0. GENERALITIES

Latin American theatre has been characterized and identified for decades, rightly or wrongly, from an almost exclusively socio-political point of view; it has been measured and evaluated as to its ideological message, as to whether or not is 'compromised', this still being the case up until the present day.

The reasons for this situation are of varying origin. On the one hand, it springs from the theatre itself, or rather, from one given conception of theatre. It seems that theatre has been conditioned by its medium of expression to a degree unparalleled in either poetry or the novel, at least not to the same degree and duration.

What Fernando de Toro (up until recently, a voice crying in the wilderness) has been repeating for the last decade, has to do with the lack of mediatization, the lack of artistic structure, in Latin American dramatic production in general. He has been calling for a mediatization that would return the theatre to the theatre, and lift it out of what has been its role in many cases, a vehicle for ideologies - however legitimate or illegitimate, however necessary or unnecessary - ideologies determined by whatever given, inevitable historical circumstances of the day. His view is one that is beginning to gain momentum.

What we see as 'new' in the theatre is a growing awareness among theatre-people of their role as artisans of dramatic production, as architects of signs, as visualizers of gesture, and not just as producers of text to be spoken out loud, or as was often the case, declaimed.

What is 'new' is the result of a radical conception of theatre as gesturality, a breaking away - not away from the theatrical modernity that has existed in Latin America at least on an experimental level[1], and not away from that European modernity that in Latin America has found itself shackled by the forces of ideological compromise - but a breaking away from the theatre of exclamation, of the purely ideological message or of commercial variété. Until recently we found ourselves caught between an existential abyss on the one hand and the most infamous kind of banality on the other.

What is 'new' is taking shape along the lines of the formula already discovered by poetry and by the new novel, that is to say, the happy union between art and ideology, in our case, between theatricality and message, the shedding of the shyness of creating theatrical art, being free from the fear of being labelled a
reactionary; what is 'new' is found in the revolution and subversion of language, in scenography, in the role of the actor, in short, in the very concept of theatre.

2. FOUR REPRESENTATIVES OF LATIN AMERICAN THEATRICAL POSTMODERNITY

2.1 Alberto Kurapel or the interspectacular multi-world theatre: »Tres Performances«

A. Kurapel's Performances are, without a doubt, a most impressive example of postmodern expression, because of their sheer authenticity, imagination, vigour and artistic elaboration.

Kurapel interprets the concept performance, or 'theatrical performance' to be more precise, as a form which unites all aspects in sensus strictus, in as much as Kurapel becomes Kurapel, character, author, director, musician, actor, scenographer, etc., all in one, to the extent that he presents us a mise en abyme and a mise en scène of his biographical and artistic self while throwing into relief the process of the dramatic text, always giving primacy to the dramatic production. The theatrical dimension is evident in as much as he takes up certain structures of traditional theatre-as-mimesis, and transforms them into a language of images. The language is radically fragmented, depracticalized and gesturalized. This conception was, in part, born of necessity, because of the socio-economic-linguistic situation in which he found himself (being Chilean and living in Quebec), and in part, as a result of his postmodern aesthetic which manifests itself in the fragmentation of the theatrical production and the drawing together of a great variety of codes which at first seem very dissimilar, but which create, in and of themselves, a system of elements as process. Postmodernity, with its plurality, cosmopolitanism (intertextuality, interculturalism) lends itself to this process of reintegration.

Kurapel defines his 'theatrical performance' as the genre of exile, to wit, not political theatre which rails against the reasons for the exile and against the marginalized ghetto status in which the author finds himself, but as the 'Seiende' of exile, which transforms the phenomenon of the exiled person into the raw material for art. Marginalization is overcome by means of 'Verwindung' ('reincorporation') and 'Verarbeitung' ('elaboration'), not by means of covering up (repressing, negating, or changing one's status as OTHER). A new identity is created without losing the old identity and without adopting completely the identity of the new milieu. The force at work here is paralogic, the unifying dissent of the codes employed. In these texts of Kurapel, the developmental principles of 'Seiende', 'Verarbeitung' and 'Verwindung' are EXILE and MEMORY; the first represents the 'here-and-now', the second reaches back and transforms the past into a 'tomorrow'[^2].

In Los tres performances we have three plays which exhibit a similar process: ExiTlio in pectore extrañamiento, Mémoire 85 / Olvido 86 and Off Off Off ou le toit de Pablo Neruda.

ExiTlio in pectore extrañamiento, a play in two parts, was staged on the 24th of March, 1983, in Montreal's Galería Tragression; it presents an impression of emptiness in time, space and conscience: it is a performance whose objective is that of creating a signifier of emptiness, a weak structure.

The intertexts are, as a part of the performance, similar to the performances which follow and similar as well to those of Prometeo encadenado según Alberto Kurapel: voice-offs, video monitors, music, slides, movies and instrumental playbacks.

The main protagonists are the Refugee and the Mask, both aided by film, video and music. Bilingualism is a feature of both the Refugee and the Mask, both of them speaking both languages, and the videos and film are done in French.
The performance starts out in a rubbish heap, where the Mask appears on top of a pyramid of tires. In the audience there are four video screens. The Refugee is seen, dressed in rags, seated with his back to the audience which watches slide projections showing scenes of violence, and hears military marches on a crackly radio interrupted by loud banging noises which cause the Refugee to react as if he were being hit on different parts of his body; then, he appears to be hurled to the floor and goes to sleep. Projected onto the curtain is a gigantic clock, the eye of "Big Brother", the icon of the past, of memory in the hic et nunc.

The rubbish heap, the shabby state of undress of the Refugee and his "newly-acquired illiteracy" all signal his status as a socio-cultural outcast, and he tries to build a new world with the cast-aways of the consumer society: in an old refrigerator he puts lamps, pillows, blankets, telephones, dishes, plastic flowers, a radio and a television set. He, himself, tries to squeeze into the refrigerator, but he does not fit, and so remains on the outside; the attempt at reconstruction has failed. The hic et nunc is denoted by the clothing that the Refugee puts on, for example, a navy blue parka, an item of clothing which most new immigrants to Canada are given in order to protect them from the cold, and also by his inability to understand the language, by an anguished sensation of nausea and dizziness (a movie shot pans in toward an open mouth), and by a feeling of desperation, such that Montréal becomes Mont réel, Mont Irréel in a living nightmare.

One Leitmotif is the common and generalized desire of the immigrant to return to his place of origin. While the Refugee confesses that he does not know where it is that he wants to return to, he never gives up the hope of finding out, and the Mask (in a video played in an empty room) confirms that the place he wants to return to does not exist, an impression which is solidified in an extended travel agency scene in which the travel destination is referred to as "over there" and the date of the trip is called "when?". The feeling of emptiness is made manifest by a clock with no hands, as well as by the blindfolded eyes and the tied hands of the Refugee, a concretization of the same theme which would later be used again in Prometeo encadenado según Alberto Kurapel.

The Mask is characterized by his status as a chameleon: he transforms himself into a military torturer, the Refugee's conscience, and a figure of authority.

The second part begins with the Refugee distributing mimeographed leaflets in which appears a list of highly significant names such as Victor Jara, Pablo de Rokha, Violeta Parra--memories of origin--as is the video projection of the text El Salvador 50,000 dead, or the slides showing scenes from a Latin American guerrilla training camp, or the intertext of political placards of the leftist movement in Latin America, Europe and Africa, or the film clips of Ernesto Cardenal reciting, or Fidel Castro giving a speech about Allende's assassination, which, in the hic et nunc are nothing other than the expression of longing for a utopia, of what was hoped for but failed to materialize, all of this terminated with other images of a commercial nature and scenes from North American politics, which only serve to emphasize the displacement of the dream by other interests and by a different ending.

The structure of emptiness, the barrenness, are manifested in the degeneration of human relations into a state of artificiality: the Refugee makes love to a plastic, inflated sex-shop doll.

The performance ends with a musical playback when the Refugee sings of the hope of liberation raised by the Sandinista triumph in Nicaragua, and when he describes the reality of exile in the hic et nunc:the early morning rumble of buses and snow removal equipment; the red, rough hands of the immigrant office cleaners who make love thinking of themselves as the Víspera de un Próximo Pensamiento. The final image is a simultaneous projection of all the intertexts that had been employed during the performance.

Mémoire 85/Olvido 86, staged on January 24, 1986 in Espace Exilio (Montréal) does not describe the memories of exile, but the hic et nunc cand emphasizes the metatextual dimension of the ludic. On the stage we meet the Hanged-man, Sutanomengana, Pedro, Pedra and the Etranger.
As the performance begins, we see the opening of a part of the stage covered by a white sheet, and we hear an old record being played followed by the scratch of the needle sliding off the record. When the sheet is removed, we see a space covered with sand, mud, all sorts of junk, and three beds with their legs half-sunk into the ground. In one of these we see Pedro and Pedra, he, dressed in striped pyjamas and the left half of his hair white; she, with blond hair, blue baby-doll pyjamas, stockings and high-heel shoes. On the stage there is also a Montreal Metro ticket-booth, where the Etranger appears, either writing or incessantly cleaning the windows of his wicket. Above the booth we see a video screen and nearby there is a metal bucket being filled with water by a hose. In a different plane we find Sutanomengana, dressed in black leotards, work boots and jacket, two large vibrators fastened between her legs and another one on her right shoulder like a military épaulette, and falsies attached to her back. She is cradling a new-born child. In front of her is a table with an electric battery with two cables and electrodes. In front of the table is a white bed with a drooping mattress on which we see a stringless guitar. On another level, we see a black pyramid where a hose is pouring water into a transparent plastic pail, and on top of the pyramid is the Hanged-man, completely wrapped up in bandages from head to toe, partly hidden by a large placard which reads 'Where is the magic?'. There is a noose hanging from his neck.

The action begins with a musical playback describing the circumstances surrounding the hanging, accompanied simultaneously, and successively, by slides which subtitle the song's text in French, and then alternately, in Spanish and French, by music from the Concierto de Aranjuez by Joaquín Rodrigo, by loud screams from Sutanomengana and by the radically fragmented dialogue of Pedro and Pedra which then deteriorates into a spitting match.

The metatextual ludic dimension is ever present. For example, when the Hanged-man, in a voice-off, introduces himself as the central character, he refers to this dramatic production as a signifier made up of images:

There is no argument [...] I don't know what the climax is ...

and he refers to the impenetrability of the signifier:

The details of the outcome will not be made known, but those who have participated will try to discover them [...]. The text is kept to a bare minimum, to increase the impact of the production [...]. The personages have been impelled to stop being personages and to become persons; all of you [...] Mémoire 85 / Olvido 86 Performance. I teeter, I balance, while the Scenography and the Wardrobe inundate this space built by hands and skin [...]. Alberto Kurapel, Autor, auteur, performer, Metteur en action, director, actor.

In other projections, the offices of Arts Exilio are described along with their problems and objectives.

While the Hanged-man is balancing, a film is projected showing girls running out of a college being pursued by buzzing flies (which later would reappear as the horseflies of Prometeo encadenado según Alberto Kurapel) and, in a video turned on by the Etranger, we witness student protests against Latin American military governments, workers' strikes, etc.

The sexual element is strongly present in this performance, either in the form of perversion or violence: Pedro, Pedra and Sutanomengana masturbate, not out of eroticism, but while leafing through glossy magazines full of commercial advertisements. In these scenes, the language is reduced to guttural sounds. In a film projection, a dark-haired girl is shown squatted on a mountain of fruit boxes, bleeding profusely from between her legs and rubbing her nipples, which are, according to the accompanying words of the Etranger, the Latin American mountain ranges menstruating violence.
The performance ends with the synthesis of diverse scenes such as the spitting match of Pedro and Pedra and a recurring playback of the Hanged-man's voice appealing to the living to know how to be lovers.

Finally, we have Off Off Off ou sur le toit de Pablo Neruda, staged on the 18th of September, 1986 in Espace Exilio (Montréal) in which appear four performers: Mario (Kurapel), the Lady Pianist, the Jogger and Rocía. All the images are variations of black and white and various shades of grey, with the sole exception of the Hen, which is a fluorescent neon red.

The performance encompasses six 'consciences' which serve as a kind of arbitration of the projection which follows.

On the stage, there are a rock and a viper, two monitors tied up with thick ropes, a table with an apple box serving as a chair, on the table a cassette recorder, pencils and paper. Then we see a Lady Pianist, hands extended over an upright piano, dressed in a striped skirt slashed up the left leg, a low-cut blouse, cap, and pulled back hair. To her right is a cymbal from a jazz drum set and behind a white curtain. One part of the stage is surrounded by burned fence-boards arranged in horizontal and oblique form.

By means of a voice-off, Mario reflects upon the structure of the performance, asking that it be accepted as it is, and upon the languages to be used. It becomes evident, in a frequently recurring monologue, that there is a desire to extirpate, eliminate, drag out confessions, judgements and the formality of tradition, all this accompanied by a violin performance of Ausencia habanera from 1850, accordion, guitars, drums, harmonicas and slides which show the various steps in the displacement of a Latin American woman, hounded and detained by ruffians who come from 'fuera del campo', a female figure who returns later in film, with hands tied together and soaking wet. (Translator's note: 'fuera del campo' is an untranslatable play on words: 'outside the countryside', a ludic variation of 'outside the city', as well as 'outside the camp', as in concentration camp.)

The performance refers to the process of its own constitution when Mario repeatedly sits down to write, always accompanied by the Lady Pianist. He outlines for us his conception of Latin American performance:

"New art is contributing to the completion of the portrait of the Latin American continent, that continent which is not exclusively agrarian, which has not been left behind in the Age of Corn, which does not want to limit itself to being an exotic folklorism for the amusement of tourists, art-buffs and foreign TV film crews." Jorge Enrique Adoum. Where is he?

[...]

"In the act of living, we play a part, and therefore we are the audience for the performance of others. The reality of human existence is nothing more than this double staging in which we are, at one and the same time, actors and spectators: life is, if you like, a gigantic happening." Pier Paolo Pasolini. Where is he?

[...]

"Aesthetic values are not an absolute independent of historical circumstances in general or the varying economic structures of historical eras." Umberto Eco.

Mario's monologues refer obsessively to an anonymous "she", to an indeterminate, unknown situation, this being intermixed with pronouncements by the Hen and gymnastic movements by the other performers. Mario incorporates the guttural language of the Hen (clo-clo-clo) and his discourse of enigmatic statistical figures: Southern Cone 30,000 ... Metropolitan area 10,000, etc.
The effect is that of the reduction of language, in that, not only do Mario's ramblings imitate the Hen, but also, his discourse never arrives anywhere but the reiterated recitation of the words cero, olvido, ... ido (zero, forget, ... went).

As Mario's power over language deteriorates, there are projections which bring back memories of family scenes, helplessness, arrests, and destruction. Bodies wrapped in burlap sacks (some half-open) fall over to the accompaniment of the Lady Pianist as their identities are revealed on a billboard.

In the 'fourth conscience', in masculine and feminine voice-offs, there is an interchange between Mario and the Hen in which they list off the deaths of various people (contemporary and historical, real and imaginary), along with dates and places of their deaths: Elvis Presley, Spartacus, Henry Kissenger, Lech Walesa, Salvador Allende, Alberto Kurapel, Man Ray, Yves St-Laurent, Marlon Brando, etc., after the manner of the documentation of 'desaparecidos' as they appear in the bulletins of Amnesty International or the opposition press in Latin America: Saúl Godínez, 32 years old, disappeared in 1982, Honduras, this being done in reiterative counterpoint until images and language dissolve into the beginning of a performance.

It only remains to mention the whole dimension of corporality, of the movement of the performers within the theatrical space, which is almost impossible to describe without visual aids. But gesturality has primacy over all else in this play as in other dramatic works of postmodernity, the spoken word being considered only one aspect among many others.

2.2 Ramón Griffero: «Historia de un galpón abandonado. Espectáculo escénico» or between gesturality and deconstruction

'Theatrical spectacle', the subtitle of Griffero's play, which was staged in April 1984 in the Sala Troley, reflects the many intertexts and codes he uses which derive from the opera, the music-hall, the cabaret, expressionism, the grotesque and symbolism. Lighting, music, screams and silences hold a predominant place as does the theatrical space itself. Instead of the text, it is images which give the effect. The text is a work in progress: a show in the act of becoming. From all of this, Griffero formulates the theory that the personages are not psychological in the theatrical sense, but stage presences [...] using, to maximum advantage, body movements, vocalizations [...] histrionics, in a well thought out "graphic" handling of the objects to be manipulated(3).

The theatrical space, similar to that of Kurapel, is a shack or shed with high cement walls (although the author would have preferred to use a parking lot so that the spectator would have felt himself to be on the inside of the theatrical space)(4).


All of the characters, and because of this the action, has a phantasmagorical quality; they speak about memories of the past in an almost delirious manner. Thus, Camilo and Carmen speak about having returned from a long and tiring journey hoping for something new and better, only to find themselves disillusioned by the Shack: they conclude that their living conditions--they are without water, electricity and heating--are much worse than in their previous existence. But we are not told where they come from or what they were hoping for. The presence of Victor, the large rat, provokes a conflict between the couple (she believed that her husband had left it behind in their former residence), since the rat is jealous of Carmen, and she in turn feels threatened by the animal. Camilo treats it like a baby, rocking it and crooning lullabies to it. The Fat Lady talks about her promotion from cleaning lady to receptionist, about the war and Don Pedro's funeral, and she announces some unspecified forthcoming festivities. The Shoe Shine Boy, who can read people's
character and future in their shoes, longs for the good-old-days when there was much shoe shining to be done. The Woman, barefoot and in rags, is a woman with a baby, abandoned by a man who had sent her to the Shack having promised to return for her. The Woman constantly repeats her story, and is followed closely by the Lady, elegant in a fox fur coat, who makes reference to a certain Rogelio. The Lady is dependent on the Woman.

After everyone in the Shack has gone to sleep, the door of the closet opens and we witness a kind of carnival: Doña Carla, half-drunk, carries a carnival mask and is wearing a red velvet evening gown slit up one side, gold high heel shoes and a gigantic curly, laquered wig (like that of Madame Pompadour). She is seeking an orgiastic experience, wanting to roll in the mud with a filthy man. Fermín, given to paranoia, tries to pacify her and stifle her desires. At the end of this scene there appears a nude figure of indefinable gender, The Water, from whose feet flow long pieces of cloth and from whose wet body one hears water dripping onto the cement.

In the following scene, "The Council Convenes", we observe the preparations for the festivities. Don Carlos allocates roles to the various participants, much as in El gran teatro del mundo. Carla will be in charge of the socio-cultural organization of the Shack--her role is to entertain and teach--a harkening back to the Renaissance/Baroque topos: delectare/docere; Mendibez will look after the finances and labour questions; Fermín is named Inspector General of the establishment and will interpret the laws of the Council and punish those who commit infractions. After the casting, each of the characters expresses his/her appreciation and honour for the role received, and everyone applauds in mutual contentment. All of this evokes the image of the formation of a government, which is accentuated by Don Carlos' words: On our shoulders is placed an enormous historic responsibility; our eyes will be the beacons to guide those who are lost ... our hands will have the tenderness of a mother [...]. But, they also have the strength and toughness of forged steel. These observations incorporate a political intertext which gives one to think of Latin American dictators, in particular of the political rhetoric of Pinochet, as does the following statement by Carmen: [...] they lie to us about the past [...] it is as if they had burned all of our family photographs and demolished the streets of our childhood, thus alluding to the twisting and distortion of the history of a whole generation by the dictatorship.

In "Daybreak in the Shack" the dialogues we heard at the beginning are picked up again and there begins a set of interactions between the characters. There is a coming together of the Shoe Shine Boy and the Woman. The Lady shows a discriminatory attitude to the others as if they were from "another race". The Water appears as a character and gives a surrealistic speech.

In the next act, we witness the "Council Reception" with its pompous music, coloured lights and trumpets, as the characters of the Shack transform themselves into audience and are informed that this evening there will be a Carnival. There is a scene filled with music, the Water makes another speech, and the Woman begins to fill a tub.

Next comes "The Carnival", theatre within theatre. The Shack is decorated accordingly. Camilo dresses up as a rabbit, Carmen as a Greek muse, the Lady as a Baroque-style rose, the Shoe Shine Boy as a harlequin, the Woman wears an expressionless mask, Don Carlos shiny black armour, Mendibez is an exaggerated Sun King, Fermín is a school marm (black glasses and a wig with a bun), Doña Carla is Mme. Pompadour, and the Fat Lady is a Circe. Then the show begins, a type of opera/cabaret: there is singing and dancing, Doña Carla howls, the Lady does ballet pirouettes. Doña Carla puts on a tape recording of the sounds that a couple makes while engaging in sex, then Doña Carla and the Lady dance and writhe to the accompanying sounds.

The second part of the show is "The Epic Scene" which recalls the dramatic style of Golden Age theatre. The play parodically harkens back to Fuenteovejuna and incorporates the rhetoric of G. García Márquez's Cien años de soledad:

Doña Carla: I will fight to the death, I will struggle like a man [...] Our town square is in danger; we must defend it [...]. Thus, Joan inspired the souls of her people with her strength and courage and defended the
town square three days and three nights. On the last night, Don Juan did not sleep, and it is said that he was seen to cry.

In the next scene, "Parallel monologues", Carmen, Camilo and the Shoe Shine Boy speak, and in spite of the hermetic quality of their discourse, they evoke allusions of acts of violence and repression. Carmen talks about the destroying of books, Camilo about informers and torturers, and the Shoe Shine Boy about terror and a gunshot.

In the episode which follows, "The Council Becomes Annoyed", Don Carlos voices the opinion that the speeches made by the Shack-dwellers only prove their weakness and inferiority, and the council makes a decision to teach them a good lesson, in the same way that their "ancestors" did. The Shack-dwellers are prohibited from eating and drinking. Jugs of water and food are hung from the ceiling, as a temptation. Some of the Shack-dwellers cannot resist the temptation, but they find out that the water is really urine and the oranges are made of plastic. At this moment the doors of the closet open and we witness the Council partaking of an elegant dinner, very reminiscent of Buñuel's film El discreto encanto de la burgesía. The Council throws food at the Shack-dwellers. Camilo, fearing that the rat will starve to death, shows it to Don Carlos who hurls it against the wall, killing it and thus causing the death of Camilo and the madness of Carmen.

By way of an entremés, Mendibez tells an erotic story from his youth which consists of a woman's showing him her vagina and his running away in alarm to be consoled by his mother. Then there is a dance in which some of the Shack-dwellers reenact Mendibez's story, inciting the Woman to do the same, all of this culminating in erotic acts which become freeze-framed. These situations continue the 'familiarization' of all the personages initiated in the Carnival scene.

The destruction, begun by the deaths of Victor the Rat and Camilo, continues when an unknown person fires a gunshot (this being, apparently, Doña Carla who, a few minutes earlier, had been given a revolver from Fermín) resulting in the death of the baby whose mother, the Woman, breaks down into a kind of dementia.

In a scene which calls to mind an inquiry or trial, it is determined that it is a 'foreign' revolver and the Shack-dwellers are found guilty of the murder. The Council, along with the Lady who has attached herself to them, enters the closet, and in a scene which parallels the "Epic Scene", the others launch an assault on the closet and burn it, only to find out that the Council had fled.

According to a note by Griffero, the play can be ended here or it can be ended with the "Epilogue" in which the Man, the Shoe Shine Boy and the Fat Lady try to make the Shack habitable.

Griffero's play is, on the one hand, gestural, kinaesthetic theatre because its body action (movements, dance, mime, etc.) occupy an important position and, on the other hand, it is a deconstructionist theatre, in that it evokes outdated historical models such as spoken theatre in sensus strictus, Baroque 'comedia' and 'entremés', cabaret, and the review/show, all of which give a marked contrast to the play actually being staged, thus educating the audience to a new way to do and watch theatre. In addition, it uses fragmented, hermetic and undecipherable dialogue in order to destroy and, at the same time, renovate hackneyed theatrical language.

The political intertext is subtly introduced by way of almost imperceptible allusions which it is up to the receptor to decipher, an example of the type of theatre which is the result of a new aesthetic among the producers of theatre and theatre-goers alike, as well an imperative resulting from the political situation.

2.3 Luis de Tavira: »La pasión de Pentesilea« or the deconstruction of myth and tragedy: the "dramatic spectacular poem"
La pasión de Pentesilea, staged in the Centro Universitario de Teatro in Mexico City on the 21st of April, 1988, is characterized by a very complex structure and an enormous plurality of intertexts and codes.

De Tavira uses, as his starting point, Kleist's romantic tragedy, Pentesilea (1806-1808) in order to create his own "dramatic spectacular poem" and not just a postmodern reworking of Kleist's drama. De Tavira does maintain some aspects of Kleist's work, namely, its unleashed passion, the suffering of Pentesilea and Achilles caused by the struggle between love and duty, as well as the rejection of traditional theatrical rules such as the length of the play, the number of its scenes and the view that the exposition should only encompass that which can be acted out on the stage. This production is an interpretation, not only of Kleist, but of various versions of the theme of the relationship between Pentesilea and Achilles, with the addition of unconnected historical moments of bellicosity such as the Napoleonic Wars and the wars of the Twentieth Century. Outdated and modern clothing are used; objects such as arrows and shields appear together with helicopters, supersonic jets, machine guns, atomic bombs, walkie-talkies and walkmans.

The characters are a mix of ancient, mythical figures and real people of modern times. Diomedes is Eisenhower, Antiloque is Pizarro and, besides Trojan soldiers, we have Spanish soldiers of the XVIth Century, US Marines of the Twentieth Century, Saint Sebastian, Napoleon, a Prussian messenger, etc.

Divided into two parts, this play borrows certain aspects of Greek, Roman and Renaissance theatre, inasmuch as the action is introduced in a prologue and there is a chorus.

Before going on the a more detailed discussion of its attributes, we would like to clarify the use of the term 'dramatic spectacular poem'. We have called it a 'poem' because of the pronounced epic-narrative qualities of the text, and simply because it is poetic. In the play, there are three types of text: direct, linear narrative (presented by the chorus), dialogue (presented in verse form, as opposed to prose) and secondary text as such (in italics), although these divisions are not always consecutive. However, the first two types of text have the same semiotic status. Here we have an omniscient narrator telling us the story, commenting on it and explaining things to us.

Moreover, the division into two 'parts' instead of 'acts' makes very clear the epic nature of the play.

The applicability of the qualifier, 'spectacular', is evident from the various codes utilized: there are optic and visual projections in which we see an atomic explosion (sounds of a bomber, supersonic jets, helicopters, machine gun fire, napalm explosions [...]. A cloud of agent orange fills the visual field [...] a woman curled up into a ball floats on the waves like a blob of foam), temporal jumps from an ancient milieu and to one filled with electronics, etc.

Finally, the adjective, "dramatic" refers to the fact that the dramatic element here has a dominant, even predominant, function, and not a secondary one as in the case of Kurapel or Griffero.

The general structure is revealed in the prologue, in which the birth of the cosmos is presented as having resulted from the laying of a gigantic egg by a woman who had materialized out of foam (Venus), the egg later being shattered by a snake (a reference to Eve of the Bible). Now we hear an affirmation, but instead of "In the beginning was the Word..." we hear "In the beginning was the Woman...". After the prologue, we are presented with a scene from a vacation beach resort in 1802, where an apparently blind carnival worker of the XIXth Century plays the flute, two children play with a huge white globe and, revealed only to the audience, a figure like that of the dead Saint Sebastian lies on the beach. A gunshot is heard and a man dressed in summertime clothes comes out with a pistol which he buries in the sand. Then out comes another man dressed identically (Clandestino 1 and 2); the two, before beating a hasty retreat chased by two Napoleonic soldiers, agree to meet in Berna. The blind man is the only one who realizes that one of the two men is actually a woman. This scene (Prologue, Scene 5) is repeated at the end of the show (Part II, Scene 11). This time the soldiers kill Clandestino 1, the one that is the woman disguised as a man, but is in reality, Pentesilea, who calls out, before she dies, to Heinrich (Kleist) who, upon realizing that Pentesilea is dead, takes the revolver and commits suicide (a reference to the suicide of Kleist).
These scenes lay out the general framework of the work, and represent, in their ambiguity, the political struggles of Kleist (he fought for France so as not to be taken prisoner by the French, and wandered all around Europe) and they connect Greece's mythical past with the historical personage, Kleist, and with events of the Twentieth Century.

A second feature is laid out in Scenes 2, 8, and 9 of Part I, and culminates the drama in Scene 10 of Part II, as a synthesis. Ulysses falls, mortally wounded and with fever and thirst (I, 2); they interrogate him as to what happened to Achilles and the Greeks in the war against Pentesilea (I, 8) and then Achilles arrives, but has to take flight again because the Amazons are pursuing him (I, 9). En Part II, Scene 10 and onward, Ulysses tells the story of what happened to Achilles, to wit, that Aquiles, after seriously wounding Pentesilea, saves her life, upon which she vanquishes him (II, 8). Mutilates and kills him, and eats his body, filled simultaneously with hatred, love and passion. Ulysses, in a delirium, says: I dreamt that Pentesilea killed him and ate his body ... which insinuates that everything that has happened, a variation on the theme 'hate vs. love', 'duty vs. passion', is just an oneiric invention of Ulysses, a product of his imagination.

Achilles lets himself be mutilated and killed for love, since it is the only way that Pentesilea's love can be fulfilled (the Amazons must choose a man only after having beaten him); Pentesilea's cannibalistic act and her attempt at penetrating the body of Achilles to join herself with him is her way of realizing love. The arrows which pierce the body of Achilles are the iconization of the opposites described above.

We would not want to leave our analysis without mentioning that the inclusions of a vanquished Napoleon, a defeated Pizarro, massacred Greeks and Amazons, all joined together by the brutal death of Pentesilea and Aquiles and the violent end of the two Clandestinos, give to this 'dramatic spectacular poem' a highly political note, without actually being a political text, by presenting a strong criticism of the use of violence by the powers that be.

De Tavira subversively deconstructs tragedy, the Greek myth of the champion, Aquiles, and the self-destruction of the barbarous Amazons, all of which teaches us of the impossibility of love in the shadow of imposed order.

2.4 Marco Antonio de la Parra: »La secreta obscenidad de cada día« or restorative ambiguity

La secreta obscenidad de cada día, by M. A. de la Parra, staged in 1984 in La Teatroneta, restaged in 1987 in El Galpón de Los Leones, in Santiago, Chile and entered in the Welttheater Festival in Hamburg, where it received much critical attention in the newspapers, has only two characters, Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud, and language that is semantically coherent; but in many ways there is a lack of pragmatic stability and its message is characterized by a weak structure, in the postmodern sense that Vattimo has given to this term.

The play is about two 'flashers' who stand outside a school in the 'barrio alto' (where Santiago's oligarchy lives) waiting for the exit of the schoolgirls and the possible appearance of important politicians, on this first day of a new term.

Right from the start, there is an emphasis on the sick exhibitionism of the two personages who, apparently, want to show their genitals to the girls (there is a great deal of word play around the size and potency of the masculine organ), but in the end, government ministers come out instead, and the two characters draw arms; here ends the play. Now, why the change? Is there a change, or does the play pursue on purpose a discrepancy between what has been accented and what eventually happens?

The play begins with a fragmentary clarification of the situation by the two characters who, in a highly mimicked style, are no more than caricatures of Marx and Freud, clowns after the style of Wladimir and Estragon. There is the expression of a certain anxiety over the possible presence of an informer, followed by the description of their own exhibitionist desire mixed together with biographical data, a debate over the
scientific theory of the two men and the causes of the current political situation, through which process the
two slowly develop a near-friendship and solidarity.

One central theme is the indirect involvement of the two in the dictatorship (without being rhetorically
explicit): collaboration. Each of these characters has put his knowledge and skill at the disposal of torturers.
Later, after continued involvement had become unsustainable, they leave the regime and, in turn, become its
victims; now they are the tortured ones. With this, the text refers to the idea a general guilt, direct or indirect,
of the whole society and generation involved in the dictatorship. This message, although we have clearly
expressed it here, is ambiguous in the text of the play: for example, when a car with six passengers passes
by, a reference is made to the secret service, but there are two possible explanations of the fear that our two
characters exhibit: Does their fear stem from the knowledge that they are breaking the law or from the
knowledge that they, themselves, will be spotted as marked men? Perhaps the implied answer to this
question is that the two characters seek to 'cleanse' themselves of past political guilt by means of their
present way of behaving.

In this play, various aspects of the new postmodern aesthetic are apparent: fragmentary, insinuating and
highly ambiguous language; mimicry, together with the clown-like treatment of the theories of Marx an
Freud; a veiled way of dealing with the ideals and frustrations of an entire generation and the
disenchantment of the following one, of the history of the dictatorship. In very colloquial language, the
spectator is given an enormous quantity of intertexts and references whose secret meanings he must then try
to extract on his own.

3. SUMMARY

The four plays studied here belong to four different types of postmodern semiosis and are expressed in four
different styles of theatrical production.

Kurapel's 'performances' exhibit the most radical form of renovation within Latin American theatre and are a
powerful and original expression within the tradition of 'performance' in general, achieving a special union
of interculturality and the use of diverse codes, which never just settle for effect for the sake of effect at the
level of the signifier, but which produce a signifier whose signified can be deduced by the spectator by
means of the various intertexts presented. Kurapel's performances take carnivalization to its ultimate limits,
and almost to its dissolution.

But it is precisely this aspect, carnivalization, which gives Griffero's work its stature: the individual is
reduced to a skeleton, a sign, an image, a carnivalesque signifier which transforms itself into an ironic
grimace, revealing for the spectator the old and the new, reinventing the wheel, stripping the signified of its
'significative baggage' but in a visual, sensual, and not purely cognitive way.

De Tavira's 'dramatic spectacular poem' is one of the most successful examples of deconstructionist form
within contemporary, international theatre. It starts out with an idea, a fragment of literature, and renders it
universal, not just rhetorically, but by the annulation of time and space, by the superimposition of contexts
and the objects of diverse historical periods, fused into an oneiric image which makes it possible 'to dream
history, to dream literature' as a sequence of images. The coherence which comes out of its apparent chaos is
its description of the two faces of desire: Eros and Thanatos.

Finally, La secreta obscenidad de cada día is an effective renewal of spoken theatre, that is, traditional
theatre. It does not fall into the trap of becoming the mimicry and rhetoric of the circus, as it might easily
have done; nor does it sink to a mere ideological debate, nor an analysis of social pathology, nor political
accusation, nor indifference: it utilizes its various codes and intertexts in an a-hierarchical give-and-take and
always with a tendency toward depragmatization which gives an apparent indifference to the texture of the
signifier, beneath which are hidden beliefs and messages which are just waiting to be discovered.

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1. The so often defended latinamerican theatre modernity was so insignificant that no joung dramatist take this as modell for their theatre, but european dramatists as Stanslavski, Meyerhold and others.

2. vid. some original opinions of Kurapel about his aesthetics, in: A. Kurapel: 3 Performances Teatrales (Humanitas). Québec 1987, pp. XVII-XIX y 47-48:

Fabricar actividades culturales en Exilio no significa, en absoluto «hacer un arte de exilio», como muchos oportunistas culturales quieren hacer creer.

[...]

Los sistemas de comunicación han ido cambiando y nosotros Creadores-Exiliados asumimos nuestra condición que nos llevará a descubrir otros estados, otros lenguajes, teniendo siempre como plataforma, nuestra Condición Social.

[...] La PERFORMANCE se vincula a la problemática del Post-Modernismo, a la tecnología, al rito. Nosotros le inyectamos características sociales que penetran en los huesos de la vida - que de una u otra forma - hemos ayudado a construir.

Existe un «proceso» que queremos mostrar y situar frente a los que quieren Ver. Un «proceso» que se desarrolle en el tiempo y en un ESPACIO que transformamos continuamente; donde juega el AZAR, el COLLAGE, la MUSICA ELECTRO-ACUSTICA, el CINE, el VIDEO, la CANCION, y el CONFLICTO DE OBJETIVOS OPUESTOS.

[...] Mostramos las contradicciones que nos convergen desde diversos orígenes, texturas, taras y privilegios, para llegar a la integración de toda resonancia humana, en esta exploración incesante del OTRO.

[...] La MEMORIA se declara implacable en EL LUGAR TEATRAL PERFORMATIVO y es allí donde se tendrá que producir la comprensión de CADA SIGNO que al «mostrar» su esencia inducirá a crear - intermitentemente - íconos anti-codificables.

¡¡Se construyen «otros» canales donde LA INCITACION genere «otras» INCITACIONES; donde la «costumbre» no tenga cabida por «tonta»; and in:

Shelley Tepperman: Alberto Kurapel habla del teatro en el exilio, en: La escena Latinoamericana 1 (1989) 52:

Para mí ser político es ser un buen actor, un buen director, un buen dramaturgo, hacer un buen teatro.
3. We reproduce the authors remarks in his manuscript: que los personajes no son psicológicos en el sentido teatral, sino escénicos [...] haciendo una máxima utilización de sus posibilidades corporales, vocales [...] histriónicas, así como un manejo meditado consciente «gráfica» de los objetos a manipular.

4. (Ibid.).

5. Quotation from the authors manuscript: Sobre nuestros hombros están depositados ... una enorme responsabilidad histórica que Nuestros ojos son los faros que guiarán a los perdidos [...] nuestras manos tendrán la ternura de una madre [...]. Pero también la dureza del hierro forjado.

6. Quotation from the authors manuscript: [...] que nos mientan sobre lo que fue [...] es como si quemaran nuestras fotos y demolieran las calles de nuestra infancia.

7. Quotation from the authors manuscript:

Doña Carla: lucharé hasta la muerte, pelearé como un hombre [...] Pueblo mío, nuestra plaza peligra es menester defenderla [...]. Y así Juana encendió las almas de ese pueblo que con fuerza y valentía defendió la plaza durante tres días y tres noches. La última noche Don Juan no durmió, se dice incluso que se le vio llorar.


11. Soñé que Pentesilea lo asesinaba y se comía su cuerpo, in (Ibid.: 161).