

Enikő Sepsi

bio-note: Enikő Sepsi, dean of Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary. Research areas: modern and contemporary theatre and poetry, religious studies. List of most important publications in foreign languages related to the topic: Rapport de l'infini à la finitude dans l'acte contemplatif. Deux exemples distincts: Simone Weil et Yves Bonnefoy, in A. Ádám – E. Sepsi – S. Kalla (eds.), *Contempler l'infini*, Budapest – Paris, KRE – L'Harmattan, France – Hongrie, 2015, 201–208; *Le "théâtre" immobile de János Pilinszky - lu dans l'optique de Mallarmé, Simone Weil et Robert Wilson*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2014; *Theatrum philosophicum* du dépassement du moi, in G. Gutbrod – J. Janiaud – E. Sepsi (eds.), *Simone Weil - philosophie, mystique, esthétique*, Paris, Archives Karéline, 2012, 35–53; L'ordre rythmique de la parole jetée dans l'espace, in Fabienne Boissières (ed.), *Dire le désordre*, Paris, Classiques Garnier, 2012, 103–115; Notes sur la politesse et quelques autres sujets, in Michel Murat – Frédéric Worms (eds.), *Alain, Littérature et philosophie mêlées*, Editions Rue d'Ulm, Presses de l'Ecole normale supérieure, 2012, 119–128; Enikő Sepsi (ed.), *Le théâtre et le sacré – autour de l'oeuvre de Valère Novarina*, Budapest, Ráció Kiadó, 2009 Décréation et poétique immobile: Alain, Mallarmé, Simone Weil et Pilinszky, in Jérôme Thélot – Jean-Michel Le Lannou – Enikő Sepsi (eds.), *Simone Weil et le poétique*, Paris, Kimé, 2007, 167–188; Miklós Vassányi – Enikő Sepsi – Anikó Daróczi (eds.): *The Immediacy of Mystical Experience in the European Tradition*, Cham (Svájc), Springer International Publishing, 2017. Enikő Sepsi, "On Bearing Witness to a Poetic Ritual: Robert Wilson's *Deafman Glance* as seen by János Pilinszky", in Jay Malarcher (ed.), *Text & Presentation, 2017*, The Comparative Drama Conference Series, 14, McFarland, 2018, 167–179.

e-mail: sepsi.eniko@kre.hu

**Theatrical Approaches to Mystery: “Kenosis” in Valère Novarina’s Works**  
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**Abstract**

Organic theatre (Polish theatre director Jerzy Grotowski’s term) tries to reach *via negativa*, the state at which the actor is a *vehicle*, an empty vessel ready to take in and carry transcendence. The debates on sacrality in Europe and America and the increasing interest in rituals outside Europe have compelled twentieth-century artists to abandon traditional theatre and the classical dramatic text (Grotowski, Tadeusz Kantor, Ariane Mnouchkine, etc.). Valère Novarina’s writerly practice, for example, is like a linguistic sink. His theatrical practice and the theatre revealed in his essays draw on the act of the creative word burnt and revived by the actor lending him or herself to action, the hidden liturgy of the word in space. Not denying the relevance to this subject of other Far Eastern sources of inspiration, I would like to offer an analysis of Valère Novarina’s theatre, where self-emptying becomes an important element in the direction of actors (i.e. the work done with the actors) and in which the Christian theological term *kenosis* is relevant in the context of rituals taking place on stage. For references to “mystery” and “self-emptying,” I will rely on some excerpts from *Talking with Angels* as transcribed by Gitta Mallasz.

Keywords: kenosis and theatre, mystery, self-emptying, Valère Novarina

**Introduction**

In this essay, I offer a short overview of theatre forms in which, through the work with the actors (i.e. directing), self-emptying becomes the basis of a new approach, “*imitatio Christi*,” and not simply in a theological or ethical sense, but also as an aesthetic application of *kenosis* to theatre. Not denying the relevance to this topic of other Far Eastern sources of inspiration, I offer an analysis of Valère Novarina’s theatre, in which self-emptying becomes an important element in the direction of actors (i.e. the work done with the actors) and in which the Christian theological term *kenosis* is relevant in the context of rituals taking place on stage. These rituals, to use the vocabulary of figuralistic typology, are the antitypes of Christ’s

kenotic act, which is the type. Figuring, which can also mean recreating, in this case means “imitatio Christi.”

Having translated some texts by Novarina and secondary literature written on his work in French and in Hungarian, I would like to add to my research on Novarina’s work and essays by presenting and defining phenomena of “kenotic” theatre in which open-ended “saint” (instead of the “sacred”) and profane elements overlap. I have presented my research in Hungarian in my book *Kép, jelenlét, kenózis a kortárs francia költészetben és Novarina színházában* and also in French at the symposium *Valère Novarina: les quatre sens de l’écriture*, which was organized in Cerisy-la-Salle in 2018 (the proceedings of which will be published as a book).

### ***Kenosis***

According to Christian theologies (Christology), *ekenōsen* (κένωσις, literally emptiness) is a primary action of self-revelation of the Trinitarian God. It also denotes the self-emptying of one’s own will and the process of becoming entirely receptive to God’s divine will. The word ἐκένωσεν (*ekénōsen*) is used in Philippians 2:7: “[Jesus] made himself nothing” in the New International Translation, but translated as “but [he] did empty himself” in Young’s Robert Young’s 1862 Literal Translation. The Greek text uses the verb form κενόω (*kenóō*), “to empty.” The New International Translation continues: “rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross. Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name[.]”<sup>1</sup>

In his commentaries written to this letter (2, 7-8), John Calvin highlights that following Christ also means self-abasement in connection with kenosis. Compared to other authors (Martin Chemnitz, Hans Urs von Balthasar, and Xavier Tilliette), Calvin has a different understanding of kenosis, which in his view is not self-diminution or the abandonment by Christ of his divine nature, but rather the act of keeping this divine nature hidden (*crypsis*).

In his *Church Dogmatics*, Protestant theologian Karl Barth refers to the Latin text of Calvin’s *Institutio* when he contends that the incarnation of Christ does not constitute any

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<sup>1</sup> New International Translation (NIV), 2011.

kind of confinement, because even in his self-abasement, Christ did not cease to be God's Son:<sup>2</sup>

The word *ἐκένωσεν* in Phil. 2:7 certainly does not mean this. It says that 'being in the form of God,' enjoying it, freely disposing of it (*ἐν μορφῇ Θεοῦ ὑπάρχων*) He carried through a self-emptying, that is, He took the form of a servant (*μορφὴν δούλου*). The *κένωσις* consists in a renunciation of His being in the form of God alone. (...) As God, therefore, (without ceasing to be God) He could be known only to Himself, but unknown as such in the world and for the world. His divine majesty could be in this alien form. It could be a hidden majesty. He could, therefore, humble Himself in this form. (...) He had the freedom for this condescension, for this concealment of His Godhead. He had it and He made use of it in the power and not with any loss, not with any diminution or alteration of His Godhead. That is His self-emptying.<sup>3</sup>

To sum up the theological introduction, *imitatio Christi* also means the possibility of repeating kenosis, being created as images of Christ means (for humankind) a condescension and the deconstruction of the human idol (images) and its exaltation. On the other hand, the word "imitation" suggests that there is some volitional act in this. In his work *Systematic Theology*, Paul Tillich distinguishes four ways of self-salvation: the legalistic, the ascetic, the mystic, and the sacramental-dogmatic-emotional. The sacramental presence of God is the opposite of self-salvation, Tillich suggests in the conclusion of his chapter: "The mere performance of the accepted rites or the mere participation in a sacramental act is considered to have saving power. The sacrament is given, and, as such, it is understood to negate self-salvation. But the way in which it is used opens wide the door for a self-saving attitude."<sup>4</sup>

Apart from some allusions and references in Balthasar and Tilliette's works, Western scholarly literature does not discuss the connection between kenosis and literature or kenosis and theatre.<sup>5</sup> It was Japanese theologian Kazoh Kitamori who, in his book *Theology of the Pain of God*,<sup>6</sup> presented the analogy of the father and son's conflict (i.e. the father sacrificing

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<sup>2</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Volume IV/1: *The Doctrine of Reconciliation* (translated by G. W. Bromiley), Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1956, 179–180.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 180.

<sup>4</sup> Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* Vol II. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957. 85.

<sup>5</sup> With two exceptions: Larry D. Bouchard, *Playing Nothing for Someone: "Lear," Bottom, and Kenotic Integrity*, *Literature and Theology*, vol. 19. No. 2 (June 2005), 159–180, and J. Edgar Bauer's study. But these studies use the adjectival form of the word (i.e. kenotic) in a metaphorical sense, and not in its theological complexity.

<sup>6</sup> Richmond, Va., John Knox Press, 1965.

his son) in traditional kabuki theatre to<sup>7</sup> explain God's hatred of sin and love for humankind, which are unified in the pain of God sacrificing his Son on the cross.<sup>8</sup>

### **Theatrical forms and trainings**

The debates on sacrality in Europe and America and the increasing interest in rituals outside Europe compelled twentieth-century artists to abandon traditional theatre and the classical dramatic text. The revolution of the ritualistic theatre, which took place in Europe in the second half of the 1960s, is connected primarily to Jerzy Grotowski. While Peter Brook and Eugenio Barba had reformed Western theatre by researching its archaic forms, Grotowski had in turn been establishing the foundations of actor-pedagogy, which has been in use up to the present day and is applied in theatrical practice.<sup>9</sup> His organic theatre (to use his term) tries to reach *via negativa*, the state at which the actor is a *vehicle*, an empty vessel ready to take in and carry transcendence. The aim of the physical training is to achieve this condition by reaching out to and training the maximal boundaries of the body.

As one of Kantor's younger colleagues Grotowski created a so-called "poor theatre" characterized by its search for a "secularized *sacrum*" and demanding from its actors the sort of total commitment usually expected from saintly men in traditional religions ("secular saint"). Instead of the mercantile attitude of actors trying to "sell" themselves to an audience, Grotowski propounded an ascetic *via negativa* of acting by elimination. He demanded that the actors take off the mask of everyday life and perform an act of total self-revelation.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 177.

<sup>8</sup> In *Der Gekreuzigte Gott*, Jürgen Moltmann criticizes several of Kitamori's statements. At the same time, the abovementioned work by Kitamori sits well with nineteenth-century and twentieth-century Russian thinkers like Nikolai Berdyaev and Sergei Nikolaevich Bulgakov, who also hold that God's suffering is an inevitable part of experiencing love and connecting with others, which is a basic characteristic of God's nature.

<sup>9</sup> See J. Edgar Bauer, Tadeusz Kantor, Kenotic Theatrology and the "Reality of the Lowest Rank", a paper presented at The 2000 CESNUR International Conference, University of Latvia, Riga, Latvia, 2004, [http://www.cesnur.org/2004/bauer\\_kantor.htm](http://www.cesnur.org/2004/bauer_kantor.htm), accessed 18 November 20; Peter Brook, *The Empty Space. A Book About the Theatre: Deadly, Holy, Rough, Immediate*, New York, A Touchstone Book published by Simon & Schuster, 1996; Tadeusz Kantor, *A Journey Through Other Spaces. Essays and Manifestos, 1944–1990*, ed. and transl. by Michal Kobialka, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1993.



1. Training at Grotowski's Teatre-Laboratorium in Wroclaw with Ryszard Cieślak. Plastic and Physical Training (1972) – Picture taken from Odin Teatret Film, director: Torgeir Wethal

Acting poorly and acting non-acting are characteristic of Tadeusz Kantor's *Zero Theater*, but they can also be seen part of the heritage of Indian and Chinese cultures (Bhagavad-Gita and Taoism).

### **The “kenotic” theatre of Valère Novarina and *Talking with Angels***

While writing this paper, I read *Talking with Angels*, first published in France with the title *Dialogues avec l'Ange*. The work is the transcription of spiritual instructions received by four Hungarian friends over a period of 17 months during the Second World War, from June 1943 to November 1944. Gitta Mallasz, Lili Strauss, Joseph Kreutzer, and Hanna Dallos held weekly meetings on Friday afternoons. During these meetings, over the course of 88 conversations, Hanna Dallos transmitted voices which, she said, did not emanate from her, but rather from four distinctly different personalities or entities. They were transcribed word for word by Mallasz and Lili Strauss. Three of the four were Jews who perished during deportations. The only survivor, Mallasz, who took refuge in France in 1960, spent years translating these conversations into French. The first edition was published in 1976, followed by a second, complete edition in 1990. The original Hungarian notes were published in the first decade of the twenty-first century. The most recent edition was published in 2010 by Fekete Sas. It is entitled *Az angyal válaszol*. (The first editions were preceded by a samizdat in the 1990s by the reverend Farkas József of the Reformed Church.)

While reading the book, I realized that some of the themes are profoundly related to Novarina's work, as is the case with writings by several other mystic authors and philosophers. I have already analysed the affinities of thought between Novarina's work and the ideas of Simone Weil.<sup>10</sup> However, the analogies with *Talking with angels* came as a surprise to me. After having drafted the essential points of this paper, I conversed with Valère Novarina about the books in question. Eventually, he wrote to me and informed me that he had read the book and it is the "livre de chevet" (bedside reading) of his principle actor, Claire Sermonne, in *Le Vivier des noms*, which is actually being performed.

I offer examples of relevant passages from these dialogues transmitted in a rhythmic and poetic form:<sup>11</sup>

	English	Hungarian
mystery	<p>"L. It is unclear to me what 'spiritism' and 'mysticism' are. By 'mysticism,' Lili means exaggerated interpretations of sensational, inexplicable, paranormal phenomena. – It is its nature to be unclear! Do you know what a genuine <i>mystery</i> is?</p> <p>A SMILE ORIGINATING IN THE DEPTHS OF THE SOUL. THAT IS A MYSTERY.</p> <p>Teeth-chattering, slobbering, despair of the shipwrecked, that is what 'spiritualism' is. They want a sign and it is not given to them. NOT THE DEAD SHOULD BE CONJURED, BUT LIFE: ETERNAL LIFE!</p> <p>The sacred teaching is not hidden in darkness and obscurity; it radiates in bright daylight. What they call up, they receive. Leave the dead with their dead! So often did they summon death that finally it came. Let us</p>	<p>"L. Olyan zavarosak a fogalmaim arról, hogy mi a spiritizmus, miszticizmus? <i>Lilinek a miszticizmusról – a közfelfogásnak megfelelő – kissé dagályos és homályos képzetei voltak.</i> – Mert nem világos. Régi ködök és gőzök, melyek eltakarodnak, ha jön a hajnal. Tudod, mi egy 'titok'?</p> <p>EGY LÉLEKBŐL FAKADT MOSOLY – EZ A MISZTIKUM.</p> <p>Hajótöröttek vacogó nyavalygása – ez a spiritizmus. Jelt kívánnak, és jel nekik nem adatik. Ne halottakat idézzünk, hanem Örök életet! S a szent tan ne rejtőzzön homályban, hanem fennen ragyogjon! Ki mit idéz, azt nyeri. Hagyd a halottakat az ő halottjaikkal! Addig idézték a halált, míg eljött. Idézzük az örömet, és eljő az Ő országa. Ne reszkető félelemmel, hanem ujjongó örömmel!</p> <p>VAN-E TERMÉSZETESEBB VALÓSÁG, MINT HOGY MI BESZÉLGETÜNK?</p>

<sup>10</sup> Poésie sans « je » dans l'espace: le théâtre de Valère Novarina et de János Pilinszky, in József Fülöp – Zsuzsanna Mirmics, Miklós Vassányi – Gabriella Szilvia Kuhn (eds.), *Kapcsolatban–Istennel és emberrel: Pszichológiai és bölcsészeti tanulmányok* (Getting Connected—with God and Man. Papers in Psychology and Philology), Budapest, KRE – L'Harmattan, Károli Könyvek, 2014, 361–371.

<sup>11</sup> Homepage of the manuscripts: <https://plus.google.com/photos/100973688777859081342/albums/5655913998192006401>, accessed 16 November 2015.

	<p>summon joy, and the Divine Realm will come! Call not trembling with fear but with jubilation!</p> <p>COULD ANYTHING BE MORE NATURAL THAN OUR TALKING TOGETHER?</p> <p>Where is that thing you call ‘mysticism’?”<sup>12</sup></p>	<p>Hol a misztikum?”<sup>13</sup></p>
saying “I”	<p>“– One word explains it: You said, ‘I.’ That was the end. A curtain descended between you and Eternal Truth. You could not have awareness, for you were in the dark. The curtain is called ‘I.’ Pull it away and you become Ó!”<sup>14</sup></p>	<p>“– Egy szó elzár. Azt mondtad: ‘én’. – Vége! Fügöny húzódik közéd és az örök Igazság közé. És így nem ismerheted fel, mert homályban vagy. “Én” a fügöny neve. Ha félrehúrod, Ó leszel.”<sup>15</sup></p>
The body	<p>“Teach playing – not <i>with</i> the body but <i>through</i> the body... EVERY ORGAN, EVERY LIMB IS ONE WITH A FORCE OF THE UNIVERSE... THE PLAYING CHILD FORGETS ITSELF.”<sup>16</sup></p>	<p>“Taníts játszani, nem a testtel, hanem a test által... MINDEN SZERV, MINDEN TAG EGY VILÁGERŐVEL EGY... A gyermek, ha játszik, önfeledt. Elfelejtí énjét.”<sup>17</sup></p>

Novarina also considers it a mystery when strong light is shed upon you.<sup>18</sup> The actor is someone who offers his or her human body by acting (playing). And the importance of the body is highlighted in Novarina’s essays (see *Lumières du corps*) and his interviews (the body has a more elevated status in the Orthodox Church<sup>19</sup>). As Mallasz states in the book *Les Dialogues tels que je les ai vécus*:<sup>20</sup>

Alors que dans nombre d’ascèses traditionnelles – mais n’ont-elles pas été déformées au cours des siècles? – l’épanouissement spirituel s’accompagnait souvent de la mortification du corps, donc de la mutilation d’une partie de l’être humain, l’évolution enseignée par l’Ange passe par la plénitude de l’homme dans sa globalité.

<sup>12</sup> 28. *Dialogue with Lili* in Gitta Mallasz, *Talking with Angels, A document from Hungary transcribed by Gitta Mallasz*, transl. by Robert Hinshaw, Daimon Verlag, Einsiedeln, 2006, 200–201.

<sup>13</sup> 28. Beszélgetés, Lilivel in Mallasz Gitta: *Az angyal válaszol, Dokumentum*, Budapest, Fekete Sas Kiadó, 2010, 185–186.

<sup>14</sup> 29. *Dialogue with Gitta* in *Talking with Angels*, 207.

<sup>15</sup> 29. Beszélgetés, Gittával in *Az angyal válaszol*, 191.

<sup>16</sup> 26. *Dialogue with Lili*, in *Talking with Angels*, 184–185.

<sup>17</sup> 26. Beszélgetés, Lilivel in *Az angyal válaszol*, 169.

<sup>18</sup> Valère Novarina, *Les cendres*, in Mgr André Vingt-Trois (ed.), *Qu’est-ce que la vérité?*, Éditions Parole et Silence, 2007, 81–93.

<sup>19</sup> *L’Amour est voyant*, film directed by Attila Mispál, Duna Television, 2011.

<sup>20</sup> Gitta Mallasz, *Les dialogues tels que je les ai vécus*, trad. par Françoise Maupin, Aubier, France, 1994 (1984), 53.

Pendant les dix-sept mois des « *dialogues* » la notion du corps est devenue miraculeuse pour moi, car l'univers s'y révélait.<sup>21</sup>

While in several traditional forms of asceticism – but have they not been deformed over the course of the centuries? – spiritual fulfilment was often accompanied by the mortification of the flesh, thus the mutilation of part of the human being, the path taught by the Angel runs through the fullness of man in its entirety.

During the seventeen months of the 'dialogues,' the notion of the human body became miraculous to me; the universe itself is revealed in it.

### **The “kenotic” rituality in Valère Novarina’s works**

Antonin Artaud’s complaint that “actors in France no longer know how to do anything but speak,” is reflected in contemporary French playwright and director Valère Novarina’s aim at articulatory cruelty and linguistic carnage. Novarina represents the contemporary French language in its state of mutation, distortion, and transformation. His theatrical practice and the theatre revealed in his essays focus on the act of the creative word burnt and revived by the actor, who lends him or herself to action, the hidden liturgy of the word in space. Man created in God’s own image becomes a creator through the Logos (Word) in this theatre.

For the notion of self-emptying and the abandonment of the ego of the actor, a text by Novarina entitled “Work for the Uncertain” (a title which alludes to a passage in Blaise Pascal’s *Pensées*) could serve as an example (Novarina reformulates this image of the actor in several ways in several texts):

It’s an enclosure where we come to see the actor thrown onto the stage, forcefully and alone, wrenching himself away from himself, always like a blind one, a foreigner, an exile, as if fallen from his true place. He speaks like an animal surprised by the very act of speaking. We come to the theater to take fright with the actor, relive our entry into the incomprehensible body along with him; to breathe through an other, to recapture the taste for living words.<sup>22</sup>

*For Louis de Funès*, an essay by Valère Novarina, was adapted for the stage by the author, translated into Hungarian by Zsófia Rideg, and directed by Adélaïde Pralon in Budapest and

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<sup>21</sup> Gitta Mallasz, *Les Dialogues tels que je les ai vécus*, 53.

<sup>22</sup> Valère Novarina, “Work for the Uncertain”, in idem, *The Theater of the Ears*, transl. by Allen S. Weiss, Sun & Moon Press, Los Angeles, 1996, 115–116.

Debrecen in 2016. The figure of the French actor (Louis de Funès) is a constant reference in Novarina's works, but the sentences and dialogues attributed to him are imagined. During a rehearsal and workshop at Károli Gáspár University in Budapest two months before the Hungarian première, Novarina explained that, while in the painting of the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries the human face had already been deconstructed (for instance in works by Pablo Picasso, Francis Bacon, Jean-Michel Basquiat, and Chaim Soutine), in theatre, no one had undertaken this. His *ars poetica* is to show the proliferation, the multiplicity of human figures, like the Cubists did. As if in Novarina's theatre the representation of humankind would be prohibited as a mere "imitation" of the truth. The actor Dominique Pinon says in *Unknown Act*: "Il resterait à dire ce qui distingue l'acteur véritable de l'imitateur d'homme" ("It remains to be determined what distinguishes the real actor from the imitator of man.")

The actor's dance in *For Louis de Funès* is a dance scene in which the puppet of Louis de Funès takes the role of the actor more vividly than the real actor, Tibor Mészáros. The dance acquires the same function as the sheer logological proliferation and numerical mania in Novarina's other performances. (For instance, Novarina writes the following in *The Drama of Life*: "The action takes place in the Arseman Factory, in the Assman Factory, in the Aceman Rictory, in the Raceman Frictory ... The action takes place in a melodrome that measures one hundred meters by one hundred meters." <sup>23</sup>) The text of *For Louis de Funès* adapted for the stage begins with an appeal ("The theatre should not restart!") followed by a list like in classic comedies such as Molière's *La malade imaginaire* [*The Imaginary Invalid*] or *The Marriage of Figaro* with the purpose of putting the audience into a hypnotic state, and the actor ruptures the ordinary use of language. As Weiss notes, citing Novarina, these kinds of lists, presented in the form of a litany, have as their goal to "repeat the names until a whirling drunkenness" sets in, "instantiating an incantatory, often exorcistic, use of language" <sup>24</sup> that leads to resurrection. <sup>25</sup> The dance is a non-dancing, an exhausting exercise performed by an awkward body thrown into the world, i. e. into André Malraux's "condition humaine" [human condition]. This use of language and the dancing to death have roles in his actor's training that is similar to the role of physical exercises in Grotowski's method.

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<sup>23</sup> Valère Novarina, "The Drama of Life: Prologue", in idem, *The Theater of the Ears*, 11.

<sup>24</sup> Allen S. Weiss, "In Praise of Solecism", in ibidem, 32–33.

<sup>25</sup> See the Resurrection scene from *Unknown Act* presented in Avignon in 2007.

The comic and Medieval-style profane music of Christian Paccoud contrasts with sacral allusions, and the alternation between the music and the sacral allusions forms a circular dramaturgy specific to Novarina's theatre which, like a spiral, ends up in renewal. This ritual borrows a great deal from the discontinued Medieval tradition<sup>26</sup> and the breath-taking courage and acrobatics of the world of circus.

Returning to *For Louis the Funès*, the text then makes statements about the actor's work, creating neologisms introducing hundreds of metaphors. The actor not only says things, he also acts out the process of annihilation, the transition from death to resurrection, which constitutes the basis of Novarina's dramaturgy. As his double, the puppet of Louis de Funès helps the actor in this process. In the most climactic moment from a dramaturgical point of view, Tibor Mészáros pulls out a puppet to illustrate the doubling of his person. The image of the perfect actor, the marionette as such is not unknown in theatre history, and it appears in several of Novarina's productions. Among the ones performed in Hungary, the *Imaginary Operette* can be mentioned as an example, in which the child of a small family living in a box-house is making his puppet's head peek out of the wall of his cardboard home.



2. József Jámbor, Kinga Újhelyi and Artúr Vranycz in *Imaginary Operett (Opérette imaginaire)* at the Csokonai Theatre in Debrecen, 2009, directed by Valère Novarina, translated by Zsófia Rideg (photo credit: András Máthé)

Mészáros's work is helped by stage assistant Sándor Horváth, or "drama-worker," to use Novarina's terminology. As if the performance were a rehearsal, at the right moment, Horváth brings in a sheep or a folding screen as if this were a perfectly natural part of the course of

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<sup>26</sup> N. Koble, M. Séguy, « Désoubli. Rencontre avec Valère Novarina », in *Passé présent, Le Moyen Âge dans les fictions contemporaines*, Nathalie Koble, Mireille Séguy (dir.), Paris, ENS rue d'Ulm, « Aesthetica », 2009, p. 83-95.

events. The folding screen covered with translucent, off-white paper is the main instrument to prompt the obscuring of the actor's person, his becoming translucent, and his "imaginary" breakthrough (literally, the actor breaks through the folding screen and becomes a galanty show, or pantomime shadow play).



In Novarina's theatre, the actor's body is the temple and a vessel of the soul, while the ego of the actor is a curtain and barrier to be transcended through an act of self-emptying through the language offered to the space and the audience. This act helps him or her burn out the body by respiring (see "esprit"), like in some saintly practices in Far Eastern cultures or psychological and spiritual trainings. Novarina refers to the self-emptying of Christ as follows: "*Personne. C'est ce que vient faire le Christ. (Mashia'h: le messie); la figure humaine, il l'apporte vide. Il vient non seulement faire l'homme avec nous mais aussi poser le divin vide sur notre face.*"<sup>27</sup> ("Nobody. That's what Christ did. (Mashia'h: the messiah); the human figure, he empties it. He comes not only to play the man with us but also to put divine emptiness on our face.")

### Conclusion

In his work *Performance Theory*<sup>28</sup>, Schechner highlights that the attention paid to the manner of theater-making is already an experiment in the ritualization of performance. In a period when authenticity is difficult to define, "when public life has been theatricalized," Schechner elaborates, "the performer was asked to doff his or her traditional masks—to be not an agent of 'playing' or 'fooling' or 'lying' (public masquerades) but one who 'tells the truth'. If not this, then at least she or he should show how the masks are put on and taken off—perhaps in that way educating the public to the theatricalized deceptions practised on them by political leaders and media dons. Instead of mirroring the age, performers were asked to remedy it. *The professions taken as models* (and frequently enough cited by Grotowski and others) *included*

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<sup>27</sup> C'est par ce double mouvement d'incarnation et d'évidement – de kénose et de matérialisation charnelle – qu'il est en nous le *principe* qui renverse, palpite, pense, respire: en négatif-positif. En réversibilité, comme est offerte devant nous l'image double et *négative* d'un corps *x* sur le suaire de Turin." (V. Novarina, "Les Cendres", in idem, *L'Envers de l'esprit*, Paris, P.O.L., 2009, 168–169.)

<sup>28</sup> Richard Schechner, *Performance Theory*. Taylor & Francis e-Library, 136-137. (see the chapter "Theater for Tourists").

*the priesthood and medicine.*"<sup>29</sup> Questioning, constructing and deconstructing anthropoglyphs, Novarina's theatre also aims at the resultative aspect of rites. In fact, it also has a liturgical purpose in the above sense of remedy. There is a certain anamorphism in understanding kenotic ritual.<sup>30</sup> In other words, the spectator must have the correct angle, i.e. he/she must be involved in order to see a comprehensible form or figure. Compared to the scripted (written) rituality, there is a "liminoid" state of receptivity of the live theatre performance, i.e. the performed.

There is a recurrent cognitive metaphor in Novarina's work: Christ is the Word/Logos, and the stage is the place where words are eaten. It is the place of the last Supper. But the last Supper is not simply a metaphor or historical allusion, but a figure of speech which has two parts: the type and the antitype linked with the "radical openness towards the future." According to Northrop Frye, compared to the metaphor, typology is not a simultaneous figure of speech. Rather, it is a figure which moves in time: even antitypes have a progress that is an intensification where newer and newer perspectives are opened up until they reveal the apocalypse. This movement describes Novarina's circular or rather spiral-like dramaturgy well (he also uses names like ANTI-Personne, spiral-woman, etc.). For Novarina, the theatre is the place for the renewed form of the Last Supper, the communion of the actors. In typology and in Novarina's dramaturgy, there is both a horizontal movement forward and also a vertical leap.

The theological approach to Novarina's theatre which I have presented is rather unusual in French theatre criticism; religion and religious issues encounter so much hatred in France that, as Novarina himself noted in an interview, he was afraid of publishing one of his texts entitled *Cendres* [*Ashes*] for Ash Wednesday in 2007, in which he wrote about the meanings of the term kenosis.

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<sup>29</sup> Emphasis in the quotation. [[https://archive.org/stream/pdfy-CsafpNwsgbUa0FVq/141228729-Schechner-Richard-Ritual-and-Performance\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/pdfy-CsafpNwsgbUa0FVq/141228729-Schechner-Richard-Ritual-and-Performance_djvu.txt)]

<sup>30</sup> See the same statement about rituals in general and especially poetic rituals: Enikő Sepsi, "On Bearing Witness to a Poetic Ritual: Robert Wilson's *Deafman Glance* as seen by János Pilinszky", in Jay Malarcher (ed.), *Text & Presentation*, 2017, The Comparative Drama Conference Series, 14, McFarland, 2018, 177.

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