



On the Cultural Genealogy of the Method in *Dau*: Ideology, Aesthetics, Ethics

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Abstract:

Unlike numerous critical texts that question the ethical and institutional characteristics of Ilya Khrzhanovsky's *Dau* project, in this paper I explore the project's genesis as a cultural and ideological phenomenon. I reveal the project's bonds with its cultural predecessors, such as Anatoly Vasiliev, Boris Yukhananov, Yuri Mamleev, Vladimir Martynov, and Vladimir Sorokin. I research not only the study of Soviet totalitarianism in *Dau* (which the project meticulously reenacts) but also the genealogy of dissident and postsocialist non-conformist cultural codes, which, despite their critique of totalitarianism, often fall into the trap of reproducing those totalitarian features. Mapping artistic devices used in *Dau*, the paper then focuses at length on the issues of power

distribution in the organization of performative process enacted by the project's participants.

Keywords:

Performance, *Dau*, Grotovsky, Yukhananov, Open process, Composition, Inductive speech

Released in 2019 and directed by Ilya Khrzhanovsky, the *Dau* project began as a biopic of Soviet physicist¹ Lev Landau before developing into an expanded multimedia project. Between 2008 and 2011, the *Dau* Institute occupied 12,000m² of the former Dynamo Aquatic Stadium in Kharkiv, Ukraine, to become the largest film set in Europe. It also became a sort of alternate reality: for three years, scientists, artists, musicians, philosophers, religious figures, and mystics, as well as cooks, cleaners, nurses, hairdressers, and secret service agents — all lived and worked at the institute within a strictly observed historical reconstruction of the period spanning from 1938 to 1968. In total, 392,000 people auditioned for the film. Over more than one hundred shooting days in the three-year period, cameras recorded each character's natural behavior in circumstances orchestrated by the director. The cast were non-actors and lived in the institute under their own names, with the exception of Lev Landau's prototype *Dau* (Teodor Currentzis), his wife (Radmila Schegoleva), their son (Nikolai Voronov), and Professor Krupitsa (Anatoly Vasiliev), the institute's director from "1938" to "1953." Their biographies were transposed to a past Soviet reality. The project resulted in seven hundred hours of film, thirteen feature films, and numerous documentations.

Many critics have tried to either affirm or discard the project's specific aesthetic achievement, departing from the concrete expectations of each of the genres integrated in it, or judging the ethics of the filming routine. Our task, meanwhile, is rather to explore the project's genesis as a cultural and ideological phenomenon, not only in the context of Soviet totalitarianism (which the project revisits and reenacts) but also in the genealogy of dissident and postsocialist non-conformist cultural codes. The project recreates a closed science

¹ Lev Davidovich Landau (1908–1968) was a Soviet physicist who made fundamental contributions to theoretical physics. His accomplishments include the independent codiscovery of the density matrix method in quantum mechanics, the theory of superfluidity, the Ginsburg-Landau theory of superconductivity, the Landau pole of quantum electrodynamics and others. He received the 1962 Nobel prize in physics for his development of a mathematical theory of superfluidity.

hub-town (*sharashka*), which had become a metaphor for Soviet totalitarian civilization, and engaged role-playing games and reality show paradigms to expose multiple angles of human relations in such a space: from whistleblowing and snitching to spontaneous affairs, promiscuity, carnivalesque transgressions, and acted-out violence during the interrogation role-plays. This thorough reconstruction of a totalitarian sociality and its communicative infrastructure was designed to expose its internal mechanisms and tacit rules. Yet our question is how and why the reality show method in researching totalitarianism and violence in fact achieved the converse effect: the same former dissident subject that deconstructs and defies the totalitarian system happens to become enchanted with and attracted to totalitarianism.

The Möbius effect caused by both an attraction to the totalitarian system and its critique is not only a feature of Khrzhanovsky's grand project but is part and parcel of Soviet non-conformist narratives more generally: of Sots Art, of Moscow Conceptualism, of the prose of Yuri Mamleev and Vladimir Sorokin, of the theatrical methods of Boris Yukhananov and Anatoly Vasiliev, of composer Vladimir Martynov's (2002) theory of anti-composition. Three elements are crucial here: 1. Identifying the whole history of the Soviet Union with totalitarianism (which is characteristic of the late Soviet and post-Soviet intelligentsia and could be historically disputed, as in this approach the emancipatory programs of socialist equality are also considered to be totalitarian). 2. Critical exposure of the totalitarian system through its mocked or profaned reproduction, which nonetheless marks this critical reproduction's inability to detach from the totalitarian system. 3. Internalizing the totalitarian system and hence being enchanted with it, as a paradoxical aspect, concomitant to its critique.

It was in fact Michel Foucault (1976) who discerned the Möbius logic in clinical discourse: according to his shrewd observation, one might start to enjoy what one analyzes critically or controls as a social vice. In *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1982), too, discover that capitalism is both axiomatic (it captivates and controls) and schizophrenic and creative; that is, capitalism subjugates, but at the same time fosters conditions under which one can deviate and elude. In *Dau*, such a Möbius disposition — being simultaneously repulsed by and attracted to totalitarian power — initiates a deconstruction of that power and its profanation; but, at the same time, paradoxically relaunches and reaffirms the totalitarian paradigm despite exerting its deconstruction. Let us study this paradox.

1. Between Resentment and Attachment to Power

In one of his lectures, the remarkable Russian theater director Boris Yukhananov (2016) tells an interesting biographical episode.² During one of his first trips to Europe in the late 1980s, Yukhananov stayed in a four-star hotel. It was his first experience of being in a “Western” hotel. He was struck by the fact that the interior and its technical efficiency was so perfect and functionally optimized, that he — a mortal human being from the Soviet Union, with its shabby and unfinished interiors — felt like the most miserable and squalid element in the hotel room. The first thing that occurred to him then, as Yukhananov himself recalls, was that this technological efficiency and functional perfection presented a sort of “kind” Western Stalinism. He was fascinated by the functional optimization and excellence of technology and design, but at the same time he felt a yearning to deconstruct, undermine, and subvert it. Yukhananov’s observation marks two paradoxes in the Soviet cultural critique of totalitarianism: 1. That Western liberties and democracy assert democratic freedoms while engaging totalitarian perfection in technologies, grounding social infrastructures upon them. For example, Western democracy is the symbiosis of two incompatible parameters — democratic demand for liberties and the all-encompassing order in technology and its productive requirements that rule not only the spheres of sociality, industry, architecture and design but artistic production and institutional infrastructure too. 2. That even with an artist’s decision to elude the totalitarian order — be it the Soviet partocracy or the rigid rules of technology — totalitarianism remains on the horizon despite any possible flight from it: to deviate from the rules, one needs to reconstruct and reenact those totalitarian rules. Consequently, one inevitably arrives at the Möbius logic: the rigid rules of the repressive and violent apparatus fuse with the ingenuous modalities of its most sacrilegious transgression. The anarchic rebellion against totalitarianism is doomed to be concomitant to the totalitarian paradigm in order to perform its degradation and decomposition. This disposition between the repressive totalitari-

² In this lecture *On the New Processuality* at the National Center of Contemporary Art in Moscow as part of the Paths of Performativity program curated by Keti Chukhrov (26 April 2016), the director and pedagogue, head of Electro Stanislavsky Theatre Boris Yukhananov touched upon the theatre of new organization, comprising diverse activities, exceeding merely acting and directing and acquiring the dimension of a non-chronotopic, perpetual time of culture. In such a time-space there is no teleology, since there is no end of the process of acting and directing, as teleology is total and presupposes violence of one ontology over the other. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zVBzHRxZT1Q>.

an infrastructure and perverse, carnivalesque deviations from it, is crucial for *Dau*. It is reproduced in each of the films, allowing the reality show participants to intervene in the prescribed rules of the closed city-laboratory by means of their own enacted transgressions.

This connection is interesting because although the project claimed to critically expose Soviet totalitarianism and its austere system, it in fact rather indulged in the excesses and abundances that existed despite and behind the system, that is, the project focused on those modes of behavior that represent the Soviet system's criminalized shadow rather than its official beliefs and provisions. Therefore, the project can be understood rather as an exercise in submerging into Soviet socialism's deviated forms, which in fact happen to be anti-Soviet and anti-socialist.

The syndrome of decomposing the totalitarian order intends to prove that life surpasses totalitarian power, yet, in the *Dau* project, transgression is mainly confined to sexual excess, promiscuity, games of violence, or perverse play: resistant deviation confronting the deadly system realizes itself as decay (of the system), rather than its complete destruction, being unable to imagine a new, non-totalitarian infrastructure. Hence, a fair question arises, as articulated by Nick Holdsworth (2020): "Why go to such lengths to recreate the austere, depressing atmosphere of the Soviet Union only to squander it on pointless pornography?"

The project's creators insist that these transgressive forms of conduct were unmediated among the "institute's" inhabitants. They claim that nobody forced the project participants to follow a transgressive or violent scenario. Yet the permanent disposition in almost all the films remains the same binary opposition between the repressive and surveyed regulations of the "institute" and the attempt to pervert them on "private" territory. In *Natasha*, one of the films of the project, the barmaid (played by Natalia Berezhnaya) indulges in sexual intercourse with the newly arrived French scientist (played by the French biochemist Luc Bigé), even though she knows they are being filmed. Earlier, she forces her colleague Olga (played by Olga Shkabarnya), another barmaid, to drink vodka until she almost loses consciousness and vomits.

In yet another film *Sasha and Valera*, Valera, one of the two cleaners (enacted by two homeless men), demands Sasha consent to a more brutal sexual intercourse than Sasha would like. Their argument about it fluctuates between a courting scene and what is almost a rape. In the same film, the service personnel (mainly the cleaners and guards) get drunk to the extent that their very survival comes into question.

In *The Brave People*, a row between the reality show inhabitants leads the wife of one of the physicists (the couple is played by scientists Andrey Losev and Larisa Berzhitskaya) into a fit of hysteria that grows into a theatrical scandal leading to the couple being expelled from the project. It is not so important whether or not this scandal emerged organically from the participants or was instigated by the director as a deliberate dramatization. What matters is the excessive behavior juxtaposed against regulated and controlled life. Regardless of whether such patterns of behavior were imposed on the inhabitants of the project or voluntarily enacted by them, the goal was to demonstrate the combination of totalitarian rule and the acts perversely violating it.

Although the preliminary negotiations with the participants about their behavior was concealed from the public, it is nevertheless evident that the performers were encouraged to indulge in promiscuous “liberties.” The reenactment of Landau’s adventures with polyamory were meant to be juxtaposed with the totalitarian control. However, the fact that Landau himself had an open relationship with his wife Kora does not immediately imply the scientist’s sexual life had a pornographic dimension. It is evident that usually, sexual libertinage — no matter whether it is applied by the totalitarian rulers or their victims — deranges the authoritarian order. Yet if we remember that this transgressive behavior was commissioned to certain project participants as part of their role, the transgression becomes devoid of its liberating connotations and cannot exceed the authoritarian frame.

According to Michal Murawski’s inquiry (SSEES 2020), Denis Shibanov, the architect of the *Dau* project, deliberately designed the architectural set so that pornographic symbolism was inscribed into the Soviet totalitarian frame, which was therefore a parody rather than a reconstruction of the Soviet secret research laboratory. As Murawski puts it, the “toxic masculinity was discernible in architecture built as female sexual organs,” bearing physiological names and reproducing the sexual anatomy of body organs, such as nipples, vagina, and so on, thus demonstrating the project’s “underwhelming underpant determinism” (SSEES 2020).

That being said, it turns out that the principal tool of resisting the totalitarian system is only confined to transgressive behavior: not only because the new, non-totalitarian social infrastructure would be difficult to achieve under repressive conditions but also because any composed construction, as Boris Yukhananov argued, is doomed to become a set of prescribed rules that inevitably turns into an apparatus. It thus transpires that a derangement of the set

of totalitarian rules does not allow one to surpass the landscape of totalitarian law; mainly because the main transgressor and subverter of those rules is, first and foremost, the totalitarian Sovereign himself, which has the privilege to suspend the law.

Consequently, perverting the rules does not lead to the abolition of the totalitarian order. It is therefore no surprise that those who exert destructive bacchanalia in their dissident confrontation of the totalitarian rule do nothing but reproduce a Big Brother/Sovereign's exclusive right to deviate and pervert the totality, which paradoxically confirms rather than evades the landscape of totalitarian construction. In *Dau*, this Sovereign is the "film director" himself, who often articulated his function as managing, observing, or ruling, rather than composing or setting the artistic tasks.

Indeed, the perverting power as its dissident critique is often encouraged by mimicking both the totalitarian order and the Sovereign's surplus pleasure in perverting it. This is why so many radical performances by Pussy Riot, the Voina group, Piotr Pavlensky, or other post-Soviet activists — when attempting to undermine authority by means of profane perversity — fell into the trap of mirroring it. This mirroring was because the Sovereign often happens to be even more perverse and transgressive than its critiques in surpassing the constraints of power. Consequently, the liberal (libertarian) critique of authority often overlooks the fact that the perversion applied as the derangement of the Sovereign's total authority happens to be, in fact, an unconscious envy to the Sovereign's exclusive right for the most unimaginable sacrilege. Moreover, sexual perversion historically and anthropologically has rarely been the focal point in the Soviet organization of power. Perversion arises as the libertarian fantasy to deconstruct order and organization or to aspire toward the Sovereign's surplus pleasure. No surprise, then, that there are so many inconsistencies in the *Dau* project's assessment of Soviet history in terms of the correlation between emancipation and discrimination. To start with, the project's creators completely identify the totalitarian paradigm with Soviet sociality, and the repressive apparatuses with communism/historical socialism. For example, very often, the scientific methods and edifices that were never part of Soviet science — such as the application of eugenics (*Degeneration*), training in holotropic breathing, or shamanic rituals — are presented in *Dau* as regular fields of scientific research in the socialist state. The inevitable result of the dismissal of the communist project is contempt for the proletariat and an approach to socialist workers as barbarians, simply because they supported socialist ideology. Historical socialism is consequently seen as an in-

vasion of “proletarian-barbarians” into the realm of civilized liberal values. The *Dau* project reproduces controversies within the liberal critique of historical socialism when it identifies communism with Stalinism. Paradoxically then, the liberal critique of communism, in disregarding the “democratic” genesis of the October Revolution and Soviet socialism, and in denigrating the uneducated, unsophisticated masses, tacitly takes up the standpoint of elitist supremacy.

2. From the End Product to the Open Process

Although the *Dau* project is undoubtedly cinematic, the more so that technically it functions as voyeuristic surveillance, its impact exceeds cinema. The action in all its series focuses on documenting the turn between mere being and excessive transgressive conduct. Khrzhanovsky’s reluctance to comply with the rules of the unified cinematic end product and the aesthetics of the composed opus has predecessors, already enumerated above — Yukhananov, Vasiliev, and Martynov. In 2002 Martynov wrote *The End of the Composer’s Time*, insisting that the timeline of a composed opus, with its beginning and end, has been surpassed. According to him, the contemporary musical form should open up as a pattern variation without an artist’s demiurgic intervention to create a fixed composition. Rather than an ultimate spectacle-performance, Vasiliev convened a method to maintain a rehearsal procedure as a constant living organism within a theatrical institution that would perpetually maintain this rehearsing regime, so that a staged performance would rather be inscribed into a set of rehearsals or a research laboratory of constant acting and play. Performance of a theatrical play in this case was reminiscent of monastic service — a daily practice of reverence transforming the text into an acting process. Yukhananov — himself a disciple of Vasiliev and Anatoly Efros — coined the term “the new processuality”⁵ to emphasize the end product’s disavowal, which is inscribed in the machine of consumption. The end product as an inevitable component to creative process becomes an object of total (totalitarian) design and technology, which thereby evades the reverence that an artistic procedure should incite (in agreement with Antonin Artaud and Jacques Derrida [2000], who emphasizes how important it was for Artaud to reject the end product).

In the episode on Yukhananov’s first visit to the West told above, the director himself emphasized how the rigid order of technology

⁵ See the lecture by Boris Yukhananov *On the New Processuality* at the National Center of Contemporary Art (26 April 2016).

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zVBzHRxZT1Q>.

and imaginary libertine anarchy are dubiously intertwined. As he shrewdly put it, the expectation of the Soviet underground that Western liberal democracy could be identified with anarchic spontaneity proved to be an absolute illusion. The discovery made by the late Soviet artistic intelligentsia by the mid-1990s was that social commission and multiple dogmatic constraints determined Western democracy and its cultural and artistic institutions; in the eyes of “barbarian” post-Soviet underground artists, these appeared totalitarian. In Yukhananov’s opinion, 1990s’ Moscow Actionism — the actions of Anatoly Osmolovsky, Oleg Kulik, Alexander Brener, the Radek community — was an affective reaction to this discovery. And indeed, these affective actionist outbursts of the 1990s were not so much resistance against Soviet totalitarianism, which by that time had already been demolished, but rather against the system of Western art institutions that turned out to be no less protocolled than Soviet cultural politics.

Hence the abovementioned figures’ obsession with deconstructing and subverting any structure, or perpetually remodeling any pattern to achieve an alternative logic of production, which could become a *self-developing performative entity* rather than an end product. Such an entity would be neither a composition — as in the performing arts, music, theater, or dance; nor a conceptualized reification of behavior — as in an art performance; nor a work of contemporary art, which regardless of medium remains an exposed object. A new, open-ended “processuality” (*protsesual’nost’*) would not evolve ergonomically as a classical work of art, or conceptually/post-conceptually as a contemporary art piece, or as a cinematic attraction; it would expand into multiple performative currents, role intersections and unexpected outcomes without the decisionism of an author to govern their development.

While we can agree with Yukhananov that an open-ended process deconstructs and subverts the system, as some sort of anti-Gesamtkunstwerk, at the same time in its incommensurable temporality and expanded scale of work it exhausts its participants. And when the director is not participating in the process himself, he inevitably confines his functions to management and surveillance and thus becomes the subject of control, rather than the head of the artistic procedure.

When commenting on *Dau*, Boris Groys (2021) interestingly emphasizes precisely its expanded duration, which enables it to surpass the digestibility of a commodified spectacle, and which he defines as “Big Time” and a broad perspective, characteristic of the temporal organization in Soviet sociality as against the velocities of capitalist

contemporaneity. Indeed, Socialist temporality relied on a universalist perspective and un-monetized time. For example, one cannot perform the Bible or ancient epics in one hour; one lives with it while reading and rereading. It is not surprising, then, that departing from this logic, a piano piece by Vladimir Martinov could last two hours, or Yukhananov's spectacle *Pinocchio* (The Stanislavsky Electrotheatre, 2019) is performed over eight hours in two sets.

However, the case of *Dau* is different, as unlike Vasiliev, Yukhananov, and Martinov, its director remains outside this "Big Time" of performed processuality in the normal temporality of the Soviet theme park's capitalist management, while his hired volunteers exert the abovementioned expanded processual temporality.⁴

For comparison, when enacting the "big project" in his *Palace of Projects* (1998),⁵ Ilya Kabakov managed to reveal the dimension of that very "Big Time." Even despite his critical irony about Soviet sociality, Kabakov emphasizes utopia's poetic and eidetic dimension in each practice presented in his *Palace*, be it cultural, such as drawing, or writing poems; or be it social, such as public gatherings, new communicative habits, new grotesque modes of applying consumer goods, strange and unexpected usages of space, and so on. Thus, surpassing the socialist rhetoric about technical modernization, Kabakov attains the dimension of cultural contemplation, juxtaposing social utopia's poetic and techno-utilitarian projections.

Yukhananov's mistrust of the end product is conditioned by the inevitable decadence inscribed into it. This mistrust is because the end product as a consumer object is susceptible to entropy and to vanishing by the token of being inevitably consumed; that is, despite its power, a totalitarian construction is subject to degradation by the token of being a non-developing, dead form that can only stagnate. Whereas, the open-end procedure, unlike the stable end product, is prone to constant dynamic movement. But in that case, since these subverting procedures do not invent any new non-totalitarian logic

⁴ To our mind, the reason why art's compositional component leads to its becoming cultural industry's commodified object is not so much in its elaborate compositional boundaries (something that Antonin Artaud was so afraid of), but in the difficulty to locate the eventual contents in the laconic and hermetic form. The drawbacks of opus, therefore, are not so much in its temporal boundaries (a play or a film shortens story or action to two hours), but in the event's elusiveness that a completed art-work attempts to encompass in itself.

⁵ Ilya Kabakov's *Palace of Projects* (Zollverein, 1998) is a minimalist building — something between a house, factory, or futuristic palace of culture. But inside, the spare space of the installation teems with projects of the future. It incorporates sixty-five models made by imaginary amateur utopians for the future improvement of the world.

but simply indulge in the decadence of the totalitarian construction, they, paradoxically, only reproduce that construction's decadent character and thereby inevitably comply with its totalitarian nature despite resisting it. To repeat, the vicious intertwining of the totalitarian form with the poetics of its decomposition does not allow one to surpass the totalitarian form, which internalizes its own decadence within itself. For example, when speculating about the nature of power in his conversation with the physicist Dau (*Dau. The Empire*), Professor Krupiza says that the best way to destroy authority would be to love it. This is because true love destroys; hence the sophistic speculation about love toward authority, which sooner or later leads to the decline and degradation of ("the loved") power.

Actually, all of Khrzhanovsky's predecessors — Vasiliev, Yukhananov, Sorokin, Mamleev — were in a way doomed to deal with totality, applying the poetics of decadence as a tool of their resistance. For example, Sorokin undermines the master-narrative framework (on behalf of culture, state, official ideology) by means of unspeakable necro/porno behavior, unimaginable violence or a transgressive act, committed unexpectedly by precisely those protagonists who seem to be most compliant to authority. In his seminal novel *Shatuny*, Mamleev (2003 [1967]) shows how the sophisticated intelligentsia discusses sublime issues of life and death in their search for life's vitality, and, in this inquiry, voluntarily transforms from knowledgeable intellectuals into the candid village residents who stop speculating and instead start "to act." Yet such "action" reveals itself in the most grotesque violence and atrocious forms of sexuality. For Mamleev, such a transition from a totalitarian, ideated Soviet city into an unregulated village, which stands for a libertine's dream of freedom, is confined to uncontrolled crime and sexual transgression, where death, entropy, and the naïveté of a candid and cruel "fool" are the only conditions for liberating oneself from totalitarian apparatuses.

In his earlier film, *Four* (2004), based on a screenplay by Sorokin, Khrzhanovsky uses a similar disposition: one has to seek out anarchic liberation from the totality of the state and its modes of control, its lexicons and law in a remote village among the elder female community, whose feast after a funeral turns into a bacchanalia that becomes even more obscene and uncanny when the elder women indulge in grotesque quasi-sexual behavior, undressing and swearing.

Meanwhile, it should be noted that that there is crucial difference between the way Vasiliev, Sorokin, or Yukhananov evade composition's constraints and how Khrzhanovsky does it. The former, despite their critique of composition, have never rejected the dramatic script completely. They rather deconstructed it by means of numerous

rearticulations through the performative experiments with acting. Retaining certain components of composition was conditioned by solidarity with actors (protagonists), whose agency cannot be revealed without a script and composition.

Thus, Khrzhanovskiy implements a flight, both from the system of cinematographic rules as well as from the socialist science hub through an improvised acting process that is no longer determined by the script or the director's prescriptions. Let us look, then, at how such an open process turns into a network of life performances in *Dau*, and how this open-ended free improvisation devoid of constraints by script or composition turns into its opposite — a pyramid of surveillance and manipulation.

3. From the Open Process to the Network of Life Performances

Modern art rejected composition a century ago, superseding it with conceptual gimmick or theoretical speculation. The ready-made can serve as a good example here. Art performance was part and parcel of this episteme. While theater, too, in its post-dramatic practices, got rid of narrative and score, cinema could not accomplish this fully. A cinematic piece should have a clear-cut composition. To purge cinema of composition altogether would be possible only by the total extraction and eclipse of the image. But, in that case, we could arrive at an art piece. Khrzhanovskiy had no intention of turning cinematic film into artist's film, yet neither did he remain within the constraints of regular filmic form. Instead of subverting composition by means of conceptual parameters, as is the case with contemporary art, Khrzhanovskiy dismissed composition by means of proliferating self-developing narratives and filmic tracks with an open end. To this end, he used the reality show paradigm with components a role-playing game and, allegedly, certain unwritten tacit imperatives that the project's inhabitants received from him.

In any theatrical or filmic process, the director (often in alliance with the script or play's author) is not only a builder of compositional construction but also a demiurge, prompting tasks and meanings into the mind and the body of an actor. These tasks (*zadacha*) are issued in order to sculpt the character or to determine the psychophysical process in the actor's performing behavior. For example, instead of telling the actor to protrude a hand, Mikhail Chekhov (2010: 371–485) would specify the task, instructing the actor to stretch a hand with the aim of plugging in an electric bulb. Or Jerzi

Grotowsky (2003: 245) would compel the actor who had to play a death scene to reenact his teenage experience of love, thus making the process devoid of clichés and prescribed expectations.

In the case of *Dau*, quite another treatment of performative acting took place, which contained more of a theatrical methodology than a cinematic one, but which nevertheless shifted away from the usual prescriptions for acting. While prescribed rules were imposed in the *Dau* project on architecture, interiors, historical features of lifestyle, clothing, infrastructure, and daily implementation of ideological protocols, the actors did not have to rely on any exact script for their roles, except for the alleged agreement to bring their behavior to some sort of excess and extremities that neither the filmmakers, nor they themselves, could predetermine. This unpredictability, meanwhile, is quite remote from the naturalist methodologies of post-dramatic theater, which resides in the recurring mundane forms of existence and the chronic temporality of daily life in theater, dance, and general performance.

In his lecture, Yukhananov (2016) argues that theatrical speech (*parole*), as against the written text, is properly performed only when it becomes *inductive* and not *deductive*. The exemplary model for inductive speech is, as he claims, “heuristic speech.” Speech is heuristic when in its evolution, meanings are created and ideas are represented. Such was the speech of poetic tournaments, pre-Socratic and Socratic philosophers. In such inductive ideation, discoveries emerge not ahead of the pronounced speech, but simultaneously with it. In fact, the poststructuralist critique of rationality, academic theory, and metaphysics and its discursive forms — especially in the works of Derrida and Deleuze — quite vividly represent the practice of such heuristic (inductive) speech. Let us remember in this connection the oral method of Merab Mamardashvili’s philosophy, who deliberately evaded confining thought to the constraints of an academic paper or a book, preferring to turn the whole of life into a perpetual open process of philosophizing aloud.

In “The Theatre’s New Testament,” Grotowsky describes something similar when he juxtaposes the “holy actor’s inductive technique” and the “courtesan actor’s deductive devices” (2002: 35–36). With inductive technique, the actor is able to reveal the psychic impulses *in statu nascendi* (in the condition of emergence). Such a method — despite the score and script — enables the actor to performatively conduct in all its accidental and eruptive force, so that no preliminary speculation or standpoint invades it. Such a form of acting evolves as prehensive steps in the direction of certain, yet unconfirmed, probability.

What is lacking in Yukhananov's apology of induction as against Grotowsky's explication of it is that the actor's performative behavior is not simply inductive, that is, merely grounded in the impulse when the meaning evolves simultaneously with the utterance and not ahead of it. Unlike poetry and philosophy, in which inductive speech arises *ex-nihilo* and coincides with the creator's "I," induction in an actor's performative conduct evolves as an excessive rendering on behalf "of the other," even if this other is an imaginary character. Thus, along with the inductive method of speech, the actor's speech is also a play into "the other than oneself." Thereby, whatever is said in the inductive mode is, in addition, also played, that is, enacted *in excess*; it is not simply a dictum of a philosopher or a poet. And in the case of theatrical performance, it is because of this performative supplement of enacting something other than "me" that the speech happens to be inductive, that is, as a matter of enacting the performative excess, the actor has no time to theorize or analyze it (Grotowsky 2002: 27–55).

According to Grotowsky's ontology, the regime of actor's play (rendition of performative excess) is a tool that reveal "the holy essence of a human being" (2002: 27–55). But such an excess — often an affective process — cannot crystallize without specific signification, which is provided by the score (partiture) of acting. The play needs the score not so much as a primary text to rely on, but to articulate the played excess with all its precision, without which performance can collapse into the chaos of affectivity.

Thus, for Grotowsky the dramatic score is not so much the original text suppressing living speech and its induction, but rather the indispensable channeling of "inner spiritual processes," which enable one not simply to utter something, but to utter something that is excessive — something that never belonged to mere life and that simultaneously endows such affective excess with form. In other words, a theatrical play (and its performative score) is not a text; it is an ideogram of performative eruptions.

This is why in their critiques of composition neither Yukhananov, nor Vasiliev, nor Grotowsky have ever dispensed with the dramatic score completely. To struggle with the predictability of composition, Yukhananov applied the method of deconstructing the score through performative segmentation and recursive cycles of action and utterance. Vasiliev did the same by means of meticulously reworking a score in prosody, intonation, and resonance. Although being critical of it, Vasiliev and Yukhananov do not dismiss composition completely because they are very well aware of an actor's institutional and artistic agency. They always knew that the complete rejection

of composition — as happened in contemporary art performances — implies the annihilation of the actor's, the performer's artistic and institutional agency. In contemporary art, the author of the performance — regardless of whether it is displayed by the artist herself or the hired performers — is always the artist and never any of the employed performers. It suffices to mention the performances of Marina Abramovich, Santiago Sierra, or Anne Imhof in this context. Their performances often engage numerous performers whose names are unknown; whereas performers in theater and cinema are as evaluated and well-known as the directors of the produced work. That is because, in the latter case, the actors (performers) are the co-creators of the composition's living texture, even despite the fact that the main artistic and ethical responsibility for the piece belongs to its writer and director. In an art performance, conversely, the employed performers are not counted as the artist's co-authors by the simple token of their job being a plain, reified reproduction of the artist's idea.

In *Dau*, this institutional and disciplinary threshold is blurred: the actors employed are not professional and they count as the experiment's hired participants rather than the director's equal collaborators. However, according to the project requirements, along with simply existing in the created setting, they had to be inventive in their dramatic and performative maneuvers: in the absence of script it was they who had to choose and determine their own performing "mania," *hic et nunc*, without any preparatory composition. The actors were responsible for defining the style of their conduct themselves, but also to make ethical decisions about their deeds. For example, the KGB colonel Vladimir Ajippo decides to perform a most atrocious interrogation of the waitress Natasha then and there (*Natasha*): within the role-playing game, she, a Soviet citizen, is accused of promiscuous contact with a foreigner. When Natasha forces Vera, another waitress, to get drunk, Vera chooses to indulge in drinking until she loses consciousness (*Natasha*). Valera, acting as the cleaner in the project, starts courting Sasha sexually until he gradually — then and there — decides to apply aggressive means to proceed with it. Sasha, another cleaner, in turn, could respond to Valera by bullying her aggressively, yet he chooses the performing "mania" of the tolerant and loving partner; although one can easily discern that, at any moment, he could have followed a converse (aggressive) performing path (*Sasha Valera*).

One of the whole project's most moving episodes is Sasha's lengthy prayer in the toilet after his "love" date with Valera (*Sasha Valera*). There, sitting on a toilet pan, he asks for mercy from God

for his homosexual sex. Even though he has no proper knowledge of the rhetoric of praying, his awkward and naïve wording happens to be the most poetic speech in praise of God. This speech on the toilet becomes a proper example of inductive acting and performing — when thought, mood, and emotion are not reproduced but are created while they are performed. It is important that in this case, the camera does not simply document some truth about daily life, but rather a grotesque and excessive outburst of living, launched as the performing procedure of the *irreal and artistic other selves* of the *Dau* project's participants. A similar mutation of normal, real daily life within the reality show takes place in *Brave People*, when a playful skirmish between the wife of one of the scientists and her neighbors turns gradually into a scandal with the woman's hysterical behavior — which, no matter whether it is a real hysterical feat or a performative gesture — leads to her and her husband's expulsion from the project.

These are not simply the documented cases of life that we watch as voyeurs. These are acts of theatricality inherent in life evolving in an extreme, excessive regime independent from any prescribed script. Often in our lives, we act contrary to our own expectations and indulge in excessive behavior dependent on circumstances that can lead us in this performative quest to either follow the path of our fears and conformist opportunism, or on the contrary surpass them by a risky deed. Likewise, certain participants had no other choice but to follow the performative path of self-victimization; others were allowed to follow the repressing and sadistic root.

Mikhail Yampolsky (2019) emphasizes this performative excess as the focal point of action in *Dau*. He argues that it is the existence in the conditions of permanent surveillance that instigates the paroxysm of excessive behavior and performative simulation among the project's participants.

It should be noted in this connection that the roles of the most victimized characters were given to the representatives of relatively unprivileged professions, to a certain sort of the subaltern; whereas the characters embodying the repressive apparatus often had penitentiary experience in real life.

4. The Stolen Performance

Unlike contemporary art, neither theater nor cinema can ever fully reject the script and composition, even when they promote the need for self-developing improvisational structures. This attachment to composition and script is due to the refusal to deprive the

performers, the renderers of play, of their pride, of artistic agency, and of the unique performative eventuality. that they produce. To repeat, in contemporary art the main agent of performance is the artist himself. That is why, paradoxically, art dispenses with the performative composition and its processuality, in favor of the conceptual artistic gesture. In cinema and theater, conversely, composition is retained, as well as the several agents between whom the labor and agency are divided; hence the crucial function of actors as the performing agents.

What is embarrassing in the *Dau* project is that while Khrzhansky takes no pains to draft a script, he nonetheless retains the artistic labor of the performers while leaving them with the responsibility of generating that very score *on their own*. The research institute as the setting becomes, in this case, the factory of the performative rendering of human fates, biographies, and personal interrelations. The project generates chains of excessive performative behavior, invented paths in the lives of the institute's inhabitants, without the need for a scriptwriter or a director to draft them. In other words, the participants are not only exposed to being recorded, as usually would happen in a reality show, but they themselves create the unique trajectories of performative behavior that, unlike the case with *Dau*, are usually composed by the writer and director in film and theater.

The poetics and artifice of cinematic narration are thus preserved as indispensable (quite converse to contemporary art), but the director himself steps out of the composing process. Yet, despite the fact that the participants — with their biographies, idiosyncrasies, and maneuvers of conduct — bear the burden of being practically the main subjects in developing the action, the distribution of authorities in the project does not allow them to attain the benefit of their artistic achievement. De jure, they count as mere volunteers of the research experiment rather than agents and co-creators within the artwork itself. And indeed, de jure, the experiment's protagonists were just supposed to live their usual lives and voluntarily comply with certain rules of the game. But they had put on their shoulders not only the responsibility for performative improvisation but even the ethical burden about explicitly violent or sexually abusive *mise-en-scènes*.

The exposure of the tragic, violent or atrocious events when they are enacted in an art piece, requires taking a standpoint, taking a side. The author of a cinematic or theatrical artwork is expected, therefore, to be within the piece to clearly reveal the position rather than delegate it completely to the role-playing game's volunteers. Moreover, the explicit ethical standpoint can only be demonstrated

if it becomes part of the common body in the performative work procedure. Even despite their subversive transformations of the dramatic score, Vasiliev and Yukhananov always stood inside such a common body of performance. The questions for the *Dau* project that inevitably arise in this connection are: 1. Does the enacted violence in the immersive role-playing game reveal it to be better than if it had been a composed script to be rendered? 2. Can it be that the director — who steps out of the role-playing game of coercion that he initiates, but functions rather as its manager than the participant of the dramatic enactment — gets into the position of that very sovereign “Big Brother,” who consciously or unconsciously gets surplus pleasure from such enhanced power?

At the end of 1990s, I was once witness to a scene when an idle Moscow militiaman promised to give some money to an elderly homeless man and woman if they performed a French kiss for him. While the homeless couple persevered in amateur artistry, the militiaman stayed as an external observer. He was the master of that act, who sneaked the performance from the subservient performers to confirm his surplus power and experience surplus pleasure from it. Despite being a voluntary performative act, complying with the militiaman’s command to perform, put that couple, socially and institutionally, into a position of guinea pigs rather than artistic agents.

Therefore, the project’s transgressive role-play was unacceptable for “Western” critics and audiences, even though they are well used to subversive and transgressive modes of artistic expression. In *Dau*, the transgressive artistic gestures cannot be assigned to their enactors, as such gestures happen to be the result of manipulation on behalf of the director’s authority. Nor are they the director’s experimental devices that he suggests to his collaborators, as he manipulatively governs their transgressive behavior from outside the artwork’s “body”; quite like the militiaman, who commissioned the transgressive act, treating its performers as submissive enactors, while at the same time evading any responsibility for this act as he is outside its implementation and hides his authority behind it. By contrast, the contemporary artist, who sometimes might also hire performers to enact the transgressive or perverting practices, includes in it his/her own self-reflection and critical assessment of this act. Olga Bryukhovetska asks a similar question when she emphasizes the ethical difference between Arthur Żmijewski’s and Khrzhanovsky’s treatment of transgression. She writes:

When we look at Żmijewski facing the “perpetrator” from the experiment, which was devised by Żmijewski, we are left with the open

question; who is the “real” perpetrator? This co-presence of the voices of the author-perpetrator and the actor-perpetrator creates a horizontal axis of shared responsibility. In contrast, Khrzhanovsky does not reveal his power position in his experiment. (Bryukhovetska 2020)

In other words, Khrzhanovsky does not share responsibility with the performer of the perpetrating act (or the victimizing one), nor does he allow the agent of the subversive performative behavior appear as the creator of his/her sovereign artistic achievement.

Let us imagine what would happen if Pier Paolo Pasolini directed his *Salo, or the 120 Days of Sodom* as a social experiment or a role-playing game about atrocious libertinage and coercion. This would become an immersive BDSM reality show. All its poignant political scale, condemning fascism, would be blurred. The neutral position of the experiment’s external observer would leave the performers and the director on opposite sides of the line without producing a common body in the common quest, which usually a theatrical or a performative art work undertakes and a director heads as the agent, fully plugged into the performative quest. As Karol Józwiak argues, “whilst Pasolini, by exploiting sexuality, intended to shock the viewers and lead them toward an intensified assessment of social and political reality, the *Dau* installation rather attempted to seduce, allure, and sedate them,” allowing the visitor a spectacular outing to the Soviet regime (Józwiak 2020).

When studying sadism’s atrocities, it is more courageous to hook them in sensuously and cognitively by means of artistic tools than to naturalistically reenact them in the role-playing game, encouraging sadism among its volunteers.

Consequently, as paradoxical as it seems, it is the script and the composition that produce the unified ethical plane of agency for both a director and actors without the vicious division of labor, so that the director does not get into the position of surveillance of his subservient and inferior bondsmen and plugs into the play itself.

To repeat, composition and score function as testimony to the distribution of labor in performative practices (cinema and theater), which mark the bodily involvement of the director or the writer in the general performative root. In this case, the director conjoins sensuously with the performing bodies and their real or imaginary fates. In case of *Dau*, the director’s role is confined mainly to macro-control of the whole process; he is uninvolved in the affective trajectories of performance. If we add to this the stages of the project’s packaging and capitalization of the project, one has to acknowledge that the more rupture between the performative process and the

director's autonomous sovereignty there is, the less the performative contribution of actors has the chance to acquire the dimension of artistic achievement and receive symbolic reward for it.

This is why Vasiliev and Yukhananov do not dismiss composition completely, even when they are critical of it. They are well aware of the need to emphasize an actor's institutional and artistic agency. As they always knew that the complete rejection of composition — as happened in contemporary art performances — implied the annihilation of the artistic and institutional valorization of employed performers' work. An actor is an indispensable unit in a performative artwork and s/he should be able to institutionally authorize one's artistic contribution in the composition as a co-author. Such authorization and reward of acting does not take place in the *Dau* project, because the actors and the director are institutionally, sensuously, and ethically split. Yet the project has an important merit in tracing those transitory moments when regular life switches into its excessive performative forms. Such moments of transition are rare and precious in the art of acting as they mainly reside in the rehearsal process. This is why Vasiliev and Yukhananov endowed the rehearsal process with even higher importance than the ultimate piece. Thus, while many see the *Dau* project's merits in its critical reconstruction of Soviet ideology, or the project creators' experimental inspection of human nature, its proper achievement lies in the unprecedented courage and ingenuity of the unprofessional performers in inhabiting the transitory line between being and performing.

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