

Tibor Várszegi

Data on “A Universal History of Chance”. The Josef Nadj Troupe and Wind in the Sack

Absztrakt

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Szerző

Tibor Várszegi Professor at the Szolnok College and the Szent István University, leader of the Department of Applied Arts Studies. He is the actor and director of his own theatrical company. Founder of the contemporary performing arts magazine *Ellenfény / Back-light*, and responsible publisher of it till 2008. He is one of the general editors and responsible publisher of the *Eső / Rain* literary magazine. He founded a theatre in Jászberény in 2009. varszegitibor@invitel.hu

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For Ödön Nagy, Csikszereda/Miercurea Ciuc,
Transylvania, Romania

The title-page of the programme of Lausanne’s Théâtre Vidy was almost completely blank. On it was merely the title of the performance and the name of the troupe, written in minute, scarcely legible letters, and a number, which could be easily made out from afar, denoting the serial number given by the theatre to performances that season. Josef Nadj’s diptychon entitled “Wind in the Sack”, the first part of which bears the title “Anteroom”, was given the serial number 9 in the 1997/98 season, although this number could serve just as well as the title of the work, which is based on texts by Dante and Beckett. Naturally, it could be attributed merely to chance that the number featuring on the programme brochure and the number representing the deepest layers of the performance were the same. But those who have long followed the works of Josef Nadj and his troupe would have noticed similar chance occurrences in their earlier works as well. And not just one. Hence, after a time such observers are prone to think that these events are really not chance occurrences after all, although neither the director, nor the troupe ever meant to do anything to create such coincidences.

Earlier, on the pretext of their work “The Anatomy of the Beast”, I attempted to formulate these observations of mine, and in my piece on the “The Habakuk Commentaries” I originally started with a description of the chance events I discovered in it. But when noting them down I had to admit failure in each case, because I was unable to formulate my feelings as concepts, and I was incapable of penetrating the chance phenomena taken together. But the fact that almost from the outset I was unable to free myself of the detection of chance events in connection with Josef Nadj’s performances indicated to me that I should not dodge the problem. Moreover, in “Anteroom” all this presents itself so graphically that I was forced to make an attempt at capturing it.

I can assert with absolute accuracy that chance events have a significance in creative art similar to that of traditional dramaturgy, and that they cannot be ignored when the works are interpreted. By chance events, to begin with I understand the coincidence of non-intentional phenomena with pre-planned, conceived and rehearsed events. First I shall use this concept in its everyday sense, when factors not taken into account during creation broaden the performance’s potential for interpretation, whether or not the creators are aware of this, or whether or not they speak of it.

I identified the performance-building role of chance events in the perspective of a horizon far beyond aesthetics when I regarded the work as not merely a final product – in other words, when I perceived not the version of the work seen in the premiere, which may be understood as final. If I had only done so, I could merely have given an interpretation of the content (perhaps an analysis), accompanied by descriptions of a few technical features. Therefore, following the interpretation of the content, I attempt to describe that invisible frame which I saw in a distant perspective, in which, in my view, the content may be related and explained. I wish to prove that the language of movement and the content conveyed by it rest on a base which stretches back to phenomena predating their appearance in aesthetics or even the emergence of movement. The story merely makes something visible, and in this way only accompanies the performance and is not its substance. My purpose is nothing other than to survey performances and the creative mechanisms which bring them about from a distant perspective – from the kind of distance from which theatre performances are not usually viewed.

I love life so much... ^[1]

The countenances lose their character, so that we direct our attention to the spirituality of the figures. Just the bodies are visible, which are explained by their surroundings. This is the case not merely inside the auditorium, but outside it, too. Not just in the theatre proper, but in the theatre foyer – the anteroom – installations by Josef Nadj are on display. In each of the installations a human-sized doll can be seen, the head of which has been replaced by a stuffed sack. One is sitting in front of a long table like a chess-player, and is watching wooden branches growing out of the table. Another is staring out from among a dozen logs sharpened to the thinness of pencil tips; a third is sitting on a chair bent forward and looking at himself in a small, spiral-shaped mirror placed among pebbles scattered on the earth, while carrying on his shoulders several blocks on stone of enormous weight.

The concealment of the faces continues in the performance. In almost every scene we can notice an image when the figures' faces are deliberately covered. On a number of occasions the performers use their own hands for this purpose, at other times facelessness results from use of costume or the set. For several scenes on end one figure stands next to a wall with his back to the audience, with his head buried somewhere in the wall itself. In one scene a girl covers her face with hair that falls down to her knees, while her companion endeavours to bring her to life in their joint dance. Later there appears a person with a duck's head (or a duck with a human's body), near which a girl removes her palms from her face, so that she can show her love by feeding it.

Like two Shiva deities, four performers arrive at the front of the stage. We cannot see the men's faces, because their heads are bent down almost to their knees, so that the girls can lie on their backs. In this way the girls' faces appear before us with their heads down, which thus turned lose their original characters and appear completely alike to the viewer. Each Shiva figure, with its one

head, two legs and four arms, moves nearer, then these arms each take a yellow pebble from pans attached to the girls' stomachs. The stones are placed next to each other in the air first horizontally and then vertically; finally, all eight pieces are placed on the earth as a single head. Into the inside of the head a ninth element is placed, a white ball, the brain, which has been left on the stage in the course of an earlier scene. In this way the deities destroying and renewing life create a new face before our eyes.

The figures stripped of their faces recall figures of epochs and cultures far removed from one another. Here we can meet not only a merchant from the Renaissance, a barefooted philosopher and a Macedonian prince, but hunchbacks and dwarves of all ages, Beckett's man in the street recalling our own times, along with Mercier, Camier, and Vladimir and Estragon, too.

All of them are inhabitants of Hell, whom the Black Angel of Hell also visits. His wings are borrowed from the umbrellas of Beckett's stories, and with his long, smoky farts gives his blessing to the existence of these figures in Hell. Following the prayer of the hunchbacks – when bent towards each other's humps, the hunchbacks are chattering away –, a woman appears with legs on her head, lacking only that part of the body necessary for the consummation of love. Giving the impression of making love, a man lying on his back slides with her into the room, and while sitting on the man's stomach, the woman showers him with unequivocal signs of her affection. The two bodies finally become one, when at the end of the scene the man places the woman on her back, and when they depart, seen from behind, they appear as a single body. The satisfaction of non-physical love is followed by Beatrice's dance with a stuffed wolf, which is probably a wolf symbolizing protection, evil and lust at one and the same time, a creature which Dante also encountered on the road leading to the Inferno.

Yet what we see is not the Inferno, not even when motifs taken from Dante or Beckett suggest it. The performance lacks many elements of the Inferno, the colours, smells and details of which we can get to know from Dante. Bianca Ursulov, the costume designer, deliberately avoided using colours characteristic of the Inferno, instead seeing as her task the parading of the earthly colours of different epochs through use of pictures by Magritte and Bosch, saying that these figures are not inhabitants of Hell, although they could be. ^[2]

The suite-like story does not replicate Hell: the protagonists merely toy with the thought of Hell, as Dante did "in order that you understand the Good". ^[3] The protagonists are looking for a story, since the fact of a story is Good itself, since the story is the certainty of existence, as Beckett sometimes craved: "to hear a story, tell a story, in the true sense of the words, the word hear, the word tell, the word story, I have high hopes, a little story, with living creatures coming and going on a habitable earth crammed with the dead, a brief story, with night and day coming and going above, if they stretch that far, the words that remain, and I've high hopes, I give you my word". ^[4]

While in literature a word represents the body of a thought, in theatre an actor does so. The body of the thought is created from the body of the actor, whose spirited play on the other hand creates the world in which thought receives a body. Playing Sin does as much as writing about it, and if it

is written in order to understand Good, then it can be played for similar reasons. The representation of sin in the theatre is one of the most important conditions for the road leading to salvation. The essence of the content of the first part of the work "Wind in the Sack" is this very idea.

The Underworld has had a place in human consciousness since time immemorial, and there have also been those who have sought the possibility of a way out (for example, Kafka), according to whom the little bird was born in order to find a cage for itself. Beckett, another extremist when it comes to the decline of existence, frames sentences which, in the opinion of those calling him an author of the absurd, are unworthy of him. "There's a way out there, there's a way out somewhere, the rest would come, the other words, sooner or later, and the power to get there, and pass out, and see the beauties of the skies, and see the stars again." [5]

The stars mentioned by Beckett could also be the stars which Dante mentions in the last lines of all three parts of the Divine Comedy. The last lines of the songs of Hell, Purgatory and Paradise likewise lead to the stars, where Love resides, "The Love which moves the sun and the other stars". [6]

It is surely not intentional, but the coincidence is nevertheless remarkable: where the cantos of Dante's work end Josef Nadj's performance begins. At the very beginning the stage is completely dark, just nine small stars are glowing on the earth. We hardly notice the silhouettes of three figures immobilized in darkness at the back. In one of the doors there appears a figure which is neither a man, nor an insect-like creature, but which recalls, at one and the same time, the Greek gods and Beelzebub, the mediaeval insect which brought destruction. It collects up the lit stars and puts them in the front pocket of its semi-transparent clothing; then, together with all the light, departs. At once the performance acquires a cosmic perspective, and leads us not ahead but backwards, to the possibility of elevation to the perspective of light and stars. From the firmament we proceed towards the Gates of Hell, where three guards stand watch. There is still no human motion, only through the planks of the entrance transformed into a room can the continual movement of a thick beam of light be seen in the background. In this way the light interprets the space. Accordingly, it does not become an illustration of the space, its function is not merely to serve more exact observation on the part of the audience in following the story at the outset, but becomes an organic part of a world. Its importance lies not in its effect, but in its interpretation. But this moving light is too much for the guards: they catch it and shut it in a pit, announcing that this world has no need of cosmic perspectives, and from the moment of the theft of the light onwards only the internal lights of Hell prevail in the later parts of the performance. Since, however, all this takes place under the eyes of the audience, the hellish events can be shifted to a cosmic perspective. Because of this, the lighting designed by Nicolas Rémi plays one of the most crucial roles in the interpretation of the performance. [7]

This cosmic perspective ensures a continuous overview of the occurrence of the episodes. Although after these the actors and actresses exclusively show the events in Hell, the initial

perspective continuously creates our way of seeing vis-à-vis the universe. In this medium the philosopher, for example, is being interpreted as someone who talks a lot, but spells out nothing, and in the last scene Mercier and Camier wall him up in a pyramid. From this perspective we can survey Vladimir, who yearns for a single leaf at the top of a dry tree growing out of Estragon's shoes, because it is the very one which is missing from his collection. In this world Mercier arranges for himself an independent and secluded world in his own cupboard, and Camier, from the top of the cupboard, attempts to get in contact with him. ^[8] The majority of the protagonists in the various scenes can be traced back to the figures of Mercier and Camier, and Vladimir and Estragon, which the dramaturgy of the performance achieves through the alternating distribution of roles.

The story presenting a crucifixion in the last scene but one requires that we think back to the first scene. Mercier and Camier, or rather Vladimir and Estragon, lift puppets concealed in sacks off the ground, from one of the side openings of the stage. Since they are wearing clothing similar to that of the puppets, in the half-light of Hell they can be easily confused with the puppets not only in their motionlessness, but also in the course of the action. One of them lifts a long slat from the planks covering the stage and fixes it to a vertical piece to make a cross, on which one of the puppets is suspended by the neck. Into this image arrive the dwarves, only the top parts of whom are living flesh: body-parts made from sacks serve as their legs. At the end of their dance they take off the puppet's shoes, and out of his trousers pours the dust which gives his body its form. As the dust pours into a cone under one of the possible Vladimirs or Estragons, so the material that up until then held him together is used up. In the end nothing remains in the sack, only that which cannot be given material form, namely the souls and spirits of our Vladimir and Estragon, which we can still remember, since during the course of the action in previous scenes we got to know them well from the auditorium. Up until this scene only their frail lives received emphasis. The lack of a body immediately illustrates the magnitude of the soul and the spirit, as well as its power in cosmic perspectives. The sack-covered heads of the figures seen in the theatre foyer and the sack-like creatures in the performance make the spirit visible in the same way as wind-sacks installed at airports make the wind visible, the wind which cannot be seen with the eye.

The dust appeared with the first emergence of Mercier and Camier. In the fourth scene Mercier unexpectedly emerges from a box, which a few scenes later turns into a cupboard. A long rope stretches out of the box, the end of which goes into Camier's mouth. Their dance with the rope at the same time conveys both their reliance on each other and their visible freedom. Their mortality is represented not only by the rope, but also by the dust from their bodies from behind their trouser legs, which is collected up on a kerchief. The kerchief is knotted up into a small bundle, which for a while is swallowed by the earth. A few scenes later, however, this small bundle, together with eight others, again comes to light, when the two girls move them from one side of the stage to the other.

Mercier's and Camier's rope is the same rope which the philosopher pulls behind him in the second scene, yet his loneliness is even more grotesque than that of those who have gone before.

Namely, when he pulls one end of the rope on the door on the left side, he himself disappears behind the wall, and from the auditorium we can observe only the movement of the rope going forwards. Before the rope comes to an end, the philosopher again appears as, holding his own end of it in his mouth, he follows the rope moving on ahead of him. He himself did not understand how things would end when he started its movement. He finds it strange that an idea started by him should end at him. In another scene the very same philosopher resorts to another method, when, squatting on the top of the cupboard, he shits out the very same rope. Snaking out of his backside it descends to come together in a shapely figure on the earth. When he discovers that his shitting of the word substituted for by rope is in vain, he quickly retracts it, and, as though it had never happened, the thought-excrement suddenly goes back to where it came from.

The whole of the hellish story is played out in an anteroom. There, the characteristic furniture of this has a role: a cupboard, a mirror and a folding table. The stage picture is therefore almost entirely empty. But, as we have been accustomed to in Josef Nadj's performances, from this room exit is not only possible through doors: one of the doors conceals in itself another door, the window is shaped like a door, the earth opens in a number of places, and the walls also comprise entrances and exits. In the first part of the "Wind in the Sack" work the walls scarcely move. Only one of the furthest walls opens, and behind the back wall of the room a wall rises which is a good deal higher than it. In the second part, as expected, the complete view extends to this wall, when we can get to know more exactly the kind of room we have entered in Josef Nadj's (theatre-)house. Certainly, Paradise will follow, but we still cannot know how this will be furnished. We might have guessed something from the earlier work "The Habakuk Commentaries", as there a similar picture is outlined in the wake of texts by Borges. Borges imagined Paradise to be an enormous library, in which similarly to a labyrinth, it is difficult to find one's way. Accordingly, there no kind of knowledge gives a feeling of certainty. The anteroom is a necessary station on the path leading to the big room, just as the committing and the confessing of sin is a condition for salvation. It is exactly the same as the slightly-modified Beckett text put to music by Félix Lajkó and sung by the Chorus in Josef Nadj's 1994 Budapest production: "I love life so much, the humility of every day, the innocent pleasures and even sin itself, which enables us to bring about our own salvation." [9]

Just slowly, slowly...

Gradually we become aware of the fact that in this work almost everything is nine. There are nine stars, which the deity gathers up at the beginning of the performance. There are nine bundles of dust which the two girls move around on the ground in the course of the work. The head-figure, assembled by the Shiva figures consisting of two bodies, consists of nine parts. After the performance I learnt that the space for the action on the stage was 9 x 9 metres. The size of the wall rising up at the back was 4.5 x 4.5 metres, while the height of the wall of the entrance hall was 2.25 metres. The former is half, and the latter a quarter, of nine, and in this way the ground and the planes of the two walls perpendicularly divide the space into three equal parts. If we draw a

line horizontally to each of these planes and supplement them with perpendicular lines which divide the space into three equal parts every three meters, then we obtain a net in which these six lines mark out exactly nine points in the space where these cross each other. The importance of these nine intersections has a role later on, in the course of what happens subsequently.

After all this the question automatically arises: Why is so important a role deliberately given to the number nine in the work? And, if the figure nine occurs so systematically in the work, why is the number of performers merely eight? Nine performers would have reinforced the significance of nine as a number, and to increase the number of performers by one would not have been particularly difficult in a story full of metamorphoses. We may justly suppose that this connection could not have been accidental. As I see it, whether accidental or not the eight performers fundamentally determine the understanding of this work built on the number nine.

While I could formulate the content of the work at the end of the performance after repeated acquaintance with the figures in the installations in the foyer of the theatre, I brooded for many weeks over the role played in the work by the figure nine, since the work required that I should tarry over the nature of this in a slow and patient way.

The world of “Anteroom” is built up on the number nine. Just as in the majority of the ancient cosmologies a role was assigned to a number, so too the theatre world created by Josef Nadj can be traced back to a single number, namely nine.^[10] In other words, as a director he assigns roles not only to actors and actresses, but also to numbers, which in the creative work take precedence over theatre work. In this way the joint theatre work can aim only at the peopling of a world that has been invented. In “Anteroom” the order based on nine is permanence and the theatrical tasks are represented by change and movement taken in the philosophical sense (also). The recurrence of the number nine creates the profundity of the work, creating for it the invisible pillar on which the theatrical creation is built. This fixed pillar cannot suffer harm despite actors and actresses with different aspirations, because they merely people a world already created. Thus, theatrical work can merely influence content, and not the invisible frame on which the joint creative theatre work is based.

In the time before the modern age men always traced the world in which they lived back to a number of some sort. The early Chinese, Egyptian, Mesopotamian and Hindu cosmologies all found the nature and essence of things in a number. These were always single-digit numbers, signs of which we can discover not only in cosmological descriptions by philosophers, but also in fine art and in music. Nine as a decisive number appears as early as Plato’s *Timaeus*, which contains one of the earliest – and therefore perhaps one of the most credible – descriptions of the lost culture of Atlantis. The arithmetic system also taken over by the Pythagoreans is explained by *Timaeus*. From him we know that the beginning of the populating of the world was represented by division of the whole into different intervals. Through the division of the whole “[w]here there were intervals of $3/2$ and of $4/3$ and of $9/8$, made by the connecting terms in the former intervals, he filled up all the intervals of $4/3$ with the interval of $9/8$ [...]”^[11] The whole represented

immobility, while movement was caused by the 9/8 asymmetrical difference. On a principle similar to this, the unmoving mover orders the world in other cosmological theories too, the difference being that those doing the explaining find different numbers for the pattern of this ordering. ^[12]

While absurdity in the world is the only principle that can be found for the working of it, the fine arts can of their own accord select a theory, since their purpose is not the imitation of a world, but the creation of it. The separation of the “technical” parts of art from the “objective” parts of reality of course presupposes the artistic recognition of subjectivity, and accordingly this subjectivity becomes one of the most important factors in art works. During the history of the fine arts, depictions of human beings have never accorded with the proportions of the real-life biological beings. This was not because artists did not know how to work out, for example, the ratio between the actual length of a nose and the actual length of a face or between the actual length of a face and the actual length of a human body, but because in drawing they did not endeavour to imitate the real world. In classical Greek culture, for example, the face was one-seventh of the whole body. The nine ratio mentioned by Plato came again to European culture only during the Late Hellenistic age from somewhere in the East, probably from Arab cultures or cultures even further afield, through Byzantine mediation. However, as it turned out in the wake of Professor Panofsky’s art history – archaeology investigations, it predominated their right up until the 17th and 18th centuries. ^[13] The division of the body into nine facial lengths began to appear in European pictures, frescos and windows in Church buildings at the very time that the world of the spirit was being given a greater emphasis than earlier, when thinking was moving from the concrete towards the abstract. This was when the face became the centre of intellectual expression, when the face became a unit of measurement of this expression. The difference between the total length of the body and the length of the head again created the 9/8 ratio in this emphatic age of the human spirit, where the number 9 represented the entire length of the body and where the number eight represented the length of the body minus the length of the head.

The appearance, conveying spirituality in an abstract way, of the faces in “Anteroom” and in the foyer is further reinforced by a tradition in art history going back several centuries. The cosmology of a theatre world that can be traced back to the number nine is similar to those which try to explain the harmony of the world. Common to these cosmologies is that in addition to arithmetic factors they also find musical analogies with which they can bring together all parts of the Cosmos. Music is just as much an *a priori* factor as numbers are, and the intervals appearing in music produced orderings similar to the consistency observed in numbers. By dividing the lengths of a string using a procedure mentioned by Plato, the intervals are divided, and by means of the variations note systems are formed depending on the number regarded as the dividing factor. The 9/8 ratio in the fine arts accords with the music ratio of the Pythagoreans, who established the distance between two neighbouring full notes according to the ratio between these two numbers. This ratio survived in the modal scale of the Middle Ages, although it did not appear so systematically between each note as it had earlier. ^[14]

In the world of “Anteroom”, musicality does not first and foremost refer to the accompanying music composed by István Kovács-Tickmayer. Perceptions arrived at in the wake of music history and art history merely mean that the place from where story and movement begin conceals their common root. Movement is music too. They have one root, and this root is the same as that discovered by the unmoving mover director. After this it is necessary only that, preserving his immobility, he should populate, through his directing, the world he has discovered.

The cosmological view in “Anteroom” discloses the image of an invisible world which accompanies the content borne by the story to a horizon which cannot be formulated but which nevertheless can be experienced. It was not by chance that the ratio nine stood at the heart of mediaeval depictions. The face signified the dwelling-place of the spirit, but nine even today represents spirituality, divine love and fulfilment in Oriental numerology. Nine, as the highest natural single-digit number, is for man the signifier of the province yet to be seen into, falling the furthest from the figure one, which refers at one and the same time to earth, the individual, identity, to the personal well-springs of the individual and to solitude. Nine signifies depth as opposed to surface signified by the one. Nine is the anti-ego and love. Nine is mercy, forgiveness, understanding and selflessness. Nine gladdens and makes happy. Without nine we cannot see beyond ourselves, and without it we cannot perceive the order of the Cosmos either. ^[15] In a world built on nine, whatever happens we can progress towards areas which cannot be seen into and which cannot be known, towards the immaterial province of the spirit, towards the realms of the infinite which can never be comprehensible to finite human beings.

As Dante built the structure of the Divine Comedy, which points in a cosmic direction, on the figure nine, so too can be recognized the role of the number nine in “Anteroom”. Just as Dante’s Hell, Purgatory and Paradise all had nine circles, so too in Josef Nadj’s “Anteroom” nine serves as a unit of measurement for the appearance not only of the physical, but also of the spiritual world.

Just as the nine circles of Dante's Hell comprise a necessary starting-point on the path leading to Purgatory and Paradise, similarly inescapable is the hell of the anteroom in the Cosmic house.

Nine scarcely compatible pictures

Like the Hungarian writer Péter Nadas, if I happen to notice something in a picture, afterwards I am unable to see it as something different even if it is not actually delineated. ^[16] The photographer of the Théâtre Vidy took a photograph at one of the rehearsals, on which after the premiere I immediately discovered the number nine, and later, with the aid of this discovery, a face also. Consequently, this invisible face, namely the powerful presence of an invisible human spirit seen by the photographer, afterwards determined my relationship to the entire work.

During the course of the photographed scene, actors playing Mercier and Camier are collecting grains from the ground with two sticks of differing lengths, in the same way that park attendants preserve the tidiness of parks with their sticks. Each grain that they collect they spear on a small spike projecting from the end of their sticks, while in the hands of their owners these sticks draw various straight lines in space. Afterwards they put the dust – perhaps once the component part of bodies – in an inner pocket of their jackets, and set off in search of new prey. The dance of these two is accompanied by a separate dance of the sticks, during which figures of various geometrical patterns are created from the intersections of the bodies and sticks. The lines created by the continuous movement accompanying the dust collection make the possible force-lines of the space visible, in the same way that the windbag makes perceptible the inflow of air, which cannot be seen by the eye. The figures created in this way are sometimes easy to recognize; at other times they fall so far from one another that because of the limits of the human mind we are incapable of recognizing the order among them, and already do not see them as patterns. But because it sometimes happens like this we cannot say that the undiscovered figures do not exist, merely that we do not recognize their possible geometrical regularity.

The photographer at the theatre in Lausanne managed to capture just such a moment when these figures were compressed into a very regular system. If we draw lines parallel with the sticks through the thighs and the lower parts of the shins, similarly to the lines drawn on the picture of the stage we obtain a regular rectangle stood on one of its corners. The lines of the figure so created likewise intersect at nine points, in line with the laws of composition based on the figure nine. This ordering of the two figures is not a consequence of intentional choreography, and the capturing of a moment is also a chance result. But once we become aware of the deeper structure of the performance based on the figure nine, can this phenomenon escape our attention, when, moreover, the scene's intention is to call attention to the identical laws governing the microcosmos of a speck of dust and the macrocosmos of lines created by the joint play of sticks and bodies, and pointing towards the universe?

Accident representing beauty is further increased by another two surprising coincidences. The

regular geometric form stood on a corner that is depicted on the photograph also served as a pattern for portraits during the Middle Ages. Pictures of faces were made with a pair of compasses and a ruler at the time that bodies were depicted according to the 9/8 ratio. ^[17] The nine tiny intersections found on the photograph in themselves denote the dominance of spiritual areas, and the recognition of these is only increased by knowledge of the pattern used for facial depiction. When, on the basis of all this, I assert that the work is about the nature of the ultimate boundaries of the human spirit, then my insight is further refined by the chancelike nature of this special accordance, and similarly to the sacks substituting the dolls' heads in the foyer, I see in the photograph the presence of a spirit without a face.

The geometric figure drawn on the photograph accords with a figure used as a pattern in Hindu numerology. In the East numbers from one to nine are prescribed for these points of intersection, because for people there the world traced back to these nine numbers comprises the complete world. In Hindu numerology they draw the diagonals of the rhombus. If we draw the diagonals on the photograph taken during the performance the number of points does not increase, but the number of lines rises to eight. Thus the earlier 9/8 ratio is again produced. The two diagonals create a link between all the possible points, and in this way the figure fully forms an image of the completeness of the world.

In the work, the number of performers is eight. There are six men and two women. Just as in the rectangle completeness is created by the links established by the diagonals, so the completeness of the world of "Anteroom" is created by the two women. ^[18] While the number nine represents the invisible spiritual field, the number eight represents the transubstantiation of the material into the spiritual field. The number nine conveys spirit which is already pure, while the number eight, however, conceals in itself the actor who in the theatre transubstantiates his body in order to make the spirit visible. In the work as a whole the 9/8 ratio expresses the ratio between the spirit and the number of actors necessary for presenting the spirit. Accordingly, with its conjuring up of the human face, "Anteroom" is a place for fulfilment of the spirit, as the actors present it in front of our very eyes. Attributable to this is the fact that when I think back to the work, I see only one face, the face of Spirit, the face of Love.

What the mind spews out is never wasted

It may not be by chance (!) that up until now not many have dealt with the nature of chance. Michael Polanyi is one of the few to have done so. In his book *Personal Knowledge*, after an investigation of the laws of physics and mathematics, he asserts that chance happenings are not rooted in natural laws, but are brought about by human activity. He holds that chance is merely a concept which man has created. Nature has no need to make a difference between chance and non-chance phenomena, therefore it splits into two only for consciousness reflecting on itself. Man invents this word when he recognizes any kind of pattern in nature. Namely, recognition of an ordered pattern is a condition for the accidental, and he claims that the concept of events

directed by chance refers to patterns ordered in this way, patterns which can be simulated only by chance. ^[19] Since we are human beings, we inevitably see the universe from the standpoint which is ourselves, and we work out the patterns in the natural sciences according to our own recognitions. Using examples, he proves at length that even the physicist most fanatically striving for objectivity is unable to eliminate the human factor; consequently, in his view there can only be realizations about oneself. Therefore I was always lost when I stood before the normative, objectivity-orientated value-system of art criticism, because if there is anything that is not objective, it is art, and it is meaningless to bring together its subjective nature with an objective standard.

In his paper “Cosmic Eye” Gábor Bódy, a Hungarian film director who died young, gives an account of an experiment in which he also drew an aesthetic conclusion concerning chance. He likewise used lines to arrive at the nature of chance. He asked his experimental subjects to draw straight lines on a piece of paper in such a way that they exhibited no regularity whatever. The experiment established that laymen were able to draw 3-5 such lines, while architects, graphic artists and designers were able to manage 15-20. More than this was impossible, since every additional line necessarily exhibited regularity with one of the lines already drawn – in other words, man is incapable of drawing chance lines spontaneously. All this means that according to the nature of existence man after a time strives for regularity when he is not aware of this. “Not only does absolute chance movement exist, but its image is much more convincing than that of human endeavour ‘variegated’ by rules.” ^[20] The less one is aware of the “rules” of form, the less one is capable of drawing lines not showing regularity with each other. In the case of the laymen the role of chance was much greater, but the experiment to eliminate chance can be also only restricted to those who spend their daily lives among lines. Consequently, chance happenings stand at the limits of human ability to know and to comprehend, on the edge of that realm – like the meaning of the number nine – which man is still just capable of seeing into. According to Bódy, chance as an aesthetic category becomes a metaphor for the unknown, as we discover in his films and his writings on film art. The phenomenon precisely corresponds with that which has long preoccupied Josef Nadj. In my article on “The Habakuk Commentaries”, I linked this with the deducing of the inaccessibility of certainties, and I maintain this concerning “Anteroom” too, by describing the cosmology of a world composed on the number nine.

When in Mercier’s and Camier’s joint dance no geometric pattern could be identified from the lines of the sticks falling far from each other, we could not even talk of the possibility of them settling into any kind of recognizable form. It was arranged into a regular pattern by the ability (recognized by Polanyi) of the human mind to create patterns, and this established the image based on nine points, and my vision which grew out of it. The director led my look so that with the establishment of the pattern, with the joint emergence of the microcosmos and the macrocosmos, I could recognize the nature of his world. And with the aid of my complete developed pattern of the world I am also able to recognize other connections, which do not feature in the creative intention, although their appearance may actually be called chance, insofar

as in such a world chance things are generally possible. Since I used the same pattern for the recognition of non-intentional actions, as in creating a connection between intended phenomena, I cannot regard the recognition of the connection between the parallel lines drawn on the picture and the action as chance.

If I did not rank recognition among non-chance phenomena, I shall have to mention how a chance action could occur in such a coherent way. It could have resulted from the very coherence of the created world which came into being in the realm of wholeness by virtue of the fact that the creator reached down to the common root embracing the entire range of qualities from which the cosmology of his world can be deduced. Naturally, in the course of creation a motionless wholeness can easily be mistaken for the movement investing it. But it very much belongs to the essence of art that the artist utilizing his sensory organs sits on the net of wholeness and remains there. And if he does not move from there, it will be only the function of the poetic intention as to what he happens to do on the stage. This is how I explain the fact that patterns can be created regardless of the creative intention, which can be seen as chance-like in the absence of recognition of the scheme. This is why I bring the number nine, featuring on the programme brochure, into connection with the essence of the performance, ^[21] and this is why I call the lights of those tiny lamps chance-creating beauty, the lights which I perceived also as stars when I sat by the wall next to the stairs of the auditorium during the first scene.

Finding the net of wholeness and keeping it is not merely an intellectual task, but rather requires sensitivity. Perhaps it is not even possible to identify it without the intuitions and personal insights of a creative person – all the more so because man is not merely a thinker, but also a being of feelings. Muses – who by mere chance were also nine in number – performed a similar task. The Muses embodied the state of inspiration, a mechanism of the brain which has not been tackled yet by either aesthetics, philosophy or art or the psychology of art. ^[22] In its changing language the same phenomenon is described by today's physics, when it regards insights and intuition as the tuning of the brain's biological and psychic waves onto the invisible waves of cosmic phenomena. It argues that in these cases "the brain's alpha waves with their 7-10 Hz resonance precisely correspond to the resonance number of the electromagnetic waves emerging between the earth's surface and its ionosphere". ^[23] A new discipline, cosmobiopsychology, states that alpha waves emerge particularly at the interface of dreaming and consciousness, or in cases where for some reason the resonance number of the brain's waves decreases to 7-10 Hz, resulting in a particularly receptive and imaginative state of mind. This phenomenon may account for the state of inspiration as well, whether we call this the presence of Muses or the science of bioelectricity. All this is worth discussing in such detail because it represents knowledge that can explain the sensitivity of the creative artist. To sit on the cosmic net of these waves means to get inspiration, the ability to sit represents the faculty over which the creative artist disposes. Thus, inspiration is a kind of knowledge which is, by its very nature, individual and subjective, which is personal and an attribute of creative sensitivity. The intuitive ability is the most important attribute in the fine arts.

Among others Arthur C. Danto points out that interpretations of works of art in the philosophy of

art over the last two thousand years and more, and in aesthetics emerging on the basis of this, have overlooked the role of intuition and insight played in works of art, or have underestimated their importance. In accordance with Plato's teaching, art has been regarded as the virtual world of reality followed by rationalization into concepts, so that the "mind" could conquer the realm of feelings step by step, ^[24] thus excluding one of the most important factors in works of art. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, this Apollonian approach replacing the Dionysian was called aesthetic Socraticism by Nietzsche, ^[25] and recently the literature accumulated on the basis of this was described as Aristotelian garbage by Richard Rorty. ^[26] In connection with theatre art it is perhaps Philip Auslander who reminds us most forcefully, by referring to Derrida, of how important a role the unconscious plays in creation. ^[27]

It is worth remembering all this in connection with Josef Nadj's performances, because this realization might explain one very important characteristic of his creative work. He turns attention to a phenomenon which would in the case of interpreting a depicted world escape our attention, but he elevates it into one of the most important performance-building factors. Josef Nadj primarily has an intuitive feel for the world, but not merely the one in which he is living, but also the one he is creating, and this is what makes him an artist in the first place. A part of his being as an artist is the thing on the basis of which he imagines, thinks out and then builds up, with his colleagues, this world, and also the way he experiences it intellectually and physically on the stage with his associates.

He does not instruct his actors as we would envisage on the basis of some traditional theatre work, he does not give detailed, precisely circumscribed, meticulous instructions. He does not describe or explain excessively a scene in terms of what he would like to see, nor does he know the practice of playing it himself for the actors' benefit. This is not a method of creating, it is just his personality. Instead of words he thinks in images, music and movement. In connection with an individual scene he articulates merely the widest frame, the thing which he had intuitive insight into and which he had conceived mostly in images beforehand. He does not give clear-cut instructions even when he has a definite idea of a scene; at other times he has no need to work out a thorough plan for the course of the scene. He remains on the net of wholeness, and is waiting for his associates to get a feel of it as well. He aims to provide a creative atmosphere for the rehearsals which could then give substance to those invisible pillars which his intuitions created and which in line with the nature of the net of wholeness gets stronger, ever stronger, even when he gets into a creative dispute with his associates. Remaining on the net is what leads the company to the premiere. For this reason he apparently lets the rehearsals go their own way, expecting his actors and dancers merely to experience the same thing and thereby create their own artistic world autonomously. This is why he likes to work with likeminded, personally chosen associates, who are also able to tune into that invisible net which constitutes the imperceptible basis of their work. With those colleagues who, sitting on the net, sense the invisible spirit and see on the basis of it.

Mercier, Camier, Vladimir and Estragon see less than the actors playing them. Not in an identical way, but they still see more than those whom they just happen to play. The Merciers and Camiers

sitting in the auditorium, the Vladimirs and Estragons stuck in their seats demonstrate the possibility of seeing, if they also want it. They can think through or check what kind of world the undiscovered gaps of the props lead to in the sequel to the Hell played in “Anteroom”. Because then we can get to a room bigger than the “Anteroom”, where we can become part of the celestial banquet instead of the infernal play. The rehearsals begin in 1999, and the premiere will be in the same year. Who knows what this one number one and three number nines will hold in store in this joint banquet for Mercier and Camier and Vladimir and Estragon in 1999? Is it certain that they will notice and see the great celestial performance? For this to happen they will have to go back to the foundations or earlier...

Just slowly, slowly.

(The study was written with support from the Hungarian Ministry of Culture and Education’s Higher Education Fund.)

Translated from the Hungarian by Chris Sullivan

Jegyzetek

1. The section headings in the study are borrowed from Samuel Beckett’s novella *Mercier et Camier* (Paris, 1970). The title itself is a reference to Borges’s *A Universal History of Infamy*.
2. It is worth mentioning in connection with this how passionately Bianca reacted when at the premiere she was given a present wrapped in purple paper. The colour of the paper recalled the colour of Lucifer.
3. See Dante Alighieri, *La Divina Commedia*, I (Inferno), I, 7-9, Milano, 1949, p. 15. The text is as follows: “Tanto è amara, poco è più morte/ma per trattar del bin ch’io vi trovai/dirò dell’altre cose, ch’io v’ho scorte.” Free translation: “Death is not much worse, I know. But in order that you understand the Good that I found there, you must hear what I saw on the road.”
4. Samuel Beckett, *Stories & Texts for Nothing*, New York, 1967, p. 105
5. Samuel Beckett, *Ibid*, p. 121
6. Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*. Trans. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. III (Paradise). XXXIII, 145. p. 147, Leipzig, 1867
7. I also spoke of the importance of the role of light in my study on “The Habakuk Commentaries”.
8. This forerunner of this scene was Josef Nadj’s work “The Philosophers” premiered in Budapest in 1994, which proved suitable subsequently also.
9. Cf. Samuel Beckett, *Mercier et Camier*, Paris, 1970, pp. 200. The original text: “Personne mieux que lui, dit Camier, n’aime la vie, l’humble existence de tous les jours, les innocents plaisirs et jusqu’aux peines qui nous permettent de parachever le rachat.”
10. In “Habakuk” the same role was played by the number four.
11. Plato, “Timaeus”. Trans. Benjamin Jowett. 36-36b. In: *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, Princeton, 1996, pp. 1165-6
12. Róbert Falus warns for example that the extreme or mean ratio is not suitable for taking as the sole principle governing our world. (Róbert Falus, *Az arany metszés legendája* [The Legend of the Mean Ratio], Budapest, 1982)

13. See Erwin Panofsky, *The History of Human Proportions as a Reflection of the History of Styles*, New York, 1976
14. Tamás Tarnóczy, *Zenei akusztika* (The Acoustics of Music), Budapest, 1982, p. 219
15. We come across this number nine symbolism not only during the Middle Ages in Europe. In Hindu numerology today it denotes the very same things.
16. The Hungarian writer Péter Nádas discovered the face of Proteus hidden among the clouds in a picture by Caspar David Friedrich, and this face disclosed the picture's invisible meaning: "At first glance I did not notice this face, but once I had noticed it I was no longer able to see it as cloud." (Péter Nádas, "Mélabú" [Melancholy]. In: *Játéktér*, Budapest, 1988, p. 72)
17. One of the finest examples of this in all art history is the head of Christ in a stained-glass window in Rheims Cathedral.
18. In Josef Nadj theatre there are invariably only a few women performers. In the presence instance there are merely two, just enough to assure the wholeness of the world!
19. See Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, Chicago, 1958
20. Gábor Bódy, *Végtelen kép* (Endless Picture), Budapest, 1996, p. 206
21. The first work of the 1997/98 season at the Théâtre Vidy was Josef Nadj's. It was not by chance that one of the critics reviewing it made a distinction between "Anteroom" and the circus theatre represented by "The Cry of the Chameleon". While the critics considered the latter work one of the most typical renewals of circus art, they said that the former work was the more profound.
22. In connection with this it is enough to refer to the various theories of genius. See for examples Kant's writings on judgment, in which he contrasts the natural scientist with the artist.
23. Attila Grandpierre, "Az élő kozmikus rádióadó-vevők fizikája" (The Physics of Living Radio Transmitter-Receiver). In: *Természetgyógyász Magazin*, 1998/2
24. See Arthur C. Danto, *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art*, New York, 1988
25. "In order to be beautiful, everything has to be meaningful." See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Die Geburt der Tragödie oder Griechentum und Pessimismus*. Hrsg. von Ivo Frenzel. N. p., 1981
26. Richard Rorty, "A filozófia és a jövő" (Philosophy and the Future). In: *Jelenkor* (Pécs, Hungary), 1995/6, p. 545
27. "[Derrida] asserts that the making conscious of unconscious materials is a process of creation, not retrieval: 'There is then no unconscious truth to be discovered by virtue of having been written elsewhere'". (Philip Auslander, *From Acting to Performance*, London – New York, 1997, p. 31)

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