

Leo Rafolt

The Academy of Arts, Osijek
Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek, Osijek
lrafolt@gmail.com

Meyerhold Bound: Montažstroj's *Vatrotehna* (2.0) and the Barbaric Discipline of the Machine

Abstract

The paper discusses the two versions of Montažstroj's *Vatrotehna* performance, inspired by Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* and Meyerhold's tragic execution. The context of both performances is analyzed, especially in the light of re-performability in post-sociorealist and neo-capitalist conditions. Montažstroj's performances are hence seen as radical *in situ* performance *praxis*, community oriented, and deeply rooted in traditions of avant-garde theatre. Therefore, questions like iterability, social proxemics and political engagement of the performance arise as most important. Aeschylus' plot intertext and Meyerhold's performative intertext thus function as a platform for *re-examining* and *re-performing* in a rigid, utmost barbaric biomechanical mode, furthermore – in a totally mediatized and mechanicocentric society.

Keywords: Montažstroj, re-performability, physical theatre, avant-garde theatre, radical performance.

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 PL License (creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/pl/), which permits redistribution, commercial and non-commercial, provided that the article is properly cited. © The Author(s), 2017

Publisher: Institute of Slavic Studies, Polish Academy of Sciences

Editor-in-chief: Jolanta Sujecka

Conception and academic editing of this issue: Wojciech Sajkowski
with the collaboration of Jolanta Sujecka

A bullet in the forehead / or a bullet in the neck...

We are not free. The sky can still fall on our heads. And the theatre has been created to teach us that first of all” (Artaud, 1958, p. 79).

Nakedness = turning the inside out, or projecting onto the surfaces of the body events of the depths. Physiologically ‘interior events’ of muscular, visceral, and mental significance are always altering the body’s topography – from the slope of the shoulders to the rhythms of breath to the look in the eyes to the movement of the fingers or the curl of the lips: the body’s surfaces are always changing in relation to interior body events (Schechner, 1994, p. 87).

I.

The tragic destiny of Vsevolod Emilevich Meyerhold, Soviet director, actor, producer, became a key point in various discussions related to interconnections between theatre and politics and, more precisely, between ambivalent forms of sovereignty and modern, twentieth century performance art. A brilliant director, researcher in the field of physical performance and a provocative and unconventional theatre space designer, Meyerhold was arrested, tortured and executed in February 1940, during the famous Great Purge. His performance proxemics was deeply influenced by the Russian formalist movement, as well as by scenic constructivism. Symbolism in the theatre, new stage mechanisms and innovative staging methodology – these were all results of a long term process of experimenting in different performance and production contexts, either in the Moscow Art Theatre, the imperial theatre houses of Saint Petersburg or in his own Meyerhold Theatre since the 1920s. The Revolution of 1917 made him the strongest advocate of the New Soviet Theatre movement, as well as the Bolshevik Party. In his actor training and pedagogy he pursued the idea of revitalizing the *dell’arte* performance tradition, both in the pragmatical and aesthetical manner. Thus, his poetical concepts of *conditional theatre*, based on the congruence between psychological and physiological acting, elaborated in his notes (*On Theatre*, 1913), will soon become the main feature of the new symbolism in Soviet performance biomechanics, opposing social realism in all of its features. Emotions in theatre were thus to be expressed physically, arising from the performer’s own quotidian experience. This method of acting pedagogy was deeply rooted in Stanislavsky’s system, but nevertheless different, much more psychophysical, so it naturally inspired

revolutionary artists and film directors like Sergei Eisenstein. Eisenstein was arrested in Leningrad in 1939, and his wife, the actress Zinaida Reich, was killed the same year. After being tortured, he confessed working as a pro-Japanese and pro-British agent, recanting this confession, from imprisonment, in a famous letter to Vyacheslav Molotov dated January 13th 1940: "The investigators began to use force on me, a sick 65-year-old man. I was made to lie face down and beaten on the soles of my feet and my spine with a rubber strap... For the next few days, when those parts of my legs were covered with extensive internal hemorrhaging, they again to beat the red-blue-and-yellow bruises with the strap and the pain was so intense that it felt as if boiling water was being poured on these sensitive areas. I howled and wept from the pain... When I lay down on the cot and fell asleep, after 18 hours of interrogation, in order to go back in an hour's time for more, I was woken up by my own groaning and because I was jerking about like a patient in the last stages of typhoid fever" (Hoover, 1974, p. 187).

II.

Meyerhold's system of performer-training is widely known as biomechanics, although it encompasses a variety of techniques and procedures for denaturalizing the theatre practice of the period, including Far-Eastern practices, the American method of actor-training, constructivism, motion platforms in physical performance methodologies or reflex-movement pedagogy, etc. Edward Braun emphasizes Meyerhold's fascination with one Japanese performance, overlooking the fact that it could have functioned as a pillar for his interest in the "new" (non-naturalistic) expressivity. Nevertheless, he underlines the importance of this Eastern performance in Meyerhold's theatrical memory: 'In 1902, the company of Otodziro Kawakami, the first Japanese actors ever to be seen in the West, performed in Russia. Their repertoire was based mainly on traditional works of the Kabuki theatre and their style was a modernised version of Kabuki called 'Soshi Shibai': stylized, yet revelatory in its naked emotive power. Above all, the critics praised the grace and virtuosity of Kawakami's actress-dancer wife, Sada Yacco', thus bringing forward one of his early notes: 'In 1909 Meyerhold wrote: '...Sada Yacco demonstrated the meaning of true stylization on the stage, the ability to economise with gestures, to reveal all the beauty of the composition'. He makes no reference to the Japanese theatre in his published account of the Theatre-Studio and he never actually saw Sada Yacco perform, yet it seems likely that his first experiments in stylized movement and gesture were influenced by what others wrote about her. Twenty years later when rehearsing Faiko's *Bubus*

the Teacher he was still citing her as an example to his actors' (Braun, 1998, p. 40). Obviously, he privileged these types of performance art. For early Meyerhold, performance denaturalization and symbolism consisted of enhancing the overall rhythm of the stage action or – in other words – precise tuning between visual, auditive and corporal-somatic elements of the performance. Every movement on the stage should be dictated by the tuned choreographic rhythm of the action, the overall rhythmical scheme. The actor's psychological development depended on this. In 1907, at Tenishev Academy in Saint Petersburg, Meyerhold gave a lecture on the brand new theatre techniques he was dwelling upon. His ideas may be summed up in three strong statements. Firstly, every theatre activity should be three-dimensional, not two-dimensional. Secondly, acting style should be focused on rhythm in diction and movement, synchronized, not on pure rhetoric. Thirdly, the illusion of para-theatricality should be abandoned, primarily, using the spectator as a bridge between the director's and actor's experience (Braun, 1998, pp. 80–82). This rhythmical component in Meyerhold's theatrical thought will lead him to interest in musical drama and, above all, in Adolphe Appia's theoretical work on music and performance. In one of his aesthetical notes, he underlines the following statement: 'Music-drama must be performed in such a way that the spectator never thinks to question why the actors are singing and not speaking' (Braun, 1998, p. 40). During the 1920s, when the ideas of performance biomechanics were already under development, often in a form of audition or workshop, Meyerhold wanted to show that human movement can be pre-learned and refashioned, using severe quotidian exercises based on physical laws of technology. Biomechanics became a practical and theoretical artistic research of one's own body as a performative machine. Again, different kinaesthetic traditions were incorporated into this performance pedagogy, both Eastern and Western, alongside with a variety of mechanical and physical theories,¹

¹ A paradigmatic example of an exercise in biomechanics is the one based on *kyudo*, Japanese archery: "One of the students, Erast Garin, describes 'Shooting a bow'. An imaginary bow is held in the left hand. The student advances with the left shoulder forward. When he spots the target he stops, balanced equally on both feet. The right hand describes an arc in order to reach an arrow in an imaginary belt behind his back. The movement of the hand affects the whole body, causing the balance to shift to the back foot. The hand draws the arrow and loads the bow. The balance is transferred to the front foot. He aims. The bow is drawn with the balance shifting again to the back foot. The arrow is fired and the exercise completed with a leap and a cry. Through this, one of the earliest exercises, the pupil begins to comprehend himself in spatial terms, acquires physical self-control, develops elasticity and balance, realises that the merest gesture – say with the hand – resounds throughout the entire body, and gains practice in the so-called 'refusal' [or 'reaction' - EB]. In this exercise the 'pre-gesture', the 'refusal', is the hand reaching back for the arrow. The *étude* is an example of the 'acting sequence', which comprises intention, realisation and reaction" (Braun, 1998, p. 174).

and the performer's space – a prosthetic form of his 'new expressivity' became even more iconic, three-dimensionally cubic and hermeneutically open towards the audience perceiving the play.

III.

There are two important features in Meyerhold's performance philosophy significant for Montažstroj's project of *Vatrotehnna (2.0)*. One is situated in Meyerhold's biography, to be more precise – in his death and torture by the Soviet regime, and the other, in his biomechanical principle of body-in-performance behaviour. Let me elaborate both of these key features by contextualizing Montažstroj's project in two distant years of the same century. *Vatrotehnna* (1990) is one of the early productions of the group – *in situ* project – generically depicted as an 'organic rally ballet' (*sletbalet*). This was actually Montažstroj's first full-length show, named after the main sponsor, a firefighting wholesale company, also selling civil defense, people's protection and industrial safety equipment. *Vatrotehnna* was performed by five men aged 16 to 22, based on the Prometheus legend, in an abandoned facility of the Badel distillery in Zagreb, in a square-like stage area on the concrete floor, delineated by flares, with the audience fully present. This was supposed to be a representation of the Caucasian rock, where the gods punished Prometheus and bound him forever, thus submitting his body to the merciless, precise, machine-like and repetitive punishment – executed by the chorus of four eagles. Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* was supposed to function as a parable, playing with the biographical note of the imprisonment and execution of a Soviet theatre director and revolutionary. Machine-like repetition of attacks and the constant wailing of hand sirens were, at that point, full of realism, announcing the future actuality of air raids and the escalation of bloodshed and war in Croatia during the 1990s. In the booklet, announcing the production – with Borut Šeparović as the main director – the performance is supposed to be divided into three mechanical acts, named in Meyerhold's biomechanical tradition – *push off* (*otpor*), *push up* (*potpor*) and *push on* (*upor*). These acts are divided into smaller scenes, thirteen in total (from 0-12), comprising the tragic destiny of a Soviet director, all the way from tragic invocation to the final sacrifice with an apology of the machine. These performance matrixes were deeply rooted in the Avant-garde theatre experience, as well as in the theatre poetics and aesthetics of the 1980s, experimenting with the performer's body in motion and in speech, but, nevertheless, following a 'conservative' standpoint where the textual base of performance art still

counts.² Social conflicts can be provoked only if they are manifested inside of the enchanted circle of creative industry, such as theatre and performance art. In Montažstroj's words, history is a machine, and so is the performer's body, as stated in their *Manifesto* from the 1990s:

The performer's body is an organism.
In motion – force against the organism is
the murder of the natural body
and establishes
the mechanism of the body.

The performer's body is a mechanism.
In motion – the force of the mechanism is
the birth of the artificial body
and establishes
the automatism of the body.

The performer's body is an automatism.
The force of the automatism is
the power of the body.
In motion – the power system of the body
establishes
the organic subject.

A bullet in the forehead
or a bullet in the neck.
1990-1994.

Meyerhold's life story is not only an intertext used in *Vatrotehna's* plot but also a performance strategy intertext, based on the main principles of biomechanical constructivism, maybe even a poetic principle. History is absorbed by this biomechanical principle of repetition, constant renewal in every following movement, but with different consequences. Meyerhold's history is a tragic one, symbolized by the mythic figure of Prometheus. Meyerhold's prison guards are Prometheus' eagles, attacking them on a square concrete floor, a rock of tragic solitude, just as it is presented in Aeschylus. Nevertheless, this repetition emerges from the performance's actuality. The audience is thus constantly warned by hand sirens and air raids. This historical (bio)mechanism is bound to repeat for the third time – after Prometheus and after Meyerhold – 'Citizens, your lives are exposed to the real aggressive danger of Montažstroj!!! Lie face down! Close your eyes!'. The intertext of this performance is barbaric in its over-rationality

² Besides Aeschylus, they were using the works of Hesiod, Goethe and Kafka.

and hyper-modernity. Although it focuses on two textual realities from the past, one mythical and the other fully biographical, the context generated by the actual performance is futuristic. Young performers dressed up in futuristic shoes, with punk haircuts, marching constantly, exposing their young bodies, and trying to coordinate their voice with the rhythm of the movement. According to spectators, their masochistic parading on the stage goes so far that it even makes them bleed. At that point, this was a reaffirmation of Avant-garde performance art and the total negation of conventional theatre *praxis*. The tragic intertext of Prometheus – as well as the tragic context of the Soviet director's death – signaled a semantic feature even more important for the performance troupe. Discipline of the machine, whether it is evoked by Meyerhold's biomechanics or Prometheus' imposed repetitiveness, can be interpreted as the supremacy of pure historic feeling, of the constant and residual clash between the barbaric and civilized, permanently producing crises, such as the fall of communism and/or disappearance of a once strong Yugoslav national identity. Performance manifestos of that sort were most common, even before the 1990s, in all of the ex-Yugoslav republics (Jakovljević, 2016).

IV.

Terror should be liberated from the concept of terrorism, violence from its systematization in a formal, discursive matrix, especially because the latter coincides with the appearance of (modern) democratic state systems (Bharucha, 2014, pp. 3, 5–10). Paul Virilio often stated 'that the elements of destruction are already factored into the technology of any apparatus, the theatre, both as an institution and as an actual site of production, cannot claim any immunity from the imminence of accidents' (Bharucha, 2014, p. 1). Montažstroj's *Vatrotehna* was actually an open call to reflect upon this immanent transgressive power of performance art, obviously relying on the omnipotent eye of the apparatus. Indeed, theatre performance should be free from the discursive power of the political regime, as it should be the case with performers' bodies, liberated from all of the obstacles except their own scenic *bios*, their biomechanics and their self-imposed rhythmic behaviour. There is one passage in Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* where Hephaestus is addressing the tragic protagonist, emphasizing his *habitualness* – almost as a *mechanical* feature of his identity. 'Son of Themis right in her counsel, you are over-lofty in your designs! Against your will, and my will too, I shall nail you to this mountain uninhabited by men, in forged bronze fetters that cannot be undone; here you will know neither the voice nor the form of any mortal, and be scorched by

the sun's brilliant flame until you lose your skin's fine colour. You will be glad when night's starry cloak hides the light, and when the sun scatters the dawn frost again. The burden of your ever-present agony will wear you down, for the one who is to alleviate it is not yet born. Such is your reward for your habit of favouring mankind; for as a god you did not cower before the wrath of gods when you bestowed privileges upon men beyond what was just. In return for this you shall keep guard of this unlovely cliff, standing upright and unsleeping, with no flexing of your legs; many will be the wails and laments you voice, uselessly, for the mind of Zeus is inexorable; every ruler new to power is harsh' (Aeschylus, 2008, p. 102).³ Emphasis is hereby put on Prometheus' deformation – his inability to do anything. Montažstroj's collective Avant-garde notion of performativity, with no implicit authorship, should be interpreted as relatively ambiguous. Meyerhold's biomechanics, first of all, functions as a performative force for young actors on the actual scene of art. It is the only or principal *language of doing* throughout the performance. Even if it is not the only one, spectators are advised to interpret it as a ground-zero of performance. Therefore it should be perceived in Austin's sense, not as pure information field or, in a way, as communication channel. No, it should be perceived as an action, an act of doing in a precise scenic and social context – an action. 'Today, performative utterances are understood to be crucial to the construction of reality, a construction that is sociotechnically *ordered*' (Bharucha, 2014, p. 20). On the other hand, the biomechanical principle is problematized inside of the Prometheus discourse, symbolizing Meyerhold. Him *being bound* or not able to *perform*, in *Vatrotehna*'s poetical and aesthetic context, makes him indeed a *de-formative* principle of the performance. If you eliminate *doing* from the whole of the performance, furthermore, Meyerhold's doctrine is lost, as well as the mythic sense of Prometheus. This is exactly why young dancers/performers are constantly moving, they are subdued to the rhythm, and performative language is precisely about this: not about speaking, retelling and narrating, but also about doing and dancing, performing, and even killing. 'Further, what is 'performed' works to conceal, if not to disavow, what remains opaque, unconscious, unperformable' (Butler, 1993, p. 24). Biomechanics is not an ally in executing Prometheus/Meyerhold. It is the only one to blame, it is a murderer. But, at the same time, for Montažstroj, this is the only way to perform, and to immunize the whole system of performance. You need to execute someone, eliminate somebody from the performance, in order for the performance art to survive.⁴

³ All quotations from Aeschylus are from this edition, translated by Christopher Collard.

⁴ For detailed elaboration of the immunization concept see Esposito (2010, pp. 1–19, 135–149).

V.

In order to understand 1990s performance of *Vatrotehna*, to grasp its context, it is necessary to analyze it as the first full-length evening performance of the troupe, as a part of a broader artistic project called *Theatralisation of Football Culture*, commenced with their first public appearance in December 1989, in collaboration with the Students Cultural Center and the Museum of Contemporary Art, when they made a short stage happening *The Football Booth in the Art Gallery*, an *hommage* to Kazimir Malevich. One more *in situ* performance, in August 1990, was connected with the future *Vatrotehna – Achtung Alarm*, an attempt to raise awareness of the severe societal changes. It consisted of a one-hour fire truck ride through the city center, blaring pieces of advice over an extremely loud megaphone on how to behave in situations of danger. *Vatrotehna* was all about staging crises, either retrospectively, using mythic or heroic figures, or prospectively, announcing a period of war, rotten capitalism, an unjustly pseudo-democratic regime, or terror(ism). ‘These problems are synoptically illustrated in the idea of ‘collapse’, a trope of absolute end and beginning that speaks to a desire on the part of the left to be unburdened from its history and a willingness to overlook the ambiguities between the nominal and phenomenal meanings of the very term ‘collapse’ (Martin, 1998, p. 187). Prometheus or Meyerhold’s captivity could be also interpreted in the context of mechanocentric and technocentric modernization – that was supposed to liberate us from work, at least to some extent, but which, on the contrary, made us even more imprisoned within our repetitive capitalist desires, enslaved on the Caucasian rock of free-market competition and trade. And the reasons for this are to be found, as Franco Berardi Bifo points out, in Futurist propaganda. Let me use his words in full: ‘As far as we think of the avant-garde as a conscious movement devoted to revolution in society, in communication, and in the relationship between society and communication, Futurism, namely Italian Futurism, can be considered as the avant-garde’s first conscious declaration. The *Manifesto Futurista* [*Futurist Manifesto*] of 1909 is an act of faith in the future. I would argue that it is also the cultural and ideological inauguration of the history of the 20th century, *the century that trusted in the future*. During the 20th century Futurism, both in its Italian and in its Russian form, became the leading force of *imagination* and of *project*, giving birth to the language of commercial advertising (especially in the Italian variation) and to the language of political agit-propaganda (in the Russian variation). The idea of the future is central in the ideology and in the energy of the 20th century,

and in many ways it is mixed with the idea of *utopia*. Notwithstanding the horrors of the century, the Utopian imagination has never stopped to give new breath to the hope of a progressive future, until the high point of '68, when the *modern promise* was expected to be on the brink of fulfillment' (Berardi, 2011, p. 12). This modern promise of human-like progress was never fulfilled. This idea of the future, based on the concepts of progress, according to Berardi, is over, at least as a clear psychological phenomena. 'It is not a new idea, as you know: born with punk, the 1970s and '80s witnessed the beginning of the slow cancellation of the future. Now those bizarre predictions have become true. The idea that the future has disappeared is of course rather whimsical, as while I write these lines the future is not stopping to unfold' (Berardi, 2011, p. 13). The *Futurist Manifesto*, as well as the one written and performed by Montažstroj, emphasized the aesthetic value of mechanics and machines. These principles were supposed to be internalized by young dancers, nevertheless, in a form of labour. 'Performance harbors a division of labor that formally separates its moments of action and reflection, only to bring the two into contact. While politics oriented toward certain ends is said to be 'in' crisis, performance can be said to occur *through* crisis: one sensibility is brought to an end and it becomes possible to dwell on and survive the excessive intensity of experience thereby produced. The uniqueness of a given performance derives from the combination of forces that gather the various assemblages that will constitute the performance' (Martin, 1998, p. 188). The poetic or aesthetic universe of *Vatrotehna's* performers is encapsulated between two extremes, comprised in the following question: How to provoke labour politics by performing, in the form of a rigid biomechanical embodiment? Berardi could maybe suggest an answer: 'Futurism exalted the machine as an external object, visible in the city landscape, but now the machine is inside us: we are no longer obsessed with the external machine; instead, the 'info-machine' now intersects with the social nervous system, the 'bio-machine' interacts with the genetic becoming of the human organism. Digital and bio-technologies have turned the external machine of iron and steel into the internalized and recombining machine of the bio-info era. The bio-info machine is no more separable from the body and the mind, because it is no more an external tool, but an internal transformer of the body and of the mind, a linguistic and cognitive enhancer. Now the nanomachine is mutating the human brain and the linguistic ability to produce and communicate. The Machine is us. In the mechanical era the machine stood in front of the body, and changed human behavior, enhancing their potency without changing their physical structure. The assembly line, for instance, although improving

and increasing the productive power of laborers did not modify their physical organism nor introduce mutations inside their cognitive ability. Now the machine is no more in front of the body but inside it. Bodies and minds therefore cannot express and relate anymore without the technical support of the bio machine' (Berardi, 2011, p. 16). Such a paradoxical position, at first glance, was actually a correct one – Meyerhold's performance training methodology, in a way, opens a way out of the *Avant-garde scenic stiffness*. It creates a deconstructive mechanism, a rigid, formatted, encapsulated body, appearing, only twenty years after, in a totally different form – as fully-mediatised new performance identity. These kind of bodies will occupy the space of *Vatrotehnna 2.0*, an attempt at artistic recreation of the original 1990s performance. As stated in one of the archival materials: 'Montažstroj embarked on an artistic inventory of social changes taking place in Croatia in the last twenty years, by attempting to renew the original play [*Vatrotehnna*]. Keeping the universal metaphors, [*Vatrotehnna 2.0*] discussed without nostalgia everything which was destroyed and which no longer exists, simultaneously bringing forth a portrayal of the multiple transitional, post-socialist, war and post-war traumas of our society. Just like young men used to be recruited off the streets, the new line-up was made up of a young generation born during the Homeland War. What started out as a reconstruction, transformed into a play about the potential disaster of an entire generation, the one born in the 1990s. [*Vatrotehnna 2.0*] discusses the decaying values of a young generation which finds it easier to imagine an end to the world than an end to capitalism, since it has no perspective, ambition or social awareness. The performers of [*Vatrotehnna 2.0*] belong to this very generation that gathered together in the play [*Generacija 91-95*]. By repeating the motifs of Aeschylus' 'Prometheus Bound', [*Vatrotehnna 2.0*] determines that there is no bearer of light – Prometheus – because nobody wants to sacrifice themselves for another, and the ruffian, Zeus, is an invisible danger all around us. [*Vatrotehnna 2.0*] reaches into the past, notes the present and points the audience's attention to what has yet to happen.'

⁵ Except members' testimonies, a couple of bad footages, low-quality videos, recordings, all of the material evidences of the 1990s performance were lost. Instead of *Vatrotehnna*'s reconstruction, in a most authentic way, members of Montažstroj decided to make a deconstruction, twenty years after the first version of the performance. *Vatrotehnna 2.0*, therefore, directs the audience towards the inner structure of performance, as well as towards the outer circumstances of the original project. Nostalgic and archaeological

⁵ This quote and suite of the self-presentation, see at the website of Montažstroj: <http://www.montazstroj.hr/en/projekt/?id=49> (26.05.2017).

ambitions, according to Borut Šeparović, were totally eliminated. *2.0* is a second and brand new attempt to question social constraints of liberal democracy and raging capitalism, especially in the context of an unsuccessful transition period. A state of crisis is being re-performed.

VI.

Meanwhile, a couple of problems arise from this kind of procedure. Peggy Phelan, among others, rooted firmly in the field of performance studies, opens up the problem of re-performability. Following Schechner's definition of performance as twice-behaved behaviour – where the first gets to be called behaviour, first of all, because it is performed much more often than twice – she asserts that performability is interconnected with *virtue of iteration*, whereas 'the copy renders performance authentic and allows the spectator to find in the performer 'presence' (Phelan, 1998, p. 10). Hence, *Vatrotehna 2.0* is an authentic production, actually – a performative reproduction, or even *auto-re-production* – in an archival sense of the word. It tends to recreate the context of the original performance, while going through the complex process of transformation into one's own intertext. Furthermore, prototext becomes the intertext. Procedures of that sort can be easily grasped as performance permutations, where the *2.0* suffix could be replaced with any other – *n.0*. If *Montažstroj*'s first full-length *sletbalet* signifies, translated again into the language of pure mechanics, version *1.0*, its natural *reprise* would add a single digit on the second, decimal place, such as *1.1* or *1.2*. But the 2010 performance of the piece is a brand new version, a pure deconstruction of the 1990s original, and – an archival attempt, for sure. A performance's only life is, on the other hand, in the present, so it 'cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance. To the degree that performance attempts to enter the economy of reproduction it betrays and lessens the promise of its own ontology. Performance's being, like the ontology of subjectivity proposed here, becomes itself through disappearance' (Phelan, 1996, p. 146). And *Vatrotehna 2.0* lives precisely in that gray area of play with the original prototext's ontology. The time of the 1990s *Vatrotehna* is not supposed to be repeated, neither are the contextual circumstances and their critical impetus. It is supposed to be *re-performed*, *re-created* and/or *re-constituted* 'but this repetition itself marks it as 'different'. The document of a performance then is only a spur to memory, an encouragement of memory to become present' (Phelan, 1996, p. 146). The ideal version of performative power, according to Phelan,

makes its subject traceless and constantly disappearing. Both *Vatrotehna* productions thus live 'in a maniacally charged present', avoiding the balanced circulations of finance', refusing 'this system of exchange and resist[ing] the circulatory economy fundamental to it' (Phelan, 1996, pp. 148, 149). So, version 2.0 was only able to refer to the 1.0 presence of the original, not being able to recreate it, even to recapture it. It could only resonate it as an intertext, thus – on a purely formal level, but, meanwhile, transforming *this 1.0-performative-entity* to some kind of an intellectual property.⁶ But this disappearance in memory makes the performance a privileged site of resistance, especially in the context of political regulation or legal control. Instead, *Vatrotehna (2.0)* – as well as any performance art – privileges the audience, situating itself in an arbitrary position, telling them that this is a unique and unrepeatably art experience. They feel like they are chosen. Version 2.0, hence, deconstructs this feeling, offering *something totally new* based on *something old, already experienced* by another audience, while *this old* is being projected on the background screen – as a form of digital liveness, *live recording*.⁷ This was, by all means, stimulating play with the audience's anticipation and awareness. Some of them, presumably participating in both versions of the production, could easily feel like Prometheus, knowing both past and future events: 'And yet what am I saying? I have accurate foreknowledge of all that is to be, and no pain will come to me unexpectedly. I must bear my destined lot as easily as I can, knowing that the power of fate cannot be fought. Yet I can neither keep silent about my misfortunes nor break my silence; it was for giving prerogatives to men that I am yoked in these harsh constraints, a miserable wretch: I hunted down fire from its source, to steal it in a filled fennel-stalk, and it has proved mankind's teacher in every craft, and their great resource. Such are the wrongdoings for which I pay penalty under the open sky: in bonds; nailed fast!' (Aeschylus, 2008, p. 104).

⁶ For problems of copyright and fluid intellectual property of performance art see Auslander (2008, pp. 147–187).

⁷ Auslander classifies the concept of *liveness*, according to its historical development, into six groups: (a) first one encompasses "*classic*" *liveness*, including physical co-presence of performers and audience, with the simultaneity of production, reception and experience; (b) *live broadcast* is the second one, considering experience of events as they occur, but in a different media; (c) third one is *live recording*, based upon a certain temporal gap between production and reception, with infinite repetition possibilities; (d) fourth one encompasses *internet liveness* with a sense of co-presence among users; (e) fifth group represents *social liveness*, in a sense of technology assisted connection with others; (f) the last one is called *website "goes live"*, and is based upon a feedback communication between technology and different users, as in interactive web-platforms and chatterbots (Auslander, 2008, p. 61).

VII.

The original performance of *Vatrotehna* was announced by *Achtung Alarm!* – a limited scenario *happening*, an action inside of the public space, as well as by several graffiti actions (*U boj u stroj za Montažstroj!*) and biomechanical marching through the old city nucleus, display of provocative posters, several photo sessions. Version 2.0 was also announced by a couple of action performances, including *Achtung Alarm! 2.0*, performed symbolically on 9/11, evoking the date which changed modern world history, and followed by two new *in situ* interventions, *Vatropokretač* and *B.D.L.2.0*. Montažstroj's lucid comments of these performances, both in their propaganda materials, as well as – later on – in the press, are self-sufficient: '[*Vatropokretač*] is the second in the line of activities that announced [*Vatrotehna 2.0*], a reconstruction of the first full-time play by Montažstroj. The [new] action consisted of a bus ride from Zagreb's city center over the slopes of Sljeme to Medvedgrad, and a pilgrimage of the audience and the performers to the Homeland Altar. The audience secured its entry into the bus by presenting their certificates of nationality, i.e. by proving they are Croatian citizens. On the way to Medvedgrad, the 'tourist guide' – a member of Montažstroj, diverted the audience's attention to modern Croatian counterparts to Mt. Olympus – such as the Presidential residence and the Kulmer estate – the home of Croatia's biggest tycoon, Ivica Todorić. The trip to Medvedgrad proceeded with the reading of the names of politicians and Croatian officials who failed to respond to an invitation to this artistic action. Once at Medvedgrad, Montažstroj's members laid down a wreath with Montažstroj's logotype – a 'Ž' written in Cyrillic lettering, next to the eternal fire, the very heart of the Homeland Alter monument, and then proceeded to perform fragments from the play [*Vatrotehna*, version 1.0] based on Aeschylus' 'Prometheus Bound' [...] Badel's abandoned distillery, in which Montažstroj had performed its first full-length play [*Vatrotehna*], became the scene for the third announcement action of the play [*Vatrotehna 2.0*] on September 30th, 2010. Badel's abandoned distillery [*sic!*], a representative example of Zagreb's industrial architecture, has been left to decay for twenty years, and still exists as a reminder of poor management of city resources. In the dusty, dilapidated space, the members of Montažstroj along with the audience watched the daily news show of the Croatian Radio Television at the beginning of the performance. After that, there was a performance of the final scene from the play [*Vatrotehna*] from 1990. The long-lasting repetitive walk ends with a nauseating wailing of hand sirens used for air-raids. *B.D.L.2.0* is a performance about oblivion, dedication to space in which it was impossible

to reconstruct the full-length version of [*Vatrotehna*] due to the utterly decaying condition of this 'protected' cultural monument'. The opening scene of the 2.0 performance includes a montage of critical reviews of the first version, read by a group of performers – while playing football. This archival introduction reexamines the basic concept of Montažstroj's *re-performability* and their prototext's *trans-formability*, situating it in a sphere of public discourse. This immediately produces *the new* of an event of art, or – in Derrida's words: 'Not only with the singular invention of a performative, since every performative presupposes conventions and rules – but by bending these rules themselves in order to allow the other to come or to announce its coming in the opening of this dehiscence. That is perhaps what we call deconstruction' (Derrida, 1992, p. 340). Self-reflective performing of the critical-discursive context of *Vatrotehna*, inside the 2.0 version, opens an artistic gateway to the other, new, deconstructive performance strategies of the intertext. Hence, 2.0 version's context is a bit more performance-oriented than the 1990s context, at least in the sense of being overwhelmed by different "representational styles of a performative world", but, unfortunately, not in the sense of the pure radicalism of performance art, that invokes freedom which 'is not just freedom *from* oppression, repression, exploitation – the resistant sense of the radical – but also freedom *to reach beyond* existing systems of formalized power, freedom to create [*sic!*] currently unimaginable forms of association and action – the transgressive or transcendent sense of the radical' (Kershaw, 1999, pp. 6, 18). The initial quotations of the critic in the 2.0 opening were therefore signals of authenticating conventions, determining the audience's relations to *the real world* and *possible worlds* of, both, 2.0 and the original *Vatrotehna*.⁸ Both troupes were eager to contextualize their performative strategies, either in the pre-War era of the 1990s or in the era of false free-market, perverted democracy, capitalism and liberal economy, two decades afterwards.

VIII.

After this long prologue, the actual performance commences, parallel with mute reproduction of the first version. The Director's *intro* is being

⁸ For detailed elaboration of authentication strategies in radical performance see Kershaw (1992, pp. 26–29). A couple of pages further on, Kershaw evokes Karl Mannheim, arguing "that under conditions of particularly accelerated social change some generations evolve an awareness, and thus ways of living, which distinguish them sharply from previous generations. In effect, there is then a major rupture in the same way, but there will be a general tendency to raise fundamental questions about socio-political organization, and to experiment with alternatives" (Kershaw, 1992, pp. 37–38).

announced and, literarily, reproduced on the screen, followed by the hectic dance of Prometheus's chorus. The performance proxemics is exactly the same, as well as the *mise-en-scène*; the dancers of the 2.0 version are following *Vatrotehna*'s original performers on the screen in almost real time. *Vatrotehna 2.0* is dramaturgically built upon the idea of iterability and repetition – and their transformative powers. But also about memory, about permutative mnemotechnics of the actors' and performers' art. Besides intertextual utterance and repetition – birds repeatedly attacking Prometheus bound – even a simulacrum of voices, bodies and movements on the stage is executed between the two versions. Iterability and simultaneous movements inside of the 2.0 performers' group is also present – as far as the laws of Meyerhold's biomechanics are being rigorously followed. After approximately half an hour of performance, a narrative instance intervenes. This is a symbolic rupture of *the real time*, an intervention coming from 2010. A narrator-performer emphasizes the loss of the proto-performance's second part. Archival VHS footage from Borut Šeparović's private collection is interrupted, damaged because of the low-quality of the analog video reproductions. *Real time* has made an impact once again, even though this VHS footage was kept *in a dark and dry place*. The performance cannot be *re-performed*. Hence, version 2.0 – at least according to the logic of iterability – is actually *Vatrotehna n.0*, just one possibility of performance, never actually a true and consistent reconstruction, such as 1.1, 1.2, 1.3 or 1.n should be in comparison with the original proto-performance. Even the performance's most narrow context is changed. *Vatrotehna 2.0* was not performed inside of Badel distillery, on its original scene, because this facility was ruined, and Montažstroj was supposed to guarantee safety for every single spectator. Nobody takes this kind of responsibility, not even performance art. Even *Vatrotehna Company* doesn't exist anymore, together with hard-to-find props, produced in bankrupt companies, and costumes used in the original production. From that moment onwards, all the way to the end, the Montažstroj group had to find different deconstructive resources – sponsored and labeled t-shirts instead of original costumes and megaphone and hand sirens made in China, approved, borrowed from Ministry of Internal Affairs, and the Minister Tomislav Karamarko himself – in order to *re-create* 'currently unimaginable forms of association and action – the transgressive or transcendent sense of the radical' (Kershaw, 1999, p. 18). A video-footage in the background is played in repeat mode. Prometheus's last tragic words are spoken out loud, and repeated afterwards, in different performance contexts: 'O my most holy mother, / O heaven revolving the light common to all, / do you see how unjustly I suffer?' (Aeschylus, 2008, p. 129). The mechanism of iteration is activated for the last time. Performers

are presenting a long history of decay, from the fall of Yugoslavia all the way to Croatian decay in corruption and wild capitalism, while running among the audience and repeating a famous graffiti sign over megaphones, in the form of a question – *Where's the revolution, scum?* – that appeared on the wall of student dorms during the 1990s. This question will be the title of another Montažstroj performance production from 2014, dealing with the problem of censorship and intellectual property. The social realism context is thus replaced with the post-communist era of the new Montažstroj group, calling themselves *Tuđman's children*, blinded by media and a society of spectacles and simulacra. Their ambitions are not Prometheus's any more, nobody is willing to sacrifice himself in a society full of perverted values. Therefore, pure gay-pornography is shown publicly on the big screen, after underage members of the audience – as well as two performers – were asked to leave the hall. The final *leitmotivs* of *Vatrotehna 2.0* evolve around possibilities for theatre to change the world. Although performers are constantly expressing their disbelief as to the strength of radical performance as such – *It's easier for us to imagine the end of the world than the fall of the capitalism!* – their community-oriented vitality lingers on the stage. At first glance, it is opening a space for action, but simultaneously dispersing it in contingency – by presenting four different endings of the Prometheus myth. In radical performance and activist theatre practice, as in the case of *Vatrotehna (2.0)* and Montažstroj's productions in general, as Kershaw suggests, cultural process is pervaded by performance. Performance becomes 'the *sine qua non* of human exchange in virtually all spheres of the social' (Kershaw, 1999, p. 13). Montažstroj's deconstruction is eager to re-perform something what was supposed to be detected in the first version – the existence of performative societies in the contemporary world, where democracy and capitalism collide. The authentic 2.0 version, truthful reprise, is not possible, not because the circumstances have changed – the new generation of performers acknowledges this and constantly repeats these motives of decay – but because, deep inside, under the surface of the socio-political system, nothing has changed. The barbaric discipline of the machine is constantly eating its children, as in the case of Prometheus and the Soviet director. This is visible in the overall *mise-en-scène*, where both of the performances designate a fixed square-like space, originally in an abandoned distillery, a symbolic place of residual labour exploitation, in accordance with the *locus horridus* of the Prometheus myth and Meyerhold's death. Using pure body-in-space mechanisms, bio-mechanics, the outrageous mechanism of political force and system of authority are both dismantled. Ascetic bodies in motion, thin and half-naked – whereby performative *insideness* is put forward, outside in front

of the audience – former children of socialism, are now being rejuvenated in a post-capitalist context. If the first version represented a limited-scale project of five years existence (*petoljetka*, 1990-1994), *Vatrotehna 2.0* is eager to de(con)struct itself even while being performed – hence, the audience is being insulted, attacked because of its lack of solidarity, and its apathy. Performers will apply similar de(con)structive mechanisms to themselves. They don't believe in theatre, although they are deeply engaged in theatre practice. The commodification effect, where performance is projected onto a market, is instantly activated. If they had some sense of political awareness, they would definitely not be on the stage, fighting for a secure position of imaginary, which transcends binarism of false and true, even good and bad, right or wrong. Instead, we are swallowed by 'the post-modern spectacle of a fragmenting democratization of consumption, a growth in access that increasingly turns theatre as a cultural resource into a commodity of capital' (Kershaw, 1999, p. 49).

References

- Aeschylus. (2008). *The Persians and other plays*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Artaud, A. (1958). *The Theatre and Its Double*. New York: Grove Press, Inc.
- Auslander, P. (2008). *Liveness: Performance in a mediatized culture*. London: Routledge.
- Berardi, F. (2011). *After the future*. Edinburgh: AK Press.
- Bharucha, R. (2014). *Terror and performance*. London: Routledge.
- Braun, E. (1998). *Meyerhold: A revolution in theatre*. Wallington, Surrey: Methuen Drama.
- Butler, J. (1993). Critically Queer. *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Queer Studies*, 1(1).
- Derrida, J. (1992). From *Psyche* – invention of the other. In D. Attridge (Ed.), *Acts of literature*. London: Routledge.
- Esposito, R. (2010). *Communitas: The origin and destiny of community*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Hoover, M. L. (1974). *Meyerhold: The art of conscious theatre*. Cambridge: University of Massachusetts Press.
- Jakovljević, B. (2016). *Alienation effects: Performance and self-management in Yugoslavia, 1945-91*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. <https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.338565>
- Kershaw, B. (1992). *The politics of performance: Radical theatre as cultural intervention*. London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203412282>
- Kershaw, B. (1999). *The radical in performance: Between Brecht and Baudrillard*. London: Routledge.
- Martin, R. (1998). Staging crisis: Twin tales in moving politics. In P. Phelan & J. Lane (Eds.), *The ends of performance*. London: Routledge.

- Phelan, P. (1996). *Unmarked: The politics of performance*. London: Routledge.
- Phelan, P. (1998). Introduction: The ends of performance. In P. Phelan & J. Lane (Eds.), *The ends of performance*. London: Routledge.
- Schechner, R. (1994). *Environmental theater*. New York, NY: Applause Theatre and Cinema Books.
- Virilio, P. (2007). *The original accident*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Photo-materials



Photo 1. *Vatrotehna*, September 17th, 1990. By Radomir Sarađen.



Photo 2. *Vatrotehna*, September 17th, 1990. By Radomir Sarađen.



Photo 3. *Achtung Alarm!*, September 8th, 1990. By Radomir Sarađen.



Photo 4. *Achtung Alarm! 2.0*, September 11th, 2010. By Damir Žižić.



Photo 5. *B.D.L.2.0*, September 20th, 2010. By Damir Žižić.



Photo 6. *Vatropokretač*, September 20th, 2010. By Damir Žižić.



Photo 7. *Vatrotehna 2.0*, October 10th, 2010. By Damir Žižić.



Photo 8. *Vatrotehna 2.0*, October 10th, 2010. By Damir Žižić.

Skok Meyerholda:
“Vatrotehna (2.0)” grupy
Montažstroj I barbarzyńska dyscyplina maszyny

Artykuł analizuje dwie wersje widowiska *Vatrotehna*, inspirowanego *Prometeuszem skowanym* Ajschylosa i tragicznością interpretacji Meyerholda w wykonaniu grupy Montažstroj. Przedstawiony został kontekst obu wykonań, a zwłaszcza perspektywa re-performatywności w warunkach postsocrealistycznych i neokapitalistycznych. Wykonania Montažstroju uznane są za radykalną *in situ* performatywną *praxis*, zorientowaną na wspólnotę i głęboko zakorzenioną w tradycjach teatralnej awangardy. W związku z tym kluczowe okazały się takie kwestie jak iteratywność, proksemika społeczna i polityczne zaangażowanie widowiska. Fabularny intertekst Ajschylosa i performatywny intertekst Meyerholda stają się platformą *ponownego zbadania* i *ponownego wykonania* w surowym, niemal barbarzyńskim trybie biomechaniki, co więcej – w totalnie zmediatyzowanym i maszynocentrycznym społeczeństwie.

Słowa kluczowe: Montažstroj, re-performatywność, teatr fizyczny, teatr awangardowy, performens radykalny.

Przekład z języka angielskiego
Wojciech Sajkowski

Note

Leo Rafolt, Sveučilište Josipa Jurja Strossmayera, Osijek [Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek], Umjetnička akademija [The Academy of Arts], Kralja Petra Svačića 1/F, 31 000 Osijek, Hrvatska [Croatia].

lrafolt@gmail.com

No competing interests have been declared.

The preparation of the paper was self-financed by the author.