Ontology and anthropology of theater Lecture 1. Introduction to course

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Preliminary remarks

Today we are starting a course called “Ontology and Anthropology of the theater”. This course will be divided into three parts. We’ll talk about these three parts today, about each of them, one third of the time allotted to us, approximately corresponding to an academic double class.

First part (Ontology of theater): short description

In the beginning we will talk about the ontology of the theater. Ontology is the study of being. So, in the ontology of the theater, we will consider how the theater relates to such a major philosophical category as being. That is, if Martin Heidegger’s main work is “Sein und Zeit”: Sein – being and Zeit – time, “Being and time”. This is the main philosophical work of the XX century and perhaps one of the most important in the whole history of philosophy. Our course is dedicated to “Sein und Theater”, that is “Being and Theater”. So, theater will be for us the same problematical category as "being" for Heidegger. I would ask you in this regard to be rather concentrated, because the very concept of the course or the theme “Ontology of the theater” is not so clear, but we will comprehend the dark by something even darker – obscurus per obscurium – this is how any hermeneutics act, because, according to Schleiermacher and Dilthey, we cannot know the whole, therefore we cannot study parts; we cannot know the parts until we know the whole. We have only one thing left: to study the whole and the parts in parallel, going round in circles around the considered problem.

The same thing with being. We can walk around it and try to discover the ontology, that is, the study of being, and every time we say: “This is being, here it is – the Being, that’s being, this is, and this is not”, we are always talking about something particular, as if we understood what "is" means. If we start conversely: “There is pure being, everything has come out of it” - it also seems to us there, as if we understand what “pure being” is, although we deal only with parts. Accordingly, being is a problem. And in the ontology of the theater we will touch upon this issue. In the same way (but here is the most interesting), okay with being – it’s however philosophy, but it seems that we know what theater is. Here is the theater, the Moscow Art Theater. As Heidegger's Dasein, this-being, this-theater – Da-theater, that is, here it is. But, in fact, this is not right. And as Dasein is problematic, so is the theater. Accordingly, what theater is – we, frankly, do not know either. It’s better to agree with me right away that we don’t know, then everything will be more interesting. Who believes that he knows exactly what theater is – well, it certainly will be necessary to dispel a persistent delusion. Therefore, admit, agree, as a hypothesis, that we do not know what theater is. At least me. We will understand this together with you.

Second part (Anthropology of theater): short description

What about anthropology? Anthropology is the study of humans. The anthropology of the theater suggests how theatrical action, theatrical practice, theatrical theory, how the theater as a whole relates to human, what role a human plays in the theater, who is the actor and how he was called in different cultures and what his place is; who is the stage director, who is the screenwriter and who is the spectator. Because if we do not yet fully know what theater is, respectively, we do not know its humanistic, human filling and its parts. This is the second part of our course.

Third part (Desacralization and resacralization of theater): short description

And the third part of our course is desacralization and resacralization of the theater. This, in essence, is about the history of the theater, which begins with sacredness, that is, with sacred cults. The theater (ancient theater) is fundamentally sacred, it develops from the mysteries (we will also talk about that, what is the mystery). Gradually, it is becoming more and more desacralized. And at the end of the course we will approach the most important problem – is it possible to return to the sacred roots of the theater? That is, is it possible to save the theater from the history of the theater, because the history of the theater moves in the opposite direction from its original meaning. That is, we have a drama, there is a kind of intrigue in this course, there is a certain detective story. Therefore, instead of the banal story about something we all know, I will try to turn this course into the opening of more and more new horizons that we will explore with you.

Today I will give a brief summary of the entire course, about all these series, so I will be very brief. I won’t be able to explain, argue, give a sufficient number of examples. This is just a presentation of the course.

Part I. Ontology of theater: survey of epistemological field

θέατρον and θεωρία

Accordingly, the first part is ontology, ontology of the theater. From the very beginning, attention must be paid to etymology. Here we pronounce the word "theater", θέατρον, but since it is not native in our speech, then we immediately, I would say, rob ourselves semantically or better we are in full equivocation. Because we use the word of another (not Russian) language, where it has a specific meaning, we can never be sure we correctly understand its original meaning.

So the word "theater", θέατρον (театр in Russian) is formed from the Greek word "θεάομαι", that is "to contemplate." Hence the concept of "sight". The most accurate Russian analogue of the concept “theater” is «зрелище[1]» (from the word «зреть», «зрение»,») because “θεάομαι” means precisely «зреть»[2], «зрение»[3], «наблюдение» [4], «со-зерцать»[5], «видение» [6]. On the one hand, and, for example, the old forgotten word «позорище»[7], that initially meant sight and theater without pejorative connotation. This old-Russian, old- Slavonic word «позорище» means now someone subjected to shameful punishment, disgrace, exhibited in the center of the city or village in sleazy appearance, tormented etc. In general, this exhibition of disgrace is closely connected with the theater, with the spectacle, with sight.

Another word that is derived from the same Greek root "θεάομαι " is " θεωρία " - that is theory. In fact, this is not just harmony, it is a unity of understanding obtained by contemplation.

Why - I will explain now. Theory ("θεωρία " in Greek) means the same contemplation, the same sight, the same spectacle. Therefore, in fact, “theory” and “theater” are very close things. In both “theater” and “theory” we contemplate so we are implementing the “θεάομαι” act - we see, we look. “Well, why,” you say, “what does the theater have to do (when the actors portray something on the stage and the others laugh or cry) with a philosopher or a scientist who makes up some abstract, theoretical constructions?” It is very important to pay attention to the hierarchy of sensory organs with which the ancient Greeks dealt, with whom philosophy was born, and almost simultaneously – theater.

Namely theater and philosophy are the same age. In ancient Greece, they appear at about the same time. Full-fledged philosophy and θεωρία, as the main speculation, the main method of philosophy and – theater, θέατρον (Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides and the others -- (classical theater). This is approximately the same historical cycle.

Hierarchy of senses in Aristotle

So, " θεωρία", which is the basis of philosophy, and "contemplation" are associated with the theater. So, it is very interesting, why the highest peak of philosophy as contemplation, speculation is associated with the theater? And this, in its turn, has a very deep idea. Firstly, Aristotle said that the sense organs have a hierarchy. Thus some sensations are more noble than the others.

Those that are more noble are more relevant to being (and now we are approaching the ontology of the theater). And those that are less noble are further away from being and from substance, and more and more material.

There are 5 sensory organs (at least the Greeks mapped this way, made such assemblage if we use Deleuze’s term).

The supreme sensory organ was sight. Why (from Aristotle's point of view)? Because we see lightning at first, and then we only hear the thunder. That which is seen at the longest distance, that which is seized faster, is closer to the world of the gods, swift and light.

And what we hear later, what we perceive closer to our body relates to the animal world, to stones, to vegetative and mineral roots of being. Accordingly, being in its pure, divine form is associated with vision. And the hierarchy of feelings goes like this:

1. first comes sight (according to Aristotle),

2. then there is hearing (because we hear thunder secondarily),

3. then comes the sense of smell (the smell of the sacrificial fire), by the way, the smoke of the sacrificial fire is the basis of the Greek concept of “God”, “θεός.” This has nothing to do with (just a consonance) with “θεάομαι”, it’s not about eyesight, but it’s about inhaling the aroma of the sacrificial animal (θύω). “θεός” that is, God is revealed to us on the other side of the fire of fire, smoke comes from it, and God, who tastes this smoke, is there (ἐκεῖ), in open space, on the other side of the smoke, on that side that is directed to him. This is the third feeling.

4. The fourth feeling is the tactile sense. We perceive a tactile touch only when the source of this is in close proximity to us, and we can smell the smell in advance.

5. And last, the basest sense is taste. Look, you can already see how today the hierarchy is turned upside down. After all, we basically start with whether it is tasty or not, aftertaste, then tactile feeling, then smells, lotions, perfumes. And we leave for the last turn what we hear and what we see.

The ancient Greeks had the opposite order. And here a very interesting point arises: how is this hierarchy of the sensory world (and the sensual world is called “aesthetics” in Greek). What is αἴσθησις, aesthesis? These are feelings. Actually, aesthetics is a concept about the sensory world, about it organization). And so, aesthetic organization of the sensory world is built on this hierarchical vertical. And here is the most interesting. Which of these feelings, of these sense organs is more connected with being, more connected with what truly exists? Here, the hierarchy of these feelings clearly indicates that above all exists what we see. Secondly, what we hear. Thirdly - what we smell. Fourthly – what touches us. And only fifthly – what we swallow and what is inside us, inside our bodies. And this means that the taste is less than a touch, the smell is more than a touch (at the next level). Sound is even more (has more being). And the highest being is sight.

This optic reveals what θεωρία, speculation, and contemplation actually are. At root, this is the relation to being. That is, through θεωρία, through contemplation, through emphasizing our ability to see being, we come closer to its essence.

Aristotle limits his sensory world hierarchy on this; thereby he completes the review of aesthetic structures that are associated not only with aesthetics, but also with philosophy, with ontology, with gnoseology.

ἰδέα seen by Plato and Plotinus

But Plato (the teacher of Aristotle), depicts an even more complete, finally clear picture. His ideas are endowed with maximum being. Ideas are some disembodied material essences, which are examples of all things in our world – i.e. aesthetic world, corporeal, sensual world. This is the main ​​Plato’s message – the doctrine of ideas. Ideas exist forever, they are patterns, they are projected into the world of becoming and give rise to all sorts of things that are temporary and which are subject to the law of birth and downfall, death. And ideas exist eternally.

But what does theory have to do with it? Here we turn again to etymology. For us, “idea” (ἰδέα) is a word of foreign language. We never think what it means. Or think, but rarely. But in fact, an idea is a passive participle from the verb εἴδω (I see), that is, the same meaning as “θεάομαι”. That is, ideas are what we see. And that’s it.

From this it is clear that what we see exists in first place; what we hear exists less; the fact that we smell is even less; what we feel is even less; and what we feel inside (taste) exists to an even lesser extent. Here we understand how the epistemological and ontological hierarchy is built.

Ideas (according to Plato) are what is. These are not the thoughts of a person in the head, this is what always existed, exist and will exist. Thoughts come and go. Or don’t come. But anyway for Plato, ideas are not human thoughts, but what a thinking person is able to contemplate at the very peak of being. This is not an ordinary vision, but a kind of special vision. In the Eleusinian Mysteries, it is embraced by the concept of “ἐποπτεία”, another term associated with vision.

ἐποπτεία (from ἐπί – on, and ὀπτῐκή act of seeing, from ὄψ, eye) is when the gaze drifts deep into being, at the being itself, to the divine eternal sphere of light – then a certain discovery of the very essence of what there is arises. Only through this concentrated exclusive intense vision we come into contact with being. Being and vision are inextricably linked.

Further we are talking about the hierarchy of vision. And here Plotinus helps us. Because he believes that there is correct vision, and there is incorrect vision. Correct vision is vision with closed eyes, because what to look at in this world? - This world only confuses us.

Therefore, vision is divided into profan false vision (but still more noble than other senses) and sacred true vision that occurs (with closed eyes).

What does it mean – “to see with closed eyes”? It means that our gaze should be immersed in ourselves, in our immortal soul, in our archetype, in the idea of ​​ourselves. And in this contemplation of gaze shift (but of the gaze, and not of another sense) inward, we overcome the boundaries of corporal, aesthetic vision and go on to speculation[8], to a special form of perception of being, which is associated with speculation, with the vision of the mind, with smart vision.

And the moment of ἐποπτεία in the Eleusis mysteries is when the deity is revealed by mysts (μύστης) and neophytes (νεόφυτος) who undergo this initiation. This is the moment of ἐποπτεία, again, of vision, sight, discovery of some kind of not ordinary object, but a certain scene, situation, or phenomenon, which is fundamentally there.

In fact, the goal of philosophy is the contemplation of being. But contemplation of being in its pure form is extremely difficult, because in order to see being in its pure form, it is necessary to cross the boundaries of those spaces, those sections of reality, where being is scattered in many objects. This is the aspiration for unity. Such an internal movement to consciousness in order to see the absent, transcendental One (Ἕν) - this is the true contemplation and true goal of philosophy.

Theater and vision

How does this relate to the theater? There is a direct connection. Theater is the place where philosophical theory (θεωρία) is realized. Namely, theater, θέατρον is a place of philosophy, this is a place of contemplation. And we would hardly come to the theater (ok, as for us, we might come), but hardly the ancient Greeks would have come to the theater if they had seen there something ordinary, something banal, something trivial, that is everywhere. They came there for the sight. And the sight, the source of the sight, the meaning of the sight is the contemplation of being.

Therefore, the ancient Greeks came to the theater to contemplate being. Hence, theater is something philosophical; it is the field of speculation. And it is in this sense (later, in the Renaissance and earlier by Petronius) that we meet such definitions as “Mundus universus exercet histrioniam” (this is in Latin), i.e. the universal world, everything in the world is a game of actors. So this phrase by Petronius is translated, and then the well-known Shakespearean phrase from "The Merchant of Venice", that "all the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players". Why is that so? Where does this metaphor come from? Why was Shakespeare’s theater called the Globe? Just because it’s actually a theater, any theater is a globe or “mundus”. It is the World, it is the "universus". This universus, of course, would never fit into any walls if it were a physical, plural world.

This is the paradigm of the world; it is his idea of ​​world that is embedded in the theater. Hence its sacred meaning: we bring the entirety of being into one small stage, into one limited amount of time. It is a contraction of being to its concentrated expression.

Sacredness of theater

Naturally, this requires a completely unique situation. The theater in its origins was a sacrament, the sacrament of discovering the contemplation of idea. And, accordingly, it was the Globe, it was the World, a more real one than the external world. It seems to us that theater is a reflection of life. Nothing of the kind, the theater never served as a reflection of life, of the world, it didn’t never show ordinary people, and what was happening to them; the theater never was a mirror. The theater was an emanating beam of being.

The theater created and made the World. The theater put the content in life, in history, in politics, in culture. The theater is the place of cosmogony, when the small germ of the World only begins to reveal its fullness at its first stages. In other words, the theater is an absolutely philosophical phenomenon, a sacred phenomenon, where the whole Universe is reduced to this building, albeit a large one (amphitheater). The whole universe is packed into theater, and this is possible if we understand the theater as an idea (as a place of contemplating ideas, as a spectacle). That is, the ontology of the theater is that the theater is the territory of being. Not a narrative of something, but the territory of being in itself, in a condensed, concentrated form.

The theater not only helps to close our eyes and look inside ourselves, but the theater makes us look inside ourselves. Because what happens on the stage, the right plays of the right theater, it’s happening inside our minds. This is our path to ourselves, to our origins. This World is pulled together into the theater and the being is gathered into our inner contemplation. Therefore, we didn’t come here to look outside (this can be done without theater). We come to the theater to glance inward. This is a place of insight, a place of introspection, a collective, well-organized, but introspection.

Secret life of scenic decorations (confuse-a-cat)

Well, and accordingly, we can say that the theater reproduces the world also in the simplest, most straightforward sense. The stage on which the action is played is the earth, and the earth is not only a stand for the human, or for houses, or for pets, the earth is such a living thing, it is a deity in Greece, therefore the scene (or podium) is sacred as sacred is the land. The sky, from which the figure of the deity often descends, deus ex machina (in contemporary theater – and civilization -- this metaphor is largely used too literally), is actually the place of ideas, the place of the upper layers of being, to which we rise. And the action itself takes place between heaven and earth. They are extremely important in the theater.

These are not just utility tools. Each history of the stage, decoration, organization of theatrical space behind the stage, around the stage, on stage is of tremendous importance, since it reflects the structure of the world.

But not only reflects. It reflects, looking not at the world, but looking at the origins of the world. Thus, the theatrical scenery that we see (these columns made of papier-mâché, some pictures of flat houses, with open windows) are stage-properties and we see that this is not real. Now, if we understand what theater is, we will understand that these papier-mâché columns, these artificial stones, these flat decorations are more alive than a real house.

That, in the end, a real house -- with its walls, with its huge number of workers, costs, constantly breaking pipes, with its chaos and baseness, in which there’s nothing to look at -- it is created for some of the lowest bodily needs. But the theatrical sketch of the windows, this flat picture gives us a map of being. It's a πανοἶκος («house of all») -- the archetype of the house that is so lightly sketched here on the stage. Why do we need to see these real columns? After all, the task is not to feel them, to nibble these columns. We are not dogs (we would have another course dedicated to pets…). There is still no theater for dogs, cats (although, as I know, there are already attempts to stage such performances for animals[9]). But still we are humans, and therefore we don’t come to nibble and to try theatrical scenery for strength and vividness. It is enough for us to see them. And, having seen them, we will understand the existence of the column, we will understand the existence of the window, we will understand the existence of the house, the wall, the car, the bicycle – whatever we notice (even though it will be one gesture, one element) – contemplating it, we see through some fractal analogue (in modern theater) the idea that stands behind it.

Therefore, this theater props are more real than the objects of our life. This is precisely what follows from the ontology of the theater that we are talking about.

Theater and topology of Hell

Another very important point is the moment of ἐποπτεία in the Eleusinian mysteries, the moment of the revelation of the highest sacrament, which was practically forbidden to communicate to other Greeks who passed this initiation into the Eleusinian mysteries. It happened in crypts, usually at night and in craters. That is, in order to pass the initiation, it was necessary to go down deep into the earth, because there, away from views of the crowd, from the profans, from the day, the true ideas of being are sleeping. In fact, this descent into the earth, deep, deep into mystery, is symmetrical to the ascent(as described by Plato in «Phaedrus») of the chariot of the Gods to contemplate eternal Being beyond the bounds of heaven. This is the achievement of two polar points, two solstices, summer and winter – both of these points are the moments of entry into the mystery.

And one of the stable elements of theatrical architecture is the organization of the amphitheater on the principle of concentric descending circles. What does this resemble? Well, if we take Dante, then this obviously looks like Hell. But don’t be so afraid right away. Hell is just Hades, Aides, the realm of invisible life of afterdeath. And, accordingly, the theater, the theater hall imitates the dedicatory space of the descent into the territory of the Mysteries, that is, the descent to the center of Hell. The scene, the actor, the action – the objects of our contemplation, "θεάομαι", "θέατρον" – belong to the center of Hell. It is to it, to the center of Hell, that the fullness of being is gathered together. And, accordingly, if we look at the architecture itself (the Moscow Art Theater or any other theater), we will see these concentric circles, which gradually, gradually come down.

Therefore, in fact, the sites in parterre are not the best places, the best sites are the lodge (i.e still a little higher). Parterre is a certain bottom of Hell. Accordingly, the gallery is much more attractive, it was there that the royal lodges or Politbureau members loges were organized (as in the Moscow Art Theater there is a remarkable historical place where Brezhnev was sitting, not in the parterre, but in the lodge). And the kings and noble people also sat in the box. This is a descent, there is a good view but still a certain distance from the center of Hell remains.

Theater – place where people is born

So, if we talk about the ontology of the theater – what we come to is that in the first part of our course we will successively examine and disassemble this connection between theater and being. Accordingly, we can speak in detail about, let’s say, the ontology of scenery, the ontology of the stage, theatrical architecture, the spectacle itself, in other words, about the varieties and structures of contemplation. People who go to the theater come for initiation into the mystery. It may not be the mystery itself, but it is some analogue of it, an indirect analogue.

Perhaps one can imagine that the theater was a preparatory part for the mystery. If you went to Greece (Ancient Greece), you may have noticed the following pattern (even in we consider Delphi and other sacred places): there are often sanctuary, theater and stadium. And they were built, as a rule, together in the structure of unified complex. The sacred temple for sacrifices, the theater and the stadium - were the three elements where Greece was created, where Greek philosophy was created, where all the citizens, real, aristocratic citizens of the Greek Polis, came to be a people.

In the theater, as well as in the temple, as well as at the stadium, was created the people. The Greeks from individuals, from householders, from representatives of some classes and professions, coming to the theater turned into something united. In fact, it was a place of affirmation of a collective entity. The Greek Polis was born in the theater. Later[10], Voltaire said that a “nation is born in parterre”. But there was almost no parterre in the Greek theaters (the parterre is a certain horizontal), but the Greek πόλις – Greek people were born in these theaters, as in the amphitheater. This is the matrix of the birth of the people, the πόλις, the unity, which, contemplating the sacrament, contemplating the being, becomes what it is.

Hence the great importance of the theater in terms of simply endowing the people with its content. It didn’t reflect anything. It communicated that which in everyday life, none of the Greek inhabitants of the πόλις knew, didn’t see, didn’t meet. The theater tells us not just what there is, but what there is in the highest sense, what must be, what is in secret, what really exists. Namely, philosophy according to Heidegger is the search for truth. And the truth is “αλήθεια” (in Greek), that is, something “not hidden”. In ordinary life, the truth is hidden for us, we forget about it. We come to the theater for the truth, for “αλήθεια”. In order to remember everything that was forgotten or that we did not know at all. Our earthly life is but a short delay between two immense eternal amounts of time – but we know nothing about them. Let us take into account the Platonic idea that souls exist before birth, and then we forgot all about it, because at the moment of incarnation the soul drinks a cup of oblivion. The theater reminds us that we forgot at birth or never knew in life. That which we do not encounter.

The theater creates the world, creates the people. It does not reflect, does not represent. It is very important.

To see is to create (and to be seen)

This is also associated with the ophthalmological theory of philosophy, because there are two conceptions about vision in Greece. The first is that our eye reflects the outside world (just reflects, is a mirror), as they think today, but Plato believed that it was not at all -- our eye is what creates visible space. Our eye emits rays. And in this regard, it does not see what is outside, but it creates within its act of vision this reality; that is philosophical vision that pierces the thickness of the multitude and sees unity beyond its borders. Therefore, in fact, on the one hand, we come to the theater to see, that is, to contemplate, but on the other hand, we come to the theater to be seen, wishing that eye, that vision, those ideas that are presented, performed on the stage, as in the center of the world, in the center of a mysterious crypt, to get sight of us.

Therefore, in fact, the question of who is the actor here, who is the spectator (pay attention to it), the contemplating spectator, the speculator, that is, which of us is an actor, and who is the spectator, is still to be proved, because the very idea that being and sight, appearance are one and the same thing, immediately and abruptly places us in a completely different phenomenology.

Part II. Anthropology of theater: survey of epistemological field

Chorus at the origin of anthropology of theater

Now we move on to the second topic: theater, part two. Here I will say two words about the history of the theater.

We know that the individual actor (ὑποκριτής in Greek, histrio in Latin) did not appear form the very start. In the beginning there was a chorus, χορός on the stage. The choruses partially expressed what was happening with chants, dances, gesture (le gestuel in French), body language, communicated some information to us with different poses, and, on the other hand, for the most part, they sang about what they wanted to tell us.

The chorus is the source of histrionic being. The anthropology of the theater takes its source also from the chorus. A chorus that is not partitioned (very important); yet non-divided into different figures of actors chorus; the chorus itself. Why was this so important? Because the general precedes the individual in classical concept of very nature of man.

A chorus sings in unison, as a rule, or two choruses, if you take satire (i.e. comedy), representing usually angelic, divine or demonic creatures. These creatures tell the audience about what? About gods and heroes.

τράγος and κῶμος

Speaking of gods and heroes, either in a serious, tragic form, as in a tragedy, or in a mocking form, as in a comedy. Both have a direct relationship with the cult of Dionysus, because the “song of the goat”– τράγος is he-goat, ᾠδή – chant -- is considered to be original meaning of the very name “tragedy”, τραγῳδία, the goat personified the god Dionysus who was victimized. κῶμος, from which the word "comedy" (κωμῳδία – where we encounter once more ᾠδή – chant) came from, was a group of winy, drunken men who came from the Dionysian processions. And, very interestingly, the κῶμος always embodied satyrs who were already drunk enough for not being afraid, not to observe any regulations, and in fact, they behaved ugly: they allowed themselves dirty jokes, molested women, broke things, demanded more wine, but, unlike ordinary drunkards (those unpleasant who were called “шпана” (hooligans) in Soviet times, I don’t know how they are called now), the κῶμος was such drunken fellows, accompanied by the god Dionysus himself.

Imagine, there is a group of people who, if deprived of this divinity, this sacredness, will most likely cause disgust, fear, because their actions are unpredictable, they are chaotic, malicious, excited, completely uncontrollable. But in this κῶμος, besides the dark side, there was also a divine side, because among them, under the guise of the same drunk young man or old man, god himself was walking. This presence of god in the κῶμος transformed the meaning of comedy, the sense of the κῶμος itself. In fact, the meaning of comedy is a very subtle, divine irony that does not mock or stigmatize social sins or different kinds of injustices. Real comedy is the highest art of staying on the edge, being exactly between the wild outburst of animal passions, the infernal impulse, powerfully transmitted outside, and the extremely divine refinement, which preserves measure in everything, because the difference between god and titan is that god does not have ὕβρις (another important term). ὕβρις is a sin of the titans. ὕβρις is the lack of tact. The titans have no tact. If they start tossing stones, they can’t stop until they make havoc of everything. If someone is attacked, then they bite, spit, and when they plunge their opponent, they begin to scoff at him or boil him (as Dionysus was boiled) in a cauldron to tear him asunder. Homer describes ὕβρις as an outrage upon the body, the corpse of a dead enemy. While the warrior is fighting another warrior, he naturally feels the rage, he hates him, he wants to tear him apart. But when he fell – at that moment it is the divine principle in man that says: “Stop. Here we draw the line. I won’t spit upon him, I won’t cut off any parts from him, I won’t tear his family on his grave (as many Achaeans did after the capture of Troy, possessed not by the divine spirit, but by the spirit of titanism)”. But the divine principle says: “Stop. You won. The fight is over. That’s all“. There is divine part in warrior that prevails now.

In the Irish epic about Cuchulainn, the hero of the Irish epos, Cuchulainn was so inflamed in battle that it was impossible to stop him, he was transformed from a divine hero into a titan. There were a number of examples, some of them indecent, because they immediately showed a huge number of naked girls who were supposed to make him stop; and secondly, put him into a cold barrel - in any case, they returned his divine being which completely turned into war, to certain borders in different ways, cut off his ὕβρις.

So, as for the κῶμος. κῶμος is a group of Dionysus followers who do not go beyond limits, do not fall into ὕβρις. This is a very fine line.

Accordingly, the choruses depicted in different types of ancient theatrical performances exactly the beings of another world. Practically, these divine or semi-divine heroic beings meant the ideas themselves.

Falling form chorus: luceferic nature of individual actor

Choruses - this is the world of the ideas-stars, these are some bright flashes that enlighten us, spectators, as people who came to the theater for initiation; these choruses tell us the main thing -- why we are sitting in the theater, not sneezing, not fidgeting; even today, when the theater has lost its sacred background for many centuries, we are still somehow respectful, we are already so boorish in ordinary life that it’s almost a feat for us to sit down and watch a play. But we still freeze in the theater because of momentum. These are the consequences of how performances were watched earlier, how to properly behave toward the theater. What happens there and what the choruses tell us as otherworldly creatures is, in fact, completely unique information, we need to catch every moment, every gesture, we need to remember, because choruses are the ideas that constitute due order in us. The choruses themselves (this source of histrionics, the source of anthropology: the actor is born from the chorus, the chorus is primary, you can talk a lot about what the very concept of “chorus”, “χορός” is a circle, round dance, circle of stars, of planetary orbits), which sing – it is the voice of the stellar world, these are ideas that tell us about the structure of being.

 In fact, histrionic choruses are some kind of alphabet of gods, which they are themselves; each of them is a certain letter, and all these letters, all these different levels of singing, their voices create the most important for us choral narrative of gods and heroes, which is not a narrative of something that once passed, but about what always is.

Therefore, in the theater, the laws of time are repealed. The structure of the ordinary perception of the world is completely changing, because what the chorus is talking about is really important. And it is from the chorus that actors are born.

Of course, many exploited the fact that one of the Greek actors, Thespis, did when he once stepped forth out of the chorus (Aristotle wrote about this) and began to proclaim the words of a god or hero on his own. This is how, the modernists / individualists say, our theater was born (because it used to be choruses, and then an actor came forward and said: “I’ll now sing solo, individually the goat’s song.”)

But to what extent was it reasonable or to what extent is was progress (or regress) I wouldn’t make my own judgment. Simply, if we trust the origins of the sacred theater, I would still focus in the collective or better “choristic” anthropology of the theater (in order to understand the essence of the actor) -- not on that guy who stepped forth, but on those choruses, that didn’t break the old order, the eternal order. If a star leaves its place and begins to think too much about itself... Do you know what it's called?

It's Lucifer. It's the morning and evening star, which finds itself in a special situation. So when someone leaves the chorus, this means that one of the highest spiritual essences that had to stay in its place breaks away from this reality.

This first actor puffed out his pride too much. And here, of course, we can already say that he wanted to become a vessel of god himself. Well done, this is the right choice, the correct one, but quite responsible. Could he endure this deity for long? Let’s remind κῶμος again - a group of drunken men returning from the festival of Dionysus. Yes, when they are numerous and they are affected by the procession of Dionysus - they can endure the presence of God, but whether you stay alone with him, without the rest of the men who make jokes, who splash out this wild, frenzied aggression of the deity that walks around them... Tête-à-tête - it is very dangerous. So, I do not want neither to glorify nor to curse that first actor, the first of the actors who came out of the chorus. But I want to emphasize that it was a very responsible performance. That in fact, the chorus itself is already so cool, it’s so fundamental to be part of this cast in which the divine meets the human, the sky touches the earth and tells the audience the highest secret of being, that it’s already the top (can it be higher?). But someone got a craving to perform an aria solo, and from this begins a certain transformation of the theater anthropology.

Bliss and damnation to be actor

We can say that this is the beginning of modernity in the theater, because what we are talking about when we deal with its anthropology which descends to choruses and masks (the masks are identical, it’s very important), masks hide the actor, hide the personality; they just portray the stars. After all, do we distinguish so clearly, with simple sight, the faces of the stars? We say: this is one, this is another, but mostly when they interrelate. It is unlikely that, if somebody showed us, took photo-portraits of stars, we would be able to distinguish them.

But in this absence of difference (maybe Mars is a little red, but this is for specialists). Angels resemble each other.

When they are described, they usually look the same (like the devils as well). They are very, very symmetrical, they have no individual features. Choruses are composed of Angels. Church singers who stand in choirs arise from that ancient theater. Chorus is the origin of proper actors.

People appearing on stage in the theater, must forget who they were until the moment they entered the stage. Here they are a chorus, here they are angels, stars and demons. And their task is to completely forget about themselves and tell the spectators about something fundamentally important. It is like playing the role of ideas. Therefore, the theater is a sight.

But this spectacle is by no means a narrative of what we see outside, this is a narrative of what we do not see outside, but we should have to see. And therefore, choruses are actually more primary than people, in a sense. A person from the chorus or an actor, as part of it – precedes the man. In the beginning were stars (according to Plato), and only after -- humans. At first there were souls, and only after bodies. At first it was eternity, and time come after.

And now the actors from the choirs are going in a different direction. They say this: “We are humans, we are temporary, we are bodily, but here we are not any more who we were. On this stage we are not humans, we are not temporary, we are not bodily.” An actor who enters the choir gets the new status. He actually becomes a certain medium, a prophet, an obsessed one. And it is the very power of this obsession, its seriousness that does not allow us, holds us back from taking a step forward.

This is a very risky step out of the choir and the solo performance of someone’s aria. Very risky. And the risk of this Thespis, who took the first step, is still challenging. We still do not really know whether he did the right thing or not. Was this a heroic action of a true believer or the beginning of decadence of the theater - we do not know. I just draw attention to how fundamental the actor’s mission is. An actor, generally speaking, is one who should not be human, cease to be human, become an idea. Not forever (unlike a saint, philosophers who go the same way, but forever). And the actor actually agrees to be there only temporarily, to be in a choir.

But even this changes human nature so much that it becomes the supreme bliss.

Therefore, in fact, acting is a thing that breaks a person up. Of course, an actor is not adapted to life and is useless in life -- a loser, as a rule. It’s hard to imagine happy actors, they would hardly be good actors. The actor agrees to neglect his personal life, his everyday existence.

But the moment when he plays, the moment when he is part of the choir, the moment when he is an idea - it more than covers his other purely human sufferings, shortcomings. And this is really a huge price, much more than a person pays for becoming an actor. If we understand what anthropology of the theatre is.

Actor of theater as source of social understanding of man

Here is another point. We now turn to Thespis, an actor who took a step forward and who became known as an actor, not a choir. We come to a more individual theater, where individual characters play the roles of gods, heroes, individual historical figures. They are called actors ὑποκριτής (hypocrites). Hypocrites in Greek means a person who is a hypocrite, a dissembler. A hypocrite is an actor. The hypocrite, in this case, is the one who portrays something that doesn’t exist. The actor is the same hypocrite, the same dissembler, the same ὑποκριτής.

Another interesting name for an actor (in a Latin context) is “persona”. That is, what we call "personality." Those who are not familiar with sociology, may ask: "Well, then, the personality is ourselves?" In fact, a person (in sociology or philosophy) is not ourselves. A person is who we portray (but in life).

This is what we are in the eyes of society, and not what we are in our own eyes, if we are able to look at ourselves in a way different than they are looking at us from the outside.

Therefore, the “person”, our idea of ​​personality is not something that is personified and portrayed in the theater, but that, on the contrary, is copied from the actor. And once again, we can notice a unique thing: at first the actor appears as a person (Greek πρόσωπον – face). Florensky[11] had the idea that there is

1. the divine image, лик (in Slavonic they apply лик to the images of Christ and Saints);

2. and a human face, person in Latin, лицо in Russian juridical use – юридическое лицо;

3. a guise as a corporal mask, личина.

Etymologically (it is a beautiful image and very helpful, this kind of division) – in fact, the all three words had the same origin and go back to proto-germanic root \*laikaz and further to indo-european \*leyg- with the wonderful meaning – to chant, to dance, to make rounds and leaps. So it remount to something akin to chorus! So maybe in these Russian words original sense is directly connected to theater…

The person is who we are not. Here you can recall the choruses. The face is just part of the choir. This is what a face and what a person is. So, a person is a certain figure appearing from the choir, representing someone other than himself. Hence the hypocrites. Hence the notion of hypocrisy and the connection of the concept of hypocrisy with the concept of “acting, dissembling”. Everything is connected around the person. A person is a mask, guise. In essence, the meaning of the person (to have face) is the meaning of the guise. Not the individual identity is primary in the determination of personality, but the mask. A person is guiseness. We are personalities to the extent that we hide our “self”, to the extent that we hide behind a mask, to the extent that we join the choir, to the extent that we are (just) actors.

But personality is the basic concept of jurisprudence, sociology, philosophy, and politics. They speak about humiliation of human dignity, aggression against personality, violation of individual rights. And here a very interesting point: wow, it turns out that the basic concept of the human language «persona» on which legal systems, political models, courts, economic systems are built; personality – is the basic definition of the entire socio-legal, socio-political structure - it turns out to be a superstructure grounded on the concept of "actor". So the society as such is built on the stage of the theater…

So, the actor is primordial, the actor is the very personality. “Personality” is the one who hides his being behind a mask. That’s what a “personality” is. This is one who carries with him a guise. That’s why we are talking about personality as a social phenomenon.

Personality is a father, husband, student, policeman. Personality is a kind of totality of our roles. And it is no coincidence that sociology is based on the metaphor of theater. But not only sociology does apply theater to its models, but also did politics, law and other social disciplines in their origins.

The source of human society, law and political organization springs from the theatrical concept.

That is, we operate with the concept of "personality", we operate with the concept of "actor."

So what is the significance of the theater, if from the anthropology of the theater, from the idea of ​​what an actor is comes the concept of “personality”, “persona” fundamental for human culture and civilization. At this moment, you can shudder, if you follow what I’m talking about, then there should come some surprise like “well, how is that for the theater!”.

The theater appears more and more as something really primordial. Firstly, the being is there. Secondly, divine revelation, mysteries are there. But also the simplest, basic, unshakable concepts of law, politics, social disciplines are derived from it. The organization of our entire society is based on the concept of “actor”, “personality”, that means the carrier of the mask. That's how fundamental the theater is. And this shows how fundamental his main or one of his main elements – the actor.

The actor is the one who is the root cause of personality and the human being is not just portrayed by him, but it is revealed in its essence by the actor. In his game, in his being on the stage, this is where the main vectors, the coordinate system of the human nature as it is are distinguished. To the extent that man is a person. Accordingly, the importance of theater in front of our eyes exceeds all conceivable limits and is growing.

Theory and practice in theater

Here we can say a few more words about the theory and practice of theater. This can be described in detail, but here are the most important things.

First, the theory is not a collection of abstract knowledge about something that needs to be brought to life or verified by life. Not at all like that. Theory is (what we talked about at the beginning) the contemplation of being. This is speculation.

And now, from the point of view of Aristotle, θεωρία is a person’s contemplation of his true cause, his natural place, his inner self. Therefore, theory is an immersion in oneself, in our nature, in being. Actually, theory is not necessary a precursor to practice. Theory has a goal in itself.

Therefore, the theater, as the space of theory, doesn’t need any practices or methods. It has need, first of all, for itself. The closer the theater is to its essence, the more it will be a theater. But when it moves away from its essence, in spite of any practices and techniques, it cannot be a theater any more. Accordingly, it will be theater to a lesser extent than it could and should be. So, theory is, in fact, the contemplation of being. This is what theory is.

And for practice? This is where a very interesting point arises. Aristotle not only talks about the difference between theory and practice, but also about the difference between practice and technics. And this is the most important thing.

What is “practice”, πρᾶξις according to Aristotle? To his mind, if theory is an immersion in oneself, then practice is an appeal of a theorizing person to the outside world. But he emphasizes that practice is only such an action of a person facing the outside world, which is based on an internal solution, on complete freedom. The practice is the property of the man capable to theorize, it is something that belongs exclusively to theoretician, to the person that is master of contemplations. So practice is in some way continuation of theory but oriented to extreriority and not into interiority.

A man who decides to build a house is performing practice. It is because he conceived this house in his inner vision, he made the existential decision to do that and he thought through all resources he needed to gather and all works he should undertaken or order. And a slave, who was given the task of building a house, does not practice. It was not he who made the decision, his actions are not related to his contemplation, because he does not have this right to contemplate. Therefore, a slave, who can also be a skilled craftsman, what he does is not called “practice”. Practice, πρᾶξις is that in which participates the full-fledged free being of a person contemplating his essence.

So what is practice? Practice is not a separation from theory, but the conversion of theoretical vector to the outside world. Therefore, in fact, practice does not prove anything to theory. Practice simply can correctly, authentically apply this theory, and can run into some internal and external limitations or be distorted. Accordingly, the antithesis of practice is not theory, but technics, τέχνη (art). And technics are quite another thing. They can belong both to a freely building homeowner and to a slave.

Technics, τέχνη don’t describe, don’t apply to this essential/existential dimension, with which the theory and its solutions are associated.

From theatrical practices toward theatrical technics

Therefore, theatrical practices and theatrical techniques should be separated. Someone who is an actor, one who belongs to the being of the choir, to the anthropology of the theater, must engage in theatrical practices, because this is precisely the task of a true actor, a person in the theater. He must transmit outside (with reference to the outside world) through theater and theory, without breaking away from this essence, this fundamental impulse of turning to himself. It can be called “an inalienable action”. This is what theatrical practice is.

Theatrical technics is something completely different. They don’t tell at all about how much the person itself, in its roots, is involved in the process of performing this or that work. Technics are a depersonalized thing. Perhaps, in technics there is an individual, there are certain skills, there is some kind of art, but in technics fundamentally there can be a human or unhuman. It is neutral being separated from theory – and thus from ontology. Technics have something dehumanizing in themselves. They become humanized only when they turns into practice. Otherwise, they lose this dimension.

This is a very important proportion that in the history of theater theatrical practices are gradually being replaced by theatrical techniques. Accordingly, theatrical anthropology is changing.

We are moving from free people who decided sua sponte to associate their fate with the being of the stage (this is practice), toward some guest workers, into some technical elements that have mastered some techniques and wrap their hands in such an implausible way, make noise and are just silly on the stage (that we largely see in more modern theater).

And when the sacred leaves the theater, not only the theoretical, but also the practical part goes away. It is very important. And they are replaced by technics. And technics in general have nothing to do with the theater, because this is alienation from the theory, thus from theater and, accordingly, something different.

Dionysus is a mask

It is very important to note: we talked about the fact that Dionysus was the god of theater, the whole theatrical history and structure goes back to him. It should be said that Dionysus was often portrayed not only by statues, sometimes of a young man, sometimes of an elderly man (Bacchus), but simply as a mask. That is very enlightening. This god of theater is not something that was simply hidden behind a mask, and not the mask of some character that it depicts. Dionysus, in a sense, is a mask. And again we return to the choir. Dionysus is not on either side of this mask. He is not personified by a mask, he is not under a mask, he does not look at a mask. He is a mask.

Dionysus as a mask is a point of contact of the most diversified angles of being reduced to one. And this is a very important point, since the mask is the person, the mask is the face, the guise. Dionysus is the archetype of personality. It is the personality that is the being of the actor, the being of the directorthat puts on the stage, comes down, because if he incorrectly draws or sculpts this role from the actor, that is, the mask, then his message will not reach others, they will not see anything. And therefore, the being of a mask itself is a unique revelation that only a theater person knows. Why do actors in life tend to be empty? Because they give everything, their being, they give their whole life to be masks. They leave nothing to themselves. But this is their deed; this is their human heroism, because in their fate they give place to something that they, like ordinary people, could not get into.

And this mask has its own being. Mask is more primordial than the one who is hiding under it, or the one who looks at it, or the one whom it portrays.

The mask (when we talk about the mask) - we should not immediately jump: “This is the mask of an elephant / No, this is the mask of god / No, this is the mask of a satyr.” The mask as such is more important than “the mask of whom?” The mask answers the question “what?” rather than “whose?”. A mask is just a person, that is, it is a person, as such. Not some kind of personality, but a personality just in its roots.

Here we can recall an interesting sarcophagus, with bas-reliefs of the Dionysian procession, where masked satyrs participate in the procession of Dionysus, (masked people and satyrs). And one satyr removes his mask – and… another satyr’s face appears from underneath. That is, under the guise of one satyr, there hides another one. He takes off one mask (with horns, with a beard) -- and we see the same satyr again. This is very important because satyr is a mask (in smaller proportions than his master Dionysus).

The man is a mask. Deity is the mask. Anything in the world, by and large, from the point of view of anthropology of theater is a mask. Not a mask of somebody, but just a mask...

Part III. Desacralization and resacralization of theater

Sacred roots of theater

Now, the third part of this course is devoted to the desacralization and resacralization of the theater.

Actually, we talked about the fact that the theater was originally a sacred phenomenon, or some preparation for the mysteries, or part of the mystery, a light version of the mystery. Accordingly, the unique content of the classical sacred theater is a story about gods and heroes, but in fact - about being. And when the theater fulfills this philosophical metaphysical function, then it is a theater. In that function it was conceived, born, manifested and existed not just for a while, but almost always. And that was its goal, its raison d’être.

The sense of the theater is to narrate about the sacred. By the way, one can notice such a thing: theater (classical theater) is first of all a play, based on dialogues. But what are Plato’s dialogues? They can be considered as plays. These are plays. These are plays where we see heroes, wisemen, politicians, eloquent rhetors, sometimes fools and the characters alike. Sometimes Plato even describes some of the gestures of the participants that remind us of actors. In any case, the ultimate saturation with vivid existential elements (in “Phaedrus”, for example but as well in other pieces) with Socrates' huge and unique sense of subtle humor, with an infinite number of existential psychological and rhetorical tricks is very comparable with real drama – and sometimes with satiric piece.

This is the deepest theater. Plato’s dialogues are theater. But this is as well a sacred theater. This is a philosophical theater.

In fact, I think that Plato’s dialogues are even more theatrical than Sophocles’s or Aristophanes’ plays, in my opinion. Because here is put the question about being in its purest form, about being, to which we make our way through myth, through archetypes, through the figures of gods, through dialectics – into being itself. So the philosophical theater is the highest form of theater; the sacred dialogues in depth are the most true sources of theater.

Then comes the mythological theater, which is directly connected with the philosophical theater. Philosophical and mythological theaters are not two different versions, they are, in fact, the same theater.

Either you can talk about the structure of being, describing the gods and their relationship with each other, or with men, or with cosmos, or you can talk about being or contemplating ideas. So the theater was always like that when it was true to itself. Namely, a theater and a sacred theater are not just a theater and some version of it. It is the only theater worthy of that name.

Initially, the theater in its origins and the final version of the theater, the theater as such, is a sacred theater. Where there is no philosophical content, where there is no myth, where there is no transcendent norms, where the world is not established, where there is no demiurgic cosmogenesis – there is no theater. Accordingly, all this is the theater itself.

Disappearance of metaphysical dimension: anthropology of spectators

Now, in modernity times, the theater is certainly undergoing desacralization. The theater’s philosophical, metaphysical foundations are taken away, it is no longer the place where people come in order to enter in the realm of the sacred.

Now in order to emphasize and to explore in depth the nature of the desacralization I want to say something about the audience as such, about the anthropology of spectators. This will be appropriate here.

When we talk about the anthropology of the theater, we usually talk about the anthropology of the actors (which was discussed). But that is the right moment to ask: what role do the spectators play when they come to the theater? In fact, if we look carefully and extend the metaphor of theater and theory (contemplation), we could imagine a group of people coming to the theater and siting down on their chairs situated in circles (as in Inferno), arriving there to contemplate something important. They have come to see a play. But sitting there they somehow begin to play themselves. What role are they playing? They play the role of the souls. Thus the audience is those people who play the role of (initiated or in process to be initiated) souls watching what is happening in the center of the world.

This, in fact, is a small death – a theater trip. You find yourself deprived of your usual living world, the light is turned off -- it’s as if you are put in a coffin. Accordingly, you forget about your usual external, non-theatrical life, you are placed in a new artificial space where you especially do not care about your body and your earthly life. You are all attention, you are all gaze, you are all hearing, you are all contemplation. But such is the existence of the soul in the sacred world. The spectators form the chorus, the sacred ring. They are stars observing the cosmic drama.

Therefore, theatrical spectators are those souls who sit in the temple or, perhaps, in the posthumous hierarchy of orders and levels, and observe the most important that happens in the world. Accordingly, this is the deepest practice, the spiritual practice of the theater. You must deserve to be a spectator. You must be competent enough to be one.

We all probably know some of the most annoying, unpleasant people who blow their nose, turn on smartphones in the theater – we see them often, but I'm not really talking about that. They are not real spectators, they are simulacra of true viewers. In order to be a full-fledged spectator, you must truly follow the rules of the theater. And to sit at your chair as quiet as dead. You should cede your body, your flesh along with your coat to cloakroom attendants, you should allow this blackout (placing in the coffin) and surrender to what is happening on the stage, correctly interpreting the sacred message that you receive from these unusual living creatures, which we call “actors”, but who are masks, living signs of the real metaphysical multi-layer world. And we do not need to recognize someone under mask: "Oh, I know him, this is one or another star". No, there is something other. When we begin to recognize actors under masks or beneath the roles and characters – the theater ends. It is necessary that in the actor we see the one he portrays, with the help of the mask or not. We do not need to know anything actors personal fate and personal life. The actor must disappear, and this is his transformation, this is the moment of his self-overcoming. And he does this to reveal the truth to souls. But in order to receive the message transmitted in that way we need as well to forget ourselves. We need to let the other inside to enter in us – the other from within. This other is eternal soul, stellar spark, our innermost Self.

Imagine what a fundamental mission the sacred theater had.

Humanism and realism as degeneration

When the theater becomes humanistic – it all ends there.

Henceforth realistic theater affirms: “Now we will speak not of gods (there are no gods), not of souls (there is no soul either, there is only the body and the nervous system), we will not talk about ideas that exist eternally, because ideas are our thoughts, and we will not make and create life, explaining its essence, but will simply reflect what is outside the walls of this theater.”

From all that living world of daytime, of routine, of banality original theater wanted to escape, to isolate, to hide, entering into the night, going down to the crypt, turning off the lights, putting us in a coffin. All this the sacred theater wanted to overcome. It wanted to make the events in theatrical production exceptional, exclusive. Well, in the realistic theater, in humanistic theater, it all ends.

Now we are told quit the opposite: “You came here to see how everything around you, what people live around you, uncle Vanya[12], a doctor who always groans, forgotten servant Firs[13]”- well, in these are ordinary stories, you always forget someone somewhere[14]. Yes, this, of course, is very cute, but it is not theater at all, or it is a theater with some other meaning.

We don’t see archetypes any more, we see only human living their everyday lives. Yes, of course, these humans can be also typologically important, they can be sometimes unusual people. Let us agree that in this humanistic theater we are often shown unusual, some bright, amazing people, or vice versa - too small people, such an image of a small person for whom we feel pity to make one cry. In other words, they can be however exceptional, but still exclusively humans. Always. In their misery, in their exceptional insignificance. But these are humans, they are no longer neither gods nor angels nor demons. They are no longer heroes overcoming the limits of human nature. They are locked inside the boundaries of the earthly life. They are deprived of transcendence.

This, of course, is another theater. This is a theater where the concept of dissembler, hypocrite, hiding one under the mask of another mask takes on a different nature. Baudrillard called it the “first order of simulacra”, like an Italian waistcoat, which was men's clothing for those who did not have enough good expensive fabric for the back. Therefore, the front part is made of expensive material, and the rear part – of something worse. And this is called, according to Baudrillard, "the first order of simulacra." Such is the humanist theater – waistcoat.

From heroic humanism to mechanical humanism

In fact, modern theater is starting from the era of the Modernity and at this transitional moment, appears Shakespeare, which is already half sacred, half humanistic, modernist. Renaissance - at this very moment the theater is being desacralized. But somehow the reappearance of the theater after the pause of the Middle Ages was more complicated phenomenon. Certainly the Renaissance was humanism but that was very special magical humanism, the heroic humanism dealing with divine humanity – with homo maximus.

From Renaissance on this desacralization moved further and further, reaching its last boundaries.

In the late Soviet theater there were such plays (few people remember, you are young) which should be consider as a punishment to watch. They were dull and essentially materialistic (and sometimes incredibly stupid). I remember being forced to watch (when we were small, in the 70-ies) plays of Arbuzov[15]. This was a real hell. There were two TV programs I was made to look for my presumably bad behavior: these are plays by Arbuzov and the “Lenin University of Millions”[16]. Both sights made me monstrously depressed and sad. Can you imagine the play about some Soviet ordinary engineer working at factory who was a bit too rude to a woman worker. So offended she went away - I wanted to say and she hadn’t return, but not. If she hadn’t returned, it could have been a little reminiscent of Lynch at least. Something like Inland Empire… But that was not the case. She went out and soon returned, and brought a suitcase full of goods from the city. At the end of the play she pardoned the engineer and started to work as usually performing her duty at factory. Nothing happened. Just Soviet living world going round and round as in never ending sleep… And all this is endless.

So humanism has lost its epic content, turned in something so mechanical, that one couldn’t remember anything. Such a gloomy thing as the late Soviet culture as a whole, in my opinion, that it’s just such an endless fundamental boredom. And the theater was its vanguard, the zone of decay and devastating slightly embellished by theater foyer. But still it was humanism. Plays by Arbuzov or something like that were about humans.

Nihilistic theater of Post-Modernity

But the process of desacralizing the theater and losing its meaning could not be stopped on humanism, because man is a too complex creature, too metaphysical, not technical enough.

And that is why the nihilistic theater of postmodernism came, which actually began to decompose not only the archetypes of gods and heroes, but the man as such. Its characters are not any more humans, albeit ordinary, small, big, not heroes, but some scattered hallucinations, objects (as in the object-oriented ontology), rhizomatic objects, half-human, half-inhuman.

Thus from humanism we are moving to the realm of pure nihilism. A postmodern theater, contemporary theater - is a theater where the technology totally prevails over practice. In principle, that means the theater loses completely and absolutely its meaning, its metaphysics, its content, and in fact we come to some kind of matrix theater. It is pure technic where machines, screens and androids are replacing step by step the rest of humanity. In contemporary theatrical productions of avant-garde (namely postmodernist) teapots sing their symphony, gurneys take out corpses to expose commenting the histories of deceased or bones powder dances the strange ballet.

This combination – a chaotic theater, a theater of such a disembodied irrational whirls -- emphasizes a certain mechanistic structure of our life. In fact, this is not just mechanical theater (and we should remember, the theater could never completely broke the connection with being), so this theater shows us what being is around us, and not only shows, but creates it. The postmodernist theater replace organic being with mechanical technical simulacrum of being, existing as great machine of production of signs totally devoided of meanings (semiurgy in Baudrillard’s terminology).

Theater: most powerful thing

The theater has never lost its power completely, that’s important.

Initially, it was a holy, sacred power.

Then it was humanistic power (remember the bright humanistic actors who really created the images of Shakespeare, for example, extraordinary, but human dramas and passions, intense, saturated, tearing everything apart). Thus, initially humanism not only reflected, but created the realties and ontologies that it depicted. This theater (and even in the Renaissance and Modernity), although it was a simulation of the sacred, still retained its original power. And it created humanistic world.

The realists in theater used to announce “the theater just reflects the life as it is”, but in fact it was not so. The realism created this humanistic realistic world, supported it, inserted a program of humanism in the viewers, in the souls of audience and transformed them in accordance with new modernist philosophical models, installing new Cartesian dualist paradigms, bourgeois standards and democratic ideals. Still in the Modernity the theater had a major influence on culture, history, even politics. Theater under excuse of faithful description in fact created the totally new reality.

Theater was and still is a very powerful thing. Moreover, the theater is the most powerful thing. And when we move into the postmodern paradigm, we see that here also the theater not only reflects the mechanism of modern culture, the decomposition of large narratives, the denudation of mechanical behavioristic (psychoanalytic) schemes, the exposition of the virtualization of everyday life – not just uses these multimedia tools to blur the line between the theater and the screen, between the theater and virtual reality, social network. It makes the reality of the life to be exactly like this. It imposes its codes and rules, enforces them, obliges them to be accepted – consciously and unconsciously.

Today's theater is theater in which different heterogenous aspects of virtual postmodern paradigm and (post)existence merge in something new and indiscernibly mixed.

In the end, post-modern theater occasionally does not require neither an auditorium nor a stage. It can directly play in our minds. In some modern plays virtual objects act and screens and planes displace each other ...

New Beginning of the theater?

This theater-matrix encodes our society. The theater retains its power even in Post-Modernity, despite the fact the postmodern theater largely delegated these functions to the cinema, which performs this encoding more effectively. But still it survived as the main laboratory for the production of this fundamental potency.

And the last question that we will not certainly answer during this introductory lecture (in this lecture we already have no time for that, and I doubt honestly as for the whole course) is whether a New Beginning of the theater is possible, is the Conservative Revolution is possible in the theater, is it possible to resacralize the theater, and return to its roots, is it possible to put this inappropriate actor back in the choir and return to the theater his fundamental ontology and anthropology that we have lost?