

SUPER-STAGING, OR THE DEATH OF THE HERO

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The way in which I have approached voice and text in my work, or rather, voice or text, relates to another word that I am also in the habit of using: staging. Not the staging of text, in the dramaturgical sense, but the staging of voice. I also think that staging is one of the generic principles that best allows the whole of my work to be approached. Whether it is staging in the most literal sense, as when the works are related to the opera or the theatre, in which there is a space or an evocation of a theatrical space. Or in apparently colder works, in which staging is also present in the system of articulation joining the different elements, as in *Eco*, 2008.

If we consider that all of reality, all of that which we experience, is staging, then art can only be a kind of super-staging. A super-staging through which we move away, or distance ourselves, or elevate ourselves, without passing any moral judgement on the other stagings in which we participate in our daily lives. It is precisely this principle which allows us to adopt a critical position and comprehend that “ah yes, of course, in fact... this... or the other reality... or the other staging... is like this”. This is why art questions us. The only problem is that art is so exaggerated that we realise that it is art. And that it is only art and nothing other than that. In other words, it is not reality. It is the staging of staging. It is super-staging.

Another, more radical, formulation would involve saying that there is no reality. As reality is individual and solitary, our search for universal concepts projects us into the space where staging takes place, thereby creating a place of universality and common understanding, moving us away from individual memory. It is therefore merely a question of living, or creating the chance to live, in better stagings, creating better characters, using better texts than the ones we are familiar with, thereby obtaining the critical opinion of those who are living them or seeing them.

I would now like to mention a problem. If, as I have said, art is a sort of super-staging, how can it be anchored in individual subjectivity? How can it combine the presentation of the work as super-staging with its ultimate legitimation in the singularity of a strictly personal experience?

In fact, I think that the process is based on memory and its staging. Being individual and unique, memory is not universal: it is not valid for others. It is a purely subjective possession; it does not exist. Like everything else, it will exist only if it is made material through staging. Through artifice. Through the confrontation with what is not real.

The work of staging the memory, by which I mean an individual memory, will also involve some very specific work on identity. Identity stops being a revelation; it is not a question of revealing, manifesting, or assuming an identity,

but of constructing opportunities for identities that may not even be univocal. On the contrary, they could be so fragmented that, as in many of my works, it is not possible to tell who is speaking, or with whom I identify, or with whom we, who are listening, can identify.

Each one of us can be more than one; we can construct dozens of identities inside us, and from there we can play (ourselves) in a wide range of situations. The classics show us this. In other words, if we read a classical tragedy we find ourselves confronted with a series of archetypes and identities represented in a range of characters. We who are watching or reading identify with this or that character, but we can also come to identify with others. This oscillation between characters stems from the construction of individual identity; we are on the side of this or that character, and also on the side of another, all of which constructs us or is in the process of constructing us. Obviously, it constructs us in terms of character, ethics, and morals; but what are character, ethics, and morals? They are our identity, that which keeps us going until the end; it is like a platform of knowledge, the human being's critical or self-aware thought, a principle governing the way. It is not calling into question a truth that stems from the fragmentation of reality, which allows us, in that moment, to construct a universal truth, a staging.

There is now a more generic question that may be posed concerning the relation between staging and perversion, or, if we wish, the relation between staging and frustration, or staging and loss. Staging is always an indicator of a deficit of reality or a deficit of the reality. In other words, to what extent is staging always an illusion or a super illusion? The question is: if there is no reality, if there is only staging, is it not the case that staging does not pass to a plane on which only desire, and not reality, can be staged?

It is in this sense that I would now like to analyse the piece *About Being Different*, which resulted from a two-month residency at the Baltic Art Centre and is a collaboration with local vicars in the Gateshead/Newcastle community. The work, which was inspired by Benjamin Britten's opera *Peter Grimes*, explores ideas of community and marginality. Peter Grimes is a fisherman who lives in the village of Fisherman's Borough in England. He is marginalised by society and lives alone and isolated in a cottage by some cliffs. Grimes is convinced that he can win the respect of his community by becoming rich. Two apprentices in Grimes's care die mysteriously and the community believes that he has killed them. The community turns against Grimes and, determined to do justice, does it in an unjust way. Grimes is driven to suicide.

I interviewed five Gateshead vicars about their experience of watching the opera. Their comments provide us with original reflections on notions of community and individuality. The residential architecture of Gateshead, which is based

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on terraced and redbrick housing, plays a part in the illustration of "sameness." It is used as a visual symbol of the community and, in the video, it leads us to question what it means to be different amidst such immense uniformity.

The volte face created by the position taken by the vicars in the video, who appropriate Peter Grimes's story in order to discuss their own differences in relation to the society in which they live, allows us to note that it is through the interpretation of a particular reality that desire is created or a particular character is assumed, and that nothing can be understood without being suffered or felt in the skin to the point that the truth is recovered for the self in an attitude that is imitative of a reality which, at first, does not concern them.

The fact that they assume for themselves the role of Peter Grimes, or the role of the misfit, helps us to understand better the role played by staging in constructing an identity, which, while appearing to us to be artificial, becomes real and heartfelt. The space occupied by causality between desire, staging, pleasure, and frustration allows a new staging to be created, or even allows us to reach the point where that staging is experienced, where we live it or participate in it as active agents. In this way, each of us, in our own way, tries to create or even embody his own character, as if it were a voice.

In the interpretation of history by these five vicars, we notice that the strategy of super-staging finds it difficult to create a hero, leading me to pose a question regarding the problematic figure of the hero. What has happened to the hero?

Everyone is a hero, but the hero is dead from the beginning, first due to tradition, and then because he loses his heroic quality by becoming global, by being embodied by others; in this sense they are all of us.

In the history of the opera, or even of the great tragedies, the hero is narrated by others; even in the present tense, he exists only by interacting with the other characters. His identity is constructed through his interactions with others. The hero has no place; he does not fit there. There are no heroes because this reality is false. The hero is a false reality because he wants to die. The others kill him. He quickly loses his heroic nature when he confronts the other characters, but, at the same time, it is in this situation that the hero exists. When he dies, the other characters remain: those who tell the story, who, ultimately, are the true heroes. The others, not managing to assume reality as theirs, look for the voice with which to sing it, to speak it. We can no longer look at the real as it is presented to us; we need artifice in order to be able to live, in order to understand ourselves. This is called being scared to confront reality, and it is with super-staging, with artifice, that we conceal and manage to speak of ourselves, although we move away from the world in which we live. The hero dies, reality disappears, and we are reborn, like the phoenix that arises from the ashes and returns to construct one more staging. ●

KADER ATTIA

I grew up between France and Algeria.

Until the age of 12, my parents had not decided to settle in one place. I was going back and forth between Algeria and France, between an Oriental and an Occidental world.

"When you leave a country, neither your home place nor the one you find, will be as important as the journey," my father used to tell me.

The journey is the space in between. It is the space we are almost always involved in, but which we rarely pay attention to.

As immigrants leaving their home place...

At the end of the sixties, Algerian people were massively emigrating for economic reasons. At this time, the growing French economy had become the stage for the "Dream of Modernity" historically called *Les Trente Glorieuses* (The Glorious Thirties). But France's former colonial space, which it had never developed, including Algeria, had not adapted to the new economic reality. Many people, from the territories of the former French colonial empire, were forced to leave their countries in search of jobs.

For all immigrants the quest for a better life in Europe represented their last chance to earn a living for some years, and still be able to return to their countries, *El Bled*, after a successful experience in France.

But actually, the more they thought of going back to their own countries, the less they did. They stayed in France alienated by modern signs of comfort: from the architecture to the pseudo efforts of social equality.

Then the journey ended.

Through this myth of Modernity and the reality of a consumer society, millions of economic, cultural, and political lives have been erased by the global order. Immigrants from the former colonial space (and I am speaking about colonial space all around the world) have become objects of this order instead of becoming its subjects: colonization of the mind.

The result is an extreme identity reaction to this order, which, unfortunately, became the basis for extremist Islamist ideologies. The expression of this reaction could also be seen on the body. The Body became the surface of identity expression: from clothes brands to the veil.

But Algeria has always maintained, even before hiding the body with a veil, a paradoxical relationship with the human body, and especially with the female body.

In Algeria, a country that is in between the Arab world and the African one, Sub-Saharan influences are strong. To understand the body's culture conflict in the North African world, it is important to keep in mind the 3,000 year old signs carved into the rocks of the Tassili caves, in the desert of the