

OPINION

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On the dissertation presented for acquiring the academic degree "Doctor"

Professional field 8.4 *Theatre and Film Arts*,

Theatre Studies and Theatre Arts Department

Candidate: Yavor Gardev Stefanov

Yavor Gardev's dissertation ***Power, Sovereignty and Directing. Essays on Performative Power, Interpretative Freedom and Creative Autonomy*** consists of an introduction, four parts, a conclusion, and a bibliography, with a total volume of 291 pages. The bibliography includes 167 titles, of which seventeen in Cyrillic (in Bulgarian and Russian) and 150 in other languages, using the Latin Script. On many occasions even though the referred works have been translated into Bulgarian the dissertation refers only to the English translation (e.g. those by Aristotle, Agamben, Benveniste, Benjamin, Weber, Deleuze, Derrida, Montesquieu, Nietzsche, Saussure, Foucault, Frankl, etc.)

Yavor Gardev's work is serious, thorough and with its conceptual power exceeds the requirements for PhD in terms of ideas and content. Impressive knowledge in various fields has been demonstrated – not only that of theatrical practice and theatre studies, but also modern and contemporary philosophical, historical, political, sociological, linguistic, psychological, psychoanalytic, and literary theories. All of them are intertwined in the study not for the sake of being listed, but in view of the multifaceted and multilayered consideration of the problem clearly posed in the title, i.e. the problem of the relationship between directing, power and sovereignty. This problem stems rather from the field of philosophy and the philosophy of theatre than from the field of private theories of theatre studies. Thus, the overall framework of the dissertation is actually philosophical. What should be pointed out at this point is the precision with which the terminological apparatus is introduced and developed, though it has never been accepted unquestioningly, but has been thematically commented and criticised. Far from being a stumbling block, interdisciplinarity has contributed to the greater coherence of the network of concepts through which the dissertation builds its own theory. There is a double emphasis discernible in this diversity of disciplinary fields. First, an emphasis on the theory of speech acts as developed by Austin and Searle through Fish, Derrida and Butler to the radical

pragmatics of Dimitar Vatsov. Second, an emphasis on the metaphysics of Alice Lagaay's metaphysics of performance. But it should immediately be noted that both the pragmatics and the metaphysics of performance are introduced and deployed in a key that I would define as pertaining to deconstruction. The self-critical use of autoethnographic elements delineates and makes sensible not only the careful reflection on the cited authors and theories, but also the experience behind the theses.

Gardev's own theory is developed gradually with the introduction of a series of hypotheses and theses that in the course of the dissertation ever more clearly outline the powerful construction of an innovative conception. Already in the first half of the work the author claims that modern theatre is teleologically oriented towards an event, which, however, precisely as far as it is an event in the strict sense of the word, cannot be controlled. Therefore, according to Gardev, the theatre seeks not to produce the event, but – in his words – to set a spatial-temporal "trap" for it (pp. 106-107). Setting the trap is, in essence, creating conditions for what is unconditional, a special kind of hospitality to what is predetermined. The theatre is hospitable to the event it aspires to, but which it cannot foresee. The twist in this *teleology* (which in some sense is without a *telos*, insofar as the event is beyond control, beyond the power of the director, and all who are involved in the preparation of the trap; it is unthinkable, the very unthinkable at the heart of the theatre, which happens without any certainty), the twist in this *telos* without a *telos* is that at the point of the event, the power of the subject is suspended (ibid.). After the event, if there was an event, if there will have been an event (but how can anyone be sure if there was an event, who decides?), the director is reincarnated as an entity created by what happened, but already different from the one who has set in a sovereign way the trap to suspend their sovereign power (p. 111).

This is in a sense the paradox that serves as the starting point for the unfolding of Gardev's

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The director has power through language. Through the language he uses to tell the actors and everyone involved in the performance what to do (such statements are performative), but also through the language in at least two other senses – the language of the text of the play he puts

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on, and the language in the sense of linguistics in general. According to Gardev, "the place of concentration of the strongest directing power through language is precisely in the gap, which forms the hesitation of the text in its own ability to reliably communicate itself and its own meaning in a subjectively embodied performance" (p. 214). This strong thesis has been developed in three directions. The gap in question is primarily a gap between written performatives and spoken statements, which not only allows, but requires the transformation of the written. Secondly, there is the difference between language and speech in the sense of Saussure. Thirdly, the gap refers to the need to build and control the context of the statements. This triple gap, on which directorial power as linguistic power rests, implies that the performativity of directorial work is processual – it has to flow and pass through different instances. I find the concept of "processual performativity" (introduced in p. 217) to be one of the most important findings of the work that can also be used beyond the theatrical field.

Processual performativity allows directorial power to be revealed as deferred power. The director sets a trap for the event they do not control, but also during the performance they are not there, they are not on stage, their performatives are sedimented in the performance, in the performativity of the statements on stage from which the director is absent. His figure is embodied by the multiplicity of the performance itself, that is the very theatrical performance.

The suspension of power in the processual performativity is both a time delay and sedimentation of the directorial performatives in the performance (p. 277). Thus, along the line of playwright-director-actors, it turns out that the performatives are transmitted from instance to instance, and with each subsequent move, the performativity is transformed. The director connects the two poles of the dramaturgical text and the actor's utterance through his performatives, but this means that his power goes in at least two directions – in the direction of the dramaturgical performatives through the interpretation of the text; and in the direction of the actor's performance through the instructions to the actors. This is the reason Gardev talks about "tripling the force field through relay accumulation and transfer of forces from the playwright to the director, and hence to the delayed performativity of the actor in the context of the performance" (p. 248). For this reason, processual performativity implies a "complex chain" (p. 188) and "complex contexts" (p. 202).

If this is indeed the case, then a question arises about how such a tripling works. *Why are the forces of performance amplified in this processuality, why is there accumulation rather than dilution of powers?*

The question is prompted by two things.

First, usually the transmission of performatives works in a different way. For example, in a request, a directly expressed request has more illocutionary power (and would have a stronger perlocutionary effect) than a retransmitted one. If a friend asks someone in person for something, it is usually a stronger performative and there are more chances of it being successful as an illocutionary act than if the request reaches the person via two other acquaintances. This is also the case with most orders. In fact, the same can be said for all directives, expressives, and declarations. Why, then, in the case of processual performativity, through which directorial power flows, does accumulation of powers occur?

Second, the question is prompted by the paradox of the construction of the trap described by Gardev himself. The power of the director is power that is inevitably associated with his own disempowerment, invalidation, in order for a non-predetermined event to happen, as a result of which the director may find themselves, without being guaranteed in any way, with more power. Is not such a moment of powerlessness in processuality essential for this type of performativity? And if so, then does not the tripling of the force field produce the very conditions for its practical deconstruction in the very flow of the exercise of directorial power?

The strong theory developed in the study would probably benefit from a more active conversation with other researchers belonging to one of the most important contexts in which the dissertation appears – the context of the humanities in Bulgaria. To give an example, I find that Todor Hristov's work on sovereignty or the theory of molecular performatives, developed by Todor Petkov, Deyan Deyanov and others, are directly related to the issues discussed in the work.

In conclusion, the dissertation is impressive and goes beyond both the formal and the substantive requirements for a PhD degree. The abstract presents comprehensively and objectively the main ideas of the work. Contributions are listed correctly. The study satisfies and exceeds the criteria for a dissertation, and I strongly support the award of the academic degree "Doctor" to Yavor Gardev before the esteemed academic jury.

by Assoc. Prof. Darin Voynov Tenev, PhD

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