Excerpts from *Le Dialogue Dramatique et le Metathéâtre* by Sławomir Świontek[1]
Translation by Jenn Stephenson

II. The Theatrical Situation as an Element of Dramatic Discourse

. . . All acts of language, including all ordinary conversation, presuppose an action that can be defined thus: someone speaks to another. The imitation of the act of language that is dramatic dialogue (as much written as presented in the scene) reaffirms another presupposition: someone speaks to another person for a second other person. So the imitation always presumes another for whom it is made: to imitate constantly signifies "imitating in the presence of someone." Thus imitation of acts of speech necessarily project, in a certain sense, their enunciation in the presence of an external addressee. In the dramatic text, one does not cite conversation, one imitates it.[2] It is this presence in the imitated acts of language in writing, that speaks to the proper situation of theatre, where there is an identity between the time of the execution and that of the reception in a space that assures direct contact between the actor/characters and the spectators.

From the theatrical situation inscribed in the text (unlike that of the dramatic situation comprised as an arrangement of relations, connections, tensions, and conflicts between characters), one will comprehend all the textual signs that take into consideration the projected presence of the external addressee of the dialogue and the communal spatio-temporal conditions of its executor and of the witness of its execution. The signs make possible, to some extent, the theatrical act as a presentation, by a real executor (actor) in the presence of a real addressee (spectator), of the fictional acts of communication between the characters, in order to provoke a real act of communication across the actor-spectator (stage-house) axis.

All notation of dialogue, all the text expressed under the stylistic form of dialogue, constitutes a certain theatrical situation. The degree of theatricalization will be as large as the text will allow, taking into account its address to the addressee situated outside who must be informed of the pragmatic context of the dialogue.

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One can say that ordinary conversation, in which the sense is ensured by the extralinguistic context, is not theatrical. Similarly, one can say that dialogue in a story is less theatrical than dramatic dialogue because its context is more or less inscribed in the narration. On the contrary, dramatic dialogue, that is deprived of such exterior aid, contains information that takes into account its extra—textual destination. This means that it reaffirms the theatrical situation defined above. Inscription of this situation in the text is reinforced and pressed by the scenic project of the author (most often linking to a historical type of theatre) where the reading is able to expand without being essential for seizing the general signification of the work and the connection of the world presented to the reality.

Inscription of the external addressee in the dramatic dialogue provokes a change in the linguistic functions and the instrumental roles belonging to the real act of language. Dialogue that is oriented towards someone who is not a participant begins to become, itself, an object of examination; it is thematized. The destination of dialogue (written or spoken) towards someone other than the participants thematizes the same communication and appeals to the essence of theatre, the essence that Ivo Osolsobě sees as a phenomenon of the meta-communicative character: "This is most important, the theatrical communication is a communication that has for its object another communication (in other terms the theatrical semiosis has for its object another semiosis): communication (semiosis) between characters of the play."[3] The dramatic text, considered as "an image of communication on the subject of communication," makes apparent its metalinguistic quality (strictly speaking—meta-communicative). This quality concerns the level of the text in which the theatrical situation is inscribed. It can be named the metatheatrical level. So metatheatricality becomes one of the means for effecting the meta-enunciative function of discourse. The means that, in the case of the dramatic text, become its structural and essential mark.

Metatheatre can be defined as a particular case of the meta-enunciative function. Yet, it is necessary to distinguish meta-enunciative enunciation from metatheatrical enunciation. It can happen that ordinary discourse has for its object at the same time itself and the mechanism that directs it; that enunciation itself becomes the theme of discourse. But this theme is contained in discourse and does not overtake the situation of enunciation. Metatheatricality appears only in the moment when this overtaking must be signalled, when the new situation is constituted, where the act of "dialoguing" itself becomes the theme of the message for the addressee who finds himself outside the situation of the dialogue; briefly, when a new axis of communication is instituted. In the first case (that of normal conversation), the participants have full awareness of being passed to the metalinguistic level. In the second case, they don't have awareness. If the symptoms of the meta-enunciative level appear in the dramatic dialogue, there is not only passage to another axis of communication. At this moment, it is a product of a change of role: the character,

unaware until the present of being "heard," becomes an "actor" charged by the author to show awareness of the theatrical situation.   Concerning the revelation of the two circuits of communication, the decisions of the author comprise a very large range of possibilities, from the act of hiding (sometimes at all costs) the existence of the external axis and the theatrical awareness of the characters (e.g. in naturalistic dramaturgy) to the obvious demonstration of the second circuit accompanied by their full collaboration (e.g. the convention of the aside).

. . . It is worthy of note that the character in the novel does not have the potential to pass from the internal axis to the external axis and to change his communicative role, even in the case where he is the narrator. In the epic work, dialogue always remains an element of the recounted story, and as such it consists in acts of language that happened "somewhere and long ago." This makes passage to here and now impossible, that is, passage that enables the textualization of the theatrical situation where the two communicative circuits begin to function. On the contrary, if there is no one to relate the events, if the fable is only presented by acts of speech, the impression is imposed on the action happening in the here and now, that the moment of presentation is the same as the moment of reception. So, in this case, it is possible to make the dialogue work in both axes of communication.

Inscription of the theatrical situation in the text creates the possibility of overtaking the normal functions of dramatic language, those functions realized in the fictive universe created by the dramatic text. When dramatic enunciation addresses itself to someone who finds himself outside of the fiction, the character attests to the duality of role that has been attributed to him; this is the fictional character who speaks to another fictional character, who only exists thanks to the enunciation placed in his mouth by the author, and who is the executor of a character played for someone who is not at all fictional and who will become a real addressee as well as a spectator during the theatrical presentation.

The dramatic text as well as the work containing a theatrical situation seem to testify to the fluidity and the inconstancy of the limits that separate (or join) theatre itself, the fiction and the reality. Moreover, it is necessary to note that all crossing to reality, all address to the public, is made during the spectacle; that is, all revelation of the theatrical situation destroys the scenic illusion. In the theatre, paradoxically, all crossing to reality is a violation of the truth, even of the verisimilitude of the represented world.[4]

It may be possible to classify the proceedings that make apparent the metatheatrical level of the dramatic text by distinguishing three principal manners of revealing or hiding the two circuits of information in the theatre. It is necessary to underline that the following examples are, in the practical dramaturgy, so linked that their attribution to one group or the other can appear to fluctuate; nevertheless, the task is to choose representative examples. The classification is founded on the following criteria: a) the doubling of the channels of communication, often

accompanied by a doubling of represented reality, and b) the fact that the characters have or do not have awareness of this doubling—in other words, the degree of attribution to the characters of the competence of the author as well as the organizer of the rules of the play. Regarding the degree of revelation of the theatrical situation in the dramatic text, it is possible to distinguish three principal types of solution:

1. Camouflaged theatrical situation (the character does not have awareness of the stage-house circuit; he acts only in the fictional world). In this case, techniques and conventions serve to inscribe in the text superfluous information (by comparison to ordinary conversation) on the situational and pragmatic context of the dialogue (in the case of ordinary communication, the context is given in advance and is external with regard to the discourse), as well as direct information about previous situations and non-presented events, e.g., before the beginning of the action or in the *entr'actes*. From the point of view of the characters, this is often information that is not useful or is only a little bit informative, concerning the state of things that are well known to them (redundant), but it is also indispensable from the view of the external addressee (reader, audience) to the dialogue. . . . Some frequent examples:

—dialogue that gives information about the state of things existing before the presented action;
—dialogue featuring a confidant;[5]
—Aeschylean chorus (chorus as a collective character);
—dialogue containing a recitation of non-presented events; typically carries necessary information for understanding the unfolding of the following action;
—peppering the entire text with information that serves to motivate the actions of characters (Ibsenian technique);
—dialogue coded with sub-textual information (Chekhovian technique);
—dramatic monologue that gives information about the psychic state of the hero or of the decision that he will make; all this as the motivation for acts that he will undertake;
—*raisonneur* (character who ordinarily serves as the mouthpiece of the author) in didactic plays, thesis plays, and other propagandistic plays;
—a hero endowed with the capacity (close to that of the author) to comment and to foresee events and sometimes the denouement of the action and its significance;
—dramatic irony (or tragedy) as the principle that organizes both the presented world and the fable is a particular case (because it overtakes the quite simple conventionality of the means already mentioned). In this case, the unawareness of the hero in relation to his situation in the presented world is compared to his awareness of the real addressee (reader/spectator) in relation to this situation. Thus, the dramatic text takes account of the projected existence of the external addressee of the dialogue, and so, of the theatrical situation. Application of dramatic

irony is also a procedure that reveals the author as administrator of the rules for constructing dramatic dialogue as conversation aimed at others about whom they talk. (Parenthetically, the text reveals also the author as creator of a tragic vision of the world, where the *anagnorisis* of the hero, his recognition of himself and his situation in the world, is accompanied by the catastrophe.)

2. Revealed theatrical situation (the character is endowed by the author with an awareness of the external addressee—and so the theatrical situation).
—*parabasis* in the Classical theatre;
—prologues in the theatre of the Middle Ages;
—*loa* in the Spanish theatre;
—diverse forms of interludes, prologues, epilogues to the piece or to its components (acts or scenes). Two types of unveiling of the theatrical situation can be distinguished: a) indirect revelation where it spoils the objectivity of the theatrical situation in the discourse, e.g. commentaries or sentiments (moral, religious, metaphysical, etc.), songs as in Brecht, introduction of a character as narrator who comments on the presented story (this happens often in scenic adaptations of Romantic works), etc. b) direct revelation where two planes of reality are constructed. In the first plane, the second plane is presented as a theatrical reality, as a staged performance. Thus dramaturgical procedures are revealed that construct the dramatic project or present the activity of the director and the actors and, moreover, are directly addressed to the external addressee of the dialogue (examples: *The Frogs* by Aristophanes, the numerous prologues and epilogues in Elizabethan drama, *Henry V*, *Troilus and Cressida*, *Pericles* by Shakespeare, *The Critic; or a Tragedy Rehearsed* by Sheridan, the prologue of *Faust* by Goethe, *Prologue et Intermède aux Funérailles à la polonaise* by Różewicz).
—construction of a character to whom the ability to create or at least to show the presented world is attributed. Sometimes this character functions either as the author or as the director (e.g. *The Theatre of the World* by Calderón, *Our Town* by Wilder). He presents himself (often in dramas that metaphorize the creative function of art in the theatre) as someone who is endowed with creative power or magic that permits him to give rise to a new world or to change the world that already exists (e.g. Prospero in *The Tempest*, Alcandre in *The Comic Illusion* by Corneille).
—numerous types of addresses to the public (*ad spectatores*). These can be differentiated according to the role that is attributed to the character who pronounces them. There are two types (the limits between the two are often effaced): a) attribution of the role of the author, e.g. questions of the *raisonneur*, maxims, sentiments, aphorisms, morals (dramas of the Middle Ages), ideological questions (dramas of social realism), didactics (plays for children, Jesuit dramas[6]); b) attribution of the role of participant: all types of aside that the other characters pretend that they do not hear, including self-reflexive discourse of a character who

presents himself as engaged in the performance; this happens, more often, in the case where the drama presents a theatrical rehearsal. The general difference between the two types a) and b) consists in the fact that the character of the second type seems to express himself on his own behalf and not on that of the author.

—a special group of dramas where the discourse between characters (and so the level of the fable) is erased (sometimes totally) in order to uniquely display (and sometimes to impose) the discourse between the stage and the house. (The clearest example of such a proceeding is Handke's *Offending the Audience* where the whole play is composed of insults and invectives thrown at the public by the characters/ actors; the play of two Polish authors, Jaroslaw Anders and Czeslaw Bielecki, entitled *Koniec* [*The End*] where a character named the Terrorist locks the house and, treating the real spectators as prisoners, he menaces them, not allowing them to leave until they finish the creation of a new piece of theatre.)[7]

The dichotomous classification presented above does not account for the richness and diversity of the means of linking dramatic dialogue to the two informative circuits imposed by the text with the theatrical situation inscribed in it. Sometimes it is difficult to classify the applied proceedings. All dramatic texts as notation of dialogue already contain the address of the addressee placed outside the notation so the situation of the theatre is inscribed here. It always acts to a degree as its own camouflage or as its own revelation. Aesthetic programs that aspire to realism in the theatre tend to efface the presence of the two communicative levels. It is the opposite tendency that underlines theatrical conventionality, displaying these as complements. But each performance must materialize the theatrical situation that is more or less hidden in the dramatic text.

3. Intermediate forms. It will be necessary, in addition, to isolate one group of means that do not directly evoke the theatrical situation. They do not unveil the two informative channels because they rest on the level of fiction, but, on the contrary, sometimes they serve to intensify it. Yet, it is necessary to classify them amongst the metatheatrical instruments because they appeal to the specificity of theatrical art. There are two types:

a) Multiplication of the presented reality. These are techniques belonging to theatre as art that re-semanticize reality, that make it or its elements the signs of the second (or again more elevated) degree, that transform natural signs into artificial signs[8] and create the sign of the sign.[9] These techniques appeal to the capacity of theatre to make fictional that which is real, in a perpetual crossing that manifests in the theatre, from reality to fiction, from fact to sign, from reality to illusion. These are particular changes of the character (with the help of mask, costume, accessory, etc.) that usually lead to different *coups de théâtre* (*anagnorisis, quid pro quo, deus ex machina*, trumperies, misunderstandings and surprises, etc.) As for the actor, these are the techniques of changing the role or identity of character, done

under the name of disguising what is considered as a fundamental instrument of the theatre. "It is the basic situation since the actor plays another and his character, "as in life," appears to others behind diverse masks depending on his desires and projects. The disguise is a mark of theatricality, of theatre-within-theatre, and of the *mise en abyme* in performance. It can only happen with the connivance of the public who must accept this material convention that is the disguise."[10] But this strategy serves above all to multiply the fiction: the character disguises himself for the other characters without passing to the other axis of communication; it is only the spectator who has the awareness of theatricality.

b)"Discoursivisation" of theatre. It is possible to distinguish another group of means that do not directly unveil the theatrical situation but which appeal to theatricality: these are texts where the theatre becomes the theme of the discourse of the characters. Contrary to the preceding group, the problems of the theatre are exposed with the aid of language. Dramatic dialogue becomes a metalinguistic utterance in the sense that it does not refer to language as such but to the language of the theatre; so it becomes a metatheatrical utterance.

Metatheatrical discourse is applied to dramas where characters are presented as people of the theatre: actors, directors, dramatists, etc. (e.g. *Saint Genest* by Rotrou, *The Roman Actor* by Massinger, *Molière* by Goldoni, *Kean* by Dumas-père, *Aktor* by Norwid, *Carnet d'un auteur dramatic* by Géraldy). A good occasion for introducing metatheatrical discourse is the presentation of a theatrical rehearsal that becomes a component of the fable. In this case, the author sometimes uses this strategy for expressing his proper vision of theatre or his aesthetic program. Sometimes, the whole drama becomes a dispute on the theatre, close to a Platonic dialogue. In France, since Molière, a dramatic genre has been created, often marked by the title "impromptu" (*The Impromptu of Versailles* by Molière, *The Impromptu of Paris* by Giraudoux, *The Impromptu of Alma* by Ionesco, *The Impromptu of Palais-Royale* by Cocteau).[11] Among the dramas that present a theatrical rehearsal, it is necessary to distinguish those in which the preparation leads to the result that the same spectacle is shown to characters who begin, at this moment, to play the role of spectators. In this case, a theatre-within-theatre is constructed where theatrical art ceases to be only the theme of discourse and where the theatrical situation ceases to be more or less either hidden or evoked by the discourse. Here metatheatricality crosses from the level of the discourse to the level of the fable.

III. A Form of Metatheatricality: The Theatre in the Theatre

One ordinarily speaks—and with little precision—about theatre-within-theatre (**TT**) in every case where one notes in the dramatic work the duplication (sometimes the multiplication) of the presented reality. One such doubling may yet be when **TT**, in the strict sense, does not appear. The levels of communication are already

doubled when discourse is addressed to the external addressee (reader/spectator), in crossing from the fiction to the reality, in revealing thus the theatrical situation inscribed in the text. There is doubling of reality when one presents the so-called real world and the dream world—fantastic, phantasmagoric—simultaneously or one after the other. The presented reality is doubled (multiplied) when two or more plays are reunited in only one dramatic text. In the latter case, many fictions are created without leaving the fiction; and it is the task of the reader or of the spectator to find the reason for the junction and the coherence of the reunited texts. All these devices introduce a level of metatheatricality, but still they do not necessarily provide a foundation for **TT**, if we do not want to employ the term theatre-within-theatre in the very large sense, one that is metaphoric or excessive. Other studies devoted to drama that reveal the metatheatrical level[12] have not always perceived that **TT** is only a particular and specific form of metatheatricality . . .

In every case, metatheatre can be understood as the revelation of the meta-enunciative aspect as dialogic text in which the true addressee is situated outside the situation where one finds the participants in the dialogue. Consequently, dialogic utterance addressed to someone becomes simultaneously an utterance aimed at someone else who is its external addressee, that is, to someone who finds himself outside the situation of enunciation. The meta-enunciative aspect is, therefore, a mark of each written dialogue. Metatheatricality appears when the two addresses (two axes of communication) and two destinations of the utterances that constitute the dialogue are revealed or thematized.

Three manners of revealing metatheatre can be distinguished in the dramatic text:

1. Changing the destination of enunciation from fictional character to a virtual (the reader implied by the text) or real (spectator in the theatre) addressee. The marks of this change signal the crossover to a new circuit of communication, as well as the institution of new roles and relations that re-link the sender and the addressee. The theatrical situation, hidden until now in the text, begins to be articulated. The same process of enunciation is unveiled; the change of circuit and of communicative roles, and consequently of the situational context and the presupposed knowledge of the participants—all this makes apparent the meta-enunciative character of dramatic dialogue.

2. Thematization of the theatrical art: theatre as an object of discourse. The phenomenon of theatre becomes the theme of the considerations and reflections of the dramatic characters. Their questions concern theatrical art in general, its aesthetic and social functions, the problems of its production and reception; sometimes these considerations are linked to the vision of theatre that the author wishes to impose on his work.

3. Theatre as an element of the fable: the doubling of the fiction. This is the case where the theatrical situation inscribed in the text is placed to the view, to the letter, placed on the stage (*mise en scène)*. The double destination of dramatic utterance is shown, as well as the process of their functioning during the spectacle; the phenomenon of theatre and its reception becomes one of the components of the dramatic fable. It is there, evidently, where the dramaturgical construction called **TT** appears.[13]

. . . The first type of metatheatricality, enumerated above, consists in holding up to view, in the dialogue as dialogue, the theatrical situation incorporated in the text, that is, in the revelation of the two communicative circuits. The second type, the most natural for language, takes advantage of the capacity to refer to itself by language, no matter what. In this case, metatheatricality can be spoken of in the same way that one speaks, for example, of the metaliterary in critical literature. Finally, the third type of metatheatricality appears in the moment when one introduces **TT** into the play, consisting of the creation of two fictional realities, two fables, where the first is the imitation of the theatrical representation, and the second is the imitation of the receptive behaviors that accompany it. The result is that **TT** forms two dramatic actions, parallel and simultaneous, that happen in the two presented realities so that the characters belonging to the first reality begin to play the roles of spectators while the others, those in the second reality, present themselves as theatrical actors. Thus the two processes, which simultaneity guarantees the same existence in the art of the theatre, become elements of the dramatic fable. It is this that clearly distinguishes **TT** from other forms of metatheatricality, one revealing the crossing from fiction to reality, without any intervention in the principal action of the play and in the fable, and the other where the art of the theatre is thematized in the discourse without doubling the presented reality (a species of play about the theatre).

Each type of metatheatricalization supposes a certain theatrical awareness of the addressee, that is, a competence that permits him to distinguish the art of the theatre from other artistic messages. In the dramatic text, **TT** results from the introduction of one text in the other, of the sort that the introduced text presents itself as a theatrical (and not literary) message that is unable to be presented otherwise than the condition of simultaneously showing the process of creation and reception of the theatrical spectacle. The text in the text that is **TT** therefore speaks, with the aid of literary means, to this that is no longer literature. Yourii Lotman has written on the subject of this species of composition: "The text in the text" is a specific rhetorical construction where the difference of coding between two parts of the text makes apparent the creative activity of the author and the process of the reading of the text.[14] Unlike that of composition encased in the story that can only be thematized in the fable, the first of these activities, that of the author, the dramatic text, is like the rest of utterance where one does not recount

a story that has already happened, but where one presents acts of language that make the impression of the story "always actual" for the reader (and truly actual) for the spectator. One such dramatic text has the possibility of placing in the fable the process of reception that happens at the same time that the story is presented. This is **TT** that obtains when the fable of the drama imitates the production of the spectacle in the presence of characters who enter into the role of spectators. The theatrical situation is held up to view in the fable, and its presentation reveals the characteristic trait of dramatic dialogue as utterance to a double addressee. Then, in the case of **TT**, it is the double communication proper to theatre (which happens between characters and which exists between the stage and the house), that becomes the theme of the dramatic fable.

In effect, **TT** provokes a phenomenon that one can call "reception of the reception." During the spectacle, a specular analogy is constituted between the situation of the characters who play the role of spectators, and the situation and the behaviors of the real spectators. This analogy can multiply itself in theory to infinity and can provoke a *mise en abyme* effect that then appears to present in the fable not only the reception of the theatre but also the reception of the reception of the interior spectacle. Thus behaviors of the real spectators and the "scenic" spectators move closer, almost to confusion. For example, in the course of the inserted scene of the *Murder of Gonzago*, Prince Hamlet is not only the spectator of the spectacle. He observes, moreover, the reactions of the other characters (the King, the Queen, Ophelia) in the same manner as the real public regards the actors who play the roles of the spectators in the interior theatre.[15] His role of observer is comparable to the role that the text imposes on the real public, that observes the behaviors of the public who form the fable of the drama. As Lotman says, "it seems that the characters of *Hamlet* cede their roles to professional performers [lit. tight-rope walkers or *bateleurs*] and who then transform themselves, in public, into members of the audience. *Au fond*, we do not observe only theatre-within-theatre, but also the audience-within-the-audience. To sufficiently render this effect, the heroes must remove their makeup and install themselves among the spectators."[16]

It is not by accident that the effect of *mise en abyme* accompanies **TT**, appearing very frequently in the baroque theatre of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This effect seems linked to the vision of the world as theatre, spilling into the epic until becoming a cliché (mocked moreover by Sancho Panza, who hears himself speak to his master). The application of **TT** in drama, so frequent in the baroque epoch, seems to stem from two premises: the one, philosophical or religious, drawn from the conception of *theatrum mundi*, and the other, aesthetic, that understands, as does Shakespeare/Hamlet, that theatrical mimesis shares the same theatre as the mirror of nature. If "The Globe" theatre finds itself in the terrestrial globe considered as a theatre, it is, itself, one theatre in another. If it wants to reflect truly,

as a mirror, the theatre of the world, it is the device of theatre-within-theatre that best expresses the essence of these things.

If one takes into consideration that theatrical mimesis is realized with the aid of means borrowed from reality, means themselves that are as real as men and objects; if the theatrical art characterizes itself by the uniformity of the means of expression of their reference;[17] if one imitates in the theatre the world considered as a theatre where all the people are at the same time actor and spectators, the intermission in the dramatic text of **TT** that makes apparent the two theatres moves closer to the *mise en abyme,* in which the infinite potential can only be interrupted by the arbitrary decision of the author who fixes the limits of the text.

When the world is comprised as theatre, and with the theatre as its mirror, the same theatre becomes a specular model of the world in which it finds a mechanism that imitates this world-theatre. If the theatre-mirror wants to exactly reflect reality, it must imitate it with the theatre that it imposes and, as a result, will reflect another theatre that, in its turn will imitate . . . and so on. If this spectacle of the *Murder of Gonzago* is not interrupted by Claudius, a new Prince Hamlet will appear, who will ask the actor to play a new spectacle (after his scenario) that he will watch with the King, and then a new Hamlet will arrange a new representation . . . and so on. Each time, this new Hamlet will become the spectator of two theatres in one. This performance that appears on the interior stage will have the task of unveiling the truth of the other that seems to us very close to our reality, presenting to us characters placed in the same situation as ourselves in the house.

All this can inspire some disquiet, as J. L. Borges remarks in his *Investigations*: "Why are we disturbed that Don Quixote can be the reader of *Quixote* and Hamlet the spectator of *Hamlet*? I believe to have found the cause: such inversions suggest that if the characters of a fiction are able to be readers or spectators, we their readers or spectators, can also be fictional characters."[18] In the course of the spectacle that constitutes **TT**, the suggestion of the essayist is less paradoxical that it seems. In the art of theatre that consists in constructing a fiction with the elements of reality, and that is produced for spectators in the same time and in the same space where one finds these spectators, there are conditions that permit the crossing from stage to house. The spectator who watches at the same time the acts of a fictional character and the real man that is the actor, the comedian who reacts to the behavior of the public, the spectator engaged in the play and the actor who overtakes the scenic frame—in all these is revealed the instability of the limits between the fiction and reality. With the theatrical situation inscribed in itself and thematized by **TT**, the dramatic text illustrates well this fluidity. The phenomenon suggested by Borges seems to realize itself; one of the two presented fictions appears more real than the other, and reality goes toward the fictional. The actor plays the role of the spectator, and the real spectator regards a specular image of the situation in which he finds himself from the point of his entry into the theatre.

The effacement of limits and the possibility of their displacement does not mean that complete identification is possible. In theatre the limit between the stage and the house is always palpable. It only pretends its fragility, or the possibility of displacing it, in order to indicate the boundaries that separate what is a text and what is not. **TT** appeals to the dialectic where—as Lotman says—the performance crosses between the text and the non-text. It produces a textual image of this performance when it confronts the two texts in which the one "wishes" to cease being text and to present itself as more real than the other. "The performance that consists of the opposition 'real/conventional' is proper to each situation of text within text. . . . Double coding of the two parts of the text is identified by artistic conventionality and treats the principal part of the text as real."[19]

TT is a particular example of composition that applies to a device that Dantua Danek calls "citation of the structure." These devices (different from "allegations" and quoted expressions that are citations of discourse) refer to styles, to different poetics, and so are "citations of artistic systems."[20] In the dramatic text when **TT** is introduced, it is the theatrical system, as distinct from of that of literature, which is this "cited structure" by literary means. The oppositional "real/conventional" that appears with **TT** coexists with the oppositional "literary/theatrical."[21] In the majority of cases, the text introduced in the play makes itself understood as more conventional, more fictional, or finally more theatrical (in the strict sense of the word)[22] by connection to the principal text that, consequently, is felt to be more real.

But different interpretations can change the connection of the two texts to reality. This depends in general on ideological awareness and on the aesthetic program of interpretation. For example, Cyprian Norwid (Polish poet, dramaturge, and aesthetic theorist of the nineteenth century who wanted to closely link aesthetics and ethics) was convinced that the task of art consists "in the unveiling of the lie of human life by the lie of art," assigning "a soiled mask" to the "ordinary reality" proper to the court of Elsinore (and so, to the presented world in the principal text). And, on the contrary, he values the theatre played by actors invited to the court, as a reality infinitely more dignified by choice and priority.[23] This interpretation finds, moreover, its affirmation in the text of drama: Shakespeare cut the spectacle at the moment when the theatrical illusion provokes important effects in the real world of the principal text, at the same instant when the theatre of the world recognizes itself in the world of the theatre that reveals its own true image. The change in the manner of the application of **TT** in the dramas of Norwid seems symptomatic of the evolution of theatrical awareness from the end of the eighteenth century until now. In his first metatheatrical play, *Aktor (The Actor),* **TT** expresses belief in the ethical function of theatrical art and, in his last play entitled *Za kulisami* (*Behind the Scenes*), the application of **TT** dismisses the possibility of theatre acting upon human life.

In the time of Shakespeare and Corneille, it was believed that the art of theatre was capable—parallel to *anagnorisis* and Aristotelian catharsis—of revealing the true face of the world, hidden under the apparent and illusory mask, or—with the aid of the magic of Prospero or Alcandre—of returning the world to a moral order that had been disrupted. Again in the work of Lope de Vega (*Il fingido verdadero*) and Jean Rotrou (*The Veritable Saint Genest*), thanks to the scenic play where he performs [lit. *exécute* with the apt double meaning in this case of perform and execute/kill] like the actor of **TT**, the hero is able to pass through, to an authenticity brought about by the conversion that he experiences when he plays the role of the Christian martyr.

But leaving the second half of the eighteenth century, the possibility—thematized in the fable by **TT**—of crossing the limit between theatre and life cedes place to an underscoring of their separation. This is already the case in *Die verkehrte Welt* by Tieck and in the epoch of the Romantic drama that has withdrawn the "I" of the hero in his subjectivity (sometimes ironized). Then, wanting to move the theatre closer to reality, the naturalists broke the fourth wall that, contrary to their program of identification of the scene and reality, definitively separated the theatrical fiction and reality. The exit from this closed space was not easy; an epoch of dramas of impotence was to come. Konrad, the hero of *Liberation* by Wyspianski, tries in vain to escape from the internal theatre that he has created himself as **TT**. He finishes by finding himself in another theatre from whence he can no longer free himself. The six Pirandellian characters search in vain for their author and their actors. They finish by remaining forever fictional beings. From pure form, Witkiewicz creates an autonomous space, which presents only a theatre, "a pure artistic space, deprived of reference from all that is not the spectacle . . . a place where the feint, the mask and the costume reign, where the spectacle in the spectacle is presented."[24] Finally, the theatre of Genet, that is (as the author says himself in his preface to *The Balcony*) only a "glorification of the image of the Reflection" (and not that of the Real!), is an analogy of the frontier where transgression does not manage our perspective towards reality but conducts us to another theatre.

. . . Yet, these two tendencies appeal to the specificity of theatrical art consisting in an interrupted liaison between fiction and reality, character and actor, stage and house, and finally between the simultaneously iconic and indexical quality of the signs of theatre. It is not only that the two orientations of research complement one another. The first—metatheatrical—seeks the manners of coding and modelling reality for the theatre. The second—existential—widely prevalent in the model, seeks to constitute a more dignified and authentic human reality.

TT shows on the stage a latent paradox of the art of theatre that hides itself in the following questions: How to create a fiction with reality? How to pass from fiction to reality? These questions concern the nature of theatrical mimesis as one of the factors that provoke catharsis. These questions equally concern the nature

of theatrical pleasure that seems to result from two psychic processes that come alternately or simultaneously during the reception of the spectacle, identification and distancing,[25] and that make the scene oscillate between the theatrical effect and the reality effect.[26] This is a divide that "introduces itself to the psychic interior of the spectator between something that he accepts as real and something to which he refuses judgement of the truth only according it the status of an image; but these two 'somethings' are the same scenic sign."[27] This occurs when the manner of being and the manner of functioning of the theatrical sign (that shows itself as itself, either as an object or as a person, as a thing situated outside of itself) decide to set in motion the mechanism that holds the sentiments of distance and identification, of conventionality and authenticity, of fiction and reality in a state of complimentarity. The reality, the materiality, of the world that creates another world, is a concretized manifestation of our projections, becoming "another scene of our imagination"[28] and lends credence to the act of identification prevented by awareness of the fiction and also to the game which contests the truth of things and so assures the salutary distance that provokes the aesthetic-ethical pleasure of catharsis.

Salutary—because it protects Man against himself and constitutes two scenes, one which is theatre and the other which is the world, placed into view by **TT** that testifies to the necessity to guard the limit between fiction and reality and at the same time open the possibility of breaching it. Violation of this limit, in the case of identification without distance, has for a consequence sanctions on the part of those who seem to better understand the truth: indulgence for children who believe that the puppets are alive, laughter for a bourgeois who wants to be a gentleman, punishment for a cowboy who has shot the actor playing the role of the traitor, death for the murderer—Claudius, who did not know to avoid investing himself in the theatre . . .

The results are more penetrating if the limit is breached in the opposite direction, not from reality to fiction, but from theatre to reality; it is the flight into folly of Pirandello's Henry IV, it is the mortal immobility of the mirror in Genet and the dead class of Kantor that is only able to revive on the orders of its master . . .

Saint Genest, the patron of the theatre, having found a unique truth in his theatrical role, paid his return to reality by his martyred death.

Notes

1. First published in French in *Zagadnienia Rodzajów Literackich* 36:1-2 (1993) 7-44.
2. There is a difference between dramatic dialogue and interpolated dialogue of the epic work. In the novel, someone (the narrator) cites that which some other person has said in the past, who reports the conversation between characters: the actions of speech are not imitated, only recounted. One might say that, in the epic work, it is not the act of dialogue that is imitated but the act of recounting.
3. Ivo Osolsobě, "*Cours de théâtristique générale,*" *Etudes Littéraires* 13.3 (1980): 427.
4. This is why so-called realistic dramaturgy, particularly that which respects a naturalist programme, is afraid of metatheatricality and avoids attribution of the theatrical situation in the text.

5. "A type of double (and conventional) character situated at the time of the fiction and outside of it, that sometimes becomes the substitute for the public (for whom he promotes the circulation of good sense) and is the double of the author. . . . It is especially in the drama or in tragedy that his presence imposes itself as mediation between the tragic myth of the heroes and the everyday existence of the spectator. In this sense, he guides the reception of the spectator and draws the image of the play" (Pavis, *Dictionary of the Theatre: Terms, Concepts, and Analysis*, trans. Christine Shantz (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1998) 74-75.

6. Parenthetically, only the examples which are the most clear and evident are given.

7. The perversity of this technique consists in the attempt to create theatre from that which is real in the theatre: the public. Moreover, the Terrorist, making the attempt, recalls, railing and ironically, the formula of the traditional theatre, when he speaks to the spectators: "This that matters to me, this is the theatre . . . that it exists . . . It is good, but it does not exist without you. I confess that I am no one without you. It is for this that I must stop you. . . . You will remain seated. The act of sitting, this will be your theatre piece. It is good, this is the perfect solution. In this theatre, a play will be performed. Precisely, it will be played for a little while . . . .You are wriggling, you wish to change position, but you will not be able to bring relief. Then, your backbone hurts you . . . And all that will be real, authentic. Finally without any aesthetic convention, without feigning or lying . . . Even if you consider yourself as the Romans and if you take me for a Vandal, you must confess that I have kept the essence of the classical theatre: the unity of place, time and action."

8. Tadeusz Kowzan, *Littérature et spectacle* (Warsaw: PWN Editions Scientifique de Pologne, 1975).

9. Pierre Bogatyrev, "*Les signes au théâtre*" *Poetique* 8 (1971).

10. "Disguise," *Dictionary* 108-109.

11. Cf. T. Kowzan "The three impromptus: Molière, Giradoux and Ionesco face their critics" *Revue d'Histoire de Théâtre* (1980).

12. Max Dessoir, "*Das Schauspiel im Achauspiel*," *Beitrage zur allemeinen Kunstwissenschaft* (Stuttgart: F.Enke, 1929); Joachim Voigt, *Das Spiel im Spiel: Versuch einer Formbestimmung an Beispielen aus dem deutschen, englischen und spanischen Drama* (diss. Georg-August Universität Gottingen: 1954); Paul Proebster, "*Événement et sens dans le discours*," *Paul Ricoeur; ou, La liberté selon l'espérance*, ed. M. Philibert (Paris: Seghers, 1955); Robert J. Nelson, *Play within a Play: The Dramatist's Conception of his Art: Shakespeare to Anouilh* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1958); Lionel Abel, *Metatheatre: A New View of Dramatic Form* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1963); Dieter Mehl, "Forms and Functions of the Play Within a Play," *Renaissance Drama* 8 (1965); Tadeusz Kowzan, "*Teatr w teatrze, czyli o dialektyce iluzji scenicznej*," *Dialog* 4. (1971) and "*L'art en abyme*," *Diogène* 96 (1976); Georges Forestier, *Le théâtre dans le théâtre sur la scène française du XVII⁰ siècle* (Geneva: Droz, 1980) and "*Le théâtre dans le théâtre ou la confonction de deux dramaturgies a la fin de la Renaissance*," *Revue d'Histoire du Theatre* 2 (1983); Manfred Schmelling, *Das Spiel im Spiel. Ein Beitrag zur Vergleichenden Literaturkritik* ([Rheinfelden]: Schauble, 1977) and *Metathéâtre et intertexte: Aspects du théâtre dans le théâtre* (Paris: Lettres Modernes, 1982).

13. Strictly speaking, considering the case of dramatic text, it becomes necessary to point out precisely, with regard to this device of theatre in drama, that we only have the situation of theatre in theatre in the strict sense of the word, only in the course of a scenic presentation of a theatre in the drama. This leads to other problems that are the subject of this limited study into questions of the dramatic text.

14. Yourii M. Lotman, "*Tiekst w tiekstie*," *Trudy po znakovym sistiemam* 14 (1981).

15. Besides, the observations of Hamlet are of considerable importance for the unfolding of the dramatic action.

16. Lotman *Tiekst*.

17. This refers to a characteristic that Umberto Eco attributes to iconic signs that refer to themselves, which are "at the same time the signified and the referent of a referential act." In "*Pour une reformulation du concept de signe iconique*," *Communications* 29 (1978).

18. Jorge Luis Borges, *Enquêtes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1957) and later Lucien Dallenbach, Le récit spéculaire: Contribution à l'étude de la mise en abyme (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1977). [Świontek points to Dallenbach in the original.]

19. Lotman 13.

20. Danuta Danek, *O polemice leterackiej w powiesci* (Warsaw: Panstwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1971) 88.

21. This does not mean that there is some subordination of reality to the literary and of the theatrical to the conventional; **TT** can do this, but in the same measure relations may be inverted.

22. But also to accompany the connotations that the linguistic practice gives to the word

"theatrical": "simulated," "played," "false," "unreal," etc.

23. Cyprian Norwid, *O szutce (Dla Polakow) Pisma wszystkie* (Warsaw: Panstwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1971) 341.

24. Jan Blonski. "*Dramat i przestrzen*," *Problemy teorii dramatu i teatru*, ed. Janusz Degler (Wroclaw: Wyd-wo Uniwersytetu Wroclawskiego, 1988).

25. O. Mannoni, *Clefs pour l'imaginaire ou l'autre scène* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1969), and Ubserfeld link the simultaneity of these devices to the phenomenon that Freud analyzed and that he called "denial": "When one dreams that one dreams, the interior dream about dreaming, is the truth. Similarly, the theatre in theatre says not the real but the true, changing the sign of the illusion and denouncing it in the whole scenic context that encompasses it" (Anne Ubersfeld, *Lire le théâtre* [Paris: Editions Sociale, 1978] 52).

26. Pavis, "Denial," *Dictionary* 93.

27. Anne Ubersfeld, L'école du spectateur. *Lire la théâtre 2* (Paris: Editions Sociale, 1981) 316-337.

28. Mannoni.