

POSTDRAMATIC TRAGEDY AND FEAR: THE CASE OF SOCIETAS RAFFAELLO SANZIO'S TRAGEDIA ENDOGONIDIA

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UNA BAUER

Academy of Dramatic Art, Zagreb

This article engages with conceptual constellations which allow a contemporary postdramatic theatre production, specifically Societas Raffaello Sanzio's theatrical series *Tragedia Endogonidia* (2002 – 2004) to be regarded as a tragedy or a series of tragedies. Particular emphasis is given to the role of fear in understanding *Tragedia Endogonidia* as a tragedy. My claim is that *Tragedia Endogonidia* contributed to the modification of contemporary understanding of tragedy to, at the same time, a more abstract and a more explicitly material one, where the anchoring of the tragic into a concrete human destiny and the resolution of a plot is replaced by “plotting of the sensorial” or “plotting of the image”, driven by anticipation directly related to an unspecified feeling of discomfort and fear.

Keywords: tragedy, fear, paradox, transgression, contingency

This article¹ explores the conditions and conceptual constellations which allow a contemporary postdramatic theatre production, specifically Societas Raffaello Sanzio's theatrical series *Tragedia Endogonidia* (2002 – 2004) to be regarded as a tragedy or a series of tragedies. Particular emphasis is given to the role of fear in understanding *Tragedia Endogonidia* as a tragedy. The text alternates between detailed descriptions of selected scenes from the performance (in italics) and my explicit argument. I claim that *Tragedia Endogonidia* has contributed to the modification of contemporary understanding of tragedy to, at the same time, a more abstract and a more explicitly material one, where the anchoring of tragic into a concrete human destiny and the resolution of a plot is replaced by “plotting of the sensorial” or “plotting of the image”, driven by anticipation

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directly related to discomfort and fear. I also reconsider several key theses articulated in Hans-Thies Lehmann's recent and already highly influential study *Tragedy and Dramatic Theatre* (Lehmann 2016) which aims at being a definite, comprehensive and authoritative account of tragedy in theatre and performance scholarship.

What we are looking at, sitting in the dark of the auditorium, and what looks back at us, is a room dressed in dazzling gold. In the first episode of Tragedia Endogonia (2002–2004), a theatre series consisting of 11 episodes² by the Italian theatre company Societas Raffaello Sanzio,³ the scene is closed off from five sides of the scenic cube, which means from the ceiling as well, open only to the audience on one side. When I write “five” something unusual is taking place – dramatic theatre convention mentions the fourth wall⁴ as the one missing, because the ceiling and the floor are normally disregarded, as they are, especially the ceiling, almost always excluded from the illusionist tradition. One is expected to ignore their absence, suspend one's disbelief, in a parallel world of theatre fiction that one has come to witness. Besides, illusionist⁵ theatre convention requires the performers to come in and come out through theatre wings, doors, curtains while we are pretending that they moved from one room to the other, or entered the house from the street, from one fictional place to the next. When it comes to Societas Raffaello Sanzio,⁶ we are often dealing with something else. The first episode of Tragedia Endogonia, dedicated to the Italian city of Cesena, is not the only one in which the stage functions as

² A theatre series is not an unprecedented occurrence in contemporary dance and theatre (Matija Ferlin, Saša Asentić, Nature Theatre of Oklahoma, Jasna Vinovški). Some artists link several theatre productions into cycles or clusters (for example BADco.'s performance trilogy dedicated to the theme of labor, Andre Sherban's The Greek Trilogy or David Hare's trilogy dedicated to the crisis of British institutions) as an afterthought, a way of retrospectively assessing the material or an opus. Relatively few playwrights, such as Martin McDonagh, intentionally wrote trilogies. On the other hand, if we look at Greek tragedies, they often deal with a series of interlinked events and characters, a continuous story or several stories evolving and developing, despite each tragedy's formal independence of each other and an ability to stand on its own (Aeschylus' Oresteia, Sophocles' Theban plays, Euripides' *Phoenissae*, *Chrysippus* and *Oedipus*). However, an interlinking of that number of theatre productions (11) into a series can still be considered unusual (especially if we consider that they were scattered around Europe, which means that only a few dedicated spectators would have had seen all the productions). It is also worth mentioning that unlike some Greek tragedies, Tragedia Endogonia is not narratively, but associatively interlinked. Its seriality is important for its tragic sensibility, as I will argue later in the article.

³ Videos based on each Tragedia Endogonia episode can be seen online, on various YouTube channels, and they are usually 20-40 minutes long. They are directed and edited by Cristiano Carloni and Stefano Franceschetti and could be regarded as art works in themselves, but they also offer a fairly good representation of the actual performances and important dramaturgical decisions. Video of the Cesena episode is available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-08pVAhCcOo> (accessed 12 January 2019).

⁴ The concept of the fourth wall, albeit not the term itself, is usually attributed to Denis Diderot. “Imagine on the border between the scene and the spectators a big wall. Play as if the curtain was never opened” (Diderot 1959: 221). This quote has usually been interpreted as a demand to sustain the fictional world that theatre creates by not acknowledging the presence of the audience.

⁵ The terms *illusionist* and *realist* are usually used interchangeably (Pfister 1988: 22; Radosavljević 2013: 125; Wolf 2009). However, one could argue that the creation of an illusion in theatre does not equal total immersion into a world created fully according to realistic representation strategies. Illusion in theatre can exist in postdramatic productions, or in other words non-realistic types of performance, as we will see from further analysis. Thus I am making a distinction between illusion and mimetic illusion.

⁶ I will be using SRS instead of *Societas Raffaello Sanzio*.

an inside of a cube, as a self-serving universe, cut off from the rest of the world, not only symbolically but physically as well. In episode number 4, the Brussels episode, the inside of the cube, all five sides are paved by something which looks like marble, and which turns the scene into a tomb, creating a sense of dread and a desire to escape. A similar thing happens in the Berlin episode, where the entire scene is firstly enclosed in black, and then this black, seemingly of itself, turns into white. As a member of the audience, you are on the verge of feeling small and insignificant, subjected to this highly sophisticated and majestic theatrical machine. There is, the stage set suggests, no way out.

The space that we are staring at, and that stares back at us, has no curtains, no windows, or any other kind of opening.⁷ The scenic cube takes over the stage completely – it is identical to it. It is not on the stage, it doesn't even allow the stage to exist, apart from existing as itself. In the Cesena episode, the stage is enchained in metal plates, copper or some other material which reflects as if golden, augments and disperses light, hurts the eyes, visually produces the feeling of warmth, but also a deep unease at the possibility, however unrealistic, that it might blind you. The way in which the stage is reflexively constructed, creates an emphasis on the distorted image itself, thematizing optical relations within the space, encouraging confusion, nervousness and parallelism of reflections. The bodies and machines passing in front of the golden walls, reflect on the surface in their multiplicity and take on various forms, different than the ones we see as "originals". As we are not entirely certain where the source of the light is,⁸ it seems to us that the light and the heat are produced by the very metal sheets, and not only reflected by them. Something which started as a simple visual effect, provokes full reaction of the various senses, the feeling of growing heat, a fiery furnace, even though the temperature of the theatre space isn't rising.⁹ While deceiving you, your senses produce the reality of theatre illusion – your skin feels imaginary dread, as if the scorching sun is coming closer and will melt you even though you know at the same time that this will never happen.

In this descriptive introduction, I am attempting to draw the reader's attention to several crucial points in the Tragedia Endogonia serial. I have also simultaneously hinted at certain key concepts in the argument that is about to follow: illusion, reflexivity, paradox, representation, the fourth wall, excess, ambiguity, fear. I am interested in seeing how a postdramatic¹⁰ theatre production, exploring the limits of representation, and not staging

⁷ SRS strongly engages in the creation of an illusion. In this case, they produce an illusion of a universe completely separated from the one we inhabit, with its own rules of conduct. More specifically, the performers look as if they hadn't arrived on stage by usual means, but as if they were teleported. In fact, one of the questions that occurs regularly during their performances is "how did they do that?", as if you were witnessing a kind of a magician's act.

⁸ Another instance of illusion production.

⁹ Again, an example of how to create an illusion.

¹⁰ Had this article been published in a publication dedicated to theatre, I wouldn't have gone into an explanation of what "postdramatic theatre" stands for, as this notion, introduced by Hans-Thies Lehmann's book *Postdramatic theatre* published in German in 1999 (Croatian translation published in 2005, and English in 2006) became widely accepted and gained international currency to the extent that it needs no further clarification in the context of theatre studies and even arts in general. However, considering the

a linear narrative of specific destinies and challenges particular humans face, can be understood as a tragedy. And how can the focus on fear as a specific affect, help us in understanding *Tragedia Endogonia* as a tragedy?

Related to this is the question of the importance of performance for understanding tragedy. According to Aristotle, in order for catharsis to happen, there is no need for an actual performance to take place. Catharsis could happen through reading only.¹¹ Structure was crucial:

There is something fearful and pitiable that can result from spectacle, but also from the actual structure of events, which is of higher importance and proper to a superior poet. For the plot should be so structured that, even without seeing it performed, the person who hears the events that occur should shudder with fear and pity... To create this effect through spectacle has little to do with the poet's art, and requires a fancy production (*choregia*). Those who use spectacle to create an effect not of the fearful but only of the sensational have nothing at all in common with tragedy.¹²

interdisciplinary nature of this journal, I feel that this notion needs a short elaboration. Lehmann's thesis is that *relevant* theatre from the end of the 1960s onwards underwent a huge paradigm shift: dramatic theatre (based on and dominated entirely by staging of plays and their coherent narrative totalities) has been overtaken by postdramatic theatre, due primarily to the changed nature of the theatre sign. This means that principles of narration, character and plot development have been replaced by the deconstruction of mimetic illusion and that the systematic deconstruction of mimetic illusion (through a whole range of ways, strategies and tactics) became the relevant aesthetic logic of theatre making after the 1960s. The term postdramatic has replaced the term postmodern, as it is more precise in its understanding of the specificities of theatre production (Lehmann 2006). Despite the relevance of postdramatic change of paradigm for theatre studies and history, some forms of psychological realism and mimetic illusionism (which adopt and dilute selected postdramatic theatre-making strategies) are still dominant forms of mainstream theatre production, both in terms of strength of official discourse on theatre and in terms of sheer number of productions in state and city theatres in Europe. Thus they still operate as a kind of a wallpaper to any discussion on experimental theatre, framing a horizon of expectations for theatre-going audiences. For example, as of today (January 2019) 13 out of 15 repertoire performances in Gavela Theatre are based on mimetic illusionism. The same goes for 8 out of 9 in the Croatian National Theatre and 13 out of 14 in the Zagreb Youth Theatre. I thus disagree with Lehmann who claims that mainstream theatre production of today is mainly postdramatic, which can also be attributed to the fact that his main focus is German theatre which is, generally speaking, the most progressive in terms of experimental productions and methods. British theatre would, however, in that respect fare even worse than Croatian in the way in which the Island perceives experimental theatre as a marginal activity. This discrepancy becomes even more obvious if we compare theatre with visual arts. In the visual arts field in Europe non-representative art seems to be the norm and in the focus of all major exhibitions such as Venice Biennial, Documenta, Manifesta, Skulptur Projekte Münster etc. Figurative painting can rarely be seen in major arts institutions in the past 60 years, despite a certain revival which seems to have happened around 2016 (Zhong 2016). Yet theatre is still very much attached to its mimetic illusionism.

¹¹ This does not mean that staging wasn't important for Greek theatre, however Aristotle didn't consider it essential for understanding tragedy, as several scholars have noted. According to Walton, "from Aristotle alone one can get no impression whatsoever of what performances in either his own or any previous period actually looked like. Indeed he confesses that, as far as he is concerned, it is quite possible to get as much from a tragedy by reading it as by seeing it, an attitude given unfortunate authority by later generations, and even some opera critics" (Walton 2015: 12). Hans-Thies Lehmann's entire book *Tragedy and Dramatic Theatre* (Lehmann 2016) is dedicated precisely to the importance of theatrical experience for the theory of tragedy.

¹² *Po.* 14.1453b1–5; 7–10, quoted in Munteanu 2012: 81.

In German idealist philosophy theorizing tragedy or rather philosophizing the tragic,¹³ is even less patient with the place and meaning of the actual performance.¹⁴ This general attitude was also present in a very different philosophical and theatrical tradition, the British one, exemplified, for instance, by Andrew Cecil Bradley. As John Bayley describes in his foreword to Bradley's *Shakespearean Tragedy*, "The plays came fully before the audience, in all their richness of possibility, all their wealth of interpretation; and they came, of course, as dramatic experiences to read, and to read about, rather than as something to be seen in the theatre" (Bayley 1991, Kindle: loc. 130).

Yet I would like to argue that this "plot structuring" that seems particularly crucial for tragedy occurs in *Tragedia Endogonia* as an important instance of postdramatic theatre not through a particular sequence of events, but through a particular sequence of images, sounds, atmosphere¹⁵ which create sensorial intensities of affects, and find a kind of release or catharsis through their development and exchange, not through the resolution of the plot, but through the resolution of the tension in the image which finds its release in another image. Therefore, performance, actual staging, becomes crucial in the attempt of the contemporary tragedy to articulate its tragic moments.¹⁶

A naked performer is lying in a fetal position, on a metal plated floor, in the corner of the room. "Heated" metal plates look and, consequently, feel as if they could burn him. A second performer, also nude, her face covered in black balaclava with blond hair sticking out, performs various fragmented moves, as if conducting an invisible orchestra. Yet something does not seem quite right. The performer has too much skin, but not in those places where it would be easy to assume the reason for it – for instance, if she had lost weight rapidly. This extra skin is illogically distributed, for instance, collecting in her

¹³ Peter Szondi opens his *An Essay on the Tragic* with "Since Aristotle, there has been a poetics of tragedy. Only since Schelling has there been a philosophy of the tragic" (Szondi 2002: 1). Tragic as a philosophical concern was introduced by German idealist philosophy and heavily thematized by Schiller, Schelling, Schlegel, Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, amongst others. In their book *Philosophy and Tragedy* Beistegui and Sparks ask why German philosophy at the end of 18th century became systematically interested in (Greek) tragedy and answer that this is due to the idea that tragedy offered "presentation of the relation between freedom and nature" (Beistegui 2000: 6)

¹⁴ In short, none of them even mentions performance as a relevant moment in their philosophical analysis.

¹⁵ Images, sounds etc. that could only be produced in an actual theatre production, and not read about for the desired effect (and affect).

¹⁶ Lehmann's entire book (Lehmann 2016) is dedicated to the development of the argument that there could be no tragedy or tragic experience without an actual theatre production. It seems to me that, while there can be no tragic experience in postdramatic theatre without the experience of being present at the performance, this cannot be applied to dramatic theatre based on plays. Plays are not simply scripts to be performed, worthless unless they are performed – this is a reductive and dangerous assumption. I do believe that tragic experience can formulate itself solely in the act of reading a tragedy, which does not mean that theatre can not produce another type of experience. To claim otherwise would mean to strip the act of reading of its sensoriality and richness, and any passionate reader knows how intense and vivid simple solitary reading can be. However, in a contemporary postdramatic theatre production, which is not based primarily on a coherent text and *mythos* (plot structure), the situation is entirely different. Indeed, in this case there could be no tragedy without theatre, because there is nothing outside of the actual theatre experience that could provide the sense of the tragic.

armpits, while her breasts appear perfect and perfectly perky.¹⁷ As the time is passing, her movements look less and less as if she was conducting, and remind us more and more of a chicken's sad attempts to fly. She is not, however, imitating a chicken, I am simply attempting to provide some sort of referential frame to what she is doing. The performer occasionally shakes her head, like a horse trying to free himself from the collar. What we hear, the sounds following her performance, are constantly on the verge of recognition (something like sounds of birds, wind through the woods). These are environmental sounds, electronically modified. They continuously remind us of something, yet we can never specify what it is. We are continuously stimulated, as everything looks like itself, yet it isn't. At some point, a machine on the stage starts shooting arrows which ram into metal plates at the other side of the room. There is no apparent human source to this intervention.

Tragedia Endogonia by Societas Raffaello Sanzio is a series of theatre performances consisting of 11 episodes, named after the cities where they were performed for the first time, or rather where each of these episodes was produced, in the following order: 1. Cesena, 2. Avignon, 3. Berlin, 4. Bruxelles, 5. Bergen, 6. Paris, 7. Rome, 8. Strasbourg, 9. London, 10. Marseille, 11. Cesena. Societas Raffaella Sanzio was founded in 1981 by brother and sister Romeo and Claudia Castellucci, together with Chiara Guidi and, initially, Paolo Guidi, Chiara's brother, who left the company 11 years after its founding. SRS was founded in Cesena, close to Bologna, in Northern Italy, where they still operate. Since 1993 they have run their own theatre, Il Teatro Comandini, which is a part of a larger structure Palazzo Guidi, built in 1719. Instead of Latin *Societas*, until the end of the 1980s they used the Italian version *Società*. They changed it as they felt that the addition of the "s" gives their "being together a plausible name" (Calchi Novati 2009: 51–52). According to Romeo Castellucci:

Societas is a word that suggests a communitarian occurrence... A community of strangers, when it gathers around the gaze of the figure, is instantaneous, transient and structureless. A *Societas* that has to be considered not in an esoteric sense... but rather as a community of strangers of whom and between whom there is nothing to say. Apart from that, their bond is, for a moment, indissoluble and carnal, and it is, in the space of a second, soteriological and necessary. (Calchi Novati 2009: 51–52)

¹⁷ In her fascinating study *Hideous Progeny: Disability, Eugenics and Classic Horror Cinema*, Angela M. Smith argues for the complex and nuanced "'aesthetic nervousness' generated by disability representation" (Smith 2011: 29). Reading her work made me realize what I probably should have figured out much earlier: that the discomfort I felt by looking at this atypical body was also related to the history of classic horror cinema. The fear of non-normative bodies, which was heavily exploited, was strongly sustained and supported precisely by classic horror cinema. Smith, however, argues that the eugenic propaganda characteristic of some horror films had no universal response in favour of eugenics, but quite the contrary, produced reactions which deviated from and undermined the eugenic narrative. Nevertheless, what is perceived as "unusual", as I claim in the chapter on Raymond Hoghe in my PhD thesis (Bauer 2010), is also perceived as something narratively potent, therefore hiding an untold story, or, a mystery, as Smith describes: "Eugenic rhetoric thus remained dependent on the body exterior as a powerful 'material metaphor' for mysterious genetic processes" (Smith 2011: 12). Unusual bodies on the stage work as a kind of a story teaser, regardless of whether that story is ever told in the performance or not. In this case, as I will show later, the story *is told* and it differs from the one I initially expected or assumed.

Oliviero Ponte di Pino places this togetherness in what he calls ‘the culture of the group’ of Italian theatre in the 1970s and 1980s, as SRS were not the only ones working collectively in that period (Oliviero Ponte di Pino in Calchi Novati 2009: 51–52). The Emilia-Romagna region in the 1980s was home to three progressive theatre companies. Apart from Societas Raffaello Sanzio, there was also Teatro della Valdoca (1983) and Albe (1983), while in the 1990s there were also Fanny & Alexander, Motus, Teatrino Clandestino, Impasto and Masque. In the context of European (and Northern American) theatre tradition, SRS are mostly grouped with artists and companies such as Jan Fabre, Heiner Goebbels, Tadeusz Kantor, Heiner Müller, Needcompany, Robert Wilson...¹⁸ In our local, Croatian context there are hardly any counterparts. The closest with regards to their artistic interests would probably be Coccolemon and Kugla glumište from the 1970s and 1980s, director Branko Brezovec, and BADco. which was founded as late as 2000. However, apart from, perhaps, a couple of Brezovec’s productions¹⁹ their success in the creation of a particularly uncomfortable affective atmosphere is unparalleled.²⁰ Their aesthetic preferences lie in the physicality, voices, noise and, most of all, image, whereas text is only sporadically used. Lehmann’s description of their work seems to the point: “It is a matter of the return of the body as an incomprehensible and simultaneously unbearable reality” (Lehmann 2006: 164).

Raffaello Sanzio, which they named themselves after, was an Italian painter of the high Renaissance, Raffaello Sanzio da Urbino (1843 – 1520), known as Raphael. This is, on the one hand, a rather puzzling choice for an avant-garde theatre company, but, on the other, it also signalizes something characteristic for them: a sort of time compression and a paradoxical historical a-historicity of their work.²¹ Raphael was one of the most important innovators in painting, the author of crucial Renaissance compositions, and his works present a culmination in perspectival research or rather the production of illusion of perspective on canvas which took 400 years to perfect. With Raphael, research of the rule of perspective reached its peak. However, using the name RS in the name of the group is somewhat misleading. Perspective, so characteristic for Raphael, is an illusion-

¹⁸ The list could be much longer, but the longer it is, the less meaningful it becomes, because the similarities become more and more generalized and unspecific, and organized around various criteria. I would argue that SRS are rather unique within the postdramatic panorama in their ability to create an atmosphere of fear and of the unexpected. If we take that as a distinctive criteria then the list of their kin becomes even smaller.

¹⁹ It is not surprising that it was precisely Gordana Vnuk and Branko Brezovec’s Eurokaz festival that organized SRS’s first visit to Croatia with *Santa Sophia* in 1989.

²⁰ I should mention here that this is also due to the fact that their financial resources and the cost of some of their productions is also unparalleled to that of any local or regional artist from the performing arts field.

²¹ For instance, in *Tragedia Endogonida* they refer to Abraham, Isaac, Jesus Christ, Charles de Gaulle, Benito Mussolini and other historical or mythical figures by recognizable details, yet these images and performers enacting them are not meant to represent characters, they are more associative clusters recalling particular sets of associations. The same is true of their costumes, sometimes reminiscent of a particular era, as in the Avignon episode, with 17th century gentleman’s clothes. Yet they are altered to such an extent, and placed in a context which does not encourage representative reading or mimetic illusion of that era, but functions more like an indication of a dream-like space of a particular dramaturgical logic where historical periods mix in unexpected ways.

ist technique of representation. As I have argued, even though SRS does engage with illusion, they do not create mimetic illusions, but quite the contrary. By creating various optical and auditory illusions, they contribute to what Lorenzo Mango calls “dissolution of representation” (Mango 1989: 35). Yet it seems that SRS’s “dissolution of representation” happens precisely through an attempt at establishing a paradoxical two-dimensionality in the theatre, an inversion of the procedure which Raphael uses to create perspective. While Raphael is creating three-dimensionality on a two-dimensional surface of the painting, they seem to be turning the three-dimensionality of the stage into a two-dimensionality of a painting. What is happening here is questioning of theatre as a form, a move which is not directed towards augmenting the representational potential of theatre but towards disturbing it, in accordance with the postdramatic paradigm shift.

The task of offering a definition of tragedy in an a-historical, self-sufficient, frozen-in-time, closed manner is obviously futile.²² As Raymond Williams says, “tragedy is [...] not a single and permanent kind of fact, but a series of experiences and conventions and institutions” (Williams 2006: 69). I will look into the idea of tragedy as something that exists in various manifestations, on a continuum, on a spectrum, both diachronically and synchronically. I will analyze it using a dimensional, dynamic, relational approach. Terry Eagleton claims that “no definition of tragedy more elaborate than ‘very sad’ has ever worked” (Eagleton 2003: 3). However, even Eagleton himself is interpreting Aristotle in this way “Aristotle’s description of tragedy in the *Poetics* in fact makes little reference to destruction, death or calamity; indeed he speaks at one point of a ‘tragedy of suffering’, almost as though this might be just one species of the genre” (Eagleton 2003: 3), implying that tragedy is indeed something *essentially* linked with destruction, death and suffering. Just like any other way of distilling tragedy to its essence, “too sad” will simply not work on its own, as an attempt to describe the essence of the idea of tragedy. Giving up on universality, nevertheless, allows for the continuity of variations on tragic experience. As Hans-Thies Lehmann claims,

However modulated, tragic experience returns again and again. In this light, what “no longer works” by widespread judgement – namely, the transmitted textual genre of tragedy – represents nothing but one specific and historically limited form for expressing tragic experience. The tragic as theatrical experience is not over and done, just this form. (Lehmann 2016: 411)

In light of this – there is not one thing to say about tragedy that would be applicable to all tragedies, like the lowest common denominator, or the essence of tragedy. But there are constellations of characteristics, conceptual and sensorial moments, put together,

²² According to Hans-Thies Lehmann, “the definition of a genre which is supposed to include highly concentrated works of antiquity, the labyrinthine dramaturgy of Shakespeare, the abstraction and classical stylization of Racine and Schiller, plays by Georg Büchner, as well as (assuming tragedies stand at issue) the works of Henrik Ibsen, Arthur Miller, Eugene O’Neill and Heiner Müller – to say nothing of Howard Barker’s Theatre of Catastrophe or pieces by Dea Loher and Sarah Kane – such a definition would be doomed to such abstractness that a concept of genre along these lines would disclose nothing new” (Lehmann 2016: 8).

do make us *think about* a production in relation to tragedy and tragic experience. On their own, none of these moments would be decisive in reading something as a tragedy, but put together, they create a constellation of contextual reading, which opens towards new meanings, via the understanding of a postdramatic theatre performance as tragedy.

I will just briefly address an inevitable question in any discussion of tragedy: whether tragedy is solely an aesthetic phenomenon. Lehmann, who claims that “no tragic experience can exist without theatrical experience”, which means that he insists on avoiding “the notion that the tragic is a reality to be found in life, which art then takes up and in turn represents” (Lehmann 2016: 3) is on the opposite side of the spectrum from Terry Eagleton who ironizes the former position:

All-out nuclear warfare would not be tragic, but a certain way of representing it in art might well be. Behind this apparently lunatic notion, which only the remarkably well-educated could conceivably have hatched, lie a series of false assumptions: that real life is shapeless, and art alone is orderly; that only in art can the value released by destruction be revealed; that real-life suffering is passive, ugly and undignified, whereas affliction in art has an heroic splendour of resistance; that art has a gratifying inevitability lacking in life. (Eagleton 2003: 15)

Both Lehmann and Eagleton are highly amusing in their mutual disgust for each other’s position, yet I find them both reductive in their attempts to give absolute primacy to either life or art. Tragic in life and tragic in the arts are two overlapping notions, which, however, do not entirely overlap. Even though my focus in this article is on aesthetic experience, it seems impossible to think of any aesthetic experience as entirely pure, autonomous and uncontaminated by life experience.²³ On the other hand, aesthetic formulation of the tragic has inevitably also influenced its real life understanding and not simply the other way around. Art and life leak into each other, particularly so in the theatre. This is especially important when we discuss the complex link between a particular worldview and the existence of tragedy which made numerous theoreticians argue that tragedy is incompatible with contemporaneity.²⁴ However, not even in Steiner’s *The Death of Tragedy* (Steiner 1980) does tragedy actually die.²⁵ Yet it is important to think about the reasons for the

²³ I find it impossible to think about the act of going to the theatre as a purely autonomous aesthetic experience. Do I stop ageing while I am in the theatre? Does my heart stop beating and my hair and nails growing?

²⁴ See Kaufmann (1992: 312, 313): “There is thus a very profound difference between the sensibilities of the Greeks and those of a great many modern critics and philosophers. The point can be put succinctly. Many writers distinguish sharply between what is merely pathetic and what is truly tragic. Not all of them invoke precisely the same criteria, but there is widespread agreement. The major point is that not all suffering is held to be truly tragic. The suffering hero must be great or noble; he must fail but be more admirable in catastrophe than ever before; the unhappy end must be inevitable and issue from the hero’s own decision in a moral conflict in which disaster was inescapable whatever choice he made. [...] Indeed, it is almost a commonplace that Georg Büchner’s *Woyzeck* and Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman* are not tragic because the heroes are “pathetic” or, as is sometimes said, anti-heroes.”

²⁵ “It is translated, in the main unsuccessfully, into other cultures, other languages, other periods of time; it gets bastardized and parodied and dissolved into other genres. But it survives” (Ward 1993: 274).

prolonged lamentation of its death. Namely, Steiner claims that tragedy is dependent on a particular understanding of the world²⁶ which excludes Christianity, Judaism and Marxism, *due to their basic belief in rationality and justice*. Yet if we look at the ancient Greek understanding of the world, we will also come across various attempts at understanding the world in rational terms.²⁷ Indeed, the emphasis was specifically on the rational connection between the way the world is organized, the way things truly are and the way our minds work.²⁸ Logos (of the world) is graspable by logos (of the mind) and vice versa.²⁹ In the words of Thomas M. Robinson, “Reality, knowledge and a rational account (*logos*) go hand in hand; this is true both for our own account of the real and for the real’s account of itself” (Robinson 2010: 32). The mind reflects the world, and is thus capable of understanding it.³⁰ However, it would be false to identify this attitude with the entirety of ancient Greek experience of the world.³¹

More importantly, not even Aristotle could completely disregard luck and chance from the experience of being human. Aristotle, as argued by Nussbaum, took on a moderate stance between those advocating for the importance of luck against those who claimed that good human life (which equals rational human life) is completely invulnerable to luck:

Lifelong enslavement, severe chronic illness, extreme poverty, the death of all one’s loved ones – any of these could make one or more of the excellences impossible to exercise. [...] In other cases, we imagine that good activity, while not altogether blocked,

²⁶ ...“the kind of unified and discipline response of feeling which made possible the Greek [drama]” (Steiner 1980: 286).

²⁷ Luck and chance also play a role, as will be analyzed later.

²⁸ This, however, does not mean that all people will, indeed, understand that: “At a human level, knowledge is attainable by certain insightful individuals (Heraclitus, Plato, the philosopher-rulers), whose statement (*logos*) of the way things are is a pale reflection of a cosmic statement of the same, uttered *ab aeterno* by *to sophon* (the world’s rational and governing principle) (Heraclitus) or by the Demiurge (the world’s rational and governing principle for Plato)” (Robinson 2010: 13).

²⁹ “The focal meaning of *logos*, for example, could be and has been taken by various scholars as “account”, “statement”, “formula” or “law”. All are reasonable translations, since all show sensitivity to the linguistic pedigree of the word in question, and all would I think be perfectly acceptable translations of the word in fragments 1, 2 and 50. None of these translations however would fit fragment 45, where the *logos* of soul is presumably, and by extension from a well understood focal meaning, to be translated as “measure”. The weakness of not translating *logos* is that possibility and probability become easily confused, and a range of meanings for *logos* tolerated that make sense as a totality but are seldom if ever all or even mostly all appropriate in any given context” (Robinson 2010: 25).

³⁰ As Heidegger said: “On the one hand, it means the logic of thinking; on the other hand, it means the logic of things; on the one hand, it refers to the regulatory dimension of the conduct of thinking; on the other hand, it refers to the structure of things themselves” (Heidegger 2018: 144).

³¹ Sophists, for instance, did not agree: “[...]they taught that human reason and language (*logos*) cannot grasp reality—that it is impotent to capture the real truth of things. But language is itself a creation of custom, designed not to put the minds of men in touch with physical reality but to put them into touch with one another. And while reality as such is something extra-human that lies beyond the reach of our inadequate cognitive grasp, human conventions are thought-things that we ourselves make and hence can understand and come to terms with. Within this custom-established domain, language and *logos* can function effectively as a means of interpersonal communication and social coordination” (Rescher 2005: 82). And this disagreement was amongst the causes for their bad reputation amongst Greek philosophers. Their time arrived in the second half of 20th century, with its emphasis on the social construction of the world.

will be significantly impeded or cut back. The person disadvantaged in social position may lack opportunities for good political activity that are available to the well-placed; the death of a child can cramp the quality or spirit of many types of activity; sickness can do the same. [...] They are regular parts of the course of many human lives. Aristotle's list makes us begin to notice the extent to which an average life is hedged round by dangers of impediment. [...] Against the opponent of luck he will insist on luck's real importance, exploring our belief that it is possible to be dislodged from living well. (Nussbaum 1986: 328, 329)

It is precisely this balance between luck and reason which enables tragedy, and not some absolute link between good (rational) behavior and positive outcomes for the one pursuing it, as was brilliantly formulated by Scheler:

The simple fact that the sun shines on the good and bad alike makes tragedy possible. At times it may happen that the causal relationships simultaneously coincide with an increase of the values. This is accepted as only accidental. It is not occasioned by intrinsic determination. Nor is it occasioned by a consideration of what the values need to reach their fulfilment of that the causality is at hand to produce them. There would be no tragedy in a world which operated on an established system of laws whereby each thing had the powers and capabilities commensurate with its values, and whereby its activity was directed only towards the exigencies of developing or unifying these values. Tragedy would likewise be impossible in a world operating on a system of laws whereby the powers would be directed against the exigencies of these values, purposely opposing them. The tragic would thrive in a satanic world as well as in a divine... (Scheler 1991: 114)

Despite Steiner's nihilistic view of Greek tragedy as being exclusively "the dramatic testing of a view of reality in which man is taken to be an unwelcome guest in the world" (Steiner 1980: xi), it seems that a combination of rational organization and chance (thus neither the Satanic nor the Divine world in their consistency of values or their absence) is something which is of great relevance for the notion of tragedy, both in the ancient Greek understanding and in the contemporary view of our universe.³² It is precisely this tension between rationality and contingency which *Tragedia Endogonia* explores further and radicalizes, still remaining within the reference system of tragedy.

³² In fact, it is Hegel's understanding of tragedy which relies most heavily on rationality of suffering. And it seems to me that precisely this insistence on rationality could bring into question whether his articulation of the tragic could be perceived as tragic at all; however that argument would require another article. "Once suffering is recognizable as rational, Absolute Spirit is almost ready to, as Hegel would say, come on the scene. The audience is finally able to attain the ethical peace and satisfaction of the same reconciliatory ethos that is the ultimate goal of Hegel's philosophy. Hegel sees art as producing reconciliation to a rational order [...]" (Barker 2008: 74). Namely, Hegel confronts political organization (public law and customs, totality, people) with family duties (individual citizens, actual consciousness), represented by Creon and Antigone "In the shock of two individual *pathos*, the two ethical powers (rights or duties) are at odds and reveal themselves in their necessary mutual co-belonging. This revelation, the true stake of tragedy, is the proper mark of the Destiny which imposes itself as the absolutely rational in which Spirit is reconciled with itself" (Beistegui 2000: 11).

We are watching a young man standing and looking up, into the feet of a female body hanging above his head. It soon becomes clear that the body he is observing is not a live body, but a doll, probably made of rubber. Even after we realize what it's about, it still occasionally looks like a living breathing body, as in one of those optical illusion drawings, where you sometimes see a duck and sometimes a rabbit. At the same time, we can clearly see that we are looking at the bottom part of the body, hanging from a rope, as if somebody put it there to dry. As the body is being brought down by a stage mechanism, it is turning around itself.³³ When the feet touch the man's shoulder, he pulls the handles hanging from each side of the body. The female body literally turns inside out, spouting red liquid over the entire stage, showing us that the outside shell, the skin, was filled with, presumably fake blood. Before releasing the handles which enabled him to turn the body shell inside out, the feet of the doll (or the shell of the doll) stand upwards, as if filled by hot air, turned inside out and floating above. The young man is standing on the stage and above his head we can see legs looking like horns, the skin turned inside out. This is that same skin, that same simulated body, it is clear now, that was pulled over the naked body of a human being from my first description. That is the reason why the body from the first image appeared so unusual. There was another silicone body pulled over it, in a gesture of multiplication which creates a feeling of dread. This other silicone body seemed to have emptied out the real body of its reality, making it silicone, producing a persistent and surprising truth of theatre representation in doubling of illusions, or in discovering the basic emptiness of subjectivity.

It seems to me that Tragedia Endogonia operates based on the following strategy: it distills several generally accepted (or problematized, but still talked about) conceptualizations related to the tragic form in dramatic theatre, and by distillation I mean that it heavily abstracts from various historical perceptions of the tragic form and from theory and philosophy of the tragic focusing on its main red threads, as if turning Raphaellesque painting into a Duchampian drawing. It then infuses these red threads, these main conceptual clues with carefully crafted ways to induce sensorial stimuli, with intense images, disturbing sounds and puzzling arrangements of props, and lets the affects and sensorial stimuli fill the empty spaces, previously taken up by *mythos* or plot mechanism in dramatic theatre. One of the key sensations and feelings that get produced, and that drive our watching, are those related to fear, anxiety and terror. Here is what I mean by conceptualizations of key moments of tragic form in dramatic theatre and their interpretations and reconceptualizations in particular moments of Tragedia Endogonia:

1. The paradox. The paradox in tragedy as a dramatic form could be summarized as follows: "It would be most tragic if the same power which has brought either itself or another object to a very high positive value becomes its destroyer – especially if this takes place in

³³ Similar images of inside-out bodies were used in another Tragedia Endogonia episode, interlinking them mutually. In the Avignon episode, a slightly different framing was used: a child was underneath the body, not a man.

the very act of its achievement” (Scheler 1991: 113) which Coffin refers to as the tragic knot (Coffin 1991). Or as Hans-Thies Lehmann would say: “the subject’s turn against himself/herself” (Lehmann 2016: 61). Yet it is interesting that this turn against oneself, even in traditional tragedy, does not need to rely solely on humans or heroes, thus characters in a play. According to Coffin, “We don’t have to talk only of human beings here. An art gallery can be destroyed by the very fire that was kindled to preserve the picture. The event has a sharp tragic character. The flight of Icarus is tragic. The very wax which glued his wings to him melts in the same degree as he flies towards the sun” (Coffin 1991: 114). I suggest that Tragedia Endogonia is staging that *turn against itself literally*. It stages the physical turn of a body against himself/herself or into the other side of itself (repeating this scene, slightly moderated, throughout various episodes). It works through realized metaphors. I have described the image of the shell of the body turned inside out, sputtering blood everywhere. The female body turned inside out, presents itself as a male body, vagina hiding a penis. But the paradox already exists before that – in the body dressed as a body, in the rubber body placed over a real body, as if the bodyness of the body is not enough, it had to be emphasized by fake skin, as if the fakeness would somehow reveal the human easier than the actual naked body of a human. This paradox was in some way *announced* by our sense of unease at the nude body which looked dangerously human, yet not quite. And the moment of the body turning inside out was accompanied by a disturbing noise and an explosion of blood, an excess of blood. This moment of resolution of a puzzle, where we suddenly understand why the body did not look entirely human seems comparable and somewhat equivalent to tragic *anagnorisis*. However, it seems like a temporary respite, only inciting a new feeling of discomfort and dread as to what would follow and how our senses would be confused next.

2. Excess. The dominant mode of tragedy is the mode of excess, of overriding, transgression, of breaking of the boundaries. What tragedies are full of is behavior that turns out to be in some way excessive or immoderate. In those situations human existence reveals itself to be self-destructive, inherently risky and catastrophic, looking for the unknown and unknowable. This overriding, excess, points towards breaking through the role of the human, going beyond what it means to be human. In Greek tragedy this would usually mean that one is breaking through the limits of the human, attempting to be God like. But it seems to me that in Tragedia Endogonia, we could see this as breaking through the boundaries of the human species as such via animals,³⁴ via machines that shoot seemingly of their own will, via algae. Perhaps the transgression of the human species is understood, in postdramatic tragedy, as an intensely material affair, as the excess of the very ground, of those on the ground, dirtied by the soil they (we) walk upon, determined by biological mechanisms partly entirely outside of our conscious will. The very title of the cycle Tragedia Endogonia that has been given to this cluster of performances, apart from being a contradiction, or an oxymoron, as Romeo Castellucci calls it, is already

³⁴ There is an abundance of animals in various episodes of Tragedia Endogonia: horses, rabbits, goats, apes, cats.

pointing towards biological necessities and contradictions of our existence. Endogonidia is a term from microbiology – there are certain protozoa formations which have simultaneously female and male gonads and reproduce themselves by splitting into two: immortal beings (Hillaert 2005). Endogonidium is an asexually produced cell that can generate a new colony, found in certain algae such as volvox, the colony-forming cell in colonial protists (Lawrence 2008: 203). Protists are a group of organisms which, unlike animals, plants or fungi are not grouped together because they share common ancestors. They are grouped together because they simply do not fall into other categories, they question the categories themselves. Most do not share any evolutionary relationships, and they often do not even look the same, but instead of acting as individuals they work together to function as one large group, benefiting from each other. The contradiction that Castellucci sees is the one “between the finality of a human being and immortality³⁵ of the species, combined into a theatre cycle” (Hillaert 2005).³⁶

3. A sense of wonder and awe. The affective sense that tragic events are somehow bigger than life, or on the other side of life. Something that, in the words of Hans-Thies Lehmann, surpasses all “ethical, political and moral discussion and perception”.³⁷ And that they include things on the other side of physicality, fighting against the seductiveness of sensoriality which blocks a deeper, supposedly fully rational understanding of the world. Yet, it is my argument that Tragedia Endogonidia produces this metaphysical sense of going beyond precisely through insistence on pure sensoriality: smells, sounds, images. It is true that the idea of the metaphysicality of the tragic has been questioned in various instances. There could be, some claim, nothing metaphysical about tragedy. As Williams notes, “The limits on man, in these plays, are deliberately trivial. With better plumbing in the municipal baths, Ibsen’s Stockmann need not have been a hero at all. If there had been a cure for syphilis, Osvold need not have died. If there had been a proper scheme of social insurance, Willy Loman need not have killed himself” (Williams 1962). But tragic sensibility, tragic sense transgresses a simple technical solution. Theoretically, many imaginable tragedies either already are or will be preventable by, for instance, the advancement of medicine, but once they have been prevented, they are no longer tragic. “Had Oedipus known that”... is precisely what creates, and not erases the tragic from tragic experience, and it cannot be resolved. Tragedia Endogonidia however engages with

³⁵ Although the idea of the immortality of the species could also be highly problematic, with regards to climate change and other disasters in waiting. But I understand it in the sense that, while individual human life stops after a relatively short period, that of the species continues far longer. Part of both the horror and comfort of dying is that the world will go on without us.

³⁶ Thus the importance of Tragedia Endogonidia being a series of performances.

³⁷ In the initial description of the Cesena episode earlier in the article, I argued that the stage set makes the audience feel small and insignificant. It is interesting that Lehmann connects this feeling of “smallness” with tragic *anagnorisis*. As Lehmann argues, “Defined in terms of dramatic structure, tragic *anagnorisis* is the subject’s insight into its “limit” – also, and especially, insight into the limit of insight. The subject recognizes that it is less than it wants to be (and must want to be), that it does not control the situation” (Lehmann 2016, Kindle, loc. 11004). Whilst *anagnorisis* is a moment of comprehension, of revelation, the feeling of smallness that I described earlier is related to affective and sensorial production.

something else – it simultaneously emphasizes the sensoriality, even the banality of blood splattered literally everywhere, from the shell of the body, rather than trying to surpass it, yet by emphasizing this sensoriality, it creates another foreboding of the dangerous and seductive beyond. It blocks the operation of reason and makes the experience pronouncedly visceral, but in such a way that through its sensoriality, the audience is pointed towards its breakdown. *Anagnorisis* in contemporary postdramatic tragedy thus becomes a partial revelation, which both creates and resolves fear. At first, we do not even know what we are to be afraid of, and once *the problem of the image* is resolved, it is resolved in such a way that our fear only expands, not being able to anticipate what next to be afraid of or how it would be resolved, as that which needs to be resolved does not follow known and established narrative formats.

4. Subjective vs. objective. The conflict of human freedom with the power of the objective world, or “the ever repeated conflict between personal autonomy and social *nomos*” (Lehmann 2016: 60). As Beistegui and Sparks say:

the tragedy would be nothing other than the presentation, the exposition, precisely, of the conflict between immutable orders co-existing in man: the order of nature or of necessity, on the one hand, and the order of freedom, on the other [...]. [...] it is only at the moment when the hero sees himself constrained to act under the weight of a necessity (of a Law) which imposes itself upon him in all its force and violence, provoking a sort of terror and fright in the spectator, that he affirms himself by going beyond this law and this order, revealing himself to be free, subject to *another* Law. In tragedy, moreover, it is freedom which reveals itself through necessity, just as in the sublime practical reason reveals itself through the absolute and terrifying grandeur of nature. (Beistegui 2000: 6)

Or, more precisely:

It is thus only through an entirely paradoxical logic of presentation that the sublime is able to constitute the site of the presentation of the unrepresentable, or of the passage from the realm of the theoretical to that of the practical. And this logic, which reveals to the imagination its own limits precisely at the moment when it demands that it go beyond them, also and at the same time reveals the suprasensible destination (*Bestimmung*) of man, unlimited or infinitizing it at the very moment when it inscribes it within its finitude. (Beistegui 2000: 3)

It seems that, rather than staging that conflict, Tragedia Endogonia is undoing it, by undoing the analytical difference between the individual and the collective. Its strategy is again realized metaphor: the actual transgression of an individual persona, a recognized moment in theorizing of tragedy, a turning inside out, a disintegration of a specific body into innumerable drops of blood. For Schopenhauer, “the individual sense of trepidation or awe must be annulled if the subject is to ascend beyond his own self. By severing the connection with subjective will, the exaltation that coexists with the sublime is this very experience of going “beyond our own individuality” (Trigg 2004: 172). Tragedia Endogonia is doing that, just more radically: staging the actual disintegration of the human, of characters, of individual destinies. This ascending beyond oneself happens precisely through sensorial-

ity, and not through consciousness, as the dissolution of the borders of subjectivity can never be achieved through reason alone. And this abandonment of a unified self can be sensed already, albeit in a less radical form, in dramatic tragedy as well: “he feels himself as individual, as the feeble phenomenon of will, which the slightest touch of these forces can annihilate, helpless against powerful, dependent, abandoned to chance, a vanishing nothing in the face of stupendous forces” (Schopenhauer 1969 (1): 204–5).

And it is precisely fear which drives contemporary postdramatic tragedy, because fear has a specific relationship with the future, and the logic of the future in a performance: fear produces future, it enables us to think in advance of ourselves, it enables us to perform the act of plotting from the very materials that we were given. When we see the body with extra skin in strange places, we expect to find out what it was that we were really looking at, we want for the sensation of dread to find its resolution. And this feeling somehow *produces* resolution, it constructs the “what happens next” of the image. This fear, in a contemporary postdramatic tragedy exemplified by *Tragedia Endogonia*, is not specified, unlike in dramatic tragedy where “fear is felt by those who believe something to be likely to happen to them, at the hands of particular persons, in a particular form, and at a particular time’ (2.5.13, l382b32–34)– felt, that is, by people as a result of a set of complex and detailed discriminations” (Nehamas 2015: 264). The fear that creates the tension in *Tragedia Endogonia* as a postdramatic performance, is to an extent an *unspecified* fear: a fear of the loss of meaning. Fear of the vast possibilities for misfortune of the human condition itself. It functions as a meta fear: a fear of fear itself, of life, a fear of all fears. Whereas dramatic performances need a specificity of their plotting in order to construct a tragedy, postdramatic performances create possibility of an abstract fear, a fear not of something likely to happen to them at the hands of particular persons, in a particular form, and at a particular time but a fear of that which could happen to them because they are humans, thus prone to *any* possible misfortune at any second of their lives. And this *any* finds its sensorially focused staging in *Tragedia Endogonia*.

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POSTDRAMSKA TRAGEDIJA I STRAH: SLUČAJ TRAGEDIJE ENDOGONIDIJE SOCIETAS RAFFAELLO SANZIO

Ovaj se članak bavi konceptualnim konstelacijama pod kojima možemo analizirati suvremenu postdramsku kazališnu predstavu, konkretno kazališnu seriju Tragedia Endogonia (2002 – 2004) kazališne skupine Societas Raffaello Sanzio kao tragediju ili niz tragedija, sa specifičnim naglaskom na ulozi straha u razumijevanju Tragedije Endogonidije kao tragedije. Smatram da je Tragedia Endogonia doprinijela promjeni suvremenog razumijevanja tragedije prema onom, u isto vrijeme apstraktnijem i eksplicitnije materijalnijem, gdje je sidrenje tragičnog u konkretnoj ljudskoj sudbini i razrješenje kroz zaplet zamijenjeno "zaplitanjem senzorijskog" ili "zaplitanjem slike", realizirano anticipacijom povezanoj s neodređenim osjećajem neugode i straha.

Ključne riječi: tragedija, strah, paradoks, transgresija, kontingentnost