



ARTICOLO

## The Dramaturg's Gaze: About the role of the dramaturg in contemporary theatre and dance practice

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*"One only understands the things that one tames," said the fox. "Men have no more time to understand anything. They buy things all ready made at the shops. But there is no shop anywhere where one can buy friendship, and so men have no friends any more. If you want a friend, tame me..."<sup>1</sup>*

A. de Saint-Exupéry, *The Little Prince*

It is generally believed that the uncatchable beauty of the greatest artworks resides in the enormous variety of their interpretations. In order to become possible, this beauty needs to be actualised, but in order to be perceived as such, it must never really be in the form of matter. A marionette of Iago, in Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Che cosa sono le nuvole?* (1968), condemned to death and discarded on a large pile of litter, explains to Othello, who finds himself in the same condition, what the clouds, passing by above them, are. He says: "Boh!" (I don't know!) and adds: "Ah, straziante, meravigliosa bellezza del creato!" (Oh, heartbreaking, wonderful beauty of creation!)<sup>2</sup>, offering us from his *über*-position, to recall Gordon Craig's metaphor, an excellent disclosure on the human condition in relation to beauty. If beauty by itself remains unapproachable, observed from this well-known (to avoid the unpleasantness of claiming it to be inherently human) position of disposability, and if it tends to dissolve into mere intuition, how do we experience its presence, or better still, how does its presence enable us to experience it?

In this article, we will try to apprehend beauty's elusiveness with a net woven by the visual representations of the great Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's classic *The Little Prince* (*Le Petit Prince*). We will be helped by Rafael Spregelburd's lessons regarding the human tendency to first *acknowledge* the already known, Jan Fabre's appeal to imagine and Vincent Dunoyer's duet with himself. A series

<sup>1</sup> A. de Saint-Exupéry, *Le Petit Prince*, 1943, (Eng. trans. *The Little Prince*, New York, Reynal & Hitchcock, 1943, p. 62).

<sup>2</sup> Translation into English by the author of this article.



of theoretical concepts addressing the polyvalent nature of the object being examined will also contribute to paving the way for this inquiry. The particular theatrical figure, whose gaze onto beauty we will try to sketch and hypothesise here, is the theatrical dramaturg.

In the final decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Western theatre and dance practice welcomed the renewed figure of the multi-specialised collaborator, namely, the dramaturg. The significant influence of his productive agency aroused controversy at the theoretical level, strengthened by mutually exclusive forces displayed in an environment unstable for the organisation of labour in the theatre after the post-dramatic shift. The process of producing performances acquired an almost oxymoronic practical value with the explicit need for theoretical redefinition, caused by the weakening of the creative predominance of the author and the progressive establishment of an anti-hierarchical and collaborative method of work. This means that the actual theatrical product started to depend, more often than before, on the long process of *working together*. As time went by, the process became more valuable, from an artistic point of view, than the product itself. If the theatrical product was still definable as such, it was rather unfinished or infinitely changeable, while its formal structure remained provisory and dependent on momentary emergences. The theoretical support for these methodological shifts in theatre and dance performances can be found in, among other sources, Fischer-Lichte's famous definition of *event*. In her book *The Transformative Power of Performance* (2008), the advancing predominance of ephemeral and shape-shifting structures in the poetics of contemporary performance practice is advocated by highlighting the intrinsic nature of theatrical art as the art of presence. This book shows the way in which the increasing general awareness of the impossibility of strictly re-producing a performance, just like the impossibility of re-living entirely any *event* of our lives, changed the way creativity itself is visualised and practical engagement in it. If there is no re-production in theatre practice, we can assume that there cannot be any production or a product either. Every *mise en scène* can be only repeatedly re-constructed, each time under different conditions. In this array of forces, where does the revived dramaturg find his role? It is difficult imagining him being able to operate as an intellectual assistant or an internal critic of the reckless and unpredictable present moment. It is even more difficult to believe that he would be able to act as a corrective factor of something which is, by definition, inestimable. What is



his practical aim? What is his method of work?

It is widely held among scholars that every dramaturg needs to find his own way of dealing with other members of the theatrical collective. His knowledge, aesthetic intuition and communication skills ensure the exclusivity of his role inside the company. Nevertheless, the director or choreographer, even though not considered to be a demiurgic figure anymore, still covers a position of authority, which gives him the power to model the competencies of the dramaturg according to his needs, doubts and his own methods of work. The other members of the group would, presumably, contribute to this delineation. The diverse ways in which any theatrical community, as is the case with any community in general, deals with its internal relations, cannot be analysed specifically. It is rather impossible to hypothesise all the factors that compete in the assemblage of this complex network of *working together*, responsible for the configuration of the ideas prior to the actual performances. However, if we want to try to find a general rule of thumb for these mechanisms, we should start from the notion of the formal and content-related similarity between the process of working and the performance itself. That is to say that the performance will contain and show, in a more or less explicit way, an actual relationship, disclosure or disagreement between the agencies in the creative process, which takes place during the rehearsals. The performance, like a malicious child, brings out into the open all the embarrassing secrets of the household. As long as there is no text to be attained dogmatically, no predefined ideal scheme of guidance from the author or an ideologically engaged message that needs to be sent, the process of work itself becomes a vacant field longing to be inhabited. In other words, since *vacancy*, as an ideal starting point can be disturbingly controversial from a theoretical point of view, creativity itself assumes features of an empty space that is aiming to become a place. From the multiplicity of given to be that we can recognise in the spatial metaphor, the theatrical event wants to become marked by its internal and external communicational networks, bounded by its rules, however impermanent they may be, warmly circumscribed or even *beautiful*, as a place can be. (Iommi 2012) The creative process is a display of a potential, prior to the assumption of one particular state of being. The theoretical tendency to assimilate the process of rehearsing into the actual product of rehearsing by labelling it all with this emergent becoming of the *event* between the two referential others, is



clearly explained in Maaïke Bleeker's philosophical metaphor applied to theatre practice. In one of her essays, Bleeker uses the example of Deleuze and Guattari's theory regarding the process of thinking as an act between sides in a dialogue. (Bleeker 2003) Thinking, philosophers claim, happens in this middle ground, not necessarily filled with pre-constructed thoughts, but rather energised by the pure need to share the idea with a *friend*. Once we turn a space into a place, our place needs to be open, so that thoughts, impressions, feelings, doubts and ideas can move freely and re-shape themselves continuously. When generated from a relationship between two people, a thought has no creator. In this sense, it is obvious that such a *friendship*, as philosophers define it, must be made between every member of the company, as well as between every member of the company and every single spectator, or between the spectators themselves.

This said, it seems impossible to disclose what could be the right modality by which the dramaturg fulfils his tasks. This uncertainty could be down to the fact that the dramaturg's field of influence is not evident in of itself. While the director, choreographer, dancers, actors, light technician or make-up artist have their precise roles inside the theatre, the dramaturg is rather an unspecialised, or a multi-specialised, figure. In the *Dictionary of the Theatre: Terms, Concepts and Analysis* (1998), Patrice Pavis approaches the dramaturg's competences through diverse historical moments. Analytical aspects of the dramaturg's work seem to be a common denominator from Lessing's time to Brecht's. The role of mediator (between artists and production, production and public, public and artwork, with every possible match or variation) is crucial as well, even though it is often problematised by contemporary authors, as in case of Myriam Van Imschoot's reading, which focuses on controversial aspects regarding the dramaturg's regulative power outweighing his function of practical linker. (Van Imschoot 2003) His tasks could also be a guideline for an internal archive, critique and practical or ideological problem solving and so on. We can note, even without listing all these functions or entering much into their details, that the dramaturg's assistance is rather self-managed from a methodological point of view. The subjective way of approaching this highly non-specified job and the responsibility generated by the freedom to choose a proper mode to contribute to the functioning of a company, are due to the reliance that comes with the figure of the intellectual. If the aim is to retrace the interesting way in which thoughts move between us, as



two parties in a dialogue, the intellectual figure has by default the characteristics of a strong engine. It is about aiding the creative development of ideas by means of alternative thinking, tying the most *errant*, divergent and unimaginable solutions into creative knots, as André Lepecki suggests in his study. (Lepecki 2015) In this sense, we can hypothesise the results of the basic *errancy*<sup>3</sup> of a dramaturg, and there are two of them: his idea could be discarded, while everyone in the process is stimulated to think *differently*, or it could be accepted, and realised through the moulds of every participant. An important note to be made is that this kind of creative engagement is expected from every member of the theatrical collective, with consideration of the specific position of each one of them.

If the methods and tasks connected to the role of the dramaturg are various, then the only constancy is variability. But apart from methods and tasks, what are his actual tools? In some early theories on this subject, Marianne Van Kerkhoven, one of the first European performing arts dramaturgs, finds this figure to be an almost *invisible* collaborator, who helps the artist by giving feedback on the work done. (Van Imschoot 2003) He is also often paragoned to the “outside eye”, or as Lepecki claims, “disembodied knowledge”. (Van Imschoot 2003: 63) Definitions which contain disappearance or detachment as the method of participation by the dramaturg can be interpreted as highly problematic, since they negate his subjectivity. Does the insistence on an eye looking from *wherever* or the mind of *whoever* have the ambition to assign the privilege of neutrality to this unspecified agency inside the theatre? If it is so, could this utopian position be helpful as well? The depersonalisation of an intellectual voice, metaphorically deprived of its body, contributes to the complete concentration of power in the mind, as Lepecki notes, recalling the Lacanian “subject who is supposed to know”, which is, Van Imschoot insists, very dangerous for the creative process. (Lepecki 2015: 52, Van Imschoot 2003) The authoritarian position, which comes with the title of an intellectual, should not be approached as if it were a measure of a proper qualitative evaluation, selecting and discarding at its own discretion, but rather as the opportunity for a receptive and

<sup>3</sup> In his *Errancy as Work: Seven Strewn Notes for Dance Dramaturgy*, André Lepecki insists on the term *erring*. Precisely because of the impossibility to accomplish the task of being the objective first spectator (since just a human, with his partial and inflicted gaze), the dramaturg needs to keep his position unstable and modifiable. Since he must make mistakes as a human, he should, according to Lepecki, do so consciously. Here, the terms *error* or *mistake* should be regarded in their etymological sense as wandering, going astray, deviating or even transgressing.



productive contribution to the process of accumulating possibilities. Following this line of thought, the legitimacy in positioning the dramaturg as a neutral observer or critic can be found only in this lack of interest in giving an actual judgment on emerging ideas and in finding ways to please and stimulate their independent flow. Nevertheless, neutrality as objectivity is a non-existent category, since every act evaluates and excludes all the others. Even if we leave aside the diverse theories concerning the ideological or political controversies that are inevitably connected with the ways of practicing authority inherent to this polyvalent role, the methods of working, personal engagement and poetical preferences are rather subjective and depend on the background, context and aspirations of every dramaturg. How does this very pronounced subjective approach collide with the two basic tools at his disposal: vision and knowledge? In what ways is gaze related to knowledge?

Thinking, as Maaïke Bleeker claims in her essay *Thinking No-one's Thought*, is highly dependent on the formal structures through which it expresses itself. (Bleeker 2015) She gives the example of the perspectival gaze that appeared in the early Renaissance, which signified a change in the way of perceiving and representing the world. As we know, the perspective sets the precise spatial relations between represented objects and the position of the spectating eye. Bleeker finds methodological similarities between the perspectival gaze and the linguistic concept of *deixis*<sup>4</sup>. As in deictic constructions, which are responsible for positioning related to space, time and people, acted out by language, it is precisely the phenomenon of perspective which by scrutinising three-dimensional space from one determined spot, sets the basis for the Modern Era. In other words, the formal enactment of the perspectival gaze re-evaluated the very relevance of human vision and knowledge of the all-encompassing possibilities of interpreting the world. The rediscovery of the subjectivity of the perceiver meant the beginning of new communicational modules. Finding oneself to be spatially, and thereby physically and ontologically, different from the surrounding world, stimulates a tendency to search for ways to relate to others, Lacan claims. (Phelan 1993) Looking from a certain perspective literally means positioning oneself *vis-à-vis* all the rest. The imposed

<sup>4</sup> Deixis (from Greek *deiknynai*, meaning: to show) is a linguistic phenomenon which puts the speaker into the context of speaking. It expresses itself through spatial, temporal and situational determiners or, in other words, through personal pronouns, adverbs, tenses, etc.



freedom of choosing what to see when confronted with the abundance of unseen possibilities is the natural state of a human being. This lifetime wanderer in his own home should reconcile himself respectfully with the richness of the never-perceivable and should do the only thing a human being can do: make subjective propositions, which means he will *err*. The importance of locating the figure of the dramaturg spatially and giving him actual human corporality is the first step towards a precise definition of his work and creative engagement in the theatre. The human gaze is literally inseparable from bodily presence. The responsibility of positioning *in front of* refers not only to the mental engagement of the viewer but equally, if not more importantly, to his corporeal status. To describe the way in which our body perceives the surrounding world, Maaïke Bleeker, in her work *Visuality in the Theatre* (2008: 1-18), uses the example of Brook's performance *The Man Who*. Recalling this performance, Bleeker notes one scene in particular. One of the characters, due to an illness, loses sensation on the left side of his body. As the result of this defect, he is unable to remember the left side of a landscape, once seen. The deinstitutionalisation of the figure of the dramaturg and the reliance on the individual qualities of this perspicacious observer are important steps in the postmodern theoretical shift regarding this identity. If Lessing's first dramaturg worked for the good of the cultural community of Germans, the contemporary dramaturg does not possess knowledge that determines an exact measure of value and utility. Leaving aside the complexity of the contemporary communities to which the theatre applies, today's dramaturg is rather a researcher, a vagrant passenger in a multi-perspective world.

When the dramaturg finds himself in front of a merely sketched and fragile creative thought by an artist, what does he do? How does the dramaturg relate to beauty? Our theoretical approach to this highly complex subject will include a hypothesis on the problematics encountered by the dramaturg while interrogating his own gaze in order to enlarge the limits of the art and the artistry he is working for. In the following lines we will recall the curious cases of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's drawings in his book *The Little Prince*, hoping that they will help us discern the mechanisms regulating the dramaturg's creativity.

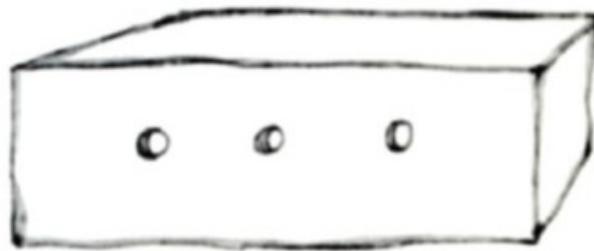
### II

*The stars are beautiful, because of a flower that cannot be seen.*<sup>5</sup>

A. de Saint-Exupéry, *The Little Prince*

How we deal with reality depends on our knowledge and our evaluations regarding it. *The Little Prince* is a book whose drama resides precisely in the collision of diverse ways of perceiving formally the same things. As perspectives are continuously changing, the world acquires diverse shapes, meanings and aims, creating in its semantic explosion multiple little worlds dispersed all over the imaginary cosmos. Nevertheless, the story of *The Little Prince* shows without a shadow of a doubt how all the complexity and wideness of the world can be condensed into the little space between the eyelids. The child's perspective is taken as a sacred one. It is in this presumably innocent and unburdened gaze, without any previous knowledge of the world, that the genuine power of being able to see and seize what is seen lies. How can our gaze remain sensitive to the world around us, as Saint-Exupéry suggests? Beauty can only be intuited. This very beauty as love means "whatever", as Mårten Spångberg said, in an unconventional interview<sup>6</sup> after his dance performance *The Internet* (2015) in the Vooruit Theatre in Ghent.

Looking at the drawing from *The Little Prince*, what does one see? (Saint-Exupéry 1943: 9)



*The Little Prince*

In Saint-Exupéry's story, the narrator claims that he has drawn a sheep. It is, in his words, hidden inside the box, out of the spectator's gaze. We cannot peek through the holes on the side of a box

<sup>5</sup> Cit., p. 70.

<sup>6</sup> Interview with Mårten Spångberg, conducted by Dr. Jeroen Coppens, May 2016, Ghent, Belgium.



to confirm for ourselves the narrator's story. Because of this impossibility, the hidden sheep becomes an absolute *other* to us. This happens because of the very nature of our visuality. It is imperfect, undoubtedly. The world is too complex for our gaze, so we select what enters it and that is a substitute for all that is excluded. Too many types of sheep and their being much too moody for our consideration, some overly "sickly", others too old, as the Little Prince observed, will all hide inside a box, or even better, will all become the box itself. (Saint-Exupéry 1943: 8) The box is the representation of *the* sheep, it is a projection, a mental image. It is the closest guess about what perfect sheep would look like. The representation as the act of observing itself makes the all-encompassing possibilities of enactment collapse into a single one. That is how we get to know the world around us.

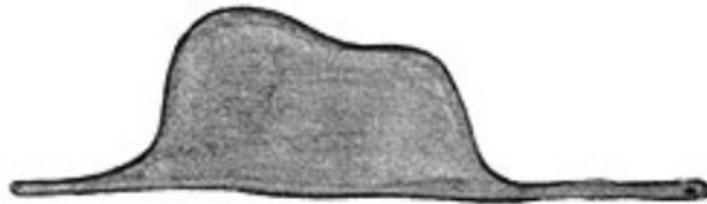
"Draw me a sheep!" – the Little Prince said. (Saint-Exupéry 1943: 6) It is an explicit invitation for the creator to express his standpoint by establishing a reference, a bond between the story and the storyteller, between the object and the subject, a sacred deal which will ensure the meaningfulness of the experience of narration itself. It is through the box, through this small banned but enchanted place that we, as readers, understand and appreciate the limits of our own cognition. In this well-taken failure to envision the multiplicity of what is possible by finding its nucleus, its perfect form, we take account of our innate difficulty and extrapolate one thing, this one *whatever*, and decide to love it more than any other *whatever* out there.<sup>7</sup>

Turning back to our dramaturg, we could ask if his job could be precisely this. Is it about discerning the most *beautiful*, in the sense of the best-formed, the most suitable, the most precisely uttered or the most convincing possibility to start a dialogue, a conversation, a process of thinking? "What is essential is invisible to the eye", claimed Saint-Exupéry's hero. (Saint-Exupéry 1943: 64) It might be that our dramaturg should look precisely where one cannot see.

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<sup>7</sup> "To me, you are still nothing more than a little boy who is just like a hundred thousand other little boys. And I have no need of you. And you, on your part, have no need of me. To you, I am nothing more than a fox like a hundred thousand other foxes. But if you tame me, then we shall need each other. To me, you will be unique in all the world. To you, I shall be unique in all the world..." (Saint-Exupéry 1943: 61).

Let's see another drawing. The one of a *hat*. (Saint-Exupéry 1943: 4)



*The Little Prince*

As a child, the narrator saw an interesting image in a book about nature, of a boa constrictor swallowing an animal. He imagined the second stage of this spectacular scene and drew an elephant inside a boa. Unfortunately, he remained very disappointed to find out that the others, or to be specific, the adult others, saw his bloodthirsty beast which was annihilating its prey, as an ordinary hat. That disclosure influenced his decision not to become an artist as a grown-up person. The child's desire to know more about the animal world acted itself out in the representation of what is already known.

Both cited drawings use a very interesting formal mechanism of veiling the presumably *right* interpretation as if it definitely existed but was permanently denied, while encouraging us, simultaneously, not to stop looking for it, inside our own gaze. Instead of relying on a default vision appropriate for our, in this case, mediocre, adult-age superficiality, (or to be politically correct, we could say: common-sense, quick evaluation), followed by the good manners of the one who blindly and kindly believes the narrator's benevolent guidance, we are taught by Saint-Exupéry that there must be an alternative even when everything seems so peacefully obvious. There is always a keyhole that leads to a completely new world.

While we are reading this book, the imaginary place between us and the story, caught in a box or in the stomach of some ferocious serpent, seems so equally small and enormous, scary and protected, lonesome and crowded... In order to avoid the confusion of it all at once, the author motivates us to keep looking for a safe place to turn our backs toward. We are invited to choose and the choice is to



be made between the same abovementioned *whatever*. What is the place that we trust so much that we do not *look* into it? What is the place where we would leave our heart unattended? What grows on the dark soil of our blindness makes up the garden we live in.

“Imagine...,” Jan Fabre also says. The renowned multidisciplinary artist and theatrical director, and his collaborator of many years and dramaturg Miet Martens, conceptualise their working and creative processes on this, only apparently, simple formula. During rehearsals<sup>8</sup> with the performers of their Troubleyn Company and with young students applying for Fabre’s masterclasses all over Europe, the two insist upon the act of imagining as the basic source of scenic creativity. “Imagine yourself as...” – the director repeats continuously. Fabre and Martens challenge their performers by inviting them to think first and then shape their bodies as if they were a diverse species of animal, machines, diabolic creatures, etc. It is not some sort of Stanislavskian conversing with the inner being through recalling past experience (since it seems implausible to remember the experience of being a tiger while, at least, appearing as a human), but rather the practice of externalising corporeally the *whatever* seen in the past. It is about exercising the readiness of a body to assume a thought and to communicate it clearly. This imagining means recollecting, in the first place, the photographs taken from our corner of the world and preserved carefully in our memory, in order to state them, secondly, as precisely as we can. It is testimony of our capacity to withstand the moment. Because “the moment is tougher and scarier and longer than time and eternity”<sup>9</sup>, as Mika Antić once said. (Antić 1989: 71 – translated by the author of this article)

### III

*The little prince crossed the desert and met with  
only one flower. It was a flower with three petals,  
a flower of no account at all.  
“Good morning,” said the little prince.  
“Good morning,” said the flower.*

<sup>8</sup> The references to the rehearsals are taken from the notes of the author of this article, produced during her visit to the Troubleyn Laboratory, in November 2016.

<sup>9</sup> “Svoju snagu prepoznaćeš po tome / koliko si u stanju / da prebrodiš trenutak, / jer trenutak je teži / i strašniji i duži / od vremena i večnosti” (“You will be able to recognize your strength/ by how capable you are of overcoming the moment, / because the moment is tougher and scarier and longer than time and eternity” – Antić 1989: 71 – translated into English by the author of this article).



*"Where are the men?" the little prince asked, politely.  
The flower had once seen a caravan passing.  
"Men?" she echoed. "I think there are six or seven of  
them in existence. I saw them, several years ago. But one  
never knows where to find them. The wind blows them away.  
They have no roots, and that makes their life very difficult."  
"Goodbye," said the little prince.  
"Goodbye," said the flower.<sup>10</sup>*

A. de Saint-Exupéry, *The Little Prince*

How do our "tamed" gazes, paraphrasing the Little Prince's fox friend's "establishing of ties", perceive the world? (Saint-Exupéry 2002: 46)

The act of seeing presumes not seeing, as the already quoted Maaïke Bleeker illustrates in her essay *Dramaturgy as a Mode of Looking* using the example of a calligram. (Bleeker 2003) It is a particular form of art, which relies on the main characteristic of one of three categories of *metapictures*, theorised by W.J.T. Mitchell in his *Picture Theory* (1994). Namely, this feature is called multistability, which means that the representation, as in the famous Gestalt visual experiments, contains two merged images but they can be seen only one at a time. When looking at a calligram, the mental projection, which is to be appreciated through words of poetry and a silhouette made by the specific disposition of the words of a poem, cannot be acknowledged simultaneously. A choice must be made in order to see.

Following the same train of thought, Rafael Spregelburd, the Argentine actor, director and playwright, uses the theory<sup>11</sup> of the writer and philosopher Eduardo Del Estal to explain the inevitable conditioning that the seen practices on the interpretation of the unseen and the dangerous arbitrariness related to the very awareness of this phenomenon. How do we look beyond the shown in order to get to know more?

<sup>10</sup> Cit., p. 55.

<sup>11</sup> Rafael Spregelburd, *Pensare la catastrofe: immagini per una scrittura anti-tragica*, workshop La Soffitta 2015 - Teatro, delivered in collaboration between Emilia Romagna Teatro Fondazione, Fondazione Cineteca Bologna and the University of Bologna, Teatro delle Moline, Bologna, February 2015. One part of the lesson is retrievable on-line at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8EEZdO0KAGo> (Accessed on 28 December 2018).



Spregelburd takes a piece of paper with a drawing of four lines made up of two sets of two parallel lines, so that they constitute something that seems like a rectangle, with the main difference being that the lines do not actually link and do not make angles. Even though the gaps between four lines are evident, to the question – “What do you see?” – the immediate answer from the audience is: “A rectangle”. The artist explains that seeing a rectangle means an almost reflexive application of which is already known onto the object of the unknown. In pragmatic terms, we could say that this tendency is due to very basic communicative principles, which give us clues to interpret the societal environment appropriately, in order to distinguish the important from the irrelevant, to react quickly to the problematic novelties encountered along the way and to function well in the community. He explains very precisely that the choice of seeing a rectangle instead of, for example, a man with a piece of paper in his hand, or the other objects in the background and so on, is almost unconscious. The spectator responds to Spregelburd’s demand by focusing on just one thing shown and by literally filling the gaps in the image in order to facilitate acknowledgement of the seen without any further difficulties. If this mechanism is obstructed, a “catastrophe” occurs, the artist claims.

Anything that transcends the cause-effect line of the dramatic narrative or any kind of synchronicity maintaining the plausibility of the story, the illogical, seemingly accidental factor that expels the drama out of the realm of the predictable, can be defined as catastrophic. To affirm this theory, Spregelburd takes the example of David Lynch’s films<sup>12</sup>. A seemingly correlated sets of events, sustained with a relatively firm and reasonable storyline, break all their logical bonds when an unexpected event or phenomenon, with unknown provenance and an obscure aim, bursts into the plot and deconstructs it entirely. The effect is a crushing of all the certainties that the spectator has previously obtained and a betrayal of his expectations. This curious dramaturgical agent makes him reposition his attention away from the content related to the formal aspects of the represented. In other words, if the story reveals itself as being emptied, or unable to develop understandable interconnections, it leaves the spectator no option but to take responsibility and reconstruct the content of the narration with the material at his disposal. The alienating narrative course, like

<sup>12</sup> In particular, when explaining “catastrophe”, Spregelburd cites the plot of *Lost Highway*, a film directed by David Lynch and released for the first time in 1997.



drawings that purposely veil their presumed essence, functions as an explicit invitation to the spectator to make an effort and see beyond what is shown.

Jeroen Coppens, in his article *The New Media Trompe-l'œil as a Metapicture*, analyses Vincent Dunoyer's *The Princess Project* (2001). The poetics of this dance performance needed complete reconstruction when the choreographer confronted the practical obstacle of not being able to count on his partner (due to the pregnancy of the ballerina) to recount the story of love. Dunoyer then decided to dance alone, or rather to dance with the absence of his colleague. He recorded the first act of the performance and played it on a screen mixed with the live recording of the second act. The overlapping of the mediated material created the illusion of a duet. While caught in the self-referentiality and multi-stability of Dunoyer's metapictures, we are exposed to some kind of neo-Baroque alienation (in the transparency of the means of production), contaminated with the *trompe-l'œil* immersive effect of the combined images. In this sense – Coppens claims – we are propelled to see even what is not there, as if we are Bleeker's *seers*<sup>13</sup>. (Bleeker 2008)

Is absence itself not just a different kind of presence? What is, then, the way in which our dramaturg sees absence, works for absence or exists in absence? Absence, like beauty, can only be intuited. "One must look with the heart..." the Little Prince claims. (Saint-Exupéry 1943: 73)

I would like to mention the scene of a plastic bag in Sam Mendes' film *American Beauty* (1999). It is a perfect example of a dancing *whatever*, with its own "entire life behind things"<sup>14</sup>, with its own choreography. We sense beauty before being able to explain it and when we can put that sensation into words, we do not feel anything anymore. In that sense, it is impossible to catch beauty, to "tame" it and to work with it, so artists and dramaturgs use matter. Crude, perishable, ugly and unshaped matter, like the litter on which Pasolini's heroes lie, is precisely this concrete terrestrial presence through which absence takes its form. No matter how limited in its powers and ignorant in its certainties, it is the pair of eyes which is necessary to host the most marvellous view of the sky.

In this sense, ideally, the contemporary dramaturg, like Bleeker's *seer*, is the one who is capable of looking at his own gaze and of questioning its reliability, while simultaneously taking into account all

<sup>13</sup> "The seer is someone who sees things that are not there: future things, absent things." (Bleeker 2008: 18)

<sup>14</sup> *American Beauty*, directed by Sam Mendes, DreamWorks, 1999.



its innate human deficiencies, its partiality and its subjectivity, merged with ideological and stylistic preferences and the literal, even material, standpoint of his observing body, in order to contribute properly to the artistic creation as a positive, stimulating and inclusive force. It is a linker, the one who is able to find, with his rich intellectual legacy, ways to build interconnections inside the theatrical company, between the artists, their art and the audience and within the creation itself that is to be breathed life into on the stage. The dramaturg is a *seer*, because he hallucinates, Bleeker claims. (Bleeker 2008) When he sees more than is visible, he leads and lets himself be led through it.

The dramaturg is an intellectual. He is more than an expert, a kind of non-expert. That means that, unlike experts who answer someone else's questions, as Slavoj Žižek claims<sup>15</sup>, the intellectual makes his own questions and detects problems before trying to solve them. The world needs intellectuals, Žižek appeals.

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<sup>15</sup> S. Žižek, IQ2 talk, Cadogan Hall, London, July 2011. Cf. also: *The Plague of Fantasies*, London - New York, Verso, 1997; *Less Than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism*, London - New York, Verso, 2012.



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### Abstract – ITA

L'articolo tratta il posizionamento della figura del dramaturg all'interno della prassi del teatro post-drammatico. Si interroga, da un lato, sui modi in cui il lavoro del dramaturg influenza la creazione artistica, prendendo in considerazione possibili controversie riguardo il suo status di intellettuale, le sue preferenze ideologiche e la sua soggettività e dall'altro, il potenziale che si annida nella capacità filosofica della figura di problematizzare e analizzare, tenendo conto anche del proprio sguardo, un vero e proprio idioma il quale connette diverse parti della totalità creativa. Con l'obiettivo di approcciare questa presenza teatrale molto sofisticata e polivalente, quest'articolo si riferirà, tra altre risorse, ai disegni di Saint-Exupéry del suo classico *Il piccolo principe*, agli esperimenti visivi di Rafael Spregelburd e alla danza d'assenza di Vincent Dunoyer.

### Abstract – ENG

This article proposes the positioning of the figure of the dramaturg within post-dramatic theatrical practice. It questions, on one hand, the ways in which the dramaturg's agency influences artistic creation, while taking into account the possible controversies around his status as an intellectual, his ideological preferences and his subjectivity, and on the other hand, the potential which nests precisely in the philosophical capacity of this figure to problematise and analyse from the inside, even of his own gaze, the very idiom which connects the parties of the creative totality. In order to approach this very sophisticated and multi-layered theatrical presence, this article will address, among other, Saint-Exupéry's drawings from his classic *The Little Prince*, Rafael Spregelburd's visual experiments and Vincent Dunoyer's dance of absence.

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