

performless

the operation of *l'informe* in postdramatic theatre

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performless:

the operation of *l'informe* in postdramatic theatre

(with a summary in English)

de werking van *l'informe* in postdramatische theater

(met een samenvatting in het Nederlands)

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introduction

As I walk inside the theatre room, I can see an orchestra tuning up instruments, and musical scores laying open on stands. Ranged across the front of the stage, the musicians seem all ready to start playing as *Paris#06*, a performance by the Italian theatre group Societas Raffaello Sanzio, is about to begin.¹ As soon as the lights go down, indicating that the performance is *now* starting, I therefore anticipate the live music of the orchestra. However, the orchestra does not play. It does not play *now* and will not play at all throughout the entire performance. In other words, the orchestra, after having clearly made itself visible in front of the stage, resists performing according to the expectations it has set itself out to produce, and invites the audience to a paradoxical type of performance: that of 'not-playing'.

With a view to examining in more detail the implications of the dramaturgical strategy manifested in this example, it seems necessary to first and foremost tackle the issue of expectation. On the basis of the above description, the expectations of the audience (and myself, as part of it) about what the orchestra will perform, disclose a linear, deductive and essentialist type of reasoning. Namely, the premise goes like this: when we see an orchestra in a theatre room, we expect that it will play music; and even that it will play well. We do not really expect that it will play 'no music'. This line of thinking thus shows that in order to assimilate something, one seeks to classify it under a recognizable form that serves a certain meaning or purpose. In this sense, what else could the bunch of people dressed in black, sitting in front of the stage and holding different instruments be, if not musicians who will play music in the performance? Hence, one can claim that the orchestra's resistance to satisfy the audience's expectations about a 'good' performance, is also an attack against this grid of assimilation and production of meaning, similarly to minimal art. Minimal art has proven to be significant in that aspect, since its goal was to specifically attack this type of reasoning and to expose what lies at the limits of meaningfulness. Art-theorist R. Krauss (1977/1981) rightly observes that minimal art was directed against such conceptual and perceptual patterns, since "we tend to think that the act of finding out what something is like means that we give it a

¹ I attended this performance in Antwerpen, theatre deSingel, May 2006.

shape, propose for it an image that will organize it [...]” (p. 245).

A resistance to perform according to this type of linear conceptual and perceptual mechanisms and deductive expectations appears often in contemporary theatre. And that happens sometimes under forms of minimalism, but also through other radical and excessive aesthetic forms that are explored in this thesis. However, such performances are generally considered to be 'difficult',² because they confront their audiences with the unexpected, and cannot be easily assimilated by their normative grids of understanding. Lehmann discusses this strand of dramaturgical strategies extensively in his study *Postdramatisches Theater* (1999), contributing with a significant historical and cultural analysis on recent aesthetic developments in theatre. But the question this thesis deals with is: does Lehmann's study offer sufficient conceptual tools to sustain an in-depth investigation of the implications and the impact of radical and excessive aesthetics, which I believe to resonate on the domain of the ethical?

Hence, this thesis launches a prolific dialogue with Lehmann's *Postdramatisches Theater* but at the same time proposes to turn to and theorize the notions of *form* and the *formless* as they were conceived by G. Bataille (1929) and developed as conceptual tools for visual arts by art historians and theorists Y. A. Bois and Krauss in *Formless – A User's Guide* (1997). As it demonstrates in its course through a focus on specific examples from the theatre work of Raffaello Sanzio and the director Jan Fabre, such analysis can bring forth an in-depth discussion of this type of dramaturgies, concentrating on how they are manifested and what their implications and impact on the ethical are.

To be more explicit, Bataille used the concept of form to indicate something that is ontologically described and classified. In his short text on the notion of the formless (“L'informe” in 'Dictionnaire', *Documents*, 1929), he associated form with mathematical deductive thinking and epistemological knowledge.³ And at the same time, by using the formless as one example among many others, he sought to deconstruct the one-to-one logic of

² Theatre scholar H. T. Lehmann characterizes postdramatic theatre as “difficult”. The quotation marks are significant because they mark a difficulty in understanding such performances, but perhaps also disclose an irony towards this overused term, indirectly criticizing the negative nuance usually attributed to it: “[...] and, on the other hand, to serve the *conceptual analysis and verbalization of the experience* of this often 'difficult' contemporary theatre”, *Postdramatic Theatre*, p. 19.

³ This is especially evident from the phrases: “for academic men to be happy” and “mathematical frock coat” that appear in his text on *l'informe* (see: p. 34 of the thesis).

a dictionary by demonstrating how words escape firm definitions. For instance, the ontological question about the formless, 'what is something without a form?' can only remain unanswered. And, as he suggested, it is rather a word the meaning of which resides greatly on its "task", on its "job" (in French: *la besogne*), on what it *does* to form. Consequently, it appears that the formless has a "task" and is therefore *doing* and *producing* something, which shows that *l'informe* is an operation, a performative. But what is it that it *does*?

With a view to pinpointing its particular type of performativity, it needs to be noted that in French, the word *informe* has a double signification that is very much reflected in Bataille's use of the term: on the one hand it refers to something without a determined form and on the other hand, it indicates that something is imperfect, ugly and flawed.⁴ As it is explained at length further on in the thesis, Bataille's understanding of *l'informe* emphasizes both of these aspects, considering it a notion that serves to declassify; as he puts it in his text on *l'informe*, "to bring things down in the world" (as translated by Bois & Krauss, 1997/1999, p. 5). Bois and Krauss (1997/1999) offer a useful clarification of this point, observing that to declassify is to say that the formless is an operation with the task of undoing the 'good' form; or else, of generating the 'bad' form of things and, thus, suspending their logocentric meaning (p. 108). So, *l'informe* is an operation of contaminating the 'good' form with the 'bad' form of things from within. In a more philosophical and political context, philosopher B. Manchev with his book *L'altération du monde* (2009) also highlights the Bataillean notion's operational task of undoing, remarking that *l'informe* undoes regimes of power and authority (p. 95). It becomes, thus, needless to say that the performativity of the formless is to be understood through its operational task not of doing something to form, but of undoing the form and performing 'less' than what is expected from it. As it is more explicitly argued in the first chapter, *l'informe* can be therefore considered an operation showing a negative performativity, since its productivity resides on the task of undoing. And this undoing is the "task" Bataille brings to the fore.

The title of the thesis is also to be understood within the aforementioned context. *Performless* is namely not a word that is hereby introduced as a new concept; it does not mean something in a strict sense. Instead, it is a word that introduces a *play*: it brings together different aspects of *l'informe* (in English: the formless) and performance that are discussed in

⁴ "informe *adj.* Sans forme déterminée. Imparfait, incomplet; laid", *Dictionnaire*, Larousse de poche, 1995.

the present thesis by italicizing the term 'form' and making it functional in more than one ways (perform-less, formless, perform). In this way, the interesting relation between the notions 'perform' and 'formless' is launched and becomes a subject of examination.

In the light of this (condensed) theoretical background, I propose to revisit the dramaturgical strategy deriving from *Paris#06* and examine its implications a bit further. More precisely, as I have already observed, the presence of the orchestra resides on a certain meaning and creates certain expectations, in the sense that its image signifies for the audience that this is an orchestra that will play music. And it is suggested that this type of reasoning brings forth an understanding of the 'good' form of the orchestra's performance. However, this 'good' form is being undone: the orchestra does not play music and, hence, resists performing according to its semantics. In other words, this artistic choice can be considered a dramaturgical operation with a specific task, which is to undo the 'good' form and to resist performing on the basis of logocentric expectations. I would, thus, propose to consider it a *dramaturgy of formlessness* that is able to increase perceptual alertness and to create agitation by inviting the audience to an encounter with the unforeseeable (and yet, so simple and basic)⁵ event. What's more, this encounter educes a feeling of incompleteness to the audience, as the orchestra performs *less* than what is expected from it. Therefore, the dramaturgy of formlessness in question brings disorder to usual patterns of understanding and perceiving and what eventually appears to stand in front of the stage is the plain image of an orchestra; more accurately, the image of what one would call an orchestra. In other words, the audience becomes aware of an alternative possibility: perceiving and understanding the orchestra as being able 'to play and not to play' as a whole. And such awareness invites the audience to an experience of potentiality that, as I show in the course of this thesis, is triggered often in this strand of performances and resonates on ethics.

As a final point to this discussion, I would like to emphasize *l'informe* as being considered an operation without an end. This is important to note because, according to essentialist thinking, form-less would refer to an endpoint; that is, to an experience or understanding of no form, of emptiness and of a complete erasure of meaning. However, as it has been already

⁵ Manchev argues that Bataille, in his work on images and representation (referring mainly to his *Dictionnaire Critique*, in which *l'informe* belongs too), is concerned with extra-ordinary cases that most of the times are the most ordinary ones. As he writes, in fact they are so ordinary that they remain invisible, *L'altération du monde: pour une esthétique radicale*, p. 33.

suggested and is explicitly argued in the following chapters, the operation of *l'informe* invokes the event of the unexpected and creates an experience of potentiality, in which the process of how meaning is produced is attacked, rather than the idea of meaning per se. In fact, one could turn toward minimal art again in order to disentangle this relationship. Namely, as Krauss (1977/1981) rightly explains, “minimal artists are simply re-evaluating the logic of a particular source of meaning rather than denying meaning to the aesthetic object altogether” (p. 262). In this sense, the orchestra that plays no music in *Paris#06* is not to be understood as formless and meaningless. One could still call it an orchestra on the basis of the image it produces, in order to assimilate and communicate it. However, its resistance to perform according to essentialist expectations, places its image *at the verge* of meaning. In other words, the logic of what the presence of an orchestra on stage *means* is being opened up and re-evaluated (it may mean that it will-play and it may mean that it will-not-play) – in a sense, the orchestra's pre-fixed meaning is *evacuated* and its 'good' form is contaminated by its 'bad' form from within. Hence, this scene can be considered a dramaturgy of formlessness that unsettles the audience, as it invites them to a confrontation with the possibility of no meaning, by touching upon the extreme limits of how it is expected from the orchestra to perform.

The particular case-study from *Paris#06* has been selected to *open* this thesis – although it is not as equally radical as the rest of the examples discussed in the following chapters – rather, because it offers a very precise and concise frame for introducing my argument. It therefore paves the way for the following chapters to succeed, which I shall hereby briefly summarize. But before proceeding to the chapters' description, it also needs to be noted that this thesis proposes ways to analyze postdramatic performances, in which philosophy and theatre theory meet and intersect. Namely, a particular focus on the work of philosophers J. Derrida and G. Agamben is conducted, as their theories vividly resonate on Bataille's operation of *l'informe* and shed light on exploring the impact on the ethical.

So, the first chapter, often alluding to the above scene of *Paris#06*, examines the historical influences and different aspects of this strand of theatre and studies the notion of *l'informe* in its various uses and conceptualizations, in order to present where this thesis 'stands' and how it 'works' as well as to weave the important notions and elements together, allowing for a

prolific theorization of *l'informe* within postdramatic theater to be launched.

The second chapter explores specific dramaturgical uses of language that have appeared in recent performances by Raffaello Sanzio and Jan Fabre, suggesting to consider them operations of 'base materialism'. It analyzes usages of signs and voice on stage that, as it is demonstrated, can be frustrating and confusing for the audience because they radically resist logocentric meaning. And instead, it is argued that they expose the 'exteriority' and scatological aspect of language, evoking an experience of the extreme limits of meaning and, thus, a crisis of reason.

In the third chapter, cases of human and nonhuman animals *sharing* the stage are examined in works of the same artists, which launch an aesthetic logic that resists the audience's expectations for seeing 'the human' body on stage and induce ambivalence and irritation. It is argued that these cases can be considered dramaturgical operations of horizontality, because they 'lower' the *humanness* of the human body and unsettle the hierarchy between human and nonhuman animals in the realm of theatre. As a result, they evoke a *proto*-posthuman thinking, which indicates a critical re-consideration of what *is* human.

Cases of excessive repetition in the works of the same artists are studied in the last chapter, which are thought to induce an experience of time as pulsation. Namely, it is claimed that such dramaturgies of time evoke intense corporeal responses and can be considered operations of pulsation that resist an understanding of time as linear and homogeneous, activating instead a dynamic and sensorial engagement. On the basis of such engagement with time, an experience of potentiality is educed, suggesting a radical *openness* to the unexpected.

And finally, in the Conclusion, the theorization of *l'informe* is summarized, showing that this strand of performances has an impact on the ethical. After an investigation of the relationship between contemporary theatre and ethics, it is therefore suggested that the performances discussed in this thesis launch the possibility for a *meta*-ethical ethics, which I propose to call 'ethics of potentiality'.

1. radical aesthetics in postdramatic theatre

The performances selected to be studied in this thesis derive from recent works of the Italian theatre company Societàs Raffaello Sanzio (with Romeo Castellucci as the director)⁶ and the Flemish director Jan Fabre, and are characteristic of their radical and provocative aesthetics. Their work appeared around the 1980s and is representative of a strand of theatre that is particularly discussed in Lehmann's *Postdramatisches Theater*, since it makes use of radically unconventional dramatic forms, such as extreme, cryptic and at times disturbing uses of texts, bodies, rhythms, voice and sounds on stage, inviting the audience to a confrontation with the unexpected and the unfamiliar. Other significant makers that appeared a few years earlier or around the same period, initiating and marking this strand of theatre with their work, are also mentioned by Lehmann, such as Tadeusz Kantor, Bob Wilson, Jan Lauwers (*Needcompany*), Meg Stuart, William Forsythe, Wim Vandekeybus, Ariane Mnouchkine, Heiner Müller, Einar Schleeff etcetera. However, I hold that Raffaello Sanzio and Fabre are exemplary cases for this thesis, because their work is still being presented internationally and considered radical today, manifesting aesthetic choices that evoke intense corporeal experiences and are used strategically, as they seek to communicate with the audience in excessive ways. Hence, their aesthetic choices have a dramaturgical significance, which I believe demands careful and separate theoretical examination. Moreover, the overall artwork of the selected makers can be considered artistically interrelated and also representative of this strand of theatre, as they both began creating provocative and experimental work in Europe under the influence of performance and visual arts, causing disturbance and conflicting impacts to the audience. Since then, they have gained international acclaim and recognition and have therefore appeared to be very influential in the work of younger directors and choreographers. For instance, the aesthetics in the works of Ivo Dimchev, Apostolia Papadamaki, Lisbeth Gruwez, Aitana Cordero, Erna Omarsdottir, Rodrigo Garcia seem to be in multiple ways related to these two makers.

⁶ Although today the makers of Societàs Raffaello Sanzio produce individual works (so, Romeo Castellucci, Chiara Guidi and Claudia Castellucci do not co-create in the same way any more), this thesis discusses earlier collaborative works and therefore refers to the name of the company (Societas Raffaello Sanzio) rather than only to the name of the director.

More precisely, the present thesis discusses specific dramaturgical strategies that appear in the episodes *Avignon#02* and *Brussels#04* from 'Tragedia Endogonia' (2002-2004) by Raffaello Sanzio and in *The History of Tears* (2005) by Fabre, suggesting to consider them as dramaturgies of formlessness. Notably, the scenes examined from these performances share a common characteristic: they mainly deal with the themes and conditions of infancy and animality. In Fabre's work these themes mostly derive from *within* the body of the human performer on stage, whereas Raffaello Sanzio demonstrates a more apocalyptic *mise en scène*, as animals and/or infants appear on stage in almost every work. As the following chapters show, this is an important characteristic for these performances' radicalism, marking a *zone* that is not defined by language as discourse and that in many way resists what the 'good' form of the human and the nonhuman animals signifies for western human thought.

In addition, this thesis at times refers to other works of these makers, hoping to offer a more extended view on how *l'informe* can be manifested, understood and conceptualized. But, as said, in all cases the discussion centers around dramaturgical strategies that I believe to be characteristic and recurrent motifs not only within the work of the specific artists but also of other makers. Needless to say though, these dramaturgical operations cannot be completely rooted out from the context and singularity of each performance. However, their performativity and impact can be investigated in relation to what they 'do' and what experience they evoke. This is also facilitated by a parallel study between the dramaturgies in question and the artworks discussed by Bois and Krauss, which demonstrates that even though they examine different fields, they do share many similarities. This affiliation does not come as a surprise when one bears in mind that both Castellucci's and Fabre's work is very much founded on aesthetics,⁷ as their main education, interest and background comes from visual arts. Castellucci namely studied scenic arts, whereas Fabre is also an internationally renowned visual artist.

Nonetheless, their work is in many aspects different as well. Although both are characterized by radical aesthetics and dispersal of energy, in Fabre this is mostly manifested through repetition, physical exhaustion, body metamorphoses and extremity, whereas in Raffaello Sanzio through a type of cryptic and morbid imagery, rhythmic disproportions and

⁷ Castellucci affirms that Raffaello Sanzio's fundamental interest is in visual art, as cited in: Giannachi, G. & Kaye, N., *Staging the Post-Avant-Garde – Italian Experimental Performance after 1970*, p. 137. And Lehmann emphasizes Fabre's radical aesthetics, calling them "aesthetics of poison", "When rage coagulates into form..." in *Jan Fabre: Texts on his Theatre-Work*, p. 139.

the frequent presence of animals, infants and unconventional bodies on stage. But, this thesis does not concentrate on a comparative analysis between the work of the two makers, and the proposal to conceptualize *l'informe* does not intend to be exclusive to the discussion of Raffaello Sanzio and Fabre. However, a comparative perspective on their work might indeed occur through the examination of different manifestations of *l'informe* in their artistic practices. Hence, this thesis discusses Raffaello Sanzio and Fabre's work not with the aim to examine it thoroughly, but rather seeking to provide a study that proposes ways for theorizing *l'informe* in favor of the analysis of radical aesthetics appearing in postdramatic theatre.

The focus hereby is drawn upon performances that have been created and presented in the last decade by these makers, concentrating though on specific dramaturgical strategies (for instance, the presence of animals and infants on stage, the use of long crying, practices of metamorphoses of the human body, projections of great rapidity, physical exhaustion). However, it needs to be acknowledged that the impact of these performances is not as profound as with earlier works, since the makers have become quite renowned in the field and present their work at the most prestigious festivals and theatre stages worldwide. Hence, a great part of the western audience has become familiar with their artistic strategies. Nonetheless, I believe that their impact is still subject for study, because, as this thesis demonstrates, their radical aesthetics (indicative of other postdramatic performances as well) has the force to unsettle conceptual and perceptual epistemological, anthropocentric and linear patterns. And what's more, they seem to have a significant impact on the ethical, which I hold to be a domain that deserves special attention and philosophical re-examination in the present times.

Chapter 1

resisting to perform

1.1 against representation: a resistance with no end

Paris #06 was first presented in 2003 but its strategic resistance to the semantics of form is not a new practice. For instance, it was in 1952 that John Cage composed his musical piece *4'33''*, during which no single note is to be played. In the score of this piece, the performer was in fact instructed not to play her instrument for 4 minutes and 33 seconds, for the sounds of the environment to be perceived as music from the listeners. Cage was namely fascinated by sounds, which, in his view, showed that there is no such thing as silence. As he attested in one of his lectures in 1958, “[...] silence becomes something else – not silence at all, but sounds, the ambient sounds. The nature of these is unpredictable and changing” (1961/1971, p. 20). Hence, although the intentions of this counter-movement are quite different for Cage than for Società Raffaello Sanzio (since the aim of the latter does not appear to have much to do with perceiving the always changing sounds of the environment), the strategy they both used and the tension therein produced are very similar.

Therefore, as Lehmann also demonstrates in his *Postdramatisches Theater* (1999), practices that show this type of resistance are not new in performing arts. Following the historiography of performance that is outlined in his book, one notices that plethora of such works has existed since the beginning of the 20th century and, hence, their inception needs to be traced back in *avant-garde* artistic movements that revolted against representation, norms, cultural codes and dominant ideologies by experimenting with radical uses of body, space, time, language and the relation with the audience. Especially Dadaism, surrealism and performance-art have all been greatly influential for the development of postdramatic theater's logic. Dadaism, triggered by Sigmund Freud's theories about the unconscious in the 1910s-20s, wanted to challenge “the 'pretense' of traditional representation” by making art in cafés, newspapers, cabaret halls etc (e.g. Tristan Tzara, Kurt Schwitters) (Jones&Warr, 2000/2006, p. 11). It was then followed by the surrealist movement, which showed even stronger fascination with dreams, forces of the unconscious, sex and fantasies.¹ And after the

¹ Seeking to irrupt the conscious and reach to the images of the unconscious, theatre directors J. Grotowski and R. Wilson were particularly influenced by surrealism as well. H.T. Lehmann comments about their work that “real communication does

Second World War, a more decisive shift took place. 'Artworks' turned into 'acts', 'events' or 'happenings',² the issue of the body became more central and the narrative got replaced by "incoherence and esoteric communication" (Lehmann, 1999/2006, p. 61). For instance, Jackson Pollock's horizontal positioning of the canvas became a performative act.³ And, as it is further discussed in the third chapter of this thesis, it radically altered the relation of the painter's body to the painting, undermining the traditional verticality in perceiving and making art.

However, the explosion of performance-art took place in the 1960s and 70s, when artists started using their bodies in more extreme and transgressive ways (e.g. C. Burden, V. Acconci, M. Abramovic), merging the public and the private domains, showing that an essentialist, complete identity of the 'self' is a western myth and heralding the era of the postmodern.⁴ Performance-scholar A. Heathfield (2004), when discussing the issue of liveness in art, denotes that

[in] Performance and Live Art the embodied event has been employed as a generative force; to shock, to destroy pretense, to break apart traditions of representation, to foreground the experiential, to open different kinds of engagement with meaning, to activate audiences. (p. 7)

And as it is demonstrated in this thesis, the strand of theatre examined hereby echoes back to several of those performance movements, as it employs radical aesthetics in its attempt to undo norms and to educe critical thinking.

not take place via understanding at all but through impulses for the recipient's own creativity, impulses whose communicability is founded in the universal predispositions of the unconscious", Postdramatic Theatre, p. 67.

² Theatre-scholar P. Pavis describes a happening as: "type of theatre activity that does not use a pre-established text or programme (at most a scenario or 'directions for use'), proposing what has variously been called an event (G.Brecht), an action (Beuys), a device, a movement, a performance art. This is an activity proposed and carried out by performers and participants based on the random and the unexpected, with no attempt to imitate an outside action, tell a story or produce a meaning, using all imaginable arts and techniques as well as surrounding reality [...] it propose a process of theoretical reflection about the spectacular and the production of meaning within the strict limits of a pre-established environment", *Dictionary of the Theatre: Terms, Concepts and Analysis*, p. 167.

³ For more, see: Jones A., "The 'Pollockian performative' and the revision of the modernist subject", *Body Art / Performing the Subject*, p. 53-102.

⁴ Jones, A., "the newly emerging artists' bodies from around 1960 to the present enact the dramatic social and cultural shifts we now define as indicative of a 'post' Modern episteme. The body, which previously had to be veiled to confirm the Modernist regime of meaning and value, has more and more aggressively surfaced during this period as a locus of self and the site where the public domain meets the private, where the social is negotiated, produced and made sense of", *The Artist's Body*, pp. 20-21.

But one of the most central figures to have inspired the theatre in question is A. Artaud. Due to his urge for a radical de-semanticization of the theatrical text and the human body, Artaud's appearance became the zero-point for experimentation in theatre and performance, and although he lived in the beginning of 20th century, his writings and visions have continued to have a great impact to the present. Artaud introduced the *Theatre of Cruelty*, that is a theatre seeking to go beyond representation. He was namely striving for a theatre that neither tries to represent nor to beautify reality. Instead, it had to stage *pure* presence, which signified for him the real, that is always cruel and painful. He thus writes that “the theatre of cruelty is not a representation. It is life itself, in the extent to which life is unrepresentable (...) I have therefore said 'cruelty' as I might have said 'life'" (as cited by Derrida, 1967/2006, p. 230). So, according to Artaud (1964/1999), theatre needs to be cruel, which more specifically means that it should break apart from normative uses of text, images and movement (pp. 68-69) and instead present acts of extremity, violence, obsessions and dispersal of energy, seeking to demolish western metaphysics.⁵

At this point, I suggest addressing Derrida's criticism on Artaud's war against representation, which is also revisited in the last chapter of the thesis, as it can disentangle the relation between representation and *l'informe*, and in this way facilitate the examination of the theatre in question. A dramaturgy of formlessness could be easily considered an operation that seeks to irrupt representation and show the 'real' event. And I place the word real in between quotation-marks to already express skepticism towards this type of exclusion among what is considered real and what not. In relation to *Paris#06*, one could in this way analyze the orchestra's 'not-playing' as an event that at the same time exposes and attacks representation – that is, as an event that deliberately constructs the image of an orchestra, producing certain expectations, and then confronts the audience with the real, which is, though, the condition of doubt about whether this is an orchestra or not. Out of this example, thus, seems to arise the impossibility of an essentialist distinction between reality, pure presence and representation, which is manifested exactly by the condition of doubt generated through this scene. Under this light, Artaud's obsession with demolishing representation and bringing the “real life” on stage seems problematic because it projects an essentialist binary

⁵ Lehmann also discusses Artaud, observing that “Body, rhythm, breathing, the here and now of the unthinkable presence of the body, its eroticism, these undermine the Logos. This body is at the same time the place of suffering and pain, the mute body of a – wrestling”, “From Logos to Landscape: Text in Contemporary Dramaturgy” in *Performance Research*, p. 57.

understanding of reality and representation.

Derrida discusses this exact problematic point, and argues that what Artaud's *Theatre of Cruelty* actually manifests is a resistance against representation that has no end. To be more precise, he argues for the impossibility of (the Artaudian) theatre to erase representation, since sustaining the dichotomy between real presence and representation only reaffirms representation (1967/2006, pp. 292-316). Hence, Derrida's criticism attacks the systems of representation and western metaphysics in general, which are greatly founded on binaries, such as presence vs. representation, right vs. wrong, good vs. evil, self vs. other etcetera. According to the Derridian reading, Artaud was then striving for the impossible. And yet, Derrida argues, Artaud was aware of this impossibility of the theatre; he was even longing for it, keeping himself "at the limit of theatrical possibility, simultaneously wanting to produce and to annihilate the stage" (1967/2006, p. 315).⁶

The strand of postdramatic theatre discussed in this thesis I believe to be in many aspects similar to the Artaudian theatre and to performance art. It namely shows a radical resistance to succumb to existing expectations and theatre traditions and, at the same time, exposes the impossibility of presenting the real. Moreover, and similarly to Derrida's view on Artaud's writings, these performances evoke an experience of the extreme limits, in the sense that they play on the borders between form and no-form, thus confronting the audience with the impossibility to discern them. But, there is also an important difference. The strand of theatre discussed hereby does not expose the limits of representation in the exact mode Artaud and performance art seem to have done. Rather, following a Derridian approach that considers idealist and, thus, impossible a total destruction of representation, it seeks to work with and within it, manipulating it in such ways so that logocentric mechanisms of perception and cognition can be disclosed and suspended. Particularly in the case of Societas Raffaello Sanzio, representation can be even considered as the central theme of their work. Theatre-scholar N. Ridout (2006) for instance, expresses this position on the basis of the company's particular work with images. He explains to this end that Raffaello Sanzio are very iconoclastic so

far from making theatre that follows Artaud into a denunciation or transcendence of theatrical

⁶ Derrida, J, "Artaud also desired the impossibility of the theatre, wanted to erase the stage, no longer wanted to see what transpires in a locality always inhabited or haunted by the father and subjected to repetition of murder", "The Theatre of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation" in *Writing and Difference*, p. 315.

representation, or that aligns itself with artists such as Marina Abramovic, for whom “theatre is an absolute enemy”, they are actually doing good old-fashioned theatre, in which representation is absolutely the central concern [...] a critical practice that deploys images or representations in order to explore how their work of deceit is achieved.(pp. 177-178)

However, Ridout's last claim seems to be problematic after a careful reading of Derrida's study. Specifically, suggesting that representation equals to deceit seems to simplify the notion of representation. Following Derrida, I would argue that representation is far more complicated, being the outcome of binary cultural patterns of cognition and perception that allow it to emerge. Hence, unless these patterns are unsettled, one cannot overcome the question of representation vs. real that is installed in western systems of thought.

With regard to representation, theatre scholar M. Bleeker (2008) detects analogous problems in Lehmann's study *Postdramatisches Theater*. As she remarks, at first the author presents a way to think beyond representation by arguing that “theatre and reality are better understood as parallel constructions and the success of theatre to convince is the effect of its being structured according to a logic similar to the logic at work in concepts of reality” (p. 44). Nevertheless, she shows that Lehmann later on also claims that, because of allowing multiple perspectives, “the spectator is granted more direct access to the things as they are in themselves” (p. 44). As it is more explicitly demonstrated in the following chapters, Lehmann examines aesthetic aspects of postdramatic theatre through the discussion of reality and representation by indeed seeking to deconstruct the binary. However, as Bleeker rightly remarks, he often finds himself trapped in that paradox of representation.

In view of this background, it seems that the issue of representation is a delicate one within the realm of theatre, showing an analogous structure to *l'informe*. In other words, both notions can easily be understood as static, firm concepts: signifying what is fake and what is without form, respectively. However, as Derrida has argued, representation (similarly to *l'informe*, as this thesis shows) bears its own failure and impossibility from within itself. It is endlessly *haunted* by presence and, therefore, its structure is characterized by movement. Representation is continuously interrupted by presence from within. In this sense, thus, Derrida shows in his article on Artaud that representation is inevitably a problematic issue because it infinitely repeats difference. He, namely, shows that it can never appear as an imitation of the real; instead, what it presents is always something different, exposing the

impossibility of separating the real from the unreal. Therefore, he advocates the affirmation and closure of this endless repetition of difference. He writes: “one can conceive of the closure of that which is without end. Closure is the circular limit within which the repetition of difference infinitely repeats itself” (1967/2006, p. 316). Similarly, this thesis proposes to acknowledge the closure of representation; that is to say, to acknowledge its structure of continuous interruption from within. And so, it examines the dramaturgies in question as operations of formlessness that unsettle binary modes of thinking by touching upon the limits of the 'good' form of things, while recognizing that a destruction of representation is an impossible project, as there can be no absolute distinction between what is real and what not.

1.2 postdramatic theatre and the Aristotelian influence

The strand of theatre I hereby propose to examine by theorizing *l'informe* started developing in the 1980s in the West and has been meticulously examined by Lehmann.⁷ He namely studied and described in detail the new “theatre situation” that flourished around that period, which he called postdramatic theatre.⁸ With the term 'postdramatic' Lehmann in fact wanted to avoid epochal categorization of new theatre practices, and rather examine them as qualitative shifts. To put it in his own words, his aim was “to read the realized artistic constructions and forms of practice as answers to artistic questions, as manifest reactions to the representational problems faced by theatre” (1999/2006, p. 21). In this sense, he argues in his book that, because of new technologies and digital culture, people have gained today a multi-perspectival form of perception,⁹ which has caused theatre to react, respond to and interrogate social, ethical and aesthetic norms in several aesthetic and conceptual ways. For instance, scenes of deafening cries, long silences, stillness, excessive repetition, appearances of infants, animals and deformed bodies, discontinuous texts, engagement with risk and danger etcetera, recurrently occur on postdramatic stage and are carefully examined in the following chapters of the thesis through specific examples. Notably, his study presents and frames such radical aesthetics at length, contextualizing them under the light of the historical and cultural trajectory towards the society of media and new technologies in the 20th century.

With the aim to mark the shift of this aesthetic logic in theatre, Lehmann also discusses

⁷ It needs to be noted that in this thesis I make use of the original German (1999/2005) and the English (1999/2006) version of Lehmann's study, because not all of the original work has been translated in English. It is therefore indicated by the year of publication and/or the language of the title, to which one I refer each time.

⁸ Lehmann specifically observes that “[...]the *theatre situation* forms a whole made up of evident and hidden communicative processes. This study concerns itself with the question of how scenic practices since the 1970s has made use of this basic given theatre, has specifically reflected on it and directly turned it into the content and theme of its presentation”, *Postdramatic Theatre*, p. 17.

⁹ Lehmann, H.T., “The mode of perception is shifting: a simultaneous and multi-perspectival form of perceiving is replacing the linear-successive. A more superficial yet simultaneously more comprehensive perception is taking the place of the centered, deeper one whose primary model was the reading of literary texts. Slow reading as much as theatre, which is laborious and cumbersome, is in danger of losing its status compared to the more profitable circulation of moving images”, *Postdramatic Theatre*, p. 16.

extensively the influence of the Aristotelian conception of theatre on western drama, and makes a significant comparison between dramatic and post-dramatic theatre.¹⁰ He observes that drama has its roots on the Aristotelian understanding of theatre, as it shows a recognizable narrative coherence, logic and totality and since the elements of “imitation” and “plot” are its leading characteristics (1999/2006, p. 21). In other words, he rightly claims that Aristotle’s theoretical construction of theatre (and more specifically, of tragedy) that appears in his *Poetics* became a paradigm that shaped the entire western conception and reception of theatre.¹¹ As he further indicates, Aristotle analyzed theatre through “an analogy with logic” (p. 40), which has been historically and culturally used as a *manual* about how theatre should work and be theorized.

Aristotle wrote his *Poetics* on the basis of a careful examination of the performances that were better enjoyed and more easily understood by the audience at that time. And, unequivocally, *Poetics* is a unique study for theatre. On the one hand, it is a book in which theatre is viewed logocentrically, suggesting that there should be logic and rationality inherent in theatre's structure, form and order but on the other hand there are several aspects of the Aristotelian idea of theatre that are rather performative, in the sense of how the order of the event is often being subverted: for instance, the sudden reversal in the plot (*peripeteia*) that remains inexplicable but addresses the audience as an interruption.¹² Lehmann

¹⁰ It is crucial to be noted that even though Lehmann made the distinction between dramatic and postdramatic theatre, he also insisted on the fact that postdramatic doesn't equal to non-dramatic. In other words, he explicitly argued that there can still be dramatic elements in postdramatic theatre, the meaning and perception of which, though, often changes. He namely writes that postdramatic theatre “developed as a way of defining the contemporary, it can retroactively allow the 'non-dramatic' aspects of theatre of the past to stand out more clearly. The newly developed aesthetic forms allow both the older forms of theatre and the theoretical concepts used to analyze them to appear in a changed light”, *Postdramatic Theatre*, p. 23.

¹¹ Lehmann specifically claims that “the complicity of drama and logic, and then drama and dialectic, dominates the European 'Aristotelian' tradition – which turns out to be highly alive even in Brecht's 'non-Aristotelian drama’”, *Postdramatic Theatre*, p. 41. And in an earlier publication he explains that: “certainly, from antiquity until the end of the 19th century (and beyond) a strong tradition indeed favored a 'logocentric' view of theatre practice [...] The order of events, the *pragmata* of the myth, is governed by a structure and logic. It is the act of reading that grasps this hidden order in the turmoil of the tragic action. These considerations throw light on the peculiar way in which text and the word have dominated the European theatre tradition”, “From Logos to Landscape: Text in Contemporary Dramaturgy” in *Performance Research*, pp. 55-56.

¹² One can think of moments of the Aristotelian *peripeteia* and *anagnorisis* in ancient tragedies, that is when the tragic hero realizes what acts he has committed by being ignorant. For example, in Sophocle's *Oedipus Tyrannus*, *anagnorisis* is the moment when Oedipus recognizes that he married his mother and killed his father. Then, moral order needs to be served through the interference of Gods (for example, Oedipus arrives to the point of pulling out his own eyes). Aristotle thus wrote that “*anagnorisis* is a change from ignorance to knowledge, disclosing either a close relationship or enmity, on the part of

particularly underlines the aspect of logocentrism,¹³ explaining that for Aristotle theatre would only be successful if there was a reasonable narration of events which made the story be coherent and complete; that is, with a clear beginning, middle and end. As he writes, for Aristotle “the 'whole' of the plot, a theoretical fiction, founds the logos of a totality, in which beauty is intrinsically conceived of as mastery of the temporal progress” (1999/2006, p. 40). Following this train of thought, one thus realizes that theatre aesthetics were founded on the quality of beauty; and at these times, beauty was in fact ensured by coherence, order, symmetry and clarity.

However, in his earlier text “From Logos to Landscape: Text in Contemporary Dramaturgy” (1997), Lehmann discusses certain aspects of Aristotle's *Poetics* from a different perspective and arrives to a significant remark: although Aristotle admittedly praised an overall logocentric understanding of theatre, his study shows that text-based theatre was not all that significant for him (p. 55). He namely underlines that text was in the ancient times primarily understood on the basis of *melos*: that is, music, singing, sound and voice. Moreover he notices that, for Aristotle, in tragedy actions and not characters were meant to be imitated, which then suggests that “tragedy can exist without characters but not without action, happenings, occurrence”¹⁴ (p. 55). Driven by these remarks, Lehmann thus explores again the relationship between Aristotelian and 'non-Aristotelian' contemporary theatre, observing that, “it would be tempting to read Aristotle's notions in the light of a certain (post)modern practice that operates without characters, presenting occurrences instead, and is based largely on musical and poetic structures” (p. 55). In other words, Lehmann rightly attempts a deconstructionist approach of Aristotle's *Poetics*. Rather than entirely rejecting the Aristotelian tradition of western theatre, he re-examines elements that have perhaps remained unnoticed until now. And he realizes that more than the text or the roles, it seems to be the physical and emotional presence (the body of the performer that will deliver the actions) that actually defined theatre in antiquity. In this sense, although contemporary theatre has indeed moved

people marked out for good or bad fortune” whereas *peripeteia* is “a change to the opposite in the actions being performed, as stated – and this, in accordance with probability or necessity”, *Poetics*, p. 18.

¹³ *Logos* is a term that in Greek has more than one signification. It could, among others, refer to *logic*, to *word*, to *speech* and *reason*. In the case of dramatic theatre, Lehmann seems to refer to theater's inherent logic in relation to its structure. Namely, dramatic theatre is also based on the “word”, that is the written-text. So, with the use of the term logocentric Lehmann seems to intertwine these two elements, logic and text/ word, within western dramatic theatre.

¹⁴ This element also resonates on the etymology of the term 'drama', which derives from the verb 'to act'.

beyond logocentric structures, it does focus on the aspects of body, rhythm and poetry that were heralded by Aristotle; but this time, by mostly seeking to deconstruct them.¹⁵ Postdramatic theatre is therefore in a sense quasi-Aristotelian.

Through his analyses, Lehmann has certainly offered a valuable study on recent developments in theatre and their relation to more classic forms of drama. His *Postdramatic Theatre* in particular provides the reader with substantive description, historical and cultural classification of contemporary theatre, which is permeated by insightful theoretical terms and nuances. Nevertheless, as this thesis shows in its course, his study does not provide efficient and precise conceptual tools to analyze the implications and the impact of this new aesthetic logic.

In the epilogue, though, Lehmann (1999/2006) refers to the notion of “afformance art”, which deserves some special attention, as it actually discloses an attempt to examine the impact of postdramatic theater.¹⁶ With this term, on the one hand he expresses hesitation towards the performativity of theatre and, on the other hand denotes the political force of postdramatic theatre, which he sees residing on perception. However, he also claims that one can never be sure if theatre has an impact on the audience and on society, since it is always uncertain whether it represents something or if it shows something real. Theatre, namely, fluctuates for Lehmann between presence and representation, generating doubt and affects. So, in the end of his study he concludes by saying that

we can clearly see that theatre does not attain its political, ethical reality by way of information, theses and messages; in short: by way of its content in the traditional sense. On the contrary: it is part of its constitution to hurt feelings, to produce shock and disorientation, which point the spectators to their own presence precisely through “amoral”, “asocial” and seemingly “cynical” events. (p. 187)

Hence, Lehmann rightly thinks that postdramatic theatre is mainly concerned with affecting the audience rather than with producing specific meanings. However, on the basis of this

¹⁵ Lehmann explains that “contemporary theatre, leaving behind the absolute dominance of the text, does not by any means abandon poetry, thoughtfulness or the glamour of speech, but brings back into focus the de-semanticizing potential of the body and visibility as such”, “From Logos to Landscape: Text in Contemporary Dramaturgy” in *Performance Research*, p. 60.

¹⁶ Lehmann, H.T., “it produces increasingly less meaning because in proximity of the zero-point (in ‘fun’, in stasis, in the silence of the gazes) something might happen: a now. Doubtful performative – afformance art”, *Postdramatic Theatre*, p. 180.

observation, I would also argue that he refers to a particular type of performativity. Namely, the ways in which theatre today undoes patterns of cognition and perception and resists expectations can be examined in more detail as negative performatives (dramaturgies of formlessness) that resonate on the ethical exactly by being excessive and “amoral”. Therefore, it seems that Lehmann's notion of “afformance art” could have also had the potential to be conceptualized for exploring how and in what ways postdramatic theatre affects its audiences, if its performative aspect were acknowledged.

1.3 *l'informe* developed as an idea and as a method

Bataille's notion of *l'informe* first appeared in the journal *Dictionnaire Critique*, a section of 'Documents'¹⁷ that was being published between 1929-1930. This *Dictionary* consisted of a series of notions, in non-alphabetical order, the meanings of which would escape classification and definition (e.g. "The Eye", "Dust", "Metamorphosis", "Abattoir"). That collection of 'slippages' (*mots glissants*)¹⁸ deliberately remained incomplete, since the publication was never conceived as a possible totality. Although Bataille dedicated only a few lines for it, *l'informe* holds a central place within this collection of terms. It marks their qualitative significance, their intensity and force of resistance.¹⁹ So, according to Bataille:

A dictionary begins when it no longer gives the meaning of words, but their tasks. Thus formless is not only an adjective having a given meaning, but a term that serves to bring things down in the world, generally requiring that each thing have its form. What it designates has no rights in any sense and gets itself squashed everywhere, like a spider or an earthworm. In fact, for academic men to be happy, the universe would have to take shape. All of philosophy has no other goal: it is a matter of giving a frock coat to what is, a mathematical frock coat. On the other hand, affirming that the universe resembles nothing and is only formless amounts to saying that the universe is something like a spider or a spit. (as cited and translated by Bois & Krauss, 1997/1999, p. 5)

In view of the expressions "mathematical frock-coat" and "for academic men to be happy",

¹⁷ M. Richardson further informs that "in 1929 Bataille is appointed editorial assistant to a new review, *Documents*, for which he contributes several articles; seven issues are published during the year and Bataille's influence in its editorial decisions increases markedly until he is the *de facto* editor; publishing many of the surrealist writers in dispute with André Breton, he is seen by the latter as a rival", *Essential Writings*, p. xii.

¹⁸ J. Gregg's definition is illuminative here: "A mot glissant is a word that establishes a limit that it cannot hold itself to. For example, silence: as a sound the word abolishes the concept it is supposed to represent; the phonetic dimension of the word transgresses the semantic limit that it pretends to set up", *Maurice Blanchot and the Literature of Transgression*, p. 67.

¹⁹ G. Didi-Huberman specifically cites P. Fédida with regard to the central role of *l'informe* and writes that "le mot *informe* n'est pas une entrée parmi les autres, [mais] le vocable *aspectuel* qualifiant le *mouvement* de tous les autres, et de toutes les expériences visées dans l'heuristique bataillienne", *La ressemblance informe ou la gai savoir visuel selon Georges Bataille*, p. 134.

one can see that Bataille sought to destabilize classical philosophical discourse.²⁰ And from his ironic tone, one can already suspect that he practiced a vehement writing – one that even resisted the act of writing itself. *Dictionnaire* actually reflects his determination “to sabotage against the academic world and the spirit of the system” (Bois & Krauss, 1997/1999, p. 16) that is, to resist against the desire to attribute a certain shape to the universe. More specifically, *l’informe* seems to belong into Bataille’s general syllogism about what he named ‘scatology’ or ‘heterology’: the science of the “wholly other” (Bois & Krauss, 1997/1999, p. 31, 47). The notions of heterology and scatology refer to processes of resisting social homogeneity (which includes all elements that can be assimilated in a productive, consumerist society) and, like the performances in question for this thesis also show, manifest themselves as violence, delirium, excess, madness (etcetera), educing agitation, dispossession and discomfort.

In other words, what Bataille succeeded in doing with his texts was to expose how heterologies unsettle form and the homogeneous, and to eventually produce a dissemination of possibilities and connections. For instance, his text “The Big Toe”, which appeared in *Documents* as well, deconstructed the idea of the human body being superior to animals. Bataille, namely, provocatively dismissed the ‘humanness’ of the human body by denoting that which primarily differentiates it from corresponding elements of other anthropoid apes’ bodies, which is the big toe (1970, pp. 200-204). However, as he also remarked, the big toe is a body part which man is greatly ashamed of, because its visibility is connected to shame or sexual fetishism. In short, from a historical and cultural perspective during Bataille’s time, the big toe needed to be covered because it was “seen as a spit” (1970, p. 204). The purpose of this text, thus, was not to privilege the big toe, but to shake up man’s pride of his erect position and his spirituality. In other words, as it is more specifically argued in the third chapter of the thesis, this text’s *task* resides more on its being read as a movement of resistance against essentialist thinking (in this case, against the dichotomy between man and animal, spirituality

²⁰ Richardson comments that: “Bataille did not renounce the role of a philosopher. If he rejected the *discourse* of philosophy, he did so because he rejected all discourse” and Bataille himself says in his interview with M. Chapsal, 1961 (that was probably the only time Bataille was interviewed): “I saw myself rather as a philosopher. I have always, before all else, leant towards philosophy. But I envisaged it in such a way that I cannot say I am really a philosopher. I have not quite succeeded in becoming one; certain of my books come close to it or penetrate into it. I realized that there is a distance between what I write and genuine philosophy. Philosophers worthy of the name must be able to link up their thought indefinitely, but I am incapable of following mine for very long...”, *Georges Bataille: Essential Writings*, p. 2.

and physicality), rather than a reduction of the human body or a plea for the human animals to become more like nonhuman animals.

It is important to mention that *Documents* was a collaborative work. It was in fact a journal initiated by certain surrealists of that time (Desnos, Leiris and others).²¹ However, Bataille's contribution was more central and very often "violated the general orientation of the review" (Stoekl, 1985, p. xi) by bringing in inappropriate and radical material. Moreover, the journal had a very specific interest in imagery and, thus, visuality. Profane photographs and illustrations juxtaposed the texts, creating ambiguous feelings. The images from a slaughterhouse that appeared next to "Abattoir", the exposed plant genitalia for "The language of the flowers" and the uncanny mannequins for "Dust" are especially characteristic for their blunt figurativeness. Probably this is also the main reason why the notion of *l'informe* has been conceptualized mostly with regard to image and within the field of visual arts, particularly through the works of Didi-Huberman and Bois & Krauss. These studies, however, also prove that even though there is considerable time-gap between them and Bataille, this gap stops mattering once the operational force of the formless shows itself to be still productive for critical thinking.

On the one hand, historian and theorist of art Didi-Huberman specifically studied and analyzed the imagery of *Documents* in his book *La ressemblance informe – ou le gai savoir visuel selon G. Bataille* (1985). In this rich examination of the formless, he relates and compares the illustrations of *Documents* to Bataille's texts as well as to other surrealist works. He considers *l'informe* as a process within form that has the power to "deform", that is, to alter form, transgress it and open it up again to new connections (p. 135). More precisely, he analyzed the images and texts of *Documents* by looking at their "transgressive, excessive resemblances" (my translation, p. 135), at their force of deformation and alteration (like in the image of a crushed spider). However, Didi-Huberman's understanding of the formless has been criticized by Bois and Krauss. As the latter explain, mapping it onto the pragmatic idea of

²¹ This was a surrealist group, that had distanced itself from the school of the famous surrealist A. Breton. There was, hence, a strong conflict between Bataille and Breton. The latter was namely accusing Bataille of a big contradiction, that is, of embracing heterogeneity and at the same time reasoning about it. Breton polemically writes that "Bataille's misfortune is to reason: admittedly, he reasons like someone who 'has a fly on his nose', which allies him more closely with the dead than with the living, but *he does reason*", as cited by Stoekl (Ed.) in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927-1939*, p. xi.

deformation is dangerously simplistic because it assumes that formless *is* something, or *is like* something.²² In that sense, morphology becomes central for discussing resemblances and, as they remark, “the slightest alteration to the human anatomy, in a painting for example, would be said to participate in the formless – which comes down to saying that modern figurative art, in its quasi-totality, would be swept into such a definition” (Bois & Krauss, 1997/1999, p. 80). Thus, according to the two authors, Didi-Huberman at times suggests a theorization of *l’informe* which contradicts Bataille’s project of resistance against ontological and firm categories while discussing the images and photographs of *Documents*, since everything is said to be *like* or *unlike* something else. In other words, the authors observe that his analysis is rather static, not paying enough attention to the operative nature of *l’informe* during the discussion of the artworks that appeared in *Documents*. But, they do not acknowledge that he nevertheless emphasized the impact of *l’informe*, showing that it is a dynamic operation of undoing that can “open up” form again onto a zone of unexpected relations and meanings, thus, leading the way to its ethical implications. And notably, this is a point upon which Bois and Krauss did not concentrate in *Formless – A User’s Guide*. Didi-Huberman interestingly calls *Documents* a “choreography of a cruel dance of resemblances that agitate” (my translation, p. 134) – and, as the following chapters demonstrate, I consider this movement of agitation, evoked to the audience, to be particularly important for examining the ethical potentials of *l’informe* in this thesis.

On the other hand, Bois and Krauss (1997/1999) studied *l’informe* in the context of modern visual arts and their contemporary reception. The two authors actually arrived to their study because of a curatorial project. In 1996 they set up together an exhibition at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris under the title *L’informe: Mode d’emploi*, which was an attempt to demonstrate the impulse and operational force of the formless as a conceptual tool. Their aim was to further the understanding of modern arts, to pick apart again the categories of ‘form’ and ‘content’ (p. 9) and to offer an alternative reading, which concentrated on the tasks, the particular performativity rather than classification of modern art (p. 21). Hence, their study *Formless: A User’s Guide* came out as the catalogue of this exhibition.²³ What particularly

²² Bois, Y.A., Krauss, R., “This is the risk one runs in wanting to measure the formless against resemblance or unlikeness at any price, instead of being aware that ‘resembles nothing’ is neither to be unlike something in particular, nor to resemble something that turns out to be nothing”, *Formless: A User’s Guide*, p. 80.

²³ Bois and Krauss write: “a book with a coherent proposition to develop, not only about modern’s art past (the onset of the

distinguishes their project is that they studiously transformed the formless into a method of analysis for art, whereas Didi-Huberman attempted to analyze it primarily within the context of *Documents*. Moreover, Bois and Krauss introduced an illuminative examination of Bataille's general thinking that allows a careful use of the formless within arts' analysis. More specifically, they understood *l'informe* to be structural, meaning that it has a *function* in a structural manner. Krauss (1994) precisely remarks that it is "a way for Bataille to group a variety of strategies for knocking form off its pedestal" (p. 4).²⁴ As a result, they rightly avoided giving any definition to the formless and yet, they managed to sustain its implications for the sake of its theorization. Notably, they "put the formless to work, not only to map certain trajectories, or slippages, but in some small way to 'perform' them" (p. 21). As they explain further, their initial aim with this book was to describe an alteration in visual arts of the modern period, which is not related to semantic registers of any particular object but rather to the grid of interpretation that determines the assimilation of these registers. In order, thus, to expose the particular performativity, the structural *function* of the formless, and to render it into a method of analysis for visual arts, Bois and Krauss retained four vectors – four operations of the formless: Base Materialism, Horizontality, Pulse and Entropy. As we shall see, these operations are related to Bataille but not all of them actually derive from his writings.

Apart from the aforementioned studies that mainly address the field of visual-arts, the formless has been also examined in a more philosophical perspective by Manchev in his book *L'altération du monde - pour une esthétique radicale* (2009). And although this study still concentrates on the issue of the 'image', it also encompasses a greater perspective on radical aesthetics, as its title suggests. The aesthetic aspect of the performances discussed in this thesis is thus pertinent to that study. More precisely about *l'informe*, Manchev argues that it was a principal operation of Bataille's notion of 'base materialism' for criticizing onto-theological ideas, even that of 'being' (p. 130). Even though base materialism is discussed in-

formless within modernist practice: Arp, Duchamp, Picasso), but also modern art's contemporary reception (the repression of certain careers or certain famous oeuvres) and even, possibly, modern art's future", *Formless: A User's Guide*, pp. 9-10.

²⁴ Both Bois and Krauss insist on the notion of the formless being about structure, rather than subject, also in their discussion with H.Foster, B.Buchloh, D.Hollier and H.Molesworth "The Politics of the Signifier II: A Conversation on the 'Informe' and the Abject" that appeared before their book, in the journal *October*.

detail in the following chapter of the thesis, it is already important to note that this operation referred to a constant resistance against the idealization and ontologizing of matter, according to Bataille. Particularly with his texts "*Matérialisme*" and "*Le bas matérialisme et la gnose*" Bataille attacked classic materialism, which expressed an ontological approach of matter, in the sense of understanding matter as a thing-in-itself. And at the same time, he insisted on a 'base matter' that is foreign to human ideals and refuses to let itself be reduced by the great ontological machines (Bataille, 1970, p. 225). In other words, Bataille was again seeking to attack the dichotomy between spirit and matter, as well as the human project of transforming matter into spirit.²⁵ So, as M. Richardson comments in his collection of Bataille's texts, for him "matter becomes scandalous, something that is constantly bringing us back down to the level of the beasts" (1998, p. 12).

Bataille's aforementioned understanding of base matter is crucial for Manchev (2009), as he holds that it points to the movement of an endless resistance that precedes structures of force and authority (p. 95). However, as it is noted in his study, he does not regard this resistance a negative force from within form, like Bois & Krauss (by claiming that it attributes 'bad form') or Didi-Huberman (deformation) did (p. 131). Manchev rather argues that *l'informe* signifies the intensity of the limits of form, which suggests that it refers to an experience of the senses (pp. 130-131). To put it differently, for Manchev the formless is a dynamic concept that becomes perceived only through an experience of 'touching the limits' of form; and through that *touch*, form is transformed. What's more, this haptic experience of the limits manifests itself as an alteration, according to Manchev. Similarly to Didi-Huberman, Manchev argues that alteration *opens up* form to a dynamic recomposition, taking place only when the limits of form are experienced (p. 72). His perspective on the limits - analogous to Derrida's discussion on Artaud's limits of representation - thus introduces an additional understanding of the operation of formlessness, not just as a negative movement of undoing, as Bois and Krauss suggested, but also as an experience of the limits of form. In this sense, it needs to be stressed

²⁵ Bois & Krauss also explain that "[Bataille] sought to vanquish the fetishizing (or ontologizing) of matter, which is what he believed materialist thinkers did. 'Most materialists', Bataille wrote, 'despite wanting to eliminate all spiritual entities, ended up describing an order of things whose hierarchical relations mark it out as specifically idealist. They have situated dead matter at the summit of conventional hierarchy of diverse types of facts, without realizing that in this way they have submitted to an obsession with an ideal for matter, with a form which approaches closer than any other to that which matter should be'" (G. Bataille, *Matérialism, Documents 1*, 1929, no.3, p.170; *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 1, p. 179; trans. J. Harman, *Encyclopaedia Acephalica*, p. 58), *Formless – A User's Guide*, p. 29.

that this thesis, although it inherits a lot from Bois & Krauss (especially the vocabulary of operations they retained for the *informe*), it is in an ambiguous relation to their study in terms of how the impact of this operation is to be conceptualized.

In view of these conceptualizations and in relation to the radical aesthetics in question for this thesis, I suggest considering *l'informe* an operation that evokes an experience of the extreme limits of form by undoing the 'good' form of things from within. In other words, I hold that an understanding of *l'informe* as a force that shows a negative performativity, which can also lead to an experience of the limits, offers a very productive framework for the analysis of the performances in question as well as for the exploration of their ethical impact.

1.4 *l'informe* in the context of postdramatic theatre

This thesis is grounded to a great extent on Bois and Krauss' study on *l'informe*, and especially on the operations they have retained for that notion. By rendering *l'informe* into a conceptual tool and focusing on its performative nature, the two authors namely offer a prominent platform for the investigation of performance as well. What's more, their analysis stems directly from Bataille's thinking, especially as it presents itself in *Documents*. Therefore, the implications of *l'informe* become integrated in and elucidated by Bataille's broader philosophical perspective. In addition, they further the notion's understanding within critical theory and philosophy, connecting it with other important concepts that shed light upon this forceful operation. However, their approach leans greatly upon the theory of psychoanalysis, discussing several artworks through Freudian and Lacanian perspectives,²⁶ which are not as productive for this thesis. The reason thereof is that this study concentrates on aesthetic and dramaturgical aspects that require a more philosophical, semiological and post-structural approach in order for their performativity and possible impacts to be examined.

Nevertheless, the operations that Bois & Krauss introduced with their study provide this thesis with a clear methodology. Notwithstanding that they were retained for visual arts, these operations prove to be efficient for theater's understanding too, once necessary adjustments and translations are made. These operations are discussed in detail in the course of the thesis and in specific relation to the performances in question. However, I consider it valuable to attempt an initial brief introduction of these notions in the context that Bois and Krauss (1997/1999) developed them:

- i) *Base Materialism* derives directly from Bataille's thinking and is the main weapon he used to combat idealism and the ontologizing of matter. The type of matter Bataille refers to is namely what cannot be described and what one has no idea of. As he explains in his paragraph on *l'informe*, it is whatever cannot be tamed by any "mathematical frock-coat", like madness, obscene words, shit or laughter. Significantly,

²⁶ For instance, they seek to understand the Batailleian formless through the Freudian views on fetishism, dreams, the unconscious, regression etcetera.

this operation has a scatological dimension: it is the force that “drags all things down to their base”. And this is why the two authors suggest to call it material-ism – it suggests a process and an operation of resistance; not an end.

- ii) *Horizontality* captures the dynamic nature of the operation of the formless, according to Bois and Krauss, and resides on the process of “lowering from the vertical to the horizontal” (p. 26), which resists the celebrated erected posture of man. Bataille namely attacked the hierarchical opposition and subsequent repression between vertical (man) and horizontal (animal).
- iii) *Pulse* belongs by extrapolation to Bataille's vocabulary for Bois and Krauss. A more correct term would rather be pulsation, which involves an endless beat that “attacks the modernist exclusion of temporality to the visual field” (p. 31). This operation opens up the relation between the visual and the carnal, for the two authors, in connection to temporality and the spectators' reception of modern visual arts.
- iv) *Entropy* belongs only by extrapolation to Bataille's vocabulary as well. It derives rather from thermodynamics, describing “the constant and irreversible degradation of energy in every system, a degradation that leads to a continually increasing state of disorder and nondifferentiation within matter” (p. 34). In other words, it refers to a negative movement which presupposes an initial regulation of a system and inflicts a deterioration of it, which the two authors use to discuss the structure of certain visual artworks.

However, the above operations can become productive for analyzing theatre only after they have been implemented within theater's context. Therefore, Lehmann's study becomes very useful at this point, as it offers an effective and flexible classification of recent aesthetic developments in theatre. Namely, it distinguishes five principle aspects of theatre: Text, Time, Space, Body and Media. Even though this classification might seem to outline a rather traditional conception of theatre, it is neither firm nor conclusive in Lehmann's study. Instead, it allows a detailed description, which illustrates how all aspects interweave.²⁷ And only this

²⁷ Lehmann, H.T., “while it is justified to dissect the density of the performance methodologically into levels of signification, it has to be remembered that a texture is not composed like a wall out of bricks but like a fabric out of threads. Consequently the significance of all individual elements ultimately depends on the way the whole is viewed, rather than constituting this overall effect as a sum of individual parts”, *Postdramatic Theatre*, p. 85.

type of a combinatory examination of all elements can set forth the postdramatic aesthetic logic in the end of Lehmann's study. With regard to this thesis, Lehmann's distinction thus enables the operations of the formless to be contextualized and translated in favor of postdramatic theatre analysis. Similarly, the aim is not to keep them separated, but to examine them in more detail and eventually arrive to a more comprehensive articulation of their impact.

Consequently, I have arrived to certain correspondences between the aforementioned operations of the formless (Bois & Krauss) and the theatrical aspects (Lehmann). They have come about after careful examination of the specific dramaturgical and aesthetic strategies I have selected to discuss. Due to the particular characteristics of the scenes in the performances I have chosen to examine though, the aspects of space and media have been left out from the current study. And so has Bois and Krauss' operation of entropy. However it needs to be noted that another Bataillean notion is hereby proposed, which in some ways resonates to entropy: this is the notion of excess (or expenditure), which is discussed at the last chapter of the thesis in relation to pulsation. The two authors in fact admit in their study that Bataille would have preferred to use expenditure instead of entropy (1997/1999, p. 34), but the artworks they analyze are better elucidated through the latter concept. Namely, they talk about artists that used tearing, degradation, accumulation, lack of elasticity, lacerated posters etcetera, which can indeed be considered operations of entropy (1997/1999, p. 38). However, this is not the case with the performances discussed in the present thesis.

And yet, it needs to be underlined that the analysis I propose is only an indication of how the conceptualization of *l'informe* can be productive in performance studies. This is definitely not the only way. Hence, the parallels that are hereby drawn are not airtight. More, new and different vectors could emerge from an examination of the same or other performances. In this sense, the present thesis acknowledges that the conceptualization of *l'informe* resists fixation and advocates instead inventing and putting 'at work' new and different relations.

The correspondences this thesis proposes and examines in the context of the particular case studies, thus, are: base materialism and language, horizontality and the body, pulsation and time. And the elements that are brought into dialogue for these correspondences to make sense are analyses of specific uses of language, body and time, and further theoretical support to help understanding the impact of those uses as operations of the formless. In that way, I

show how, why and what it implies to consider radical postdramatic artistic strategies dramaturgies of formlessness. To be more specific, I present how these evoke an experience of language's *base materiality* by undoing expectations for logocentric meaning, how they resist anthropocentrism by undoing the *horizontality* of the bodies on stage and how they use the structure of *pulsation* in order to bring forth a nonlinear and dynamic experience of time. And through this examination, I arrive to the conclusion that those performances evoke a crisis of reason, a *proto*-posthuman thinking and an experience of potentiality, which, as I explain further on, bear a significant impact on the ethical.

1.5 perform-less: performativity and *l'informe*

Bois and Krauss have clearly shown in their study that *l'informe* is an operation. In other words, they have demonstrated that for Bataille *l'informe* was not something that has no-form. Instead, it is a notion pointing to what cannot be described in epistemological terms (such as the form of the universe, of a crushed spider or of a spit, as Bataille claimed) and therefore resists ontological doctrines and logocentric thought. In this sense, *l'informe* is a concept in movement; it is an operation that undoes the 'good' form of things. And more precisely, it is a negative performative. As the two authors specifically write, it is

not so much a stable motif to which we can refer, a symbolizable theme, a given quality, as it is a term allowing one to operate a declassification, in the double sense of lowering and of taxonomic disorder: Nothing in and of itself, the formless has only an operational existence: it is a performative, like obscene words, the violence of which derives less from the semantics than from the very act of their delivery. The formless is an operation. (1997/1999, p. 18)

In order to understand the performative nature of *l'informe* it is first and foremost important to examine the uses, meanings and implications of this notion. Performativity is namely a term that was first introduced by J.L. Austin's speech-acts theory in his book *How to Do Things with Words* (1955/1976). Notably, his observations about what words *do* have deeply influenced, but have been also subverted by, philosophy, linguistics and critical theory. More specifically, Austin claimed in his study that some utterances essentially fail to fit the traditional, natural model of 'true or false' and are at the same time wrongly treated as unimportant or nonsensical (p. 4). On the basis of this remark he thus made a distinction between 'constative' and 'performative' utterances: the former being statements or descriptions and the later delivering themselves the act. For instance, the utterances one is using for ceremonies, such as weddings (*I do*), baptisms (*I name you...*) and so on, are performative because they produce something (a married couple, the naming of a child) instead of merely representing or reporting on an event (p. 5). As he puts it:

In these examples, it seems clear that to utter the sentence (in, of course, the appropriate circumstances) is not to describe my doing of what it should be said [...] or to state that I am

doing it: it is to do it (p. 6)

Nevertheless, this separation becomes problematic the moment one tries to define how to really distinguish performative utterances from all the rest, because in a way all utterances can be thought to 'produce' something. This realization led Austin to the unsatisfying, for him, conclusion that all utterances can be "implicit performatives" (as cited by Culler, 2000, p. 505). And, in order to further avoid this confusion, he tried to distinguish three dimensions of every speech-act: the locutionary (act of speaking a sentence), the illocutionary (act of performing by speaking) and the perlocutionary (act accomplished by performing the illocutionary act).²⁸ Therefore, as literary theorist J. Culler (2000) remarks, Austin's notion of performativity brought into light an aspect of language which was then considered marginal (that is, what it 'does' and what it 'produces'), by breaking the link between meaning and the intention of the speaker (p. 507).

A crucial point regarding performativity specifically in relation to *l'informe* within the context of theatre, is that Austin considered the performative to work successfully only with 'natural and serious speech' - therefore not with theatre or poetry (p. 9). However, critical theory has undermined this thesis. Especially Derrida deconstructed the idea of 'ordinary language' in his correspondence with philosopher J. Searle, by demonstrating how ordinary is always and at the same time parasitic and abnormal. He namely showed that a successful performative is always an *impure* performative, as the entire systems of language and culture are based on pre-determined meanings of words, that can 'work' successfully only thanks to their historical and cultural reiteration. He therefore wrote in a criticizing voice:

Is not what Austin excludes as anomalous, exceptional, 'non-serious', that is, *citation* (on the stage, in a poem, or in a soliloquy), the determined modification of a general citationality – or rather a general iterability – without which there would not even be a 'successful' performative? Such that – a paradoxical but inevitable consequence – a successful performative is necessarily an 'impure' performative. (1972/1988, p. 17)

²⁸ Culler, J., "He distinguishes the locutionary act, which is the act of speaking a sentence, from the illocutionary act, which is the act we *perform by* speaking the sentence, and from the perlocutionary act, which is an act accomplished (effects secured) by performing the illocutionary act. Thus uttering the sentence 'I promise' is a locutionary act. By performing the act of uttering this sentence under certain circumstances I will perform the illocutionary act of promising, and finally by promising I may perform the perlocutionary act of reassuring you, for example", "Philosophy and Literature: The fortunes of the Performative" in *Poetics Today*, p. 506.

In this sense, theatre, being already part of our reality, is at the same time parasitic and real, serious and non-serious. And consequently, a performance cannot be excluded from the possibility of investigating its performative aspects.

Moreover, philosopher J. Butler developed the notion of performativity in relation to gender, sex and the subject, demonstrating how an iterative form of power is exercised on the bodies, producing and determining how subjects and genders are to be performed. Following Derrida's logic, she thus writes:

[...] I would suggest that performativity cannot be understood outside of a process of iterability, a regularized and constrained repetition of norms. And this repetition is not performed by a subject; this repetition is what enables a subject and constitutes the temporal condition for the subject. This iterability implies that "performance" is not a singular "act" or event, but a ritualized production, a ritual reiterated under and through constraint, under and through the force of prohibition and taboo. (1993, p. 95)

Both Butler and Derrida, thus, drew attention to the cultural and political parameters that decide how language, gender, subjectivity and other social codes are to be 'performed'. And as they explained, it is the condition of reiteration that renders them as successful performatives. So in this sense, the possibility of their meaning is founded on the possibility of repetition. For instance in language, meaning is attributed to a word due to its historical iterability and transmission, which underscores the consensus establishing authoritative speech and binding power.²⁹ And in the same way, obscene words are generally considered to be insulting because they have been historically and culturally repeated in that context and not so much because of their semantics.³⁰

However, the performativity of *l'informe* seems to propose a rather different nuance, since what it *does* is an *undoing*. In this sense, it is a negative performative that, as the following chapters explicitly show, produces the scatological dimension of form and a declassification (rather than production) of the expected, iterative norm. The dramaturgies of formlessness

²⁹ Butler, J., "Performative acts are forms of authoritative speech: most performatives, for instance, are statements which, in the uttering, also perform a certain action and exercise binding power. Implicated in a network of authorization and punishment, performatives tend to include legal sentences, baptisms, inaugurations, declarations of ownership, statements that not only perform an action but confer a binding power on the action performed", *Bodies that Matter*, p. 225.

³⁰ See: Butler, J. (1997) *Excitable Speech: A politics of the Performative*.

discussed in this thesis in particular, undo the normative understanding of language, body and time and respectively suspend semantic systems that are epistemological, anthropocentric and linear.

Especially in relation to postdramatic theatre, I therefore argue that the negative performativity of the formless can be considered an operation of 'performing less'. But the question is: performing less than what? Returning to the scene in *Paris#06*, one notices that the orchestra indeed performs 'less'; that is, 'less' than what is normally expected from it. So, the term 'to perform' is here determined by the ability to satisfy the expectations of the audience and more specifically, defines the 'efficiency' of the orchestra's performance according to these expectations.

Against this background, I believe that the performativity of *l'informe* can be further articulated in dialogue with J. McKenzie's study entitled (in a homophonic way to 'perform-less') *Perform-or else* (2001). This book namely investigates the notions of performance and performativity in their various contemporary understandings, arguing that even though they constitute two of the most appropriated terms today, they bear very different and contradicting significations. Moreover, it creates the awareness that due to their excessive usage, these notions threaten to become representative of power and knowledge, exactly like disciplines were in earlier centuries. The problematization and pluralization of the terms that this study offers, thus, proves to be useful in elucidating how the performativity of *l'informe* can be understood in a non-deterministic way within the context of theatre.

McKenzie (2001) focuses on the implications and meanings of performance and performativity since their emergence in the cultural, managerial and technological fields. Conducting this parallel study, he thus realizes that although these notions appeared at the same time (around the 1960s), they carry disparate nuances: sometimes they are read as signifying resistance or experimentation (cultural performance) and other times as signifying normativity and efficiency (p. ix). Therefore, the '-or else' attached to the title of his book, implies different things in each context: "be socially normalized" (p. 8) when it reflects upon cultural performance, "be fired and institutionally marginalized" (p. 7) in organizational performance and "you are outmoded, undereducated, in other words, you're a dummy!" (p. 12) in technological performance. Hence, the author demonstrates that performativity is a

blurred and 'multi-tasked' notion, the meaning of which depends on the field it is being used in.

Specifically within the field of Performance Studies, McKenzie denotes that these notions have a political significance that adheres to 'liminality': "marginal, on the edge, in the interstices of institutions and at their limits, liminal performances are capable of temporarily staging and subverting their normative functions" (p. 8). The concept of liminality is very interesting to examine at this point in relation to *l'informe*, as they seem to convey similar implications. It derives from the Latin "limen", which means "threshold" (Turner, 1982, p. 41), and was first developed by V. Turner, who mainly used it as a theoretical model for his anthropological studies. He connected it with rituals and tribal myths that he considered being anti-structural because they liberated "human capacities of cognition, affect, volition, creativity etc. from the normative constraints incumbent upon occupying a sequence of social statuses, enacting a multiplicity of social roles" (Turner, 1982, p. 44). But later on it was also theorized in favor of performing arts, to observe how they can socially and politically transform individuals. McKenzie, in fact, pays special attention to this notion in relation to cultural performance, considering it necessary for understanding cultural performance and performativity in arts. And, as he writes, liminality alludes to "a mode of activity whose spatial, temporal and symbolic 'in betweenness' allows for social norms to be suspended, challenged, played with, and perhaps even transformed" (2001, p. 50).

It becomes then evident that liminality and *l'informe* are in many ways overlapping, both signifying a resistance against norms and grids of expectations. However, *l'informe* manifests this resistance in a forceful way: by undoing and declassifying the norm, by being radically inefficient in its performance and by invoking the unexpected. In other words, it is a scatological performative that 'lowers' the norm rather than only creating an 'in between' of what is normative and what not. In this sense, Bois and Krauss analogy of *l'informe* with obscene words is pertinent: they are violent because of what their 'delivery' *does* (shock, racism etcetera) and not because of what they mean. For instance, the event of not playing in *Paris#06* attacks the audience's linear thinking and its violence resides on the fact that the orchestra performs radically 'less' than what is expected from it. Hence, even though this scene does eventually evoke uncertainty and ambivalence (a liminality), it does so only by producing discomfort, surprise and agitation. As it will be more explicitly shown in the

course of the thesis through more examples, the formless is a performative that operates indeed like obscene words (as Bois & Krauss have claimed). It irrupts norms and expectations by radically lowering them to their extreme limits of the base.

According to McKenzie, the joint concepts of liminality and performativity have been over-used in Performance Studies. In fact, he claims that they have been converted into normative concepts, which pinpoint not only to subversion of normativity but also to normalization. In order to underscore this dimension of liminality, he uses the term “liminal-norm”, which “operates in any situation where the valorization of liminal transgression or resistance itself becomes normative” (2001, p. 50). Therefore, one needs to be careful in how one uses and contextualizes these terms. However, *l'informe* is by no means suggested here as a substitute of liminality or performativity. Rather, it is suggested as a negative performative able to disentangle dramaturgies that radically attack norms and expectations by 'performing less'. As the title of the thesis indicates by italicizing and placing the word 'form' in the middle to make it functional in different ways, the formless is an operation that performs less. It, thus, needs to be used as a tool to think about how dramaturgical practices work, and not as a model that will 'lock' their understanding.

Chapter 2

dramaturgies of language: operations of base materialism

2.1 problematizing the usage of language on stage

In postdramatic theatre the 'text' does not usually aim to communicate a determined meaning or plot. As Lehmann (1999/2006) has rightly observed, postdramatic performances rather seek to create a 'magical' binding with the audience through different uses of language and, as consequence, meaning is often kept under suspension (p. 262). Therefore, I suggest understanding the concept of 'text' in a broad sense, alluding to different dramaturgical uses that are manifested in postdramatic theatre: it can be set or improvised, written or oral, consisted of words, voice, gestures, other sounds or just silence.¹ In this sense, and as it appears from the discussion of specific examples later on, it is also suggested that animals and infants have language. Hence, the significance of the postdramatic theatre text does not solely depend on the semantics of words and their discursive, logocentric relations. To a much greater extent it depends on the tones of voice, rhythm, breath and the polyphonic synthesis of speech and sound on stage. In other words, dramaturgical and aesthetic attention is most often directed upon texts that can disperse logocentric meaning and evoke radical ways of experiencing language.

This chapter concentrates on such types of text that derive from the work of Societas Raffaello Sanzio and Jan Fabre. More specifically, it focuses on particular performances that *use* the language of animals and infants on stage: episodes *Avignon#02* (2002) and *Brussels#04* (2003) from the cycle of performances *Tragedia Endogonidia* by Societas Raffaello Sanzio and *History of Tears* (2005) by Jan Fabre. These manifestations of language are characteristic in the overall work of the two makers, whereas analogous cases appear in several other postdramatic performances, usually evoking intense experiences to the audience.² I propose

¹ In support to that point, Lehmann notes that "performance text" may signify something even broader in the context of postdramatic theatre. It namely refers to all types of sign usage: "the written and/or verbal text transferred onto theatre, as well as the 'text' of the staging understood in the widest sense (including all performers, their 'paralinguistic' additions, reductions or deformations of the linguistic material; costumes, lighting, space, peculiar temporality, etc)", *Postdramatic Theatre*, p. 85.

² Such engagement of infants and animals is very frequent in Raffaello Sanzio's productions. For instance, in *Inferno* (2008) a big glass-box contains infants that play, whose voices take over the theatre space for some minutes, in *Aesop's Fables* (1992) 300 live animals of various species are the *protagonists*, in the episode *Paris#06* the goat-Poet grazes on the back of the stage

to consider them operations and argue that they radically resist what is usually expected from the formal usage of language, which is to classify and organize the world or a story for us in order to understand it, to allow communication on the basis of logical meaning and to guarantee coherence. Hence, I claim that the audience's expectations for language performing its 'good' form (namely, delivering a meaningful discourse, message or story) are being undone in these cases. And I therefore suggest considering them operations of formlessness, seeking to generate language's 'bad' form; that is, a form of language that does not try to communicate through the formal usage of language. As it is explained shortly, such an unusual choice of proposing the adjectives 'good' and 'bad' is crucial for understanding the impact of language in the specific examples, helping me to argue that the dramaturgies in question seek to expose language's base materiality: an experience of “the mere event of speaking” (Agamben, 1999/2002, p. 138) through a usage of signs and voice that radically 'lowers' the expectations of how language should *work* altogether.

As we have seen, Bataille's project with *Dictionnaire Critique* was to unsettle the unilateral understanding of the language of science and metaphysics.³ He namely recognized that language enables communication but at the same time constructs a system of norms and rules by which to live. To be more specific, with his writings he expressed great skepticism towards the language of logic and science being the only way for man to understand and experience the world. In this sense, his text on *l'informe* suggests that each time the meaning or the shape of something cannot be determined with words (like the universe or a spit), then this is considered a failure for philosophy, mathematics and human thought altogether. In his book *Inner Experience* (1954/1988), Bataille wrote more clearly about the issue of language in relation to man's experience of his/her existence, yet complicating it further:

with respect to men, their existence is linked to language. Each person imagines, and therefore knows of his existence with the help of words [...] It suffices for a short time to follow the trace, the repeated course of words, in order to perceive, in a sort of vision, the

etcetera. Similarly, cries are used extensively in the works of Fabre, like in *Je suis sang* (2004), in the opening scene of *My Movements Are Like Streetdogs* (2000) and in the recent *Orgy of Tolerance* (2009). Significantly, in works of younger choreographers, such as Ivo Dimchev, Apostolia Papadamaki and Liesbeth Gruwez, similar strategies appear to a great extent (see, for instance, performances *Concerto* (2008), *Mano a Mano* (2007) and *Birth of Prey* (2008) respectively).

³ As Bois & Krauss put it: “to sabotage against the academic world and the spirit of the system”, *Formless: A User's Guide*, p. 16.

labyrinthine constitution of being. (pp. 83-84)

So, on the one hand, Bataille acknowledged the human need for language's 'good' form in order for man to perceive and communicate his *being* in the world. But on the other hand, he detected that within this usage of language the "labyrinthine constitution of being", as he puts it, is very present and active. He, thus, continues:

this is no doubt pitiful, but man only gains access to the notion which is most loaded with burning possibilities by opposing common sense – by opposing the givens of science to common sense. I don't see how, without the givens of science, one would have been able to come back to the obscure feeling, to the instinct of the man still deprived of "common sense". (italics in the text, p. 84)

With regard to this remark, it might at first come as a surprise that Bataille attributes so much value to the language of meaning and science. However, this is not really the case. Instead of opposing the language of reason against the language of nonmeaning ("instinct", "obscure feeling"), Bataille exposes the entanglement of one another and shows how one exists within the other. In addition, by starting the phrase with the word "pitiful", he expresses the urgency for thinking this complex and contradicting point. Notably, one should keep in mind that contradictions and paradoxes were the foundation of his thinking. The last sentences of this quote, for instance, attest that only through the language of reason people can conceive language's inadequacy to determine anything like "common sense" among humans. In view of these elaborate contradictions, I thus hold it is more useful to look at what Bataille's words are *doing* in order to understand what they *mean*. Namely, these writings (and certainly not only these) manifest an urge to resist taking any firm position and to expose the 'bad' form of language from within language itself. They deliberately confuse and eventually suspend the distinction between the language of meaning and non-meaning, or between reason and madness, as they show how epistemological language is itself conditioned by an incompleteness to determine all things. The Bataillean operation of undoing the meaningful and logocentric form of language from within as well as the resistance to succumb to an end (that is, to deny the epistemological form of language altogether) are therefore significant and very useful for understanding the specific performativity of the dramaturgical operations discussed in this chapter. And in the following chapters, this insight shall remain the driving force behind my argument.

In the same way, the dramaturgies of formlessness that are being explored here neither deny epistemological language nor arrive to a state of nonmeaning. Rather, they can be considered operations that resist expectations for rational language, evoking an experience of a language that is never 'completed', in the sense that it never arrives to communicate any definite meanings, and can therefore bring frustration and irritation to the audience. Notably, they evoke such an impact by generating the 'bad' form of language from within, which, again, does not equal to saying that they generate a language with no meaning whatsoever. Instead, the performances in question seem to launch an understanding of language as being able to communicate with or without determined meanings, and ultimately also manifest the impossibility of arriving to a language empty of meaning. Therefore, the audience is caught up in a confusing web, as they are confronted at the same time with the threat of an emptiness of meaning as well as with the impossibility of it. To put it differently, they find themselves experiencing the *limits* of meaningful language, which induces the realization that nonmeaning is constitutive of meaning, as the event of voice and signs are constitutive parts of language. Hence, the binaries between meaning vs. nonmeaning or reason vs. madness, deeply embedded in the western understanding of language, are being unsettled.

2.2 theories of language's *form* and (*base*) *matter*

a. stabilizing and destabilizing the 'good' form of language

In the course of western thought, one notices a dominant focus on the rational, epistemological and scientific 'good' form of language. As N. Garver states in his preface of Derrida's *Speech and Phenomena*, "this is certainly true of Plato's theory of forms, of Aristotle's doctrine of predication, of the mediaeval controversy over universals, of Leibniz's grand project for a universal symbolism, and of rationalism and idealism in general" (1973, p. xi). And it is also apparent in structural and pragmatic linguistic theories that have been developing since the beginning of the 20th century, which reinforce the association between meaning and logic. In short, these theories examine language mainly as a system of signs that is regulated by grammatical, syntactic, phonetic, semantic and other rules and canons in order to produce meaning and to allow communication. Ferdinand de Saussure (1916/1974) was the originator of structural linguistics, a school which, by distinguishing between language (*langue*, as the social phenomenon of language) and speech (*parole*, the individual ability to use the system of language), focused on speech and tried to develop a system of signs that would help to understand the overall system of language.⁴ As Culler (1974) explains when introducing Saussure's study, structural linguists hold that human communication happens because there are rules that organize our world and serve as the foundation of our thinking;⁵ so, their aim is to examine how these rules create possible meaning. But at the same time, as Culler also observes, Saussure's work should be recognized

⁴ Specifically, he focused on the relations between the elements of language in the present (synchronically) and introduced two parts of linguistic signs: the signifier, the sound pattern of a word, and the signified, which adheres to the meaning of a word.

⁵ Culler, J. "In the case of language, communication is possible because we have assimilated a system of collective norms which organize the world for us and serve as the very basis of our thinking. The reality which is crucial to the individual, Durkheim argued, is not the physical environment but the social milieu, a system of rules and norms internalized by each individual and underlying his social and political behavior", "Introduction" in *Course in General Linguistics*, Saussure, de, F., p. xiii.

for initiating an understanding of language as a system and network in itself, and not just as a function of man, acknowledging the importance of semantics, the principles of phonology and that meaning in human actions is determined by categories and rules.⁶

This is not so much the case though for the field of pragmatics, which examines how meaning is transmitted through context – encompassing, among others, speech-act theory, issues of intention, logic and semantics. For instance, P. Grice, in his book *Studies in the Way of Words* (1989), praised a language of full-intelligibility and proposed to conceive and start constructing such an “ideal language”, which can be at least partly accepted by all formalists.⁷ Moreover, he made a distinction between *natural* meaning and *non-natural* meaning, in which the former is determined by a relation of cause and effect (1989, p. 89). As consequence, one realizes that in order to analyze meaning and communication, pragmatics demand conventions: to form exemplary patterns of (ideal, meaningful) utterances and rely on a systematic study of their uses (Grice, 1989, p. 137).

Such widespread western positions indicate that language has been historically understood as a *closed* system, regulated by its own rules and internal developments. Notably, Wittgenstein was the main philosopher working himself in the areas of mathematics, logic and language, who challenged this idea of language. Namely, in his later work, he claimed that the meanings of words derive from their public use and not from any inherent logic. Particularly in the study *Philosophical Investigations* (1953/1994), he concentrated on 'ordinary', that is, everyday uses of language, inventing some “language-games”⁸ (similar to children’s games in simplicity, through which words and meanings can be learned) that would

⁶ Culler even observes that “the notion of rule-governed creativity – of individual creativity that is made possible by a system of grammatical rules – is what [Saussure] hacked, and it was left to Chomsky to show how the linguistic system could account for sentence formation without denying the freedom of individual speakers” in: Saussure, de, F., “Introduction” of *Course in General Linguistics*, p. xxiii.

⁷ Grice, P., “The proper course is to conceive and begin to construct an ideal language, incorporating the formal devices, the sentences of which will be clear, determinate in truth value, and certifiably free from metaphysical implications; the foundations of science will now be philosophically secure, since the statements of the scientist will be expressible”, *Studies in the Way of Words*, p. 23.

⁸ Wittgenstein, L., “there are *countless* kinds (of sentences): countless different kinds of use of what we call 'symbols', 'words', 'sentences'. And this multiplicity is not something fixed, given once and for all; but new types of language, new language-games, as we may say, come into existence and others become obsolete and get forgotten [...] Here the term 'language-game' is meant to bring into prominence the fact that the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life”, *Philosophical Investigations*, p. 11.

transform conventional philosophical problems into wordplays of logic. By posing basic questions like “Now, what do the words of this language *signify*? - What is supposed to show what they signify, if not the kind of use they have?” (p. 6), Wittgenstein's intention was also to mock the traditional philosophical attempts of attributing absolute meanings and rules to words. He thus underlined that “the meaning of a word is its use in the language” (p. 20), showing that there is no language 'as such' and that meanings are arbitrary and subject to change.⁹ *The Blue Book* (1934/1980) even begins with a question that, as he observed, “produces us a mental cramp”: “WHAT is the meaning of a word? Let us attack this question by asking, first, what is an explanation of the meaning of a word; what does the explanation of a word look like?” (para. 2). Significantly, Wittgenstein was the first thinker to systematically attack and destabilize the 'good' form of language from within the philosophy of logic and reason.

But the idea of language as a non-essentialist system was actually developed later on with post-structuralism. This movement emerged in the second half of 20th century, mainly in France, and decentered the understanding of language as a firm structural form. R. Barthes marked this period with his manifesto on the “Death of the Author” (1968/1989), which rejected the idea that the author determines the semantics of his work and at the same time announced the possibility for multiple meanings and interpretations on behalf of the readers: “we know that in order to restore writing to its future, we must reverse the myth: the birth of the reader must be requited by the death of the Author” (p. 55). Additionally, his text on “The Rustle of Language” (1975/1989) is significant because it placed an emphasis on the sound of language, on what noise it produces rather than on the semantics. As he noted, the rustle of language forms a “utopia of music of meaning” (p. 77). And as an example to that, he wrote about his experience of watching one of Antonioni's film in Chinese without any translation. As he explained, even though he could not understand the meaning of the words, he would still hear “the tension, the breath or something like a *goal*” (p. 79). Thus, as he suggested, experiencing language in that way does not mean that it abandons the realm of meaning, but that meaning becomes a “vanishing point of delectation” (p. 78); it becomes impenetrable and requires an “erotics (in the broadest sense of the term)” (p. 79). It therefore seems that Barthes was interested in highlighting a poetic and performative quality of language, that would

⁹ Wittgenstein, L., “It is *primarily* the apparatus of our ordinary language, of our word-language, that we call language; and then other things by analogy or comparability with this”, *Philosophical Investigations*, p. 138.

destabilize its logocentric form and reception.

However, Derrida was the prime post-structuralist thinker who dealt more systematically with the issue of language's 'construction' and 'de-construction'. In his work he argued that history and culture are the elements that condition language and, therefore, it is not possible to study it without studying the mechanisms of power and knowledge that produce it.¹⁰ In order to do that, he practiced a strategy of deconstruction in his analysis. Namely, recognizing that metaphysical binary hierarchies (such as fiction-truth, speech-writing, meaning-nonmeaning, presence-nonpresence etcetera) dominate western thought and language, he wanted to disclose the paradoxes and contradictions that institute them (Lechte, p. 131). In that way, he hoped to deconstruct the assumptions and mechanisms that generate such ontological thinking and to evoke a more critical approach. Additionally, Derrida introduced the notion of “différance”, constituting the performative basis of deconstruction. In French, the word 'différer' means both 'to differ' and 'to defer'. So, by bringing into play this double meaning of the word, Derrida emphasized the relativity and heterogeneity of meanings in general within language: that meaning is always subject to binary oppositions and that it is postponed due to the continuous chain of signifiers and contexts. The operation of *différance* (which, even though it is misspelled, sounds exactly the same with “différence” in French) became the way to show how meaning at the same time differs and defers. As he explains,

Within language, within the system of language, there are only differences. A taxonomic operation can accordingly undertake its systematic, statistical and classificatory inventory. But, on the one hand, these differences *play a role* in language, in speech as well, and in the exchange between language and speech [...] What we name as *différance* will thus be the movement of play that “produces” (and not something that is simply an activity) these differences, these effects of difference [...] *Différance* is the nonfull, nonsimple “origin”; it is the structured and differing origin of differences. (1967/1973, pp. 140-141)

The movement of *différance* is also clearly manifested in the double antithetical meaning

¹⁰ J. Lechte, offering a concise overview of the most influential thinkers of the 20th and 21st century that is useful for an overall introduction of post-structuralism at this point, writes that “often associated with the work of J. Derrida, post-structuralist thought examines the notion of difference in all its facets and discovers that Saussure had left intact certain (metaphysical) presuppositions about subjectivity and language (for example, the privileging of speech over writing) – vestiges of the historicist framework with which Saussure himself was dissatisfied. [...] Most importantly, post-structuralism is an investigation as to how this is so”, *Fifty Key Contemporary Thinkers*, p. 128.

structure of some terms, such as *pharmakon* (meaning poison and antidote), *supplement* (meaning surplus and addition) and *hymen* (meaning inside and outside), which have been studied in his work (Lechte, 2008, p. 132).

Hence, although Derrida did not explicitly refer to language's materiality, his work appears to discuss different aspects of this issue. Especially his analysis on the "sign" proves to be very useful for untangling the use of the sign in regard to the discussion of *Avignon#02* in this chapter, whereas his deconstruction of M. Foucault's understanding of 'madness' and 'reason' even opens the way to explore the impact of these performances. However, Agamben's writings, together with Bataille's understanding of language, mostly help elucidating the usage of language in the performances hereby.

b. *experimentum linguae*

In Agamben's work the materiality of language becomes a central topic of philosophical research. Agamben concentrated on the experience of language's "exteriority" (1978/2007, p. 6), calling his project an *experimentum linguae* "in which what is experienced is language itself" (1978/2007, p. 5). And his study proves to be very useful because it tackles the particular nuance of language's materiality upon which I propose to focus for discussing the performances in question. Moreover, Deladurantaye (2000) offers another significant examination of the specific philosophical understanding of language as 'matter' in his article on Agamben's notion of potentiality. And I consider his analysis important not only because Agamben's *experimentum linguae* is further elucidated but also because it is connected to Benjamin's and compared to de Man's theories, offering a greater insight upon the issue.

It should be underlined that it is in the book *Infancy and History* (1978/2007) where Agamben explained his *experimentum linguae*, which refers particularly to the experience of the language of infancy (p. 6). Significantly, according to him, infancy does not indicate a stage of the ineffable – a stage, in which language simply does not exist.¹¹ On the contrary, Agamben argued that infancy is the concept which "articulates the question of the limits of language [...] an attempt to think through these limits in a direction other than that of the

¹¹ Agamben argues that the experience of language in infancy has its own logic which "can be indicated, whose site and formula can be designated, at least up to a point", *Infancy and History*, p. 7.

vulgarly ineffable” (p. 4). Following Wittgenstein's train of thought,¹² he questioned the existence of language itself (by asking “what is the meaning of 'there is language'; what is the meaning of 'I speak'” (p. 6)) and, thus, arrived to the focal point of his project: “Infancy is an *experimentum linguae*, in which the limits of language are to be found not outside language, in the direction of its referent, but in an experience of language as such, in its pure self-reference” (p. 6). In other words, he invited his readers to think of the experience of language as an event of voice and sound - in which there is no difference between (Saussure's) language and speech -, as a resistance to logocentric meaning, as an event of materiality “in which one can encounter only the pure exteriority of language” (p. 6). Furthermore, in his later book *Remnants of Auschwitz* (1999/2002), Agamben returned to this concept of language's exteriority - calling it this time “semantics of enunciation” - through a reading of Benveniste and Foucault. As he explained, Benveniste's interest in the theory of enunciation rendered an important shift towards “not what is said in discourse but the pure fact that it is said, the event of language as such, which is by definition ephemeral” (p. 138).

In order to analyze Agamben's view on the experience of language's materiality, and especially on the experience of potentiality it launches, Deladurantaye (2000) referred to De Man's and Benjamin's projects. He remarked that De Man's work was greatly influenced by Benjamin's notion of the “*reine Sprache*” (pure language),¹³ which was appreciated as a “language which would be pure signifier, which would be completely devoid of any semantic function whatsoever...” (pp. 5-6). Notably, as he explained in the same essay, both De Man and Agamben understood Benjamin's “*reine Sprache*” in the same way, “that it is a language possessing no meaning function whatsoever and is in a sense simply the matter of language” (p. 7). However, Deladurantaye again rightly observed that there is a great difference in the ways De Man and Agamben approached this understanding of language's materiality. For De Man the experience of language's exteriority eventually marked an endpoint - it would indicate hopelessness and block access to any aesthetic or ethical propositions and ideas,¹⁴

¹² “I am now tempted to say that the correct expression in language for the miracle of the existence of the world, albeit as expressing nothing *within* language, is the existence of language itself”, Wittgenstein as cited in Agamben., G., *Infancy and History*, p. 10.

¹³ Benjamin, W., “in this pure language – which no longer means or expresses anything, but, as expressionless and creative Word, that which is meant in all languages – all information, all sense, and all intention finally encounter a stratum in which they are destined to be extinguished”, *Illuminations*, p. 80.

¹⁴ Deladurantaye notes that in de Man's late work the materiality of language is associated “with stuttering, loss, falling,

whereas for Agamben it seems to have an essential impact on ethical and aesthetic concepts: instead of engendering the disappearance of the human and the ethical in the mechanico-grammatical machinations of language, opens up thought to a thinking of ethics, transforms the *aporia* which 'the matter of language' created for De Man into a *euporia*. (p. 8)

In other words, Deladurantaye marked out a reversal, or else a transformed *hope*, brought by an encounter with language's materiality within Agamben's train of thoughts.

Hence, Deladurantaye's article shows that Agamben's understanding of *experimenti linguae* destabilized the dominant 'good' form of language, opening up space for more possibilities of conceptualizing, imagining, discussing and experiencing language. And it also shows that Agamben's project differentiates from De Man's in the fact that the experience of language's materiality is considered able to unsettle ethics in a non-definite way, meaning that it has a transformative but also non-deterministic force. Deladurantaye namely referred to this last point when he examined Agamben's response to Wittgenstein's assessment about the boundaries of language, who (Wittgenstein) said

My whole tendency, and I believe the tendency of all men who ever tried to write or talk [sic] Ethics or Religion, was to run against the boundaries of language. This running against the walls of our cage is perfectly, absolutely hopeless. (as cited by Deladurantaye, p. 9)

As Deladurantaye rightly claims in his article, Agamben is in accordance with the above statement but for him the condition of hopelessness is not an endpoint; instead, it has a power of reversibility that opens onto an ethics. Namely, the *experimentum linguae* resides for Agamben on one's repeated encounter with hopelessness, on one's endless running against the 'boundaries of language', out of which *anything* can become possible:

For Agamben, it is a matter of transforming hope, of seizing upon the *perfection* and *absolution* of such *hopelessness*. A way of escaping the aporias of presupposition (or self-reference) is *not* hoped for. Instead, a new, transformed hope is envisioned in light of this perfect, absolute hopelessness where humanity is *absolved* from the task of dissolving the aporetic bars of such a cage. (Deladurantaye, 2000, pp. 9-10)

The above affirmation of hopelessness being able to transform the *aporia* into a *euporia*

automatism, the 'inhuman' and death", "Agamben's Potential" in *Diacritics*, p. 7.

illustrates and foregrounds an ethics of potentiality, which as I will argue in the Conclusion of this thesis, is launched by the performances in question. More specifically, an infantile experience of language suggests an experience of the 'materialization of language', when that language is not just depending on postulates, content and principles. According to Agamben, such a realization reaches the limits of man's understanding of language, and therefore resonates on man's understanding of life, politics and community as well. He specifically notes:

only because man finds himself into language without the vehicle of a voice, and only because the *experimentum linguae* lures him, grammarless, into that void and that *aphonia*, do an *ethos* and a community of any kind of people become possible. (1978/2007, p. 10)

In other words, for Agamben, the experience of language as an event that does not serve to communicate content or specific meanings, can liberate men from analogous understandings of life and community, as these are also founded on presuppositions, rules and principles. And, like it is argued in the Conclusion, such an encounter with (language's) impotentiality to 'work successfully', can eventually displace ethics.

c. the operation of base materialism

Bataille's understanding of materiality is very close to Agamben's, although it refuses to think the undoing of form in an ethical way. But it also shows an additional point of differentiation. Namely, for him, materiality – or rather materialism, which is a term that highlights better the continuity of the process¹⁵ – is also an operation of *lowering* (1970, p. 225). So, Bataille's approach adds another element to the notion of materiality: *baseness*. Baseness of matter indicated for him a constant resistance against hierarchical thinking, following a scheme of high and low. As he noted, no man should submit himself or his reason to anything that is elevated; man should submit himself only to what is *lower* and cannot mimic any particular authority (1970, p. 225). What's more, the forceful materialism of the *base* is direct and sudden, thus, able to undermine idealism of matter: that is, the urge to ideologically,

¹⁵ Materialism is a more accurate term to use here than materiality because the latter suggests a condition, an end, whereas the former shows a continuous operation.

spiritually or theologically classify extremities and crude events (1970, p. 180). In other words, the Bataillean understanding of materialism refers to a qualitative, dynamic *base* and not to a hierarchical one. It is an operation of the scatological, meaning that it exposes something base that is “wholly other” and unexpected (Bois & Krauss, 1997/1999, pp. 31, 47); it is not a thing-in-itself but a radical, dynamic force that “drags things down to the world” (Bois & Krauss, 1997/1999, p. 5).

Bois & Krauss (1997/1999) put an emphasis on the *baseness* of Bataille's matter and developed it into an operation of the formless in their study – it is the operation of base materialism. As they explain,

Bataille's matter is shit or laughter or an obscene word or madness: whatever cuts all discussion short, whatever reason cannot drape with a “mathematical frock coat”, whatever does not lend itself to any metaphorical displacement, whatever does not allow itself to be informed. According to Bataille, matter is seductive waste, appealing to what is most infantile in us, since the blow it strikes is devolutionary, regressive, low. (pp. 30-31)

Hence, they underlined that the Bataillean scatological matter is violent and sudden, and yet seductive rather than brutal. Its devolutionary operation is also apparent in the photographs by Eli Lotar that illustrated the text “Abattoir” in *Documents*. These photos, namely, present animal meat placed orderly at the slaughterhouse of Villette, displaying images that provoke horror. Bois (1997/1999) discussed their performativity and highlighted the double use of the slaughterhouse: on the one hand, it addresses the representation of death (with the blunt images of raw meat) but on the other hand, everything seems to be extremely ordered, aesthetic and clean in that place (p. 47). Consequently, crudity gives the impression of being beautiful. Bataille, thus, seems to have used the image of a slaughterhouse not only to expose its uncanny heterogeneity that creates horror, but also to underscore how violence is being strategically suppressed. He was actually seeking to expose those social mechanisms that disguise violence into the 'costume' of beauty and spirit. In Bois' words: “it is not violence as such that interests Bataille, but its civilized scotomization that structures it as otherness, as heterogeneous disorder: to put it into quarantine with 'an unhealthy need of cleanliness, with cantankerous pettiness and boredom'” (p. 46). Thus, base materialism is to be understood as an operation that resists ontological prisons and aims to declassify matter, “to extract [matter] from the philosophical clutches of classical materialism, which is nothing but idealism in

disguise" (p. 53).

But, in what way is it possible and useful to consider the uses of language in the performances hereby as operations of base materialism, as operations of *l'informe*?¹⁶ Through a combinatory reading of Agamben's understanding of language's materiality (as an experience of a language beyond discourse) and Bataille's emphasis on the *baseness* of matter, I propose to consider the following dramaturgical uses of language as operations that educe an experience of the 'exteriority' of the *baseness* of language. Namely, the scenes discussed here derive from states of infancy and animality – that is, states which evoke an *experimentum linguae*, an experience of language outside or beyond logos and firm meaning. And their *baseness* resides on the radical manifestations of language, inducing an experience of the extreme limits of meaning: namely, uses of extreme and long cries, an infant 'talking' on stage to a mechanical figure and a text that derives from a goat. So, in all cases the 'good' logocentric form of language is being undone, *lowered* and declassified from within. Voice, cry and the sign are namely considered to mark this qualitative *baseness* in and of language, violently lowering and irrupting expectations that favor a meaningful text. However, as it has been already underlined, it is not suggested that they evoke an experience or understanding of *pure* matter. Rather, they unsettle the dominant cognitive and perceptual mechanisms that produce binary classification and essentialist thought.¹⁷

¹⁶ As it has been explained in the previous chapter, base materialism is retained as a vector of the operation of *l'informe* by the two authors.

¹⁷ Lehmann also highlights this capacity of postdramatic performance in general, writing that "theatre implicitly invites [...] such performative acts that bring about meaning in a new way, or rather: put meaning itself at stake", *Postdramatic Theatre*, p. 102.

2.3 operations of base materialism: an alternative way to theorize postdramatic usages of language

Lehmann (1999/2006) highlights in his study that the postdramatic text is hardly controlled by logical meaning. He states that meaning is suggested rather than explained and, thus, remains unrecognizable (p. 146). Moreover, he remarks that language becomes a performance-object. That happens when words, sentences or noises are repeated and distorted and, as consequence, do not make any sense per se but are nevertheless crucial for the dramaturgical composition of a performance. The same occurs in cases of stammering, wrong accents, leaps of the tongue on stage, and disembodied voices through the use of sound technologies. In fact, Lehmann rightly argues that contemporary theatre produces a soundlandscape, a 'Klanglandschaft'¹⁸ (rather than a traditional focus on dramatic text), which is often transformed into a parody of the language of power in media and ideologies.¹⁹ And at another point in his study, he also considers this extensive usage of voice in postdramatic theatre an urge to thematize the reality of voice.²⁰

All these observations demonstrate that for Lehmann postdramatic theatre is the "theatre of the real", where the real is being put "on equal footing with the fictive" (1999/2006, p. 103) and which he calls "das TheatReale" (1999/2005, p. 370).²¹ However, in the context of the performances discussed in this thesis, such an understanding of the uses of voice is not adequate. Or, to put it differently, such an understanding limits the analysis of their impact. Namely, Lehmann's train of thoughts about the real and the fictive arrives to conclusions that

¹⁸ Lehmann, H.T., "Text, Stimme und Geräusch verschmelzen in der Idee einer Klanglandschaft", *Postdramatisches Theater*, p. 273.

¹⁹ Lehmann, H.T., "Er parodiert beispielsweise die Gewalt der collagierten Mediensprache, die sich als die moderne Fassung der ‚enkratischen‘ Sprache, der Sprache der Macht und der Ideologien erweist", *Postdramatisches Theater*, p. 263.

²⁰ Lehmann, H.T., "Die Wirklichkeit der Stimme wird selbst zum Thema", *Postdramatisches Theater*, p. 276.

²¹ Lehmann also writes about postdramatic theatre of the real that "the main point is not the assertion of the real as such [...] but the unsettling that occurs through the *undecidability* whether one is dealing with reality or fiction. The theatrical effect and the effect on consciousness both emanate from this ambiguity", *Postdramatic Theatre*, p. 101.

concern the audience's moral behavior; that is, the social role and individual responsibility of each spectator. For instance, he refers to cases of animals dying or (seemingly) being killed on stage that elicit to the spectators questions about whether these are real or fictive scenes and if they should intervene or stay passive (pp. 103-104). But such a discussion of radical uses of language, or any other system of signs, does not call into question the mechanisms of power (cultural, social, political and others) that construct the existing moral codes. Hence, even though Lehmann rightly seeks to deconstruct the binary of real vs. fictive, he focuses on the behavioral ambivalence that is evoked to the audience without analyzing what is actually taking place on stage; that is, without studying the *undoing of the form*. I shall return to this critical issue in the following chapter, in relation to the presence of animals and infants on stage but, for the context of this chapter's examples, instead of following Lehmann's interest in questioning whether the text that derives from the goat in *Avignon#2* represents the real language of tragedy or if the infant's voice in *Brussels#4* is the real facet of language or if animals and infants should be *used* in theatre at all, I propose to concentrate on the mechanisms, the implications and the performativity of these dramaturgical operations as they are manifested on stage. One can then approach and theorize the experience of those uses of language in ways that can allow a different type of examination of how they 'work' and how their impact can be articulated.

Against this background, I therefore suggest considering the dramaturgies of language in question operations of base materialism, which allows them to be theorized in more detail. This is possible mainly because the focus of the discussion is now directed upon their structural function as operations; that is, on their performativity. As it has been discussed in the previous chapter, the notion of performativity emerged from the speech-acts theory and was developed in linguistics in order to describe what words *do*. And Derrida's and Butler's studies were the most decisive in attributing social and political connotations to the concept of performativity, as they both argued that language's performativity resides on the cultural and historical reiteration of the words' meanings.²² So, words *produce* actions on the basis of

²² For instance, in her study *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*, Butler attests that hate-words can wound the one who is addressed not because of what they mean or what they name, but because of the specific performativity they have acquired through their historical and cultural iteration, which is to wound, to offend, etcetera. Therefore, she recognizes that there is a possibility of subversion. If the one addressed does not 'perform' accordingly, then the performativity of the word can be subverted and re-directed. Salih highlights this exact point in her book *The Judith Butler Reader* (2004): "In *Gender Trouble* Butler deploys Nietzsche's insight that 'there is no 'being' behind doing, acting, becoming; the 'doer' is merely a fiction

social norms and rules.

However, when the uses of language on stage are considered operations of formlessness, then their performativity necessarily resides elsewhere. As the discussion of Agamben's and Bataille's theories has demonstrated, the experience of language's 'exteriority' has the potential to irrupt (western) dominant cognitive and perceptual patterns and to undo the 'good' form of language. Hence, the operation of exposing language's *baseness* is a negative performative: it declassifies language's own 'good' form. This scatological dimension of performativity becomes apparent in Bataille's text "The Language of the Flowers" that appeared also in *Documents*. In this text he refers to flowers and plants in order to make some philosophical remarks. He also acknowledges, though, that such a 'substitution' might seem absurd to classical philosophy because forms that come from nature are considered too 'low' for the 'elevated' spirit of philosophy (1970, p. 178). However, this movement of lowering marks the scatological performativity of his text: it undoes the expectations (at least of his time) about how 'serious' philosophy should be and, thus, creates tension within thought about what high and low define; as he writes, it creates "confusing mockery into everything that is, due to pitiful avoidances, *elevated*, noble, sacred..." (my translation, 1970, p. 178).

Moreover, his analysis on the human appreciation of the beauty of flowers uncovers an analogous hierarchy of privilege and power. Namely, he remarks that flowers generally symbolize love and ideal beauty for humans (pp. 174-175). But man refuses to admit that this beauty is also superficial, ephemeral and very fragile, since flowers die very fast and as they grow they also become ugly, because pollen 'dirties' the petals. In other words, their ideal form and seductiveness rests on their *baseness*. Krauss underscores this point as well and argues that Bataille's obsession with dirt and stain discloses the scatological operation of the formless, which is "to do something to neutralization; to lower it" (1997/1999, p. 5).²³ And

imposed on the doing – the doing itself is everything'. [...] Moreover, if we agree with Butler and Derrida that authorial intentions are not binding and that contexts are 'non-saturable', then the notion that certain words are necessarily and inevitably wounding is thrown into doubt. Seizing on Austin's unstable distinction between constative and performative utterances, in *Excitable Speech* Butler characterizes *How to Do Things With Words* as 'an amusing catalogue of failed performatives'. *Excitable Speech*, on the other hand, is an attempt to maximize the subversive potential of failed performatives which may never be 'successful' in enacting what they name", p. 212.

²³ Krauss explains about the neutralization in language that: "What the structural linguists have uncovered are the hierarchies that lie at the heart of every 'neutralization', such that we are never just speaking of an oppositional pair but of a relation of privilege and power between terms: the unmarked term already germinating with the potential to rise toward higher orders of generalization, of abstraction", *Formless: A User's Guide*, pp. 113-114.

man's denial to come in terms with the *baseness* within all things is the point which Bataille thought constantly exposes and attacks.

Bataille's approach to base materialism as a scatological operation, thus, becomes very useful for illuminating the postdramatic approach to language, as it is manifested in the discussion of the performances that follows.

2.4 dramaturgies of formlessness:

a. *Avignon#02*: the song of the goat

The second episode of *Tragedia Endogonidia* by Societàs Raffaello Sanzio is named after the French city Avignon. The intention of the makers for this performance was to create a tragic text that comes from a male goat, since “in *Tragedia Endogonidia* each show inaugurates a language of its own” (Castellucci et al., 2007, p. 148). As they clarify when addressing the etymological meaning of the term 'tragedy', “the text must 'come' from a goat. The time has come for the eponymous animal to take back what belongs to it: its name” (Castellucci et al., 2007, p. 47). The word tragedy namely derives from the Greek words 'tragos', which means 'male goat', and 'odē', which means 'song', indicating together the 'song of the male goat'. Therefore, *Avignon#02* is a contemporary tragedy inviting a male goat to literally become its Poet, thus putting 'at work' a dramaturgical operation that *lowers* the 'high' form of the historical tragic texts to the animals' *baseness*, in terms of language. In other words, the act of making the goat the “Poet” of a contemporary tragedy attacks the significance of tragedy altogether, as it can be easily considered offensive to and dismissive of ancient poets of tragedy, such as Sophocles and Euripides. And at the same time it attacks the expectations one usually has from a tragic text, as these are generally considered to be masterpieces in the realm of western theatre and literature and to represent the highest form of the human spirit and language.

Particularly the process of 'subtracting' the text from the goat is significant to study hereby, since it marks a scatological dramaturgical operation that exposes language's materiality of the *base*. The goat 'creates' the language of the piece by randomly crushing under his feet alphabetical signs that are written down on carpets and define his private biological mapping. These alphabetical letters, on the one hand representative of human language and on the other hand alluding to the goat's biology, are in written form and placed on the

ground; they are material-ized. So, the goat, ignorant of what these letters may mean or represent for humans, is invited to graze on them and to 'give birth' to the language of the performance.

More explicitly, Raffaello Sanzio adopted an analogical system of combination of phonemes provided by twenty amino sequences, which belonged to a specific male goat and were responsible for his: cellular respiration, the growth of horns and his putrefaction. The sequence of the signs that characterized each amino acid was reproduced on three white carpets. The goat was then let free to graze on the surface of these carpets, producing a constellation of letters that was collected by the team and made up a fundamental writing (Castellucci et al., 2007, pp. 48-50). This constellation became the text of *Avignon#02* which was performed in different ways during the show. Namely, at the outset of the performance, there was a projection that showed the goat stepping over the carpets with the letters. And later on two women *sang* the text that had been subtracted through the aforementioned method: one was reproducing with her voice the sounds, for which the letters stand, and the other was conducting the rhythm with her hand. The letters/signs of the same text were in the end of the performance also projected on a PVC screen. They would appear one after the other in several combinations, in very high speed and accompanied with loud noises. In that projection, letters started dissolving at some point, transforming themselves into trembling lines and uncanny figures (for the discussion of that scene, see: pp. 151-155 of the thesis).

In view of these diverse uses, one can indeed claim that the text of the performance becomes a "performance-object" (1999/2006, p. 46), as Lehmann has observed. The letters out of which this text is composed are in a continuous process of *translation* throughout the performance (they become sound, signs, images, voices, music, gestures) and used like a motif that appears in different forms. However, this performance-object has arrived to become a language from the *bottom up* – exposing the Batailleian heterology, the scission between the 'high' and the 'low' form that in general characterize the western understanding of language.

Castellucci alludes to the etymological implications of tragedy when he writes that "from the name derives the word and from the word a whole series of words: a text-testicle" (2007, p. 48). This element of continuity represents the transformative force of meaning: seen as something liquidized that can never be fixated, like Derrida had also announced through the

notion of *différance*. In addition to that, it demonstrates a more specific purpose of this dramaturgical operation for creating a text. That is, to lower the elevated human spirit that a tragic text is expected to represent. Namely, the letters on the white carpets have to be first crushed under the feet of the goat in order to germinate the sequence of signs and ultimately the language of the piece. Castellucci notably acknowledges the scatological materialism characterizing this process when he claims that “as the goat walks, each letter becomes stained; it is no longer something that means. For me, this is an image of the materiality of language, but material reduced to shit, reduced to something which has fallen” (2007, p. 231). However, on the basis of his statement it seems that he overlooks the ability of these signs to still evoke a meaning, despite the scatological process of getting 'stained', since the adult spectator is still capable of assimilating them and attributing names to them. These letters do not just become form-less, in the sense of no form. They have an alphabetic indication, form and meaning in the eyes of each adult spectator, which is though severely attacked and invokes an intense impact. Namely, the dramaturgical choices with regard to the creation and performance of this text, manifest a resistance for language to be presented in its 'good' form and induce irritation and ambivalence to the audience. I therefore propose to lean onto Bataille's line of thinking and consider them operations of base materialism that *lower* the signs (alphabetic letters) “down to earth”, under the feet of a goat, resisting the audience's expectations and undoing language's (and tragedy's) 'good' form.

Bois and Krauss discuss Cy Twombly's painting *Olympia* (1957) in *Formless-A User's Guide* in a similar tone, the parallelism with which can further disentangle the scatological usage of language in *Avignon#02*. This painting presents a narrative that radically and even violently attacks the references deriving from the title of the work, as well as the expectations that the modernist era of art set out that demand a purely visual reception and conceptualization of art. The name 'Olympia', as the two authors underline, is generally associated with a multitude of narratives and ghosts, such as Greek mythological figures and Manet's famous painting *Olympia* (1863), which had created great frustration in its time because of presenting a nude prostitute looking at the spectator (1997/1999, p. 147). So, Twombly's painting, by showing obscene words on a canvas, radically lowers these strong references of the name and at the same time undoes modernist expectations for a purely visual reception of the artwork. Namely, the violent words inscribed on the canvas, such as “fuck Olympia” and “morte”

(meaning, death), directly address the viewer, evoking corporeal irritation and discomfort. Similarly to the artistic strategy of subtracting the tragic text from a goat, these words are therefore debasing and scatological performatives that can upset and corporeally agitate the audience. As Krauss specifically writes:

“Fuck Olympia” is also concerted to play with the axis that links this command to its viewer/reader, the axis that aims directly at the receiver of the command, making him or her the target of its deictic act of pointing. (1997/1999, p. 148)

Although the dramaturgical operation of *Avignon#02* does not make the spectator a target as directly and violently as Twombly's *Olympia* does, both artworks can be considered scatological operations that undo what is historically and culturally expected from them, through language: namely, the latter, through the use of obscene words, seeks to annihilate the strong implications of the name (Olympia) and the modernist tradition of visual reception of painting, whereas the former seeks to attack the tragic text and the 'high' spirit it is expected to represent, by using a text that is literally extracted from a goat.

- **deconstructing the sign**

Avignon#02 thus exposes the 'base exteriority' of language through the usage of the language of a goat. In order to examine this aspect in further detail, I propose to shed more light on the event of the text deriving from a goat, by conceptualizing the notion of the sign. Namely, I propose to discuss the heterogeneous structure of the alphabetic letter (the sign), which is being crushed under the feet of the Poet. For this reason I turn to Derrida's significant analysis of the elapsed zone between the expressive and the indicative nature of the sign, which appeared in his early study *Speech and Phenomena-and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs* (1967/1973), as it offers a useful theoretical framework for discussing this performance.

As Derrida explains in this book, philosopher E. Husserl (coming from the fields of logic and phenomenology) made a radical and important distinction between the expressive (*Ausdruck*) and the indicative (*Anzeichen*) nature of the sign (p. 17). So, according to his theory, only the expressive signs are thought to be meaningful, which Derrida describes as “always *what a discourse of somebody wants to say*: what is conveyed, then, is always a linguistic

sense, a discursive content" (p. 18). The distinction between indicative and expressive signs thus demonstrates that, for Husserl, the indicative sign (such as a written sign) alone was not sufficient for conveying a meaning in language, whereas on the contrary, the meaning of expressive signs was underpinned by the intentionality of the speaker and could provoke reflection. Husserl namely attested that "every sign has a meaning but not every sign has a 'meaning', a 'sense' that the sign 'expresses'" (as cited by Derrida, p. 23).

At first sight and according to this reasoning, the individual letters/sounds used during *Avignon#02* can be understood as indicative signs as well, since they can be identified as letters of the alphabet and do not signify something other but themselves in the eyes of the audience. The distinction between the indicative and expressive nature of signs that Husserl brought into light is therefore able to underscore the heterology that characterizes them. However, it also demonstrates a deterministic view of language, which seeks to preserve a hierarchical power of logocentrism, identity, subjectivity, intention and meaning. With this criticism against the Husserlian distinction Derrida specifically notes that

being interested in language only within the compass of rationality, determining the logos from logic, Husserl had, in a most traditional manner, determined the essence of language by taking the logical as its telos or norm. (p. 8)

As consequence of his essentialist thought, Husserl was caught up in paradoxical situations, in which this distinction could not be valid. Derrida states that Husserl called such cases "entanglements" (*Verflechtungen*) and that he admitted that "signs in the sense of indications (notes, marks etc.) *do not express anything*, unless they happen to fulfill a meaning *as well as* an indicative function" (italics in the text, p. 20). Nevertheless for Husserl, these cases continued to be unimportant because, as he argued, the expressive and the indicative sign could still be logically separated. And, as example of *pure* expressive function, he referred to moments of soliloquy.²⁴ Consequently, Husserl's persistent denial to question (or even explain) the initial origin and 'purity' of the sign inflates Derrida's project to deconstruct this concept. In that book Derrida shows why Husserl's understanding of the sign should be considered dogmatic, as it does not question "the starting point and the precomprehension of an operative concept

²⁴ As a response to such separations Derrida comments "We know already *in fact* that the discursive sign, and consequently the meaning, is *always* involved, always *caught up* in an indicative web. Caught up is the same as contaminated: Husserl wants to grasp the expressive and logical purity of meaning as the possibility of logos", *Speech and Phenomena*, p. 20.

(that of signs in general)" (p. 24).

Furthermore, Derrida draws a parallel between the meaningful and the indicative structure of the sign, openly claiming that heterogeneity is what makes language possible (p. 30). By explaining how this is a manifestation of *différance* - that is, of the movement that produces the effects of differences in language - he namely demonstrates that the idea of an effective language is an illusion and that signs can not be solely derivative. Instead, they are involved in unlimited representations, as they are able to function only if a formal identity enables them to be issued again. In other words, the meaning and function of signs depends on their historical iterability, which is to say that it is not possible to distinguish them in essentialist ways. "The sign is from its origin and to the core of its sense marked by a will of derivation or effacement" (pp. 50-51) is a Derridean sentence that in fact sentences any attempt of ontological distinction to failure. So, Coker (2003) rightly comments in his discussion of Derrida:

For in order not to be merely momentary and evanescent, even verbal or pre-linguistically experiential expressive meanings must, as Husserl's own philosophy requires even for silent soliloquy, be reiterable, identifiable, and recallable over time as having the same meaning, hence must be articulated indicatively. (p. 271)

Under this light, Husserl's analysis of the sign proves to be not substantial but functional for marking sign's heterogeneity, helping one to acknowledge the impossibility of arriving to firm dichotomies within language.

The element of heterogeneity that characterizes the sign is important because it directly resonates onto the dramaturgical operation of *Avignon#02*.²⁵ The strategy of using on stage indicative, material signs (that is, letters with no logocentric meaning) namely underpins the impossibility to ontologically distinguish the indicative from the expressive signs. Moreover, it evokes an understanding of language that does not merely remain at the level of exposing the illusion of meaning and nonmeaning as separated conclusive entities. To be more explicit, even if many of the spectators might not be aware of the logic followed for these signs to appear (that they define the goat's sequences of amino-acids), the signs are used *as if* they

²⁵ It needs though to be noted that Derrida does not in the same way 'crush' (under the feet of a Poet) and destruct the concept of the sign, but draws attention to the importance of Husserl's "entanglements", which imply that there cannot be a 'real' expression opposed to an 'unreal' one. He thus deconstructs, and not destructs, the notion of the sign by taking up Husserl's 'construction' in a way that it implodes in its own inevitability.

were a language and that is how they manage to lower language's 'good' form. Through repetition and transformation (from sound to letters, to song, etcetera), they are namely issued again and again and become meaningful for this performance. They constitute its language, however cryptic it might seem or sound to the audience. This movement and, simultaneously, counter-movement of the always unsuccessful attempt to become meaningful exposes how signs fluctuate in-between indication and expression, inviting the audience to experience language as a self-contaminated system (that is, as a system in which the 'bad' form is always already part of the 'good' form). And as a result, confusion and annoyance is invoked in the spectators.

b. *Brussels#04*: the *thingness* of language

The fourth *episode* of *Tragedia Endogonidia* also inaugurates a language of its own; and that is, the language of infancy. The first time that the curtains open in *Brussels#04* the audience sees a black woman dressed in a white uniform of a cleaning-lady – an image of “contemporary slavery”, Ridout notes (Castellucci et al., 2007, p. 106). She is mopping the floor of what appears to be a huge marble room and directs her gaze to the audience, as if she is about to say something, just at the moment the curtains start closing. As they open again, a baby surrounded by toys is on stage; she stays there for about ten minutes and seems to be totally unrelated to that huge marble stage that gives the feeling of a sterilized laboratory. On one back corner a metal figure with a big moving mouth is also placed; they call him Hans (Castellucci et al., 2007, p. 91). At some point Hans starts uttering syllables. The baby that appeared in the opening-performance (that took place in Brussels) was Flemish, therefore Hans reproduced sounds of the letters of the Dutch alphabet. Familiar with those sounds but still unable to communicate by forming words and sentences, the infant 'responds' to Hans by producing sounds with her voice. Theatre-scholar J. Kelleher (2007) observes about the scene:

At one point, this figure 'comes to life', three rectangular slots – eyes and a mouth presumably – opening and closing for the machine-like articulation of a series of phonemes, alphabetic scraps, the rudiments of a language, a rudimentary tutelage that only serves to emphasize again the child's unrelation to the play of patience and recall an anticipation, implicit in any language game. (Castellucci et al., p. 96)

Kelleher notably characterizes Hans' language as “rudimentary tutelage”. And by this he makes a double observation: on the one hand, these syllables are the rudiments, the basic elements of language, and on the other hand, they consist a tutelage, pinpointing at what characterizes our education and the human elevated spirit.

The two opening scenes of the performance seem to evoke a sense of discontinuation. At first, a scene with a woman mopping the floor takes place, and right after an infant who *speaks with* a machine-like figure appears. What mainly produces this discontinuity is that the first image looks rather familiar and can be well expected in theatre, whereas the second causes many difficulties, as the appearance of the infant takes the spectator by surprise and is not easy to assimilate. Ridout comments “the appearance [of the infant] here is something of an anomaly, or at least enough of one for some of the conventions of modern theatre-going to be suspended” (Castellucci et al., 2007, p. 108). In other words, the baby's presence on stage marks an event of the unexpected. Namely, it exposes an opposition between bodies that are considered meaningful or allowed and expected (actors, adults) on stage and those that are not (infants, animals) within the industry of theatre. But this aspect, bearing significant moral implications as well, is discussed at length in the following chapter. At the moment, it is useful to focus on the dramaturgical operation that connects the use of language between the adult actress, who is at the verge of speaking, and the infant and Hans, who *speak*.

With regard to how language is *used* in the above scenes, I therefore suggest that a dramaturgical operation of base materialism is at work. What Kelleher describes as rudiment is a reference to the *baseness* of language; that is to the *lowest*, simplest elements that constitute it. However, in comparison to the infant, Hans' linguistic *baseness* is formalistic and systematic since the sounds he utters still represent the 'good', 'correct' form of language (phonemes of alphabetic letters). On the contrary, the infant's sounds evoke a different experience of language's *baseness* and I would suggest those to be considered as language's rudiments instead, since they indicate language *before* it enters discourse, hence, beyond the ability to convey logical meaning.

The aspect of linguistic 'incompleteness' that defines infancy is even present in the etymological meaning of the term in-fans, which signifies someone who does not (yet) speak (from the Greek verb 'fimē', which means 'to speak'). However, this doesn't mean that infancy

signifies the ineffable and the un-sayable. As Agamben rightly argues in his *experimentum linguae*, in spite of not being inside discourse, infancy is still inside language; and it actually defines its *thingness*, its materiality.²⁶ The ineffable is thus a pre-requisite of human discourse and the other way round, and the voice of infancy is what most closely expresses the human experience of language's materiality. Agamben (1978/2007) therefore attests that “the unsayable is precisely what language must presuppose in order to signify [...] whereas the singularity which language must signify is not something ineffable but something superlatively sayable: the *thing* of language” (p. 4).

Following these thoughts, I propose to understand the dramaturgical strategy of interrupting the actress' voice and inviting on stage the voices of Hans and the infant's, scatological operations that undo the limited understanding of language as a system that always 'works' effectively, in the sense that it always seeks to articulate words that produce firm meanings. To do that, I propose to follow Agamben's reasoning and allude to his understanding of the ineffable and the *thingness / base materiality* of language. The dramaturgical operation in question namely on the one hand creates to the audience (and interrupts) the expectation of some word to be uttered on behalf of the woman, manifesting the ineffable as being constitutive part of language, and on the other hand evokes an experience of language's *base materiality* during the interaction between Hans and the infant. In order to investigate this operation of formlessness, I suggest returning to Agamben's study on the language of infancy. But, to do that more thoroughly, the discussion of another similar, and yet in some ways different, scene should be first included.

c. *History of Tears*: the 'impossible' voice

Infancy becomes a central dramaturgical aspect in Fabre's first scene²⁷ of *History of Tears* as well. But that happens through a different process, since in this piece only adult performers appear, whose usage of voice is characterized by loudness and extremity. In fact, the *baseness*

²⁶ Agamben also underlines that linguistic researches show that “the baby forms the phonemes of every language in the world”, *Infancy and History*, p. 60.

²⁷ Prior to this scene there is another 'introductory' scene with a woman playing the harp. Her melody (which sounds a lot like a lullaby) creates an atmosphere of calmness and reassurance. So, the next scene creates a great contradiction due to the disturbing long cries.

of language's exteriority resides here on the specific act of crying, which exposes an irruption in language's logical form.

To be more explicit, during this scene, the stage is filled with performers dressed in white. Half of them pretend to be babies and the other half adults, who are supposed to take care of them. The babies lay on white pillows on the floor, producing a long and deafening screaming. At times, the adults lift them off the floor, in an attempt to comfort them. But each time they lay them back again, their lament of despair starts all over. This devastating crying lasts for about twenty minutes and brings disturbance to the spectators. One of the performers in that piece, describes the process:

All we had to do was to be babies on the floor, screaming like hell. And when a 'parent' would lift us up, we would get quiet. The baby cries had to do with the primal scream. Infants have this amazing ability: they cry and their voice never gets cracked. But with adults it is almost impossible. The scene was extremely difficult to rehearse. (A. Papadamaki, personal communication, February 17, 2009)

This is one of the strongest scenes in this performance because of the particularly intense and prolonged use of voice. The infant-performers even had to keep uncomfortable positions as they cried (tensed throat, bent legs and stretched feet) in order to represent that baby-state, which made their performance even more exhausting. Papadamaki describes this cry as "almost impossible", which underlines a border between possibility and impossibility in the use of human voice and illustrates the extremity of this event. Hence, this scene seems to evoke feelings of vertigo and disequilibrium because of the radical use of voice. Moreover, it manifests an operation of *lowering* human language to the extremity of repetitive, desperate and deafening cries. According to Bataille, such usage of language reaches the limit of the 'possible'. As he writes in his *Inner Experience* (1954/1988)

the extreme limit of the 'possible' assumes laughter, ecstasy, terrified approach towards death; assumes error, nausea, unceasing agitation of the 'possible' and the impossible and, to conclude – broken, nevertheless, by degrees, slowly desired – the state of supplication, its absorption into despair. (p. 39)

If the degree of possibility in human voice is to be measured, then such an infantile outcry of despair could be considered its extreme limit. However, the binary of possible vs. impossible

is underpinned by another binary, which is that of meaning vs. nonmeaning. That is to say, continuous cries are considered typical for infants because they have not yet entered the language of Logos, meaning and discourse, which makes different types of communication possible. But for adults, such extreme uses of voice are usually considered mad, as they do not communicate a message with a clear meaning. In this sense, the disturbance evoked from this scene also indicates that the basic criterion to measure the 'efficiency' of language is meaning.

But, what happens when that efficiency depends on other factors, such as physicality and extremity of voice? Theatre-scholar and maker E. Hrvatin's observation on the general use of voice in Fabre's work in *Jan Fabre: la discipline du chaos et le chaos de la discipline* (1994) illustrates the quest of such alternative dimensions of communication through language. In this study he remarks that the use of voice in Fabre's work causes a "disORGANization" (p. 24) of discourse. Five letters inside this word are deliberately written in capital, aiming to highlight that disorganization is caused from within the organs of the body and resembles to a dissection. "The voice is to be found in-between body and language. The voice belongs to the body because this is what produces it [...] The voice is the trace that the body leaves within discourse" (my translation, p. 124). Hrvatin's point, thus, demonstrates that the meaningfulness of the cry taking place in the *History of Tears* resides on its aspect of physicality. Under this light, Bataille's experience of the limits is also produced at moments of extreme physicality deriving from the human voice, which, in other words, designate the *baseness* and *thingness* of language. Specifically, such moments expose the gap that keeps discourse and voice apart, both designating human language.

In order to more clearly examine the heterogeneity that constitutes the relations between discourse, voice and the *thingness* of language, which appear in *Brussels#04* and in the *History of Tears*, I suggest revisiting Agamben's study on infancy and his *experimentum linguae*.

- **language and infancy**

Infancy holds a significant role in regard to the issue of language. That happens because it marks the passage from *mere* voice to meaningful discourse. And in that way, it conditions the form of language - it is namely only then that a distinction between language and discourse or between voice and speech becomes possible. Agamben (1978/2007) criticizes this point

relating it to the issue of experience and arriving to the conclusion that infancy marks “the transcendental experience of language” (pp. 5, 58). In order to unravel the implications of this remark, one needs to examine what Agamben understands with the term “transcendental” and why experience becomes important in that matter.

Notably, Agamben (1978/2007) redefines that term in relation to language, which now “indicates an experience which is undergone only within language, an *experimentum linguae* in the true meaning of the words, in which what is experienced is language itself” (p. 5). Hence, the transcendental here does not refer to something spiritual, ontological or theological, but rather to a *baseness*. To transcend language indicates an operation of “experiencing language itself” thus, of material-izing it, of exposing its *thingness* and declassifying the privilege of the semantic. Hence, Agamben's understanding of such transcendental experience is attuned to Bataille's operation of base materialism, to processes of deregulating the hierarchy between high and low. Moreover, due to essentialist dichotomies in language - such as Benveniste's between the semantic and the semiotic and Saussure's between language and speech - Agamben recognizes that western human experience of language has always been founded upon a split, and that it is constituted by a violent structure of “the faculty or power of speech” (p. 8). In that sense, posing the question of the transcendental suggests both *lowering* language to its *thingness* and undoing these binaries.

Furthermore, Agamben argues that only through the notion of experience does it become possible to think of and understand the relation between infancy and language.²⁸ However, he also clarifies that the type of experience in question is not equivalent to the modern interpretation of the word, which correlates it to knowledge (that is, to the belief that experience is the pathway to knowledge and certainty). And it is neither equivalent to an experience that is mediated. To that end, Agamben notes that today experience is mediated and “enacted outside the individual” (p. 17). With this remark he refers to the massive use of (new) technologies, which suggests that the majority of people prefer to be observers rather than to actively experience something (for instance, one could say that they prefer to play video-games rather than playing at the streets, or to take photos rather than experiencing physically or otherwise the space they are in). However, this position seems to be exaggerated

²⁸ Agamben, G., “what is experienced in the *experimentum linguae* is not merely an impossibility of saying: rather, it is an impossibility of speaking *from the basis of a language*; it is an experience, via that infancy which dwells in the margin between language and discourse, of the very faculty of speech”, *Infancy and History*, p. 8.

on behalf of Agamben, because it excludes the experience of using technology from the realm of experience altogether too easily. But, Agamben also admits that this point “is not to deplore but to take note of [...] since in there we can glimpse the germinating seed of future experience” (p. 17).

In order to specify the type of experience he refers to, Agamben then introduces another type, which, in his account, characterizes better infancy. That is the notion of “pure experience”, which was described by Montaigne in his *Essays* as “incompatible with certainty, and once it becomes measurable and certain, it immediately loses its authority” (as cited by Agamben, p. 20). But, in order for Montaigne's understanding of pure experience (which can also be a nearing to death experience) to stand, there needs to be a separation made between experience and science, human knowledge and divine knowledge (p. 21). At this point, I believe that a contradiction appears within Agamben's train of thoughts. Since the transcendental seems to undo the mechanisms of power over language by exploring its *thingness*, how is it possible that it also pre-supposes the above essentialist divisions? This paradox is however displaced later on in his study, when he notes that there can not exist a subject of such *pure experience*, because imagination and fantasy have been long excluded from knowledge, considered “as unreal” (p. 27). Hence, this position finds an exit out of Montaigne's essentialism and redefines the categories. In fact, it relocates the problem on the basis of some other, much deeper divisions: those between logic and imagination, logic and madness, meaning and nonmeaning, to the discussion of which I return shortly.

Agamben therefore demonstrates with his study that there is a *moat* between, on the one side, language and voice and, on the other side, discourse - and that is where infancy stands. For him, there has never been any articulation of their relation; there is only *emptiness* marking the space between them. But in order to realize the reason for that lack of articulation one needs to acknowledge that in infancy there is no awareness of the subject's identity, of the 'I'; so, as soon as the subject constitutes himself through the use of speech, then language becomes determined by the 'I'. In other words, in Agamben's account, the origin of language becomes a matter of consideration once man enters discourse and decides to exclude infancy from language's realm. Agamben is severely critical to such an exclusion, arguing for the impossibility of defining the origins of language whatsoever. He namely writes,

the idea of infancy [...] as a pre-linguistic subject is shown to be mythical, with infancy and

language seeming to refer back to one another in a circle in which infancy is the origin of language and language the origin of infancy. [...] For the experience, the infancy at issue here, cannot merely be something which chronologically precedes language and which, at a certain point, ceases to exist in order to split into speech. (p. 55)

In other words, essentialist concerns about origins and divisions of language are being deconstructed in Agamben's study. It becomes then clear that his understanding of a "transcendental experience" indicates a condition of language being free from the notions of subject and identity.

The uses of language that appear in *Brussels#04* and *History of Tears* demonstrate an understanding of language on the basis of such a transcendental experience; in which language is not considered to be only determined by discourse and the subject's identity. The woman's relation to language through the ineffable followed by the infant's transcendental experience of language in *Brussels#04*, are namely operations of *undoing* the notion of the subject – of silencing discourse and inviting voice and the ineffable to be experienced as parts of language on stage. And in the same way, the extremity of cries in *History of Tears* is a radical operation that seeks to articulate the *moat* separating voice and discourse, infancy and language. As operations of base materialism, these dramaturgies therefore declassify the 'good' form of language (the language of truth and science) and invite the audience to an understanding and experience of language as voice, the ineffable, and cry. Consequently, they evoke a profound feeling of ambivalence and agitation to the audience, which, as I argue in the end of the thesis, has an impact on ethics.

2.5 crisis of reason - conclusion

Against this background, I hold that the performances in question evoke a crisis of reason. The notion of crisis is important to consider hereby, as it shows that the aforementioned dramaturgies are operations of undoing the 'good' form of language without suggesting a denial or elimination of reason and meaning altogether. And rather, crisis points to an internal destabilization of reason, a moment during which criteria that usually determine what is reasonable and what not become dysfunctional, even inoperative.

With regard to the specific performances, thus, crisis is provoked by unexpected confrontations with the scatological *other* of language, which evoke cognitive disorientation and perceptual disruption to the audience. To be more precise, they invite them to an understanding of language as an experience of its 'rudiments', such as voice and signs, showing how meaning and nonmeaning cannot stand as separated entities; each one is rather always extracted from within the other. For instance, the method of subtracting a text out of a goat's body and biological mapping contradicts western expectations of how a language of tragedy 'should work', and seems unreasonable. However, this scatological operation is reasonable *in itself*. As it has been demonstrated, there is at the same time an *unreasonable* dramaturgical logic (led by the etymology of the word tragedy) and a *meaningful* transformation of this text into what Lehmann calls a "performance-object" (becoming the 'language' of the piece). In the same way, the infantile manifestations of voice in *Brussels#04* and the *History of Tears* dislocate a western understanding of language as being only discourse. By evoking an experience of de-subjectivization and physicality of language, what appears to be meaningless (in terms of unclarity of meaning) shows itself to have meaning. Hence, all aforementioned cases can be considered operations of base materialism, which *lower* the form of language to its *baseness*, to a point of dys-functionality, demonstrating how meaning and nonmeaning always reflect back to one another.

Therefore, the operations of base materialism in question invite the audience to an encounter with unexpected uses of language, which articulate meaning's ability to shift, to be the "vanishing point" (to borrow Barthes' phrasing) of itself and to resist any firm position.

Such a type of self-reflexive resistance is, thus, able to deconstruct categories and to *open up* thought and imagination towards an ethics, as it is more explicitly argued in the Conclusion of the thesis. But for now, in order to tackle the implications of this crisis, I propose to explore a famous text by Derrida that, as I demonstrate, leads to an analogous understanding of crisis. However, to comprehend his overall argumentation, it is important to take note of the main steps he takes in its course.

In “Cogito and the History of Madness” (1967/2006) Derrida deconstructs Foucault's study *Madness & Civilization*, pinpointing at issues that seem paradoxical to him. Notably, he claims that it is not possible to write a history or an archeology of madness, because these concepts (history and archeology) “have always been rational ones” (p. 43) and as a consequence, madness and reason (*cogito*) will in the end be forced to remain separate, totalitarian unities. In order to demonstrate that, he concentrates on textual characteristics of Foucault's study. At first, he recognizes that, since Foucault's writing “exceeds, by questioning them, the values of 'origin', 'reason' and 'history', it could not be contained within the metaphysical closure of an archeology” (p. 43). Namely, Foucault attempted to write a history of madness *itself*; by making madness the theme and first-person narrator of his book, “a history of madness itself, in its most vibrant state, before being captured by knowledge” (as cited by Derrida, 1967/2006, p. 40). In the course of his study, Foucault showed that with the Classical Age (17th - 18th centuries) madness was reduced to silence due to social strategies that wanted to get rid of “supposedly anti-social figures such as the libertine, the homosexual, the debauched person, the dissipater [...] these people were confined in hospitals, workhouses and prisons” (Lechte, 2008, p. 141). Because of that, Foucault's actual aim was then to write the archeology of that silence. But in order to achieve it, he needed to reject the language of reason and, as Derrida quotes, to link madness “to words without a language or without the voice of a subject” (1967/2006, p. 40), which seems to allude to the notion of materiality.²⁹

However, according to Derrida, this project was not without problems. As he explains, in order to write an archeology, one needs to make use of the language of reason to a great, methodological and philosophical, extent. Consequently, even though Foucault

²⁹ This becomes even clearer from the continuation of the quote, “obstinate murmur of a language that speaks by itself, without speaker or interlocutor, piled up upon itself, strangulated, collapsing before reaching the stage of formulation, quietly returning to the silence from which it never departed. The calcinated root of meaning”, *Writing and Difference*, pp. 40-41.

acknowledged this problematic point in the use of language in his study and even though he revealed the historical discontinuities in the history of madness (the different understandings of madness that appear in Middle Ages, Renaissance, Classical Age and its medicalization in the 19th century), he could not escape an essentialist separation between madness and reason. However, according to Derrida, he did try to avoid that trap by “reaching the point at which the dialogue was broken off, diving itself into two soliloquies” (pp. 45-46). Foucault named such a point *Decision*. But for Derrida, this term is too harsh and fails to underscore that this is a self-dividing action, “a cleavage and torment interior to meaning *in general*, interior to logos in general” (p. 46). So, he proposes to call such an action *dissension* instead, which suggests that the scission is internal. But, in either case, an attempt to locate an exact point at which such a separation has taken place within history is subject to fail because it always reflects back onto another event.

Hence, Derrida demonstrates with his reading that on the one hand, history's discontinuity was exposed by Foucault in that matter but on the other hand, binary oppositions that keep history together as a system of study were not put under examination. As he notes, Foucault's study still assumes that “reason can have a contrary, that there can be an other of reason, that reason itself can construct or discover, and that the opposition of reason to its other is *symmetrical*. This is the heart of the matter” (p. 48). And this he considers inevitable, because the only way for someone to write about the history of madness is by being inside the 'system of reason', using its strategies and tools, by objectifying madness, and by, finally, writing a structural study of it.

Notwithstanding this critique, Derrida also recognized that Foucault's greatest achievement was to make the crisis of reason manifest itself. Namely, Foucault's study demonstrated a “crisis of reason” because, even though it tried to escape reason, it necessarily spoke from within both madness and reason. And throughout this study, the impossibility of them being separated is being exposed. Derrida hence writes:

But this crisis in which reason is madder than madness – for reason is nonmeaning and oblivion – and in which madness is more rational than reason, for it is closer to the wellspring of sense, however silent or murmuring – this crisis has always begun and is interminable [...] Crisis of reason, finally, access to reason and attack of reason. (p. 76)

Such an understanding of crisis can well depict the impact of the performances I have

analyzed in this chapter, as it emphasizes on the impossibility of meaning and nonmeaning to be exclusive and distinct domains. In this sense, the dramaturgies of language discussed here, by inviting the audience to an encounter with language's exteriority and meaning's inoperativeness, evoke a crisis *in* and *of* reason.

Chapter 3

dramaturgies of human and nonhuman animal bodies:

operations of horizontality

3.1 against anthropocentric¹ theatre traditions

At the outset of the episode *Paris#06* (2003) of 'Tragedia Endogonia' by Raffaello Sanzio,² the audience can see two men crawling from the upstage corner right. Attached to each other, half-naked and with their heads hanging in-between their shoulders, they move slowly, carefully and synchronized in a diagonal line across the stage. These two seemingly identical bodies moving on all fours create the impression of an animal walking down the stage.³ The moment they reach the front corner, they separate and stand up to a vertical position. And a few moments later, a goat appears grazing on the same stage with them,⁴ who neither shows some virtuosity nor creates any dramatic development; he just *is* there.

This is a scene that can be considered "difficult", borrowing Lehmann's characterization of postdramatic theatre that has been previously introduced (1999/2006, p. 19). The reason for such an adjective is that it resists anthropocentric traditions of western theatre by letting human and nonhuman animals⁵ *share* the stage. However, it needs to be mentioned that

¹ The term 'anthropocentrism', as its etymology demonstrates, refers to the belief that the human (*anthropos*) is the centre of the universe and that, respectively, the world can only be interpreted through the perspective of the human. This term is indicative for describing western thought about life in general, as this chapter argues. For instance, philosopher M. Calarco underpins this position, underlining the necessity for a gradual transition from western anthropocentric to non-anthropocentric thought. He writes that "it is important first to understand how deeply anthropocentric much of our thinking about animals and other form of nonhuman life is [...] The genuine critical target of progressive thought and politics today should be anthropocentrism as such, for it is always one version or another of the human that falsely occupies the space of the universal and that functions to exclude what is considered non-human (...) from ethical and political consideration", *Zoographies: The Question of the Animal from Heidegger to Derrida*, p. 10.

² I refer to what follows right after the scene with the orchestra performing a 'non-playing', presented in the Introduction.

³ For Kelleher this could be the image of a horse, as it is indicated in: Castellucci et al., *The Theatre of Societas Raffaello Sanzio*, p. 124.

⁴ As it has been previously discussed, this goat holds a significant role in the cycle of 'Tragedia Endogonia', since the term 'tragedy' etymologically refers to 'the song of the goat'.

⁵ Even though the term 'nonhuman' can have a broad signification (as any-thing that is not human), hereby I am using it specifically for animals and infants. The reason why I study them together as 'nonhuman animals' is that their appearance in western theatre context carries similar dramaturgical and ethical implications. Namely, it unsettles the humanized theatre space - meaning, theatre based on the human body and *logos*, as discourse and reason - and raises ethical questions about their being *used* there (for instance, I show later in more detail how theatre-scholar L. Orozco expresses her concern for the

human and nonhuman animals have shared the stage many times in theatre, for instance when they are used for evoking an effect of the real, as part of realist staging practices (see: p. 110 of the thesis). But, the *sharing* that takes place in *Paris#06* as well as in the other examples studied in this chapter, invokes particular surprise and agitation in the audience because of the position and the role that nonhuman animals get within the aesthetic logic of these performances and because of how the relationship between them and other human animals is staged. It thus resists satisfying expectations of seeing only human actors that (re)present and 'perform' an ideal *humanness* on stage and evokes a 'being-with' between them. Ridout (2006) specifically refers to the first point, observing that when we go to the theatre

we know who we expect to see on stage. We expect to see actors. This needs saying: we do not even expect to see human beings, in all their diversity, but, as their representatives, a kind of group apart, more beautiful perhaps, more agile, more powerful and subtle of voice. (p. 97)

According to this claim, the appearance of nonhuman animals, or even of human animals that are not ideally human, may seem frustrating, unordinary, and anomalous⁶ for western theatre traditions. Ridout explains in the same study that this happens because western theatre is founded on tragic theatre, which is “ideal, male, political and only human” and follows the “pre-tragic theatre, material, feminine, infant and populated by the animal” (p. 117).⁷ Theatre-

fact that animals and infants increasingly participate in the capitalist market and theatre economy in her article “Never Work with Children and Animals” in *Performance Research*, 2010, p. 80). This joint-analysis proposed here is also supported by Ridout's study *Stage Fright, animals and other theatrical problems* (2006), in which animals' and infants' appearances on stage are considered together as “theatrical problems” and by Read's *Theatre, Intimacy and Engagement* (2009), who examines the impact of their appearances in postdramatic performance together as well. The latter writes: “for those of us interested in the relations between humans and other animals, including those animals in their infancy that we deign to call human, we are faced with the choice between classifying animals, including infant animals, as automatons, or granting them volition and information processing capacities”, p. 147.

⁶ Ridout prefers to call them 'anomalous'. Deleuze & Guattari's distinction between the term 'a-normal' (the French word for abnormal) and 'anomalous' is interesting to take note of, as it highlights the radical nature of the latter term that also exists in its etymology in Greek (meaning, the strange and the non-equal). They write that the former is “a Latin adjective lacking a noun in French, refers to that which is outside rules or goes against the rules, whereas *an-omalie* [...] designates the unequal, the coarse, the rough”, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 269.

⁷ It is important to note here that tragic theatre was though also indebted to the mythical pre-tragic world, as it was still very much within a mindset in which humans are not superior to either gods, half-gods or animals (for instance, many divine figures are mixed human/bestial bodies). Also Ridout seems to acknowledge this point by admitting that it is problematic to create such a generic binary between tragic and pre-tragic theatre. He, namely, attests that “it is only the 'ideological' presentation of these differences that they solidify into such apparently 'self-evident' binary formation”, which is to say that

scholar A. Read (2009) discusses this very topic as well and characterizes western theatre “multiply finessed but deeply conservative, humanist-theatre collective” (p. 86). Notwithstanding these remarks, it needs to be noted again that attempts of joining, in diverse ways, human and nonhuman animals together on stage are not that rare in contemporary performance. Lehmann's (1999/2006) study on postdramatic theatre for instance demonstrates that this is a widespread phenomenon, underscoring how the renunciation of the ideal human and the ideal human body becomes particularly visible in the work of William Forsythe, Meg Stuart, Wim Vandekeybus, Bob Wilson and Fabre (p. 163).

In view of that context, this chapter calls into discussion performances by Raffaello Sanzio and Fabre that manifest a radical resistance to the superiority of the human on stage, and therefore evoke a sense of insufficiency to the audience with regard to how successfully the human body 'performs his/her humanness' on stage. More precisely, I argue that their work shows a specific performativity: it 'lowers' the human ideal form of the body that is expected to be seen in theatre to that of the animals, invoking frustration in the audience. For this reason, I conceptualize their dramaturgies of the body through Bois' & Krauss' (1997/1999) notion of *horizontalité*, which is the second vector the authors retained for *l'informe* and refers to an operation of lowering and attacking the human elevated 'good' form that is considered superior to the 'horizontal' animals (p. 26).

Returning now to the aforementioned scene in *Paris#06*, it needs to be underlined that this is not a central example to be analyzed hereby. However, as I have partly shown, it serves well for this chapter's introduction because of illustrating rather clearly its central concern: addressing an articulation of resistance against anthropocentric theatre traditions. Moreover, this example is useful because it allows a twofold signification of *sharing* to become fairly visible.⁸ Namely, with this verb I refer to animals and infants that literally appear next to the

Attic tragedy was actually developed out of mythological and historical narratives when a certain political order was also created (that of the 'city'), *Stage Fright, animals and other theatrical problems*, p. 117.

⁸ It is also interesting to allude to the double meaning of the verb 'to share' in French (that is, *partager*), which philosopher J.L. Nancy brings to light in his text “Sharing voices” (*Le partage des voix*, [1982]), published in English in *Transforming the Hermeneutic Context: From Nietzsche to Nancy*. G.L. Ormiston & A.D. Schrift (Eds.) (1990). In this text he explains that sharing in French means both to share and to separate, and he specifically shows that *partager* does not suggest a synthetic movement or fusion (p. 35). Instead, that what is shared is exactly a separation or difference; that is, a mark of a limit. This pluralized differential structure nuanced by Nancy I believe that is also evoked by the performances in question, as this chapter shows

human performers but also to a metaphoric nuance of sharing, which pinpoints states of animality and infancy that are *produced* from within the human body.

So, on the one hand, the goat in this example is present and *stays* on stage with the other human animals without provoking any dramatic developments. This dramaturgical choice marks a radical resistance against western anthropocentric theatre expectations, according to which humanness has always been privileged, situated at the centre of attention and of dramatic action. As I show later, in the discussion of analogous examples, the goat just 'being there', next to the human performers, *lowers* the elevated 'good' form of the human bodies – in a sense, the goat de-humanizes them. And on the other hand, the movement of the two performers towards verticalization illustrates a state of animality of the human body. Kelleher's (2007) observation is important for emphasizing on this animality. He, namely, considers that the choreographic route in *Paris#06* depicts a progressive transformation from animal to human. He writes: “so, the animal comes in, one by two, separating eventually to form two upright humans” (Castellucci et al., p. 124). In other words, the two conjoined half-naked bodies crawl together in a slow, rather ritualistic rhythm, giving the impression of an animal entering the stage. Their bodies and movement, thus, generate an image of animality that happens by imitating the exterior form of an animal walking. This point is illustrated even better in the discussion of Fabre's work, which I consider exemplary for showing how animality is produced from within the human bodies through movement and physical intensity.⁹

Moreover, the choreographic route to verticalization (together with Kelleher's aforementioned comment about it) is essential to take note of because it elucidates another point for this chapter: it suggests that verticality pertains to the human form whereas horizontality pertains to the nonhuman. This is certainly a generic attribution but also essential for indicating a historical and cultural hierarchy between human and nonhuman animals, which often appears in their conceptualization and which the performances in question unsettle. Derrida (2006/2008), for instance, criticizes this hierarchy and clearly refers

(especially through the discussion of Derrida that follows in the next pages), pointing to the relationship between human and nonhuman animals; dividing and connecting them at the same time.

⁹ Van Den Dries comments that “For Fabre, bodies must be in a permanent state of energetic impulse. They have to be ready for the scenic battle; they have to be on the alert so that they can translate every stimulus in bodily tension, a movement, an attack”, *Corpus Jan Fabre*, p. 51.

to the characteristic of human verticality, writing that man's "upright stance" has "an ambiguous privilege" (p. 54). And Ridout (2006), when discussing the appearance of nonhuman animals on stage, highlights the connection between verticality and the authority it suggests, writing that "along with language, verticality is one of a number of characteristics customarily understood to distinguish humans from non-human animals" (p. 112). But most importantly, this aspect of horizontal vs. vertical is underpinned by Bataille's acute understanding of a 'high' and a 'low' form of the human body, on the basis of which Bois and Krauss retained in their study the operation of horizontality. Therefore, special attention should be paid upon Bataille's train of thoughts.

Bataille's writings vividly criticize man's pride of being erected from the animal state because this pride is based on a repression (Bois & Krauss, 1997/1999, p. 26). However, for Bataille this repression is also unavoidable, and with his writings he exposes this exact problematic. For instance, arguing that man has constructed his world according to anthropocentric rules and by considering the animal nature lower and embarrassing, Bataille gives the example of one's excrement's smell. So, he underlines that animals do not seem to show any repugnance to it whereas

man appears to be the only animal to be *ashamed* of that nature whence he comes, and from which he does not cease to have departed. This is a sore point for us. We have fashioned this humanized world in our image by obliterating the very traces of nature; and above all, we have removed from it everything that might recall the way we come out of it. (*The History of Eroticism* as cited by Richardson, 1998, p. 16)

It becomes clear from this phrase that Bataille denotes an impasse within the humanized world, which suggests that an unbridgeable hiatus keeps humanity and animality apart. So, the shame he refers to is crucial, marking that because humans seem to have less sufficient tools to live with nature (one of them even being to worry about their excrement) at the same time gives them the possibility for experiencing the limits of their 'humanness'. So, Bataille undermines the opposition human vs. animal, but not by pleading for humans to become more like animals. Rather, following his overall thinking, the "sore point" seems to indicate the impossibility for humans to become animals, which can then translate into an experience of the unexpected, excess and eros.

The problematic of this hiatus becomes also visible in Bataille's article on the mouth, which appeared in *Dictionnaire*. In this short text called "Mouth" (*Bouche*), Bataille contemplates upon the suppressed use of the mouth by humans compared to that of animals (1970, pp. 237-238). As he notes, for animals the mouth is the beginning and the most living and terrifying part of their bodies. However, human animals seem to be ashamed of showing the full force of their mouths because it is considered uncivilized to do so. Even though in moments of experiencing radical emotions, such as anger, terror or pain, human life seems to bestially concentrate in the mouth, man generally suppresses such physical impulses. Therefore, Bataille concludes that humanness is characterized by an authoritative face and a "closed mouth" that looks like a strongbox. These ironic metaphors disclose Bataille's view on that matter, who seems to pinpoint another "sore point" for humans: a continuous endeavor to elevate themselves from animals even at the expense of suppressing their own nature. As a result, he claims that they end up with a distorted mouth testifying their distorted understanding of humanness. Again, here Bataille does not ask for the human mouth to be used like the animals'. Instead, he draws the attention upon the example of the use of the mouth in both, seeking to show how futile it is to mark such unilinear and indivisible lines to distinguish human from nonhuman animals.

In view of this background, the current chapter explores works of Jan Fabre and Società Raffaello Sanzio and argues that by letting human and nonhuman bodies *share* the stage in the ways they do, these performances show a resistance to register and classify the human 'good' vertical form that represents anthropocentric expectations. This resistance, conceptualized as an operation of horizontality, deregulates the hierarchy between human and nonhuman animals and, thus, brings out a sense of agitation in the audience, able to elicit a type of thinking that launches a process of critical re-consideration of the human and the nonhuman animal in a non-anthropocentric mode; that is, on the basis of the event of life shared by both.

3.2 theorizing the *hiatus*: human and nonhuman animals, apart

In order to proceed to the analysis of such dramaturgical operations, I suggest firstly exploring how and what it means for the categories of the human and the nonhuman to be kept apart. In that way, their conceptualization as operations of horizontality can be contextualized and their ethical implications already traced. Particularly studies by Agamben and Derrida examine this problematic of human/nonhuman animal hiatus and offer a concise theoretical framework for the following analysis. They argue that mechanisms of power and hegemony produce and classify the human as superior and as more significant than the nonhuman.¹⁰ Therefore, they demonstrate that anthropocentrism is constructed on the basis of a singular idea of the human 'as such' – meaning, on the basis of an essentialist understanding of human as the measure-of-all-things, the central and complete entity in the world.

a. the anthropological machine

Agamben specifically seeks to disclose the hiatus that separates human and nonhuman animals and explore its potentiality, in his study *The Open: Man and Animal* (2002/2004). Following an itinerary which begins with ancient Greek and messianic philosophers, and continues with the 18th and 19th centuries' developments in scientific and anthropological thought and arrives to the manifestation of humanism in the 20th century, he observes that western thought has been historically operating on the basis of an “anthropological machine”. In the course of this examination, Agamben shows that the category of the human has always been the result of political and philosophical separation between humanity and animality and that western thought has had a low opinion of nonhuman animals since ever. For instance, he

¹⁰ It is useful to make note here of philosopher Heller-Roazen's explicit criticism, as a support to this point. He states that: “the belief in the natural distinction of man among living creatures is a well-established one, and its origins can be traced without much difficulty to the inception of scientific and philosophical reflection in the classical world [...] Setting a clear boundary between human and inhuman beings, the classical definition of man as rational animal clearly aimed, among other things, to dispel the undifferentiated dimensions of all animal life”, *The Inner Touch: Archeology of Sensation*, p. 91.

argues that philosophers have mainly been taxonomists of animals, securing a distance between them and the humans. Descartes was one of them, considering nonhuman animals “automata mechanica” (p. 23), whereas Heidegger also had a rather low opinion of them. The proof for that is that Heidegger considered animals to be in close proximity to their environment and its stimuli and yet “poor in the world” or “without world” (*weltarm, weltlos*), meaning that they can never experience the world in the way humans do (p. 51). Hence, according to Agamben, the superiority of the human over the nonhuman animal was always ensured by western thought.

Moreover, Agamben marks another point in that hierarchical relation, which has to do with man's own animal nature. As he explains,

in our culture, man has always been thought of as the articulation and conjunction of a body and a soul, of a living thing and a *logos*, of a natural (or animal) element and a supernatural or social or divine element. (p.16)¹¹

The above remark demonstrates that animality and humanity have been distinguished *within* man (what is man's animal and what man's human side). Additionally, it implies that certain elements *only* belong to the category of humanness - such as soul, *logos* and the divine. In other words, it shows that western man considers himself superior because he attributes superiority to such elements. Therefore, a privative hierarchical differentiation between him and the other animals is also to be noted.

According to Calarco (2008),¹² Agamben's motivation for this exploration is the acknowledgement of the disastrous consequences man has caused to animals because of such “political and ontological obstacles blocking access to realization of an alternative being-with other animals” (p. 92). However, Agamben expresses nowhere in this study a clear concern or

¹¹ Moreover, Agamben wonders if the body of the slave can be used today as a manifestation of failure of this separation. “Perhaps [...] the body of the slave is the unresolved remnant that idealism leaves as an inheritance to thought, and the aporias of the philosophy of our time coincide with the aporias of this body that is irreducibly drawn and divided between animality and humanity”, *The Open: Man and Animal*, p. 12.

¹² Calarco's philosophical study *Zoographies: the Question of the Animal from Heidegger to Derrida* serves as a tool for this chapter to think through Agamben's and Derrida's theories from an animal-studies perspective as well. However, this perspective concentrates on the life of animals, on the “being of animals or animality” (p. 2) and on eradicating the human/animal distinction, which I do not consider to be evoked by the performances in question for this thesis. Therefore the main points of his study, although they appear to be very useful for a further consideration of the issues raised, do not hold a central role in the chapter.

hope for a 'being-with' other animals. It seems that his aim is rather to disclose and discuss the hiatus that keeps the two categories apart, "to ask why – within man – has man been separated from non-man, and the animal from the human" (p. 16). And, according to the outcomes of his study, the cause of this caesura is that the human (as the carrier of *logos*, the divine, the soul etc.) is strategically produced and secured by the anthropological machine of western thought.

The anthropological machine refers to the assemblage of "symbolic and material mechanisms at work in various scientific and philosophical discourses" (Calarco, 2008, p. 92), which produces and classifies the human and the animal while at the same time ensuring their separation. In fact, Agamben discerns two variants of this machine at work: the modern and the ancient. And both are driven by a dual process of inclusion and exclusion (2002/2004, p. 37). As he explains, the modern involves an animalization of the human from within the human: meaning, it operates by excluding the human from within itself as not being human, like the figure of the *Jew*. And the ancient involves the humanization of animal life: meaning, it operates by including the animal to the human, like the figure of the werewolf but also the slave and the barbarian, as figures of the animal in human form. In view of these parallax variants, it becomes clear that in both cases the caesura is produced by the human, who seeks to be separated from and elevated above the other animals. The constitution of this absolute differentiation, thus, excludes animality from humanity.

Hence, both Agamben and Bataille seem to recognize that the hierarchy between human and nonhuman animals is the outcome of a view that privileges humanness. Additionally, their reasoning exposes *an open*, a lack of articulation in-between man and animal.¹³ In other words, both thinkers consider that there is a caesura within this mode of thinking and that it is unbridgeable. However, it needs to be noted that Bataille's observations to this issue are also close to Heidegger's, which have been criticized by Agamben. Even though Bataille refrains from any low or poor opinion about the animal world, he nevertheless makes some similar distinctions as Heidegger. For instance, he puts an emphasis on animals being radically open to their environment in a naïve way, as it is demonstrated by their lack of shame and guilt, articulated in "Mouth" and in the earlier quote from *The History of Eroticism*.

¹³ Agamben, G., "Both machines are able to function only by establishing a zone of indifference at their centers, within which [...] the articulation between human and animal, man and nonman, speaking being and living being, must take place", *The Open: Man and Animal*, pp. 37-38.

Such distinctive characteristics are not though regarded as conditions to set a hierarchical relation between human and nonhuman animals, in Bataille's account.

Agamben is particularly concerned about how to suspend the anthropological machine for a different thinking about life to emerge; a life, in which there is no need for humanity and animality to be in a hierarchical relation. And for this reason, he directs his attention upon this caesura, this “missing link” between human and nonhuman animals, and tries to articulate it. He then realizes that there, can “neither an animal life nor a human life” be obtained (2002/2004, p. 38). What can only be obtained in this *open* is a *bare life*, that is a life that cannot be classified with certainty neither as animal nor as human; the event of life. In his study *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (1995/1998), Agamben specifically characterizes bare life as: “a zone of indistinction and continuous transition between man and beast, nature and culture” (p. 109), like the ancient figure of the werewolf and life in refugee camps today. This empty zone in which Agamben's bare life can be obtained is crucial for understanding the operational force of the dramaturgical strategies in question later on.

b. the 'abyssal rupture'

Derrida's lecture *The Animal that Therefore I Am* (2006/2008)¹⁴ addresses the issue of this caesura as well but, contrary to Agamben, it places at the centre of discussion the nonhuman animals rather than the human. And his mode of thinking upon this issue proves to be very useful for thinking also about the performances in question. Namely, his study does not only show that there is a caesura (he prefers to call it “abyssal rupture” (p. 31)) produced by the human, but it is also not concerned with negating this mode of thinking. Considering, thus, the caesura as unbridgeable, Derrida concentrates instead on its 'edges' and argues that they are not unilinear and indivisible (on one side the human and on the other side the nonhuman animal), but multiple and complex. In other words, he seeks to articulate this gap not in order to assimilate it but in order to vary and pluralize its structures and limits, which would in that way produce “a radical reinterpretation of what is living” (p. 160).

Derrida's thoughts upon this matter were, namely, initiated by an encounter with his own

¹⁴ This ten-hour lecture/seminar was delivered by Derrida at the 1997 Cerisy conference and was originally entitled “The Autobiographical Animal” .

cat gazing at him while he was nude. As he explains, this encounter made him feel embarrassed for his nudity but also for feeling embarrassed about his nudity at the first place, since he awkwardly realized that in her gaze there was no understanding of the human principles of modesty and immodesty (pp. 4-5). In other words, Derrida begins with a personal story that, similarly to Bataille's text on the mouth, raises the question of human shame of man's own human nature, in contradiction to what happens with animals. And this incident also shows that Agamben's anthropological machine of western thinking is at work. Moreover, this incident leads him to ask about the "thinking concerning the animal" (p. 7), that is, to ask how man thinks about animals as well as about "*the point of view of animals*" (p. 13). And he realizes that western philosophy has generally set out a specific thinking about 'The animal', singularizing all animal species under the same category.¹⁵

Critical to this anthropocentric denial of multiplicity, Derrida claims that human thought is reductive and essentialist when it comes to nonhuman animals. His deprecatory remark is explicit: "The animal, what a word! The animal is a word, it is an appellation that men have instituted, a name they have given themselves the right and the authority to give to the living other" (p. 23). Therefore, he demands that this term is substituted by *the animals*. However, the pluralization he is advocating is a more complex issue. Namely, Derrida's thesis is that there is an abyssal rupture separating human and nonhuman animals. But, he does not believe that this rupture could be bridged, in the sense of annihilating the multiple differences between them, and, hence, suggests a closure of that debate:

there is no interest to be found in debating something like a discontinuity, rupture, or structure, or even abyss between those who call themselves men and what so-called men, those who name themselves men, call the animal. Everybody agrees on this; discussion is closed in advance. (p. 30)

As mentioned already, what he is interested in instead, is the edges of this abyss, seeking to pluralize, heterogenize and problematize them. As he puts it:

this discussion becomes interesting once, instead of asking whether or not there is a limit that produces a discontinuity, one attempts to think what a limit becomes once it is abyssal, once

¹⁵ In particular, Derrida marks that from Aristotle to Lacan, and including Descartes, Kant, Heidegger and Levinas western philosophy attests that "the animal is deprived of language. Or, more precisely, of response, of a response that would be precisely and rigorously distinguished from a reaction; of the right and power to 'respond', and hence, of so many other things that would be proper to man", *The Animal that Therefore I Am*, p. 32.

the frontier no longer forms a single indivisible line but more than one internally divided line; once, as a result, it can no longer be traced, objectified, or counted as single and indivisible. What are the edges of a limit that grows and multiplies by feeding on an abyss? (pp. 30-31)

On the basis of this reasoning, Derrida proposes the French term “animot” ('mot' being the suffix that means 'word' and “animot” sounding exactly like “animaux”, that means 'animals' in French), which “brings us back to the word” and induces awareness about how human language and thought always try to “draw the limit, the unique and indivisible limit held to separate human from animal” (p. 48). With this remark, Derrida denotes that human essentialist thinking names each thing in an essentialist way, 'as such' (meaning, in a Heideggerian sense, such as it appears in its being (p. 48)) and, as a result, produces the closed, one-dimensional categories of 'human' and 'animal'. Therefore, the term “animot” can interrupt this thinking by affirming the absence of a human conclusive word to name or talk *for* the other animals. As he concludes:

Hence, the strategy in question would consist in pluralizing and varying the “as such”, and, instead of simply giving speech back to the animal, or giving to the animal what the human deprives it of, as it were, in marking that the human is, in a way, similarly “deprived”, by means of a privation that is not a privation, and that there is no pure and simple “as such”¹⁶ (p.160)

Derrida's advocacy for difference and alterity (but not in a privative way) seems to be complementary to Agamben's concern about suspending the anthropological machine. Namely, his discussion reveals that Agamben's notion of 'bare life' can also refer to the life of

¹⁶ Read also proposes reflection on the term performance 'as such', aiming to multiply the 'as such' like Derrida. As he claims, the 'as such' should not only refer to human performance. In order to explain his point, he brings up Žižek's analysis (in *The Puppet and the Dwarf*) of Benjamin's essay “On Language as Such and on the Language of Man”. According to Žižek, Read writes, human language is not universal, as if it would comprise all other species, but it is the only existing language for humans. However, Žižek also notes that for Benjamin there seems to be a minimal difference separating language from language 'as such'. Namely, language 'as such' distinguishes itself by referring to the formal linguistic structure “deprived of the insignia of human finitude, of erotic passions and mortality, of struggles for domination and the obscenity of power”. In that sense, Read also invites a thinking about performance that is not based on a unilinear division between the human and the nonhuman performance. Instead, he follows a Derridean thinking of focusing on minimal differences that can vary the 'as such-es' and of finding other ways to reflect upon human and nonhuman appearances on theatre stage. In his words “my proposition here is that there might be a means to substitute the event of performance for language in Benjamin's example and to learn from the minimal difference that subsequently ensues between the general and the particular”, *Theatre, Intimacy & Engagement: The last Human Venue*, pp. 82-83.

animals that are sacrificed for man's 'well-being',¹⁷ since the animal cannot just be considered a singular entity but should *open up* to a multiplicity of living beings. Additionally, it aims at finding ways to effect change within western anthropocentric thinking – for instance, by proposing the word *animot* for reflection. Thus, Derrida's theorization of the problem seeks to undo anthropocentrism by inducing an ethics of 'being-with' between multiple human and nonhuman animals (p. 81). This point is crucial for discussing the impact of the performances in question. Namely, I suggest that the particular cases of human and nonhuman animals *sharing* the stage in postdramatic theatre do not evoke questions about whether there is a limit that keeps them apart or not. Instead, I claim that these performances manifest a resistance against anthropocentric expectations from within human theatre, which declassifies the fixed categories of animality and humanity.

¹⁷ Derrida is very critical about the general human attitude with regard to animals in favor of the human 'well-being', insisting particularly in their suffering from genetic experimentation, industrialization of animal meat and overactive reproduction of meat for production. Addressing the western hegemonic philosophical thinkers, he attests: "not one of them has ever taken into account the essential or structural differences among animal species. Not one of them has taken into account, in a serious and determinate manner, the fact that we hunt, kill, exterminate, eat, and sacrifice animals, use them, make them work or submit them to experiments that are forbidden to be carried out on humans", *The Animal that Therefore I Am*, p. 89.

3.3 *l'informe*: an operation of lowering

Introducing the operation of horizontality onto the above theoretical background is crucial for disentangling what the specific cases of bodies *sharing* the stage *do*. In other words, it is crucial for pinpointing at the performativity and the impact of these dramaturgical operations. Namely, I argue that such cases (of human and nonhuman bodies *sharing* the stage) can be considered operations of horizontality because they lower the humanness of the human bodies, which means that they undo their 'good' form and unsettle anthropocentric expectations with regard to theatre. With a view to examining how 'lowering' concretely manifests itself in the dramaturgies in question, I consider it important to first explore the notion of horizontality as it appears within Bataille's thinking and as it was developed in Bois & Krauss' *Formless – A User's Guide*.

In his book *L'altération du monde* (2009), Manchev underlines that *l'informe* is "the principal operation of base materialism" (my translation, p. 128). This remark is significant to note at this point, because it shows that *l'informe* is also an operation of lowering (since base materialism refers to scatological processes of lowering to the level of *baseness*, as it has been explained in the previous chapter). According to this claim, thus, the notion of horizontality should be understood as isolating and describing the operation of lowering from the vertical to the low, horizontal field. And I say 'should' because this term is nowhere to be found within Bataille's actual texts. Bois and Krauss (1997/1999) were the first to introduce it as a vector of the formless, in order to describe a crisis modernism brought about in the demarcation between the visual and the carnal within the realm of visual arts. As Bois explains in the introduction of their study, "the impressionists' exaltation of 'pure vision'" considered painting "as a window opened onto the world" (pp. 26-27). Therefore, the vertical field of vision was set in a hierarchical opposition to the horizontal space that the bodies of the viewers occupy. According to this view, art demands an activity of mere visual perception, that aims to grasp the unity of a form and which is completely disconnected from the body of the perceiver. This essentialist antinomy between the visual and the carnal also meant that "paintings' vertical section and completely covered surface were always opposed to the

horizontal and diagrammatic space of writing” (p. 27). And, as the two authors demonstrate, this verticality was initially destabilized by Picasso and other cubists, for who the canvas transformed into a written page; meaning, that it attained a non-vertical structure of arbitrary signs.¹⁸

However, Bois and Krauss' study makes it clear that the operation of horizontality manifests itself most concretely in Pollock's work. As they underline, the artistic method he developed in late 1940s - referred to as 'drip painting' - provoked a shock within western art “not because he was the first to paint with the canvas lying flat, but because he was the first to underscore the horizontality of the support as the essential element of his work process” (p. 28). Pollock, namely, changed the anatomical structure of painting by lowering his body axis over the canvas that was lying flat on the floor, letting the paintbrush drip and, in short, submitting to gravity. Hence, his 'dripping-paintings' looked more like indexes of marks “bearing witness to the horizontal's resistance to the vertical” (p. 97), as Krauss puts it. According to this remark, thus, Pollock's work did not seek to eliminate verticality altogether but rather to resist the hegemony of the vertical visual field.

Notwithstanding that his paintings were hanging on the wall and, hence, demanded visual verticality, the images were at the same time indexes of the horizontal ground on which they were first created. Artist and art theorist Robert Morris was very influenced by Pollock at that period and emphasized upon the force of gravity apparent in the work, which, in his view, “pulled form apart” (as cited by Bois and Krauss, p. 98). Namely, Krauss explains, Morris understood *form* to be organized through the visual vertical field within visual-arts “because it can resist gravity; and what yields to gravity, then, is *anti-form*” (as cited by Krauss, p. 97). In that sense, it was interesting to consider Pollock's work a manifestation of tension between form and anti-form. When discussing Pollock's and Morris' art, thus, Krauss considers their works hanging on the walls as testimonies of an operation of lowering; an operation assuming the horizontal field, which was constantly active within the vertical plane: “a force that had been put in play in a move to disable the very formation of form” (p. 98). This last phrase is a key-phrase with regard to how the operation of horizontality manifests itself also

¹⁸ But, as the authors underline, post-impressionist painter Paul Cézanne was actually the first to set out a resistance to this antinomy. For instance, his work *Still life with a plaster cupid* (c.1892) manifests an early attempt to erase the caesura between the 'purely visible' (horizontal) and the 'carnal' (vertical) since it shows a “floor plane verticalized outrageously, the objects are ready to slide from their position, to dislodge themselves and roll onto our feet”, *Formless – A User's Guide*, p. 27.

in the performances in question. Emphasizing on the ongoing resistance to submit to a complete form of humanity and animality (for the context of this thesis), this phrase namely demonstrates that the aim of horizontality is not to erase the distinction between them but - following the Derridian approach - to tense their 'edges'.

In view of this background, it becomes clear that Bois & Krauss' understanding of horizontality addresses a structural alteration in visual arts history, which affected the bodily (carnal) perception of the artwork. And as they showed, lowering the body axis and submitting to gravity was enough for a crisis in the impressionists' blind belief in "pure visuality" to take place.¹⁹ However, Bataille's writings suggest a hierarchy between the vertical and the horizontal specifically in relation to humanity and animality, as it is also indicated by "Mouth".²⁰ His text "The Big Toe" ("*Le Gros Orteil*") that appeared in *Documents* is especially characteristic of attacking the idea of an ideal human form and lowering it to one of, what he claims is considered during that time most shameful and monstrous human parts: the big toe. Bataille's general aim with this text was to discern two opposite types of seduction - one on the basis of beauty and another on baseness (1970, p. 204). However, what is interesting for the course of this chapter is to elaborate upon Bataille's attempt to *shake up* man's pride about his erect position. In that way, horizontality, which is the operation of lowering the humanness of the human body (in other words, the operation of undoing its 'good' form), can be disentangled and further examined in the analysis of the performances that follows. Therefore, I propose to leave aside the discussion on seduction and concentrate on the elements that offer a nuance on the 'lowering' in "The Big Toe".

Bataille underscores in this text that the big toe is the most *human* part of the human body because no other element of the body is as differentiated from the corresponding element of the anthropoid ape (1970, p. 200). However, he presents various examples from the Chinese

¹⁹ Horizontality seems to be an effective theoretical tool also for looking at the alteration that happened in the axis of the human body from modern to postmodern dance. In the 1960s and 1970s there was, namely, the urge to lower the centre of gravity of the human body from the uplifted vertical positions of classical ballet and modern dance. This was specifically apparent in contact improvisation, which developed techniques of falling and catching.

²⁰ The two authors certainly acknowledge that aspect of Bataille's theory but decide to extend it in the realm of visual arts. They write: "However, we should note that the vertical-horizontal opposition is not entirely circumscribed by the hierarchical relations (which Bataille seeks to invert, all the better to denounce) between man and animal. Another modernist version of this opposition singles out human symbolic practices [...]", *Formless – A User's Guide*, p. 26.

and other cultures, which suggest that the big toe (and it being visible) has been connected to shame and fetishism.²¹ Therefore, he realizes that man generally sees himself as being elevated from his feet up, with his head seeking to reach the sky and the sun. But this human urge for elevation towards spirituality also indicates that man is embarrassed of his big toe, considering it too low, filthy and muddy; “as a spit”, even though it essentially helps man stay vertical (1970, p. 200). Once again, Bataille brings forth the issue of human shame with regard to the human body. But this time the operation of lowering from 'high' to 'low' is manifested in the text, suggesting a division between the elevated body posture ('good' form) and the baseness of the big toe ('bad' form), which Bataille seeks to invert. That is to say, he plays with the paradox that the big toe is thought to be the dirtiest and most embarrassing part of the human body whereas, at the same time, it is also the most human. In a way, this reading proposed by Bataille mocks man's refusal to admit the baseness of his existence. Under this light, Bataille's text shows a negative performativity because it produces an *undoing*. Hence, this text's purpose is not to reach to a conclusion. Rather than simply privileging the big toe over the elevated form of the body or reducing the human body altogether, Bataille's text seeks to undo the hierarchical relation that constitutes them by lowering the humanness of the human body from man's head to the big toe.

Bois and Krauss (1997/1999) claim that the operation of lowering which appears in Bataille's writings, in fact implies “a fall from high to low” (p. 69). And accordingly, they argue that there can be no third term during this fall, thus, there can be no dialectic relation between these two edges (p. 71). The understanding of horizontality that they propose, therefore, corresponds to Derrida's reluctance to bridge the abyssal rupture keeping human and nonhuman animals apart, and to rather pluralize it. Moreover, their position implies that the impact of the 'fall', as it appears in Bataille's mode of thought, inverts hierarchical relations with some sort of violence.²² Following this shared orientation in Bois and Krauss,

²¹ For instance, he writes about Chinese women having to tightly cover their feet up to the point of becoming atrophic or about certain Turkish tribes for whom it was not decent to show their bare feet and even had to sleep with their socks on, *Oeuvres Complètes*, p. 201.

²² I see this violence expressed in Bois' use of the word 'decapitation' when he writes that: “For Bataille, there is no third term, but rather an 'alternating rhythm' of homology and heterology, of appropriation and excretion. Each time that the homogeneous raises its head and reconstitutes itself (which never stops doing since society coheres only by means of its cement), the job of the *informe*, base materialism, and scission is to decapitate it”, *Formless – A User's Guide*, p. 71. In other words, the operation of horizontality is thought to drag down with force whatever seeks to be elevated.

Derrida and Bataille, I suggest considering the dramaturgies of the body discussed in this chapter, as operations that lower the humanness of the human body with some sort of force, because they radically resist anthropocentric expectations installed by western theatre tradition and evoke frustration to the audience.

3.4 the aspect of the body in postdramatic theatre

When elaborating on the body as an aesthetic aspect of theatre, Lehmann concisely describes the twofold phenomenon of human and nonhuman animals sharing the stage in his study *Postdramatic Theatre*.²³ This brief section in his book demonstrates that there is a great difference in how the issue of animals is handled by recent performances in relation to earlier. More precisely, the author remarks that in theatre there has always existed a tendency of anthropomorphism (humans behaving like animals), whereas actual appearances of animals mostly aim at altering the experience of theatrical time.²⁴ However, more radical aesthetics appearing in postdramatic theatre arrive to the point of denying anthropocentrism – which, according to him, is inherent in drama – by letting nonhuman and human animals share the stage and, thus, creating a “sympathetic equality between them” (1999/2005, p. 387). Moreover, Lehmann refers to dramaturgical explorations of conditions like deformation, monstrosity and instincts that are thought to bring the human body closer to animality. For instance, Stuart's, Vandekeybus' and Forsythe's work, in which Lehmann claims that “a renunciation of the 'ideal' body is highly visible” (1999/2006, p. 163), are characteristic of such explorations. And in the end of this section he mentions examples from pieces by Raffaello Sanzio, Fabre and Bob Wilson, in which animals actually stand next to the performers on stage.

However, it seems that Lehmann does not examine the issue any further. Although he clearly addresses that articulation of resistance against anthropocentrism and against the idea of an ideal form of the body manifested in postdramatic theatre, he does not propose a way to explore its implications. Hence, his analysis is not sufficient; neither for studying how this resistance takes place, nor for discussing its impact. On the basis of that, I argue that in cases of human and nonhuman animal bodies *sharing* the stage a lot more than just a “sympathetic

²³ This section appears in the German version of the book but was not translated for the English one.

²⁴ As it is explained at length in the next chapter, dramatic theatre traditionally ensures a coherent narrative and temporal order that is being destabilized by postdramatic theatre, which rather seeks to put an emphasis on the 'here and now' of the performance event, shared by both audience and performers. In this sense, the 'liveness' of animals on stage in dramatic theatre emphasizes the experience of the present, *real* time rather than the temporal order suggested by the dramatic action.

equality" is involved. Namely, I argue that they demonstrate a negative performativity, considering them dramaturgical operations of horizontality: operations that undo the 'good' form of the human body because they lower its humanness and disturb anthropocentric expectations.

a. critical appearances of nonhuman animals

Before proceeding to the analysis of the dramaturgies in question as operations of horizontality, I suggest specifically concentrating on cases of animals and infants appearing on stage and the questions they raise. This issue seems to be critical since animals and infants participate more and more often in recent theatre productions,²⁵ raising questions, concerns and several types of discussion. Particularly Lehmann considers these appearances attempts to intensify the physical presence of the body and an effect of the real on stage. He argues that postdramatic theatre shows how closely related the reality of the human body to the reality of the animal body is (1999/2005, p. 387).²⁶ Beginning this discussion by drawing an emphasis on the significance of the body in a general sense, he writes that postdramatic theatre "represents bodies and at the same time uses bodies as its main signifying material. But the *theatrical body* does not exhaust itself in this function: in theatre it is a value *sui generis*" (1999/2006, p. 162). On the basis of this comment, it becomes clear that, for Lehmann, physical presence plays a central dramaturgical role in postdramatic theatre (which, as he shows in his study, opposes to dramatic theatre processes in which the body was considered mainly a 'tool' for the dramatic action, the plot, to develop). However, focusing merely on the reality of the body limits the discussion of this issue. Similarly to the previous chapter with

²⁵ Some well-known examples for that are: Alain Platel's *Wolf* (2004) in which fourteen dogs participate, Rodrigo Garcia's *Approche de l'idée de méfiance* (2006) in which a turtle wonders on stage carrying a camera on her back, Castellucci's *Inferno* (2008) where a bunch of children appear inside a glass cube and Fabre's *My Movements are Alone like Streetdogs* (2000) in which three dead dogs and one alive are on stage.

²⁶ In an earlier article specifically dedicated to Fabre's work, Lehmann discusses the same issue of reality vs. fiction with regard to the performance *Elle était et elle est, même* in which tarantulas are on stage together with the performer. Lehmann considers essential the questions that arise to the audience about whether these tarantulas are poisonous, real and dangerous, while thinking about this strand of theatre. As he argues, the panic and unpleasant situation created evoke an "aesthetics of poison" because "what really matters is the aggressive gesture by which the certainty, the detachment of knowledge, is removed", "When rage coagulates into form..." in *Jan Fabre: Texts on his Theatre-Work*, p. 139.

regard to language, I suggest leaving to the side questions that concern the reality of the body, and focusing rather on how a resistance to anthropocentric expectations takes place through its appearance. In that way, the performativity (as operations of lowering) and the impact of this aesthetic logic can be explored. Ridout's and Read's studies on this issue prove to be very useful for inviting such a discussion.

Ridout's *Stage Fright, Animals and other Theatrical Problems* (2006), namely, concentrates on moments that produce an “ontological queasiness” in theatre (p. 3). Borrowing this phrase from theatre-scholar Barish, Ridout refers to moments during which the audience experiences confusion, disappointment, discomfort and anxiety in theatre, but to which nevertheless “he will repeatedly seek to return” (p. 3). Specifically, he discusses incidents of stage fright, cases of audience members feeling embarrassment due to face-to-face encounters with actors and examples of animals' and infants' appearances on stage.²⁷ In the course of this study he, thus, argues that such moments may seem anomalous but are also in a sense constitutive of theatre's political and ethical value.²⁸ In the chapter about animals' appearances in particular, Ridout argues that the audience is confronted with “the extreme 'otherness' of the animal”, which eventually brings awareness about the “histories and politics of labor and its exploitation upon which the theatre operates” (p. 29). Bringing into discussion Fabre's and Raffaello Sanzio's work among others, he admits that animals and infants that appear in their performances are engaged in a network of signification, which would be very easily criticized as anthropocentric on the basis of the assumption that “it wrenches the animal from its animal-ness and places it within a world of human signification” (p. 109). However, Ridout criticizes the anthropocentric mode of thinking manifested by such a claim. He, thus, underlines that it is “based upon an ontological distinction between human and nonhuman animals” (p. 110) and encourages instead an ethical thinking that does not resist making

²⁷ Hence, in this case “stage fright” interestingly does not pertain the actor's anxiety of being on stage, as the traditional use of this term suggests, but the audience's, which shows that postdramatic theatre no longer resides so much on how persuasively and successfully the actor acts his role, but on what the impact of his presence is with regard to the audience. In relation to the works discussed hereby, the aim is namely to induce different types of intense and unexpected experiences to the audience, that (as Ridout argues) often cause fright.

²⁸ To be more explicit, Ridout notes that theatre often becomes “uncomfortable, compromised, boring, conventional, bourgeois, overpriced”, *Stage Fright, Animals and Other Theatrical Problems*, p. 3. However, he also considers this normal if one thinks that theatre is just another 'business' of modern capitalism. But, in such moments, during which theatre 'fails' and creates intense discomfort (an 'ontological queasiness'), the audience experiences a political relationship. As he puts it: “something of our relationship to labor and leisure is felt”, *Stage Fright, Animals and Other Theatrical Problems*, p. 34.

meaning out of animals and infants on stage. Therefore, he is skeptical about the principle of respecting alterity by keeping a distance²⁹ and it seems that he promotes a Derridian ethical thinking. In other words, Ridout's resistance to an ontological, undivided and unilinear distinction between human and nonhuman animals echoes Derrida's advocacy for pluralization of the animal and the human 'as such'.

As it has been already suggested, this chapter holds that an ethical thinking of continuous negotiation between human and nonhuman animals is evoked by the performances in question, which is similar to Ridout's. However, the central focus in Ridout's study resides on a different area than here. Although it discusses various aspects with regard to nonhuman animals' appearances, it mainly argues that such appearances bring recognition and affect to the audience about man's economic and political entanglement with them. And with that remark, Ridout refers precisely to the human violence and domination over animals (p. 125). Theatre-scholar Orozco concentrates on this aspect as well in her article "Never Work with Children and Animals" (2010). But her position is opposing Ridout's, arguing that the audience remains dangerously unaware of the actual risks taken for the realization of such performances. Underlining that children and animals are exploited, industrialized and objectified in many ways by the capitalist market (advertising, science, food industries etc.), her article expresses fear that something analogous has started happening in theatre. As she explains, her concern lies on the fact that there is considerable risk-management and responsibility for animals' and infants' participation in performance, which are neither revealed to nor experienced by the audience. She writes:

But what is the role of the audience? While for them risk-taking functions largely at a metaphorical level, they are arguable willing partakers in an experience that commercializes fear and risk-taking [...] the spectator is not asked to take risks but is offered the opportunity to watch someone else's endangerment from the comfort of the auditorium. (p. 85)

These debates are certainly relevant for some of the performances I examine in this chapter. But, even though I acknowledge their urgency, they are not explored in the present thesis. The reason thereof is that this study concentrates on the impact deriving from an aesthetic,

²⁹ Here he explains that this type of ethical thinking "has characterized much recent ethical philosophy, including, of course, the work of Levinas, as well as other projects that take Heidegger as a starting point (either positively or negatively)", *Stage Fright, Animals and Other Theatrical Problems*, p. 110.

dramaturgical and philosophical examination of radical aesthetic forms. Thus, the focus is rather upon the perceptual and cognitive impact of the performances, which I hold to evoke ethical potentials.

Closer to this thesis' focal point is therefore Read's view on infant and animal appearances on stage in his study *Theatre, Intimacy & Engagement* (2009). Particularly in the chapter about the anthropological machine, Read clarifies that his aim is not to follow the direction of political and economical discussion that Ridout proposes, but that of a "bio-aesthetic web" that can lead to the re-consideration of the human (p. 90). Namely, Read underlines that western theatre has been producing the category of the human on stage like Agamben's anthropological machine is producing it within western thought. Emphasizing upon the need of man to establish his identity as a human, he considers theatre to serve this need. He writes, "for if man has no specific identity other than the ability to recognize himself 'as human', then humans will need a theatrical machinery to affect this defining quality, to stage itself, him or herself, as human" (p. 92). But, according to him, there are also performances that resist succumbing to that anthropocentric machinery of theatre by inviting animals and infants on stage. For instance, he refers to Raffaello Sanzio's work that measures the tension between human and nonhuman animals. At this point it becomes already clear that the present thesis is similarly concerned with aesthetic processes of undoing the category of the human in postdramatic theatre. However, a more structural analysis of selected scenes in performances is conducted hereby in order to specifically explore their dramaturgical operations of formlessness.

Additionally, in the same study, Read is very careful when describing the relation of postdramatic performance to Agamben's understanding of the 'open' (that is, the hiatus between human and nonhuman animals in which 'bare life' appears). As he notes, performance would very much like to imagine that it can occupy this *empty* space but the anthropological machine operates in a smoother way, which means that it is very difficult to be located and suspended (p. 96). Under this light, Read seems to situate the force of today's theatre on its operations of resistance against the ideal humanness when he writes that "it is performance that nightly in the human laboratory, that is, the last human venue, has demonstrated the workings of this device" (p. 96). Even though this sentence suggests that performance can disclose the strategies of the anthropological machine (by inviting the

audience to confront its mechanisms), it does not assume that it is also capable of stopping it entirely. As it is explained more extensively in the end of this chapter, I similarly argue that the performances in question do not *destruct* the anthropological machine of western thought. Rather, by resisting anthropocentrism, they have the force to render inoperative the machinery within the realm of theatre.

However, and despite the similarities, Read's study has its limitations for supporting the analysis here because of its literary form. Written in a rather performative tone, it offers an interesting but also at times confusing intermingling of personal stories and opinions together with the performances and their theoretical discussion, which often keeps the arguments and the theoretical analysis of the performances implicit.³⁰ Contrary to that, the operation of the formless proposed hereby offers a more systematic and structural way to discuss the implications of animals' and infants' appearances on stage.

³⁰ For instance, in the chapter "The Anthropological Machine" and during the discussion about 'interrupting' it, Read mentions where this chapter's idea grew out of: the National Art Library of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. From then on, he continues by explaining how he returned to this place again with his daughter, who noticed an animal statue that he had always ignored for a human. Right after, a detailed description of the building is given which goes on until the end of the chapter and demonstrates the "ubiquity of the tension between animality and humanity" (p. 100). This chain of examples, although they are thought stimulating and appealing, keep the argument of the chapter in suspension. And this, I find to be a general characteristic of Read's book. Hence, it becomes rather difficult to make a productive use of his study for an academic thesis.

3.5 dramaturgies of formlessness:

a. bodies in metamorphoses

The opening scene of Fabre's performance *History of Tears* has already been discussed from the aspect of the voice in the previous chapter. At this point I suggest returning to it and concentrating on the aspect of the body with the aim to observe how this scene also resists anthropocentric expectations. Moreover, I introduce a few additional scenes from Fabre's works, which I regard complementary to the one from *History of Tears*, in order to gain a better insight on how the humanness of the body is being undone from *within* the human body. So, in view of these examples, I argue that the particular dramaturgical uses of the body lower the ideal form of the human and can therefore be considered operations of horizontality, that are able to bring irritation to the audience.

It needs to be underlined that Fabre has a distinct way of working with the body of the human performer, which is very much inspired by nonhuman animals. As a result, his work is exemplary for this chapter. Namely, the bodies on stage in his performances move in repetitive, intense and exhausting rhythms. And on the basis of this movement, they seem to undergo constant transformations from human to nonhuman animal states. In other words, they rarely seem to satisfy audience's expectations for seeing a 'good' human form on stage, arriving to the point of inducing disturbance in the spectators. Theatre-scholar Van Den Dries (2006) is explicit about that aspect in Fabre's work, attesting that "the body constantly transforms. It cannot be pinned down. It glides, it meanders, it all quivers. The body takes many shapes" (p. 7). And Hrvatin (1994) also highlights that the performers' bodies in Fabre's works mainly metamorphose into animal bodies, writing that "the bodies of the animals are more exposed than those of the actors. These animal bodies bring to the performance the risk of the unexpected" (my translation, p. 70). These claims, hence, suggest that Fabre's iconography of the human body is to a great extent associated with animals, which shows

that a resistance against a complete and ideal form of humanness is manifested in his work, inviting the audience to an encounter with the 'unexpected'.

As it has been previously described, during the opening scene in *History of Tears*, the stage is filled with performers dressed in white, half of which pretend to be infants crying in despair and the other half their parents who try to comfort them. This deafening scene lasts for about twenty minutes. And its long duration is significant because the impact of their movement and cries becomes even greater. Particularly the bodies of the infant-performers give the impression of being in a constant transformation from adult to babies in that scene. Even though the audience can clearly see that they are adults, the act of keeping a long and intense infant-condition on their bodies *lowers* their human form and causes ambivalence. Lying on the floor, their bodies are namely contracted, tensed, with their knees above the chests, their toes stretched, their hands twitching, their mouths wide open resembling to animals, and their faces looking distorted. Papadamaki's comment about this scene is important to mention here. She attests that "it was extremely difficult to rehearse for months. It was so fake to just pretend you are a baby. But through that process of faking there was so much *truth* coming out" (A. Papadamaki, personal communication, February 17, 2009). This remark (to which I also return in the following subsection, to disentangle her use of the word 'truth') demonstrates that there is a demand of extreme energy and physicality on the side of the performers for achieving and maintaining this infant body state for so long. Their bodies undertake *anomalous* shapes, meaning shapes and actions that are unusual and exhausting for adult humans, even if they are trained performers.

Many other examples from Fabre's work can be mentioned here, that show analogous resistance to the audience's expectation. For instance, in two much earlier productions, *Sweet Temptations* (1991) and *The Power of Theatrical Madness* (1984), there are scenes in which the performers pretend to be dogs, meaning that they literally imitate some exterior aspects of a dog. In the first case, the performers bark and show their teeth to the audience, as if they were in an alert state for attack. And in the second case they are on all fours, trotting around the stage for about fifteen minutes. Imitating the plain form of an animal or an infant, as in these three performances, is significant for producing a radical transformation to the image of the body. Namely, the human body of the performer excessively acts and behaves like an animal or an infant to the eyes of the audience. And this is characteristic in Fabre's work, as Van Den

Dries' and Hrvatin's comments have also indicated. Hence, this transformation is not the result of psychological identification, emotional interpretation or abstract imagination of how a dog or an infant would act. This transformation begins with improvisation: by keeping the body posture of an infant, by screaming like an infant, by barking like a dog and by walking on all fours with the movement quality of a dog. It is, thus, the imitation of the form, meaning the imitation of the exterior image of characteristic actions, movements and behaviors of a specific nonhuman animal, which produces a metamorphosis of the body.³¹ And this point is discussed at length in the next pages.

The more recent performance *Angel of Death* (2003) is another example of Fabre's work in which a series of metamorphoses is taking place. In this solo piece, the dancer, Ivana Jozic, is placed at the center of a rather small room on the four walls of which there are projections. Some of them show W. Forsythe moving and talking inside Montpellier's anatomical museum (van Den Dries, 2006, p. 45). Hence, on the one hand the audience, sitting around the dancer, is bombarded with images of deformed infant bodies and monstrous figures from the anatomical museum. Within this landscape, Forsythe is also moving in an unusual way, characteristic of his dancing style,³² that makes those decomposed bodies seem not that different from the human one moving among them. His *unfinished* movements and distorted body lines, namely, emphasize the operation of *lowering* the humanness of the human body. And on the other hand, the audience is confronted with the dancer's body in the middle of the room, which is in a process of constant metamorphoses from human and sensual to reptile, insect or wild animal images. Moving in a very small space in precise and mysterious ways, she continuously evokes such images of different animal species, both human and nonhuman. Hence, it becomes clear that all aspects of this performance seek to 'lower' the

³¹ For instance, Fabre describes the improvisation of 'the dying animal' in the interview to Van Den Dries, which is exemplary of this element in his work. He explains that during that improvisation "the actors and dancers copy the kinetic qualities of an animal, savour the metamorphosis of the animal's walk, alertness and sensuality. And then all of a sudden they're shot dead. They cramp up, their limbs shake. They fall down and get back up. Lasting contractions in a long death battle. That's a study in physicality that I like to us and that has also taken shape on stage, most explicitly in Emio Greco's performance in *Da un'altra faccia del tempo*", *Corpus Jan Fabre*, p. 315.

³² Choreographer William Forsythe is known for radically deconstructing classical ballet structures and for experimenting with different art forms in his choreographies. Dance scholar G. Siegmund explains that "In the course of his career, Forsythe has merged ballet with numerous other art forms and fields of knowledge, thus constantly opening up new possibilities for how the body can move", May 2008. Retrieved from : <http://www.goethe.de/kue/tut/tre/en3361069.htm> (last visited 16/10/2010).

human body, iconographically articulating flowing monstrous and animal forms that the body can take.³³

These cases, thus, illustrate quite vividly a *disability* to perform according to the ideal form of the human body, thus eliciting an always incomplete form. The performers in all examples inhabit human bodies, but their humanness is not experienced as a firm, ideal category; it is not experienced as a human 'as such'. Instead, it becomes an open, transformative and dynamic aggregate. Further, this doesn't mean that the human animal is to be considered inferior to the nonhuman animal. On the contrary, it is being lowered, meaning that it is penetrated by dynamic differentiations of bodies and identities, which vary its 'as such'. Additionally, the states that the human bodies have to achieve in the above examples can be related to Bataille's article on the mouth, which, as it has been presented, recognizes that the mouth's full use is considered unnatural and embarrassing for human animals. And under this perspective, the dramaturgical uses of the body in Fabre's work are also attempts for transgressing that decent and 'correct' form of humanness.

- **operations of becoming**

Common to all these examples is the excessive imitation of the form of animals and infants. However, as it has been noted already, these processes of imitation have a transformative force, which is what Papadamaki calls "truth". I would rather propose to consider them as operations of metamorphosis or as operations of 'becoming'. In that way, it can be better illustrated how these processes lower the humanness of the human form. Hrvatin (1994) also discusses this point, by distinguishing the nuance of the terms 'transformation' and 'metamorphosis'. He claims that

Fabre's actors do not transform into roles [...] Instead of talking about transformation, we are talking about a metamorphosis, present in Fabre's overall work. This very important element of Fabre's iconography demonstrates that the metamorphosis passes over the plane of forms (different to transformation, a psychological game of identification in which the form depends on the actor). (my translation, p. 161)

³³ Van Den Dries also highlights the constant metamorphoses taking place in this performance: "Metamorphosis is ubiquitous in the text, in the dancing, in the images. There is a continuous flow in which the old and the young dancer keep taking on different shapes and remind us of poses of other icons. There is the theme of circularity in which life and death are taken up in an eternal cycle of dying and being born", *Corpus Jan Fabre*, p. 46.

I regard Hrvatin's above understanding of metamorphosis crucial to explore at this point, because it discloses how the 'good' human form is being undone – that is, how the operation of horizontalization is manifested in Fabre's work.

But, in order to shed light upon this issue, I suggest introducing Deleuze and Guattari's (1980/2004) philosophical notion of “becoming”, with which they underscore a distinction similar to Hrvatin's. According to them, becoming is very different from 'being' or 'resembling' to another. Hence, it is not a mere imitation or an identification (p. 262). Rather, becoming refers to an operation of metamorphosis that penetrates movement and all particles of the body. Even though the two authors do not examine any theatre practices, it is striking to what extent their writings on becomings-animal resonate on the aforementioned examples. Namely, they specifically address the issues of proximity and form for the operation of becoming to take place. So, according to them, the form of one's body should closely connect to the molecules of the body one is *to become*; that is, to details and particles of that body. They explicitly write that

starting from the form one has, the subject one is, the organs one has, or the functions one fulfills, becoming is to extract the particles between which one establishes the relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness that are *closest* to what one is becoming, and through which one becomes. (p. 300)

Hence, the element of proximity through movement, underlined in their description, shows that the animal and the human should come so *close* that they become indiscernible. However, this does not mean that the human actually becomes an animal. But it also doesn't mean that this becoming is a phantasy or a dream. They insist that “becoming produces nothing other than itself” (p. 262). The example they give of (the actor) Robert de Niro's performance is useful to elucidate this point of molecular becoming. As they explain, in a film De Niro had to move like a crab. But this could happen successfully only if he would let some characteristic of the form of the crab enter into composition with his movement and the moving images of the film (for instance, by walking sideways). Hence, - echoing the examples of the dogs in the performances mentioned - the two authors write: “you become animal only molecularly. You do not become a barking molar dog, but by barking” (p. 303). The performers in Fabre's theatre works similarly need to bark, cry out or walk on fours in order for the operation of

becoming to be put at work. What's more, Deleuze and Guattari's notion of becoming shows that no animal or another human is produced. Hence, the operation of becoming just lowers the human, in the sense that it resists to its ideal, vertical form of humanness.

Moreover, the notion of becoming is able to offer a better insight on the implications of horizontalization. This study clarifies that becoming can be understood as an 'involution', which refers to an evolution between heterogeneous elements (p. 263). However, the authors underline that this term could only be attributed if involution is not confused with regression, which "is to move to a direction of something less differentiated" (p. 263). Under this light, the operation of lowering the human to the nonhuman form is not reductive but qualitative and based on differentiation. Respectively, the performers in the above examples become creative and dynamic aggregates, in the bodies of which heterogeneous elements can communicate. This heterogeneity is crucial in the process of becoming for Deleuze and Guattari, who claim that becoming is also a "symbiosis" of different elements, meaning a 'living-together'. They write that "[becoming] is in the domain of *symbioses* that bring into play beings of totally different scales and kingdoms, with no possible filiation" (p. 263). Following the logic of this remark, I propose to think of the uses of the bodies in the performances in question not as attempts to eliminate the differences between human and nonhuman bodies, but as attempts to expose internally divided lines in their unilinear separation. In other words, they can also be regarded as *responses* to Derrida's demand for varying the 'as such' of the human: they seek to pluralize and heterogenize the human 'good' form of the body. Consequently, they evoke a 'symbiosis' or, in Derrida's words, a 'being-with' that is founded on differentiation.

b. nonhuman animals 'just being' on stage

The dramaturgies of the body in the work of Raffaello Sanzio also lower the 'good' form of the human body that is expected to be seen on stage. But in their case, these operations are most vividly manifested in the letting of humans, non-humans and other bodies that do not apply to the 'good' form of humanness to occupy the stage, rather than in images produced through processes of metamorphosis of the body, as it happens in Fabre's work. These

performances are, then, indicative of a dramaturgy that is very often dependent on the physiology of the body: several animals, infants, children, robots, sick, old and deformed bodies appear on stage.³⁴ Usually standing next to 'good' human bodies, I hold that they 'de-humanize' them; that is to say, they lower their 'good' form because of the position nonhuman animals get in this aesthetic logic and because of how the relationships between human and nonhuman animals are staged. Notwithstanding the aforementioned plurality of body types, in this chapter - that concentrates on how anthropocentric theatre traditions are resisted through a twofold *sharing* of the stage - attention is drawn specifically upon presences of animals and infants on stage that induce ambivalence and possibly irritation to the audience.

As the introductory example of the episode *Paris#06* indicates through the presence of the goat grazing around, presences of nonhuman animal bodies are significant for this chapter as long as they are not used for the dramatic development of a performance. It is instead their dramaturgical *use* that I consider important, which is that nonhuman animals just occupy a space of the theatre stage, sometimes standing next to the human performers. In other words, they are not on stage to demonstrate some type of virtuosity like it goes on, for instance, in a circus or in advertisements, and the discussion of their presence there ought not to be limited in their bringing a realist effect on stage. On the basis of these remarks, I therefore argue that such presences of nonhuman animals can be considered dramaturgical operations of horizontality. To be precise, I claim that their *just* sharing the traditionally humanized theatre stage with other human bodies can be considered a dramaturgical operation with a specific type of performativity in relation to what is expected from the audience to see on stage: it lowers the humanness of the human body and radically resists anthropocentric theatre customs. Hence, these performances let an unexpected 'being-with' between human and nonhuman animal bodies happen on stage.

Many productions by Raffaello Sanzio involve animals and infants in that way. For instance, the infant appearing in episode *Brussels#04* - that has been discussed in the previous

³⁴ Papalexioiu calls those bodies "unhoused" (*ανοίκεια*) and highlights their dramaturgical significance. She writes that "those bodies do not reflect some kind of 'pathology' [...] The performers respond exclusively to the dramaturgical needs, which are indicated just by their physical being on stage" (my translation), *Όταν ο λόγος μετατρέπεται σε ύλη: Romeo Castellucci/Societas Raffaello Sanzio (When Logos Turns into Matter: Romeo Castellucci/Societas Raffaello Sanzio)*, p. 49. The performance *Giulio Cesare* (1997) is a very good example of that element in Raffaello Sanzio's work since all leading roles are distributed according to the physiology of bodies. For instance, Antonio is played by a man with a tracheotomy, Brutus and Cassius by two anorexic girls and Cicero by an obese man.

chapter with regard to the aspect of language - is evident of that. Such presences are significant in the overall work of Raffaello Sanzio but even more in the episodes of *Tragedia Endogonidia*, which deal directly with tragedy. In other words, animals' and infants' situation of 'just being' on stage resists tragedy's anthropocentric principles, as these performances lack a narrative that would allow for an understanding of the human body as the centre of the universe. Castellucci's (2000) vision of theatre underpins this point and demands that nonhuman animals return to the scene. Further, he argues that tragedy was born when the hierarchy between human and nonhuman animals was established and the human became the Author of the theatre text, which were the cause for the nonhuman animals to disappear from the scene.³⁵ For that reason, he wants to invite animals and infants back on stage and re-discover a pre-tragic theatre.³⁶ He attests that "the polemical gesture we make regarding Attic tragedy consists in bringing the animal back on stage" (p. 24). Therefore, his vision evokes a resistance against this anthropocentric hierarchy and exclusion of the nonhuman animal.

With a special emphasis upon the body, Castellucci (2000) also claims that "the body of the animal mainly consists in a simple and, at the same time, radical reality: 'being there'" (p. 24). However, this remark clearly concentrates on the reality of the body, which is an issue that I do not consider productive for the course of this argument. As it is already mentioned, this aspect of theatre has been discussed by Lehmann at length. But, since it is not a point that can elucidate how resistance against anthropocentrism is manifested within theatre, I propose to leave it aside in the present discourse. Hence, even though it seems that Castellucci regards this 'being there' as a testimony of body's real-ness, I believe that it shows rather the company's dramaturgical choice about how to *work* with nonhuman animals. In other words, I propose to put an emphasis not so much on the event of nonhuman animals appearing on

³⁵ Ridout also comments on Castellucci's critique of that hierarchy, writing that "the animal on stage today is a phantom of an earlier animal presence which humanity had not yet violently compelled to succumb to its rational purposes, nor stripped of its power to mediate. The animal became mute nature when humanity made it so", *Stage Fright, Animals, and other Theatrical Problems*, p. 121. Moreover, he argues that Castellucci's remarks suggest that the disappearance of nonhuman animals from stage is connected to the division of labor. In regard to that point, he claims that "Western theatre has kept the animal offstage in order to hide its origins in these moments of inaugural violence and the institution of divisions of labor", *Stage Fright, Animals, and other Theatrical Problems*, p. 114.

³⁶ Pre-tragic theatre indicates for Castellucci "a priori, an infantility, an infantile theatre, in which 'infantility' refers to a condition beyond language", "The Animal Being on Stage" in *Performance Research*, p. 24. According to this remark, pre-tragic theatre is a theatre of animals and infants, who are the ones that are not inside language as discourse. Therefore, this remark also underpins the proposition of this chapter to study them together.

stage (which has to do more with their bodies' liveness, reality and resistance to representation), but on what they *do*, which is that they are *just* being present on stage. On the basis of this aspect, their presences can be considered dramaturgical operations of horizontality.

In order to illustrate this aspect in Raffaello Sanzio's work with some examples, I propose to firstly return to the scene of *Brussels#04* that was previously discussed. This scene is, namely, characteristic for showing how nonhuman animals are dramaturgically *used* in the theatre of Raffaello Sanzio and can, thus, be regarded operations of horizontality. As it has been already described, the second time that the curtains open in this performance an infant appears in a pretend-marble room with no exits. She stays there for about ten minutes and has a few toys around her. The majestic, bright and silent stage seems to intensify the un-belonging of the infant in that grand and humanized territory of theatre. Raffaello Sanzio describes the situation in these words: "there are no other actors in the scene, there is no music, the light is bright and diffused and there are no loud noises" (Castellucci et al., 2007, p. 91). One could say that the overwhelming setting together with the silent atmosphere create suspense and anticipation; as if something is about to happen. Therefore, it becomes particularly interesting that nothing dramatic happens. The infant is not there to play a dramatic role like, for instance, pretending to be some performer's child or some missing baby in the piece. On the contrary, the dramaturgical choice is quite basic: the infant will just occupy the stage, as she pleases, for up to ten minutes without playing any specific role or creating any expectations about what should happen. Of course, Hans, the mechanical talking-figure, is also on stage. After the first minutes of silence, he starts articulating sounds that the infant may be familiar with and may or may not respond to. So, even though there seems to be a desire to have the infant talking, this is not forced. Guidi is explicit about the dramaturgical role not only of the infant but of every figure that appears in this piece. She says that "they are figures that 'stay' for a long time on stage, alone, without provoking a theatrical dynamic or developments" (Castellucci et al., 2007, p. 92). Therefore, the presence of the infant on stage on the one hand aims to resist anthropocentric theatre traditions. On the other hand, it resists expectations for dramatic development. And what's more, the infant just being on stage becomes a dramaturgical operation. Her sheer presence and microscopic body lower the ideal and

vertical form of the human actor, who is usually expected to be there.³⁷

Many other analogous cases appear in the work of Raffaello Sanzio, some of which can be mentioned here in order to give a better insight to this dramaturgical operation. For instance, the goat that appears in *Paris#06* also appears in *Avignon#02* in a similar way: grazing on stage next to other human animal bodies. In the *London#09* (2004) episode, the stage is full of cats and kittens freely moving around the performer. And the early performance of *Aesop's fables* (1992) by Raffaello Sanzio's children's theatre is particularly remarkable since 300 animals of various species were involved. In all these cases, nonhuman animals stand next to the human bodies, putting 'at work' the operation of horizontality. This does not happen because the differences between human and nonhuman animals are eliminated. On the contrary, I hold that the differences and similarities between them become strongly visible to the audience, as they stand next to each other and are the centre of attention. But at the same time, their hierarchical relation is undone, since nonhuman animals are usually excluded from theatre, unless they help with the narrative or show some special abilities; they are usually not supposed to be there and even more, they are not supposed to be equally central with the humans on stage.

Hence, sharing the same theatre stage and just being there resist that hierarchy. The differences between human and nonhuman animals no longer determine who has the right to be there and occupy the space. Ridout (2006) takes this remark even further arguing that the strangeness of the nonhuman on stage comes not from the fact that it ought not to be there, has no business being there, but rather in the fact that it has as much business being there, being exploited there, as any human performer. (p. 127)

According to Ridout's claim, thus, when seeing this type of *sharing* on stage, there might occur a moment of a surprising realization: nonhuman animals are awkwardly denied space and rights by the human, even though the world has always been shared between them.³⁸

³⁷ Notably, the reaction of the audience has been quite intense in this performance. For instance, when it was first performed in Brussels, the audience was shouting against the director for letting an infant alone on stage. See: Castellucci et al., *The Theatre of Societas Raffaello Sanzio*, p. 108. However, I hold that these reactions are mostly representative of a resistance "against making meaning out of animals and infants on stage", as Ridout has rightly observed, and do not take into consideration that in this way anthropocentric principles are being undone.

³⁸ Derrida makes a similar observation by asking "Can one, even in the name of fiction, think of a world without animals, or at the very least a world poor in animals [...]?", *The Animal that Therefore I Am*, p. 79.

This claim has several implications with regard to animal rights' and western politics, which are not of central concern in this thesis. However, I consider it important to mention here, as it inverts current moral codes and challenges an ethical thinking that invites a re-consideration of the authority of the human animal, which is generally understood as superior to the nonhuman.

- **doing less**

With the aim to further clarify how the operation of horizontality manifests itself when nonhuman animals are just being on stage next to the humans, I propose to disentangle the nuances of the term 'just'. This can happen by briefly looking at how their inherent capability to perform the maximum of their capacities on stage also lowers the idea of ideal humanness. Hence, 'just' acquires a more complex dimension with regard to what nonhuman animals 'do' on stage, since their presence there does not equal to doing-nothing when it is juxtaposed to that of the human performers. This point triggers extensively Castellucci's (2000) interest in them, who underscores that “the device of technique cannot be used by the animal, as it already possesses the greatest device: to be alienated on stage, immobile, in an alert state” (p. 25). Hence, Castellucci makes a distinction between nonhuman animals and human performers in theatre, which resides on the issue of technique: the former do not need it because they already possess it, whereas the latter usually do in order to be on stage. But what does this distinction say about the humans' performance? This point can be further explored through the observations of the Iraqi author Al-Jahiz in his *Book of the Living Things* (8th century), which was recovered by Heller-Roazen in his study on the notion of the 'lesser-animal'.

Heller-Roazen (2005) argues that the human is a “lesser-animal” because s/he is always capable of doing less. As he explains, Al-Jahiz underpins this characteristic in his book, claiming that even though both man and animal are capable of wondrous works, animals are “flawless”, meaning that they can spontaneously accomplish their acts flawlessly (p. 129). However, humans are very different in that aspect since, as he writes, “man is made in such a way that when he accomplishes an act that is difficult to carry out, he has the ability to do one that is less difficult” (p. 131). On the basis of these remarks, Heller-Roazen arrives to the conclusion that man is a lesser animal than the other living beings but also to the realization

that “the essence of human action lies in the possibility of reduction” (p. 132).

In view of this train of thoughts, an important aspect of the human on stage is uncovered. Namely, if the human's essential and distinctive characteristic is to 'do less', then the general expectation to see a complete and perfected form of humanness (and human performance) on stage is annulled. To be more precise, seeing human and nonhuman animals standing next to each other on stage makes one aware of the easiness and confidence with which a goat grazes on the floor or the cats wander around, in contradiction to humans, who - aware of the implications of the theatre stage - usually try to perform their best, even if that's merely standing. Therefore, even if the principle of doing-less does not correspond to the traditionally ideal and complete form of humanness (the human 'as such') one expects to see on stage, it is still the most remarkable characteristic of the human, following Heller-Roazen's reasoning. This seemingly paradoxical aspect of human performance is analogous to Bataille's example of the big toe, which although it is by many considered embarrassing, it is still the most human part of the human body.

Consequently, sharing the stage also evokes the impossibility to achieve an ideal and flawless form of humanness. The human animal's humanness is mainly demonstrated by his/her ability to do-less, which means that s/he can never reach the perfection of nonhuman animals' performance. This element also mirrors the negative performativity of *l'informe* in the sense of 'performing-less', as it has been investigated in the first chapter of the thesis and is nuanced by the title of the thesis. Doing-less namely evokes a sense of incompleteness to the audience in relation to high expectations they might have for the 'good' performance of the human bodies. And thus, the hierarchy between human and nonhuman animals, based on the superiority and perfection of the human, is resisted. Under this perspective, the 'good' form of the human is lowered and open to re-examination.

3.6 *proto*-posthuman thinking - conclusion

Considering and examining the aforementioned dramaturgical choices as operations of horizontality also paves the way for an overall exploration of their impact, which resonates on ethics. With a view to this exploration, I propose to briefly return to Agamben's understanding of the 'open' but this time through its reading by Deladurantaye. His essay on Agamben's 'open', namely, offers an insight on that philosophical notion, specifically with regard to the implications of the anthropological machine of western thought. This is relevant to theatre since, as Read (2009) remarks with some skepticism, some believe that it has the force to stop the anthropological machine. As he specifically writes, "some have claimed, quite enthusiastically but erroneously [...] that theatre has played its part in alerting its audiences as well as its performers to how it might set about stopping this machine, or perhaps more realistically, interrupting it" (p. 96). But in order to understand what stopping and interrupting the machine suggests and why Read considers it erroneous, it is essential to re-visit Agamben's study.

Deladurantaye (2003) notably clarifies in his essay that Agamben's understanding of openness is different from that of Heidegger's, for whom it refers to man's experience of the world's immensity as s/he takes distance from everyday concerns, stimuli and responses and which, according to him, differentiates men from animals (p. 4). Hence, in Heidegger's account, as Deladurantaye notes, nonhuman animals are characterized by a type of 'worldlessness', that suggests an ability to experience the world only through immediate stimuli. However, he underlines that for Agamben this is not so. Specifically, the latter's conceptualization renders openness a common element for human and nonhuman animals, indicating "an openness of inactivity, of disengagement from one's environment and, perhaps, one's world" (p. 5). This is a special sort of inactivity, which Agamben calls *désœuvrement* (meaning, inoperativity) in his book and signifies an un-exhausted mode of potentiality "that cannot be exhausted in the passing of the potential to the actual" (p. 6). The notions of potentiality and inoperativity are investigated in-detail in the next chapter as well as in the Conclusion, but for the moment it needs to be noted that they do not allude to a life

of laziness or withdrawal; they rather indicate a life form full of potentiality, in which what is common between human and nonhuman animals is the event of life itself. Therefore, for Agamben, the type of life that can occur in this openness is neither just human nor just nonhuman; rather, it is a form of *bare life*, in which the categories of man and animal do not need to be hierarchically distinguished. In Deladurantaye's words, such life is "neither strictly human nor strictly animal, but from the open space between the two" (p. 9).

Under this light, stopping the anthropological machine would suggest that the discrepancy between human and nonhuman is exposed and an experience of bare life is evoked. However, one should be careful in considering theatre able to stop the machine altogether. The experience of the bare event of life that is elicited by the performances in question can, namely, resist and render anthropocentrism inoperative within theatre, but perhaps not so easily to a greater extent than that. Hence, in accordance with Read, this thesis also shows hesitance in claiming that theatre is capable of pausing Agamben's anthropological machine of western thought in general. This would be a very wishful and broad claim since this machine has been successfully at work for centuries in complex and undetected ways - according to Read (2009), "it is a much more smooth operator" (p. 96). However, I do consider that the performances discussed hereby have a significant impact against anthropocentric traditions within the realm of theatre. Through dramaturgical operations of horizontality they resist anthropocentrism, undo the ideal humanness that is generally expected on behalf of the audience and pluralize the human and nonhuman animal form on stage. In light of this background, I therefore propose to understand the overall impact of the aesthetic logic of such performances as an invitation to a prime non-anthropocentric, *proto*-posthuman thinking of the human.

The immediate connotations of the term posthuman are though distant from the current discussion. They are connected to the developments "in cybernetics and information technology that have fueled the quest to reproduce and reconstruct the human being" (Lechte, 2008, p. 332). For instance, in the realm of cultural theory and media studies D. Harraway's writings on the cyborg (it needs to be underlined that she generally avoids using the term posthuman and prefers cyborg) are tightly linked to this discourse. In her famous feminist essay "A Cyborg's Manifesto" (1991) she states that we are all cyborgs, which means that each one of us is "a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of

social reality as well as a creature of fiction" (p. 149).

Human hybridity in relation to technology, biology and cyberspace is also what creates the postmodern notion of the monstrous, according to philosopher and performance scholar B. Kunst.³⁹ In her essay "Restaging the Monstrous" (2008), she explores the manifestations of the monstrous in ancient, modern and postmodern times and, through a reading of Agamben, realizes that this category has always been produced by the human through external and internal mechanisms of hierarchical separation. Therefore, she encourages an examination of the anthropological machine's mechanisms of separation, arguing that in this way the generative potentiality of the monstrous could be disclosed. After showing how the monstrous has been historically represented by the hermaphrodite, Frankenstein and cyborgs, Kunst arrives to the conclusion that today "despite the omnipresent visibility of connections, we are still not done with the mystery of separation" (p. 213). In other words, she does not consider it urgent to deal with the mysteries of conjunctions (hybrids). Rather, she prompts an investigation on the category of the human and the mechanisms that ensure his superiority in relation to the 'other' nonhuman. She writes that today "hybrids may be literally pouring out of the laboratories, but at the same time, it seems, they have even stronger tendencies to divide and separate when it comes to ownership and power over natural and artificial entities" (p. 216). When it comes specifically to theatre, Kunst holds a position that seems to be very close to Read's and to this thesis': she does not consider that theatre can easily stop the anthropological machine, unless the monstrous is "restaged" and a "resistance to such operations of separation and closure" takes place (p. 221). With that last phrase, Kunst suggests developing a more engaging and direct relation between audience and stage at the event of a performance,⁴⁰ which though does not happen in the strand of performances examined here, as the audience is kept in the dark and is, in that sense, distant from what is happening on stage. However, Kunst's essay is still beneficial for this thesis because it voices an urgency to re-consider the category of the human.

³⁹ Kunst, B., "In many cultural and philosophical observations from the 1980s and 1990s (Baudrillard, Kroker, Gibson, Haraway etc.) dealing with the development of technology, biology and cyberspace, the topos of the monstrous marks the transgressive moment where previously invisible connections between nature and culture become visible and force us to rethink what is human", "Restaging the Monstrous" in *Anatomy Live: Performance and the Operating Theatre*, pp. 215-216.

⁴⁰ Kunst, B., "there are no cognitive and aesthetic relationships between stage and audience at work, there is no (public) place offered, no possibility to return the gaze, and no possibility of being heard in many directions", "Restaging the Monstrous" in *Anatomy Live: Performance and the Operating Theatre*, pp. 220-221.

In view of this background, the impact of the performances in question can be considered as an invitation to a *proto*-posthuman thinking. This term, namely, introduces a prolific correlation of the suffixes 'proto' and 'post', launching the possibility for these temporal nuances to be seen qualitatively (rather than chronologically) and in continuous dialogue with one another, circling around the question of what the human and the posthuman *is*. Therefore, this notion also puts 'at work' *l'informe's* operation of undoing, suggesting an undoing of the conceptualization of the posthuman through a constant return to the question about the human and the nonhuman animals. It thus refers to a *primal* stage of understanding the posthuman, which necessitates a re-conceptualization of the human and the nonhuman animal under the light of non-anthropocentric modes of thinking. As the discussion of Fabre's and Raffaello Sanzio's works has shown, cases of human and nonhuman animals *sharing* the stage launch an experience of the simple event of life itself, that induces a pluralization of the 'as such'. In other words, the human performers on stage in these examples evoke a sense of incompleteness to the audience, as their performance is not successful in representing an ideal humanness. The 'good' form of the human animal is namely rendered un-working and consequently, its pluralization resides on this element of 'incompleteness' and formlessness. Therefore, *proto*-posthuman thinking involves a process of re-thinking the human and the nonhuman animal no longer in terms of essence and privation, but in terms of the event of life itself. In this way, a non-hierarchical 'being-with' between them occurs, that evoke an ethics of potentiality.

Chapter 4

dramaturgies of time: operations of pulsation

In postdramatic theatre, several techniques of time manipulation and distortion, such as diverse rhythms, alternating tempos, pauses, acceleration, repetition and long duration of actions, movement and speech evoke unusual ways of experiencing time, which are intrinsically related to the work's intention and theme. In other words, the aspect of time shows significant dramaturgical relevance in contemporary performance. Lehmann (1999/2006) also discusses this point, particularly emphasizing upon postdramatic theater's focus on the experience of the present time, that is the experience of the time 'here and now' of the performance event, as shared by performers and audience. "The idea of time as an experience shared by all constitutes the centre of the new dramaturgies of time: from the diverse distortions of time to the assimilation of the speed of pop; from the resistance of slow theatre to theater's convergence with Performance Art and its radical assertion of *real time* as a situation people live through together" (p. 155), Lehmann attests. In a general sense, thus, postdramatic theatre strategically resists a chronological understanding of time, which presumes quantitative and linear continuity between the three temporal positions (past, present and future). And rather, it explores diverse aesthetics that evoke a more profound and nonlinear experience of time.

This chapter examines such dramaturgies of time, specifically concentrating on cases in which an intense action is repeated excessively in a pulsatory rhythm. To be more precise, it returns to the works of Raffaello Sanzio and Jan Fabre and discusses a scene with a projection of an accelerating sonic and visual rhythmic beat (*Avignon#02*), a scene in which a long and 'eventless' presence of an infant on stage suspends time (*Brussels#04*) and a scene of repeated alternation between deafening cries and silencing of cries (*History of Tears*). Throughout the examination of these performance cases, it is argued that a resistance against the 'good' form of time is taking place. As it is explained in more detail later on, with the term 'good' form of time, I hereby indicate the dramatic and coherent temporality in the context of theatre and the analogous linear, homogeneous and quantifiable understanding of time, according to dominant western conceptualizations.¹

¹ As Derrida clarifies, the metaphysics of time (that is, time considered linear and quantifiable) "determined all of classical ontology [...] it is intrinsic to the totality of the history of the Occident, of what unites its metaphysics and its technics", *Of Grammatology*, p. 72.

This chapter further argues that such dramaturgies of time show a particular performativity; they *do* something to time, in the sense of evoking a qualitative, *cairological* experience of time (see: p. 138 of the thesis). Specifically, their resistance manifests itself as an operation of undoing time's 'good' form, which is to say that the chronological form of time is being perturbed and irrupted in these scenes. In the following analysis, I therefore propose to consider the dramaturgies in question as operations of formlessness. And more specifically, I suggest considering them as operations of pulsation, which invoke an experience of time as an excessive rhythmic beat.² In other words, I argue that the excessively repetitive actions occurring in the scenes in question evoke pulsatory rhythms that undo linear patterns of perceiving time and activate instead a dynamic and sensorial engagement with time.

Bois and Krauss introduce and examine the operation of pulse in their study on the formless, underscoring that by being much more excessive than mere movement, pulsation may elicit discomfort, disorientation and nausea to the audience.³ However, Bataille does not discuss in his work the notion of pulsation, nor time as a philosophical topic. As a result, a few immediate links can be made between Bataille's texts and the aspect of time in theatre. But at the same time, his overall line of thinking, and even more in relation to the structure of expenditure he discloses (see: p. 146 of the thesis), illustrates very well the prime concern of this chapter, which is to show how the form (of time) is disrupted from within. Further, the artworks conceptualized by Bois & Krauss as operations of pulse prove to offer a significant insight on the performances examined hereby, because they share similarities in structure. Therefore, the analysis of the performances in this chapter often resides to their analogy with some of the artworks studied by the two authors.

Consequently, on the basis of Bois' & Krauss' analysis of the artworks and of their aforementioned remark about pulsation being distinct from mere movement, this chapter demonstrates that in the performances discussed hereby time is no longer experienced as a

² As it is explained in-detail in the next pages, this notion was proposed by Bois & Krauss as an operation of *l'informe* for the examination of visual arts in the modernist period and was therefore related to visuality. Hence, according to the two authors, pulsation "involves an endless beat that punctures the disembodied self-closure of pure visuality and incites an irruption of the carnal", *Formless – A User's Guide*, p. 32.

³ They specifically write that "what we call pulsation, then, is distinct from mere movement". Additionally, when discussing Morris's *Footnote to the Bride* (1961) Bois and Krauss note that "sometimes the spectator is panicked or struck by nausea when [...] one notices that the sculpture's flesh-colored membrane is ever so slowly swelling, propelled by an unknown mechanism, to become, for an instant, a kind of breast", *Formless – A User's Guide*, pp. 32-34.

measuring system that is homogeneous and quantifiable. Rather, these dramaturgies radically resist one's servitude to the 'good' form of time by generating pulsatory tempos that are excessive and to which the spectators have difficulties synchronizing. As a result, a somewhat intense corporeal response is induced, the spectator's understanding and relation to chronological time gets irrupted and an experience of potentiality is evoked. Potentiality here indicates an experience of radical *openness* to the unexpected through a process of *decreation*, and it is discussed at length at the end of the chapter. The spectator's expectations about what is to happen on stage next are, then, rendered difficult to be determined by linear cognitive processes or through firm pre-suppositions.

4.1 conceptualizations of time

The term 'good form' of time addresses the dominant western conceptualizations of time, a focus upon which can render more explicit time's analogous understanding in the context of theatre and in relation to the dramaturgies in question. Agamben's essay "Time and History: Critique of the Instant and the Continuum", which appeared in his study *Infancy and History* (1978/2007), lists and discusses the dominant cultural and historical conceptualizations of time, therefore offering a productive framework for investigating the parameters of time's 'good' form. Namely, he briefly discusses the Graeco-Roman, the Christian, the modern, the Hegelian and the Marxist approaches of time. At the same time, another marginal concept of time, that of the Stoic, is also introduced by the author, which is useful for theorizing what the dramaturgies of pulsation *do* in the following examples. However, there is a significant difference between Agamben's essay and this chapter. The former is primarily concerned with the ways that concepts of time respond to man's experience and conceptualization of history. Hence, the issue of history is an essential one for Agamben. But it is not as central for this chapter, which rather concentrates on what happens once a radical change in one's experience of time occurs within the realm of theatre. Therefore, I do not extend the discussion to Agamben's observations about history hereby, unless it helps to elucidate the discourse upon time.

Agamben's examination of the overriding concepts of time seems to attribute some crucial characteristics to the 'good' form of time: that time is mainly understood geometrically (that is, through an Euclidean understanding of space);⁴ that it is considered quantifiable; and that its foundational feature is the 'now'.⁵ Determined already by the Graeco-Roman approach, as Agamben explains, these attributions considered time circular, and continuous. Continuity in particular was theorized by Aristotle through the notion of the geometric 'point' that was equated to the 'now'. Agamben clarifies that for Aristotle, time's "continuity is assured by its

⁴ Agamben, G., "since the human mind has the experience of time but not its representation, it necessarily pictures time by means of spatial images", *Infancy and History*, p. 100.

⁵ Agamben, G., "whether it is conceived as linear or circular, in Western thought time invariably has the point as its dominating feature", *Infancy and History*, p. 110.

division into discrete instants [*to n̄yn*, the now], analogous to the geometric point [*stigmē*]” (p. 101). Hence, the 'point' would signify the elusive instant, meaning the now that cannot be grasped separately but that is quantifiable, autonomous and assures an absolute division between past, present and future. So, Aristotle established time “as a quantified and infinite *continuum* of precise fleeting instants” (p. 102). In a similar way, Agamben claims that Christianity set out a thinking of the continuous and quantified time, even though it was now internalized, progressive and represented by a straight line aiming to redemption (p. 104). As for the modern concept of time, due to the rise of capitalism, the urban life and the technological developments, Agamben claims that it can be represented by a rectilinear and homogeneous line, that seeks infinite and continuous progress (p. 106).⁶ He seems to disregard though the synchronous developments in science during that period, such as quantum theory, relativity and the Freudian discourse on the unconscious, which also affected this modern phenomenon of time by shattering people's certainty about what time is.⁷

It, thus, becomes clear that those paradigms noted down by Agamben determine time as linear and always as quantifiable and based on the now. What's more, they establish a separation between time and the living being, since time is turned into an absolute measuring system to which man should synchronize. This ontological conceptualization of time is affirmed and criticized also by Derrida (1967/1997), who argues that

the expression 'vulgar concept of time' designates, at the end of [Heidegger's] *Being and Time*, a concept of time thought in terms of spatial movement or of the now, and dominating all philosophy from Aristotle's *Physics* to Hegel's *Logic*. This concept, which determines all of

⁶ B. Kunst's position with regard the contemporary experience of time seems to be in support to Agamben's, although her essay mostly concentrates on a very different topic (that is, on modes of working together). She is also in accordance with the literary critic and political theorist F. Jameson with regard to contemporary experience of time, and attests that “the contemporary acceleration of time, which results from the industrial, economic and scientific processes of the last two centuries, has not only dissolved the spatial coordinates of work processes, their immobile and static territoriality, but also changed the modes of individuation of contemporary subjects. Jameson argues that contemporary temporality is a schizophrenic one; it is a temporality of the present, which lacks any phenomenological connections to be able to hold on to the past and anticipate the future. However, the experience of the contemporary subject and the individuation of the human being is achieved through multilayered and parallel present time experiences, which, regardless of the possibility of openness and liberation, have to be carefully planned throughout and have a particular, effective time structure”, “Prognosis on Collaboration” in *TkH Journal for Performing Arts Theory*, p. 24.

⁷ Lehmann also acknowledges these developments and even considers them reasons for intersubjectivity appearing in dramatic theatre, which signifies a subject in a constant conflict, “a subject of rivalry”, *Postdramatic Theatre*, p. 154.

classical ontology, was not born out of a philosopher's carelessness or from a theoretical lapse. It is intrinsic to the totality of the history of the Occident, of what unites its metaphysics and its technics. (p. 72)

Agamben also realizes in his study that Marxist theory implied an alternative conceptualization of time. In fact, it was through Marx's revolutionary concept of history that the dominant form of time seems to be contested. He specifically argues that for Marx, history's essential element was "praxis", which signifies man's activity of producing himself "as a universal individual" (p. 109). Therefore, history is considered man's *nature* within Marxist theory, which also indicates that time can no longer be understood as homogeneous and quantified (p. 109). Thus, man, as an historical being who 'makes' and enacts his own history, is thought now capable of taking possession of his own time, which suggests that the traditional conceptualization of time is inadequate. In its place, a more dynamic and incoherent concept of time is required – one that does not exclude time from the human subject. Nevertheless, Marx did not offer a general philosophy of time.⁸

Agamben though offers another, rather forgotten, model of time that derives from Stoicism, showing that it sets out a thinking of time that does not conform to the 'good' chronological form. The Stoics proposed a conceptual model for the temporality they invoked, which is the notion of *cairós*⁹ (p. 111). According to them, Agamben notes, subservience to the 'good' form of time "constitutes a fundamental sickness, which, with its infinite postponement, hinders human existence from taking possession of itself as something full and singular" (p. 111). Stoicism in fact used the notion of *cairós* to signify a contingent becoming of subject and time, which suggests that the subject is *of* time and therefore capable of seizing his own present. In other words, time is experienced as interrupted, requiring the subject to remain *open* to what is to come in order to take full possession of the possibilities that might arrive unexpectedly. Within this context then Agamben states that *cairós* is "the abrupt and sudden conjunction where decision grasps opportunity and life is fulfilled in the moment" (p. 111). Hence, this alternative conceptualization of time points to a radical re-signification of man's relation to

⁸ However, his history of the class struggle as a history that interrupts linear time, which Agamben points out, forms a concrete time theory.

⁹ In Greek the term 'cairos' differs from the term 'chronos' in the sense that the latter indicates a chronological, quantitative understanding of time, whereas the former a more qualitative one; namely, 'cairos' is used to indicate the appropriate or right time for taking an action.

time, which is now founded on time being heterogeneous and considered as a dimension of the living being.

However, Agamben does not discuss with further detail the Stoic understanding of time, therefore hindering a more careful examination of potentiality in relation to these approaches. What's more, a paradox seems to emerge thereof. From one perspective, time is regarded as heterogeneous and contingent to the human subject. But on the contrary, the subject seems to be considered fully present in the now, as if the subject is the origin of time, which would again lead to an essentially subjectivist conceptualization of time. And, thus, 'openness' would, erroneously, assume full-actualization of the present. In other words, the certainty of the subject's full-presence in his/her present time is not contested by these approaches. Time is thought to be heterogeneous, but the presence of the subject seems to be considered complete.

a. temporal nuances of the trace

Therefore, I propose to shortly focus on the notion of the 'trace', through which Derrida deconstructed the metaphysics of time. In that way, it becomes possible to disentangle the relation between time, presence and potentiality in this alternative conceptualization of time, suggested by Agamben.

Derrida (1967/1973) begins his discussion on the trace when he detects an interesting paradox in Husserl's phenomenological approach of the present time, that seems analogous to the one appearing in Agamben's introduction of the Stoic approach. Specifically, as he demonstrates, on the one hand Husserl rightly argues that the 'living now' is heterogeneous, constituted by a presence that is already a non-presence, which also suggests that the now is already a not-now (p. 65). But on the other hand, (as Derrida again explains) Husserl also claims that "the source of certitude in general is the primordial character of the living now" (p. 67), which shows that he nevertheless considers the subject's certainty (of his full presence and experience) of the living-now the essential origin of time. Derrida exposes the contradiction in this argumentation and proposes to understand instead the 'living present' through the structure of the trace. He, thus, proposes to operationalize the trace in order to deconstruct Husserl's reasoning and to expose its missing links.

The trace, being a notion that implies an infinite movement of repetition between presence and nonpresence, can namely offer a solution to the impasse Husserl finds himself confronted with. It is a particularly useful idea because it refers to an imprint, a track,¹⁰ evoking a chronological confusion and leading to an understanding of the living-being's dynamic engagement with time. As Spivak (1997) comments when introducing Derrida's *Of Grammatology*, "it marks the absence of a presence, an always already absent present" (p. xvii) since the trace presents itself in the present time, but its presence already belongs to the past. And yet, the trace's past can only be conceived as a present-past, namely as a past that cannot be determined in its 'own time'. Therefore, the trace can never be fully present to the one who conceives it. It is always deferred in time and, hence, constitutes itself through a lack of origin. Following this logic, thus, Derrida criticizes the phenomenological concept of the 'primordial living-now', writing that the trace

cannot be thought out on a basis of a simple present whose life would be within itself; the self of the living present is primordially a trace. The trace is not an attribute; we cannot say that the self of the living present 'primordially is' it. Being-primordial must be thought on the basis of the trace, and not the reverse. (1967/1973, p. 85)

Extending this complicated temporal function of the trace to a more general discussion of the experience of the 'now', one arrives to similar remarks. Namely, the presence of the living-being in the now is always already deferred. The present is being experienced and already not-experienced since at the moment the now is being perceived, it already belongs to the past and the past can only be understood in the present. This endless movement of difference, of being-in and being-out-of time, thus, shows time as non-linear, non-quantifiable and heterogeneous to the living-being.

Moreover, the now has a relationship to the future; that is, its 'openness' to what is to come. Derrida (1967/1973) discusses this point by using again the notion of the trace and its spatial exteriority. He specifically writes that the trace is also "the intimate relation of the living present with its outside, the openness upon exteriority in general, upon the sphere of what is not 'one's own' etc" (p. 86). He calls this openness 'spacing' and explains that the spatial

¹⁰ In the Introduction of the book, G. Spivak underscores that "[Derrida's] word is 'trace' (the French word carries strong implications of track, footprint, imprint), a word that cannot be a master-word, that presents itself as the mark of an anterior presence, origin, master", *Of Grammatology*, p. xv.

externality of the trace “opens as pure 'outside' 'within' the movement of temporalization” (p. 86). In other words, the trace (as well as the now) is already inside and outside of the time one conceives it, always in motion and open to what is to come. Consequently, present time cannot be conceived on the basis of a living-being's full presence in it. It can only be understood as an endless movement of difference, which suggests the lack of origin as the condition of openness and potentiality.

The above joint-examination of Agamben's and Derrida's theorization of time permits a closer look upon the impact of the time dramaturgies discussed in this chapter. As the following analysis illustrates, the specific dramaturgical operations of pulsation *shatter* the spectator and evoke an understanding of time that is characterized by movement and heterogeneity. So, in a sense, the 'broken' spectator gets immersed into the 'broken' now and an experience of potentiality is induced.

4.2 the aspect of time in dramatic and postdramatic theatre

Before proceeding to the analysis of the particular performances, it is essential to gain an overview on how the dramaturgical role and use of time has shifted from dramatic to postdramatic theatre, which can help exploring time's specific performativity as an operation of pulsation. It is because of radically resisting expectations that are based on traditional drama structures - which have established the 'good' form of time in theatre - that such dramaturgies can be considered operations of undoing chronological time. Moreover, it needs to be noted that the dramatic form of time is still dominant today, which means that the aspect of time most often stays unnoticed behind the narrative and the dramatic action. Lehmann (1999/2006) highlights this point, observing that

the complementary aspects of the unity of time – continuity on the inside, isolation from the outside – have been and still are the basic rules not only of theatre but also of other narrative forms, as a side glance at Hollywood films with their ideal of the 'invisible cut' would quickly prove. (p. 161)

Framing the dramatic temporal logic can, thus, underpin, contextualize and gradually disclose what the particular dramaturgies of time discussed in this chapter *do*; hence, what their performativity is.

In order to explore this field, I propose to mainly focus on Lehmann's study (1999/2006), which brings into light and investigates this shift, arguing that in the last decades “a phenomenon in the aesthetics of theatre is established: the intention of utilizing the specificity of theatre as a mode of presentation to turn *time as such* into an object of the aesthetic experience” (p. 156). His study, specifically recognizes that until the 1960s, the aspect of time in western theatre was reduced to the fictive time suggested by the text's narrative (p. 161). In other words, the experience of time was subject to how the traditional layers of *historical time* (past, present, future) become parts of the dramatic actions, always aiming to guarantee a coherent totality of the plot. The principles of coherency and unity derive again from a rather deterministic reading of Aristotle's *Poetics*, which influenced deeply the entire tradition of

western theatre.¹¹ Lehmann further explains in his study that to achieve coherence, such conception of drama advocated a unity of time so that “a recognizable logic shall reign without interruption” (p. 159). And even, as he writes, it emphasized upon an Aristotelian element to ensure the *beauty* of drama, which resides on its ability to be 'eusynopton' (easily surveyable) and 'eumnemoneuton' (easily remembered) (p. 159). This element is 'megethos', signifying the magnitude and temporal expansion of dramatic actions.¹² To be more precise, according to *Poetics*, each action needed to have an adequate length - to be neither too long nor too short - in order to become harmonic, beautiful, perceivable without any time delay and, above all, understood.

In view of this background, Lehmann (1999/2006) rightly observes that the aesthetic aspect of time remains neglected in the overall experience of the dramatic form, stating that

time as such is meant to disappear, to be reduced to an unnoticeable condition of being of the action [...] Nothing was to release the spectator from the spell of the dramatic action. The true meaning of the Aristotelian aesthetics of time is not aesthetic. (p. 161)

In other words, he attests that dramatic theatre does not challenge the traditional conceptualizations of time. And his realization becomes crucial for understanding how then time has evolved into a dramaturgical element in postdramatic performance. However, it needs to be acknowledged that this remark also demonstrates that Lehmann often contradicts his own view, as he sometimes finds himself criticizing Aristotle's *Poetics*, and other times the specific essentialist reading of *Poetics* that has dominated western theatre tradition.

One notices that the disappearance of the dramatic action is intrinsically related to the development of the dramaturgies of time.¹³ This juxtaposition becomes apparent in the work of theatre makers who tried to destabilize the dramatic temporal logic. For instance, already

¹¹ As it is pointed out in the first Chapter of this thesis, Lehmann has demonstrated that it is not the Aristotelian conception of theatre itself, but its one-sided interpretation, that has lead to the tradition of logocentric dramatic theatre. Furthermore, he admits that *Poetics* was a descriptive text and was not meant to be followed as a manual, writing that “regardless of its philosophical implications, Aristotle's *Poetics* was a pragmatic and descriptive text. In modern times, however, its observations were reinterpreted as normative rules, the rules as prescriptions and the prescriptions as laws – description was turned into prescription”, *Postdramatic Theatre*, p. 160.

¹² Aristotle defines 'megethos' as “the magnitude in which a series of events occurring sequentially in accordance with probability or necessity gives rise to a change from good fortune to bad fortune, or from bad fortune to good fortune”, *Poetics*, p. 14.

¹³ As Lehmann puts it, “the 'crisis of drama' (Szondi) around the turn of the century was essentially a crisis of time”, *Postdramatic Theatre*, p. 156.

the epic theatre of Brecht, seeking to produce a distancing-effect (*Verfremdungseffekt*), is characterized by sporadic interruptions of the actions, which results firstly, to a series of ruptures in the fictive story and secondly, to a separation between the temporality indicated by the story and the temporality of the audience and performers being together at the theatre space, acting and watching in the 'here and now'.¹⁴

Lehmann discusses Brecht and several other makers in his study, who epitomized the shift between dramatic and postdramatic uses of time. However, he does not provide theoretical tools for elaborating on how these uses of time, that are manifested on stage, can be conceptualized, in terms of what they *do* and what their impact can be. For instance, he addresses Bob Wilson's, Peter Brook's and Ariane Mnouchkine's durational performances, which, by often using slow-motion techniques, place the experience of time at the centre of dramaturgical attention. About Wilson's theatre in particular he observes that the slow tempo of bodies moving on stage evokes an unfamiliar experience of time, which transforms time into an aesthetic and dramaturgical element. He writes that "the passing time turns into a 'Continuous Present' [...] Theatre becomes similar to a kinetic sculpture, turning into a *time sculpture*" (p. 156). Moreover, Lehmann makes analogous observations for performances that use excessive repetition. Bringing up Tadeusz Kantor, Forsythe, Pina Bausch and others as examples, he mostly stays at the point of acknowledging that repetition is used for destabilizing and deconstructing the totality of a form, which gives time to the attention of the spectators' act of seeing (pp. 156-157).

Notwithstanding their pertinence, such remarks do not manage to offer an elaboration upon dramaturgical structural processes and do not permit further conceptualization. Moreover, they do not explain how the present time (the 'here and now') of the performance event is to be understood and what its implications are with regard to the conceptualization of time as well as the presence of the spectator within time. Therefore, many questions, regarding the processes leading to these observations and their effects, remain unanswered.

¹⁴ Brecht ultimately wanted the spectators develop and exercise their own critical thought when watching theatre. So, he writes that in order to produce the distancing-effect, "the actor must make it possible for the audience to take his own art, his mastery of technique, lightly too. He puts an incident before the spectator with perfection and as he thinks it really happened or might have happened. He does not conceal the fact that he has rehearsed it, any more than an acrobat conceals his training, and he emphasizes that it is his own (actor's) account, view, version of the incident", *Short description of a New Technique in Acting, which Produces an Alienation-Effect*. Retrieved from:

<http://www.english.emory.edu/DRAMA/BrechtAlien.html>. (last visited: 10/12/2010).

4.3 pulsation: an operation of excessive repetition

a. in the context of modern visual arts

With a view to promoting a conceptualization of postdramatic uses of time, I therefore propose to consider the dramaturgies in question operations of 'pulsation'. Bois and Krauss (1997/1999) developed in their study the notion of 'pulse' as an operation of *l'informe*, which proves to be productive for the theorization of postdramatic performance as well. But, as it happens with horizontality, this term does not belong to Bataille's actual vocabulary. Bois and Krauss retained pulsation in order to discuss a problematic point concerning the way modern visual arts are being understood and received; and more specifically, in order to attack the modernist exclusion of temporality and corporeality from the visual field (p. 32).

As the two authors explain, already since the end of 18th century a radical exclusion of temporality and corporeality has shaped the reception of modern visual arts, under the conviction that "pictures reveal themselves in an instant and are addressed only to the eye of the viewer" (p. 25). In other words, the overall aesthetic pleasure of modern art is considered an activity of perceiving the painting without any time delay and as a coherent entity, which means that an artwork needs "to have a beginning and an end" (p. 26). It becomes then clear that there is a correspondence between modernist and Aristotelian dramatic understanding of time.¹⁵ Namely, both dramatic theater's and modern arts' ontologies require that the aspect of time remains unnoticed behind the narratively coherent field of an artwork and that, for both, the ultimate aim is to offer aesthetic and perceptual pleasure to the one who sees.

Against this grid of interpretation, thus, Bois and Krauss propose to analyze certain modern visual artworks through the notion of pulsation, retained as an operation of *l'informe*. And they argue that "once the unified visual field is agitated by a shake-up that irremediably

¹⁵ It is important to note here that Bois and Krauss admit that even though such postulates and exclusions are sometimes myths (since many of the principle artists of the modern period refused to conform to them), they are still "foundational myths: their solidarity seals the coherence of modernism as an interpretive grid", *Formless: A User's Guide*, p. 26.

punctures the screen of its formality and populates it with organs, there is 'pulsation'" (p. 32). For instance, they refer to Duchamp's *Anémic Cinéma* (1925), a film in which round discs turn statically in spiral circular movements. They look like on-going revolving propeller blades that demand the fixed gaze and attention of the viewer, "a film whose illusion works paradoxically to produce nothing but the perception of a static plane" (p. 133). Their excessive spiral movement, though, at the same time attacks the static visual field of the gaze, producing a "hiccup of repetition" (p. 134) that seems to go on forever in a rhythm of a beat. In other words, this artwork uses temporality through a syncopated repetition of an intense action; intense, because this spiral turning movement is excessive, hypnotic and can create nausea when synchronizing one's vision with it for a long time. Hence, due to the temporal wave of pulse, the film evokes a visual as well as corporeal experience to the ones who look at it (p. 135). As a result, it destabilizes the 'good' form of modern art, meaning that it destabilizes the exclusion of the aspects of time and the body – and therefore, its performativity can be understood as an operation of formlessness, as Bois and Krauss eventually show.

The two authors even take the discussion of this work into the discourse of psychoanalysis in order to theorize the corporeal experience it brings, arguing that the constant swelling and deflating movement of the circles as well as the diastolic repetition of the pulse itself have an erotic suggestiveness. However, such a discussion would not be that productive for the analysis of the performances in question, since this chapter centers around the issue of time and particularly on how radical destabilization of the 'good' form of time induces an intense corporeal experience that invites the spectator to an experience of potentiality.

b. for the context of theatre

Aiming to disentangle the implications of pulsation specifically in regard to the performances in question, I thus suggest delving into the notions of excess and repetition. These notions qualify pulsation (as it is manifested in the performances) and are therefore able to frame the examination of the following examples. Moreover, the investigation of the notion of excess allows at this point a direct correspondence between Bataille's writings and pulsation. Pulsation can be further illuminated by Bataille's notion of expenditure, although

the latter addresses a very different context. And what's more, the relation between excess and repetition can be pinned down before proceeding to the examination of how they are manifested in the performances discussed below.

Expenditure is a notion that points to loss, excess and their insufficient regulation from the state, which Bataille used in order to criticize political economies' obsession with production, utility, regulation and scarcity in his essay "The Notion of Expenditure" (1933). Interested in the surplus value produced in society, he believed that there is an over-accumulation of capital, wealth and energy due to strong political and social demands for preserving wealth, which, nevertheless, contradicts human needs. The reason for such a diagnosis on behalf of Bataille was the 'principle of loss', meaning the human unconditional need for expenditure that cannot be subject to any regulation. Bataille explains in this essay what types of activities are indicated by the principle of loss, writing that

the so-called unproductive expenditures: luxury, mourning, war, cults, the construction of sumptuary monuments, games, spectacles, arts, perverse sexual activity (i.e., deflected from genital finality) – all these represent activities which, at least in primitive circumstances, have no end beyond themselves. (Stoeckl (ed.), 2008, p. 118)

Hence, he argues that such activities cannot be productively assimilated by societies and are designated as 'radically other'. What's more, although they contradict capitalist attempts to regulate expenses and to direct human behavior toward prolific ends, they constitute inherent needs of man and cannot be suppressed. Consequently, Bataille claims that another form of societal organization is needed; one that does not seek to subordinate but, rather, to instrumentalize and use the designation of excess. So, through a series of examples of societies in which immediate and excessive exchanges of products were taking place and wealth was openly circulating (such as the potlatch),¹⁶ he shows that it is possible for the principle of loss to be used as an essential factor of economies.¹⁷ Thus, in a more general

¹⁶ Bataille insists on the example of the potlatch, which is an archaic form of exchange for the American Indians, identified by Marcel Mauss. According to the traditions, potlatch was usually practiced in a festivity and involved an excessive exchange of gifts. Namely, the moment that someone accepted a gift offered to him/her, s/he had to return a more valuable one or s/he would be humiliated. And as Bataille explains, potlatch did not only refer to gifts but also to an analogous exchange of rivalries. Stoeckl, A. (ed.), *Visions of Excess*, p. 121.

¹⁷ Bataille writes: "It is important to know that exchange, as its origin, was immediately subordinated to human end; nevertheless it is evident that its development, linked to progress in the modes of production, only started at the stage at

sense, Bataille argues that state policies should take into consideration that men are incapable of just regulating or limiting themselves, their energy and their wealth. On the contrary, men often arrive to extreme activities just “to accede to the insubordinate function of free expenditure” (Stoeckl (ed.), 2008, p. 129).

Notwithstanding the context of political economies, which the notions of expenditure and excess address, this line of thoughts offers a better insight into the operation of pulse. That is so once Bataille's principle of loss is parallelized to the structural aspect of pulsation, namely to a constant beat that does not appear to have “any end beyond itself” - like, for instance, the turning spirals of Duchamp's *Anémic Cinéma*. In this sense, pulsation is an operation that produces a surplus, an excess, something radically other to linear perceptual and cognitive processes. And, as it is demonstrated with regard to postdramatic dramaturgies of time, pulsation produces an experience of time as something excessive and heterogeneous.

However, pulsation does not only designate excess. It also indicates repetition of excess, which is constant, violent and due to which a corporeal experience of time occurs. But, how is it possible for repetition, generally thought to reproduce sameness, to be excessive and generate otherness? One would think that by repeating an act or a series of acts, its intensity would gradually get reduced because it would become more familiar and anticipated. Derrida's critique on Artaud's desire to erase repetition and praise expenditure instead, proves very useful for disentangling this exact relation in the realm of theatre. This essay, namely, demonstrates the futility of positioning the two notions against one another within performance practices.

When Derrida (1967/2001) discusses Artaud's view on this issue, he writes that for Artaud repetition separates force, presence, and life from themselves.

This separation is the economical and calculating gesture of that which defers itself in order to maintain itself, that which reserves expenditure and surrenders to fear. This power of repetition governed everything that Artaud wished to destroy, and it has several names: God, Being, Dialectics. (p. 310)

In other words, Derrida explains that repetition signified for Artaud representation, truth, dialectics and theological totality; namely, elements that he denounced with his *Theatre of*

which this subordination ceased to be immediate. The very principle of the function of production requires that products be exempt from loss, at least provisionally”, Stoeckl, A. (ed.), *Visions of Excess*, p. 123.

Cruelty because they reflected mimesis, on the basis of which the whole western theatre was founded at his time. Moreover, repetition was equal to non-expenditure for Artaud, because it would only produce sameness. Therefore, as Derrida clarifies, he desired expenditure instead, which would reveal the present *as such*, evil and cruel.¹⁸ The reason thereof was that Artaud wanted his *Theatre of Cruelty* to be a theatre of difference, where nothing would 'return' to repeat itself. Each event, each word, each action needed to be singular, excessive and present only at the present time.¹⁹

However, such a distinction cannot be sustained since “the menace of repetition is nowhere else as well organized as in the theatre”, Derrida rightly attests (1967/2001, p. 311). Theatre, being the origin and source of control for representation, has the ability to produce repetition of expenditure, “designating the fold, the interior duplication which steals the simple presence of its present act from the theatre, from life, etc, in the irrepressible movement of repetition” (1967/2001, p. 312). In other words, excessive repetition does not produce 'sameness' and representation in theatre; it rather discloses how repetition always involves singularity and difference.²⁰ An act can never be the same while repeated.²¹ Like a fold, it infinitely discloses different sides of the same.²² It thus appears that Derrida partly leans on

¹⁸ Derrida explains that, for Artaud, “repetition summarizes negativity, gathers and maintains the past present as truth, as ideality. The truth is always that which can be repeated. Nonrepetition, expenditure that is resolute and without return in the unique time consuming the present, must put an end to fearful discursiveness, to unskirtable ontology, to dialectics [...] pure expenditure, absolute generosity offering the unicity of the present to death in order to make the present appear *as such*”, *Writing and Difference*, p. 311.

¹⁹ Artaud writes “an expression does not have the same value twice, does not live two lives; all words, once spoken, are dead and function only at the moment when they are uttered, a form, once it has served, cannot be used again and asks only to be replaced by another, and the theatre is the only place in the world where a gesture, once made, can never be made in the same way twice” (TD, p. 75), as cited by Derrida, J., *Writing and Difference*, p. 312.

²⁰ Also Hrvatin claims that a performance is repetition, bearing in mind that in French repetition signifies both 'repetition' and 'rehearsal'. He writes that “en effet, le théâtre fonctionne sur la répétition. Pour aboutir à un spectacle, il faut passer par un cycle de répétitions, d'exercices (en français le mot 'répétition' signifie et l'action et le fait de répéter pour s'exercer) [...] Le spectacle est une répétition”, *La discipline du chaos – Le chaos de la discipline*, p. 40.

²¹ This point is also the main argument in Deleuze's *Difference and Repetition* (1968), a study that seems to demonstrate the excessive possibilities of repetition as well. Deleuze, namely, tried to explain modernity's discomfort with repetition inspired by Nietzsche's idea of the 'eternal return' (*die Ewige Wiederkehr*). However, this book focuses upon and problematizes the specific topic of repetition in a rather complex philosophical way, the study of which does not seem as prolific as Derrida's approach of Artaud's *Theatre of Cruelty* for the discussion of the particular strand of performances.

²² Lehmann also highlights the power of repetition in the realm of theatre, claiming that the 'same' is inevitably undergoing processes of change when it is repeated, becoming empty of or overloaded with meaning. [“das Gleiche ist, wiederholt,

Bataille, in his emphasis on the meaning of repetition of excess.

In the analysis of the *History of Tears*, the discussion returns and concentrates on the issue of excessive repetition and the violence it suggests. But for the moment, it is important to underline Derrida's view on the relation between repetition and excess in connection to Artaud's *Theatre of Cruelty*, since all dramaturgies of time discussed in this chapter show similar characteristics. Namely, excessive repetition of intense actions taking place on stage produces not only difference but radical *otherness* of time, which is experienced as difficulty to synchronize to the pulsatory beat the performances introduce and results to disorientation, irritation and confusion.²³

unvermeidlich verändert: in und durch Wiederholung ist es das Alte und das Errinerte, est ist entleert (schon bekannt) oder überfrachtet (Wiederholung macht bedeutungsvoll)”, *Postdramatisches Theater*, p. 336.

²³ See also the Introduction of the thesis for Derrida's treatment of Artaud.

4.4 dramaturgies of formlessness

a. *Avignon#02*: pulsatory acceleration

In the final video of the episode *Avignon#02* by Raffaello Sanzio, signs of the alphabet (the same that were getting crushed under the feet of a goat in an earlier video of the performance) are projected onto a big white screen that covers the entire stage. The way the letters repeatedly emerge and vanish in the projection generates an overwhelming rhythmic beat and evokes an intense corporeal experience to the body of the spectator, thus rendering the investigation of that scene significant for the chapter.

To be more precise, for about five minutes, black signs continuously move in loops, evolving from and dissolving within a white background and in an excessive rhythmic beat, creating the effect of strobe lights – that is, a sharp contrast for the human eye. Claudia Castellucci (2007) characterizes this contrast even violent, writing that

through the projection of the video, which shows a percussive sequence of letters of the alphabet, there is a demonstration of power, which is even more violent when the frequency of the switches between black letters and white background is increased. (p. 69)

The rapid pulse of the signs' movement is also accompanied by a sonic beat, consisted of a sonorous collection of human voices, which renders the visual effect even more fierce. What's more, the visual and the acoustic beat gradually accelerate, reaching a level of very high speed. As a result, the letters seem to be in a constant transformation, as if they are liquidizing and melting into one another; and during that acceleration, Rorschach blots also start to appear in-between the letters.

As the pulsatory, excessively repeated speed of sound and imagery accelerates, it becomes almost impossible for the human eye and ear to synchronize to the beat and, hence, to perceptually and cognitively 'grasp' the individual signs and sounds. They namely become

incomprehensible, all looking like blots and rendering the spectator asymptotic to the visual and audio field surrounding him. What *happens* is long and excessive movement. The passing from the perception of recognizable alternating signs and sounds to the stressful perception of their mere movement, engages the spectator in a profound corporeal experience of anxiety and distress.²⁴ On the basis of the spectator's gradual impossibility to synchronize with the speed, this passage also evokes a violent sense of 'loss of time'; meaning, a transient and abrupt detachment from time's homogeneous and quantifiable facet. Hence, the excessive pulsatory repetition of sound and image in this scene attacks visual and auditory senses, inducing a shattering and disorienting corporeal experience, and undoing the experience of time's quantifiable and chronological form.

Theatre-scholars Pitozzi and Sacchi discuss how analogous projections appear in other episodes of Tragedia Endogonia (*Berlin#03, Bergen#05, Marseille#19*).²⁵ They call them spectrographs and claim that in their diverse uses, they become actual manifestations of time (p. 63). Pitozzi's & Sacchi's understanding of this analogy seems to point to a process of undoing time's 'good' form as well. As they explain, spectrographs signify here a sequence of melting figures within a light contrast, which imprint blots onto the retina (p. 63). And the specific organization of these spectrographs demonstrates that "an image is a process, a movement able to manifest the form of time" (my translation, p. 63). Hence, specifically with regard to the projection in *Avignon#02*, this observation addresses the accelerating pulsation of the signs, which transforms the static image into excessive movement (for the human eye) and translates into an intense corporeal experience. However, their phrase 'form of time' here needs some elucidation. From their text, it seems that it refers to an experience of "intervening into the grain of time, into its matter and consistency" (my translation, p. 63). So, for them, 'form' does not indicate the 'good' form but its opposite; namely, it seems to indicate nothing but form – only matter. Therefore, their position is analogous to this chapter's. Namely, they seem to argue that a formlessness of time is *produced*.

Notably, there needs to be a distinction made between 'bare' form, as a firm condition (of

²⁴ Pitozzi and Sacchi also underscore that because of the rhythmic acceleration the spectator's perception is pushed to its own limits, causing anxiety ("dans cette accélération rythmique, la perception du spectateur est elle aussi entraînée et poussée vers ses propres limites: on passe d'une forme de reconnaissance à une forme d'angoisse"), *Itinera*, p. 64.

²⁵ In the projections of other episodes there appear layers of scrims in-between of which also shapes, shadows and faded images alternate in diverse colors, lights and speed.

matter) and formlessness, as an endless movement of undoing the 'good' form without ever reaching a final state. This distinction is necessary because, if we consider the living-being as being *of* time and his/her experience of time as always already deferred (meaning always *in* and *out of* time, following Agamben's and Derrida's points of view), then stabilizing time as something material would be impossible (since it would presuppose its full self-presence to the living being). So, considering the pulsatory acceleration an operation of the formless, as I propose to do hereby, suggests that a complete state of materiality of time cannot be sustained. The operation of pulse manifests itself as a transient and powerful experience of inability to successfully synchronize to the beat of the now and brings with it an evanescent and violent loss of orientation from quantifiable sense of time. Therefore, the projection works as an operation of materializing time, indeed of constantly "intervening" in time, as Pitozzi and Sacchi put it; but, where intervening indicates an endless movement of presence and nonpresence in the present time.

This dramaturgical operation of pulse can be also related to Duchamp's film *Anémic Cinéma*, discussed by Bois and Krauss. Being projections that generate an excessively repeated visual motif in a pulsatory rhythm, they can be both considered operations that attack visual perception and, thus, induce a corporeal experience of time. However, in the case of *Avignon#02*, the beat does not allow a synchronization with time. Instead, *Anémic Cinéma* is a projection that puts the seer in a situation of a trance exactly because it permits a hypnotic, tuned-in synchronization. Hence, with regard to *Avignon#02*, as Pitozzi and Sacchi rightly put it, "it is not so much about rendering the invisible visible, but about signaling the atemporality even of time through visible signs" (my translation, p. 63). In other words, through the medium of the image, the projection in question concerns the infinite and indivisible flux of time; that is, time as something that cannot be captured in its entirety.

- **signs, becoming blots, becoming traces**

In order to examine in more detail how essentialist conceptualizations of time are being undone in *Avignon#02*, I propose to concentrate more carefully on the repeated movement of appearance and disappearance of the letters. The letters even have a dramaturgical significance, since this episode is mainly concerned with the issue of language and, particularly, with the practice of writing. This is primarily manifested by the act of extracting

the *text* of the piece through the biological mapping of a male goat, as it has been already discussed earlier. Notably, the alphabetic letters that this text consists of return again and again in various modes of writing²⁶ in this performance. In a sense, *Avignon#02* is then also about the human attempt to 'capture' language and meaning through the practice of writing. Kelleher claims that this episode is "constituted around the practice, the materiality of writing. But this is an insomniac writing, something buried like an irritant in the very deeps of night, scratching at the overexposed surface of things" (Castellucci et al., 2007, p. 57).

Kelleher's metaphors indicate a practice of writing in which meaning is never fully present; that is to say, a language the meanings of which are always in movement. In relation to the final projection of letters in *Avignon#02*, this type of insomniac writing manifests itself vividly and has a strong impact. Each letter appears and then disappears, is being written and then erased, until it is rewritten again, and so on; all, in an excessive movement. At first, the letters are perceivable but once pulsation starts accelerating, they become more and more elusive to the human eye. The signs become blots. In other words, the excessive pulsatory movement in this projection also works as a manifestation of the impossibility of language to firmly stabilize meanings and forms. And this becomes possible through the specific manipulation of time; namely, through the operation of accelerated pulsation.

Because of the constant movement and lack of stability they show, the letters can also be conceptualized through the structure of the trace in this projection. It is therefore useful to return to Derrida's notion of the trace at this point, in order to examine the temporal disorientation evoked by this projection. As it has been already noted, a trace cannot have an absolute origin and does not conform to the 'good' form of chronological time because it "cannot be summed up in the simplicity of a present" (1967/1997, p. 66). Namely, the trace that is perceived at the present already belongs to the past and already has a (non-determinable) relationship with the future. Hence, it evokes a temporality of difference and movement. Derrida elaborates on this point, explaining that

if the trace refers to an absolute past, it is because it obliges us to think a past that can no

²⁶ Kelleher observes that "first, there is the video in the antechamber of the goat (the 'poet'), recuperating for itself the etymology of the goat song, the *tragos*, tracing a path of its own choosing across diagrams that represent an alphabet of its animal destiny, the coding of the DNA. There is then the beautiful sequence in the white chamber where the 'ambassadors of the poet' read from a device that I imagine being marked with the goat's choices [...] Finally, between us and the space of performance, there is the alphabet screen and its accompanying cacophony, where writing and speaking are configured as the self-production of their base elements[...]", Castellucci et al., *The Theatre of Societas Raffaello Sanzio*, p. 57.

longer be understood in the form of a modified presence, as a present-past. Since past has always signified present-past, the absolute past that is retained in the trace no longer rigorously merits the name 'past' [...] With the same precaution and under the same erasure, it may be said that its passivity is also its relationship with the 'future'. The concepts of *present*, *past* and *future*, everything in the concepts of time and history which implies evidence of them – the metaphysical concept of time in general – cannot adequately describe the structure of the trace. (1967/1997, pp. 66-67)

The trace, thus, marks an essential impossibility of the subject to fully synchronize with the present time, which utterly destabilizes linear and quantifiable conceptualizations of time. In a similar way, the projection in *Avignon#02* can be considered an operation that has the same effect. Through excessive repetition, it violently disconnects the subject from his/her surrounding field. In other words, the spectator cannot fully tune in with what is being projected on the screen and at the same time loses track of time as something quantifiable and linear. Consequently, this projection, considered an operation of pulsation, undoes the 'good' form of time and evokes an understanding of time as always heterogeneous and in movement.

b. *Brussels#04*: 'eventlessness' and time in suspension

In *Brussels#04*, time seems to pass slowly, rendering the manifestation of pulsation very different from that in *Avignon#02*. But this is not to say that *Brussels#04* is a durational performance or that it is consisted of scenes in slow-motion. On the contrary, in *Brussels#04* the aspect of time is not being distorted or manipulated. Namely, bodies come on stage, usually alone and in silence, they remain for a while, they perform some small gestures,²⁷ and then walk out. The tempo they introduce is not too slow but also not too fast. It feels 'ordinary'. And it stays unaltered. Hence, pulsation cannot be understood in a literal way here, since there is no actual beat. However, the lack of significant dynamics or alterations in

²⁷ For instance, there is the opening scene with the cleaning lady, who calmly mops the marble floor without even looking at the audience, and the following scene in which the audience sees an old man sitting on the bed and then gradually lying down.

the tempo suggests that a rather steady rhythm transpires the whole episode.²⁸ In other words, the performance generates an internalized, soundless pulsation that leads it through.

Notably, that rhythmic homogeneity is hereby conditioned by a state of dramatic eventlessness, which suggests that the operation of pulsation should be in fact understood as an excessive repetition of eventlessness. Guidi explains that “the figures come on one at a time, separated by long intervals of darkness. They are figures that 'stay' for a long time on stage, alone, without provoking a theatrical dynamic, without creating expectations or developments” (Castellucci et al., p. 92). So, Guidi's remark shows that what causes the feeling of slowness and maintains the internal pulsation transpiring the performance, is eventlessness; that is, the lack of dramatic development. In this way, the spectator is given more time to pay attention to the details on stage, to observe the small, usually unnoticed changes and to experience the density of time in its passing - hence, to experience time in a qualitative rather than quantitative way.²⁹ Therefore, dramatic eventlessness does not actually suggest that *nothing is happening*. Instead, it seems to indicate eventfulness, but in a micro-scale. The spectator is invited to experience the passage from imperceptibility to becoming perceptible (how micro-events appear and disappear in perception in time), which is also to experience time in movement. In this sense, the steady and 'eventless' rhythmology of this performance can be considered an operation of pulsation that undoes chronological time and engages the spectator in a more dynamic and sensorial experience of time in motion.

However, the scene in which the infant appears on stage evokes a somewhat different experience. Namely, for as long as the infant 'stays' on stage alone, observing the space around and at times interacting with a few toys and with Hans (the talking mechanical figure, see: second chapter of the thesis), it becomes almost impossible for the audience to endure the situation of 'eventlessness' or to appreciate the passage to becoming-perceptible. Being confronted with an infant alone on stage evokes restlessness and discomfort to the audience. From one perspective, moral judgements arise (as it has been discussed in the previous chapter), but most importantly a feeling of irritation is induced. The infant is namely given

²⁸ It needs to be noted that there are few more dynamic scenes. For instance, there is a scene with a police officer hitting a man. This scene is actually executed in a beat that is given by the amplified sound of the truncheon beating the man's body. So, a steady rhythm is also kept in this rather violent scene.

²⁹ Pitozzi and Sacchi observe about all episodes in *Tragedia Endogonia* that they handle time not as something measurable (chronology), but as rhythm and flux; that is, as *cairology* (“il s'agit à proprement parler d'avoir une prise sur le temps, là où *chronos*, le temps mesurable, se fait *rythmos* et *rehuma*, rythme et flux indivisible”), *Itinera*, p. 61.

the freedom to inhabit the stage as she pleases for up to ten minutes, unless she starts crying (Castellucci et al., 2007, p. 91). But, because she is an infant, this freedom suggests an unconditional openness of possibilities and actions that might even entail danger. Kelleher argues that

on stage she does not occupy her infancy as a story but as a slice of sheer enduring. From the point of view of an adult spectator, enduring is the infant's actions, and it is by way of her action that she keeps time open for us. (Castellucci et al., 2007, p.96)

In other words, Kelleher seems to claim that the infant's mere endurance *opens up* a dynamic engagement with time for the adult audience. However, I do not believe that the analogy is directly as such. Rather, it is through the agitation evoked and through a suspension of chronological time, that 'time is kept open' for the audience. What's more, agitation becomes further encouraged by the small baby's "sheer unrelation to the place" (Castellucci et al., 2007, p. 96), since the infant is present on a majestic marble stage when the curtains open, as if she was abandoned there -³⁰ "a mute presence, unselfconscious, white and microscopic, inside a white macroscopic space" (Castellucci et al., 2007, p. 92). So, this aesthetic contradiction of magnitude even augments the irritation, creating the impression that the infant is entirely alone and free to act as she pleases.

Hence, as the pulsatory internal rhythm of 'ordinariness' becomes more and more difficult to endure, chronological time gets suspended. The operation of pulsation now interrupts the 'good' form of time in an abrupt and violent way, since the expectations of the audience for *something to happen* exceed and resist the ability of getting absorbed within the reverie of the passing time. Therefore, their attention gets even more tensed and the experience of quantifiable time irrupted. Art-theorist J. Crary's (2001) understanding of suspension and attention offers an insight on this state. He claims that

the state of being suspended, a looking or listening so rapt that it is an exemption from ordinary conditions, that it becomes a suspended temporality, a hovering out of time. The roots of the word *attention* in fact resonate with a sense of 'tension', of being 'stretched', and also of 'waiting'. It implies the possibility of a fixation, of holding something in wonder or contemplation, in which the attentive subject is both immobile and ungrounded. But at the

³⁰ Kelleher also writes "the (baby) does not appear born but put or left there, less an image of the hope of a historical awakening and more a historical deposit, some lump of actual humanity caught in the gob of the theater's storytelling machinery", *The Theatre of Societas Raffaello Sanzio*, p. 96.

same time a suspension is also a cancellation or an interruption. (p. 10)

In this sense, in the scene in question, intensive attention manifests itself as a state of alertness, tension and agitation on behalf of the audience; thus, as a rather awkward hovering out of time – a time suspension, during which the presence of the audience within the present is at the same time intensified as well as interrupted. So, on the one hand, their attention is activated and immersed into the present time. But, on the other hand, they are confronted with the infant's endurance of the present and sheer openness and unpredictability of the future, which interrupts their full presence in the 'here and now'.

Giacometti's *Suspended Ball* (1930-31), which Bois and Krauss (1997/1999) discuss in the section on pulse in their study, is pertinent to suspension's effects of tension and interruption. Giacometti's sculpture is namely consisted of a recumbent wedge on top of which a sphere with a cleft removed from its underside is suspended, hanging from a thin string. The two forms are very close to each other, almost touching. However, they do not touch; their contact is suspended. Because of that suspension, the sculpture induces irritation, "the kind [of irritation] provoked by the disturbing perception of a *lack*" (p. 154) as Nadeau, cited by Bois and Krauss, argues. Although the two authors end up contextualizing the 'lack' in terms of unconscious sexual desires that do not pertain to the discussion of the performance, they also show that, by constantly producing the possibility and impossibility of contact, Giacometti's sculpture generates interruption and tension. Namely, the spectator's desire for contact of the two forms seems to be repeatedly produced and interrupted by the image, thus, inducing feelings of tension, irritation and a disturbing 'hovering out of time'. As a result, their discussion seems to suggest that the artwork can be considered an operation of pulsation, in which not only the ball but also time is suspended, with the spectator experiencing a dynamic alternation of presence and nonpresence in the 'here and now'.

In view of this background, the scene with the infant of *Brussels#04* can be also considered an operation that irrupts chronology and engages the spectator into a rather intense experience of the flux of time – into an understanding of time as *cairology*. So, this scene generates for the audience the possibility and impossibility to follow the 'ordinary' and 'eventless' rhythm of the event on stage. And in this way, they also experience the impossibility of being fully *in* time, which marks an experience of time as heterogeneous and

nonlinear.

c. *History of Tears: rupture in time*

As it has been described in earlier chapters, Fabre's *History of Tears* begins with a long scene of deafening cries. Namely, half of the performers on stage are supposed to be parents and the other half infants, who cry out loud. Every time that the 'parents' lift them up in their arms, their tremendous crying stops and a few moments of calmness follow. But, once they lay them back onto the floor, the screams start all over. This alternating series of actions is repeated excessively for about twenty minutes, creating a cacophony of voices and a scenery of chaos that become difficult for the audience to endure. In this scene, therefore, pulsation manifests itself as an ongoing repetition of two opposite situations, extreme crying and not-crying, that evokes great frustration and irrupts the audience's as well as the performers' experience of chronological time.

However, repetition does not indicate here repeating the actions in a specific form and order, like it happens often in Fabre's work: for instance, repeating precisely, clearly and in unison a sequence of movements or sounds.³¹ On the contrary, what is repeated is a constellation of intense actions that do not appear in strict unison. To be more explicit, in this scene, the 'parents' need to lift the 'babies' up, lie them back down on their pillows, gradually undress them and put a great effort in keeping them silent by caressing them, talking to them, hugging them etcetera, whereas the 'infants' need to scream loudly, keeping their bodies in an infant-like shape and stop crying as they are being lifted up or hugged. But, even though this constellation of actions begins with some order, and the crying and non-crying happen simultaneously for all, the stage is slowly being transformed into a landscape of rage, chaos and frustration as the scene goes on. For instance, the performers' diversities in crying (that is, in tone, quality, scale and density of voice) and moving (the ways their hands and feet are twitching and their positions in space) becomes even starker as they get more tired and have less control over their bodies; and the 'parents' start becoming angry and restless as they

³¹ Van den Dries observes about Fabre's work that "in his first theatre productions, in the eighties, repetition was the main structuring principle. Actions were repeated ad infinitum and this had its effect on the length of his performances, which expanded up to five hours or more. This does not happen so often in more recent performances", *Corpus Jan Fabre*, p. 157.

cannot make the crying stop, thus, ending up throwing the 'babies' violently on the ground. So, this process transforms the stage into an arena in which the performers - exhausted from screaming and frustration - move chaotically on stage and their bodies seem dismembered, as they move and scatter around. In other words, even though there are guidelines about the execution of these actions, each performer deviates more and more because of the physical fatigue and intensity they demand, which are even increased by the event of repetition.

Hence, the *mise en scène* is quite simple here, in the sense that very specific tasks need to be executed by the performers on stage. Moreover, a scenery of representation is clearly formed: namely, some performers need to act 'like' infants and some others 'like' parents. But, due to the excessive repetition of the radically contradicting states of screaming and not-screaming, due to the extremity of the voice and due to the intense physicality this scene demands, it becomes impossible for the actions to be regulated within a precise frame of representation; they continuously deviate. So, neither the 'infants' can be successfully considered infants nor the 'parents' as parents because of the extremity of their actions and voice that takes them 'out of their roles'. In other words, the fictional world that is promised to be constructed once the performance begins³² is slowly being undone by the intensity of the actions' repetition – that is, by the operation of pulsation.

This seems to be an effect of what Hrvatin (1994) denotes in Fabre's work's relation to representation, which is that “he [Fabre] adds the repetition of movements, actions and acts inside representation” (my translation, p. 37). Although I argue in the first chapter of the thesis for a 'closure' of the issue of representation through Derrida's line of thinking, its discussion inevitably returns with this performance, with a view to examining how the aspect of time becomes a dramaturgical element in the work. And it should also be underlined that through this type of work with repetition, Derrida's criticism on Artaud seems to become justified. Namely, using repetition within theatrical representation does not necessarily result to mimicry and sameness, as Artaud thought. On the contrary, excessive repetition is analogous to expenditure – it can, thus, become the means to produce radical difference and singularity. Papadamaki, one of the 'infants' in this work, indirectly refers to the use of repetition that Hrvatin brings up, showing that it also aims to provoke physical tiredness and disconnection from the sense of the 'here and now'. She specifically comments that “the only

³² This is even more so because of the woman playing the harp; the melody she plays gives the impression of a lullaby or that a fairy-tale is about to begin.

action we could and had to do was screaming and stop screaming. It is such a hard physical action that brings one into a state of deep tiredness; one actually loses one's self in time" (A. Papadamaki, personal communication, February 17, 2009). Hence, excessive repetition and exhaustion also make one 'lose one's self in time', which suggests that this process enables an intense and dynamic, rather than quantitative, engagement with time.

The impact of this scene is no less intense. The disorder, loudness and violence of the stage evoke frustration and disturbance to the audience. Lehmann (1999/2005) highlights the aggressiveness of repetition that characterizes Fabre's overall work, explaining that repetition in his performances seeks to disturb the audience and in that way make time "be felt" (p. 335). And in this sense, the repeated alternation of crying and non-crying with the violence and chaos it brings, is hereby considered an operation of pulsation that aggressively irrupts chronological time and induces an intense sensorial experience of the present time. The pulsatory movement of this repetition is neither too fast nor too slow or ordinary, like in the previous examples. So, the tempo is not what ruptures time in this case. However, the radical interchange between excessively loud, intense actions and calm, silent moments makes the repetition very difficult to endure because the experience of each scene resonates into the other. In other words, the audience finds itself being repeatedly and abruptly thrown *into* and *out of* the act of the 'here and now', thus experiencing the impossibility of being fully present in any of them. In that way, a schism occurs; that is, a radical rupture of man's experience of chronological time.

- **excessive repetition: a force of violence**

In order to explore further how the operation of pulse is manifested at the outset of the *History of Tears* and what it *does* to the form of time, I propose to concentrate further on the particular type of repetition that takes place in this scene. As it has been argued, repetition here concerns an interchange of opposing actions (screaming – not screaming) that results to physical fatigue and brings disorder on stage. So, repetition manifests a force of violence. And the term 'violence' specifically suggests that repetition appears as a process of rupturing the order of theatrical representation, the presence of the spectator in the 'here and now' but also time's 'good' form, which is mostly at issue hereby.

Bois and Krauss (1997/1999) discuss Coleman's film *Box* (1977) in the section on pulsation

of their study, qualifying the type of repetition it presents as violent too (p. 163). The film they analyze has a similar structure to the scene in question, which makes it useful for offering a better insight on the impact of repetition. Namely, *Box* shows a boxing match. The film is cut into frames of short bursts and is interrupted by spurts of blackness, therefore manifesting a pulsatory movement in form of repetition; “of beats that are separated by intervals of absolute extinction, even while the urgency of the rhythm promises the return of another and another” (p. 162). Moreover, there is a voice-over of repeated phrases, which emphasizes even more the event of repetition.³³ So, the imagery of the boxers hitting one another is quite violent by itself and would therefore make one assume that the audience would corporeally experience this violence. However, as the two authors argue, the aggressiveness of the event is displaced from the image of its representation and is rather to be found on the pulsatory rhythm of the image and the voice, which also resonate on the bodies of the viewers. As they explain

Box is not 'about' the violence of the sport of boxing but, rather, that the image of this brutal sport is 'about' the violence of repetition and its structure of the 'beat', felt as a set of explosive endings always abruptly propelled into motion again. (p. 163)

Box demonstrates a great relevance to the scene in question exactly because screaming is analogous to hitting. They are, namely, both considered acts of violence and evoke aggressiveness. Moreover, hitting and screaming are interrupted by moments of blackness and calmness in the examples respectively, which suggests that a pulsatory repetition of the events occurs. According to this analogy and Bois' & Krauss' reasoning, thus, I propose not to consider the act of screaming in the *History of Tears* as the direct cause of disturbance and irritation to the audience. Rather, I suggest that the violence of this scene is primarily generated by the event of excessive repetition.³⁴ And it is in this sense that pulsation can be understood to produce a force of violence; that is, a process of undoing the 'good' form of time.

³³ Bois and Krauss note that, for instance, phrases such as “go on, go on”, “again, again”, “break it, break it”, “stop, s-t-o-p-i-t” are heard, *Formless - A User's Guide*, p. 162.

³⁴ The scene with the police officer beating a man in *Brussels#04* shows an even more direct analogy with *Box* and the logic of conceptualization Bois and Krauss propose, since it consists a representation of a cruel scene (the person who is being beaten is lying on the floor, half naked and covered with fake blood), the violence of which is transposed into the structure of the pulse (amplified sound of the beat of the truncheon).

4.5 experience of potentiality - conclusion

Throughout the discussion of the particular performances, it has been argued that dramaturgies of time manifested as excessive repetition of intense actions or situations, can be considered operations of pulsation. More specifically, this chapter has shown that dramaturgies of pulsation evoke a disturbing somatic experience and render impossible man's ability to synchronize with the 'good', quantifiable and linear, form of time, that generally makes man certain of knowing what time *is*. And rather, in such cases time is experienced as a dimension of the living-being that is heterogeneous and nonlinear, the certainty of which can not be possessed by the subject. So, in these examples the audience is invited to engage with time in a dynamic and sensorial way, which *opens up* their expectations towards the unexpected and the unpredictable. Namely, by losing track of time as something linear and unified as well as by losing track of their own certainty of full-presence within time, an experience of the infinity of possibilities and impossibilities about what can happen on stage is evoked. An experience of potentiality is, thus, induced. In order to disentangle what potentiality hereby suggests I propose to return to Agamben's thinking and examine his understanding of this notion.

Agamben's discussion of potentiality can elucidate the impact of the performances in question for, as Deladurantaye poetically phrases in his essay on "Agamben's Potential" (2000), "potentiality is a temporal concept, is the concept of time's darkness, the hushed shadows massing about the stage of what happens" (p. 13). Further, it is an issue to which Agamben has dedicated his entire project to. Deladurantaye quotes Agamben affirming that his overall work "is an attempt to understand the meaning of the verb 'can' [potere]. What do I mean when I say: 'I can, I cannot'?" (Agamben, 1999, p. 177) and arguing that "philosophy is a firm assertion of potentiality, the construction of an experience of the possible as such" (Agamben, 1999, p. 249). On the basis of these statements, it becomes then clear that Agamben's philosophical work is preoccupied with the meaning of the verbs can and cannot, which reflect the question of potentiality; that is, the issue of the 'possible' and the 'impossible'.

In the collection of essays under the name *Potentialities* (1999), Agamben unravels his understanding of the notion, which is greatly founded on Aristotle's approach. As he notes, the latter is generally considered to have opposed potentiality (*dynamis*) to actuality (*energeia*) but, as Agamben shows, this is a misconception (p. 177). He explains that Aristotle in fact considered potentiality being conserved in actuality and states that

contrary to the traditional idea of potentiality that is annulled in actuality, here we are confronted with a potentiality that conserves itself and saves itself in actuality. Here potentiality, so to speak, survives actuality and, in this way, *gives itself to itself*. (p. 184)

In order to disentangle this complex nuance of potentiality, Agamben delves into the verbs can and cannot, and realizes that the experience of potentiality resides on the articulation/manifestation of the verb 'can' but without the certainty of that capacity being fully possessed by the subject. In other words, he considers the experience of potentiality to show an indistinctiveness of the potentials 'to-act' and 'not-to-act' or to 'can' and to 'cannot'. As an example for that, Agamben brings the relation between vision and darkness and remarks that even though one cannot see in darkness, one can still see darkness ("the eye does not see anything but is, as it were, affected by its own incapacity to see" (p. 217)). In other words, man has the potentials both to-see and to-not-see that manifest themselves indistinctly. Therefore, he claims that

to be potential means: to be one's own lack, *to be in relation to one's own incapacity*. Beings that exist in the mode of potentiality *are capable of their own impotentiality*; and only in this way do they become potential. They *can be* because they are in relation to their own non-Being. (p. 182)

Hence, the experience of potentiality suggests that impotentiality is absorbed by the actualization of any act. In *The Coming Community* (1990/2007), Agamben offers a more concrete example that shows how impotentiality manifests itself as part of actuality. He namely refers to the case of Glenn Gould, the renowned piano player whose great mastery resided on directing his potential to not-play the piano onto his actual playing the piano, which turned the act of playing into a project that was complete by being 'less'.³⁵ He thus

³⁵ For instance, after 1964 he withdrew from live concerts and only made recordings, pointing out, as T. Page writes in his Introduction in his collection of Gould's writings in *The Glenn Gould Reader* (1984), that "a tremendous conservatism"

observes that

while his [Gould's] ability simply negates and abandons his potential to not-play, his mastery conserves and exercises the act not his potential to play (this is the position of irony that affirms the superiority of the positive potentiality over the act), but rather his potential to not-play. (p. 35)

It is, thus, in this context that Agamben's emphasis on the notion of *cairós* is to be read. To put it differently, with the reference to the Stoic notion in his text, the author does prompt the subject to actualize the present time, but that is only by exhausting his/her incapacity in doing so. And in this sense, the conceptualizations of time and of the subject's presence in time that he proposes are to be considered as 'broken'. Deladurantaye's discussion of Agamben's potential sheds light on an additional significant aspect of this notion, which appears in his essay "Bartleby, or on Contingency" (1999) and helps understanding potentiality as a process. Namely, he underscores that the author's theory of potentiality consists a doctrine of creation that necessarily involves a process of *decreation*. Therefore Deladurantaye writes that

we approach the heart of Agamben's theory of potentiality as a true doctrine of creation, one that does not simply view Being under one of its signs, but integrally as the unity of possibility and actuality, and that thus holds that every creation involves *decreation*, the renouncing of pure potentialities. (2000, p. 21)

Under this perspective, *decreation* is understood both as an active part of creation (that is, in the emergence of something new) and as the marking of the impossibility of pure creation, pure potentiality and something entirely new. Hence, *decreation* is in tension with creation, and, under this light, potentiality is seen as a radical force of creation: in order for something to be created or complete, it should undergo a process of de-creation, of un-doing.

So, potentiality as a temporal concept signifies for Agamben a process of *decreation* of the

overtakes any artist forced to perform the same music again and again, until it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to move on", pp. xii-xiii. Moreover, as Page rightly informs us, his playing was very eccentric (he would experiment and alter the tempos of classical pieces, he would sing while playing and make unusual movements with his body, etcetera) and he would practice very little the piano, as he instead preferred to think and write since he "felt that some thoughts were better realized at the keyboard of a typewriter than at that of a piano", p. xiv.

past for something *new* to emerge.³⁶ Therefore, it is related to history and to man's relation to time. However, for this chapter I propose to detach potentiality from its reference to history and rather explore it as a temporal concept by considering *decreation* a process that refers to form and formlessness. In other words, I suggest regarding *decreation* as an operation that undoes the 'good' form; and specifically, the 'good' form of time. As I have shown, these performances employ dramaturgies of pulsation that *de-create* the dominant conceptualization of time, which is to say that they become operations of undoing time's 'good' form. And as a consequence, something *other* emerges; that is, an alternative engagement and understanding of time as a dimension of the living being and as heterogeneous and qualitative. Notably, that *other* experience of time consists also an experience of potentiality, since the spectator experiences the possibility and impossibility of being present in the present time. The ambition of these performances is not of course to deny the western understanding of time altogether, but to unveil that excess of time within time and within one's presence in time. Therefore, doubt about people's certainty of time and of their full presence within the 'here and now' is evoked. In other words, the audience is invited to come "in relation to their own incapacity", to use Agamben's phrasing. Like with the example of the eyes being able to experience the capacity to-see and to-not-see (in) darkness, in this case the spectator experiences his/her capacity of being present and non-present at the present time. St. Augustine's statement about time is pertinent to such an experience of potentiality because it articulates the impossibility to explain time in ontological terms.³⁷ He says, "what is time, then? I know very well what time is if not asked about it, but if somebody asks me what time is and I want to explain, I become confused" (Augustine of Hippo, Confessions, Book XI, Ch XIV, 17, as cited in Kunst, 2010, p. 24).

Augustine's experience of confusion and uncertainty about articulating time, thus, mirrors the experience of potentiality within actuality; that is to say, the experience of incapacity

³⁶ Deladurantaye explains that Agamben conceives potentiality "turned back toward the past, toward history" and "that potentiality can be turned back toward the past, to 'the return of the new'", "Agamben's Potential" in *Diacritics*, p. 17.

³⁷ Kunst also cites and comments on Augustine's statement, writing that "if we approach his statement from a contemporary perspective, we find that, today, this unspeakable ontological understanding of time is replaced with the maneuverable and explainable notion of time. That means that the contemporary experience of time is contained within our knowledge of what time is (or 'what the time is'). This experience of time can also be related to the frequent sentence: sorry, don't have the time – which, of course, is but another description of our general experience of time", "Prognosis on Collaboration" in *TkH Journal for Performing Arts Theory*, p. 24.

within capacity. And if it is approached from the perspective of theatre, this experience of radical dubiousness liberates the spectator from deterministic and logocentric expectations, opening up to the wholly *other*. As it is argued more explicitly in the Conclusion of this thesis, the ethical potential of contemporary theatre resides on this gesture of *opening up* to the unexpected and the unknown. Derrida, at the outset of the homonymous documentary about him, makes a distinction between the French words *futur* and *avenir*, that marks the temporal zone this gesture addresses. He explains that the difference between these terms (which both mean future) is that the former refers to that “which tomorrow, later, next century will be”, so to the predictable and scheduled. But the latter refers “to what and who will come whose arrival is totally unexpected [...] The *other* who comes without me being able to anticipate their arrival” (Derrida, 2002). Hence, 'opening up' indicates that the audience is invited to resist their own certainties through an encounter with the unanticipated other; to *open up* to the “hushed shadows massing about the stage of what happens”; and therefore to a radical understanding of ethics.

conclusion

1. dramaturgies of formlessness

In the previous chapters, attention was drawn upon dramaturgical operations deriving from works by Jan Fabre and Societàs Raffaello Sanzio, which are exemplary of a strand of postdramatic theatre that is generally considered “difficult” because of its radical aesthetics. They were specifically studied as operations that undo the 'good' form of the human language, the human body and the human understanding of time, on the basis of which I suggested considering them dramaturgies of formlessness. Namely, formlessness marks a continuous resistance and undoing of the 'good' form of things from within, thus making the opposition between 'good' and 'bad' form untenable. Against this background, a concentrated analysis on the ways the above aspects (language, body, time) resist to perform their (good) form was conducted through particular examples in the thesis, showing how this resistance induces a destabilization of firm ontological, logocentric and essentialist patterns of perception and cognition of the audience in this strand of performances.

More precisely, on the one hand I underpinned Lehmann's claim that the elements of language, body and time constitute central aesthetic and dramaturgical aspects of theatre; on the other hand, I resided on the belief that they are also basic elements pointing to how the category of the human animal is historically and culturally produced and conceptualized within western theatre and western thought. In other words, they are elements pointing to the 'good' form of the human animal; that is, to a traditionally essentialist understanding of the human animal. Along the discussion of the performances selected, it was namely argued that 'good' form refers here to logocentrism, anthropocentrism and linear thinking, whereas 'formlessness' addresses dramaturgical processes (here, base materialism, horizontality and pulsation) that strategically undo such firm conceptual and perceptual patterns.

Furthermore, I resided on philosophy, critical theory and contemporary theatre theory to specifically argue that the dramaturgies discussed can be considered operations with a particular 'task' - that is, the task of undoing the 'good' form of things. And on the basis of this task I have claimed that they show a negative performativity (producing an *un-doing* of their own 'good' form), which then suggests that they can be considered operations of formlessness. To be more specific, this study invoked Bataille's philosophical idea of *l'informe*

and Bois & Krauss' theorization of this notion for the context of visual arts, in order to conceptualize it and make it productive for the discussion of radical aesthetic forms in postdramatic performance. Additionally, it demonstrated how such dramaturgies of formlessness unsettle the spectators and invite them to confront the unexpected, the 'other' that touches the extreme limits of form, that is manifested as baseness, bareness, materiality, heterogeneity, monstrosity, madness, violence. And, at the same time, this thesis also betokened possible impacts of such dramaturgies of formlessness, which resonate on the ethical. In its course it has been argued that the dramaturgical operations discussed hereby can have a corporeal impact to the audience, such as irritation, anguish, discomfort and disturbance, which evoke a crisis of reason, a *proto*-posthuman thinking and an experience of potentiality.

Against this background, I therefore hold that the performances in question problematize and disobey established ethical discourses, invoking the *informe* as the unexpected, disturbing, heterogeneous and scatological event. Due to these attributes, hence, radical aesthetic aspects of postdramatic theatre are often considered as non-ethical. However, I hold that exactly because they resist being assimilated through the existing understanding of the ethical, they launch the possibility of a *meta*-ethical ethics, which I propose to conceptualize as an 'ethics of potentiality'. Namely, they address ethics and the corresponding notion of community not as something socially constructed on the basis of presuppositions and attributes but as a shared experience of each one's own incompleteness,¹ that induces an experience of potentiality and can therefore be articulated in dialogue with Bataille, Agamben and Bataille's closely related thinkers M. Blanchot and J.L. Nancy.

In view of these observations, this thesis thus also offers an additional perspective to the use of *l'informe* as a conceptual operation. Whereas Bois & Krauss' study on *l'informe* (1997/1999) begins and ends by proposing the conceptualization of this notion for the structural analysis of a strand of modern visual arts and their contemporary reception with the aim to liberate "our thinking from the semantic, the servitude to thematics" (p. 252), this thesis begins with the same premise for the field of postdramatic theatre but seeks to extend the operational force of the formless into the domain of the ethical. Notably, the two authors do seem to recognize the ethical implications of the formless in relation to the radical other, as

¹ It is important to note Blanchot's words who, alluding to Bataille, envisions such an understanding of community "I repeat, for Bataille, the questions: Why 'community'? The answer he gives is rather clear: 'there exists a principle of insufficiency at the root of each being...' (the principle of incompleteness)", *The Unavowable Community*, p. 5.

they emphasize how it points to a type of difference that cannot be managed in a logical way. Difference is namely a concept that is usually thought to be ontologically opposed to sameness. However, as Bois and Krauss argue while discussing *l'informe*, the encounter with what is thought to be radically different (the monstrous, base matter etc.) escapes such ontological distinctions because it cannot be assimilated or managed in a logocentric way. As a result, it creates a “nonlogical difference” and therefore deconstructs the binary of same vs. different. As they write in the conclusion of the book, entitled “the destiny of the *informe*”,

the inevitable production of the monstrous, or the heterogeneous, by the very same process that is constructed to exclude the nongeneralizable, this is the force that creates nonlogical difference out of the categories that are constructed to manage difference logically. (p. 252)

But with this claim they mostly address the issue of radical difference in social terms, seeking to attack the idea of the norm. So, they specifically underline that, according to Bataille, the production of the categories of the 'ideal' and the 'scatological' are constitutive for the production of the norm.² Apart from this limited reference that relates to ethics though, they do not discuss this matter any further.

Against this background, I therefore consider it even more important to conclude this thesis with an attempt to think how the operation of *l'informe* exceeds the territory of the discourse of art and resonates to the ethical, especially as and once it is conceptualized for the realm of postdramatic theatre.

² They more specifically address this point in relation to the visual field by referring to Bataille's text “The Deviations of Nature”, in which at first he discusses nature's production of freaks and then turns to the composite photographs of Francis Galton, *Formless – A User's Guide*, p. 251.

2. theatre and ethics

The relation between theatre and ethics has been addressed for a long time, if one considers that it was already communicated through Aristotle's notion of catharsis. The complex notion of catharsis namely also referred to a moral cleansing and purification of the spectator through a process of identification with the actors in ancient tragedy, as they had to suffer and pay for their mistakes when the Gods were called to deliver justice.³ Even though Aristotle's thinking is in many ways more complicated and reticent, his *Poetics* have been interpreted in a logocentric mode within the discourse of theatre, often pointing to an understanding of ethics as a set of moral rules by which to live, mostly defined by essentialist oppositions between good and evil or right and wrong. In distinction to such understandings of ethics, I hold that the performances in question resonate onto what we could call an 'ethical thinking', launching the possibility of a *meta*-ethics. In other words, they evoke challenges and situations that can affect the ways one thinks about ethics and the question of the ethical altogether. To borrow Ridout's phrasing from his study *Theatre & Ethics* (2009), this type of ethical thinking "involves working out on what basis, if any, we can make such judgements. On what do we found our conceptions of right and wrong?" (p. 11).

In the last few years the relationship between theatre and ethics has deserved some special attention, particularly as research on contemporary performance has grown. Ridout's (2009) and H. Grehan's (2009) studies are exemplary in this respect, as well as the issue entitled "The End of Ethics? Performance, Politics and War" of *Performance Paradigm* journal (2007) that bears directly on performance and ethical matters.⁴ However, these studies and articles address or discuss the relation between theatre, aesthetics and ethics on rather pragmatic grounds and in close connection to the issue of spectatorship, which differentiates them from the present one. To be more explicit, they mostly study performances that deliver a recognizable ethical contribution either by the themes and issues they address or by the

³ This meaning of catharsis is indicated by Aristotle's definition of tragedy, which states that by evoking pity and terror, tragedy brings about catharsis of these emotions, *Poetics*, p. 10.

⁴ Here Read's significant study *Theatre and Everyday Life: An Ethics of Performance* (1993) should be also mentioned. However, this study contextualizes ethics and theatre quite differently from the way I do, as it concentrates on the relationship between an ethics of performance, the urban environment and the experiential understanding of everyday life.

processes of their making-of (for example, by unconventional ways of collaborating and producing a work). And in relation to their theoretical context, it needs to be noted that these studies indicate a great tendency to approach ethics through the complex and in-itself contradictory philosophical thinking of E. Levinas, that, as it is argued further on, often renders the interpretation of Levinas' views on ethics and aesthetics problematic.⁵

For instance, the aforementioned issue of *Performance Paradigm* reveals the above-mentioned characteristics. At a first glance, its title ("The End of Ethics?") echoes an approach to ethics similar to this thesis'; Scheer explains that

we are not announcing the 'End of Ethics' as the ethical correlative to arguments about the 'End of History'. The title is a provocation to re-think the discourse of ethics in relation to political performance and art, and to re-assert its significance. (p. 3)

However, as this comment and the rest of the title ("Performance, Politics and War") suggest, wars and political developments shape the thematic framework for this discussion. In other words, most of the articles published here examine performances and performance activists that manifest an ethical contribution with their work, in the sense that almost directly, they deal with various political and social issues.⁶ But the examples discussed in this thesis, even though they can sometimes evoke references to certain socio-political events through their aesthetics and imagery,⁷ do not express any immediate correspondence. Rather, they communicate with and address the audience in a perceptual and conceptual level; perhaps, as well, in a more 'physical' way, as they often educe a corporeal impact. Hence, on the basis of this lack of explicit references and direct political articulation, I hold that their ethical significance resides rather on potentiality.

From this perspective then, Ridout's study (2009) seems to be more useful because, in spite

⁵ In his Introduction of "The End of Ethics?" theatre scholar Ed Scheer also admits the scholars' and artists' great preference to discuss the relationship between ethics and theatre through Levinas, writing that "of the various approaches to this discourse available to scholars and artists, perhaps the most pertinent to this topic and the one most frequently cited in these essays is the one outlined by Emmanuel Levinas. For Levinas, ethics centers on the responsibility for and to 'the other' in a contingent and situational rather than abstract relation", *Performance Research*, pp. 3-4.

⁶ Scheer explicitly writes that "the essays in this issue of *Performance Paradigm* provide an account of the diverse range of recent performance works in which the possibility of the ethical response to political events is directly broached or even structurally implicated in the work itself", "The End of Ethics? Performance, Politics and War" in *Performance Research*, p. 3.

⁷ An example of that, deriving from the performances discussed in this thesis, is the scene with the policeman beating another man in the episode *Brussels#04* by Raffaello Sanzio, which evokes a reference to Carlo Giuliani's death in the G8 meeting in Genoa, Italy 2001.

of being rather brief, it offers a broad theoretical view that can contextualize the overall relation between theatre and ethics. It discusses and problematizes the history of this relation (starting even from Aristotle, Plato and ancient tragedy) and underscores how theatre is distinct from other art forms, since it happens in the presence of spectators and while these are usually conscious of their status as spectators (p. 14). This reciprocal spectatorship taking place in theatre is crucial according to Ridout, because it creates ethical confusion (the spectator traditionally needs to pretend not to know that the actor acts a role) and seems to signify theater's basic ethical nuance: that "perhaps it is the uncertainty about truth and untruth which is foregrounded in the theatrical experience, that makes it an appealing place to come in search of ethical questions" (pp. 15-16). Within this context, thus, Ridout concentrates on contemporary theatre, highlighting that the relationship between theatre and ethics is now founded on this uncertainty, which "goes hand in hand with an openness to the future and the unpredictable rather than a specific ethical position" (p. 49).

Notably, Ridout's remarks are pertinent to the event of the unexpected invoked by the *informe*, as it has been discussed in this thesis, acknowledging that theatre does not only have an aesthetic value but also an ethico-political, which he too chooses to approach through Levinas. However, alluding to the Levinasian thinking of ethics through the 'other'⁸ in order to discuss theatre aesthetics, appears to be often problematic due to the philosopher's complexity of thinking.⁹ For instance, Ridout (as well as Grehan) pays special attention to the essay "Reality and its Shadow" (1948), with which Levinas marks the limits of aesthetics when ethics is concerned because, as Ridout comments, it "seduces its viewers into evading responsibility for the world" (p. 55). To respond to such criticism on behalf of contemporary performance, thus, Ridout states that theater's ethical potentials are probably to be traced in a type of theatre that does not function as a place of mere representation and illusionism but as

⁸ Ridout additionally informs the readers that the reorientation of ethics towards 'otherness' rather than 'selfhood' mostly came after the Nazi genocide. And it is in this historical moment that Levinas offers a rethinking of the relationships between self and the world and, as Ridout explains, "proposes that we ought to live life eternally in relation to the 'other'. The ground of our human existence lies in our encounter with the fact the the 'other' exists, an encounter in which we ought to recognize an infinite obligation towards the 'other'", *Theatre & Ethics*, p. 52.

⁹ However, it also needs to be noted that Ridout and Grehan recognize in their studies the difficulty of turning to Levinas for the discussion of postdramatic theatre: "one might argue that [...] the misappropriation of Levinas by theatre and performance studies removes from his thought precisely those elements which tend towards the impossible, the mysterious and the theological, leaving a less austere but rather more viable kind of ethics, appropriate for day-to-day use" (Ridout, 2009, p. 55) and "despite the dangers of using Levinasian philosophy, I continue with his philosophy because I explore the ways in which performance can stimulate active engagement, reflection, action, response and responsibility for the spectators" (Grehan, 2009, p. 21).

one that recognizes and foregrounds the distance between performer and spectator (p. 24). However, as Manchev's discussion of the relation between Levinas and Bataille demonstrates, this whole argument does not seem to take into account Levinas' overall work (especially Levinas' *Totality and Infinity* (1961)). For instance, Manchev (2009) underlines this type of misinterpretation of Levinas' thought, arguing that he (Levinas) is in fact a philosopher of excess, whose use of the notions of 'holiness' and 'desire' in *Totality and Infinity* indicate that (p. 229). On the basis of these remarks, Manchev thus even claims that Levinas is very closely related to Bataille, since both underpin an understanding of ethics as an experience of sensing the extreme limits (p. 231).

Grehan (2009) from her side theorizes Levinasian ethics as well in order to talk about the issue of spectatorship in contemporary performance. And, as she clarifies, her study is mostly interested in a type of active spectatorship "in the sense that [the spectators] can become intrigued, engaged and involved in a process of consideration about the important issues of response and responsibility and what these might mean both within and beyond the performance space" (p. 5). In other words, Grehan's book specifically insists on a sense of responsibility for the other that she claims is evoked by today's performances. So, the topic of research directly turns her study towards Levinas, in the works of which responsibility is a major issue. In order to frame this debate, she refers to performances that at first sight seem to share common characteristics with the ones discussed hereby, because, as she argues, their radical aesthetics can evoke corporeal impact such as irritation, unsettlement and ambivalence (one of them is even *Genesis: from the Museum of Sleep* (1999) by Raffaello Sanzio). However, the themes of the performances she discusses also deal with direct and decisive political and ethical concerns. For instance, they refer to Nazi's genocide, to nuclear testings, indigenous people, prisoners of war, refugees and asylum seekers, cloning etc. As a result, her study is also quite distant from the present one, as it analyzes aesthetic aspects that carry immediate political and ethical significance, through which she investigates the sense of responsibility and response on behalf of the spectators.¹⁰

¹⁰ The same interest in the spectators' sense of response and responsibility is also expressed in Lehmann's *Postdramatic Theatre* (1999/2006), which refers to an "aesthetics of responsibility (response-ability)" (p. 184). To be more precise, in the end of his book the author returns to his criticism against the current media-saturated world and argues that theatre can only intervene through its "politics of perception" (p. 185), which suggests that it can activate to the audience an ability to respond in a political sense. As Lehmann argues, this becomes possible because whereas media disrupt the experience "of a relation between address and answer" in the process of generating images (p. 185), theatre makes visible this rupture by inviting a mutual, collaborative implication of performers and audience to the production of images.

Ridout's study finishes with a crucial remark, on the basis of which I come to propose the operation of *l'informe* and the theoretical perspective it offers, as a perhaps more prolific way to examine the relationship between radical aesthetics in theatre and ethics, than the Levinasian (mis)interpretations that usually appear in the field of theatre studies. He thus acknowledges that one usually values contemporary works for their ethical contribution when this contribution is recognizable and understood (p. 66). In other words, he seems to be skeptical of the ethical impact of works that directly address ethical and political matters and that can, thus, be easily assimilated by the existing discourse of ethics. And driven by this skepticism, he wonders whether theater's greatest ethical potential may actually reside in works with no immediate and recognizable ethical contribution; that is, "precisely at the moment when theatre abandons ethics" (p. 70).

The performances discussed in this thesis seem to belong to that latter type of theatre Ridout describes. Without dealing directly with political and ethical themes, they evoke an ethics that does not usually meet the existing demands or expectations and that can be conceptualized through Bataille's line of thinking. In other words, by inviting an encounter with the unexpected and with what resides 'at the limits', this strand of postdramatic theatre educes a *meta*-ethical perspective of ethics that can be better approached through Bataille's thinking in dialogue with the notion of potentiality.

3. ethics of potentiality

For delving into the ethical implications of *l'informe* and of Bataille's overall philosophical thinking with the aim to trigger a clearer understanding of what I suggest considering an 'ethics of potentiality', it is important to present his view on the question of knowledge and its *shadow*, non-knowledge. It appears that "by inserting the moment of non-knowledge into the operation of knowledge" (Bataille, "*Le non-savoir*", as cited by Richardson, p. 181) the notion of potentiality emerges - in the sense that it was theorized by Agamben and previously discussed in this thesis -, which indicates an awareness and experience of one's own lack and insufficiency. In this sense, Bataille's salient refusal to embrace knowledge as a complete totality resonates on the ethical, pointing to a community that cannot be understood under the principle of a substance, an essence or a presupposition and that cannot always *function* effectively, as it often fails in performing its 'good' form.

It becomes clear from his numerous writings that Bataille was polemical to any understanding of knowledge as a closed and stable system of truth, arguing that it usually brings a servility and "an acceptance of a way of life in which each moment has meaning only in terms of another, or of others which will follow" ("*Le non-savoir et le révolte*", as cited in Richardson, p. 171). And instead, he affirmed that the most constitutive part of knowledge is non-knowledge; hence, these two notions are not antithetical. Moreover, he considered that one's experience of non-knowledge being part of knowledge usually comes within unexpected and intense moments, writing that "the unknown is clearly always what is unforeseeable" ("*Non-savoir, rire et larmes*", as cited by Richardson, p. 172). For instance, extreme laughter is such a case, according to Bataille, because it can never be fully known as it mostly comes unexpectedly. Namely, one can find and distinguish various methods to set laughter off, but can never really know what *is* laughable. So, as he puts it "perhaps the domain of laughter is even definitively – at least this is how it seems to me – a closed one, to the extent that the laughable remains unknown and unknowable" ("*Non-savoir, rire et larmes*", as cited by Richardson, p. 172). The unknown is, thus, for Bataille also what brings anguish, because it exposes the impossibility of arriving to an understanding of some conclusive

knowledge and it marks an experience of the 'limits'. As a result, Bataille argues, this confrontation induces discomfort and a sense of “ecstatic loss of knowledge” (*Le coupable*, as cited by Richardson, p. 175), which suggests a shattering and intense experience of lack that manifests itself within knowledge.

In view of this background, it becomes needless to note that Bataille's understanding of the unknown, as the experience of the unforeseeable and of the extreme limits that bring anguish, resonates with the performances discussed in this thesis. Namely, evoking an experience of the extreme limits of meaning-full language (that elicits a crisis of reason), of the humanness of the body (that elicits a *proto*-posthuman thinking) and of one's understanding of and presence within time (that elicits an experience of potentiality), is the impact of dramaturgical operations that, as I have shown, induces discomfort, agitation and doubt, and, thus, opens up the zone of the unknown within knowledge. Hence, on the basis of Bataille's thinking, such dramaturgies of formlessness can be considered to offer an experience of the domain of knowledge being incomplete, in relation to the audience's expectations. Notably, the notion of 'incompleteness' can be easily considered as a condition that strives for 'completeness'. However, within the philosophical perspective of potentiality, this nuance of the term is contested.

Therefore, Nancy's, Blanchot's and Agamben's notions of community can be helpful for exploring what incompleteness hereby suggests. Their studies even intersect, each one being attuned to Bataille's line of thinking in its own way. Blanchot's and Nancy's in particular also weave together a dialogue that extends Bataille's thoughts onto the domain of the ethical. To be more specific, Nancy's (1982/2006) notion of the *inoperative community* echoes an ethics of 'being-in-common', which suggests that what men, as singularities, share is their own shattering experience of finitude and mortality, that causes a rupture from within. Hence, Nancy holds that community is “given” to us on the basis of finitude and of the sense of rupture we have in common, and need not be produced or done by the state or other attributes (p. 35); what is still needed, though, is an operational thinking about community, “of its insistent and possibly still unheard demand, beyond communitarian models or remodelings” (p. 22). In a similar tone, Blanchot (1983/1988) talks about the *unavowable community*, alluding as well to a community of interrupted, fragmented and suspended singularities, that “makes us responsible for new relationships, always threatened, always

hoped for, between what we call work, *oeuvre*, and what we call unworking, *désœuvrement*" (p. 56). In other words, Blanchot also draws an emphasis upon the experience of one's own finitude, incompleteness and potentiality, inviting further reflection onto this direction of ethics. His notion of 'unworking' in particular resonates on *l'informe's* process of 'undoing', both being operations (negative performatives) that produce a sense of incompleteness from within 'work' and from within the 'good' form of each thing. And finally, Agamben's *coming community* (1990/2007) is inhabited by the "whatever" singularities, who are thought to experience a being-with each other without the need to affirm an identity, or "a representable condition of belonging" (p. 86). In this sense, ethics is understood by Agamben as "*the simple fact of one's own existence as possibility or potentiality*" (italics in the text, p. 42). He, thus, proposes to consider the fact of life we have in-common as the *topos* on which potentiality and actuality meet, in the sense that one is always in relation to one's own incapacity.

With the echo of the above thoughts - that can also be regarded as invitations for further thought - I suggest considering the dramaturgies of formlessness examined hereby operations with an additional task; that is, the task of evoking an ethics of potentiality. As we have seen, the experience of potentiality refers to being able of one's own potentiality and impotence at the same time, which in fact launches an ethics of thinking and questioning ethics itself. Alluding to Aristotle, Agamben (1990/2007) makes a significant clarification with regard to potentiality, which can help disentangling what I hereby suggest. He thus remarks that potentiality to-be has a specific activity as object (*energein*, being-in-act), whereas in the potentiality to not-be the activity does not simply derive from potentiality; rather, the object of potentiality is potentiality itself (pp. 34-35). To clarify further, Agamben also invokes Aristotle's articulation of this theory within the faculty of thought, demonstrating how in the potentiality to not-be "passion and action coincide" (p. 36). As he explains through Aristotle's *De Anima*, thought is the manifestation of potentiality to-think and to not-think, since thought doesn't always pass into the act.

Thanks to this potentiality to not-think, thought can turn back to itself (to its pure potentiality) and be, at its apex, the thought of thought. What it thinks here, however, is not an object, a being-in-act [...] but its own passivity, its own pure potentiality (to not-think). (p. 36)

In analogy to this point, I therefore propose to understand ethics of potentiality as a *meta-*ethics, that suggests an understanding of ethics as having the potentiality to not-be ethical

(ethical, in the sense of following existing moral principles), which then indicates that the domain of ethics cannot simply be determined by moralistic and logocentric rules and postulates. Rather, it shall be considered a domain that is 'given', as the aforementioned philosophers attest, merely on the basis of the event of life that is shared and that it consists of *whatever* singularities. Hence, being regarded as performances that “abandon ethics” (Ridout) or that are “amoral” (Lehmann) and non-ethical altogether, the works discussed in this thesis launch an ethics that evokes an experience of and engagement with potentiality. For instance, the encounter with the presence and language of the infant on that majestic marble stage in *Brussels#04*, educes an experience of the event of life as potentiality; that is, of the mere event of existence that is active in its own passivity. Namely, the infant is *just* being there, not having to perform something else than her being there – she is thus active and passive, inviting the audience to an experience of non-action and non-language as parts of action and language; impotentiality as part of actuality. And notably, this encounter elicits a sense of excess and incompleteness at the same time, as the presence of the infant within the aesthetic logic of this performance exceeds and, hence, leaves dissatisfied the audience's expectations about who, what and how one should perform on stage.

It is therefore in this way that *l'informe* in theatre also invites the audience to an experience of thought and non-thought, that resonates on ethics. By invoking the unexpected, the incomplete and the excessive, it namely induces the potentiality to self-reflexively think about how one thinks, which suggests re-considering and questioning one's own faculty of thinking. So, the question of the ethical opens up from within thought to its own (im)potentiality, at the same time announcing its impossibility to be pinned down in terms of firm presuppositions and principles. *L'informe* in theatre thus launches an ethics as the experience of thought itself; namely, an ethics that is at all times in relation to its own openness.

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Summary

This thesis discusses radical aesthetic strategies that appear in contemporary performances, with the aim to examine how they 'work' and what their impact is. More precisely, it studies particular aesthetic strategies that derive from recent performances by the Italian theatre company Societas Raffaello Sanzio and by the Flemish director Jan Fabre. Considering them exemplary cases for this strand of theatre, as their work is very influential and is still being presented and considered radical today, this thesis argues that they evoke intense experience, seeking to communicate with the audience in excessive ways. Their performances are, namely, characterized by radical dramatic forms, such as extreme, cryptic and at times disturbing uses of texts, bodies, rhythms, voice and sounds on stage. More specifically, this thesis concentrates on aesthetic choices that appear in their works and deal with the themes and conditions of infancy and animality, marking a *zone* that is not determined by language as discourse and that in many ways resists to perform according to western linear, anthropocentric and logocentric expectations of the audience. In other words, such strategies invite the audience to a confrontation with the unexpected and the unfamiliar, therefore showing a dramaturgical significance that I believe demands careful and separate examination.

A resistance to perform according to western patterns of perception and cognition and to deductive expectations appears often in contemporary theatre through radical and excessive aesthetic forms. And such performances are generally considered to be "difficult" (Lehmann, 1999/2006, p. 19), because they confront their audiences with the unexpected and cannot be easily assimilated by normative grids of understanding. Theatre scholar H. T. Lehmann discusses this strand of dramaturgical choices extensively in his study *Postdramatisches Theater* (1999), contributing with a significant historical and cultural analysis on recent aesthetic developments in theatre. But the question I deal with is: does Lehmann's study offer sufficient conceptual tools to sustain an in-depth investigation of the implications and the impact of radical and excessive aesthetics?

This thesis, thus, launches a prolific dialogue with Lehmann's study but at the same time proposes to turn to and theorize the notion of the *l'informe* (the formless) as it was conceived

by G. Bataille (1929) and was developed as a conceptual tool for visual arts by theorists Y. A. Bois and R. Krauss in *Formless – A User's Guide* (1997). The latter authors paid special attention to the structural *function* of this notion and, in order to examine it further in relation to modern visual arts, retained four operations of *l'informe*, which are significant for this thesis. These are: Base Materialism, Horizontality, Pulse and Entropy. On the basis of the above conceptualizations, I therefore suggest that an insightful analysis of radical aesthetic and dramaturgical choices is rendered possible through the 'lens' of *l'informe*, which concentrates on how they 'work' and what their implications and impact are.

To be more explicit, Bataille used the concept of form to indicate something that is ontologically described and classified. In his short text on the notion of the formless ("L'informe" in 'Dictionnaire', *Documents*, 1929) he associated form with deductive thinking and epistemological knowledge. And at the same time, by using the formless as one example among many others, he sought to deconstruct the one-to-one logic of a dictionary by demonstrating how words escape firm definitions. For instance, the ontological question about the formless, '*what is something without a form?*' can only remain unanswered. And, as he suggested, it is rather a word the meaning of which resides greatly on its "task", on its "job" (in French: *la besonge*), on what it *does* to form. Consequently, it appears that the formless has a "task" and is therefore *doing* and *producing* something, which shows that *l'informe* is an operation, a performative. But what is it that it *does*?

With a view to pinpointing its particular type of performativity, it needs to be noted that in French the word *informe* has a double signification, that is very much reflected in Bataille's use of the term: on the one hand it refers to something without a determined form and on the other hand, it indicates that something is imperfect, ugly and flawed. As it is explained at length in the thesis, Bataille's understanding of *l'informe* emphasizes both of these aspects, considering it a notion that serves to declassify; as he puts it in his text on *l'informe*, "to bring things down in the world" (as translated by Bois & Krauss, 1997/1999, p. 5). Bois and Krauss (1997/1999) offer a useful clarification of this point, observing that to declassify is to say that the formless is an operation with the task of undoing the 'good' form; or else, of generating the 'bad' form of things and, thus, suspending their logocentric meaning (p. 108). So, *l'informe* is an operation of contaminating the 'good' form with the 'bad' form of things from within. In

a more philosophical and political context, philosopher B. Manchev with his book *L'altération du monde* (2009) also highlights the Bataille's notion's operational task of undoing, remarking that *l'informe* undoes regimes of power and authority (p. 95). It becomes, thus, needless to say that the performativity of the formless is to be understood through its operational task not of doing something to form, but of undoing the form and performing 'less' than what is expected from it. *L'informe* can be therefore considered an operation showing a negative performativity, as its productivity resides on the task of undoing. And this undoing is the "task" Bataille brings to the fore.

The title of the thesis is also to be understood within the aforementioned context. *Performless* is namely not a word that is hereby introduced as a new concept; it does not mean something in a strict sense. Instead, it is a word that introduces a *play*: it brings together different aspects of *l'informe* (in English: the formless) and performance that are discussed in this thesis by italicizing the term 'form' and making it functional in more than one ways (perform-less, formless, perform). In this way, the interesting relationship between the notions 'perform' and 'formless' is launched and becomes a subject of examination.

This thesis, thus, conceptualizes the notion of *l'informe* for the context of postdramatic theatre, suggesting to consider certain dramaturgical strategies *operations of formlessness* and arguing that they have an impact on the domain of the ethical. To this end, a particular focus on the work of philosophers J. Derrida and G. Agamben is conducted, as their theories vividly resonate on Bataille's operation of *l'informe* and shed light on exploring the impact on the ethical. More specifically:

The first chapter examines the historical influences and different aspects of this strand of theatre and studies the notion of *l'informe* in its various uses and conceptualizations, in order to present where this thesis 'stands' and how it 'works', as well as to weave the important notions and elements together, allowing for a prolific theorization of *l'informe* within postdramatic theater to be launched.

The second chapter explores specific dramaturgical uses of language that have appeared in recent performances by Raffaello Sanzio and Fabre, suggesting to consider them operations of 'base materialism'. It analyzes usages of signs and voice on stage that, as it is demonstrated, can be frustrating and confusing for the audience because they radically resist logocentric

meaning. And instead, it is argued that they expose the 'exteriority' and scatological aspect of language, evoking an experience of the extreme limits of meaning and, thus, a crisis of reason.

In the third chapter, cases of human and nonhuman animals *sharing* the stage are examined in works of the same artists, which launch an aesthetic logic that resists the audience's expectations for seeing 'the human' body on stage and induce ambivalence and irritation. It is argued that these cases can be considered dramaturgical operations of horizontality, because they 'lower' the *humanness* of the human body and unsettle the hierarchy between human and nonhuman animals in the realm of theatre. As a result, they evoke a *proto*-posthuman thinking, which indicates a critical re-consideration of what *is* human.

Cases of excessive repetition in the works of the same artists are studied in the last chapter, which are thought to induce an experience of time as pulsation. Namely, it is claimed that such dramaturgies of time evoke intense corporeal responses and can be considered operations of pulsation that resist an understanding of time as linear and homogeneous, activating instead a dynamic and sensorial engagement. On the basis of such engagement with time, an experience of potentiality is induced, suggesting a radical *openness* to the unexpected.

And finally, in the Conclusion, the theorization of *l'informe* is summarized, showing that this strand of performances has an impact on the ethical. After an investigation of the relationship between contemporary theatre and ethics, it is therefore suggested that the performances discussed in this thesis launch the possibility for a *meta*-ethical ethics, which I propose to call 'ethics of potentiality'.

Samenvatting

Deze thesis bespreekt radicale esthetische strategieën die worden ingezet in hedendaagse performances met als doel te onderzoeken hoe deze strategieën ‘werken’ en wat hun impact is. Specifiek wordt ingegaan op bepaalde esthetische strategieën die aanwezig zijn in recente performances van het Italiaanse theatergezelschap Societas Raffaello Sanzio en de Vlaamse regisseur Jan Fabre. Ervan uitgaande dat deze performances exemplarisch zijn voor deze soorttheater, omdat hun werk van grote invloed is en nog altijd wordt gepresenteerd en als radicaal wordt beschouwd, stelt deze thesis dat zij een intense ervaring teweegbrengen, al zoekende naar exorbitante wijzen van communiceren met het publiek. Hun voorstellingen worden namelijk gekarakteriseerd door radicale dramatische vormen, zoals extreem, cryptisch en soms verontrustend gebruik van teksten, lichamen, ritmes, stemgeluid en klanken op het toneel. In het bijzonder concentreert deze thesis zich op de esthetische keuzes in hun werk die betrekking hebben op de thema’s en omstandigheden van kindsheid en dierlijkheid, die zo een *zone* aanduiden die niet wordt bepaald door taal als discours en die op vele manieren weigert zich te gedragen in overeenkomst met de westerse lineaire, antropocentrische en logocentrische verwachtingen van het publiek. Met andere woorden, dergelijke strategieën nodigen de toeschouwer uit tot een confrontatie met het onverwachte en het onbekende en derhalve geven zij blijk van een dramaturgische significantie die, volgens mij, vraagt om een zorgvuldige en op zichzelf staande bestudering ervan.

Een weerstand om volgens westerse patronen van perceptie en cognitie en deductieve verwachtingen op te treden, manifesteert zich vaak in hedendaagse performances door middel van radicale en excessieve esthetische vormen. Dergelijke performances worden doorgaans als “moeilijk” beschouwd (Lehmann, 1999/2006, p.19), omdat ze hun toeschouwers confronteren met het onverwachte en omdat ze niet gemakkelijk kunnen worden begrepen volgens normatieve schema’s van betekenisgeving. Theaterwetenschapper H.T. Lehmann bespreekt deze soort dramaturgische keuzes zeer uitgebreid in zijn boek *Postdramatisches Theater* (1999), waarin hij een significante historische en culturele analyse van recente esthetische ontwikkelingen in het theater biedt. De vraag die ik echter aan de orde wil stellen, is: biedt Lehmanns studie voldoende conceptuele gereedschappen voor het uitvoeren van een diepgaand onderzoek naar de implicaties en de impact van [dergelijke] radicale en

excessieve esthetica?

Deze thesis brengt, aldus, een vruchtbare dialoog op gang met Lehmann's studie, maar tegelijkertijd wil het voorstellen om ons te wenden tot en het theoretiseren van het idee van *l'informe* of het *formless* (het vormloze), zoals het werd geconcipeerd door G. Bataille (1929) en verder werd ontwikkeld tot een conceptueel gereedschap ter analyse van de beeldende kunsten door de theoretici Y.A. Bois en R. Krauss in *Formless – A User's Guide* (1997). Deze laatste auteurs schonken in het bijzonder aandacht aan de structurele *functie* van dit begrip en, om het verder te kunnen onderzoeken in relatie tot de moderne beeldende kunsten, onderscheidden zij vier werkingen van *l'informe*, die van belang zijn voor deze thesis: *Base Materialism* (basis materialisme), *Horizontality* (horizontaliteit), *Pulse* (pulseren) en *Entropy* (entropie). Op basis van de bovenstaande conceptualiseringën wil ik voorstellen dat met het perspectief van *l'informe* een inzichtrijke analyse van radicale esthetische en dramaturgische keuzes mogelijk wordt die zich concentreert op hoe zij 'werken', wat de implicaties en de impact hiervan zijn.

Meer expliciet gezegd, gebruikte Bataille het concept 'vorm' om iets aan te duiden dat ontologisch is beschreven en gecategoriseerd. In zijn korte tekst over het idee van het vormloze ("L'informe" in 'Dictionnaire', *Documents*, 1929) associeerde hij vorm met deductief redeneren en epistemologische kennis. Tegelijkertijd, het *formless* als een van vele voorbeelden gebruikend, trachtte hij de één-op-één logica van een woordenboek te deconstrueren door te tonen hoe woorden aan vastomlijnde definities ontsnappen. Zo kan, bijvoorbeeld, de ontologische vraag naar het vormloze (the formless): 'wat is iets zonder een vorm?', enkel onbeantwoord blijven. Volgens hem, ligt de betekenis van dit woord eerder in zijn "taak", in zijn "functie" (in het Frans: *la besonge*): in wat het *doet* met de vorm [in plaats van wat het *is* zonder vorm]. Hieruit volgt dat het *formless* een 'taak' lijkt te hebben en dus iets *doet* en *produceert*, wat op zijn beurt toont dat *l'informe* een *performatief* is. Maar, wat is de *werking* ("operation") van *l'informe*? Wat is het dat het *doet*?

Met het oog op het vaststellen van deze bepaalde soort van performativiteit, is het nodig om op te merken dat het woord *informe* in het Frans een dubbele betekenis kent die duidelijk in Batailles gebruik van het begrip is terug te zien: enerzijds refereert het aan iets zonder een bepaalde vorm, anderzijds duidt het op iets dat imperfect, lelijk en gemankeerd is.

Zoals uitgebreid wordt uitgelegd in de thesis, benadrukt Batailles opvatting van *l'informe* deze beide aspecten, hij beschouwt het concept als een dat is bedoeld om te declassificeren; zoals hij zegt in zijn tekst over *l'informe*, "to bring things down in the world" (in de vertaling van Bois & Krauss, 1997/1999, p. 5). Bois en Krauss (1997/1999) bieden een bruikbare verduidelijking op dit punt met hun observatie dat met 'declassificeren' wordt gezegd dat het *formless* een werkingsproces is met als taak de 'goede' vorm ongedaan te maken, te 'on-doen' ("undoing the good form"); of anders gezegd, om de 'slechte' vorm van dingen te genereren en, zo, hun logocentrische betekenis op te schorten (p.108). Dus, *l'informe* kan worden begrepen als een werking waarin de 'goede' vorm van dingen van binnenuit met de 'slechte' vorm ervan wordt besmet. In een meer filosofische en politieke context, accentueert filosoof B. Manchev in zijn boek *L'altération du monde* (2009) ook de werking van het 'on-doen' in het Batailleaanse concept, waarbij hij opmerkt dat *l'informe* regimes van macht en autoriteit 'on-doet' (p. 95). De performativiteit van het *formless* moet, dus, begrepen worden vanuit diens taak om niet iets met de vorm te doen, maar juist de vorm ongedaan te maken en 'minder' te presteren ("performing 'less'") dan wat ervan wordt verwacht. *L'informe* kan dan worden opgevat als een werkingsproces die blijk geeft van een negatieve performativiteit, aangezien zijn productiviteit schuilt in de taak van het 'on-doen'. En dit 'on-doen' is de 'taak' die Bataille onder de aandacht brengt.

De titel van deze thesis dient ook binnen de hierboven genoemde context begrepen te worden. *Performless* is namelijk niet een woord dat hierbij als een nieuw concept wordt geïntroduceerd; het heeft in strikte zin geen betekenis. In plaats daarvan, verwijst deze titel naar een spel met woorden: het brengt de verschillende aspecten van *l'informe* (het *formless*) en performance die in deze thesis worden besproken samen door het woord 'form' te cursiveren en op deze manier op meer dan één manier te laten functioneren – *perform-less*, *formless*, *perform*. Op deze wijze wordt een interessante relatie tussen de noties 'perform' en 'formless' tot stand gebracht die vervolgens onderwerp van onderzoek kan worden.

In deze thesis wordt, kortom, het idee van *l'informe* binnen de context van postdramatisch theater geconceptualiseerd, waarbij wordt voorgesteld om bepaalde dramaturgische strategieën als 'werkingen' van *formlessness* te beschouwen en wordt beargumenteerd dat deze een impact hebben op het domein van het ethische. Om deze laatste reden wordt er

specifiek aandacht besteed aan het werk van de filosofen J. Derrida en G. Agamben, aangezien hun theorieën levendig resoneren met Bataille's idee van de taak van *l'informe* en een licht werpen op het verkennen van de impact op het ethische.

Preciezer geformuleerd:

Het eerste hoofdstuk onderzoekt de historische invloed en verschillende aspecten van deze soort theater en bestudeert de notie van *l'informe* en de verschillende wijzen waarop het gebruikt en getheoretiseerd wordt, om zowel het 'standpunt' van deze thesis aan te geven en zijn 'werking' te presenteren, als de belangrijke noties en elementen samen te brengen en zo een vruchtbare theoretisering van *l'informe* binnen het postdramatische theater te kunnen starten.

Het tweede hoofdstuk bestudeert bepaalde dramaturgische vormen van taalgebruik in recente performances van Raffaello Sanzio en Fabre die, zo wordt beargumenteerd, kunnen worden beschouwd als werkingen van *base materialism*. Bepaalde wijzen van het gebruik van gebaren en stemgeluid op het toneel worden geanalyseerd die, zoals zal worden aangetoond, frustrerend en verwarrend kunnen zijn voor het publiek, omdat ze radicaal weerstand bieden tegen een logocentrische betekenisgeving. Er wordt beargumenteerd, dat zij in plaats daarvan de 'uitwendigheid' en scatologische aspecten van taal blootleggen, waarmee ze een ervaring van de extreme grenzen van betekenis en, dus, een crisis van de rede teweegbrengen.

In het derde hoofdstuk worden voorbeelden in het werk van dezelfde kunstenaars van menselijke en niet-menselijk dieren die het toneel *delen*, onderzocht die een esthetische logica tot stand brengen, die ingaat tegen de verwachtingen van het publiek om 'het menselijk' lichaam op het podium te zien en ambivalente gevoelens en irritatie opwekt. Er wordt beargumenteerd dat deze voorbeelden als dramaturgische werkingen van horizontaliteit kunnen worden opgevat, omdat ze de *menselijkheid* van het menselijk lichaam 'verlagen' en de hiërarchie tussen mens en dier binnen theater op de helling zetten. Als een gevolg hiervan, roepen zij een *proto*-posthumaan denken op dat wijst op een kritische heroverweging van wat menselijk *is*.

Voorbeelden van excessieve herhaling in het werk van dezelfde kunstenaars die een ervaring van tijd als 'een pulseren' schijnen op te wekken, komen aan de orde in het laatste hoofdstuk. Er wordt namelijk gesteld, dat dergelijke dramaturgieën van tijd intense lichamelijke reacties teweegbrengen en dat ze kunnen worden beschouwd als werkingen van

pulseren die tegen een begrip van tijd als lineair en homogeen ingaan en in plaats daarvan een dynamische en zintuiglijke betrokkenheid activeren. Op basis van een dergelijke verbintenis met tijd wordt een ervaring van potentialiteit teweeggebracht, die lijkt te wijzen op een radicale *openheid* voor het onverwachte.

Tenslotte wordt in de conclusie de theoretisering van *l'informe* samengevat, waarbij wordt aangetoond dat deze soort van performances een impact heeft op het ethische. Nadat de relatie tussen hedendaags theater en ethiek is verkend, zal daarom worden beweerd dat de in deze thesis besproken performances de mogelijkheid voor een *meta*-ethische ethiek op gang brengen, waarvoor ik wil voorstellen deze 'een ethiek van potentialiteit' te noemen.

Vertaald door **Aukje Verhoog**