in Bulgaria, Yavor Gardev quite rightly dedicates the introduction of his paper to methodological arrangements in his work, namely to the presentation and argumentation of this approach. This he does by determining the scope of the study within the realm of theatre, without expanding it to derivatives of these relations in other spheres or in general in the metaphoric media discourse. Here he scrupulously reflects on his own point of view and figure in different distance modes (the so-called "anti-alienation measures" and "temporarily fortified points") something that I find particularly important in this type of research.

Gardev has chosen to organize the text of the first of the four parts of his dissertation around the categories of power reflections and how they can be useful for understanding the relationship between power and directing. For this purpose, he has completely rethought the categories already used, such as "performance", "performing and performing arts". At the same time, he carefully exposes and gives meaning to the existing conceptual apparatus when reflection on the category "power", as well as the visions of power in the social sciences. Furthermore, here I would like to add a comment regarding the introduction and the first part of the dissertation, but it is valid for the dissertation as a whole. The way terms and concepts are employed stands out with exceptional precision. His use of terms and concepts is subtle and thorough, as if to avoid any possible questioning of the arguments presented. But it is also the result of careful weaving of a durable network of concepts which is meant to "hold" the object, not to lose sight of it in any case. Still conscientious, scrupulous, careful is this work in the next three parts of the dissertation. I consider this precision in the use of concepts an admirable quality of the dissertation.

In the first part of the dissertation, presenting the four dimensions of power, as well as the four approaches to power in detail, special attention is paid to the approach of Haugaard - what power can most effectively serve - projecting it on the loss of freedoms for the figure of the director (pp. 90-100). With sound reasons, in my opinion, Yavor Gardev sees the greatest potential in understanding contemporary directing.

Then in the second part, where he presents the historical overlays on the concepts of power or, more precisely, directs the attention to their historical formation, in order to maintain the critical distance

to considering them; in my opinion, what stands out as the most interesting and fruitful segment, is the pointing out of the analogy between the performative event in the theatrical field and Koselleck's idea of the hiatus between the historical event and the historical narrative of the event. Since in the formation of my own methodological tools in my research work, I have relied on such an analogy (although from a completely unique perspective), I can confirm the convincing potential of such a transfer, and - why not - its effectiveness. From his own analytical perspective, Gardev unfolds this analogy in the figure of the "spatial-temporal trap for the event and the event itself", which places the intentional subject in the process of making theatre.

In the same way, both in the first chapter and in the third, the categories of sovereignty are dealt with, carefully unfolding the available configurations around its study, exposing them, and analysing them in terms of the formation of the power potential of the director's figure. What I find most fruitful in this part is the carefully conducted and unfolded analogies between the power constellations in the theatrical field and the ideas of Foucault, who "sees power as a" complex strategic field "to show how" the director's active sovereignty "can function" (p.153) The fourth chapter is devoted to a more precise definition of the concept of "sovereignty", in which, however, the essential work on the reconfiguration of the director's power through speech and language is also carried out. In this sense, of course, considering the categories "performativity" and "performance" becomes central. In this line of thought, he quite naturally also deals with perspectives on the "subject", defining them as a "subject-reporting perspective" and a "subject-leaving perspective" (p. 183). I will skip the debate referred to in this chapter on the question of whether "theatrical studies are a "leading discipline" in the performance area, not only because "it is only in German universities where "it seems completely legitimate." (p.187) [Of course, mostly because of the leading role of those in Fischer-Lichte's research]. But mostly because I am not particularly convinced of its productivity. More importantly, in this final part of the dissertation the author considers the transition from linguistic to performative reversal as time phases in a paradigm. The three shortcomings of the performance theory as an explanatory tool for the directing power are set out in Fish, which I find extremely useful in view of its proximity to both hermeneutics and phenomenology. From here on, the aspects of the question of interpretation, which is usually associated with the directing power in the theatre, are also logically considered. The dissertation author's attention is mostly focused on clarifying the meanings of what he calls "deferred power" or "deferred sovereignty" in directing. In order to avoid any methodological misunderstanding, and in this last chapter of his work, Yavor Gardev considers it necessary to remind that what he places among the "intellectual events in the field of philosophy, epistemology and linguistics" is the "case of the director" (p. 221), and not of theatrical historiography or theatrical

studies in general. Although it seems too much, such a clarification insists on a methodological precision, which I especially appreciate.

What he emphasises on in the conclusion of the research work is that it is possible for "the presence and action, the intentional subject and the non-subjective event" to coexist in an epistemological context, which comes quite logically after the work done, and, in my opinion, gives a well-grounded key to understanding the director's figure. In it I see one of the most significant contributions of the dissertation.

At the same time, I confirm the contributions described in the conclusion.

Let me also conclude by saying that this is an educational dissertation.

The abstract has been prepared as required. It contains the mandatory presentation of the objectives and tasks of the study, the scope, and the subject of the work. Accordingly, the content of the dissertation is set out and each part is presented. A detailed bibliography is presented.

The publications of Yavor Gardev on the topic of the dissertation, made during the dissertation research, are also indicated.

Given all that has been said so far and given the importance of the dissertation and the contributions made, I recommend that Yavor Gardev be awarded the academic degree "Doctor".

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