

Antinomies in Today's Realistic Theatre: A Critique from an Affective Theory Perspective

Frithwin WAGNER-LIPPOK

Universität Hildesheim, Institut für Medien, Theater und Populäre Kultur, Hildesheim, Germany
himmelschwarz@hotmail.com

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE: Frithwin Wagner-Lippok is a theatre director and theorist in Berlin, Barcelona and Rio de Janeiro. At the University of Hildesheim he is writing his PhD thesis on the theatrical event as an affective space in productions of Jürgen Kruse and Bruno Beltrão. His theoretical-practical projects focus upon contemporary aesthetics, performativity, and affectivity in the theatrical event.

Abstract

According to the recent book *Lob des Realismus* (“Praise of Realism”) by Bernd Stegemann, postdramatic theatre has fallen into the trap of poststructuralist and postmodern positions and lamentably failed to tackle the task of realism. The author holds that in theatre the re-instatement of *mimesis* is the realistic processing of a material, achieved through the dialectic analysis of its contents and historical context. The present article touches the core positions of this criticism, paradigmatically illustrated by René Pollesch’s production *Kill your Darlings* from 2012, advancing against them an argument from affect theory based upon considerations by another critic of postmodernity, Fredric Jameson: Stegemann’s criticism, intoned on behalf of realism, is sublated on the basis of a different realism model resulting in a diametrically opposed appreciation of Pollesch’s paradigm *Kill your Darlings* that in the light of Jameson’s theory appears to be a remarkably *realistic* theatre production. Its success with critics and the audience, as well as the presented affect-theoretical approach, conflict with Stegemann’s position, and it remains uncertain but interesting, even if only for epistemological reasons, if and how both perspectives can be reconciled.

Keywords: affective realism, affect theory, affective space, German contemporary theatre, phenomenology

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Reality

“Please step aside. *Attention! We jump — now!*” Six performers in coloured unitards float down from the stage ceiling, unhook from the ropes, begin with gymnastic exercises, one of them, bare-chested, holds a microphone and is now running in circles about the stage, while asking: “*What is this here? I don't know, what this is. Where are we here? In a room, too narrow, or too big, for our love. It is not our fault that our love doesn't work out! I walked down the street, passing those serial houses, and I would have liked to tell you: Of all those windows ablaze with light, there is none I would want to get into...*” (Pollesch, 2013: 190).¹

Where are we here? In the Volksbühne in Berlin, in René Pollesch's opening night of *Kill your Darlings! Streets of Berladelphia*, on 18th of January 2012. A cosy club atmosphere pervades the house, some spectators are still talking, eating pretzels, drinking beer, while Bruce Springsteen's *Streets of Philadelphia* from 1994 runs in loop. The music spreads a melancholic mood, and (almost) only one person will speak tonight: the actor Fabian Hinrichs. He addresses the fifteen-piece group of Berlin acrobats acting onstage beside him, as “capitalism” and “network”, courts their love, and ponders on its brittleness. Later on, he will judder around seated on an excavator, grinning at his own technical philistinism, or put on a bizarre octopus costume, or hide, as artificial rain clatters down, under the covered wagon that is waiting lonely in the stage background and that, of course, he will finally pull around the stage in circles similar to those he is running now, so to speak, on a trial basis.

Once again, there is disquiet in theatre theory. Under the impression of crises, wars, climate change, and refugee tragedies, a feeling of unease

1. The quotations are taken from the video soundtrack recorded on the opening night on 18 January 2012, in Volksbühne Berlin. A printed version can be found in: René POLLESCH. “Kill your Darlings! Streets of Berladelphia”. In: Matthias NAUMANN and Michael WEHREN (ed.), *Räume, Orte, Kollektive* (Spaces, places, collectives). Berlin: Neofelis, 2013, p. 190-220 (all translations into English by me).

against postmodern gimmicks is growing that urges new, more up-to-date, aesthetic solutions. Almost two decades after the *postdramatic theatre* programme (Lehmann, 1999) and its revision by André Eiermann's *post-spectacular theatre* that – in light of the neoliberal usurpation of criticism and transparency – discards central postdramatic positions such as immediacy and face-to-face-communication, instead rehabilitating “intermediary” agencies (Eiermann, 2009: 47; 99; 116²), the prosaic reality that seemed to have almost been annulled in the ensuing web of poststructuralist discourses and narcissistic autoreferentiality comes back from the wilderness: dull and humourless, in military equipment and rubber boats. “Reality is back with violence,” says Bernd Stegemann (2015: 7) in his recent book *Lob des Realismus* (Praise of Realism). In light of today's news, even *real persons* – “experts of everyday life”³ or topic-specific lay actors – and *real*, documentarily proved issues, formerly announced as “invasion of reality” (Tiedemann and Radatz, 2007: 7), appear increasingly harmless. Behind the “real” people populating a postdramatic theatre that seemed to have run out of subject matter lately, another reality to be reckoned with becomes visible. Just as in that cartoon – where a man enters a private road and, smiling at the caution sign “Beware of the dog!”, bows down to stroke the small confiding dachshund while above him the threatening dark silhouette of a huge and teeth baring monster dog appears – the “real” in many postdramatic arrangements proves to be toothless and trivial as soon as political and ecological realities actually knock on the theatre's door. Having secured a comfortable position in postmodern discourses and, inspired by them, in postdramatic theatre, this sort of reality-oblivion, to paraphrase a Heideggerian term, has finally provoked a *Kritik des Theaters* (critique of theatre) as the dramaturg and theatre professor Bernd Stegemann (2013) titles his book, the quintessence of which is summarized incisively on the back cover: “As long as theatre refuses to reflect the connection between postmodern aesthetics, neoliberalism, and the production of egoistic subjectivity, it won't be able to establish a critical relation to the present.”

In theatre, the present is real twice: first, because the present takes place at any time *around* it and, second, because at the same time theatre is *part* of this present, originating from and belonging to it. The same actually goes for the individual that is surrounded by the outside world and yet part of this world. This double state of being – to be only one thing more in the world and, at the same time, to be the agent of a self by ascertaining this world – is conceived by Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1964: 181) as *bodiliness*: as mutual projection of inner and outer reality, just as a picture arising from two series of reflections between two opposed mirrors that are mutually interleaved,

2. In the cited publication, Eiermann speaks of “intermediary” agencies, for example, on page 47 in the context of the “replacement of a supposed immediate by a explicitly mediate encounter” (Ablösung einer vermeintlich unmittelbaren durch eine explizit mittelbare Begegnung), or, on page 99, explaining “The mediating actor” (Der vermittelnde Akteur), or also, on page 116, taking Jérôme Bel as an example who “actualizes strategies of body art in the form of their symbolic mediation” (diese [Body-Art] jedoch gerade in Form ihrer symbolischen Vermittlung aktualisiert).

3. A term used by the performance group Rimini Protokoll for the laypersons they worked with onstage. Miriam DREYSSE i Florian MALZACHER (ed.). *Experten des Alltags. Das Theater von Rimini Protokoll* (Experts of Every Day Life. The Theatre of Rimini Protokoll). Berlin: Alexander, 2007.

“none of them belonging to any of these surfaces since each only replicates the other, both of them together making a pair, a pair that itself is more real than any single one of them.” This paradoxically scintillating interface seems to be where the real appears.

But what is *real*, anyway? Each artistic approach to reality is bound to a *concept* of reality, on which, in turn, the concept of realism depends. A century before the auto-incarceration of poststructuralism in a sort of self-referential pandemonium of signs, the hopelessness of which appeared in Jacques Derrida's famous formula “Il n'y a pas de hors-texte” (Derrida 1983: 274) and from which philosophy today tries to escape by a *New or Speculative Realism*⁴ that signs up to rehabilitate reality, William James (1890: 296) postulated “various orders of reality”⁵ – phantasy, dreams, or the sensual world – to any of which we may allocate things and *within any of which* we may give them our assent concerning its existence.⁶ Grounded on James' basic thought that each of these worlds have their own ways of existence and *raison d'être*, the phenomenologist Erving Goffman (1974: 8) bases his analysis on the crucial question that in any given situation – “often containing other people and more than the scene that can be overseen by the immediately present ones” – one would spontaneously ask: “What is it that's going on here?” The answer determines the *frame* in which an occurrence is embedded; that is, its *reality*. Each realism must relate to this reality.

Postdramatic theatre, as Stegemann writes in 2015 in his recent book *Lob des Realismus* (Praise of Realism), has lamentably failed to tackle this task by having fallen into the trap of poststructuralist and postmodern positions. Therefore, he claims the reinstatement of *mimesis*, i.e. the realistic theatrical processing of a material by help of the dialectic analysis of its contents and historical context. In the following, I shall touch the protruding positions of this critique, illustrating them by René Pollesch's production *Kill your Darlings*,⁷ which was premiered in 2012 in the Volksbühne in Berlin, and, after a short critical transition, oppose it by an argument from affect theory, based upon considerations by the critic of postmodernity, Fredric Jameson: The-rein, Stegemann's criticism, intonated on behalf of realism, shall be sublated

4. Cf. Peter GAITSCH et al. (ed.). *Eine Diskussion mit Markus Gabriel. Phänomenologische Positionen zum Neuen Realismus* A Discussion with Markus Gabriel. Phenomenological Positions on New Realism). Berlin: Verlag Turia + Kant, 2017.

5. In *The Perception of Reality* (first published 1869 as an article in the journal *Mind*), William James questions at first the *criteria* for our judgment on something to be “real”: “Under what circumstances do we think things real?“, followed by the chapter “The Various Orders of Reality” where he attributes, among the “Many Worlds“ a particular quality to the sensuous world as the “World of Practical Realities“ (William JAMES. “The Principles of Psychology“. *American Science Series. Advanced Course*, Vol. II, chapter 21. New York: Holt, p. 296).

6. “The whole distinction of real and unreal, the whole psychology of belief, disbelief, and doubt, is thus grounded on two mental facts – first, that we are liable to think differently of the same; and second, that when we have done so, we can choose which way of thinking to adhere to and which to disregard.” (William JAMES. “The Principles of Psychology“. *American Science Series. Advanced Course*, Vol. II, chapter 21. New York: Holt, p. 296). Erving Goffman criticises the fact that James finally adjudged an exceptional status to the sensuous world as “realest reality“, which he considers a deplorable drawback of James' former radical position: “Then, after taking this radical stand, James copped out. He allowed that the world of the senses had a special status [...]“ (Erving GOFFMAN. *Frame Analysis. An Essay on the Organization of Experience*. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1974, p. 3).

7. Stegemann exemplifies his assumptions in *Lob des Realismus* (Praise of Realism) by means of five theatre texts or, respectively, productions: Henrik Ibsen's *Enemy of the People*, Peter Hacks' *Die Sorgen und die Macht* (Anxieties and Power), Kathrin Röggla's *Wir schlafen nicht* (We Don't Sleep), *Elfriede Jelinek's Die Kontrakte des Kaufmanns* (The Merchants' Contracts), and René Pollesch's *Kill your Darlings! Streets of Berladelphia*. In the case of *Enemy of the People* and *Kill your Darlings*, he refers to the respective stage productions.

on the grounds of a different realism model that stems from literary science, resulting in a diametrically opposed appraisal of Pollesch's paradigm *Kill your Darlings* as a paradigm of realistic theatre. For this purpose I shall use an argument based on analogous correspondence between literary language and theatrical action. The production's evident success with critics and audience is opposed by Stegemann's position, and, due to their different epistemological origins, there is no evidence if both are reconciled by an affect theory perspective.

Realism I

In light of the complexity and enigmatization of the present world, Stegemann (2015: 8) claims a new "visibility and comprehensibility" of reality in theatre. The task of realism is to free the insights about the world from the "dense relativistic fog and from contingency": there is a reality, "and we can try to comprehend it. And there is artistic experience that enables people to share their impressions and frees them, for some moments, from suffering from their lives as an opaque series of coincidences. A realistic representation helps to recognize the world and imagine its changeability."

In the 20th century, the traditional concept of realism has been converted "into a container term" no longer allowing us to know "if something is still represented or if the representation has become its own content" (Stegemann, 2015: 8). Especially the refusal to represent *anything*, that the abstract expressionists, at the time, could still claim to be a realistic expression; that is, by enabling the individual to experience ambivalence radically and individually, and thus his or her detachment from all social ties shifted realism from an art of recognition towards an art of self-experience. Thereby, it became a slogan for ideologies. Naive socialist realism suddenly faced Western abstract expressionism — which was even supported by the CIA who could argue that abstract paintings were the realistic manifestation of a free and self-determined subject. Instead of *showing* something, this art expressed by itself a subjective freedom that allowed it to quit any concrete representation. The view of realism turned back towards the subject. Stegemann (2015: 10-11) calls this, in contrast to the *socialist realism* where the subject aims to comprehend his or her environment in the picture, the "capitalist realism" that trains the subject to become a lone fighter "in a free-for-all battle." The concept of realism continues to splice, finally denoting either (pejoratively) any naive representation or everything that appears in reality. Hereafter, two lines are to be discerned: a "commercial realism" that in many fields purveys a criminally simplified copy of reality easy to figure out; and a "postmodern realism" that characterises performative arts and is restricting in cases where ambivalence ("the aesthetic equivalent of postmodern relativism") dominates as a formal gadget, and fertile where "particular sorts of conflicts [...] seek to reflect the conflicts of the complex present."

Stegemann (2015: 11-13) counteracts this by proposing a timeless, dialectical art "that provokes shared experience of reality." This was already shown, as Stegemann (2015: 12) explains, by Gustave Courbet where "the reality of

representation operates with conventionally unexpected forms” — convention being understood as instrumentalisation of art as the beautiful appearance of bourgeois idealism. A realism worthy of the name shows the world other than as we think we know it. The psychological theatre, too, by help of its Fourth Wall, can either make visible the conflicts in the surrounding world — or illusionistically conceal them. That fourth wall, however, is a thorn in the side of the avant-gardes. They criticise representation as a presumptuous statement about the world, and the viewer's position as an “imperial gesture” whose contention claims to be the more objective the more unrecognizably he hides behind the representation. May this theatre also broach the issue of an unjust world — its stylistics still keep being subject to “the tendency to let them appear natural” (14). Thus, the bourgeois solidification is followed by a “formal explosion”, first in symbolism and naturalism and later in the ongoing conflict between “recognisability and critique” that finally falls into the “maelstrom of relativism.” In the 20th century the question of recognisability and the attitude by which recognition can be criticised gets radicalised by the discernment that any observation influences its object. The relation between reality and subject has become undecidable. While capitalism benefits from this contingency, the relativism of observation is aesthetically formulated in more and more detail. The two major political systems react with totalitarianism or, respectively, with the paradox of modern democracy according to which the differentiation of life areas makes binding decisions more and more difficult, thus paving the way for fundamentalist forces. As a consequence, “in closed societies an art that makes tangible the contingency of the conditions means a critical gesture, while in open societies the same relativizing force meets the demands of capitalist economy” (15).

Radicalisation of contingency, however, occurs primarily because the undecidability is mixed up with arbitrariness, thus becoming relativism. The postmodern lifestyle therefore “is a telling expression of an unemancipated society” that supports the *bourgeois* and paralyzes the *citoyen*, “having lost all confidence in the common public” (16). But the very undecidability demands decision — a *decidable* situation needs not be decided, as it already contains the decision in itself (as inner necessity); *undecidability*, however, calls upon me as a subject to adopt a position. Because — and this is the nub of the matter in Stegemann's argumentation — if the standpoint influences the recognition of reality, “then the question of finding a standpoint provokes the politically true statement about reality.” This is the socialist consequence from the observer's problem, and its solution is the *class standpoint* that leads to the sublation (*Aufhebung*)⁸ of individuality in the history of social conflicts. The role of realism is to make visible the threads of the dependencies on his or her surrounding reality, by which the individual hangs and wriggles.

While the avant-garde enables the observer to experience something about himself through art, the perspective from the class standpoint enables

8. *Aufhebung*, according to Hegel, has the connotations of *raise*, *suspend*, and *preserve*. Cf. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich HEGEL, *Die Wissenschaft der Logik: Das Sein* (Science of Logic: The Being), vol. 1, book 1, section 1, chapter 1, C: “Aufheben des Werdens” (Sublation of Becoming), “Anmerkung” (Notation), 1812. In: Georg Wilhelm Friedrich HEGEL, *Gesammelte Werke* (Collected Work”), edited by Hans-Jürgen GAWOLL, vol. 11. Hamburg: Felix Meiner, p. 64.

“a triangular relationship of realistic art, where the self-reference of the œuvre brings the hetero-reference to its surroundings in a relation that may be experienced, by the observer, as a play of art and reality” (18). Thus, instead of an isolated subjective experience, realism is about “putting on a relationship between artistic form and a therein appearing other reality. The self-references of the artistic means enable the hetero-reference that comes to light as a content that is not identical with the material or the form of the artwork” (20). Wherever the thematising of these means without any reference to the social reality congeals into a mere content, this dialectic is dismantled and reduced to the experience of aesthetic oscillation — as in Duchamp’s ready-mades: the object is real, but its experience cannot be traversed but individually, being no longer an experience of realism — since it facilitates “no longer the community of those seeing the real surrounding world through an aesthetic experience in a new way” (20).

New tries

A new way to destroy postmodern doubts about the referentiality of an external reality — and the constructivist claim that reality is only what a recognising conscience makes it to be — is opened by the founder of the *new realism*, Markus Gabriel, who according to Stegemann (2015: 59) postulates many *fields of meaning* that may be differently real, making any exclusive explanation of reality obsolete. This revision of the blind spot of questioning the own existence leads, in a Cartesian turn, to the proposition that even doubt must exist somewhere. The new realism thus neglects the *conditions* of recognition, focusing on speculations about its *possibilities*. As reality, nothing else remains but “the meaning of provisional assertions that may be suspended any time by a subsequent, different interpretation.” At least, Derrida’s *différance* itself still exists, “independently from its interpretation.” That, however, provides little comfort to Stegemann. If the remainder of reality is nothing but its own deconstruction, as the “new, ultimate reality”, we find ourselves in a “historical situation comparable with the Middle Ages. The spiritual status of its inhabitants is a confession of faith that fits perfectly the ruling ideology” (60). By this, deconstruction and exploitation conjoin to yield a “closed context of interconnected fates” (61) that might become difficult to escape.⁹

Hope comes, according to Stegemann (2015: 63), from where the classical postmodern aesthetic means, such as interruption, re-entry, and self-reference, do not serve the postmodern capitalist confession of faith but “unfold their effects beyond postmodern aesthetics.” If interruptions “applied by all forms of realness that happen to be en vogue in postmodern aesthetics” (65) only make the presence of the real come to the fore, they result “in the very contrary of what the appearance of reality is in a realist sense” (65). As a counter-example, he mentions the Berliner Schaubühne production of

9. Stegemann’s hope, thus, lies in Occupy masterminds like David Graeber, the philosopher Slavoj Žižek, and the *new realists* or *speculative realists* around Markus Gabriel, Maurizio Ferraris and Armen Avanessian.

Ibsen's *Enemy of the People* that “uses the interruption technique of postmodern theatre without following its Ideology” (156-157). Interruption does not *as such* become the event (*Ereignis*) but “changes unremarkably the position of the viewers” (157) as the actors act from the audience, step by step and in a plausible way, without any alienation technique (*Verfremdungstechnik*), so that the audience at some point spontaneously starts to intervene in the conflict that is staged as a public debate, finding themselves suddenly in the centre of the fiction and participating, as if it were nothing out of the ordinary, in the voting process against the protagonist Thomas Stockmann:¹⁰ an example of how to apply a postmodern interruption technique *realistically*.

Nevertheless, a reactionary attitude hides behind the effects of immediacy of performative theatre, as Stegemann's last witness, Slavoj Žižek, asseverates, because this theatre seeks to emulate the world in its unrepresentability, making itself “the mirror of a missing world's logic” (Stegemann, 2015: 82), and thus becomes nihilistic theatre: “a circulation of objects and signs [...], or of bodies and signs – of bodies, however, that are almost objectivated by their passionate or disrupted though hopeless and insoluble relations.” In contrast, a vivid and dramatic theatre displays “the contradiction of lacking a world and the desire towards a world.”

This, however, is the very effective principle in *Kill your Darlings* – that Stegemann portrays in overwhelmingly negative terms and that nevertheless seems realistic in the sense that it not only deplores a negative reality that Žižek doesn't deny at all (herein one step advanced in comparison to Stegemann – *what* he denies is only its nihilistic affirmative repetition onstage), but also, as I maintain, confidentially approaches this lack by artistic means in order to overcome its paradoxical logic.

Kill your darlings – a (phenomenological) perspective from affect theory

The untenability of the conceptual separation of world and subject has been tackled by Merleau-Ponty (1964, translation 1986: 183) who proposed not prematurely establishing the subject as a fixed point of departure (not even in the undercover form of capitalist “conditions” by which it may be seduced) but rather as some sort of *in-between* that is built by both the world and, at the same time, by building the world; that is, to think in terms of a *process* and conceive the subject in a *dynamic* way – comparable with reflections between mirrors, as mentioned above. Such an approach, inspired by affect theory, implies a reality where the single person does not act as a political agent but rather as a *bodiliness* (*Leiblichkeit*) oscillating between self and world (*chair* in Merleau-Ponty's terminology; cf. 1964: 181); that is, as a mediator equally open to both sides – self and world – in an interspace filled by, or made of, affects, with “scintillating properties” (Tygstrup, 2012: 201) in a dynamic force field,¹¹ and to which corresponds realistically

10. The stage production *Enemy of the People* of the Schaubühne Berlin involves the audience and has been shown in more than 30 cities. For documentation cf. <<http://goo.gl/oj879Q>> [Last accessed: 1 September 2017].

11. “Affects alight and persist in the unfinished and processual, as scintillating qualities of the present with their own characteristic signature” (Tygstrup, 2012, p. 201).

the “theatrical event as a dialogically structured intermediate occurrence” (Zwischengeschehen - Roselt, 2008: 16).

In Pollesch's production *Kill your Darlings! Streets of Berladelfia*, reality effects are being employed too: by the microphone warning “*Step aside, please*”, the excavator, the gymnastic exercises exerted by an authentic acrobats group from Berlin, and by the question “*Where are we here?*” Stegemann (2015: 184) objects to their statement of authenticity: “The fact that theatre refuses to deceive mimetically does not yet mean it is true.” *Kill your Darlings*, however, avoids any authenticity claims or deconstructs them as being illusory: “You are missing something, you don't have enough” — those lines, by mantra-like repetition, become, by constant repetition, a murmuring, a Heideggerian “empty talk” (*Gerede*); and from the announcement “We jump — now!” remains ironically only a soft, so to speak, floating-on-a-cloud-like descending movement, criticising thus, the pseudo-risky way of life that some people mistake for involvement. The presented message doesn't wear out in superficial visibility, it is rather imperative to think along and laugh with and read between the lines of the performance. For instance, that we are lacking love, or the unquestioned belief in it, precisely because both, love and faith do not lie on the surface; that, on the other hand, such concepts have been looked through long since and deconstructed in their historicity — and now they have no more validity, which is why we miss them. In no case does the performance display pure deconstructivist positions but rather balances them with remaining slices of prototypical melodramatic subjects that allow us to experience our phenomenal (romantic) yearning for those (deconstructed) illusions: “Anyway, why does no-one kill himself for love anymore? / The best scenes you won't see tonight because none of us would bear them” (Pollesch, 2013: 191).

Stegemann (2015: 188), however, does not evidence his critique by his experience of the performance, but rather by a programmatic collection of statements¹² from Pollesch (2012: 38) in which the latter transforms the “customary problems of racism, sexism, capitalism” into questions of “representation, heterosexuality, and inauthentic community.” According to Stegemann, Pollesch's theatre dispenses with any *beyond* of the signs and any inner subjective life “distorted by social norms” (Stegemann, 2015: 188). Instead, he says, Pollesch attacks productions of normality in performances (e.g. heterosexuality), which make a claim to power marking all other ways of living as deviant. Without reflecting the social *causes*, however, says Stegemann, Pollesch's critique leaves the dialectic base “living entirely in the present which is split up in endless differences.”

As a summary, Stegemann pushes his criticism of Pollesch's “critical postmodern realism” to its outer limits, and, by doing so, towards an aspect in Pollesch's aesthetics that will be of interest in the following: “*The theatre of René Pollesch works at every approachable level on these new moments of*

12. Its title is *Der Schnittchenkauf* (Buying Canapés) alluding to Brecht's *Messingkauf* (Buying Brass) for its programmatic character. Cf. René POLLESCH. *Der Schnittchenkauf*. Berlin: Galerie Daniel Buchholz, 2012.

presence, at the same time being driven by a reflective naivety that wishes to experience contingency as beauty and deconstruction as play."

What he criticises here is a dimension, though not present in Pollesch's theoretical statements, that is palpable all the more in the *performance* of *Kill your Darlings* where it implements — as play, break-up ("in endless differences"), time-independency ("on any approachable level"), moment, and unexpected suddenness — an entirely different temporality ("new moments of presence") compared to the one that Stegemann imagines to be adequate for a realistic theatre that aims to deal with the real situation by fiction and therefore needs a plot, a narration, or what literary science calls a *récit*. Irrespective of Pollesch's theoretical comments, this other dimension comes into its own even more evidently — or more perceptibly (it is impossible to follow the performance *without* perceiving this dimension) — onstage "on any approachable level": in the dispersed "appearances" of the acrobats who elegiacally demonstrate their exercises, in the stage design (a sensually-significative mixture of symbolic elements — for instance, the towering, coloured scintillating gala curtain contrasted by a puppet-show-like Brechtian curtain and the covered wagon à la Mother Courage — and of sensual effects such as the violent rainfall rushing down in the middle of the performance), in the thematically and stylistically anachronistic music (Bruce Springsteen's *Streets of Philadelphia*, a narration about a dying AIDS patient, which functions as a topologic tilting figure oscillating between inner narrative thread and outer formal means), above all, however, in the actor Fabian Hinrichs who presents an obviously well-prepared text displaying it "playfully", which gets permanently covered or pushed aside by other, more *real*, impulses: the problem with the damned excavator that judders uncontrollably, being anything but easy to operate; the grotesquely unwieldy octopus costume that ruins any free-flowing dialogue with the acrobats "chorus"; yet the very first appearance onstage, the aforementioned sublime-pathetic floating down from the theatre ceiling, overlaid and crossed by technical processes (hooking off the rope), and so forth.

All these disruptions urge frequently — though not always — to the forefront, becoming thus more "real" than what Hinrichs is saying, in the very sense that Goffman (1974: 10-11) called a *frame*, since they answer the question about "what is going on here." The question is *not* what is the *meaning* of this, say, when Hinrichs is "let down together with a chorus of acrobats from Berlin from the grid floor" (Stegemann, 2015: 188-189) asking in the moment of landing: "What is this here? / I don't know / what this is" (189) — a seemingly rhetorical question that Stegemann answers referring to its surface: "the stage, the audience, all those who are here, anyway..." This reality, however, is exactly *not* the reference here. And since Stegemann doesn't ask what *is* the question, he consequently continues misguided by *text interpretation*: "...and at the same time the question opens up from the concrete to the big question of life's purpose, of what might be space or life anyway, or" — now citing performance text — "if all this isn't all too tight or too big for our love" (Pollesch, 2013: 190). Whereby, as Stegemann (2015: 189) concludes, "the performance

theme has been discovered.” That is in several aspects correct — though contrary to how Stegemann conceives it, as shall be shown now.

Stegemann (2015: 189) comprehends the scene as the meaningless self-reference of the protagonist — “like a host who charmingly and humbly serves one opulent course after the other, pointing out apologetically with every new dish that the finest, unfortunately, cannot proceed today.” The serving of the courses of the meal celebrates its own decay, congealing into a picture of irrevocable transience. In the “gesture of inquiring assent” of these statements, Stegemann, praising realism but not seeing any of it at work here, can only perceive the “tradition of Brechtian alienation (*Verfremdung*)” — especially since the latter is insinuated all too obviously by the Mother Courage covered wagon and the label fragments “FAT” and “ZER” on the glittering Brechtian curtain.

The question “what is going on here” — and thus the question of reality — as Goffman and James understand it, is, however, not answered by what is *said* (as Stegemann assumes) but by what *happens* framing the scenic situation: an actor (not a character) floats down gracefully together with some co-actors in a spectacular circus-like scene from the grid-floor, reminding us of some redeemer descending from heaven to save mankind. It is a *show* that exposes openly and auto-ironically its scenic fragility as soon as actors meet technical devices, and thus its playing character. “What is going on here” is this very *showing* of the show: “Hi, I’m the protagonist and I am being let down by a steel rope from the grid-floor, which is funny but yet no more than a stupid little show that has no deeper meaning, so *here* you need not search — but then, where?” This procedure, the assertion of the gesture of the technically transparent letting-down, and not the text spoken by Hinrichs, is the framing reality of this moment.

Maybe this is not the mimesis that Stegemann (2015: 8) wants to rehabilitate in the form of realistic representation by which we can conceive “the world and imagine its changeability” because it is not an imitation of social reality in the sense of an accomplished, authentic copy. But, as Paul Ricoeur (1975, translation 1986: 51) explains in his metaphor theory, Aristotle didn’t understand mimesis as imitation in terms of a passive depiction but rather characterises mimesis as a double tension “between fidelity *and* fairytale-like poetic fiction, between reproduction *and* elevation.” What takes place, in this “fairytale-like” dynamically elevating sense, in *Kill your Darlings* is the mimesis of what occurs outside and inside, even here amidst us as we are sitting in the theatre: after numerous failed trials of approaching each other, the protagonist and the acrobats will hide from the rain in lustful communion, leading scenically *ad absurdum* the whole issue of alienation (*Entfremdung*), of love, of the impossibility and the scandal of coming together with the beloved, who is addressed optionally as capitalism or network — thus criticising this issue. Reference to the world, thus, *is* achieved, for the onstage reality of the technical and social problems of togetherness *does* actually point to a reality outside, raising the very question that Stegemann misses in postdramatic theatre: What are the causes? Which reality impedes the success of happiness? Here as well as “outside” there is a distinction between

dialogue and scenic reality. Statements are not the essential, as this text, too, gets displaced or blurred *behind* a corporeally urging reality (protection from the pattering rain) that all of a sudden crosses the discourse, breaks into it, saying look out, here comes the real. The objection that Pollesch's theatre remains in self-referential discourse only scratches the surface; in fact, it is true that a discourse is being presented but the circumstances of the performance, its corporeality, its atmosphere and the affects that go hand in hand with the being together of humans on a stage and in a theatre space are apparently revealed as frame — and thus as true constituents of a social, not only individual, reality.

Jameson's affectivity concept

If Stegemann's analysis of postdramatic loss of reality held true (given that one accepts the class standing point in the first place), the spectator, however, by no means makes the experience of a self-referential vexatious game, unconnected by any ties to social reality, but on the contrary experiments a performance that speaks critically towards itself and towards all possible positions, on the surface about loving the "network", thereby asking, and simulating, central questions of living together, then it seems sensible to assume *some* realism at work behind this experience. As now a concept from literary science comes into play, it is provisionally and in gross simplification assumed that language is for literature what scenic event is for theatre. The *récit*, or narration, is analogous here to scenic action, or the development of action — narration being realised as linear temporal succession (past, present, and future), just as action drives the events onstage forward in the sense of development. (A narration that follows more than one narrative thread would then correspond to a theatre play with a multilayered, complex action.)

Fredric Jameson (2013: 14; 27) develops in his book *The Antinomies of Realism* "The Twin Sources of Realism: Narrative Impulse" and "The Twin Sources of Realism: Affect, or, the Body's Present." These two impulse sources must, he says, converge to yield a realistic novel. He describes the narrative impulse with an example of Giovanni Boccaccio's *Decamerone*: the ninth tale of the fifth day, which, if only by the *Decamerone*'s framing, is mere narration — "the purest form of the *récit*" (24) — consisting, according to Jameson, of pure *narrative impulse*. Noblemen tell stories to one another in turns as a pastime in the refuge where they hide from the plague, and the current narrator starts by telling how her story has been told to her by another person. The two threads of the plot cross in the object of a hawk which has different functions in each thread, oscillating between them as a tilting image.¹³ Narrations, however, normally do not only consist in the *récit* that corresponds to an action mode that Jameson calls *telling*, but are also always interspersed by elements of a quite other temporality, the pure form of which Jameson

13. "For the hawk — in this, paradigmatic of most twist or trick endings, even those which do not turn on a single object — is double-valenced, which is to say that it can serve a different function in each of the contexts in which it appears, switching back and forth in a kind of Gestalt effect." (Fredric JAMESON. *The Antinomies of Realism*. London: Verso, 2013, p. 23-24).

illustrates by a second extreme example: “Lunch went on methodically, until each of the seven courses was left in fragments and the fruit was merely a toy, to be peeled and sliced as a child destroys a daisy, petal by petal” (Woolf, 1915: 56).

Contrary to most lunch descriptions, this one cannot possibly be ranged into any narrative time but creates a totally other temporal form that Jameson (2013: 25-26) circumscribes by the terms “present of consciousness”, “impersonal consciousness of the present”, only “impersonal consciousness”, or the “‘eternity’ of individual consciousness” – we will simply call it *eternal consciousness*. This dimension stands cross to narrative time, bringing about its halt, break, or suspension. Other than *telling*, its mode of action rather corresponds to *showing* – which in literature requires *description*. Description is done by metaphors. Thus, the circle closes onto Ricoeur, who conceives the metaphor not as a common replacement on a word level but rather as related to mimesis, comprehending it as reproducing *and* elevating a reference function. The timeless-eternal dimension of *showing* is the matrix for affects. Other than emotions, they carry no name yet, being still tivable and purely corporeal. Emotions *in nuce*, anonymous, amorphous, impersonal,¹⁴ prior to any separation of an I and an object pole, both being brought about only by the very affect in the first place (Böhme, 2001: 38). The affective is what opposes the narrative, hampering it in its flow, crossing or bridging it, without itself having any naming yet. The problem of poets and narrators thus is “to seize its fleeting essence” (Jameson, 2013: 31), i.e. to help the affect, in light of its namelessness, to become language. “It is therefore words themselves (the medieval universals) which are incompatible with the body and its affects [...] that we need a different kind of language to identify affect” (37).

The analogue to the *namelessness* of the affects that appear – beyond the linear temporality of past, present, and future – in the timeless present of the eternal consciousness and that suddenly, in the medium of language, still stand before the words, would be, in theatre, a moment of *eventlessness*, of the absence of a traceable (i.e. having a trace to be processed) development that drives a scene forward – thus, of *scenic stillness*, a moment that might consist of a *gesture* having an effect such as a tableau or a *still*, breaking through the whole theatrical action by its threateningly strange temporality. It is true, *something is* going on here, too, in this point of space and time, in the moment of this quite different experience, but it is of a non-narrative kind, as Sartre observes it in the sudden that unexpectedly, maybe obscenely, *shows* for instance in a break-in, a burglary, a surprise, an interruption (!): the former and the sudden not being held together by any causal-logic ligature, the expected story action rather having been “stopped” (as Husserl’s *epoché* parenthesises the approval of reality) in the sense of *bridged*, or *crossed*, be it for another action, or a *pause* made in favour of a *description* (in literature) or, respectively, of a *gesture* (in theatre).

14. In the German language, an approximation of this idea is given by impersonal verbs such as *mich friert* (I’m cold; literally: [it] freezes me).

Interruption, for Stegemann a non-realistic postdramatic defensive manoeuvre that suddenly makes appear, instead of reality, the physical realness of theatre by inhibiting the words' narrative flow (that has the function of making re-cognizable reality mimetically), turns out, from the perspective of an *antinomic* realism, as the ingredient of a different kind of temporal phenomenon that is, according to Jameson, the second source of the realistic novel and, in theatre, appears as an affective impact in the guise of standstill, hold, scenic adjustment etc., alimanted not by an *eternal consciousness* but by a corporeal dimension of presence (Merleau-Ponty's *chair*) where affects go in and out. This affective dimension, in a novel hard to be brought into language (otherwise the corresponding affects would be nameable emotions such as anger, grief, etc.), corresponds in theatre, in the frame of the above achieved analogy, to its *unplayability, unrepresentability or unperformability*. Performed "affects" are but represented emotions. Affectivity onstage rather would appear as interruption of the scenic development of a plot, as deviation, pause, break-in, or other impulse that crosses the scenic course.

From this perspective, in the performance of *Kill your Darlings* realism doesn't consist either — in accordance with Stegemann — of the "invasion of reality" (in the form, for instance, of real experts), but rather — in contrast to what Stegemann assumes — the crossing of a scenic development, or plan, by affective interruption of it. *Kill your Darlings* displays such interruptions as if it was for learning, some of which seem to be veritably *staged*, for instance the sudden appearance of the technical problem with the excavator as if it was a technical glitch. In the light of Jameson's theory, a scenic course or action is "realistic" not only by telling, from one's own class standpoint, the conflicts of reality through fiction, but by drawing from *two* sources: a developing story and a bodiliness that crosses, interrupts, inhibits or otherwise *affects the story's course*. An affect, then, is what Judith Butler (2009: 34) conceives by "coming up against": any striking bodily attack that all of a sudden emerges, corresponding to nothing on the timeline of the *récit* but being simply (and sometimes uncomfortably) a derogation of time in the familiar temporality of narration, or, respectively, in theatre, in the scenic development. Between these two dimensions, the narrative impulse (*telling*) and the affective impulse (*showing*), there might occur, then, a crossing point: this is reality, or at least the realistic in a singular concretion, the birthplace of a theatrical event.

As previously mentioned, Stegemann (2015: 189) compared the protagonist Fabian Hinrichs with a host "who charmingly and humbly serves an opulent course after the other, pointing out apologetically with every new dish that the finest, unfortunately, cannot proceed today." What appears to Stegemann as the protagonist's complacency and self-reference in a auto-referential theatre rotating around itself corresponds exactly to this eternal evenness of an a-temporalised or, so to speak, "dys-timed" successive serving of the seven menu courses in the cited lunch passage of Virginia Woolf and its decay — "*methodically*", until only "*fragments*" remain and the fruit finally is peeled and cut in pieces, as a child picks a daisy, petal after petal. What Stegemann criticises, thus, is pure affectivity, creating a picture of irrevocable transience.

According to Jameson's literary *realism*, a *realistic* theatre performance would be pervaded by the linear temporality of a scenic development and, at the same "time", unpredictably crossed, interspersed, and perforated — "on every approachable level" — by the timeless, "eternal" dimension of affectivity. Affects suspend linearity and narrative temporality — those "new moments of presence" that Stegemann (2015: 188) criticised in the résumé on *Kill your Darlings* — just as we can either focus on the floating clouds or on our own actions in their specific, respective speed, either on the film or on the ringing telephone, but never on both of them at one moment. We "are at the same time driven by a reflective naivety, wishing to experience contingency as beauty and deconstruction as play" — these words from the criticism on *Kill your Darlings* now, from an affect-theoretical perspective, sound only consequent. Whoever engages himself, in a theatre performance, in interruptions of a scenic movement can enjoy them without thereby leaving the space of realistic experience.

Coda

Stegemann's claim for *mimesis* contains an uncritical pre-assumption: that theatre has a call to analyse and change reality, and that it is not allowed to leave it at showing the state and depicting the disquietude of the individual, his or her frustration and uncertainty, with the possible consequence that solidarity emerges between the many individuals who might become affectively aware of contexts, causes and mechanisms as a shared experience of their being together: a public affair, a *res publica* where the uneasiness of the individual is given the chance to become part of an "affective space" (Tygstrup, 2012: 204),¹⁵ the individual problem becoming thus collective uneasiness. At bottom, Stegemann (2015: 203), too, senses that the affective uneasiness *per se* may be a realistic force — why else would he thoughtfully write on the last page of his book: "*Reality consists not only in language and arguments. We do not yet know what the body can do*"?



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15. An "affective space" is defined by Frederik Tygstrup as a "relational spatiality of lived human experience according to one specific aspect, that is, the question of just which affects are produced in this relational economy" (Frederik TYGSTROP. "Affective Spaces". In: Daniela AGOSTINHO, Elisa ANTZ and Cátia FERREIRA (ed.), *Panic and Mourning: The Cultural Work of Trauma*. Berlin, Walter de Gruyter, p. 204).

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