didaskalia
gazeta teatralna

From the issue: **Didaskalia 177**
Release date: październik 2023
DOI: 10.34762/qms5-ww69
Source URL: https://didaskalia.pl/en/article/dreaming-performance

/ INSTYTUOWANIE

Dreaming as Performance

An Attempt to Explain the Phenomenon of the Inner Mental Theatre Stage

Tomaž Krpič | Faculty of Social Sciences, Ljubljana University

Dreaming as Performance. An Attempt to Explain the Phenomenon of the Inner Mental Theatre Stage

This article addresses the phenomenon of sleeping performance artists. Several performance artists have investigated or included sleep in their performance art. These artists radically transform Eric Bentley's conventional theatre model from 'A impersonates B, while C looks on' into "A impersonates A, while A looks on.' The sleeping performer builds a mental inner theatre stage inside their body, becoming the 'spectActor,' who simultaneously embodies both the performer and the spectator. The spectActor's consciousness is generated by memories stored in his or her body. He or she is in the state of aesthetic inner-bodymind.

Keywords: sleep; performance; body; spectActor; theatre stage

Sleepers are in separate worlds, the awake in the same.

Heraclitus

Introduction

In theatre and performance, the theatre stage is at the centre of the event. Every bodily movement of the actors, performers and spectators is oriented towards and organized around the theatre stage. Jens Roselt, who prefers to speak of theatrical space – which includes both stages and auditoria – holds that such a space 'organizes gazes, makes something visible or shifts perspective' (2014, p. 89). The theatre stage is usually perceived as a specially designed theatrical element with significant time and space extensions. It is a place filled with stage props and sets, occupied by actors and performers, and perceptible to audiences. Having information flow from the actors or performers to an audience is essential every time theatre is created, for the theatre stage is a place where art creators transfer their creative process and its results to an audience and promote and nourish the theatregoer's creative quest for meaning. Even theatre communities depend on how the theatre stage is constructed as part of their theatre's spatiality (McConachie, 2002). The theatre stage in modern theatre is often a proscenium stage, but it can take many other forms. There is no universal style. Almost any place can effectively serve as a theatre stage: from Shakespeare's Globe to the weightlessness of space in an Ilyushin 96, the Russian cosmonaut-training airplane, in Dragan Živadinov's *Gravitation Zero – Noordung Biomechanics*. It can be purpose-built or ready-made. One 'can take any empty space and call it a bare stage,' writes Peter Brook. 'A man walks across this empty space, and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged' (Brook, 1995, p. 7). The bottom line is that without a theatre stage, it is impossible to do a play or performance. The absence of a theatre stage literarily means the absence of theatre and performance, for a theatre stage is a 'precondition of performance, but at the same time also an

output of theatrical processes,' says Roselt (2014, p. 90).

In the past, the conventional theatre stage was contested many times and in many ways (Lehmann, 2006, pp. 193-206; Leach, 2013; Biet and Triau, 2019; Merx, 2013, pp. 54-58). In most of these attempts, the performer and the theatre stage were still separated. The theatre stage did not become a part of the performer. In the conventional theatre, the actor or performer is considered an element of the theatre stage. The notion that the theatre stage is a part of the performer would mean that the theatre stage is located inside the performer under his or her skin, not merely on or near the body's surface. In their introduction to a monograph on misperformative acts in theatre and performance, Marin Blažević and Lada Čale Feldman define a misperformative scene as 'the one where the edge plays a decisive role' (Blažević and Čale Feldman, 2014, p. 12). The inverted relationship between actor or performer and theatre stage has been explored on the interface of theatre and performance. This article answers the question how the misperformative phenomenon of a sleeping performer helps us explain the existence of the inner physical and mental theatre stage.

Bringing the Theatre Stage Inside the Performer's Body

What does it mean for the theatre stage to be a part of the performer's body? A number of performance artists have opened their bodies, often violently, to the spectators' gaze, literally placing the theatre stage inside their bodies. For example, in *Stomach Sculpture – Hollow Body/Host Space* (1996, Fifth Australian Sculpture Triennial), Stelarc exposed his internal body to the audience by orally inserting a specially developed camera – a sculpture – attached to a cable, so that his body became a host, an internal platform for

an artwork.

Those performance artists have built temporal theatre stages inside their bodies, which in this article are referred to as physical inner theatre stages. Conventionally, the theatre stage is a physical space. Actors and performers expose their performing bodies on the stage to enable a constant communication flow towards the audience. The audience members watch, listen, touch, smell and taste in the auditorium or, alternatively, as trans-spectators on the theatre stage. Although the flow of information from the auditorium is usually much weaker than that from the theatre stage, the communication between the actors or performers and the audience is certainly not one-way, despite the fact that the message from the actors and performers is the favoured one. The performers monitor the audience members' reactions, but their ability to absorb information from their surroundings is limited because their mental and sensual focus is primarily on their own performing. The actors/performers intend to communicate to the audience their intimate emotions, feelings and thoughts, as well as the characters they create on the stage. They use different body techniques, stage props, set designs, scripts and costumes to create a communication channel linking them to the audience.

Building a physical inner theatre stage inside the performance artist's body could be a very dangerous process involving various risks and resulting in vague outcomes. The primary hazard for performance artists is the danger of physical injury by cutting, piercing, stabbing or the use of any other similar marginal reflexive technique on their performing bodies (Crossley, 2005; 2006). Another risk that performance artists must accept when a performance is staged inside the artist's body is the possibility that the spectators will lose the connection with the artist and will have difficulty

accessing the meaning of the performance. The absence of a direct gaze into the performers' bodies has two consequences. Firstly, as the spectators are more apt to believe what they see with their own eyes, doubts, distrust or distance to the performance and artist may develop (McConachie, 2007, pp. 561-566). Secondly, in building a physical inner theatre stage, performers radically contest conventional theatre where clear representational communication between actor and audience has always been expected, self-evident and non-negotiable, even if often contested (Kulick, 2019, pp. 26-30).

Reducing the Conventional Theatre Model

Before explaining how sleeping on a theatre stage helps us understand the inversion of the performer–stage relationship, we must demonstrate how reducing the conventional theatre model leads to a different view of the relationship between performer and spectator. In *The Life of the Drama*, Eric Bentley describes conventional theatre thus: 'A impersonates B, while C looks on.' A is an actor, B is a character, and C is a spectator (Bentley, 1983). According to this model, actors impersonate their characters on stage while spectators watch them from the auditoria. However, any element and its relationships in this model can be questioned. A and B can be integrated just as an actor can become a performer who 'plays' himself or herself on the stage. A can be 'expelled' from the stage, leaving C alone in the auditorium. In participative theatre, C can become A either to impersonate B or to perform his or her own life. Alternatively, C might temporarily join A on the stage as a trans-spectator or as a substitute for the actor. The most radical reduction of Bentley's model of conventional theatre would be: 'A impersonates A while A looks on.' The performer thus impersonates him- or herself while being his or her own spectator. Although this situation initially seems to be practically impossible, many theatre and performance artists

have incorporated it in their work. Their efforts are important because they concern the dilemma of whether reducing the gap between performer and spectator obliterates the theatre space, and thus the theatre stage. We can also ask whether this reduction can result in a new perception of the theatre stage.

The SpectActor

Reducing Bentley's conventional theatre model towards the solipsistic nature of the theatre stage leads to a new relationship between performer and spectator – their unification. The idea of integrating the performer and the spectator into an inseparable unity is not new. The Italian philosopher Giulio Camillo (1480-1544) proposed a panoptic theatre of memory, a structure comprised of multiple conceptual relationships in which the individual participant is simultaneously a performer and a spectator. In Camillo's theatre model, the emphasis remains on the spectator, who stands in the centre of a specially designed amphitheatre made up of forty-nine boxes. Each box is inscribed with symbols and icons, visual and textual motifs from classical mythology, cabbala and astrology, symbolizing and evoking the knowledge and wisdom of the universe (Aurasma, 2003; Bolzoni, 2017). This should be possible because memory is a distinct performance of images. The locus of knowledge is inside the individual and is therefore his or her lever of power and control over the symbolic world. For Camillo, theatre and performance are just tools to reach the overarching goals of universal knowledge and wisdom.

Camillo's theatre concept has recently been partially adopted and developed by the Slovenian performance artist Janez Janša (Orel, 2011; 2013),[1] who coined the term 'spectActor' to address the unique situation in his projects in

which the spectator and the performer become one (Hrvatin, 2001, p. 62). In some of his projects, Janša placed the art event inside the participant's performing body (Lukan, 2008), but he did not resort to any complex technology to build a theatre stage inside a human physical body. He used much simpler solutions. In both of the aforementioned performative installations, he built huge walls of ice blocks before letting them melt down over the next few days. The visitors were invited to contemplate their memories in close proximity to the ice walls or in specially designed cabinets of physical, individual and collective memories.

In his performances, Janša shifted not only the art event and, by extension, the theatre stage from the actors and performers to the participants/spectators, but he also confirmed that the theatre stage does not need to be entirely physical. One aspect of his creation of the stage – the ice walls and memory cabinets – did not differ from conventional theatre and performance. However, he also helped the participants to create their own mental inner theatre stages in their somatic performing bodies. Janša's work thus fully resonates with Roselt's argument that physical space is an objective supposition of the subjective agency of an individual in theatre and performance (Roselt, 2014, p. 95).

The Sleeping Performance

It would make sense that the construction of an inner theatre stage is only emotional and cognitive for the spectator, while it should be (at least) physical for the performer. The performer must transform his or her own body physically in order to send a meaningful message to the audience, while for the audience the necessary change can only be mental in order to contemplate the information gained from the theatre stage. This relationship

between the performer and the audience remains firmly in the conventional theatre. In any other theatrical situation, this relationship can be significantly disturbed. Is it possible that the performer establishes in his or her own performing body only a mental inner theatre stage that, however, is still somehow accessible to the spectator? What kind of performance would enable us to best investigate such a transformation? In the past several decades, there have been performances in which the performers slept on theatre stages or in art galleries and museums. Examples include Chris Burden's *Bed Piece* (Market Street Program, 1972); Susan Hiller's *Dream Mapping* (English meadow, 1974); Susan Kozel's *Telematic Dreaming* ('I + the Other: Dignity for All, Reflections on Humanity,' Amsterdam, 1992); Bruce Gilchrist's *Divided by Resistance* (Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1996); Marina Abramović's *The House with the Ocean View* (Sean Kelly Gallery, 2002); Emilia Telese's *Life of a Star*and *Sleepwalking* (New Forest Pavilion, Venice Biennale, 2005); Carolina Bianchi's *The Cadela Força Trilogy. Chapter I: The Bride and The Goodnight Cinderella* (Academie voor Theater en Dans, 2008); Chajana denHarder's *Sleep*(Corcoran Gallery of Art, 2012); Taras Polataiko's *Sleeping Beauty* (National Art Museum of Ukraine, 2012); Tilda Swinton's *The Maybe* (Tate Modern, 2013); Zhou Jie's *36 Days* (Beijing Now Art Gallery, 2014); Anna Nowicka's *Wellspring* (Eden Studios, 2020); and Mala Kline's series of performances that explore dreaming (2023). There have even been performances in which the audience slept, such as Jim Findlay's *Dream of the Read Chambers: A Performance for the Sleeping Audience* (Rubin Museum of Art, 2014) or Mårten Spångberg's *Natten* (Kunstenfestivaldesarts, 2016).

In 1996, Bruce Gilchrist, together with Jonathan Bradley, staged the digital performance installation *Divided by Resistance* in the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London. A digital electrocardiograph and a computer

with specially developed software to establish mutual communication between the performer and spectators were used. While Gilchrist was sleeping, his brainwave activity was transmitted via an optical cable to the computer where the information was digitally transformed into images that were projected on a screen for the audience. A select number of spectators had the opportunity to participate in the performance by sitting in 'a seat of consciousness,' a specially designed chair from which they could communicate with the artist's sleeping body and mind through their own bodies.

The chair scanned the condition of the participant's body and sent a mild electrical current to the sleeping performer based on the results of the scan. The sleeping performer's condition during the REM phase was communicated to the participant in the chair and simultaneously projected on the big screen placed behind the sleeping artist to ensure that the audience could see Gilchrist's reactions. The artist's reactions were also communicated to the participant seated in the chair of consciousness via pads built into the seat. Despite the fact that the communication between the participant and the sleeping performer was limited and vague, Gilchrist's performance 'demonstrated the possibility for tangible intervention in the process of the unconscious mind' and the ability 'to extend the artist's body/mind out to the literal touch of his/her audience' (Warr, 1996, pp. 13-17; 2000). *Divided by Resistance* was a clever experiment in communication between the unconscious sleeping artist and the spectators, conducted in laboratory-like conditions.

As can be seen from the above description of one of the finest examples of a sleeping performance, the situation is different than in the conventional theatre. For instance, in William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's*

Dream, Oberon, the King of the Fairies, sends a sprite, Puck, to pour magic juice on Demetrious' eyelids to make him fall in love with the first person he sees when he awakes. Puck, however, mistakes the sleeping Lysander for Demetrious, and it is Lysander, not Demetrious, that falls in love with Helena. In Shakespeare's play, an actor who impersonates Lysander is seen sleeping on the theatre stage. The sleep is simulated, for the actor while performing sleep, something one rarely does in everyday life.[2] Things are significantly different when performance artists fall asleep. During a conventional play or performance, the performer's consciousness focuses on the play or performance and on its possible effects on the audience. However, when a performance artist sleeps, their consciousness is limited (they are unconscious) or at best re-oriented (they are dreaming). The most obvious difference between sleeping and waking is the sleeper's profound disconnection from his or her social environment.

The Theatrical Brain

The sleeping performer is in a separate world. Sensorially and cognitively, he or she is temporarily divided from the audience. In the last decade, cognitive science has tentatively entered the field of performance studies. One idea about cognition and theatre – which, however, is not directly related to the sleeping performer – is worth of our attention: Erin Hurly's concept of theatrical brain. 'The brain,' says Hurley, 'operates like a small theatre, producing representations of action and emotions that are not necessary executed by their audience but are nonetheless electrically experienced by them (Hurley, 2010, p. 31). Hurly's idea is based on Bert O. States's work on mirror neurons. The mirror neurons in a person's brain are activated when he or she observes someone else's bodily behaviour, or engages in the same behaviour or action (Umiltà, 2016). Mirror neurons help

an individual unveil the intention of the observed behaviour of others (Rokotnitz, 2006, p. 135). The concept of theatrical brain is particularly useful for the interpretation of the spectator's perception of theatre and performance. While the spectator is watching the actor or performer on the theatre stage, the spectator's mirror neurons provide him or her with similar sensations while triggering old memories and experiences, which allow the spectator to establish an empathic relationship with the actors and performers.

By activating mirror neurons, the brains of the performer and spectator mimic the operation of theatre, while theatre imitates the fundamental brain function (States, 1994). However, theatre simply uses a distinct faculty of the body-mind relationship 'created' by natural selection that makes humans social animals. In order to activate mirror neurons, humans re-shape their bodies and physical environment to provide brains with sensorial 'food' – in this case with a performance in a theatre or art gallery.[3] Mirror neurons, when activated, also help retroactively create both theatre and performance. If the concept of the theatrical brain works well for the interpretation of conventional theatre and performance, does it also provide a plausible explanation for the sleeping performance artist? What happens when the brain and thus the mirror neurons of the sleeping performer are no longer stimulated from outside? And seeing that States and Hurley mostly speak of the spectator's experiences, tending to leave out the performer, where is the place for the spectActor? As communication between the performer and the audience is radically interrupted, the performer's senses stop providing the brain with the whole palette of stimuli like they do when the performer is awake. The mirror neurons of the sleeping performer cannot be properly activated. However, as the mirror neurons have a natural tendency to be an active component of an individual's external agency alongside the rest of the

brain, they ‘feel’ deprived, and thus the theatrical brain produces its own temporal inner mental theatre stage to stay active. The brain supplies the sleeping performer with dreams, transforming him or her into a spectActor on their own inner mental theatre stage.

The Dreaming SpectActor

In considering the sleeping spectActor on the inner mental theatre stage, one is confronted with the dilemma of whether sleeping and dreaming on stage can be considered a genuine performance. What is crucial here is the sleeping performer’s loss of consciousness – a necessary precondition for the artist’s creativity. Scattered throughout Marcel Merleau-Ponty’s publications and often limited to short comments, his remarks on dreaming and sleeping indicate that the fact that Merleau-Ponty values sleep less than the waking state derives from his predominant orientation towards regarding perception as ‘the background from which all acts stand out’ which ‘is presupposed by them’ (2007, p. 58). Because sleep results in ‘a withdrawal from the intersubjective world’ through a ‘radical alteration in the tension of consciousness’ (1964, p. 46), Merleau-Ponty does not consider the consciousness of a sleeping person to be genuine consciousness (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 148; 1968, pp. 5–6, p. 262; 2007, p. 442; 2012, p. xxx). For genuine consciousness to appear, an individual must encounter the reality within his or her reach through perception. Thus, according to Merleau-Ponty, a sleeping performer cannot be genuinely conscious, because he or she has radically lost perceptual contact with the audience and the surrounding environment. The conclusion that can be drawn from Merleau-Ponty’s stance is that only conscious actors or performance artists can achieve genuine consciousness and thus genuine creativity.

If there was no way for the performance artist to regain at least some level of consciousness during sleep, it would not be possible to ‘build’ an inner mental theatre stage in his or her mind. Merleau-Ponty accepts that sleepers may have dreams but he considers dreams to be false consciousness even if dreamers regain a certain level of consciousness. He anticipated that the perception of reality and the perception of dreams share the same element: experience (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 6). While dreaming on the mental inner theatre stage, the performer has experiences that can hardly be compared to those of someone who is awake; he or she may remember them after awakening and only then can he or she recognize them as an imaginative creation of a unique experience.

Unfortunately, little is known about the content of dreams of the sleeping performers, how they experience and evaluate them, or what they perceive to be their meaning. Most artists apparently pay little attention to this aspect, being more interested in the possibilities offered by modern technology that enable them to establish communication with spectators than in being art shamans in Schechner’s sense (Kozel, 1994). There are only a few examples of modern artists who have developed mechanisms to somehow relay their dreams or to ‘enable’ members of the audience into their sleep. Susan Hiller’s *Dream Mapping* and Bruce Gilchrist’s *Divided by Resistance* offer examples of performance artists designing ways to report their dreams to the audience. The participants of Hiller’s performance sketched their dreams after waking. Gilchrist, as previously noted, used a digital electrocardiogram monitor and a computer with specially developed software to inform the audience about his dreams and to establish some kind of communication with them.[4]

The Dreaming Performing Body

Like the theatre stage, the performing body has a central position in theatre and performance (Conroy, 2010, p. 8; Shepherd, 2006, p. 1). By dreaming, performers produce unique inner mental theatre stages, and transform themselves into spectActors. For Hans Belting (2014), dreams are images that a human body produces involuntarily and without self-awareness. He finds dreams a paradoxical performance, which the body does not fully control despite being its only provider. The body is more the object than the subject of an individual's memories and visual experiences (Belting, 2014, pp. 48-49). Rather like Hurly, Belting believes that when someone dream, the mental 'interior' of their body becomes a theatre stage or a kind of screen on which their dreams are somehow projected. Belting does not specify the actual location of the projection and what is used to project the dreams. We can assume that the process takes place in the human brain.

Belting's understanding of dreams, which he construes as a set of images provided by the body within the body, reveals two further aspects of the dreaming performance artist. First, there are similarities and differences between Camillo's theatre of memory and the sleeping and/or dreaming performer. In both cases, the performing body is at the centre of theatre. Yet Camillo's theatre of memory is meant to be physical, not mental. The body is primarily the object of memory, wisdom and universal knowledge, not its provider. However, the spectActor's body constructs an inner mental theatre stage of dreams where, at the same time, it is the subject of the sleeper's memories, wisdom and knowledge. In either case, memory plays a crucial role. It provides the spectActor with valuable resources. This is, in some sense, a reminiscence of Jerzy Grotowski's idea of the poor theatre, where the process of acting in the theatre is created in the sub-consciousness of the

performing body in relation to the memory (Grotowski, 1987, p. 34). The relationship between role and self is inverted in Grotowski's theatre: the role is a tool the actor uses for self-exposure (Auslander, 1997, p. 64). Grotowski even claimed that the body does not have memory because the body is memory: 'It is our skin which has not forgotten, our eyes which have not forgotten' (Grotowski, 1971, pp. 1-13). In order to find creative responses to a play (Kumiega, 1985, p. 135; Meyer-Dinkgräfe, 2001, p. 74), actors need to search within what Grotowski at first called 'body-memories' before coming to refer to it as 'body-life' (Slowiak and Cuesta, 2007, p. 109) in his later work.

Secondly, the idea of projecting memory images inside the human mind while dreaming is reminiscent of Cartesian theatre, a concept developed by Daniel Dennett in his book *Consciousness Explained* (1991). Dennett is highly critical of any attempt to use the Cartesian theatre model to explain human consciousness because he considers it a successor to Cartesian dualism which posits that the body and the mind are separate entities. In Dennett's view, accepting Cartesian dualism leads to an infinite regression that is epistemologically and ontologically unbearable. This attitude is often represented in performance studies as well. Sandra Reeve has correctly observed in her work that the division into the body and the mind has been successfully surpassed in the past few decades (Reeve, 2011, p. 6; Searle, 2010). People have bodies and they are bodies. There is no physical/mental separation between the body and the mind (McConachie, 2013, pp. 29-30; Barba, 2005, pp. 153-161, p. 161; Grotowski, 1968; Fischer-Lichte, 2014, pp. 33-34; Zarrilli, 2020, pp. 73-113). The fact that the 'components of body and mind meet and interact' was already well known to performance artists in the early 1970s, with some of them contesting the body–mind dichotomy in their performances (Fischer-Lichte, 2008; Grosz, 1994; Zarrilli, 1995, pp.

181-199). In arguing that a dreaming performer is a spectActor on a mental inner theatre stage, this paper does not subscribe to Cartesian theatre design.

To Merleau-Ponty, the body is the accumulation of previous experiences, knowledge, memories, emotions and feelings (1968, p. 262). During sleep, the outside world is held at a distance, and the dreamer turns to the only available 'subjective sources of one's existence': the dreamer's own body (2007, p. 336), which becomes the source of his or her dream experiences. The memories and knowledge accumulated in the body function as a reservoir from which dreamers source the material to construct their imaginative dream world. Since memories and knowledge are collected while a performer is in the state of so-called genuine consciousness, it seems unreasonable that Merleau-Ponty is not willing to accept that the consciousness of a dreamer (a dreaming spectActor in our case) cannot produce a genuine sleeping experience. The body is not merely an object of dreams; it is also their autonomous creator. This body dualism is a source of contradiction; sleep deprives the sleeper of his or her sensorial experiences; nevertheless, dreams recapture the flow of his or her past experiences but in a new form (Leder, 1990, pp. 57-59). When the spectActor dreams, the body is absent; yet it is still present, because it is the only source and creator of dreams.

While the performing body is asleep and dreams, it produces bodies on the inner mental theatre stage. Those bodies are different from the bodies on the conventional theatre stage. To Fischer-Lichte, who follows the phenomenological paradigm, the actor or performer on the conventional theatre stage is a unique combination of the phenomenal and semiotic bodies. The phenomenal body is used in everyday life. It is the body an

individual identifies with. When an actor appears on a conventional theatre stage, he or she ‘puts on’ a semiotic body. In dramatic theatre, the actor performs a distinct character, and this enables him or her to send a meaningful message to the audience. During a play, the phenomenal body is hidden under the semiotic body and emerges only if an actor makes a mistake. In post-dramatic theatre or performance, the phenomenal body is not always hidden. The performer deliberately exposes it to the audience. The semiotic and phenomenal bodies appear alternately, and this creates the meaning of the performance (Fischer-Lichte, 2004). When a performer falls asleep, he or she enters a state in which one cannot entirely deliberately assume their own or any other person’s character, a state that occurs on the outer physical (or conventional) and the inner mental theatre stage as the performer dream. The performer does not control the form of the semantic bodies. His or her phenomenal body appears fully on the outer physical theatre stage, but it would be wrong to believe that the dreaming performer becomes the radical version of the performing body reduced to the phenomenal body. Even the sleeping body can be ‘loaded’ with meanings meant for the spectator. Although the performer is no longer consciously fully in charge of his or her outer semiotic body, the audience can still creatively participate in the performance. The performer’s sleeping phenomenal body is perceived by the audience as a distinct cultural ‘object,’ therefore the meaning of the perception of the sleeping body of the performer is assigned more by the spectators than by the performer.

When the performer dreams, the sleeping phenomenal body produces semiotic bodies on the inner mental theatre stage. The only bodily agent in the personal theatre of dreams is the spectActor, although he or she is unaware of that when he or she dreams. Semiotic bodies are in an interesting contradictory position; they are without their own phenomenal

bodies, but the body behind them is the body of the dreaming spectActor. I find Phillip Zarrilli's phenomenology of performance – particularly his views on the body-mind relationship – suitable for wrapping up the interpretation of the performing body on the inner mental theatre stage. Zarrilli goes along with Merleau-Ponty on the importance of the sensorial relationship of the performer with the performing environment (Zarrilli, 2007, p. 646). Small wonder, then, that the sleeping performer was not the central focus of Zarrilli's interest. Nevertheless, it is highly interesting that Zarrilli produced a play that included dreams. In his *Told by the Wind*, two characters find themselves in a situation where neither is sure who is the dreamer and who is just a part of the other's dream (Zarrilli, 2015). Zarrilli holds that the performer must develop a deep conscious awareness of physicality on the theatre stage. He expresses this beautifully when he writes that the performer 'thinks with the body' and 'acts with the mind' (1995, p. 190). In one of his articles, Zarrilli develops a typology of performing bodies that includes the aesthetic inner-bodymind, defined as 'a deeply felt, resonant inhabitation of the subtle psychophysical dimensions of the body and mind at work together as one in the moment.' I suggest that the sleeping spectActor on the inner mental theatre stage is in fact in a state of aesthetic inner-bodymind, although with severely limited sensorial contact with the environment, as long as the performer's dreams are generated from their past experiences. The dreaming spectActor is in a state in which he or she receives a life-world as an immediately deeply felt lived experience on the inner mental theatre stage (Zarrilli, 2004, p. 657; 2020, pp. 14-16, p. 85). As such the sleeping spectActor is perhaps not more than one step away from the actors in Zarrilli's *Told by the Wind*.

Conclusions

The theatre stage is perhaps one of the most intriguing elements of theatre and performance. It can be built in many ways. It can even be placed inside the human body as a physical or mental inner theatre stage. This article uses the example of the sleeping performer in an attempt to explain the phenomenon of the inner mental theatre stage. By the end of it, however, the reader might be left with more questions than at its beginning. If the inner mental stage is such an interesting phenomenon, why performers who dream on stage produce so little evidence of their dreams? There are many possible explanations.

First, theatre is a communal art, and solipsistic performance inhabits its frontier where a theatre creator is lonely. Second, some of the sleeping performers instead develop modern technology with which dreams could be read from outside. Third, others perhaps want to stipulate symbolic vulnerability and loneliness of people in modern societies. And so on.

Another question is whether the concept of inner mental theatre stage can be used for interpretations of other forms of theatre and performance. Even in the conventional theatre, the spectator constructs the inner mental theatre stage in his or her mind alongside the conventional ‘outer’ theatre stage. The only moment when this double nature of the theatre stage is temporarily reduced to a one-dimensional theatre stage occurs when the performance artist sleeps and dreams during their performance.

Finally, what about daydreaming? Is it not that daydreaming includes an inner mental theatre stage where the daydreamer vividly creates characters and plays according to his or her wishes only to be seen by him or her? It

seems that the only difference between the spectActor and the daydreamer is the level of separation form the social environment, the level of consciousness and control over the inner mental theatre stage. If this is so, much work is still ahead of us.

Wzór cytowania / How to Cite:

Krpič, Tomaž, *Dreaming as Performance. An Attempt tExplain the Phenomenon of the Inner Mental Theatre Stage*, „Didaskalia. Gazeta Teatralna” 2023 nr 177, DOI: 10.34762/qms5-ww69.

Author

Tomaž Krpič, PhD (tomaz.krpic@guest.arnes.si, tomaz.krpic@fdv.uni-lj.si) is a sociologist, theatre scholar, editor and research associate at the Faculty of Social Sciences, Ljubljana University. His research interests concentrate on various aspects of the performing body, the spectator’s creative engagement in theatre, social construction of the theatre community and political theatre. He is an associate editor of the journal *Teorija in praksa*. Tomaž Krpič is currently working on a monograph on the performing body. ORCID ID 0000-0001-7039-8630.

Footnotes

1. Previously known as Emil Hrvatin, the artist took his new name from the then Slovenian prime minister as part of his art project *Janez Janša/Ready Name*.
2. On the difference between the performing body in everyday life and on stage, see Drew Leder (2007, p. 107).
3. To describe the relationship between the mental and the physical worlds, I use Elizabeth Grosz’s (1994, p. xii) metaphor of a Möbius strip.
4. Gilchrist spent an intense period in preparation for the performance. During that time, the performer trained his body to produce dreams during sleep, he then remembered them and wrote them down, not unlike an actor preparing for a role to be performed on a conventional stage (the author’s e-mail correspondence with Bruce Gilchrist, 21 August 2022).

Bibliography

Aurasmaa, Anne, 'The Conceptualization of Time and Space in the Memory Theatre of Giulio Camillo (1480?-1544),' *Nordisk Museologi* 13, 1 (2003), pp. 51-70.

Auslander, Philip, *From Acting to Performance*, Routledge, London 1997.

Barba, Eugenio, 'Children of Silence: Reflection on Forty Years of Odin Teatret,' *The Drama Review* 49, 1 (2005), pp. 153-161.

Belting, Hans, *An Anthropology of Images. Pictures, Medium, Bodies*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 2014.

Bentley, Eric, *The Life of the Drama*, Atheneum, New York 1983.

Biet, Christian and Triau, Christophe, *What is the Theatre?* Routledge, London 2019.

Blažević, Marin and Feldman, Lada Čale, *MISperformance: Essays in Shifting Perspectives*, Maska, Ljubljana 2014.

Bolzoni, Lina, 'The Memory Theatre of Giulio Camillo: Alchemy, Rhetoric, and Deification in the Renaissance,' in *Lux in Tenebris: The Visual and the Symbolic in Western Esotericism*, ed. P. J. Forshaw, Brill, Leiden 2017, pp. 66-80.

Brook, Peter, *The Empty Space*, Mac Gibbon & Kee, London 1995.

Conroy, Colette, *Theatre & the Body*, Palgrave Macmillan, London 2010.

Crossley, Nick, 'Mapping Reflexive Body Techniques: On the Body Modification and Maintenance,' *Body and Society*11, 18 (2005), pp. 1-35.

Crossley, Nick, *Reflexive Embodiment in Contemporary Society*, Open University Press, New York 2006.

Dennett, Daniel C., *Consciousness Explained,* Back Bay Books, Boston 1991.

Fischer-Lichte, Erika, *Ästhetik des Performativen*, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main 2004.

Fischer-Lichte, Erika, *The Routledge Introduction to Theatre and Performance Studies*, eds. M. Arjomand and R. Mosse, Routledge, London 2014.

Fischer-Lichte, Erika, *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics*, Routledge, London 2008.

Grotowski, Jerzy, 'Les Exercises,' *Action Culturelle du Sud-Est*, 6, supplement (1971), pp. 1-13.

Grotowski, Jerzy, 'Tu es le fils de quelqu'un (You Are Someone's Son),' *The Drama Review*

31, 3 (1987), pp. 30-41.

Grotowski, Jerzy, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, ed. E. Barba, Odin Teatrets Forlag, Holstebro 1968.

Hrvatin, Emil, 'Terminal SpectActor,' *Janus* 9 (2001), pp. 62-67.

Hurley, Erin, *Theatre & Feeling*, Palgrave macmillan, London 2010.

Kozel, Suzana, 'Spacemaking: Experiencing of a Virtual Body,' in *The Routledge Dance Studies Reader*, ed. A. Carter, Routledge, London 1998, pp. 81-88.

Kulick, Brian, *The Secret Life of Theatre: On the Nature and Function of Theatrical Representation*, Routledge, London 2019.

Kumiega, Jennifer, *The Theatre of Grotowski*, Methuen, New York 1985.

Leach, Robert, *Theatre Studies: The Basics*, Routledge, London 2013.

Leder, Drew, 'The Actor's Body: Symposium Reflections,' *Contemporary Theatre Review* 17, 1 (2007), pp. 107-109.

Leder, Drew, *The Absent Body*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1990.

Lehmann, Hans-Thies, *Postdramatic Theatre*, Routledge, London 2006.

Lukan, Blaž, 'Body in Context: Slovene Theatre at the End of Transition,' in *Theatre and Performance in Eastern Europe: The Changing Scene*, ed. D. Barnett and A. Skelton, Scarecrow Press, Lanham 2008, pp. 169-179.

McConachie, Bruce, 'Falsifiable Theories for Theatre and Performance Studies,' *Theatre Journal* 59, 4 (2007), pp. 553-577.

McConachie, Bruce, 'Using Cognitive Science to Understand Spatiality and Community in the Theatre,' *Contemporary Theatre Review* 12, 3 (2002), pp. 97-114.

McConachie, Bruce, *Theatre & Mind*, Palgrave Macmillan, London 2013.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice, *Phenomenology of Perception*, Routledge, London 2012.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice, *The Merleau-Ponty Reader*, eds. T. Toadvine and L. Lawlor, Northwestern University Press, Evanston 2007.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice, *The Primacy of Perception. And Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology, the Philosophy of Art, History and Politics*, ed. J. M. Edie, Northwestern University Press, Eventson 1964.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice, *The Visible and the Invisible*, ed. C. Lefort, Northwestern University Press, Evanston 1968.

Merx, Sigrid, 'The Politics of Scenography: Disrupting the Stage,' *Performance Research* 18, 3 (2013), pp. 54-58.

Meyer-Dinkgräfe, Daniel, *Approaches to Acting: Past and Present*, Continuum, London 2001.

Orel, Barbara, 'Cabinet of Tears: The Art of Memory, Configuration of Perception and Digital Technologies,' in *The Wailing Wall*, eds. J. Janša and M. Murnik, Maska, Ljubljana 2011, pp. 37-47.

Orel, Barbara, 'Gledališče, spomin in novi panoptikon,' *Dialogi* 49, 3-4 (2013), pp. 31-38.

Reeve, Sandra, *Nine Ways of Seeing a Body*, Triarchy Press, Devon 2011.

Rokotnitz, Naomi, '"It Is Required You Do Awake Your Faith": Learning to Trust the Body through Performing *The Winter's Tale*,' in *Performance and Cognition. Theatre Studies and the Cognitive Turn*, eds. B. McConachie and E. F. Hart, Routledge, London 2006, pp. 122-146.

Roselt, Jens, *Fenomenologija gledališča*, Knjižnica Mestnega gledališča ljubljanskega, Ljubljana 2014.

Searle, John R., *Making the Social World: The Structure of Human Civilization*, University Press, Oxford 2010.

Shepherd, Simon, *Theatre, Body and Pleasure*, Routledge, London 2006.

Slowiak, James and Cuesta, Jairo, *Jerzy Grotowski*, Routledge, London 2007.

States, Bert O., *The Pleasure of the Play*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca 1994.

Umiltà, Maria Alessandra, 'The "Mirror Mechanism" and Motor Behaviour,' in *Theatre and Cognitive Neuroscience*, eds. C. Falletti, G. Sofia and V. Jacono, Bloomsbury, London 2016, pp. 15-22.

Warr, Tracey, ed., *The Artist's Body*, Phaidon Press, London 2000.

Warr, Tracey, 'Sleeper,' *Performance Research* 1, 2 (1996), pp. 1-19.

Zarrilli, Phillip B., *(Towards) a Phenomenology of Acting*, Routledge, London 2020.

Zarrilli, Phillip B., 'An Enactive Approach to Understanding Acting,' *Theatre Journal* 59, 4 (2007), pp. 635-647.

Zarrilli, Phillip B., 'Beneath the Surface of *Told by the Wind*: An Intercultural Experiment in Performance Dramaturgy and Aesthetics,' *Asian Theatre Journal* 32, 1 (2015), p. 46-78.

Zarrilli, Phillip B., '"On the edge of a breath, looking": Cultivating the Actor's Bodymind through Asian Martial/Meditation Arts,' in *Acting (Re)considered: A Theoretical and Practical Guide*, ed. P. B. Zarrilli, 2nd edition, Routledge, London 1995, pp. 181-199.

Zarrilli, Phillip B., ‘Toward a Phenomenological Model of the Actor’s Embodied Modes of Experience,’ *Theatre Journal* 56, 4 (2004), pp. 653-666.
