

Dror Harari

Artificial, Animal, Machinal: Body, Desire, and Intimacy in Modernist and Postmodernist Theatre

Exactly one hundred years separate two notorious dramatic aristocrats: Alfred Jarry's wild Ubu and Sarah Kane's apathetic Hippolytus. Ubu is iconic of Jarry's surreal reaction to nineteenth-century positivism and, at the same time, a criticism of modernism's abstract poetics and will-less aesthetic experience. Kane's Hippolytus is a witty and macabre response to the late twentieth-century 'logic' of capitalism. Nevertheless, these seemingly diametrically opposed characters share one trait that binds them – spending desire. In this article Dror Harari considers these figures as conspicuous waypoints along a broader spectrum of indispensable relations between body and desire in modern theatre. He tracks certain dramaturgies of desire, as theorized and/or realized by theatre practitioners and philosophers. Starting with modernist attempts to overcome desire by likening the performer's body to a machine, he closes with the indifferent Hippolytus becoming a desiring machine. Dror Harari is senior lecturer in the Department of Theatre Arts, Tel Aviv University. His recent articles have appeared in *The Drama Review*, *Samuel Beckett Today/Aujourd'hui*, *Theatre Research International*, and *Theatre Annual*. His study *Self-Performance: Performance Art and the Representation of Self* is forthcoming in Hebrew from Resling Publications, an Israeli academic publishing house.

Key terms: desiring machine, modernist dehumanization, Alfred Jarry, *Ubu Roi*, Sarah Kane, *Phaedra's Love*.

IN THE PALACE, Hippolytus sits in a darkened room, watching a Hollywood film flicker on a television screen. He is sprawled on a couch, surrounded by expensive electronic toys, empty packets of crisps and sweets, and an array of underwear and socks. He stares at the screen while eating a hamburger; he feels a sneeze coming on, selects a sock with his free hand and blows his nose. Indifferently he watches the violent scene played on the screen, chooses another sock from the pile, masturbates into it, and throws it away. He eats another hamburger.

This is the opening scene of *Phaedra's Love* by Sarah Kane, first performed at London's Gate Theatre in May 1996.¹ Not a single spoken word but a series of actions create an image of an X-generation decadent prince wallowing amidst gadgets ad nauseam, who owns everything that consumer society can offer, but whose desire is lost, scattered, wasted among the myriad brands, appliances,

screened images, and junk food. And he, along with it, is wasted, scattered, and slowly sinks into the royal couch in a degenerated state of self-destruction.

In the fourth scene Hippolytus is seen again watching television while playing with the remote control of an electronic toy car. His gaze wanders from the car to the screen without seeming to find any kind of pleasure in these actions, as he munches on sweets out of a large bag in his lap. Later on Phaedra enters the room and throughout their dialogue the Prince's gaze and attention will wander incessantly among indifferent and equally insignificant objects of desire: the television screen, the electronic toy car, and Phaedra, his stepmother. 'You're difficult. Moody, cynical, bitter, fat, decadent, spoilt,' are the words Phaedra hurls at him.² Even as she confesses her love and performs oral sex on him, Hippolytus continues, indifferently, to munch sweets and watch television.

Exactly one hundred years earlier another fat, cynical, crass, and greedy 'aristocrat' strutted onstage, heralding the birth of the avant-garde: Ubu Roi (King Ubu). 'Vous êtes un fort grand voyou,' 'Pauvre malheureux,' 'Tu es si bête!'³ ('You are a bloody great oaf.' 'Poor fish,' 'How stupid you are!'),⁴ Mother Ubu teases-titillates him before they proceed on their regime coup, a rampage of slaughter and looting that ends on a ship sailing for the shores of France and Ubu's promise to appoint himself Master of Finances in Paris. Dystopia, for the spectators in the auditorium, had never appeared more ludicrous or frightening and utopia more the object of their most cherished desire.

A whole century lies between these two decadent embodiments: Jarry's 'pauvre malheureux' Ubu and Kane's 'fat, decadent, spoilt' Hippolytus. Both exemplify in-your-face poetics of excess and transgression that generate shock. Both plays were 'fringe' productions, semi-experimental, appearing at a specific cultural-historic moment which to a certain extent is parallel – end of the century (*fin de siècle*). And yet *Ubu Roi* played on the stage of the symbolist Théâtre de l'Œuvre, directed by Aurélien Lugné-Poë, a shrine of lyrical, theatrical modernism that promised the spectator redemption (at least of an aesthetic kind), while *Phaedra's Love* played in a small London fringe theatre, located above a pub, at a moment of deep despair from neo-liberal policy, Thatcher's legacy, at the riper stages of postmodernism, one of whose aspects is cynical, deconstructivist doubt of the modernist redemption dimension.

What, then, links Ubu and Hippolytus together? I wish to examine the affinity between these two decadent embodiments and locate it on the spectrum of relations between body and desire, present and blunt in both cases. Since *Ubu Roi* and *Phaedra's Love* are alike typical of a postdramatic theatre aesthetic that reshuffles the relations between the dramatic play and its theatrical staging – as the first scene of Kane's play clearly shows – forming an embodied performative texture,⁵ I allow myself to oscillate between what is conventionally considered drama (the linguistic text) and the

live theatrical performance. This is not done unintentionally but rather quite purposefully, because my point of departure for this study is the discourse of modernist body and its performative manifestations. As I have already stated, Jarry's Ubu, in his mere appearance on the stage of the Théâtre de l'Œuvre is bound to this tradition, and both he and Kane's Hippolytus correspond to it.

Artificial: Desiring Transcendence

In 1925, Spanish thinker José Ortega y Gasset published his famous essay 'The Dehumanization of Art',⁶ identifying and nurturing the tendency of modernist art (in his words, 'artistic art')⁷ into abstraction and rejection of realist representation, suffering from the excess of what he calls 'human content'.⁸ Ortega writes: 'For the modern artist, aesthetic pleasure derives from such a triumph over human matter,'⁹ and he adds that 'The new sensibility [of modern art] is dominated by a distaste for human elements in art.'¹⁰

For Ortega, the uncompromising quality shared by all modernist artistic styles is, as his essay's title claims, the dehumanization of art – the vital value and inevitable trait of the new aesthetic sensibility and of good fine art in general. Having this stance in mind, the question begs to be asked: how is this uncompromising demand manifested in the case of the performing arts, where the 'human element' cannot be dissociated from content and form and, more importantly, is constitutive of their ontology, epistemology, and aesthetic experience?

In the same year that Ortega's essay was published, the Russian-French critic André Levinson, in his essay 'The Spirit of Classic Dance', wrote:

When a dancer rises on her points, she breaks away from the exigencies of everyday life, and enters into an enchanted country – that she may thereby lose herself in the ideal.

To discipline the body to this ideal function, to make a dancer of a graceful child, it is necessary to begin by dehumanizing him, or rather by overcoming the habits of ordinary life. . . . The accomplished dancer is an artificial being, an instrument

of precision and he is forced to undergo rigorous daily exercise to avoid lapsing into his original purely human state. . . . You may ask whether I am suggesting that the dancer is a machine? But most certainly! – a machine for manufacturing beauty – if it is in any way possible to conceive a machine that in itself is a living, breathing thing, susceptible of the most exquisite emotions.¹¹

This could be considered a modernist interpretation of classical ballet practice, inspired by the aesthetic *zeitgeist* of the early twentieth century. Levinson, a multi-disciplinary art critic noted for his writing on dance, especially ballet, deliberated with the creation of a critical theoretical language that would address the body, especially the moving body of the dancer who ‘make[s] use of his knowledge of mechanics and that finally dominates this knowledge’.¹² Levinson’s words resonate with the Cartesian dualist tradition that advances a mechanical interpretation of the body.¹³ His text reveals a typical modernist appreciation for modern expertise (the engineer as the prototype of modern specialization and the machine as its exalted achievement), precision, and the subjugation of individual sensitivity to an aesthetic purpose.¹⁴ Levinson strips the dancer’s body of its phenomenal, corporeal being – ‘the bodily being-in-the-world’¹⁵ – and likens it to ‘a machine’ that overcomes individuality and deadens desire, both of the performer and the spectator, in order to create a pure sign of beauty.

The modern machine fantasy, as Levinson expresses it, has enchanted quite a few modernist theatre theorists addressing the question of the performer being an essential component of a live performance. The actors’ personality and even more so their body have been perceived as constraints that stain the abstract poetics of art and sabotage the possibility of a pure, objective, aesthetic experience of the beautiful. The phenomenal body, as well as its realist representations in art, is perceived as belonging to an order of concrete reality, to a category of the quotidian – ‘spontaneous life’ or ‘human world’ as Ortega puts it¹⁶ – and thus alien to the distant, autonomous, harmonious, and perfect sphere in which the art object exists.

‘The poet begins where the man ends,’ Ortega states.¹⁷ Maurice Maeterlinck, symbolist poet and playwright, formulated this well in his famous essay of 1890, ‘Menus Propos – Le Théâtre’: ‘The stage is the place where masterpieces go to die, because performance of a masterpiece by means of *human and contingent* elements is an antinomy. All masterpieces are symbols, and symbols cannot sustain the active presence of man.’¹⁸ In order to save the theatre from what he considers to be its fatal destiny – that is in fact its liveness realized in the actor’s corporeal presence – Maeterlinck sees no other way but to rid the stage of the presence of actors: ‘We should perhaps remove the human being from the stage altogether. . . . Will the human being be replaced by a shadow, a reflection, a projection of symbolic forms? I do not know, but the removal of the human being seems to me a necessity.’¹⁹

And, indeed, the aesthetics of symbolist theatre, as seen in the example of the play *La Fille aux mains coupées* (*The Girl with Cut-off Hands*) by Pierre Quillard, produced in 1891 on the stage of Paul Fort’s Théâtre d’Art, not only forced the actors’ bodies to be almost static and reduced their distant presence to mere voice, it even forced them to emerge disembodied from behind a gauze scrim that separated the stage from the audience.²⁰ This was done in order to imbue the flesh-and-blood actor with abstract qualities such as Levinson attributes to the ideal dancer: namely, ‘an artificial being’ that overcomes its routine habits.

The disembodied quality of the actor also suits the symbolist aspiration for a synthetic theatre in the spirit of the Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk* (total work of art). This becomes clear from Paul Fort’s (unrealized) intention to end the theatre evenings at the Théâtre d’Art with a *tableau vivant* of a symbolist painting in which ‘actors and models will represent the immobile figures’.²¹ While immobility is inherent to the *tableau vivant* genre, here it becomes a demand, since it enables the reduction of the actors’ presence to a minimum, turning their bodies almost into pictorial signs. In other words, in order to generate the desired transcendental

experience, the actor's body must become a visual component, evocative but distant and indifferent, and integrated in the overall aesthetic of the work.

Artificial: Transcending Desire

The modernist dehumanization and mechanization of the body corresponds with Arthur Schopenhauer's thoughts regarding the channelling of the will for the pure aesthetic experience of the work of art, overcoming and in fact negating that very will. Schopenhauer, one of the philosophers who largely affected the growth of modernism in France, argued that the absolute concreteness of our existence should be identified with the will, a basic drive that lacks rationality and precedes the activity of cognitive thought. According to this idea, the subject is then defined not by thought but by the will: desire acting in the world, originating from a biological drive to which the individual is enslaved.

Therefore, says Schopenhauer, it is a source of suffering: 'The in-itself of life, the will, existence itself, is a constant suffering, and is partly woeful, partly fearful.'²² Overcoming will, annulling it, negating it – 'This is the ultimate goal, and indeed the innermost nature of all virtue and holiness, and is salvation from the world'²³ – can be possible either through abstinence or by means of art which places an object of aesthetic apprehension and pleasure: 'On the occurrence of an aesthetic appreciation, the will thereby vanishes entirely from consciousness.'²⁴ In other words, and following the Kantian model which Schopenhauer addresses throughout his essay, art generates pure, will-less viewing and appreciation of aesthetic objects. Hamutal Bar-Yosef explains:

The power of art lies in its ability to unite rationality and the senses, give the abstract its sense expression. The work of art enables the subject to unite with the object. . . . It enables the subject to forgo individuality and will and become a kind of pure reflection of the object of artistic description.²⁵

For the modernist stand – adhering to the *l'art pour l'art* credo and demanding the

autonomy of the work of art, its dissociation from an empirical reality – it is no small matter to cope with the material, phenomenal, particular body, or rather the body-will of the performer that constitutes a source and object of desire, and thus an obstacle for the transcendental experience of the beautiful.

As one can gather from Maeterlinck's words, the modernist artist understood the inevitable but problematic link between the materiality of the performing body (its plastic, rhythmic, vocal presence) and its semioticity.²⁶ Apart from the fact that the two are inseparable, the body's materiality possesses an excessive quality that devours its symbolic signifying function. This excessive and threatening quality (following Julia Kristeva we might call it 'semiotic')²⁷ releases desires that are inevitably present in the live encounter between two body-subjects, body-wills.²⁸

Amelia Jones claims that the corporealized experience of the art object is suppressed in modern writing on art, while the disinterestedness of aesthetic judgement places an ephemeral, disembodied subject. This is especially noted in aesthetic writings on theatre and other performing arts that bring together sensuous organic bodies, performers and spectators. Jones adds that the presence and demonstration of the body in the live art work 'is specifically anti-formalist in impulse, opening up the circuits of desire informing artistic production and reception'.²⁹ Jones is dealing specifically with instances of performance art and body art that emphasize the particular physical embodiments of the performer as subject; however, circuits of desire are opened in every situation of a live event where the simultaneous corporeal presence of performer and spectator takes place, and theatre is no exception.

As one can deduce from the words of Levinson and Maeterlinck, modernist performance chooses to block or shift the circuits of desire and suppress the body by dematerialization, dehumanization, and the mechanization of the performer. Theoreticians and practitioners of modernist theatre

propose two main solutions for overcoming the body and desire: first, the option of replacing the flesh-and-blood human being with a machine, stretching an idea-thread from von Kleist's *Über das Marionettentheater* (1810) to Gordon Craig's obscure 'The Actor and the Über-Marionette' (1908) and the futurist Fortunato Depero's *Balli Plastici* (1917) – a dance in which dancers were replaced by puppets – through to the Bauhaus teacher Oskar Schlemmer, who wrote: 'Might not the dancers be real puppets, moved by strings, or better still, self propelled by means of a precise mechanism, almost free of human intervention, at most directed by remote control?'³⁰

The second solution does not replace an actor with a machine, but it does suggest the metamorphosis of the actor's body into a machine-like stage object, with the machine serving here as a model of a perfect, effective mechanism that embodies modernist values of precision, efficiency, practicality, and harmony. In this context one may note a few examples, such as Giacomo Balla's *Macchina Tipografica* (1914), Ivo Pannagi's mechanistic costumes for Maxim Michailov's *Mechanical Ballet* (1919) – which 'deformed the entire figure bringing about machine-like movements'³¹ – and other futurist theatre and dance manifestations, Schlemmer's stage productions at the Bauhaus, as well as Meyerhold's biomechanical acting technique.

Animality: Desiring Intimacy

But then came Ubu. At a time when the symbolist performance tries to overcome insatiable desire by means of pure aesthetic experience – namely suppressing the phenomenal body-will – Ubu represents crass, childish body-will that upends any order or norm, flooding, devouring, and leaving only destruction in his wake. *Ubu Roi* does appear on the stage of the Théâtre de l'Œuvre, which prefers and appreciates more highly the refined and meditative qualities of symbolist poetry.³² However, it draws upon a long tradition of popular entertainment and, specifically and more immediately, is linked with the cabaret world that flourished in

Paris in the late nineteenth century: a scene embodying the parodying-satirical-carnivalesque spirit of *fumisme*,³³ whose declared forefather was no other than François Rabelais, creator of the gigantic literary figures of Gargantua and Pantagruel – fantastic embodiments of exaggerated desire in an exaggerated body.³⁴ How, then, does Ubu's appearance 'shittring' his way upon the symbolist stage of the Théâtre de l'Œuvre settle in with modernist discourse of the body and desire? Is Ubu – symbol of primitive, unharnessed, animal desire – perhaps the postmodern alternative to modernist abstraction and mechanization of the body?

In his book *Theory of Religion* (1973), Georges Bataille equates animality – that is, immediacy and immanence – and the desire that nourishes it, with intimacy or the 'intimate order'.³⁵ Bataille centres his book on the individual who has been disconnected from his immanent nature, whom he identifies 'as a "thing", and [as such] a negation of intimacy'.³⁶ In a discussion of that individual who yearns to recover his lost immanent nature – when 'the failure of return becomes the central tension of human life'³⁷ – Bataille distinguishes the 'intimate order' that is mythical and sacred from the 'profane world' – that is 'the world of things'.³⁸ The intimate order indicates the reality of continuity and uninterrupted flow, where there are no objects or distinct selves: 'What is intimate, in the strong sense, is what has the passion of an absence of individuality.'³⁹

For Bataille, this reality is identified with animality, for animals have no autonomous or hierarchical existence in relation to the rest of the world – they are integrated in it without any distinct subject-object cognition: 'Every animal is *in the world like water in water*.'⁴⁰ On the other hand, the order of things, or the order of reality, is opposed to the order of intimacy and is identified with the profane world in which discontinuity, individuation, and separation into subjects and objects maintain pragmatic relations of subjugation. Civilization can then be defined as the opposite of animality and identified with lost intimacy, and at the same time with nostalgic desire for intimacy, since, as

Bataille writes, 'the real order is subordinated to the search for lost intimacy'.⁴¹ Against this background Bataille argues that intimate experience is necessarily different, outstanding, and paradoxically 'intimacy is violence, and it is destruction, because it is not compatible with the positing of the separate individual'.⁴² He adds that 'there can be no breaking of the order of separate things, no intimacy, without violence'.⁴³

Ubu's character represents the possibility of turning excessive desire – bursting the limits of body-self – into a value, a rebellious, anarchical force that contests the system of social norms and proposes redemption not by erasing desire or suppressing it, but rather by total surrender to body-will and deviant salvation through the gutters of evil and egoism – a theatre of cruelty. Unlike Kurtz, protagonist of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (first published in 1899, three years after *Ubu Roi* was produced at the Théâtre de l'Œuvre), who leaves civilization in order to head a cannibal tribe in the jungle, wild animalistic Ubu moves in the opposite direction, from the Polish jungle to France, to civilization: 'I'll get myself nominated Master of Finances in Paris',⁴⁴ he announces as his ship sails for France, carrying on board 'Père Ubu and all his gang'. His unbridled desire is exhibited, excessive, threatening the existing order of things.

Bataille links intimacy-generating violence with the violent-sacred idea of 'sacrifice' in the sense of taking something useful, practically valuable to the system of profane production of things, removing it from that order, and transferring it to the mythical, sacral world of intimacy. As he puts it: 'Sacrifice is the antithesis of production, which is accomplished with a view to the future; it is consumption that is concerned only with the moment.'⁴⁵ In other words, as Aim Deulle Luski explains, 'sacrifice uproots the thing from the world of practicality and replaces it with the world of "whim" which is desire, or – alternately – the way in which a man's closeness is formed to the thing that is forever out of his reach'.⁴⁶

Since sacrifice in essence is not a productive act but rather one of useless spending,

the spending is needed in order to break out and ensure passage from the profane world of things (and of instrumental productivity) into the sphere of intimacy. This is the principle of immoderation characteristic of the Ubu character (as it is of Bataille's writing) – creating an excess that contests the abstract logic of artificial, efficient, reductive economy so typical of modernism, that distances and preserves the autonomous artistic object for fear of being consumed.

Ubu's desire erupts, exceeds, surges out of his body, out of Aragon, of Poland – violently and extremely (this is *fisicofollia*, body madness, serving the coup d'état). The ship of fools he sails is a sort of avant-garde carnivalesque sovereignty – the last remnant of another intimate, integrated existence – passing by Europe on its way not to the Baudelairean remote 'forêts de symboles' ('forests of symbols'),⁴⁷ a kind of paradise where things blend into each other to form a pure, total aesthetic experience, but rather to bourgeois Paris that symbolizes the profane world of things in order to take over and impose a new order on it. Instead of aspiring to physical transcendentalism – of material, of the body – *Ubu Roi* presents the option of channelling desire through the body back to the social body to fulfil a utopian option of a social and consciousness change.

In other words, in *Ubu Roi* (as in Bataille's writing on intimacy) there is a longing for some nostalgic, impossible return to an authentic, primordial, animalist order of existence that in fact ensures that very lost wholeness longed for by the aesthetic transcendence of *l'art pour l'art*. Ubu, then, in spite of it all is not the postmodernist alternative to the dehumanized, artificial body of modernism, but remains, rather, a modernist because he performs redemptive animality in an attempt to transcend the mundane order of things and reform reality.

Machinal: Desiring Machine

HIPPOLYTUS: Free will is what distinguishes us from the animals. (*He undoes his trousers.*) And I have no intention of behaving like a fucking animal.

*Priest performs oral sex on Hippolytus.*⁴⁸

Versus the modernist, machine-like artificial creature that channels desire into pure aesthetic contemplation, or – alternatively – the Ubuesque who recruits it for violent revolution in an attempt to replace the order of reality with intimacy, stands the figure of a couch-potato prince, indifferent and depressed, to whom nothing seems to come close, in whom nothing apparently arouses desire. Is Hippolytus a degenerate product of repressed modernist desire or perhaps the consequence of revolutionary, avant-garde Eros that has wasted too much futile desire? In opposition to the negation of the body-will or its exaggeration, which eventually complies with the modern idea of selfhood and individualism, Hippolytus poses the question whether a uniform, authentic self exists to begin with, a source of desire.

Elizabeth Grosz distinguishes two main conceptions of desire that have developed in western thought:⁴⁹ the approach whose philosophical roots lie in the writings of Plato, and which continues to nourish even the twentieth century's psychoanalytical premises, sees desire as a lack, a deficiency that shapes the human subject. Plato, for example, perceives desire as an inherent lack of perfection in human beings and, at the same time, an expression of their longing for the good and the beautiful that they lack. To the fundamental view of desire as lack Hegel adds the idea that, unlike other deficiencies that befall man, desire is the one conditioned by being unrequited, and therefore the object of desire is always and necessarily another desire. If desire is fulfilled, it is consumed.

Freud sees lack, which is constitutive of desire, not as inherent to the subject but as a function of social reality. Desire, then, is the movement of substitutes that creates a series of objects or representations that compensate for a lost, primordial experience of perfection, fullness (in other words, the symbiotic mother-child relationship); compensation for the parting with the lost or forbidden object (the mother). As we have seen, Schopenhauer argues that since the substitutes of the lost object will never satisfy our desire, we shall forever remain in a state of lack and a frustrating attempt at satisfaction.

In the conventional model, then, the basic premise is that desire stems from one source, deficient, lacking, but defined and permanent: the subject. It is always directed at an alternative object that means to compensate for the unattainability of the missing object (primordial or ideal). Drawing on Bataille, we may consider desire as a nostalgic longing for intimacy, which assumes a lacking individuality and carries with it the promise of wholeness. Modernist manifestations actually submit to this economic model of desire that is based not only on a dyadic subject-object link (that suits Bataille's 'order of separate things'), but also on its preservation through channelling into an aesthetic experience or a revolutionary one that compensates for imperfection.

Unlike this common model that attributes source to desire, as well as a negative character of deficiency or lack that bears the promise of change or at least a chance of redemption, both Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari propose an alternative model that sees in desire a creative force, desire that is free *a priori* of the need to satisfy or achieve integrity, and so not object-dependent, and at the same time questions the status of the autonomous subject. According to Deleuze and Guattari the subject in the capitalist age is a 'desiring machine' meant for process, producing and transporting desire that seeks more ties and relations than any object or social formation is able to provide.⁵⁰

Opposite the traditional system whereby desire is inscribed in the private and social body and is translated into a stable cultural meaning, capitalism, according to Deleuze and Guattari, encourages desire to wander outside the body, lose its source, and settle in the flow of capital, to assimilate into commercial circuits, the production and consumerism of capitalist economy. However, when desire abandons the body, when overflow threatens and inflation of unharnessed desire occurs, the system's sentries go into action and channel the stray desire back into artificial social territories.

Thus Deleuze and Guattari argue, for example, that the Oedipus complex in its Freudian version is not a universal psycho-

logical structure, but rather an artificial invention of the 'economy of desire' in the capitalist age. The model of the Oedipal triangle is meant to solve the problem of excessive desire within the framework of a culture which, on the one hand, feeds on a surplus that turns the wheels of production-consumption, and on the other checks desire and hands it back to the fabricated bourgeois order.⁵¹ 'This state', writes David Gurevitz, 'turns the subject-object into a mere process: its interiority, its essence, is taken away.'⁵²

PHAEDRA: You've got a life.

HIPPOLYTUS: No. Filling up time. Waiting.

PHAEDRA: For what?

HIPPOLYTUS: Don't know. Something to happen.
... Till then. Fill it up with tat. Bric-a-brac, bits
and bobs, getting by ...⁵³

Unlike Phaedra, enslaved by desire that floods and consumes her self, causing her unbearable suffering – 'Can't switch this off, Can't crush it. Can't. Wake up with it, burning me'⁵⁴ – Sarah Kane's Hippolytus embodies the subject in process. His lack of interiority, of essence, is a symptom of the seepage of desire that has been displaced from the body and from the false alternative territories of capitalist economy and bourgeois culture. Hippolytus, the prince whose subjects shower him with birthday gifts (spending their money on him before they spend him), is no longer the symbolic body that embodies and represents the royal myth, the authority, the kingdom and its future; this prince is nothing more than cultural goods, an organ within an anti-Oedipal royal family in which desire has broken the dams set up by culture to channel it productively: the daughter sleeps with her father, the son with his mother, and a brother with his sister.

The ego and the ethical subject are now replaced by a machine through which the desire of Hippolytus, his (step-) mother, sister, and subjects flows and scatters without any specific direction or target, a machine assembled from different interfacing points, no longer body, no longer organism but rather distinct organs: mouth, eye, hand, nose, genitals, networked with countless

objects, consumer goods, interfaces of other desiring machines through which desire flows and is recycled: hamburger, remote control, television, screen, nose, sock, electronic car, bags of sweets, sex organs, caressing hand, mouth. Desire flows in all directions, serial, recycled, indifferent, wasted, and wasting Hippolytus who has actually lost his desire. He is a desiring machine, a consumer machine – all-swallowing, all-vomiting.

HIPPOLYTUS: I'm bored.⁵⁵

Desiring Redemption (After All)

Could capitalist 'machinal-ity', in process, deprived of essence, with multiple inter-connections – according to the model drawn by Deleuze and Guattari – paradoxically be as immanent as 'animality': inherent in the world without a distinct consciousness, and therefore a post-humanist, but modernist option of intimacy? And perhaps Hippolytus – the princely desiring machine – is another variation of modernist dehumanization that replaces the phenomenal body with a machine-body in order to overcome desire and extract the willing subject from the ongoing frustration of its existence? And perhaps it is but a postmodern parody of the monumentality of modernist desire, declaring the ultimate triumph of capitalism, the surrender of will, its turning from a force of change into a production mechanism serving the capitalist system, the commercialism of desire, its becoming a consumer good?

I would tend to accept the latter option and answer unhesitatingly in the affirmative. It most likely reflects the sense of despair present in many of the plays produced in the 1990s and the attitude of young playwrights of the X-generation towards growing trends of globalism, capitalism, and alienation, along with the loss of identity, of a sense of belonging and the ability to effect change and transform reality.

But Scene Eight, that concludes the play, questions the parody option. In this scene we witness the bestial, shocking, and terrifying sacrifice of Hippolytus by the masses: a scene that ends with the mangled prince,

castrated, a 'body-without-organs' (BwO),⁵⁶ smiling to the vultures that wait to devour his carcass as he murmurs calmly: 'If there could have been more moments like this.'⁵⁷ At the last moment, immanent animality has overcome the desiring-machine, and at the tragic moment of sacrificing the prince, the offering, we witness the redeeming return of intimacy. Bataille writes:

Man is afraid of the intimate order that is not reconcilable with the order of things. . . . Because man is not squarely within that order, but only partakes of it through a thing that is threatened in its nature (in the projects that constitute it), intimacy, in the trembling of the individual, is holy, sacred, and suffused with anguish.⁵⁸

Only by becoming a 'body-without-organs' – opposing the organism, that is 'the system of the judgement of God' (the theological system but also 'the order of separate things', the socio-symbolic system in general)⁵⁹ – and ultimately in his death does Hippolytus feel alive, feel the intensity of desire,⁶⁰ and only his terrifying sacrifice sanctifies intimacy for the spectator: 'The individual,' Bataille writes, 'identifies with the victim in the sudden movement that restores it to immanence (to intimacy)'.⁶¹

Turning the prince into a sacrificial offering has generated the turning point which facilitates redeeming liberation from the capitalist economy of desire that produces, consumes, and trades in recycled indifferent desires, and enables the transition to an order of intimacy; forming 'man's closeness . . . to the thing that is forever out of his reach', as Deuelle Luski puts it.⁶² This tragic moment offers a flicker of hope for redemption in the spirit of modernist thinking.

Notes and References

1. Sarah Kane, *Phaedra's Love*, in *Sarah Kane: Complete Plays* (London: Methuen, 2001).
2. *Ibid.*, p. 79.
3. Alfred Jarry, *Ubu Roi*, in Maurice Saillet, ed., *Tout Ubu* (Paris: Livre de Poche, 1962), p. 33–4.
4. Alfred Jarry, *Ubu Roi*, trans. Barbara Wright (New York: New Directions, 1961), p. 9, 10, 11.
5. See Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, trans. Karen Jürs-Munby (London; New York: Routledge), p. 85–6.

6. José Ortega y Gasset, *The Dehumanization of Art and Other Essays on Art, Culture, and Literature*, trans. Helene Weyl (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1968), p. 23.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

8. *Ibid.*

9. *Ibid.*, p. 23.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 29.

11. André Levinson, 'The Spirit of the Classic Dance', in Selma Jeanne Cohen, ed., *Dance as a Theatre Art* (New Jersey: Princeton Book Company, 1992), p. 117.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 113.

13. Cartesian dualism echoes a new and revolutionary materialist approach to the human body, already presented in *De Humani Corporis Fabrica* (1543), written by Andreas Vesalius, father of modern anatomy. Vesalius first examined and represented the human body systematically, as an object, and organized it in terms of organs or separate parts of one large machine. See Daniel Garrison and Malcolm Hast, *On the Fabric of the Human Body: an Annotated Translation of the 1534 and 1555 Editions of Andreas Vesalius' De Humani Corporis Fabrica* <<http://vesalius.northwestern.edu>>, accessed 5 February 2013.

14. I do not know whether Levinson was aware of Le Corbusier's revolutionary *Towards a New Architecture* (first published in French as *Vers une Architecture* in 1923), when he likened the dancer's body to a machine whose ultimate aim was to 'constitute the arresting beauty of a finished airplane' (Levinson, 'The Spirit of the Classic Dance', p. 11). But it should be remembered that the concept of the machine formed the core of Le Corbusier's argument regarding the possibility of modernizing life architecturally. Le Corbusier claimed that modern architectural thought should follow the logic of engineering, and design functional building as if they were airplanes, cars, or ships. Thus, Le Corbusier famously likened a house to a machine for living and an armchair to a machine for sitting. Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, trans. Frederick Etchells (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1986), p. 89.

15. Erika Fischer-Lichte, 'Embodiment – From Page to Stage: the Dramatic Figure', *Assaph: Studies in the Theatre*, No. 16 (2000), p. 68.

16. José Ortega y Gasset, *The Dehumanization of Art*, p. 22.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 31.

18. Quoted in Patrick McGuinness, *Maurice Maeterlinck and the Making of Symbolist Theatre* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 108. (Emphasis in the original.)

19. *Ibid.*, p. 110.

20. 'The actors, placed against the background of the painted canvas . . . appeared as distant, dreamlike shadows. As in symbolist painting, the perspective and depth were eliminated and the flat abstracted bodies of the actors appeared against the flat background of the painted backdrop.' Frantisek Deak, *Symbolist Theatre: the Formation of Avant-Garde* (Baltimore; London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), p. 145.

21. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 142.

22. Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, Vol. 1, trans. E. F. J. Payne (New York: Dover Publications, 1969), p. 267.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 152.

24. Arthur Schopenhauer, *Parerga and Paralipomena*, Vol. 2, trans. E. F. J. Payne (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), p. 245.

25. Hamutal Bar-Yosef, *Decadence in European Literature* (Tel Aviv: Ministry of Defence, 1994), p. 26. (My translation from the Hebrew.)
26. See Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance: a New Aesthetics*, trans. Saskya Iris Jain (London; New York: Routledge, 2008), p. 17.
27. Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. and abridged by Margaret Waller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984).
28. Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, p. 102.
29. Amelia Jones, *Body Art / Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), p. 5.
30. Quoted in RoseLee Goldberg, *Performance Art: from Futurism to the Present* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1988), p. 105.
31. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 25.
32. See Deak, *Symbolist Theatre*, p. 237–8.
33. 'Fumisme was, if anything, politically incorrect. . . . The function of *fumistes* was to counteract the pomposity and hypocrisy they perceived as characterizing so much of society.' Phillip Dennis Cate, 'The Spirit of the Montmartre', in Phillip Dennis Cate and Mary Shaw, ed., *The Spirit of the Montmartre: Cabarets, Humor, and the Avant-Garde, 1875–1905* (New Jersey: Rutgers, State University of New Jersey, 1996), p. 23.
34. Olga Anna Dull, 'From Rabelais to the Avant-Garde: Wordplay and Parody in the Wall-Journal *Le Mur*', in Phillip Dennis Cate and Mary Shaw, ed., *The Spirit of the Montmartre*, p. 199–241.
35. Georges Bataille, *Theory of Religion*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Zone Books, 1989 [1973]), p. 17.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
37. Aim Deuelle Luski, 'Nothing is More Foreign to Man than His Animality: an Epilogue to *Theory of Religion*', in Georges Bataille, *Theory of Religion*, trans. Ido Basuk (Tel Aviv: Resling: 2003), p. 100. (In Hebrew.)
38. Bataille, *Theory of Religion*, p. 37.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 50.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 19. (Emphasis in the original.)
41. *Ibid.*, p. 84.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 51.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 80.
44. Jarry, *Ubu Roi*, trans. Barbara Wright, p. 162–3.
45. Bataille, *Theory of Religion*, p. 49.
46. Luski, 'An Epilogue to *Theory of Religion*', p. 109–10. (In Hebrew.)
47. Charles Baudelaire, 'Correspondances', in Charles Baudelaire's *Fleurs du mal/Flowers of Evil* <<http://fleursdumal.org/poem/103>>, accessed 30 January 2013.
48. Sarah Kane, *Phaedra's Love*, p. 97.
49. Elizabeth Grosz, *Space, Time, and Perversion* (London; New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 175–80.
50. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), p. 1–8.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 262–71. 'Oedipus is this displaced or internalized limit where desire lets itself be caught. The Oedipal triangle is the personal and private territoriality that corresponds to all of capitalism's effort at social reterritorialization' (p. 266).
52. David Gurevitz, *Postmodernism: Culture and Literature at the End of the Twentieth Century* (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1997), p. 125. (In Hebrew.)
53. Sarah Kane, *Phaedra's Love*, p. 79–80.
54. *Ibid.*, p. 71.
55. *Ibid.*, p. 83.
56. Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, p. 149–66.
57. Sarah Kane, *Phaedra's Love*, p. 103.
58. Bataille, *Theory of Religion*, p. 52.
59. Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, p. 158–9.
60. 'The BwO is desire; it is that which one desires and by which one desires.' *Ibid.* p. 165.
61. Bataille, *Theory of Religion*, p. 51.
62. See Note 46.