

Against Narrativity and Linearity: Landscapes of Postmodernism in the Theatre of Nekrosius and Vasiliev

While a popular definition of narrative states that "a 'narrative' is a story or part of a story," most literary scholars don't realize that the concept of narrative in drama goes all the way back to Aristotle.¹

In *Poetics*, Aristotle endorsed cause-and-effect relation between the events as a fundamental aspect of the plot. Though Aristotle doesn't speak of narrative, Aristotelian plot is necessarily narrative and the storyline advances as a progression from past to future. Thus, causality presupposes that action entirely occurs in a linear time segment. With the advance of the postmodern era a conspicuous departure from the Aristotelian ideas on temporal linearity manifests itself in numerous stage pieces. Using the work of two prominent post-Soviet directors, Eimuntas Nekrosius and Anatoly Vasilyev, I will demonstrate how contemporary post-Soviet theatre uses a theatrical model based on the unity of time-space continuum rather than temporal development.

To this end, I will employ the concept of theatrical landscape introduced by Elinor Fuchs as "dispersed fields of activity where many time periods may be represented simultaneously. There are, of course, human figures on these natural /conceptual landscapes, but the landscape itself is the central object of contemplation."² Following Fuchs' general ideas on time emptying itself into space and on multivalent spatial relationships prevalent in a contemporary stage piece, I will analyze particular staging methods the two directors use to suspend both plot and character development.

The fact that both directors have received a rigorous training in Stanislavsky system at the Russian Academy of Theatre Arts makes their staging methods even more challenging. A Stanislavskian piece presupposes a psychological motivation of character's behavior, the primary role of character in the structure of the piece, causality on all structural levels and time linearity as a fundamental precondition. Breaking away from the magisterial tradition of the Russian theatre, both directors disposed of psychologism, causality and time linearity. Yet, to what extent a stage character as a major source of dramatic opposition is undermined in both Nekrosius and Vasilyev is a question left for future research.

Nekrosius' stage works consist of scenes played as stage metaphors/images rather than the sequences of events to advance the plot. The transformations of images form what is referred to by the critics as by-plays -- visually powerful scenes which retain only a suggestive connection to the original playtext. The text is usually truncated to free space for by-plays; and it is the by-plays that take up the task of forging an organic wholeness of Nekrosius' work.

Vasilyev seeks to attain the immateriality of stage which is created and recreated at every single moment of the production. A self-styled Platonic, he finally discovered word as a

¹ See Wikipedia.

² Elinor Fuchs, *The Death of Character* (Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1996): 12.

non-material medium most suitable for attaining the ephemeral quality. He arrived at the idea of text devoid of its narrative function and of word purified of mundane meaning. The "beat of the attacking word" as Vasilyev describes it, becomes an audio sign which, combined with light and music scores, creates a domineering soundscape. Together with physical movement, this soundscape, in turn, accounts for Vasilyev's style as a mixture of stage game and religious ritual.

My presentation will include video demonstrations of works by Nekrosius and Vasilyev.