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Alexandra Smith

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Alexandra Smith

Nikolai Evreinov and Edith Craig as Mediums of Modernist Sensibility

Nikolai Evreinov (1870–1953) was a Russian playwright, director, and theorist of the theatre who played a leading part in the modernist movement of Russian theatre. Evreinov's 1911 monodrama *The Theatre of the Soul* (*V kulisakh dushi*) was staged by the Crooked Mirror theatre in St Petersburg in 1912. It was also performed in London (1915) and Rome (1929), and inspired Man Ray to create his aerograph *The Theatre of the Soul* (1917). In this article Alexandra Smith links Evreinov's play to Russian modernist thought shaped by the atmosphere of crisis associated with the Russo–Japanese War and the first Russian Revolution. It demonstrates that Edith Craig's production of Evreinov's play suggests that the philosophy of theatricalization of everyday life might enable modern subjects to overcome the fragmentation of modern society. Craig's use of the montage-like techniques of Evreinov's play prefigures cinematographic experiments of the 1920s and Marinetti's notion of synthetic theatre. Alexandra Smith is a Reader in Russian Studies at the University of Edinburgh and is the author of *The Song of the Mockingbird: Pushkin in the Works of Marina Tsvetaeva* (1994) and *Montaging Pushkin: Pushkin and Visions of Modernity in Russian Twentieth-Century Poetry* (2006), as well as numerous articles on Russian literature and culture.

PLAYWRIGHT, director, theorist, anthropologist, historian, musician, teacher, composer, and philosopher, Nikolai Evreinov was one of the most prominent theatrical innovators of the modernist period. A self-proclaimed genius, he was completely dismissed by Soviet critics as an émigré director and an avid believer in the philosophy of theatre for oneself based on the highly subjective approach to the formative role of art in the life of the individual and society. The rediscovery of Evreinov's art in Russia today was triggered by the Moscow Art Theatre production of his 1921 play *The Chief Thing* (*Samoe glavnoe*) in October 1999, coinciding with the rise of post-Soviet subjectivity.

Evreinov's reputation was much more stable abroad throughout the twentieth century since he was widely recognized as an important theoretician and master of monodrama. In 1920 Oliver M. Sayler named Evreinov, Stanislavsky, and Meyerhold as the three major forces in Russian avant-garde theatre.¹ Although usually highly praised for his contribution to the revival of monodrama and harlequinade in the twentieth century,

Evreinov's ability to synthesize Stanislavsky's psychological realism and Meyerhold's 'grotesque' and stylization manifested itself in the production of the mass spectacle *The Storming of the Winter Palace* (*Vzятие Зимнего дворца*) in 1920. It was a mythologized and hyperbolized re-enactment of the highlights of the Bolshevik uprising, subordinated to the principles of theatricality.

Together with the prominent Russian artist Yurii Annenkov, Evreinov managed to present his own artistic version of the storming of the Winter Palace with the help of eight thousand participants, including soldiers who had taken part in the 1917 October Revolution, and an orchestra of five hundred that played revolutionary songs. A real horn blast from the battleship *Aurora*, anchored near the Winter Palace on the Neva river, created a special theatrical effect that had a considerable impact on the audience of a hundred thousand spectators located in three main areas linked to the Winter Palace itself.

The performance was directed from a platform raised in the middle of the square next to the column commemorating the Tsar,

Alexander I. Evreinov used field phones, light signals, and motorcycle couriers in order to heighten the dramatic effect.

According to T. S. Dzhurova, Evreinov's compositional techniques were similar to Eisenstein's use of intellectual montage: the gaze of the spectators at this night-time mass spectacle was constantly directed towards the red and white platforms erected on Winter Square.² The role of the red platform in the spectacle was especially powerful since it created a visual representation of the consolidation of the revolutionary forces capable of the conscious organization of chaotic flow of time into a meaningful artistic symbol. James Roose-Evans describes it thus:

At the end he had a Tree of Freedom around which all the nations were united in brotherly celebration while the soldiers of the Red Army exchanged their rifles for sickles and hammers. From the darkened windows of the Winter Palace red stars with five points were lit. On top of the building a huge red banner was raised. The performance ended with a mass singing of the Internationale, fireworks, and a parade of the armed forces.³

Evreinov's allegorical depiction of the revolutionary events that incorporated the use of cinematographic devices had a considerable impact on Sergei Eisenstein, who reproduced Evreinov's monumental style in his 1927 film *October*. Eisenstein's film testifies to the growing importance of the spontaneity-consciousness paradigm described in Katerina Clark's study *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual*, which suggests that Soviet socialist realist novels constructed the hero moving from a state of spontaneity to a higher degree of consciousness.

The Theatricalization of Everyday Life

Clark's exploration of 'the great historical drama of struggle between the forces of spontaneity and the forces of consciousness' in terms of new social ritual can be easily extended to the theatrical experiments of the 1920s.⁴ After all, as early as 1904, Viacheslav Ivanov, one of the most influential Symbolist thinkers of the period, wrote two essays, 'The Poet and the Mob' (*Poet i tolpa*) and 'New Masks' (*Novye maski*), in which he called for a

new all-national and mythogenic art to appeal to the most universal spirit of the nation and forge a bond between poet and crowd. Evreinov's mass spectacle *The Storming of the Winter Palace* might be seen as an embodiment of the theatre of the future that would unite the poet and the crowd in a common celebration and service as described in Ivanov's essay 'New Masks'.

It is clear that Evreinov drew on Ivanov's belief in the leading role of tragedy in social and spiritual reintegration: his 1920 mass spectacles were in the style of Ivanov's desire to link the new tragedy with the elements of the Dionysian sacrifice re-enacted symbolically. In addition to *The Storming of the Winter Palace*, Evreinov staged outdoors three allegorical depictions of revolutionary events performed in the style of religious mystery plays: *Hymn to Liberated Labour!* (*Gimn osvobodzhennogo truda!*) on 1 May 1920, *To The World Commune* (*K mirovoi commune*) on 19 July 1920, and 'Blockade of Russia' (*Blokada Rossii*) on 20 July 1920. These fulfilled Ivanov's goal to drive the individual out of his conventions in order to restore the experience of communal ecstasy through the theatricalization of everyday life.

Since Evreinov moved to the south of Russia soon after the 1917 revolution and returned to Petrograd only in 1920, after living in Tiflis and Sukhumi, none of his spectacles was deemed to be a reconstruction of eye-witness accounts of the events: they were heavily imbued with mythologized details that enabled participants of the spectacles to experience themselves and the world in a new way and foster a re-evaluation of established values. According to Ivanov, the new type of theatre would lead to dithyrambic catharsis, enabling the participants of the performance to experience death and resurrection in the style of Dionysian rites.⁵ Evreinov's mass spectacles exemplify Ivanov's eclectic approach to the drama based on modern political and theatrical theory.

The idea of open-air mass spectacles as a form of modern artistic subjectivity originated during the first Russian revolution (1905–1907) and became popular among Russian Futurists, with whom Evreinov was

collaborating on many projects. After the 1917 revolution, the military-like and all-inclusive mass spectacles were only partially related to the creation of proletarian theatre. To a large extent, they were linked to the establishment of a new ritual celebrating a new social order and revolutionary achievements.

Platon Kerzhentsev's 1918 book *The Creative Theatre* described the creation of a true people's theatre based on Russian folk drama as a highly desirable development. Similar calls for a complete break with professional theatre were manifested in Romain Rolland's 1903 book *The People's Theatre* (translated into Russian in 1910), inspired by the open-air collective performances then popular in America and England. Harold Segel links this phenomenon of physical cultism with a widespread repudiation of organized religion:

The institution of the house of worship, of the church and synagogue, came to be viewed as repugnant because of its identification with bourgeois society. . . . For those individuals unwilling to abandon a belief in the need for faith, alternative spiritualities were sought.⁶

Linking Social and Artistic Ideals

This context enables us to understand how Evreinov's theatrical events stemmed from his preoccupation with the tension between individuality and social unity. Evreinov's mass spectacles attest that the cultural activities of Russian modernists did not amount to the complete rejection of the populism of the 1860s. While criticizing the positivism of the early period with its focus on ideology and utilitarian taste, they did not altogether abandon the notion of social authority, even when they proclaimed the autonomy of art and the moral superiority of the lone artist.

In Russia the search for new religious experiences based on the performance of the collective self at the beginning of the twentieth century led to the emergence of the notion of the theatre of ideas. It was seen as an artistic form that could unite actors and directors sharing a vision of the art of acting and methods of that particular theatre. Vera Komissarzhevskaya explains:

Every such theatre must be like a community, following a 'master', something like what in painting is called a 'school', in which all the disciples carry out freely and enthusiastically the ideas of their leader and are able to work together on the same picture.⁷

Having tried to implement her vision in the real world, Kommissarzhevskaya collaborated with Meyerhold on several productions. Yet after their joint visit to Berlin in 1907, devoted to the study of Reinhardt's productions, Kommissarzhevskaya criticized Meyerhold's desire to turn his actors into puppets, and in 1908 she appointed Evreinov as her new director. (Due to financial hardship, however, the theatre was closed in 1909.) Similar ideas highlighting the need for collectively shared religious-like experiences were advocated by Aleksandr Scriabin, who called for the initiation of the spectators dressed in special robes for a performance.

The most influential production of the 1910s to exemplify the notion of the theatre of ideas was Gordon Craig's production of *Hamlet* by the Moscow Art Theatre in 1912. Its combination of the elements of monodrama with the new monumental language and cubist-like decorations was highly praised by leading Symbolist poets and critics, including Valery Briusov and Maximilian Voloshin. Russian critics were particularly impressed by Craig's architectural organization of space and his pure movement of forms, colour, and light with the help of moving cubes and imaginative use of light and screens. In Voloshin's opinion, the elaborate use of cubes invented by Craig, that could rise or fall at any speed, was especially suitable for Symbolist drama that features a historical space, as well as for tragedies.⁸

Craig's production of *Hamlet* influenced many Russian modernist directors who were seeking to reproduce dynamics and special relationships on stage with the assistance of imaginative employment of lighting, music, and dance. They aspired to establish the new form of synthetic theatre comprising elements of opera, drama, and dance. Their productions emphasized the imagination of the master actor capable of improvising upon an idea in the vein of *commedia dell'arte*. They

also sought to reinvent the Russian cultural tradition of the nineteenth century that linked the artistic ideal of unity to the social function of art, presenting Russian writers as prophets, martyrs, and spiritual leaders.

Lev Tolstoy's claim in his seminal treatise of 1897–98, *What is Art?* (*Chto takoe iskusstvo?*), that the communication of feeling from the artist to the audience should be seen as the single most important function of art inspired many Russian modernists who, to use Kandinsky's words, became preoccupied with their power to evoke 'the progressive refinement of the soul'.⁹ At the same time, many Russian modernists experienced the anxiety of individuation that stemmed from the political and philosophical concerns and social tensions that led to revolution in 1905. In search for new truths and meanings, the Russian creative intelligentsia embraced the philosophies of will of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. In a Schopenhauerean manner, Fedor Sologub proclaimed:

In high art images strive to become symbols, that is, they strive to instil in themselves a multi-meaningful content, they strive so that, in the process of perceiving them, it would be possible to uncover ever deeper meanings.¹⁰

The Revival of Monodrama

If nineteenth-century civic critics asserted that truth could be found in an extensive description of everyday life and external reality, Sologub in his essay 'Art' (*Iskusstvo*) expressed his belief that only by looking within can one find truth. His vision is fully applicable to Evreinov, whose cabaret performances provided escape from phenomenal reality, which was seen by him as 'the excessively materialistic world'.¹¹

In the light of these trends, Evreinov's revival of monodrama might be seen as an artistic response to the turbulent period in Russia associated with the 1905 revolution and the war with Japan that shaped extreme individualism in Russia. Valerian Chudovsky's 1912 article refers to productions of the cabaret Crooked Mirror (*Krivoie zerkalo*), which actively promoted Evreinov's plays, as the most representative of contemporary

aesthetic trends expressing modern subjectivity and the subliminal self. The Crooked Mirror cabaret was founded in St Petersburg in 1908 as a theatrical club specializing in parody. According to Chudovsky, the parodic touch of Crooked Mirror's productions reflect on modern forms of extreme subjectivism, which manifests itself as comic.¹²

By contrast, according to Aleksandr Kugel', the revival of monodrama undertaken by Evreinov and Boris Geyer originated from the highly pessimistic modern world view that led to the disintegration of morality into the plurality of subjective values. Kugel' defines the crisis of dramatic theatre as a crisis of universalist morality, the latter associated with Kant's notion of a single moral obligation. Kugel' links the revival of monodrama to the new interest in the performer's ability to be a religious-like figure capable of sharing his/her emotional experience with the audience. He found the actor's ability to create a vision of dream-like reality comparable to book illustrations that represent snapshots of contemporary life. As Kugel' points out, 'the task of art is to cognize life in such a way that it would be possible to capture its rhythm'.¹³

The idea of Kugel' that every work environment, social group, and manifestation of ordinary life corresponds to certain rhythmic patterns links up with the underlying theme of interaction between painting and poetry found in the experiments of Russian Futurists and French Dadaists. His vision of drama as an artistic rendering of psychic life – seen as the intuitively comprehensible flow of existence – develops Evreinov's views in his *Introduction to Monodrama*,¹⁴ in which he claims that the appropriate relationship between audience and performance in the theatre is one of sympathy; therefore complete unity between character and audience is achievable if everything happening on stage can be subjectively perceived by one main character.

Evreinov linked his monodrama to recent publications in psychology. As Katherine Lahti notes, his 'attempts to prove scientifically that monodrama is the best, most effective theatre only feebly hide the fact that his version of monodrama satisfied his own pro-

clivity to extreme subjectivism'.¹⁵ In Lahti's opinion, ultimately Evreinov's monodramas make one point: 'the self is subjective'.¹⁶

Although the interest in monodrama might be interpreted as an exploration of modern subjectivity and psychoanalysis, the genre of monodrama was not invented by modernists. Its origin is associated with Jean-Jacques Rousseau's 1766 music drama, *Pygmalion*. While the popularity of the form initiated by *Pygmalion* had decreased by 1815, monodrama was imported to England through the work of Robert Southey, among others, and shaped many dramatic works of the major English Romantics, including Wordsworth's *The Borderers* and Byron's *Manfred*.

Many elements of monodrama can also be found in Romantic music: Hector Berlioz's music of the 1830s, for example, is usually defined as *monodrame lyrique*. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, monodrama became a fully conceptualized genre in its own right, representing a new kind of subjectivity. Its goal was to align the spectator as closely as possible to the protagonist so that the viewer would sympathize with the protagonist's experience as it was happening on stage.

In Evreinov's theoretical works, monodrama was a form concerned with the external expression of the internal experience of a single protagonist. There are three types of monodrama: single-character monodrama; divided-self monodrama, which depicts the fragmented parts of an individual psyche at war within an individual; and multi-character monodrama, in which the surroundings and other characters are presented through the filtered consciousness of the protagonist.

Lahti links Evreinov's revival of monodrama with the growing interest in ancient rituals both in Russia and Europe, as was noted in Ivanov's essays. They were extensively studied by Jane Ellen Harrison, British classicist and specialist in Slavonic studies, who maintained close contacts with leading Russian cultural figures.

The interest in monodramatic forms of performance and rituals triggered interest in non-verbal communication and the import-

ance of gestures among Russian practitioners, including Evreinov. In his *Introduction to Monodrama*, Evreinov cites Gordon Craig as a director whose monodrama appeals to him because of its desire to overcome the dependence of contemporary drama on literature by employing visual effects and non-verbal communication.¹⁷

A 'Revolt against Grandiosity'

Given that Laurence Senelick defines modern monodrama as a manifestation of 'high-spirited revolt against grandiosity', it is also possible to say that the assault on words gave rise to a new theatrical language.¹⁸ According to Senelick, 'The playwrights featured at André Antoine's Théâtre Libre in Paris claimed they were presenting "slices of life", best exposed in short, striking format'.¹⁹ Similar one-act plays became popular in Russia in the 1910s, their authors including Leonid Andreev and Geyer as well as Evreinov, and their venue the Crooked Mirror cabaret.

But in spite of many parodic touches, Evreinov's vision of monodrama focuses on its ability to evoke emotions associated with various settings with the help of minimalist stage design and the deployment of a ritualistic style of performance – points discussed by Harrison in her seminal 1912 study *Ancient Art and Ritual*. Harrison writes:

The commemorative dance does especially *re-present*; it reproduces the past hunt or battle; but if we analyze a little more closely we see it is not for the sake of copying the actual battle itself, but for the *emotion felt about the battle*. This they desire to re-live. . . . The habit of this *mimesis* of the thing desired, is set up, and ritual begins. Ritual, then, does imitate, but for an emotional, not an altogether practical, end.²⁰

Drawing on Tolstoy's emphasis on the unifying function of art and on Ivanov's notion of collective identity, Harrison offers her own model of art. Like Ivanov and Evreinov, she called for the restoration of the theatrical collective:

Art is in its very origin social, and social means human and collective. Moral and social are, in

their final analysis, the same. . . . 'Art,' says Tolstoy, 'has this characteristic, that it unites people.'²¹

In her book, *Themis: a Study of the Social Origins of Greek Religion* (1912), Harrison situates the origin of religion in collectively held emotion and outlines the relevance of ancient rituals to contemporary re-evaluations of humanist values and ideas of national identity. She also argues that the excesses of nationalism emerging in the 1910s stemmed from two major causes: collectivism, which, in her view, had turned into a fashionable dogma; and the triumph of emotion over reason, which led those who favoured war. She offered Dostoevsky as an antidote to these excesses – a model, for Britain, of how a national identity could be defended without recourse to the kind of nationalism that, she believed, held sway in Britain.

The Influence on British Modernism

Harrison's ideas on ritual and drama influenced many British modernists, including D. H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, and James Joyce; and her vision of the imaginary Russian model shaped by Dostoevsky's ideas appeared to have had a considerable impact on Edith Craig and Christopher St John (pseudonym of Christabel Marshall, writer, translator, and long-standing partner of Edith Craig) who decided to stage Evreinov's 1912 monodrama *The Theatre of the Soul* (*V kulisakh dushi*) in London in 1915.²²

Edith Craig's production of this play in London helps unravel the complexities of modernity's relationship to femininity and to address more general questions about the relationship between politics and the theatre in the 1910s. The advancement of modernity and the growing importance of urban public space in Great Britain led to an increase in the participation of middle-class women in London public life between 1890 and 1914. Christine Anderson believes that, during this period, the identity of middle-class women changed from 'Angel-in-the-House' through 'New Woman' to 'Angel-in-the-City' and, ultimately, to 'Modern Woman'. Thus the

British theatre of the time served as an important space where this transformation was highly visible. Anderson writes:

As a result, the theatre as a whole (the physical space, the stage, the performances, the actresses, the playwrights, the directors, the managers, and the audience) changed and became not only an agent of modernity, but an institution of modernity. It was within the theatre through the introduction of 'Suffrage Drama' and the formation of the AFL (Actresses' Franchise League) that the first consciously woman-centred, feminist, middle-class, political, and performative space emerged.²³

Julie Holledge, in her informative study on female performers and directors in Edwardian Britain, describes the Pioneer Players as an important women's society engaged in suffrage drama.²⁴ The society's founder, Edith Craig, was a well-established actress, costume designer, and director who contributed significantly to political campaigns and the development of women's drama. Craig's image of the modern woman was also supported by her role as an innovative director interested in advanced technology: the spectacular visual effects of her productions at the Little Theatre were highly praised for skilful and innovative use of lighting.

Craig was largely involved with suffrage drama that aspired to portray emancipated women as feminists. Several resolutions of the AFL meetings promoted at Caxton Hall in 1911 (which appeared in the publication *Votes for Women*) called upon dramatists seeking the true feminist spirit 'to study modern women in their workshops, studios, and factories'.²⁵ The AFL resolutions suggest that politics should be seen as 'a vital necessity for the truthful interpretation of the drama of life'.²⁶

The artistic aspirations in AFL members' approval of the use of propaganda in drama go beyond the desire of British suffragists 'to reform their society by domesticating public life'.²⁷ The merger of propaganda and theatre in this context is linked to modern female politics, which stemmed from the desire of middle-class women to redefine themselves within the modern city. The role of theatre in raising consciousness and forming a gendered identity during this period was prominent.

Role of the Pioneer Players

According to Elizabeth Crawford, Edith Craig set up the Pioneer Players in 1911 to produce plays about suffrage and to reflect on theatrical experiments that could appeal to the artistic sensibility of modern spectators.²⁸ The Pioneer Players presented themselves as anti-commercial, and listed among their main objectives such goals as 'to produce plays dealing with all kinds of movements of interest at the moment' and 'to assist social, political, and other societies by providing them with plays as a means of raising funds'.²⁹ In the 1911–12 annual report, Edith Craig writes: 'All we ask of a play is that it shall be interesting.'³⁰

In the period of their activity (1911–25) the Pioneer Players were subjected to commercial and political pressures and the performers experienced unpredictable conditions of employment that disrupted the traditional role ascribed to women as carers or dependants. As a play-producing subscription society, it relied heavily on its membership. While the annual reports stated that 64 plays were produced for subscription performances, Christopher St John recalled 150 performances altogether.³¹

The outbreak of the First World War broadened the scope of social engagements undertaken by the Players. Katharine Cockin points out that the society's decision of December 1915 to establish an art theatre in London was perceived by some critics as betraying its commitment to promote suffrage-related drama:

The change in the Pioneer Players' agenda can now be dated precisely, not to the outbreak of war (although this had important implications . . .), but to December 1915 with the pivotal and controversial production of Nikolai Evreinov's expressionist play.³²

Cockin observes that in 1915 the society's membership changed significantly, leading to an increase in aristocratic membership. In Holledge's opinion, there were pragmatic reasons for this change, because Craig and her associates 'were quick to realize that their audience would not be interested in plays about the oppression of women while the

newspaper headlines were filled with the atrocities of war'.³³ While half of all the plays performed in the pre-war period were authored by women, in 1914–21 the proportion of plays penned by women fell below one-third. As Nina Auerbach explains,

feminists regretted Edy's abandonment of women, but the Pioneer Players remained vital by broadening their scope, and Edy strengthened herself when she brought male as well as female visions into her little empire.³⁴

Evreinov's monodrama would have appealed to Craig's artistic sensibility. The genre of *cabaret artistique*, which was popular in Europe and Russia, would perhaps have been seen by Craig as highly suitable for the examination of modern subjectivity and urban alienation. Segel writes in his analysis of the *Cabaret Voltaire* and its links with European theatrical experiments:

Apart from the prominence of especially fine talents such as Riviere, Bruant, Wedekind, Reinhardt, Hugo Ball, and Boy-Zelenski the cabarets became the focal point of considerable artistic innovation and experimentation . . . a reaction against naturalism and especially symbolism. . . . The movement was away from the lofty, grandiose, grandiloquent, ethereal, and sombre to the lighter, more playful, more informal, and less sophisticated.³⁵

The Theatre of the Soul

Edith Craig's interest in Evreinov's plays would also have been triggered by the growing sense of crisis as regards masculinity – reinforced by experiences of the war. The protagonist of Evreinov's *The Theatre of the Soul* is tormented by his divided self, and, in this, is similar to D. H. Lawrence's protagonist from *The Rainbow*, whose ontological insecurity made him experience the 'horrible slipping into unreality' which 'drove him mad' to the extent that 'his soul screamed with fear and agony'.³⁶

Evreinov's monodrama, revealing similar concerns with the process of slipping into unreality, prefigures the French Surrealists' experiments with automatic writing inspired by the dynamic psychiatry used for the treatment of nervous breakdowns during the First

World War.³⁷ Cockin lists several experimental and defamiliarizing devices in Evreinov's play, including special noise and light effects, the use of the telephone to illustrate communication between various fragmented parts of the human mind, and the unusual treatment of time – the monodrama supposedly lasting just eighteen seconds. Cockin finds the synthetic quality and intensity of Evreinov's monodrama comparable to the Italian Futurist performances that embodied Marinetti's notion of synthetic theatre, able 'to compress into a few minutes, into a few words and gestures, innumerable situations, sensibilities, ideas, sensations, facts, and symbols'.³⁸

Evreinov considered *The Theatre of the Soul* to be the most original play in the history of the theatre. Envisaged as a parody of Stanislavsky's preoccupation with psychological realism, its action takes place inside a man's body, and his giant internal organs appear on the stage, moving in time to the music, which represents the protagonist's various moods.

This action supposedly unfolds in his soul over the course of half a second. The man leaves his wife and child for a café singer, who abandons him. The protagonist views the Wife and the Songstress through his three selves – rational, emotional, and eternal. Other characters include the Professor; M₁, the Rational Entity of the Soul; M₂, the Emotional Entity of the Soul; M₃, the Subliminal Entity of the Soul; M₁'s Concept of the Wife; M₂'s Concept of the Wife; M₁'s Concept of the Songstress; M₂'s Concept of the Songstress; and the Porter. All the characters are introduced by the Professor, who calls the play a 'genuinely scientific work in every respect, abreast of the latest developments in psychophysiology'. He states that the presentation of the human being as a combination of several entities is in line with the psychological theories of Wilhelm Wundt, Sigmund Freud, and Théodule Armand Ribot.

The three Entities are all dressed in black, but M₁ wears a frock coat, M₂ an artist's blouse and a red tie, and M₃ well-worn travelling clothes. M₁ wears spectacles, speaks quietly, has thin lips, and greyish, well brushed hair; M₂ appears youthful and energetic, with untidy hair and full, red lips;

M₃ wears a black mask and looks like an exhausted traveller. The eternal Self is detached, while the rational and emotional Selves are antagonistic to each other.

The rational Self advises the man to return to his family, while the emotional Self urges him to give up his boring existence and run away with the Songstress; the rational Self reminds the man that the Songstress is forty years old, with ingrown toenails, wig, and painted face, whereas the Wife is an ideal mother; the emotional Self responds that the Wife is a petite bourgeoisie in shabby clothes with coffee stains. The Wife, meanwhile, sees her husband as an atheist, philosopher, and excessive drinker. The protagonist, unable to bring together his conflicting Selves, shoots himself through the heart.

The Fragmented Mind of Modern Man

The experimental and pessimistic nature of Evreinov's presentation of the modern Self influenced Man Ray's 1917 aerograph, which was originally titled *The Theatre of the Soul* and is known today as *Suicide*.³⁹ Ray incorporated several abstract elements in his aerograph, including the two suspended egg-like forms in the foreground which resemble the lungs mentioned in the Professor's description, while the triangular configuration of lines in the upper centre was probably meant to illustrate the nervous system. As Francis Naumann suggests:

it is also possible that Man Ray may have intended the oval shapes to represent the main characters in the actual play itself: the Rational and Emotional Entities of the Soul. . . . Since the Emotional and Rational Entities are actually one and the same, representing opposing states of the self, this act could be interpreted as a suicide.⁴⁰

The graphic representation of the fragmented mind of modern man and the allusion to suicide in the final part of the play set off the many negative responses to the 1915 production of the work in London. In response to the critics who disliked Evreinov's crude psychology, Christopher St John wrote:

Everyone who thinks at all knows that the interior of a human soul has very little furniture and that

what takes place there is astonishingly simple. What a man expresses through the medium of his brain and personality is complicated, both in its beauty and its ugliness, but the thing from which this elaboration of thought and action is evolved is as it exists in the soul elemental whether the soul be a philosopher's or a peasant's. For this reason it seems to me that the crudeness of 'The Theatre of the Soul' is a virtue rather than a defect.⁴¹

Pamela Colman Smith's stage design and decorations for the monodrama corresponded well to Evreinov's intention to question the popular belief that scientific positivism might kill poetic inspiration. The representation of the heart as the source of the emotive aspects of human psychology invokes the monistic doctrines that emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century, including Loeb's theory of tropisms, American behaviourism, Pavlov's conditioned reflex theory, and Bekhterev's objective psychology.

St John's account of Craig's production suggests that Craig understood Evreinov's attempt to visualize the fragmented modern self as a visual spectacle performed in Cubo-Futurist vein, which prefigures Man Ray's interpretation. Ray would have been familiar with St John's description in the Introduction to the 1915 edition of the play, which states:

In the production of the play Miss Edith Craig used a queer and fascinating machinery, of the simplest kind, by which little was seen of the three entities of the soul beyond their faces appearing at different levels out of intense darkness. The heart was represented by a glowing red space which appeared to pulsate owing to an effect of light. The concepts of the women were seen in the foreground and were brilliantly lighted. The whole effect was thrilling and beautiful, and helped enormously to create a dramatic atmosphere.⁴²

The Professor describes the heart as part of the human machine:

I think that the human soul manifests itself in that part of the physical breast which a man instinctively strikes when he wishes to emphasize his good faith, or even when he uses such expressions as 'I am distressed in the soul', or 'I rejoice with my whole soul', or 'My soul burns with indignation'.⁴³

He also explains his drawing of the human heart in a way that suggests it is a light parody

of scientists like Pavlov and his followers – behaviourists and anti-mentalists – who, in their revolt against subjectivity, focused their attention on objective psychology. Evreinov's Professor playfully compares the nervous system with a telephone, explaining his chart to the audience as follows:

This plan, ladies and gentlemen, represents, as no doubt you can see, a large heart, with the beginning of its main red artery. It makes from 55 to 125 pulsations a minute, and lies between the two lungs which fill and empty themselves from fourteen to eighteen times a minute. Here you see a little system of nerves, threads of nerves, pale in colour, and constantly agitated by vibration which we will compare to a telephone. Such is the scene in which 'the entity self' plays its part. But, ladies and gentlemen, science does not confine itself to explaining things.⁴⁴

Creating a Theatre of Dreams

Smith's set and costume design for Craig's production contributed to the idea that this monodrama was closer to the visual arts than the theatre. Undoubtedly, the heart represented by the glowing red space and the use of intense darkness, against which several faces resembling masks were displayed at different levels, evoked the atmosphere of performances by the Ballets Russes. Prior to her work on Evreinov's play in 1915, Smith had produced exquisite illustrations for Ellen Terry's book *The Russian Ballet*, which includes several androgynous images of Vladislav Nijinskii. Smith's drawings highlight the transgressive and dream-like quality of Russian modern dance, stage, and costume design, which Terry described as follows:

I think they rather transport us into a country which has no nationality and no barriers, the kingdom of dreams. The Russian ballet has transformed itself in a little over a decade because its guiding mind has been more than national. The musicians, artists, dancers and ballet-masters have depended more on invention than on reality. Many stories of widely different character have been drawn on for the new ballets, but all have been treated with an imagination which is neither the property of a nation nor the result of patriotism.⁴⁵

Smith's stage design for the production of the monodrama features the representation

of the male protagonist's inner thoughts. (According to Evreinov's instructions the inner monologue was supposed to occur only for half a second.) Smith's stage design brings to the fore the surreal quality of the play, which evokes the ephemeral atmosphere of Russian Ballet productions. In spite of Cicely Hamilton's insistence that the women's theatre had not been influenced by the Russian Ballet or by Reinhardt,⁴⁶ its productions of Evreinov's plays such as *The Theatre of the Soul* and *A Merry Death* are concerned with exploring subjectivity in a manner similar to that of the Russian Ballet and Reinhardt's productions. *The Theatre of the Soul* also invokes Voloshin's definition of modern drama as a theatre of dreams, as described in his 1913 article 'Theatre as Dreaming' (*Teatr kak snovidenie*). Both works appropriate important tenets of Bergson's notion of psychological time.

Evreinov's play talks about memory in terms similar to Bergson's description of duration, since the ending of the play suggests that the whole action might be interpreted as a nightmarish dream seen by a passenger on a train. In the final part of the play, the protagonist is woken by the Porter, who enters the stage with a lighted lantern and says: 'This is Everyone's Town. You have to get out here, sir. You change here.'⁴⁷

Evreinov describes the act of suicide as something surreal that might be forgotten by the protagonist, who might be acting in real life in an automatic manner like a zombie. The character M3 repeats the Porter's words robotically: 'Thank you, yes. I have to change here.'⁴⁸ Evreinov describes him as a person who behaves in a habitual way and performs everyday tasks without paying much attention to reality, as if his real consciousness was switched off during waking hours.

The concluding lines of the play are: 'He puts on his hat, takes his bag, and follows the Porter, yawning.'⁴⁹ The moment of awakening described in *The Theatre of the Soul* simultaneously presents different spatial and temporal realities: Evreinov's representation of the act of possible suicide illustrates Bergson's assumption that the external world is associated with the stable element, and the

individual with the fluid element. Evreinov's play advocates the necessity of simultaneity within artistic creation and calls for sensitivity to the confrontation of self and worlds, conveying his belief that this tension can be replaced. Evreinov's play highlights the sense of rapture associated with the confrontation between the inner and outer life: the sound of a cannon functions as an object signifying the rapture that indicates the modern subject's dislocation.

The Somatic Traumas of Modernity

Just as experimental film made visible a body never before visible – at once whole and in pieces – *The Theatre of the Soul* set out to negotiate the literal, post-traumatic, bodily disfigurements suffered in the Russo-Japanese War. According to numerous reports from Russian psychiatrists, the population's exposure to violence and traumatic events during that war and in the 1905 revolution resulted in fear becoming the dominant emotion with which they dealt. As Jacqueline Friedlander's PhD thesis on Russian psychiatry pertinently demonstrates, these experiences expanded Russian specialists' understanding of a traumatic event and its effects on human psychology, even compelling some to come into direct contact with the battlefield.⁵⁰ Many specialists came to the view that those not predisposed to nervous breakdown could become mentally ill as a result of overwhelming circumstances.

Evreinov's allusions to Freud and other famous psychiatrists in the beginning of the play reflect on the concerns related to public mental health. The aesthetic and philosophical tenets of Evreinov's play illustrate well that, despite of the prevalence of the modernist paradigms separating the mind from the body, the corporeal became metonymic with film's materiality, which shaped many literary works of the period featuring the subordination of plot to somatic and disjunctive rhythms. The image of the pulsating heart in Evreinov's play, and references to modern dance, point to the kinaesthetic ground of his modernism, based on the juxtaposition of mechanical repetition with

shock experience in the style of montage-like narratives.

Evreinov's exploration of somatic traumas of modernity in *The Theatre of the Soul* develops Bergson's ideas on memory and duration, as expressed in 'Concerning the Nature of Time'. Bergson writes:

There is no doubt that for us time is at first identical with the continuity of our inner life. What is this continuity? That of a flow or passage, but self-sufficient flow or passage, the flow or implying a thing that flows, and passing not presupposing states through which we pass; the *thing* and the *state* are only artificially taken snapshots of the transition; and this transition, all that is naturally experienced, is duration itself.⁵¹

The Indivisible Flux of Feeling

Bergson says that we pass the inner time to the time of things through perceiving the world inside and outside simultaneously. In a montage-like manner, Evreinov's monodrama illustrates the flow of time perceived as a simultaneous display of snapshots in transition. The use of the telephone in the play heightens the sense of artificiality of the analytical perception of duration that remains incomplete without the role of memory in the process of conscious duration. As Bergson puts it,

To each moment of our inner life there thus corresponds a moment of our body and of all environmental matter that is 'simultaneous' with it; this matter then seems to participate in our conscious duration.⁵²

This results, states Bergson, in our extended sense of duration to the whole physical world that enables us to see the universe as a single whole and grasp in an instantaneous perception various 'multiple events lying at different points of space'.⁵³

According to Christopher St John, Evreinov 'may be right in his assumption that the reflections of the soul are crude'.⁵⁴ This assessment reveals St John's understanding of the correlation between the use of montage in modern art and the dislocated body experience caused by violence and mass destruction. Evreinov's play visualizes the Bergsonian

philosophy of the unity of fragments of life that takes into account the positive data of science and asserts the possibility of intuitive metaphysics.

According to Maurice Bourgeois's 1911 article on the popularity of Bergson's ideas in Britain and in Europe, Bergson's philosophy epitomizes all leading principles of modern art and pervades the whole of contemporary thought. Bourgeois even observes some traces of musical Bergsonism in the work of Debussy, famous for its 'remarkable use of continuous melodies which express the indivisible flux of feeling – of "pure duration"'.⁵⁵

Evreinov's quasi-religious transposition of Bergsonism, which prompts within the spectators of his play the feeling of the Infinite, also stresses liberty, creation, and the spirituality of the soul. Viewed in this light, the title of the play might be seen as an allegorical depiction of the search for a new faith or belief directly encountered in intuition. Craig's use of violent and striking imagery in the production of Evreinov's *The Theatre of the Soul* heightens its revolutionary desire to relinquish intellectual discourse in favour of sensual immediacy and direct action.

Craig's rendition of Evreinov's protagonist suggests British avant-garde artists who presented themselves as displaced proponents of modernism and aggressively asserted their aesthetics and ideology in various journals, including the *New Age* and *BLAST*. Inevitably, the outbreak of the First World War sharpened the perception of modernity as an embodiment of social crisis, and Edith Craig was one of the first directors to bring to the attention of her audience the notion of fragmentation and disillusionment affecting both men and women. According to Anderson, 'in London between 1890 and 1914, "modernity" was the anxiety produced by the perceived collapse of "separate spheres" for men and women'. Anderson writes:

Modernity was defined between 1890 and 1914 through the urban space of the city of London, within the setting of a consumer culture, and through the performances of these shifting values, behaviour, and ideologies often portrayed in literary, art, and dramatic forms.⁵⁶

Expressing a Crisis of Identity

Anderson's description of the prevalent sense of crisis associated with the collapse of separate spheres for men and women enables us to understand the revival of monodrama both in Russia and Britain in the 1910s.

The genre of monodrama proved to be especially suitable for the expression of the crisis of identity and old values reinforced by experiences during the First World War. Anderson explains:

On August 4, 1914, England declared war on Germany, and as a result, the women's suffrage movement ended temporarily without an approved Parliamentary bill for women's suffrage. The advent of the First World War, however, did not bring an end to modernity or a middle-class, female politics. Although all suffrage societies diverted their politics from the vote to the war for the time being, they did not abandon their commitment to women's suffrage or their identity as Modern Women.⁵⁷

Undoubtedly, the vision of modernity as an alienating experience became more pronounced during the war, and gender stereotypes were being reassessed by many writers. In 1915, Christopher St John, for example, published her autobiographical novel *Hungerheart* as well as a translation of Evreinov's *Theatre of the Soul*. Both works explore the notions of the crisis of modern identity, advocating a Bergsonian concept of intuition against the quantification of time and the encroachment of science in all spheres of life.

Both authors appear to favour Image as the medium of intuition that enables the simultaneous presentation to the mind of two distinct and disparate sense impressions. Christopher St John might have read Evreinov's play through the lens of her own protagonist, Joanna Montolivet, who thinks that society imposes on women a role shaped by marriage and maternity, depriving them of a shared humanity. Christopher St John's book was published by Methuen, which also published D. H. Lawrence's *The Rainbow* in 1915: the latter was banned mainly because of its depiction of a lesbian affair.⁵⁸

David Kleinbard's understanding of D. H. Lawrence's *The Rainbow* as an expression of

ontological insecurity might be easily extended to Christopher St John's creative output. Kleinbard writes:

In *The Rainbow* Lawrence focuses upon patterns of feeling and thought that have not been adequately interpreted in psychological theory until recently. Will Brangwen most clearly exemplifies Lawrence's intuitive grasp of a mental condition that R. D. Laing explained extensively in his study of mental illness, *The Divided Self*. Laing labels this pervasive state of anxiety 'ontological insecurity'.⁵⁹

In *Hungerheart*, St John similarly explores issues of loss of identity.

In his commentary to St John's novel, David Trotter points out that the sameness and difference explored within the text circulates also between the text and its readers.⁶⁰ Just as St John's novel highlights irresolvable tension between sameness and difference, Evreinov's *The Theatre of the Soul* draws its audience's attention to the inner drama of a modern subject, advocating the view that perception, by analogy, is prior to language and in many ways superior to it, since language itself had become the vehicle of Victorian abstract moral values and pseudo-religious and imperialist sentiments.

With the aid of technology, Craig reinforces the message of Evreinov's play, which conceives poetic disposition as a momentary pose that presents the inner psychology of an artist; and such a creative moment can be compared to a drunkard's dream-like cognition of life. Yet Evreinov's propensity for direct action, his glorification of the notion of discontinuity, and his frank espousal of sensual immediacy subordinated to his radical urge to promote the eclipse of the realm of absolute values, were not to everyone's liking. Both Evreinov's and Craig's emphasis on the ecstatic, unmediated impact of the artistic experience and the intensity of emotion based on consciously cultivated artistic perceptiveness eschew plunging into the depths of an artist's psyche.

In spite of two successful performances in London, a third was cancelled. In her Introduction to her translation of *The Theatre of the Soul*, St John explains that a matinee performance was planned for 18 November 1915 at

the Alhambra, when Mr Charlot, the theatre's business manager, informed her that the play was unsuitable for an Alhambra audience and would not pass the Censor. She wrote that no official explanation was given to her or Edith Craig: they had heard that Mr Charlot found some graphic depictions of violence too offensive. St John observes:

We can hardly swallow the one [reason] conveyed to us indirectly, that it was the repulsive incident of a woman's wig being taken off and her bald head displayed, which caused Mr Charlot to withdraw the play!⁶¹

As a result of this act of censorship, the public were left to infer that the play was, as St John put it, 'indelicate and obscene'.

The 'Madness' of Modern Dance

St John says that no attempt was made to communicate the real reason for Charlot's conduct. It may have been due to some references in the play to abortion and violence, but also to Evreinov's reputation as a scandalous director. His 1909 production of Oscar Wilde's *Salome* was banned by Russian censors after the dress rehearsal: the play was defined as being too erotic, and disrespectful to religious images. Even so, the sympathetic depiction of adultery in Evreinov's *The Theatre of the Soul*, as well as references to abortion and the glorification of the cabaret singer and dancer, might have been seen as allegorical depictions of the crisis of modern society.

According to Judith Walkowitz, 'to a considerable degree, before and after the war, the story of dance in London is the story of domestication, of the incorporation of transnational cultural forms into a national culture'.⁶² Walkowitz denounces the scandalous trial of the American dancer Maude Allan, whose activities were seen as too dangerous by advocates of Victorian values. In Walkowitz's view, the 1918 trial and the disenfranchisement of the American 'flapper' suggest that the dance which liberated many women was perceived by the traditionalists 'as a vehicle for shifting cultural and political identifications of gender and the national body in the early twentieth century'.⁶³

In light of the controversy that was often associated with erotic dancing both in Russia and in Britain in the 1910s, Evreinov's depiction of the mischievous cabaret singer and dancer who sings about making love to a stranger on the train may have been seen as subversive. The song inserted into Evreinov's play *celebrates* the carefree singer and dancer who searched for the man who threw himself into her arms in the darkness of the train. It makes fun of the popular belief that modern dance and madness were interchangeable. Evreinov's play glorifies anarchy and the desire to escape the traumatic somatic experience of modern times through theatre and music.

What might well be seen as censorship of *The Theatre of the Soul* is possibly one of the first signs of the cultural backlash against advanced thought and cultural experimentalism in Britain at the beginning of the twentieth century. In 1918, during Maude Allan's trial, it became obvious that the wartime hysteria of ultra right-wing conservatives and the stories about moral perverts and internal enemies were further blows to the spirit of cosmopolitan and liberal creativity that Edith Craig, St John, and their colleagues were trying to promote.

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