

Call For Papers

DEJOUER L'INJOUABLE PLAYING (WITH) THE UNPLAYABLE

International symposium, Université Stendhal-Grenoble 3 (France)

28-29 November 2013

Organised by Alice Folco and Séverine Ruset

« Le texte de théâtre n'aura de valeur pour nous qu'inattendu, et – proprement – injouable. L'œuvre dramatique est une énigme que le théâtre doit résoudre. Il y met parfois beaucoup de temps. Nul ne savait comment jouer Claudel au commencement, ni Tchékhov, mais c'est d'avoir à jouer l'impossible qui transforme la scène et le jeu de l'acteur ; ainsi le poète dramatique est-il à l'origine des changements formels du théâtre ; sa solitude, son inexpérience, son irresponsabilité même, nous sont précieuses. »

Antoine VITEZ, « L'Art du théâtre » (1985), in Le Théâtre des Idées

The symposium, hosted by the University of Stendhal Grenoble 3 (Traverses 19-21 / CINESTHEA Research Lab), in partnership with The Hexagone Theatre, Meylan, aims to investigate the notion of the unplayable or the unperformable. This is often used in an empirical and subjective way to characterize all sorts of works seemingly incompatible with the stage, or at least with 'the prevailing theatre practice' of a certain period (B. Dort, "Le texte et la scène, pour une nouvelle alliance"). The objective is not to run the gamut of impossible plays by revisiting the history of 'armchair theatre', but to examine from a dynamic perspective the passage to the stage – be it delayed or problematic – of certain texts or devised projects which, for internal reasons (space and time structures, characterization, genre crossing), or external ones (disappearance of the contextual codes explaining them, technical evolution, changes in the expectations of producers, creators and audiences), force the practitioners to invent new practical solutions, and the audience members to redefine their concept of theatricality.

The conference addresses the notion of the unplayable via two principle strands: reception and the creative process.

'Reception': the historical dimension of the unplayable/unperformable

The criteria of what is 'non-theatrical' vary hugely from one period to another. This is evident with productions, such as *Lorenzaccio* by Musset, which was performed several decades after its publication in 1834. Within the context of this symposium we aim to investigate the historical dimension of the 'injouable'. The word, which appeared in France in the second half of the 18th century (a quote attributed to Voltaire is referred to in *Trésor de la langue française*) could well have been cast into obsolescence in the 20th century, when theatre liberated itself from the exclusive patronage of the mimetic aesthetic and when '[making] theatre out of everything' became possible, as Antoine Vitez once stated. The conference aims to question to what extent the notion of the 'injouable' reveals the norms and canons of a

certain period, that which saw the prevailing model of drama as rhetoric decline in favour of a pictorial and illusionistic paradigm. This turn of the events in the 1750s gave way to the rise of modernity and the era of theatre directors. In order to put this to the test, and to clarify the criteria of 'non-theatricality' encapsulated in the French word 'injouable', or the English 'unplayable' or 'unperformable', we wish to study cases from different periods which present significant discrepancies between their literary and theatrical histories (either because their first production happened years after their publication, or because they dropped out of the repertoire, for reasons not related solely to the fashion of the time), but also to investigate theoretical and critical discourses from different periods and geographical areas.

'Creative process': the stage confronting the impossible

Within the context of performance today staging a new work is always a challenge, yet some material raises more issues than others. These issues can be rooted in an historical context which no longer applies, creating the need for reinvention; or in a crossing of disciplines (dance, cinema, new technologies and so forth) which may alter presence. Furthermore, in contemporary theatre, some stage directions can be so abstract or illogical that executing them can be very problematic. Interestingly enough, the result is that the 'injouable', far from acting as a deterrent, can often stimulate. It is almost as if the unplayable nowadays lives only to be played.

The second strand of our symposium will look into the apparently insurmountable obstacles which stage artists tend to confront themselves with, and the creativity they are consequently encouraged to develop. We will welcome proposals which analyse how contemporary theatre deals with the following challenges: withdrawal, negation of presence (how does one perform silence, stillness, nothingness?); the opening-up to 'aberrant movements' (Deleuze, *L'Image-temps*): acceleration & deceleration, inversion, fragmentation, change in proportions; doubling-up: twinning, ubiquity, simultaneity, competing regimes of representation; or abstraction (how do theatre directors deal with Martin Crimp's first stage direction in *Attempts on Her Life*, which specifies that the piece has been written 'for a company of actors whose composition should reflect the composition of the world beyond the theatre?'). We will examine the concrete solutions through which artists attempt to make what resists the stage theatrically effective, and to turn what 'cannot be performed' into fertile soil for new stage possibilities. We will also collect testimonies from directors and actors, asking them to define what is still, in their opinion, 'an undoable task' (Antoine Vitez), and what they feel they can gain in taking up arms against it. Our objective is two-fold: firstly, to identify the main performance issues the stage finds itself grappling with today – what they are and where they come from; and secondly, how these affect both audience and artist.

Scientific committee: Peter BOENISCH (University of Surrey), Bénédicte BOISSON (Université Rennes 2), Christophe CAVE (Université Stendhal-Grenoble 3), Joseph DANAN (Université Sorbonne Nouvelle - Paris 3), Marie-Christine LESAGE (Université du Québec A Montréal), Ariane MARTINEZ (Université Stendhal-Grenoble 3), Gretchen SCHILLER (Brunel University), Julie SERMON (Université Lumière-Lyon 2), Julie VALERO (Université Stendhal-Grenoble 3)

Abstracts (about 500 words) are to be sent in French or in English by the 10th of April 2013, together with a short biography, to both of the following e.mail addresses :

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