**Living Archives and Politics: The Case of Recent Russian Theatre**

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Virtually anything can be an archive after something has been in existence or has happened – as wars, revolutions or mere accidents are said to ‘happen’; and it is an archive because it has acquired significance or has been invested with significance and/or meaning by individuals, social groups or whole societies after the event. An archive is what Emile Durkheim calls a totem in so far as a totem represents an antecedent: it indicates or speaks for this antecedent but does not replace it. Durkheim’s examples in his 1912 *Les Formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse*  (*The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*) are the animals which stand for particular peoples among the numerous indigenous peoples of Australia. Durkheim mistakenly defines them as ‘tribes’, as was then common for anthropological discourse, but central to his argument is the idea that totems, while identifying each of these different peoples and specifying their grouping together, differentiate between them.

Durkheim’s theses regarding the role of totems go beyond simple categorization. They attempt to come to grips with a perception of cosmic order in which totems, besides placing human beings in the cosmos (hence his notion of ‘religious life’), are concretely representative of them. His proposition, when transferred to poetics, finds a correlative in the latter. In the language of poetics, the form of representation peculiar to totems is in a metonymic relation to the persons or objects that they conjure up. Thus, for instance, the crown in Shakespeare stands for the monarch. It must be noted that the term ‘representation’ here, which is familiar to theatre studies, does not refer to matters of mimesis or of imitation and copying, as has come down the ages through Aristotle in translation. ‘Representation’ here refers to visual configurations. Vocal configurations, which are integral to the theatre but are not always deployed by it ­– think of dance or mime, but also of silences in verbal theatre – are not, for the moment, part of my discussion.

Let us stay with indicative metonymic relation, with this manner of standing for or standing beside something else but not replacing it, since it is vital to the processes of memory. It is vital not only because metonymy is a trigger for the act of rememorizing and remembrance, but also because it is a way of fixing memory, that is, of memorizing what has become a matter of the past so that this past is not forgotten: elegy, it could be said, becomes history. By the same token, phenomena in a metonymic relation to the humdrum of the everyday may seem banal in the present, but the stuff of bigger entities, including history, can be incipient in them.

Everyday material of this kind gathered by sociologist Abdelmalek Sayad eloquently suggests how the banal is transcended. In his 1999 *La Double absence*, a study of Algerian immigration in France (*The Suffering of* *Immigrants*, 2004), Sayad cites his interview with a worker who observes that his entire life is defined by his papers – salary slips, work register, social security correspondence and other papers, all of which, he says, ‘remember everything’. [[1]](#endnote-1) The very idea of papers remembering, rather than of people remembering, is striking, and is all the more so when put into context. A paper inventory that identifies a person, and identifies him, as well, for governmental-administrative purposes, as is the case of Sayad’s Algerian worker, holds for that person’s life in the present. Yet, when, put into storage for information, it is already being archived. And it is archived again when this inventory is deposited in a larger institution, say a National Archive or an Archive of Immigration, where it is set into history for researchers of one sort and another. They are bound to be historians or sociologists, like Sayad himself, but researchers could also be theatre practitioners (playwrights, performers, community-theatre collaborators, and so on) who are interested in accessing sources on the basis of which, or perhaps only in relation to which, or inspired by them, they compose their theatre pieces.

Such sources are written, and the oral source that is Sayad’s interview is moved to a second degree when it is put into written form. It is in this state in a book, but is somehow reframed, still in this second degree, when the once-spoken interview becomes a document in an official archive; and it is nothing less than its documentary quality that is attractive to theatre makers concerned with ‘authentic’ narratives and images for reasons that need not be exclusively aesthetic, but could well be ethical or political in the spirit of investigative journalism. It is not hard to imagine that accounts, not least performance variations of them inspired by such recent events as Maidan or the not-quite-as-recent Arab Spring would be preoccupied by authenticity, especially when it is coupled with the desire to communicate what can be proven to be true. Official archives are, of course, repositories of memory, and this is how their papers ‘remember’, to return to Sayad’s interviewee. Archives are assembled on the assumption that the ‘true’, or, at least, the approximately true, if not the ‘truth’ as such, can be pieced together with their help, if not established fully from them.

Memory, however, is not uniquely the provenance of individuals, irrespective of how many individual archives are stored for consultation. It is salutary to recall Maurice Halbwachs’s methodically, even obsessively argued position that individual memory is partial not only because it is selective but because, by itself, it is utterly incomplete. Memory does not belong to one, but embraces many, and, in involving many, since it absorbs people in relation to each other – ‘you’ and ‘me’ – it is necessarily collective. In his manuscripts from 1925 to 1944, which were first published as *La Mémoire collective* in 1950, Halbwachs upholds the social principle of memory: memory cannot be collective without being rooted in the social.

Halbwachs maintains, furthermore, that what is conceived of as individual memory, albeit as social individual memory, is, in fact, group memory. Individual memory, it might be said, is filtered through the group to which the person remembering profoundly belongs and with which he/she may have a deep affinity. We could say, as well, that the something remembered is refracted through the prism of plural memories whose individuals share a group awareness and consciousness. Indeed, Halbwachs believes that an individual’s memory of the past relies upon this group consciousness. [[2]](#endnote-2)Viewed from within these parameters, Maidan in Ukraine, or the Arab Spring in Tunisia or Egypt– or civil war in Syria, or occupation in Palestine – remembered via this or that play or performance is likely to project an identifiable group consciousness. As a consequence, the work is likely to have a group-shared understanding of its subject, give or take personal variations on it. This synergy between the personal and the communal is larger and broader than straight-out ideology, even though ideology plays a part in its dynamics.

Interviews and various other types of testimonies are inclusive to sociological method but have also been promoted by researchers of oral history, which came into its own in the later 1960s and early 1970s. Oral history filled in the gaps where written sources were absent (including ‘traditional’ cultures based on oral transmission) and it filled out the panorama with studies of everyday life, which historiography had undervalued or neglected.[[3]](#endnote-3) In Britain, the same period saw the development of community theatre, which focused on smaller-community rather than larger-society issues, backed in its endeavours by grass-roots politics and its emphasis on the empowerment of the people: ‘the people ‘ were distinguished from their leaders, governments and the state. As is well known, the grass -roots politics of these decades the world over were populist, leftist, in various senses of this term, and activist, furthering minority-group causes that generally had to do with ethnicity, race and gender, and increasingly, in subsequent decades, within the framework of human rights and also, of course, religion.

Community theatre in its many manifestations, including verbatim theatre, a branch of documentary theatre that took hold in Anglophone countries in the later 1980s, was seen to be a channel for both consciousness-raising and social intervention – a means for dealing with injustices. ‘Giving voice to’ subaltern groups entailed their right to be heard: this, too, was a facet of empowerment and sometimes, as well, of straight-out enfranchisement, necessity for the latter suggesting the existence of some kind of servitude – an unexpected implication as regards allegedly advanced democracies; and verbatim theatre took up the challenge, literally giving voice to people, who might otherwise not speak, by interviewing them on questions of current concern. Plays were constructed from the precise words of the interviewed protagonists. Since they were plays and not direct transcripts, the words of real-life people were arranged according to the intentions of the nominal playwright or playwrights. The degree to which the latter respected the exact tone and tenor – and, indeed, contextual placing – of the words that they were now both *re*arranging and archiving depended on these playwrights’ commitment to the impetus for ‘truth’ of this type of theatre.

As verbatim theatre in Britain – to take a prominent example – moved away from its community origins to enter the portals of mainstream theatre, increasingly from the 1990s and noticeably in the twenty-first century, it reinforced its ties with the Royal Court Theatre in London. The latter was, one might say, the driving force of documentary -style theatre and its proliferation across the country.

Russia now enters the picture. The Royal Court, long known for its nurturing of new playwrights and, particularly, of a documentary, neo-naturalistic form of playwriting, has also built its reputation not so much on political engagement as on moral indignation, albeit expressed in a detached, ‘objective’ style. In 1999, the Royal Court ran seminar-workshops on verbatim techniques in Moscow on the invitation of playwrights Elena Gremina and her husband Mikhail Ugarov, supported by the British Council. Gremina’s immediate response was to set up in 2000 a Documentary Theatre festival to advocate what was now known as the ‘new drama’. In 2002, she and Ugarov established the independent, private Teatr.doc in a small black-box basement, helped by two already highly regarded young playwrights, Maksim Kurochkin and Ivan Vyrypaev, who have since become major figures of the new-drama scene.

Verbatim and the very principle of documentary theatre in general provided a young generation of Russian liberal-minded theatre practitioners with a means for recording contemporary life in the making and so for relaying oral history in the flesh of performance. These practitioners had grown up during the upheavals of perestroika (1986-1988) and then of the dissolution of the Soviet Union in December 1991, and this documentary/verbatim model allowed them to counter both classics – Russian and world classics – and Soviet problem plays with an approach fitting for the volatile, uncertain aftermath of the total collapse of the regime.

The brutal struggles over ever-shifting political and economic power were creating new elites from which the disenfranchised and disabused ordinary small people were alienated. Among them were countless disaffected youth who resorted to abuse and violence ­–­ theft, beatings, drugs, rape, murder ­– for dealing with what they were unable to grasp, materially, morally, psychologically and emotionally. A verbatim approach could give voice to them, who were the witnesses of massive sociopolitical changes and who, in most cases, were the victims of these changes. The ‘new drama’ was perceived by the equally new, emergent theatre practitioners, united by group consciousness and common values and viewpoints, as a conduit – not a surrogate but a *conduit*  – for democratic freedom of speech and democratic participatory, rather than top-down authoritarian, governance.

In these past fifteen years, Teatr.doc has hosted some seventy productions and thousands of play readings, launching the careers of important writers, actors and directors, among them Pavel Pryazhko, who lives and writes in Russian in Minsk in Belorus, and his director Dmitry Volkastrelov, who created Teatr Post in St Petersburg in 2011 along the lines of Teatr.doc; and, although Teatr.doc is in the forefront in Moscow, flanked by the city’s Playwright and Director Centre, which was formed in 1998, and by Teatr Praktika formed in 2005, it has garnered its influence from within a Russia-wide network.

The principal players within this network are, first of all, actor, director and playwright Nikolay Kolyada, who, in 1996, founded the Yekaterinburg Drama School in the Urals, the first Russian school of playwriting. He notably encouraged women among the playwrights he mentored, thus the acclaimed Yaroslava Pulinovich. Pulinovich’s *Natasha ‘s Dream*, written in 2008, when she was twenty-one, is a sixteen-year old’s monologue on the abuses she had suffered since early childhood (Natasha is in an orphanage-reform school); and it was performed almost immediately in Britain and the United States. Kolyada’s plays, while not in verbatim mode, explode with the language of the streets, with the violent vernacular characteristic of all Russian documentary theatre.

His productions, too, whether of his own plays or of Shakespeare, Tennessee Williams and similarly canonical texts, are littered with the garbage of the streets – mountains of papers, plastic bags and bottles, tin cans and rags, ­all of it archiving, in the moment, images with words that assault consciousness so as to be retained in it. Canonical texts undergoing this process – *King Lear* (2008), *Hamlet* (2010) – are reinvented totally in the image of the here and now, to look and sound like living archives coming into being on the spot. Kolyada’s hope is that consciousness of social dysfunction will stir up the desire to remedy it.

Then there is the group of dramatists from the car-manufacturing city of Togliatti, showcasing the brothers Durnenkov, who have been writing together throughout the 2000s and, today, primarily separately. Again, they draw attention to the vulnerabilities of people in a society falling apart, Mikhail, the younger brother, who has settled in Moscow, viewing human distress from a phantasmagoric angle rather than a more prosaic how-it is one. And then there are other active regional centres and companies, some, like the verbatim-style Voronezh Chamber Theatre, which concentrate on their city, measuring their local space as metonymically representative of the wider geopolitical space surrounding it. For all the variety to be found in the new drama country wide, and the new type of direction that comes with it – a cooler hand to temper the violence, dismay and nothing less than horror ready to explode from the page –­ its target is what might be called the social consequences of cataclysmic politics as people attempt to go about their business as best they can, or fail to do it at all.

Big politics as such, and particularly politics as dominant power, rarely appear in verbatim theatre. Gremina’s 2010 *One Hour Eighteen Minutes*, directed by Ugarov, is an exception to the rule. The play imagines a trial that actually never happened of the prison and medical staff involved in the days before the death in prison of Sergey Magnitsky in 2009. The accountant and auditor had uncovered a tax fraud of hundreds of millions of rubles against the government, allegedly perpetrated by government officials. These same officials then had Magnitsky arrested. After his death, to which the lack of medical attention from the doctor on duty and the beatings he had endured from prison guards for one hour and eighteen minutes (hence Gremina’s title) had allegedly contributed, Magnitsky was accused of having embezzled the tax receipts himself!

Gremina was not able to access anyone for interviewing other than a few lower-rank staff, but she was bold enough to examine a subject which, imputing that power at the highest echelons was posibly implicated, including, rumour had it, President Putin, had drawn the noisy condemnation of international human-rights organizations. In doing so, her composition, together with Ugarov’s production, archived, for the present as well as the future, knowledge that otherwise may well have been suppressed. Suppression is a kind of obliteration, and is the condition of forgetfulness and so of *loss* of memory. Along with oral accounts, Gremina had also used Magnitsky’s prison diaries.

Pryazhko’s 2011 *The Soldier* might be a comparable venture into the terrain of big politics. Volkastrelov’s direction at Tear.doc in 2013 was a tour de force of ellipsis into which could be read Chechnya and Georgia, Russia’s then most recent wars. An anonymous soldier enters, undresses and has a shower, all in silence. The whole is filmed in actual time and projected in black and white on a screen. The performance of about twelve minutes ends with Pryazhko’s only two lines, spoken in the third person off screen – and so, in the absence of an ‘I’, maintaining anonymity: ‘The soldier came home on leave. When he was supposed to return to the army, he did not go back to the army’. And that was it – protest at its most matter-of-fact; protest that could not be denied. Teatr.doc had, by this time, acquired representative status among its new-drama peers – even totemic status, in Durkheim’s thinking, as viewed by the new-drama group as well as the wider theatre profession. Just as significantly, teatr.doc had developed like-minded audiences who entered more or less symbiotically into the consciousness of the world that it radiated through its testimonial material. Given this, Ugarov’s claim in October 2014 that teatr.doc’s basement was a ‘memorial’ was not exaggerated.[[4]](#endnote-4) If papers can ‘remember’, as the worker from Algeria had noted to Abdelmalek Sayad, so, it would appear, can walls. The occasion for Ugarov’s words was teatr.doc’s surprise to discover that its landlord had unilaterally terminated its lease for the basement. Vehement critics of the Putin regime see attempts at censorship and silencing behind this enforced closure.

Teatr.doc is a project-driven theatre and so is not a permanent ensemble company, the latter fortunately still a common practice in Russia. But, like virtually all theatres in Russia, it does have a repertory, keeping works in it for numbers of years. This suggests that, when Gremina and Ugarov find new premises, they will most certainly have *One Hour Eighteen Minutes* performed again; and, since the very act of performing the play in the first instance was a memorial to Magnitsky, every subsequent performance will, in the very act of performing, be a living archive, aided in being this by its direct communication with a breathing, responding public.

As an addendum: since I wrote this paper, Teatr.doc has settled (February 2015) into its new, light-filled and airy premises, opening with *Vyatlag*, premiered in 2013, by Artur Stradinsh. Stradinsh was a Latvian farmer, exiled in 1941 to a labour camp in Siberia for belonging to an organization whose activities were considered by the Soviet authorities to be counter-revolutionary. *Vyatlag* consists of Stradinsh’s diary fragments written on cigarette paper, which were not confiscated by the camp guards because, although a non-smoker, he pretended to be one, hiding his papers under tobacco in a tobacco box.

The theatre piece is essentially a monologue, despite the occasional songs from the Siberian region sung by a woman standing beside her partner as he reads, slip of paper after slip of paper, without accentuation of any kind, the small, daily entries charting the tedious routine of camp life. Only occasionally does he note this cruelty or that, whether from the guards or fellow inmates. No attempt is made to play the part, no attempt to make theatre, but, in its intention to preserve the memory of Stradinsh’s observations intact, that is, through an ‘objective’ reading-rehearsal mode, the performer turns the performance into a simulated archive, precisely of the kind that could be read in solitude. Except that this is an archive constructed to be shared with a public. Do I hear anyone thinking, ‘but is it *theatre*’?

The idea that theatre can *construct* historical memory and not simply reconstruct or reenact it has different contours in the Maly Drama of St Petersburg directed by Lev Dodin. The Maly *is* an ensemble company that collaboratively develops its productions through an approach Dodin calls ‘co-authorship’, the idea originating with Stanislavsky; and this means that the actor and the director work towards an envisaged production instead of following the director’s pre-set plan or overriding ‘vision’. Their elaboration together of characterization and of the interconnection between roles is of fundamental importance when it comes to devising scripts from novels, which successive generations of actors joining the company have done. The MDT’s penultimate example of such ‘theatre of prose’ is the 2007 *Life and Fate*, which took the company three years to devise as they acted the novel on their feet – dialogue, descriptions, narrative passages, philosophical expositions, intrusions, asides, and all – until Dodin, helped by several actors, edited a production rendition of four hours from the hundreds of hours of tries and probes explored in rehearsals.[[5]](#endnote-5)

The process is not unlike that of a choreography crafted by choreographer and dancers together on their bodies. In the Maly’s case, the process equally involved the actors coming-to-know, especially actors in their early twenties – those least likely to know – a history of which they were unaware partly because it had been repressed, side-stepped or simply not easily available, whether in official archival form or through oral memory retold. By the same token, one of the many tasks of the actors was to internalize this history with such human and artistic integrity and such complete ownership of all the actorly skills and dispositions continually evolving from their training, that this history could be brought to consciousness in spectators, empathetically, as well. Younger generations of spectators, the peers of the younger actors, could be assumed to be no wiser than the actors had been before their devising and its attendant research with Dodin. Nor could older generations, who had lived through World War II and its aftermath, necessarily be familiar with the novel’s theses, since these had not been integrated in Soviet textbook history. These theses, which in many respects demystified official history, would consequently be a discovery for spectators brought up on dogma. There is little doubt that one of Dodin’s aims in staging *Life and Fate* was to write publicly some contentious, even ‘clandestine’ history ­­– live.

*Life and Fate*, the novel, was written by Vasily Grossman, who was a war correspondent of considerable reputation at Stalingrad and then during the Red Army’s offensive on Nazi Germany: essentially he covered the years 1941 to 1945. He completed his novel in 1960, but it was immediately banned for its argument that Soviet communism and Nazism were two sides of the same ruthless tyranny, intent on degradation and destruction. The book appeared in the Russian émigré press in Russian in 1980 (Dodin found it in Finland in that year), in English in 1985, and in Russia during perestroika in 1988. Central to Dodin’s production is a long sequence set in a German concentration camp. The dialogue between a Gestapo officer and an interned old Bolshevik turns on the Bolshevik’s contention that the Soviets had outstripped the Nazis in atrocity and so had a good deal still to teach the Nazis. Dodin juxtaposes images in such a way as to merge Russian Jewish prisoners destined for the gas chambers, Russian prisoners in German labour camps, and Russian prisoners in Soviet gulags. His montage device reinforces Grossman’s thesis regarding the indistinguishable character of the two regimes.

Juxtaposition of this kind also suggests the simultaneity of incidents and conversations and, above all, of time. Scenes in camps, brief glimpses of battle, which are not shown but implied solely by a military hat or coat, and scenes concerning Viktor Strum, a nuclear physicist whose betrayal of his colleagues under political pressure is the moral core of the production, are caught frame by overlaid frame. They are, as well, offset against domestic scenes between Strum and his family, poignant moments of love, a letter from Strum’s mother in a Jewish ghetto, just before she is deported to the death camps and, among other pieces, a game of volley ball. The game is played behind a net that recalls a time of pre-war youth but also configures the meshed wire of camps and the doors of hell. The stage design stays the same throughout the production, facilitating its temporal and chronological compactness, its theatrical and metaphoric inventiveness, and its superbly nuanced acting and emotional charge.

Its cultivation of emotional impact separates the MDT from the deliberately dispassionate productions of the new drama, and, for that matter, of younger-generation contemporary productions in general. So, too, does the artistic complexity and refinement symptomatic of MDT work; new-drama aesthetics are, by contrast, direct and streamlined, when not pared back completely to the minimum. And these two primary differences are significant differences, indicating that not only do diverse approaches to the activation and projection of memory exist, but also that the very different groups by age and experience of divergent social time, which weaves different histories, fashion their own, idiosyncratic way of remembering.

Dodin is among prominent directors aged seventy and over whom younger practitioners, eager to be innovative, consider to be traditional, even old-fashioned, and whom they seek to dislodge. This energetic, combative and competitive avant- garde incorporates the new-drama artists, not least the twenty-eight year old Volkostrelov, who completed Dodin’s five-year directing course, where he found his creative independence. But the avant-garde has numbers of very diverse actors, designers, composers and directors, many of the latter just hitting forty or coming into their later forties (all ‘young’ directors by Russian standards) and who, as such, are the children and adolescents of perestroika and 1991. Not only were they nurtured by the uncertainties, together with the promises, of perestroika, but they were also the inheritors of the radical, indeed traumatic, overturn of one political system by another. The word ‘traumatic’ cannot be stressed enough, since the trauma indubitably entailed in such massive structural overhausl, as well as those in psychological and so daily life overhauls not only has immediate effect but is long-lasting, more often than not with gravely deleterious consequences, many of them invisible to the naked eye.

Within roughly fifteen years after 1991, it became more or less evident to the children of perestroika that the replacement system known as wild or ‘savage capitalism’ (after the French ‘*sauvage*’) with concomitant *laissez-faire* jungle politics at hand, was in its own way unstable, carrying unforeseen penalties as to what this and, indeed, newly minted other political structures would bring. The volatility that accompanies as well as follows radical political overturns *not* bound to the tenets of dictatorships generally can do anything but guarantee the desire for political and social liberty and equity at their heart. The aftermath of the Arab Spring, in the conditions specific to each country, where events and actions under this generic name have occurred, testifies to the highly problematical character of the questions ‘Where to now?’ or ‘Where to next?’ in these contexts. How these questions are posed will largely depend on who asks them with regard to which memory of preceding events and actions is evoked.

The so-called ‘post-Soviet’ practitioners discussed above may have between them the kind of sum-total collective memory Halbwachs ascribes to groups having common values. Yet what values they have in common are probably most accurately tabled in negative terms. In other words, their memory is constructed through disappointment, disillusionment, lack of faith, lack of ideals and, above all, cynicism. Their cynicism towards both communism *and* capitalism makes of them critically trenchant, acerbic and acidic archivists. In their company, the humanism of a Dodin is pretty well from another era; and their pronounced voice raises the question of how, in comparable cases elsewhere in the world of disillusionment and cynicism, do younger generations deal with archiving memory that they deem to be far less than satisfactory.

My concluding remarks have no intention of ‘tying-up’ the subject according to some academic formula, but of opening out the subject a little more and leaving it suspended with a ‘to be continued’ sign, which your questions will allow me to develop. Konstantin Bogomolov’s 2012 production *Lear*, *A Comedy* now serves this purpose because it is unusual among young directors (Bogomolov is just about forty) to go as far back as the Stalin years to perform their indictment of the here and now. Allusions to Stalin’s show trials – through Soviet military costumes, podiums, microphones – are shaping tropes of the production as a whole. This is so even when business suits replace obvious Stalinist paraphernalia – Lear wears a suit, as do, on occasion Goneril and Regan. Soviet-era tropes are continued through such details of cultural habit as the way toasts are raised, how they succeed each other and how speeches, and what kind of speeches are made on celebratory occasions, which are not necessarily official or formal ones.

All aspects are embedded in contexts, whether at dinner tables or at board meetings (unmistakable allusions, now to present-day capitalism), that blatantly point to the collusion of power and money, and to political and financial maneuvering and corruption. Cross-gendered roles – Lear is played by a well known actress from the Moscow Art Theatre, Goneril and Regan by men – are in the spirit of sinister carnival, upstaged by effects such as that of the outsize lobsters that stick out of Lear’s pockets in lieu of guns. Lear, at a buffoon-like banquet wears a paper crown of the kind worn at parties, and this crown is not representative of a king, but metonymically stands for all the leaders of Russia. Oligarchs, thugs, politicians – and what, indeed, is Shakespeare’s Lear if not a politician? –appear endlessly to reproduce the same image, like multiple reflections in trick mirrors.

Bogomolov’s re-organization of Shakespeare’s text with excerpts from Nietzsche and the poetry of Paul Celan may superficially recall Dodin’s *Life and Fate*. Yet the production has none of Dodin’s humanism, and its foul language, which is all the more shocking, in a Russian theatre context, when uttered in volleys by women, even when they are playing men, is part and parcel of a deliberately anti- humanist perspective. Its excessive, grotesque, abrasive and crude style of performance batters the audiences again and again, mercilessly rubbing their noses in the mess of the present whose roots, the production implies, are not only in the past but also in the repetition of the past in the present. It is as if the memory of the past has taken such strong hold that it cannot help but influence the practices of the present.

Bogomolov has consistently directed at the Moscow Art Theatre, a grand, institutionalized house, Stanislavsky’s house and not a non-descript black-box basement, and this very fact may be saying plenty about how Russian theatre, notwithstanding the country’s ceaseless difficulties, has been open to remembering and, at least until now, has been able to remember. Multiple reasons can help to explain this aperture to memory, but two need to be noted on the occasion of this conference: the freedom from 1991 (with perestroika as its important predecessor) to roughly the mid-later 2000s, however relative it may be to some social groups, albeit not to others; the finances made available, primarily from the government, to the institutional theatres and the opening, at least, for burgeoning theatres to seek and find independent financial resources, something that was only a hope in the perestroika years. The ability to remember in all societies, although for varied reasons specific to them, is contingent not only on the artistic capacities of artists and the concordance of their audiences, but also – and crucially ­– on the politics of the powers in power, who generally do not want to cede power.

1. French edition, preface by Pierre Bourdieu, Paris: LeSeuil, 1999, p. 73; *The Suffering of Immigrants*, trans. David Macy, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. *La Mémoire collective*, ed. Gérard Namer, Paris: Albin Michel, 1997, pp. 65-6. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Oral history as a particular kind of history deserving serious academic attention grew out of the Annales School and its emphasis on daily life, the micro-history that provided a corrective to the ‘big’ history of exceptional individuals, shattering events (like wars) and heroic acts. Thus the studies of Fernand Braudel, and most notably his *La Méditerranée et le Monde Méditerranéen à l'Epoque de Philippe II* (1949), Paris: Poche 2009 (*The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*) and *Écrits sur l'histoire. (Writings on History),* Paris:**:** Éditions Flammarion, 1985**.**  [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. John Freedman quoting Ugarov in *The Moscow Times*, 19 October, 2014. I am indebted to John Freedman and Elena Gremina for clarifying Pryazhko’s exact wording of *The Soldier*, as cited above. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. ‘Theatre of prose’ is Dodin’s terminology. A detailed study of its methods and the productions developed in this category (with the exclusion of *Life and Fate* ) is to be found in Chapter 3 of my *Dodin and the Maly Drama Theatre: Process to Performance,* Routledge: London, 2004. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)