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András Hatházi^[1]hathazi.andras@ubbcluj.ro**Luxury balance, or the luxury of balance?**^[2]

The content is unknowable, because we approach it with words. These have different meanings for each and every person, and the essence is lost in the pronouncement of words. Consequently, I cannot say that I will reflect upon "luxury" balance, a phrase borrowed from Barba. I am just clinging to this expression used by Eugenio Barba (and which, most likely, is still used by him) and I will try to harmonize it with something that I discovered for the first time during my work with David Zinder, and which I dared to try in my most recent collaboration with Matthias Langhoff. So referencing Barba is just a pretext for the following exposition.

It has to do with the steady-state condition of "I don't know what will happen", the discipline -producing structure of "I won't interfere!", and the cheerfulness of "I'm only contemplating all of this". It's about the actor, the role, and myself. And their balance. Yet, perhaps, it is simply about **freedom**.

Actors are not free. They give up their freedom without hesitation for the sake of safety. Therefore they pretend to see, to hear, to exist. They know they should see, so they believe they see. They know they should hear, so they believe they hear. They know they should exist, so they believe they exist. Indeed, they are convinced of this. And so they remain **merely** actors who would like to become characters. This is why you can analyze them, form an opinion about their presence, develop techniques to improve their work. Because, unfortunately, actors don't consider for a second what might happen if they did not follow the well-known order, if they did not hide behind the sterile, seemingly secure and tested canons, but let the characters take their fleeting, but nevertheless rich fates into their own hands.

What would happen if characters turned into real human beings and did not try to remain interesting theatrical figures? But they don't, because the actors don't even think. The actors know. And this is not good. Romeo goes to the Capulets' ball, because the actor knows that this is how Shakespeare has written it, and if he did not act like that, the performance would stop, or it would be a different play from the well-known and expected *Romeo and Juliet*. The actor should not enter the ball because this was the agreement of the makers of the scene during the rehearsals, but because Romeo (and not the actor!) wants to go in. At a certain point, he really feels that this is what he should do. Romeo feels this; it is **not** about the actor *knowing* that this is how he should feel. For this to happen, the actor must renounce knowledge, all knowledge about the scene. He has to forget how the play continues, how the play ends. Instead, he needs to pay attention to his own Romeo, and he needs to obey his (that is, Romeo's) rising caprice. In order to do this, it is not enough to read the text in a different way, it is not enough to

squeeze interesting ideas into the scene. We need to think about man himself – but most of all , about ourselves – in a different way.

My starting point is that the personality, or at least how we usually think of it, is not a homogeneous, unchangeable entity, but merely a dynamic, situation-dependent, ever changing guard-rail that we create in self-defense against the world outside us. (And there is a special luck and virtue in our creating it. We have a chance to participate in the future discovery and development of our **essence!** I tend to think that we learn forms of conduct by close observation; we refine the patterns of others, shaping them, tailoring them for ourselves.) Consequently, there's no single I, and we can never say that we are whom we think we are. It's true that we react in a unique way to never-changing human situations, but eventually we come to do so mechanically. But, whenever we lose our balance a little bit, we instantly panic and feel our situation to be extreme. We "lose" our "personality", we "turn inside out" and, dragging our whole existence into danger, we desperately try to fill the gap through which the outside world may find a way toward us. Anything can threaten us, a sudden fatal event or falling in love, but regardless of how we live the moment, positively or negatively, we suddenly have the option to react **differently**. Suddenly we experience **freedom**.

In my interpretation, this is what theatre events are about. About people who suddenly find themselves in situations where their automatic behavior loses its meaning and they are forced to act in an unusual way by things going on around them and affecting them immediately. At such times categories do not exist **a priori**, but **a posteriori**. The situation can be evaluated only at a later point and participants in the event can be characterized as being this and that only after passing through it. But this belongs to the past, and theatre's time is exclusively the now, the unpossessable (in the full sense of the word) present.

So then, how could this happen?

When I was a child I played board games a lot – by myself. I played card games for four players – alone. In the same way, I played chess or other strategy games against one of my selves. I played Monopoly on my own, representing six people, and while I knew what the "other" kept up his sleeve, I kept forgetting it in order to preserve the passion of the game. Whenever I picked up the cards of the next player, I focused exclusively on his perspective and strove to win the game with his knowledge. I became the role, and I forgot the actor who knew the dangers of playing a certain card. Since I didn't cheat, I enjoyed the whole thing. It was extremely entertaining to me to continuously move from forgetting to the always new discoveries that this game offered. I think I encountered the seeds of my present discovery then without knowing the least thing about it.

As I write this piece, it occurs to me that what I call "luxury balance" might contribute to solving another important question about the effect of alienation. I once asked Matthias (Langhoff) how Brecht, the inventor of the phenomenon, thought about this. He could not give an exact answer, because – as he said – Brecht couldn't tell (neither undoubtedly, nor approximately) what he meant in speaking about the process of alienation either. However, I agreed with Matthias (as far as the translation from German to Hungarian and vice versa permitted) that this phenomenon might be about the actor (and the creators of the performance) reminding the audience they are all in a theatre, and whatever they see and evoke is not a reality. But it could easily be one.

This is where my interpretation of luxury balance fits in. Because everything depends on who I am at that moment. The actor? The role? Or the continuous spectator of myself: me? Where have I swung during the state of balance required by this trio? What have I become? I think that this is the starting point of realistic or theatrical (or stylized, call it what you will) modes of playing. We form the performance depending on whom we put forward. The character? I will be a realist. The actor? I could display my professional knowledge and be theatrical. Do I employ the effect of alienation? In that moment, I could be the one who signals: this is just theatre. You do not need to take it seriously, but only that of which it speaks.

I know this might seem too simple. But I don't think there is more to it than that. Shall we gloss over the details? That would be mere window-dressing.

I know that I am being silent about what people expect to hear: the disclosure of how these ideas can be achieved. I won't tell, because this concerns only me. I won't tell, because it will incite imitation and because it would immediately become a dogma. I won't tell, because the words are my words, and they acquire a completely different meaning in the recipient. I say only this: we don't need to know or follow any "actorly aim", we don't need to be somebody. Luxury balance or the luxury of balance? Among whom? Among the actor, the role, or the supposed ego of daily routine? Yes. And just as it is easy to find the centre of gravity that assures balance in the case of a triangle, the solution is no different in this case: all we need to know is, who is the AB side, who is the BC side, and who is the AC side?

And what are their dimensions?

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2002 First prize of the ERDRAMIL Drama Competition for *The Crazy Resner*, 2002 Award for the Role of Charlie Conlon and for recognition of pedagogical activity at the Festival of Hungarian Theatres from Kisvárd (Hungary)

[2] The „Luxury Balance was published” in vol. 59. (2014), March, no. 1, *Dramatica*, Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai 1/2014

