



# Intersemiotic Modernism: Matija Ferlin's *Sad Sam Lucky* between Poetry and Its Embodiment

Intersemiotički modernizam: *Sad Sam Lucky*  
Matije Ferlina između poezije i njezina utjelovljenja

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**ABSTRACT** | *Sad Sam Lucky* is a solo performance by the choreographer and performer Matija Ferlin, conceived as part of his ongoing non-dance-like and non-theatre-like conceptual project *Sad Sam*, which started in January 2004 in Amsterdam, where the first part of this pseudo-durational piece was premiered. Ferlin's performance *Sad Sam Lucky* is somewhat specific in the author's oeuvre, mainly because it assays to become a physical response to the work of the Slovenian avant-garde poet Srečko Kosovel (1904—1926), translating it and transposing it at the same time, in-between languages and dialects (Slovenian, Croatian, Istrian, and/or English), and in-between performative regimes (embodied response and a pseudo-recital). Kosovel's confessional poetry, i.e. profound, contemporary, tense in its stylistic imagery, and, at the same time, almost revolutionary in its ideas, is therefore being performed as a live matter of language, driven by Ferlin's main idea — not to do theatre, not to do dance, not to translate, but to trans-body Kosovel's verses, and his melancholic prophecy, thus creating a form of a highly physical, turbulent and emotional homage to this very unique avant-garde author.

**KEYWORDS** | staging, difference and repetition, intersemioticism, translation, re-wording, embodiment, dance theatre

Structurally, the existence of two supposedly different systems — denotation and connotation — enables the text to operate like a game, each system referring to the other according to the requirements of a certain illusion. Ideologically, finally, this game has the advantage of affording the classic text a certain innocence: of the two systems [...]¹

Reflecting on the transparency of language as such, Lotman once wrote:

A page looks like a wall of a cell on which a prisoner has at different times scribbled his feverish jottings which for him have some inner associations, but which for the outside observer seem unconnected. Many of the jottings are not texts, but mnemonic abbreviations of texts preserved in the author's mind².

Lotman wrote this to show how the processes of decoding are dependent on different social and cultural contexts, if not deceiving, differing mechanisms, rather than translation tools for possible mutual understanding or mutual communication, in a certain semiosphere, i.e. “the semiotic space necessary for the existence and functioning of languages, [but] not the sum total of different languages”³. Therefore, a certain language, same as its translation, is always a function, “a cluster of semiotic spaces and their boundaries”, which exists only inside of a specific theoretical matrix. However, in their reality, languages exist only inside of different processes of semiosis and are, hence, “eroded and full of transitional forms. Outside the semiosphere there can be neither communication, nor language [...] Just the fact that it is a universal of human culture, that there exist both conventional and pictorial signs (or rather that all signs are to some degree both conventional and representational), is enough to show that semiotic dualism is the minimal form of organization of a working semiotic system”⁴.

Translation is dependent on differences created in a semiosphere, in the same way as language itself. Gilles Deleuze often conceived the phenomena of difference and repetition as the engine in a dynamic process of establishing linguistic empiricism. His basic assumption was that notions of difference and repetition are fundamentally interconnected, i.e. they condition or enable

1 Barthes, *S/Z*, 9.

2 Lotman, *Universe of the Mind*, 76.

3 Ibidem, 123.

4 Ibidem, 123—124.

each other. The difference is the vehicle of repetition, and repetition is situated in the movement of difference itself, at the same time — being a path to it. As such, difference is beyond any relationship. It is justified in itself, as a difference that is not different from something — as in the field of (linguistic) representations, negatively determined differences, etc. — but it only differs. In this kind of structures, the difference is predetermined as a unilateral distinction. The difference is different. The only possible concept of difference is the difference beyond the concept, precisely because every concept of difference, e.g. selection, division, limitation, transformation, paraphrase, translation, *differentia specifica*, or *omnis determinatio*, etc. precisely misses the point of “differentiation”. According to Deleuze, philosophy failed to define difference and repetition, as it has always interpreted difference as a negative entity, and repetition as bare physical duplication of examples.

Deleuze’s concept of repetition could be put in relation to the idea of reproduction, or performativity *sui generis* on the one hand, and the idea of translatable variation on the other. When one is confronted by a repetition “which proceeds masked, or comprises displacements, quickenings, slowdowns, variants or differences”, which exist only insofar as they are capable of deferring, i.e. leading the subject away from the point of departure, one also tends to see a hybrid and an almost translatable state of existence, in which repetition is never “pure”, “uncontaminated”, but only approximative, “the very word repetition seems to be employed symbolically, by analogy or metaphor”<sup>5</sup>, thus reminding us of the infamous notion of *traduttore* as *traditore*. Hence, intersemiotic translation functions precisely in the same way.

One often tends to purposely re-create difference by repeating, outside of a certain idiomatic frame. Every translation, therefore, resides inside the space of perpetual inter-semiosis, i.e. constantly reminding of the utmost liaison between the context, its semio-corporeality, and the translation process as such. When dealing with the complex processes of translation between literature and theatre, performance texts, or even abstract contemporary dance pieces, where semiotic systems are, at least on the expressive level, totally distanced, their semantics offers seemingly open translatability. Jakobson defined intersemiotic translation as “an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems”<sup>6</sup>, eager to avoid “transmutation” as a prerogative of the afore-mentioned distance between two or more idioms. To put it simply, if intralingual translations encompass a sort of “re-wording”, i.e. an interpretation of one system of verbality by means of other signs of the same

5 Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 24.

6 Jakobson, “On linguistic aspects of translation,” 261.

language, and inter-linguicism would signify an interpretation of verbal signs by means of another language, then intersemiotic translation ought to signify an interpretation of verbal signs by means of pure non-verbality. Translatability between syncretic semiotic systems, e.g. dance or theatre performance, and conventional textual and linguistic semiotic systems, should therefore be interpreted on the surface of this “re-wording”, or, to put it in purely Deleuzian sense, inside of the language that only exists as a reaction to matter that is completely unrelated to language, e.g. a non-linguistic matter which it transforms. The process of “re-wording” will, furthermore, eagerly deconstruct prejudice underlying differences between languages, as well as their presumed untranslatability, due to rigorous distinction between static signifier and signified.

Therefore, intersemioticism, as every kind of translating, is not only connected to linguistic competence, but also to interpretation of *the difference that differs* as such. Performance, like literature, is a “differing machine” *sui generis*, constantly recreating versions, variations, or indeterminacy, as well as new ways for concealing, suggesting, alluding, illuding, implying, etc. Key issues which arise from defining intersemiotic translation in the context of “differing”, whether as a sort of “re-semiotization” or “re-wording”, are the following: firstly, how can different semantic transfers, or even small differences in meaning, be perceived in the light of semiotic structures, which are often totally different in nature; and secondly, what meanings are therefore retained and modified in this process of “re-wording” and/or “re-semiotization”. Or, to put it differently, intersemioticism works if one accepts the premise that different levels of signification work together in translation, and even a poetic polysemy of the most abstract content could be partially translatable and transformable, at a different level, into, e.g. visual art, a photography, not to mention “texts” in which a number of languages operate in a syncretic manner, i.e. film, theatre performance, or even dance. Deleuze, therefore, binds the idea of two types of repetition, *bare* and *disguised*, not only reversing a relationship between repetition and repression within the realm of psychoanalysis<sup>7</sup>, but also implying that the former is more “contaminated” with difference as differing than the latter. Signification is, hence, never fixed, but always “a relation” between concepts and their objects, in any given field of representation, while pure sense, on the contrary, represents expressive content attributed to a concept, or an object, that may not, necessarily, inhabit this representational field. An object being conceptualized may have sense without having any meaning, in the same way as, in some cases, concepts may not be “fully comprehensible”, or, on the contrary, “infinitely comprehensible”<sup>8</sup>.

7 Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 3–27.

8 Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, 3.

For Umberto Eco, intersemiotic translation is in the basis of cultural transfer as such, often conceptualized as “re-semiotization”:

[C]ulture continuously translates signs into other signs, and definitions into other definitions, words into icons, icons into ostensive signs, ostensive signs into new definitions, new definitions into propositional functions, propositional functions into exemplifying sentences, and so on; in this way it proposes to its members an uninterrupted chain of cultural units composing other cultural units, and thus translating and explaining them<sup>9</sup>.

Therefore, in intersemioticism, different meanings constantly shift from one context to another, from one discursive practice to another, or from one succession frame to the next one. Some literary texts are almost destined to be represented vocally, translated into another realm of semiosis, the embodied one, or as Barthes puts it:

Semiologically, each connotation is the starting point of a code (which will never be reconstituted), the articulation of a voice which is woven into the text. Dynamically, it is a subjugation which the text must undergo, it is the possibility of this subjugation (meaning is a force)<sup>10</sup>.

*Sad Sam Lucky*, a solo performance by the Croatian choreographer and performer Matija Ferlin, is a continuation of his ongoing romantic conceptual series *Sad Sam* which started in January 2004 in Amsterdam, when the first piece was premiered. In Croatian, “Sad Sam” means “Now I Am”, or even “Now Alone”, as differential potency of translation is activated. Ferlin engaged in one more project with a similar goal, that of deconstructing conventional contemporary dance discourse and traditional dramatic theatre form, titled “Staging a Play”, in which many performative assets of “Sad Sam” cycle are reemployed and “re-worded”.

In *Staging a Play: Glass Menagerie*, e.g. only literalness of choreographic translation is retained in relation to stage directions that make up for nearly a fourth of Tennessee Williams’ text, and stage direction is treated as a concrete choreographic task, laid bare in its performing intention. Hence, what looks to be a textbook studio setup creates a specific assembly. Four white walls, entrances that would evoke a performative frame — if the walls were only higher than a meter. A white table with chairs around it, all neatly lined

<sup>9</sup> Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics*, 71.

<sup>10</sup> Barthes, *S/Z*, 9.

up, with a pseudo-marionette intention of a “dictator” director, Matija Ferlin, standing, talking to performers, narrating, translating, and showing in expansion, using huge and even exaggerated gestures, and even jumping, as if in a loose warm-up routine. A hyper-assisted staging of Tennessee Williams’ play, *The Glass Menagerie*, with more than obvious dictator on the minimalist set, i.e. giving directions, announcing the next scenes, commenting, reading his notes, on or off the microphone, hiding himself in the obscure outer framework of the white stage setting, behind another performer, in the corners, with his back to the audience, maybe even referring to Tom Wingfield, the narrator of the original play.

Williams’ precise control of the play’s “descriptiveness” is somehow transformed into Ferlin’s choreography, creating a multi-layered and allusive performance reality, supported by a simple, minimal design. Indeed, a memory play, as Williams often depicted this work. Stage setting of this performance reveals a scene that constantly struggles to become a non-realistic memory, free from any prescribed meaning, on the one hand omitting, and on the other exaggerating details, depending on how much stage directions are perceived to be essential to the understanding of the play, to creation of the play’s characters, or performers’ habitus, etc. The only thing revealed here, ultimately, is the “procedure”, a hyper-detailed stage instruction that immanently embodies every performer, translates words into movements, but not only as a conventional theatrical *mise-en-scène*, but as an idea to be fulfilled in real time, continuously translating every possible trace of “literatureness” of the play into a background noise, primarily for the sake of stage directions, encompassing nearly a fourth of Williams’ text, which are therefore treated as a choreographic task. Demarcation that is consequentially created, perverting the outer into the inner frame, forces performers’ bodies to play “onto” the stage setting, therefore not only geometrizing what is hidden and what is revealed, but creating a sacred space of the most inner and intimate performance, as well.

In *Staging a Play: Antigone* the source of speech, performer’s mouth, is constantly hidden, thus constantly embodying the fragility of a signifying process. This play opens a space for the complete scenic reduction, even for the sake of *dramatis personae*. A heterogeneity of the play’s characters is reduced to a single performing body, even a single narrative voice, although constantly hidden from the spectators’ gaze. If conventional performance instruments, bodies, movements, and speech, are not sufficient enough to recreate a complex symbolism of Sophocles’ plot, they ought to be subsumed to a series of situations — or almost installations on the stage — where a solo performer reaches and explores his performative boundaries. The body that is, thus, left on the scene, *among all this props*, is at the same time a protagonist, a perform-

er, a choreographer, then an autocrat and a rebel, a prophet and a messenger, a woman and a man, depending upon the prop with which Ferlin communicates. Language of the play is, therefore, both translated and materialized into props, all of them being glocal, agricultural tools, e.g. bricks, hazel rods and branches, loam, clay powder, roof constructions, etc. They do not function as pure scenography or set design but are here to depict a complex relation between the performer's body, the character that is being embodied, eliminating its textual (or even vocal reference — where does the voice come from?), and their mutual symbolism.

Creon and Antigone stand on opposite sides of what constitutes an irreconcilable debate, in which both characters take on the quality of madness, blindness, and fanaticism. Where one would expect a colon in the text of the play behind the name of a certain character, a prop occurs on the stage, depicting and demarcating a new trajectory for the solo-performer to follow. A specific balance between these trajectories will make the performer free from his character, and thus able to be embodied by another, or be ready to embody it, with the body that is so polyvalent that it simultaneously builds and destroys, narrows and widens, writes and deletes.

In *Staging a Play: Tartuffe* all performers perform silently while saying Molière's text for themselves, thus auto-translating it into a most intimate choreo-text. If everything is put on the performer's body, then this body is naked. *Tartuffe* purposely eliminates the fourth wall, forcing its performers to constantly gaze at the audience, *preaching* its suffering, but also creating discomfort and unbearable tension as every spectator, that silent witness, enters the sphere of "mantric" repetitiveness enhanced by the music. Even though their movements are very limited, the performers manage to embody images, lined up like a deck of cards, wearing almost intolerable and hyper-colourful costumes. As performers in space are the sole carriers of Molière's narrative — in a way deconstructing it, although always keeping in mind that the plot is canonical, and thus known to the audience — their bodies are often trapped between pure illustrations and bare abstractions.

Ferlin's approach to movement here is totally conceptual, sometimes even over-expressive, not really eager to engage in "staging" a well-known plot in a literal manner, nor by pure gesticulation, nor by acting, but in a manner of neoclassical *orchestra*, hence, keeping the entire ensemble — in all its colourism — constantly on the stage. Colourful costumes sometimes become characters for themselves, almost in a constructivist sense of the word, e.g. in the case of ingenious narrative framing of the performance with an initial appearance of a thin, naked, and hungry Tartuffe, and his final decay in a figure of the performer with stomach full of material remains, and a grotesquely stretched

mask consisting of different layers of other people's personalities. Layering that is persistent to this "staging" elevates the costume design to the level of signification's surplus that speaks for itself, insofar as all of the performers are not allowed to speak. They have learned their roles by heart, thus performing their movements according to the text that resonates silently in their heads, beneath all this costume and makeup. In-between patchwork and geometry, simplicity and colourism, a costume becomes "the body's new body", as in the case of a good minus-procedure in pop-art. Therefore, non-spoken endurance of the body, where one is forced to speak but to stay silent, becomes visible in the performer's costume as well, which is not only interconnected with the potency of choreography, but with almost a stroboscopic strength of dynamic colours dispersed on the stage.

The afore-mentioned examples clearly demonstrate that "staging" in Matija Ferlin's choreographic vocabulary is, indeed, an intersemiotic process of translation, relying inasmuch as on differing as on bridging the gap between different idiomatic systems in the play. The concept of "staging" is far from coherent in contemporary theatre, dance, or performance, as it often dwells upon the multitude of signs, signals, and codes on the scene, as the example of postdramatic theatre has often demonstrated. Potency that this concept has gained over time often goes hand by hand with the process of peeling of semiotic signs, which makes it even more vague, or even blurry. Specific performative poetics that Matija Ferlin and his team have developed so far, mostly in the mode of "staging" by "re-wording", or intersemiotically translating different canonical texts, within the *Staging a Play* series, offers a specific interpretation of performance art as something simultaneously distanced and close to dramatic theatre. By transferring a dramatic matrix from the "textual" to the choreographic domain, their apparently immanent, dramatic (or conventionally linguistic) verbliness does not only represent a point of criticism of the occidental performative logocentrism *sui generis*, but also imposes a new model of their close reading, through the lenses of different arts.

*Staging a Play* project, therefore, differs from conventional staging manoeuvres not only by translating words into movements, or conventional dramatic vocabulary into their physical equivalents, but by pushing the boundaries of a pre-established creation and perception of the theatrical event, as such. The term *staging*, which usually implies directing, dramaturgy, usually leaving scenography, costume design, lights, and sound, etc. somewhat besides, often as peripheral elements, is therefore, in this project, utterly redefined. The relationship between staging and choreographing a literary canon, thus, opened a space for a continuous semiosis, where, simultaneously, running away from dramatic text and running away from dance is equally beneficial, mainly



because it stays open towards all possibilities of interweaving, between pure bodies, voices, gestures, objects, their environment, and their instrumentalization. And then, language of drama occurs in different forms, i.e. choreographically, through costumes, props, set design, or even syncretically, privileging this *other* focal point, which then sets a secondary tool of a conventional Western dramatic theatre, e.g. set, costumes and props, in a primary place, as they are equally eager to enthrone themselves as the apparatus to articulate the spoken word.

*Sad Sam Lucky* experiments with language and speech in a similar way. This dance-like imaginary encounter with a Slovenian poet Srečko Kosovel, whose first name evokes “luck” in most South-Slavic idioms, died at the age of just twenty-two in 1926, and is now recognised as a key figure of European poetic modernity, notably for his poems inspired by impressionism, expressionism and then constructivism. In *Sad Sam Lucky*, alone on stage, with a writing table and piles of paper as props, Ferlin engages in a physical and turbulent dance of translatability, an invisible conversation and/or simultaneous interpretation guided by the verses of a modernist poet. Two modernisms collide here, as this “intrusion” of choreographed discourse into the field of poetic translation advances on the black, half-empty stage. Somatic or bodily differences between what is said on the scene (English reminiscences on Kosovel’s dramaturgically modified poetry), and what is only choreographed, embodied, or subsumed to movement (i.e. a rigid choreo-text by Ferlin), open and articulate a specific kind of translation politics that commences exactly at the point where resistance of words towards embodiment is to be exploited, looking further than the surface of “staging a play”, or poetry in this case. Modernity’s most real reality is, thus, “kept in place: its kinetic being”<sup>11</sup>. The same or similar procedure of somatic “in-wording” is performed in most of Ferlin’s *Sad Sam* pieces, but, perhaps, most directly in his last piece, *Sad Sam Matthäus*, where Johann Sebastian Bach’s *Matthäus Passion* (BWV 244; performed by Philippe Herreweghe and Collegium Vocale Gent)<sup>12</sup> is being “translated” into a three-hour long choreography, in real time, simultaneously, with different choreographic and textual reminiscences on his past performances.

Dance modernity of this kind ought to be sought in its contingent relation to translation as such, or, to put it differently, in its constant attempt to get rid of textuality choreographically imposed to it, i.e. to recreate its own notion of choreo-*graphy*, that translates and transmutes “while staging”. Ferlin’s *Sad Sam*

11 Lepecki, “Performance and Corporeality: Suspension of the ‘Human,’” 14.

12 Rafolt, “Imati mesiju iza leda nije lagodan položaj,” 181–192.

*Lucky* is not only a physical response to the work of a Slovenian avant-garde poet, a unique *hommage* to this author, but also an essay to approach his poetry, or its textuality, as well as to distance himself from it, using different dramaturgical tools, most common in poetic translation processes as well, e.g. irony, distancing, wordplays, etc. (“I have a lot to do today. Isn’t that cheerful?”). Ferlin constantly abstracts Kosovel’s verses out of their immanent content, differing into subjectivity, most personal traumas, etc., therefore intersemiotically “upgrading” it to another level of textual closeness or translator’s honesty. On the stage, it is only dust that rises with each movement. A white floor is surrounded by curtains, closing the space like a black box, representing a room, a capsule, or a piece of paper; smell of incense floats in the air, a few books<sup>13</sup> and blank pages with indecipherable writing are visible on the floor, which will soon be stapled in turn on the black surface of the table. Matija Ferlin stands upright, hands blackened, gazes feverishly, often scanning the space in front of him. One sentence is repeated as a motto before every section of the piece, followed by narrated verses, chanted words, anecdotes. Physically navigating between restraint and explosion, between lightness of gestures and the gravity of the body in collision with the ground, with a cyclical structure, the performer tirelessly brings us back to the starting point, to this sentence, echoing from a poem by Srečko Kosovel. Dance is, hence, presented as a minoritarian art or performance form — in a way, like poetry inside of the literary realm — so their reality is overwhelmed with contingency, abstractness, and untranslatability, even a “minoritarian” aura in Deleuze’s and Guattari’s sense, as assemblages of the effects or heterogeneous orders of signs, which cannot be reduced to binary structures-of-meaning, or to a dominant or transcendental signifier. “There is nothing that is major or revolutionary except the minor. To hate all languages of masters”<sup>14</sup>.

Translating often leads to misinterpretation, where one artistic and poetic concept is restructured as an embodiment of another, supposedly “total” concept, of literature and arts, i.e. its norms, genres, and styles, or, furthermore, of law and desire. Language of the minoritarian is, *sui generis*, “affected with a high coefficient of deterritorialization”, usually as inherently political, and inside of the minoritarian concept “everything takes on a collective value”<sup>15</sup>. The act of Ferlin’s creation, as well as its translatable reach to Kosovel’s poetry, thus, ought to be perceived as related to assembling and disassembling, or as

13 Books neatly placed on a performance floor, next to the table, are Kosovel’s oeuvre, with Slovenian edition of *Integrals (Integrali)* on the top, most visible.

14 Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, 26.

15 Ibidem, 16–17.

the authors often emphasize, as writing with its double function — “to translate everything into assemblages and to dismantle the assemblages, [whereas] the two are the same thing”<sup>16</sup>.

Ferlin’s concept of “translating” poetry into a somatic discourse of contemporary dance, furthermore, opens a space for interpreting dance-genre via its own “adverbial position”<sup>17</sup> inside of the realm of art. In a way, every dance (same as poetic genre) — mainly because of its non-verbality and abstractness — is dependent on being translated, which settles this form in an unstable ground of artistic *depen-dance*. Indeed, all of Ferlin’s works are difficult to be defined only from a logocentric or, on the other hand, somatocentric point of view. His notion of choreography may be defined solely in relation to the surplus movements that it excludes, as well as the surplus texts that it embodies. This often happens in poetic discourse:

Poetic texts are evidently formed from a peculiar ‘swing’ of structures: texts created in the ‘I-s/he’ system function as autocommunication, and vice versa; texts become codes and codes messages. By following the laws of autocommunication — the division of the text into rhythmic segments, the reduction of words to indices, the weakening of the semantic connections and the emphasis on syntagmatic ones — the poetic text is in conflict with the laws of natural language. And yet we perceive it as a text in a natural language, otherwise it could not exist or fulfil its communicative function. But on the other hand, if the view that poetry is merely message in a natural language gets the upper hand we lose a sense of its specificity. The high modelling capacity of poetry is associated with its transformation from message to code. The poetic text is a kind of pendulum that oscillates between the ‘I-s/he’ system and the ‘I-I’ system. Rhythm is raised to the level of meaning, and meanings are formed in rhythm<sup>18</sup>.

All these “unnatural” elements of a poetic communication can be easily transposed into the language of dance, creating new meanings from “leftovers” of poetic communication, e.g. rhythm or blanks. Nevertheless, deterritorialization of language and the dancer’s body, in this sense, is not accomplished solely by transposing language (or Kosovel’s poetic text) into movement (or Ferlin’s choreo-text), but by activating an intermediary entity as well, which is corporal as such — *a human voice* (which will later on become Ferlin’s somatic obsession in most of his recent plays, especially those from the cycle

16 Ibidem, 47.

17 Lepecki, “Performance and Corporeality: Suspension of the ‘Human,’” 22.

18 Lotman, *Universe of the Mind*, 33.

*Staging a Play*). Whereas the mechanical voice of an answering machine is jarring, disturbing and uncanny, the variables of a human voice actually “enhances the sense-making effect”<sup>19</sup>.

The physics of the voice was often obsessed with the in-betweenness of the body and the language, or the self and the Other, simultaneously between *pho-nos* and *logos* and between *zoe* and *bios*. Dolar argues that, in Freud, it is the voice that “distinguishes the superego from the law”<sup>20</sup>, because superego is precisely the unwritten version of the law, the law’s “unspokeness”. Relying on Freud, Dolar emphasizes the significance of silence, or non-verbality, as “the negative of the voice, its shadow, its reverse, and thus something which can evoke the voice in its pure form”<sup>21</sup>, which even ought to make the signifier visible and recognizable.

Ferlin’s play *We are Kings not Humans* (*Mi smo kraljevi, a ne ljudi*) from 2015, therefore, continues this vocally, textually, linguistically, and discursively displaced research of movement, as a form and as an invention — of both choreographer’s pure authorship and multi-layered possibilities of language, a topic Ferlin dealt with in his previous group projects as well. A fundamental, almost socio-choreographic question, for him seems to be that of the possibility of the existence of a performance act at the moment “beyond the event”, i.e. when the language that appears in it ceases to be treated as its central point of reference. His choreographic “linguistics” will therefore become rudimentary, using children’s language, children’s thoughts, and sentences that are collected from a number of sources, creating a specific world beyond logocentrism of the “world of adults”. Performing this kind of pre-linguistic structures allows Ferlin to recreate a unique, intriguing, and authentic stage world, not imposing itself as a kind of simultaneous translator between the supposed precision of adult language and the pure and unfettered sensitivity of children’s language, but, on the contrary, using a specific combination of heterogeneous artistic languages and forms, which submit themselves to dance and movement, yet to some extent exploiting it for dramatic purposes. In this sense, the subtlety of language dissolves as “building material”, both at the level of the intimate dialogue that the performers have with the space, and at the level of deep psychological relationships towards children and childhood in general, without teaching and moralizing, with a handful of simple (“children’s”) answers to complicated (“adults’”) questions about humanity and the modern world.

19 Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More*, 22.

20 Ibidem, 100.

21 Ibidem, 152.

*Sad Sam Lucky's* intersemioticism, in a way, presupposes at least four languages, or four semiotic systems, whereas three of them are conventional, i.e. Slovenian original of Kosovel's poetry, its translation to Croatian, its dramaturgical reminiscence in English (by Goran Ferčec), and its somatic (dance-like) choreo-translation. Traces of Kosovel's poetry are, thus, mediatized through all of the aspects of the *Sad Sam Lucky* performance, e.g. vocally articulated, "danced", physically present on the paper, as props, books, etc. Material becomes persistent in exposing its own origin, depicting its own traceability, in a sense of Deleuzian repetition. When Ernst Jandl<sup>22</sup> defines a poem, he distinguishes visuality for a paper and for the lips. While the former is formed by expanding the text on paper, in the latter the reciter *is the paper*, by opening his lips, but not necessarily creating a sound, hence freeing the subject from the shackles of language, emphasizing bodily articulation, rhythm and sound. *Sad Sam Lucky* negotiates with Kosovel's poetic intertext precisely in this way, by opening his body to a certain choreographic material (mostly from his *Integrals* and some short autobiographic notes), by resonating with Kosovel's biography, etc. This is done in multiple ways: as with a "loose" performance script (Ferlin reaches for a script previously nailed on a black table as though as establishing an abstract performance score, especially in purely non-verbal sequences, and thus translating it *in situ* in his unique somatic expression); as with a "fixed" performance score, almost a textual device for corporal mimicry, a supposedly direct translation from one semiotic realm into the other; and finally, as a foreign language, Deleuzian difference, that needs to be translated for the audience, i.e. not Slovenian original, not Croatian (performer's mother tongue), not English (language of the piece), but at the same time Slovenian, Croatian, and English.

Perpetual nailing of new scripts on the black table emphasizes the contingency of the semiotic response created in the performance, i.e. responses to "formal" languages of the piece, although often "re-worded"; responses easily understood by the audience, although often "translated" for them; responses to abstract re-imagining inside of the dancer's bodily habitus or Kosovel's purposely distanced original, etc. Therefore, staging and translating processes are immanently interconnected in this piece, which is often articulated in the performer's voice, e.g. changing from the recitative to reading modes, declamation to acting, following script inputs to improvising, concretizing to fully abstracting personal or poetic images, etc.

Ernst Jandl takes out the poem *Chanson* from his own poetic oeuvre, confident that it could be used as an example of a poem that can only be written

22 Jandl, *Otvaranje i zatvaranje usta*, 4–34.

once, because the way it was “performed” is unrepeatable, i.e. instantly consumed. To clarify the nature of this method, not surprisingly, the author recalls the school practice of learning a foreign language, in which a small notebook plays an important role, the pages of which are divided into two equal parts by a vertical line, with foreign words written on the left and their (possible) native equivalents on the right. Jandl’s entire poem deals with four words that line up, swap places, interconnect, and deconstruct. Ferlin’s performative semiosis functions like this, in-between difference and repetition, in-between abstract poetic original, its English reminiscence-as-translation, its abstract embodied translation, etc. where audience is free to choose upon the number of columns to follow and experience during the performance.

The first section of *Sad Sam Lucky*’s script is thus dedicated to “spaces and things”, the second to “agitations”, the third to “actions”, the fourth to “conditions”, and the fifth one to “visions”, each one opening a specific chapter of Kosovel’s poetry, usually choosing verses, or resituating them in an aleatoric performance machine, or expanding them with extra-material, often intimately connected with the performer (as in the fourth section). This performative vocabulary, beyond its montage structure, ought to accommodate interrelationships not solely based on imitation, resemblance, or derivation, but rather on the interpretation of different codes, different *valences*, whereas all of them form “heterogeneous series”<sup>23</sup>. The notion of *valence* should be perceived here as in chemistry, as something inherent to the chemical element that opens a space for combining it with, or even replacing other elements, as in Latin *valens*, to be well, to be strong, to become an agent of constant creation and transformation.

The first, second and third part of the piece are simultaneously “danced” and spoken, being open for different performative valences, whereas, e.g. the first part (“Spaces and Things”) is very introspective and repetitive, the second part (“Agitations”) is dynamic and direct, the third part (“Actions”) again being introspective, and the last two parts (“Conditions” and “Visions”), performed non-verbally, embody the most intimate struggles of Kosovel’s poetic discourse. This kind of intersemiotic translatability is visible not only insofar as distancing from the author’s poetry occurs, but in different choreo-regimes as well, usually reflected in a textual form, ranging from pseudo-lyricism to pseudo-dialogism.

23 Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, 77—89.

A room.  
It's quiet, it's dead, grey.  
A room.  
Me.  
Silence is everywhere.  
Sun is shining.  
A little more of the sun.  
A little more of the sun.  
A little more of the sun.  
Open door.  
A room.  
A room.  
Microorganisms.  
It's quiet, it's dead, grey.  
Silence.  
A room.  
The pavement is deserted.  
The fire died out.  
No.  
A blind horse.  
No.  
White grave.  
No.  
Autumn's grave.  
No.  
A room.  
Melancholic accordion.  
No.  
A little more of the sun.  
A little more of the sun.  
A little more of the wind.  
No.  
The sea.  
No.  
Grayish blue sea.  
No.  
A flood.  
No.  
Ljubljana is sleeping ("Spaces and Things").

Duh u prostoru: Few weeks ago I had a really high fever. My body temperature was close to 40c\*. I did not feel good. My mother came and took care of me. One night I had such a terrible cough, I wasn't able to fall asleep. I was sharing my large bed with my mother. I was lying on my side facing my back towards her. In one point she placed her hand on my back, between my shoulder blades and in that point I felt warmth coming from her hand and I stopped coughing immediately. We didn't talk about it. Next day the terrible cough arrived again and while fighting with it I asked my mum if she can place her hand on my back again. She did. The cough stopped in the exact moment as she placed her hand. I remember I tried to provoke the cough but wasn't able. That night as the night before I fall asleep easily with my mother's hand on my back.

Delam iz bolesti: I always had interest in performing different types of death. Certain deaths are more easy than others. For example Pneumonia. So hard to show it physically. I mean I have so little knowledge about that disease. I know people who died of it but have no idea about its manifestations. How to perform Pneumonia?

Duh gori u prostoru: When I was a teenager I always wanted to have mystical experiences. My brother and my mother had them. And sometimes they would talk about them at the dinner table. I wanted to see signs. I wanted sky to open, I wanted to leave my body and see it from above, I wanted to hear things nobody else can hear. Fifteen years has passed since then. While they continue to have mystical experiences, I don't.

Svetli kordi klavirja: *(Pjevanje 3 akorda, ponavljanje do 3 puta).*

Samoten smeh: Every time I say a joke in Canada nobody laughs but they say 'It's so funny'. I say a better joke again and they don't laugh but say "Oh my God! That is so funny". Then I say a joke, for which I think it's a very successful international joke, but again they don't laugh. They say: 'Caludia! Come over here, you have to hear this. It's so funny!' So, today when they say: Matija, I have to tell you something funny! I always ask: Funny like funny hahaha? Or funny like funny?

Ti mirno spiš: *(Otvorene oči i zvuk hrkanja, repetativno).*

Kaj je žalost?: It's like when you have pain in your chest, and you cry a lot. Your eyes are swelling from crying. Your limbs are heavy. Your hands are cold.



Your face looks different. You do not feel like walking. Talking seems hard too. Sometimes companionship is comforting.

On je pokopan: My dearest lady. What should I write in this terrible hour? Our hearts are broken and I cannot write even one single word. There is one eternal thought in our memory. We are seeking for someone to be with, someone to show him tenderness and say a warm word to him, but he's gone. Our sorrow is terrible and strong. I do not know how, but for the whole time I saw death lying in his bed. Sometimes he said that I should stay strong and powerful and that I should accept the illness. I was encouraged by it and I tried to push away the thought of him dying. My heart was torn apart in an endless suffering. He suffered for three months and on Thursday evening of 27th of May at 9:37 he left for good. I do not know why, but I cannot, I cannot imagine that this really happened, though I saw everything, all with my own eyes.

Splašena duša: 'BOO!' Sometimes I hide myself in the darkness of a room and I wait until I see someone's shadow and then I go 'BOO!' or I hide under the table and in stillness I wait for the right moment to go 'BOO!' or I follow someone silently and when I feel that the right moment has arrived, then I go loudly 'BOO!'.

Ura žalosti: *Iskreno plakanje.*

Razočarani: Back in 1996, one day I arrived home from school and I witness what I that was a miracle. A sculpture of Holy Mary made in wax & wrapped in cellophane that usually stands on a shelf next to the TV was placed on a dining table. That wasn't a big change but this time her face was different. There was blood pouring out of her eyes. I started shaking, I thought I was the one. The chosen one. The one with a miracle. One phone call and it turn out that my brother had painted bloody tears. He needed Holy Mary with blood tears as prop for one of his video clip shootings" ("Conditions").

The overall content of Ferlin's solo performance is not only to be sought in Kosovel's imagery. Most of the fragments are, indeed, taken from his poems, but they are often amalgamed with strong, vivid images of hesitations, of troubled identity, of desolation in the face of a drifting Europe. Interestingly, intersemiotic translation procedures are consistently designated by different performative strategies: at first, Kosovel's words resonate with restraint, the motionless body, concentrating all the intensity of the subject in his voice, then they are suddenly transferred to a second voice, superimposed, more

intimate, halfway through the piece, where he narrates parts of his life, tells anecdotes that make the public laugh, together with bestial cries, as they are finally embodied, subordinated to a strong image of a young poet (the dancer's disembodied body) in a duet with the wooden table.

Roland Barthes offers an interesting analysis of *Sarrasine*, a novella by Honoré de Balzac about a castrate, named Zambinella, whom Sarrasine, a troublesome artist, believes to be the ideal woman. In his *S/Z* Barthes identifies five symptomatic codes that create meaning through which a text progresses in a narrative tissue. These modes are then vaguely defined to fit the specific relationship between the text and its overall structure, whereas two of them are irreversible, i.e. the hermeneutic code forces the narrative forward, and the proairetic code creates patterns of behaviour that cannot be anticipated in the text as such. The last three codes are reversible, where the third one, the semic code, identifies specific and concrete signs and objects that work together to create lasting themes in the text. The fourth one, the symbolic code, deals with abstract concepts open to individual interpretation. The last (reversible) code is not of structural nature, so Barthes names it cultural code, implying that modes of understanding often rely on deeper social and anthropological structures<sup>24</sup>. His notions could easily be applied to the performative potency of Ferlin's embodied translations (of Kosovel's poetry), mainly in a sense they presume a hermeneutic niche (Barthes' first code) for any deeper understanding of the "negative space" of the performance narrative, e.g. withholding valuable information for the sake of abstraction or allusiveness. This creates a series of moments not known that the audience could imagine in expectation. These interconnections between Kosovel's poetry and Ferlin's choreo-texts are not only loose in purely abstract nonverbal sequences, but in those that have a firmer dramaturgical structure as well. In the third segment of *Sad Sam Lucky*, titled "Actions", Kosovel's resonances become almost direct, but the performance is, hence, almost exaggerated in abstraction, therefore creating a specific gaze towards its own pseudo-narrative structure.

I sit and write.  
 The flies are dying in a glass.  
 I woke up.  
 Raise anchor!  
 I sing and I bark.  
 Eye's sweet smell.  
 Movement.

24 Barthes, *S/Z*, 3–43.

Boris opened the window.  
The rain is falling.  
Tomorrow: leaving for Paris.  
I protest.  
I'm standing on a grey road.  
Everyone's looking.  
Laugh, laugh, laugh.  
Give up on yourself.  
I can't.  
BB' Action.  
Shoot!  
Shoot!  
Shoot!  
Open the museums!  
When I jump, the piano is heard.  
To destroy, to destroy, to destroy!  
A car spattering mud.  
I've turned off the light.  
This sun is sad.  
I sing solar energies.  
I closed the door.  
Weary we fall.  
The end.  
Spirit in a room.  
Spirit burns in a room.  
Bright chords of the piano.  
A frightened soul.  
Your voice is soft.  
Music.  
The hour of grief.  
But I can't cry.  
I am hard as the steel that has to stab the heart.  
You sleep peacefully.  
The disappointed.  
Autumn quiet is inside of me and outside.  
Hunger.  
Shameful laughter.  
Anomaly of will.  
He is buried.  
I am like a cloud, a cloud that carried evening's gold from there.

What is sadness?  
 I live in misery.  
 The tormented.  
 Grieving others.  
 A cynic.  
 Transformer.  
 The static of sadness: melancholy.  
 I love my pain.  
 I work from pain.  
 I am luxury.  
 Anomaly of psychology.  
 Romanticism.  
 AA<sup>2</sup> Depression  
 I want to be on my own.  
 Evening burns like fire.  
 Tu, tu, tu.  
 There my spirit calms down.  
 I am a broken arc of a circle.  
 And a crushed figure of a sculpture.  
 And someone's withheld opinion.  
 10 tons of grief.  
 It is nice to lay dead.  
 And then again the night and heavy sweat ("Actions").

Barthes' proairectic code, furthermore, refers to specific norms, rhythms and patterns that provide logical unfolding of moments, scenes, or literary devices. Barthes emphasizes these rhythms as procedures deeply rooted into the author's habitus, as the author is submitted to them. If one tries to find this structure of in-coding in performative discourses, it is easy to find it amongst dramaturgical procedures. In order to become a choreo-texts, *Sad Sam Lucky* had to go through many dramaturgical appropriations, wherein nuances of Kosovel's poetry were left hidden from the plain sight. A semic code, employed here, represents a signifier which refers the audience of Ferlin's piece to imagine an object that will continue existing hypothetically in their minds as they perceive it, being closely connected to the symbolic code, i.e. to the attachment of meaning onto those potent fields of constant referencing.

These two codes are therefore of utmost importance in contemporary dance, providing spectators with certain "differing licences", in order to validate their individual interpretation of what seems to be an abstract material of corporal language. Even not knowing all the correspondences between

Kosovel's poetry and Ferlin's choreo-text, one cannot escape the feeling, e.g. that this dance-performance has something to do with the revolutionary habitus of the Slovene avant-garde poet, even if this is not obvious at first glance.

Is there a continuum between the level of meanings that are attributed to Kosovel's words by the author and individual meanings, in Ferlin's case, of their spoken or embodied word? There seems to be more complex relation between the order of signs and the anarchy of the individual who uses these signs to express something different from what (linguistic) rules of translation would prescribe. In Schleiermacher's theory of language, the concept of the subject is not a very suitable philosophical starting point, because it pre-exists merely as a relation, i.e. the sense of identity is felt inside the subject, but it is not caused by it. The crisis of the subject, thus, consists in the fact that the subject does not create the truth in which it exists, but can only testify to it.

Following Schleiermacher's arguments, Manfred Frank was eager to demonstrate how linguistic expression becomes double-marked: it manifests the system, or totality of language, but it also implies that language becomes language only through speech. No linguistic expression can thus be understood without this double determinability towards speech. As Lotman implied regarding contingency of understanding in arts, culture, and in life: "However, a degree of comprehension is at the same time a degree of non-comprehension"<sup>25</sup>.

Manfred Frank underlines Schleiermacher's argument that language is historically an open (parasemic) system, i.e. individual and universal at once, where universal constitution is the one based on principally revocable agreements between speakers (with each speech act it often changes its overall meaning) and individual constitution presumes styles and genres, or language processing with regard to the speaker's own understanding of subjects. This is why there are no rules that are always valid in understanding works of literature, or works of art, principles which could be used to decipher every text from every period. Following Frank's hermeneutical notions, one could presume that texts are subject to all imaginable interpretations, so they are constantly "being translated", and this is precisely why understanding is not to be misunderstood for interpretation, i.e. hermeneutics related to proper understanding<sup>26</sup>. Anglo-Saxon theory of interpretation used to designate this as a difference between verbal meaning, or any neutral meaning independent of time, and significance, or any arbitrary relationship that exists between verbal meaning and something else<sup>27</sup>.

25 Lotman, *Universe of the Mind*, 80.

26 Frank, *Kazivo i nekazivo*, 111.

27 Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, 101.

Ferlin's attempt to translate Kosovel's poetry into a new bodily language is a reconstruction of its meaning as well, therefore always new or different, revealed only in a kind of performative divination, as the subject of creative dramaturgical negotiation. *Sad Sam Lucky's* choreo-text demonstrates that an activity of writing is always incomplete, so it requires the act of reading as a certain hermeneutic extension. Choreographic interpretation of this kind reduces Kosovel's poetic ambiguity as much as possible — towards a certain interpretation regime, of course — but restructuring it as much as possible in another semiotic system or constituting a new demarcation, full of individual signs that make up for the constitutional hierarchies between the original version and its translation. Different dramaturgical procedures, thus, function as translatory enzymes, the catalysts of biological systems, the remarkable molecular devices that will determine the pattern of transformation. Any interpretation is, in the last instance, a hypothetical procedure. One cannot derive meaning from grammar, or even vocabulary, because that what has meaning is not caused, but motivated through the mediation of the interpreter, willing to try to exhaust the text, whilst aware that this is not really possible. A dancing body is always eager to demarcate and to map what it embodies, even if it refers to a concrete wordily realms, translating it, willing to accept that misunderstanding arising from this translation can never be totally resolved. If speech distorts (linguistic) intention, omitting its wordily realms to what is about to be said about something, a dancing body tries to preserve it, even if, due to the inevitability of individual interpretation of the *wor(l)d*, dissent is more likely to occur than consensus. Maybe this is the reason for deterritorialized nature of dance among performance arts, as well as poetry among literature, i.e. their precariousness in a world dominated by neoliberal phantasma of the necessity of utmost understanding, often metaphorized by "Globish", blurring genres, styles, bodily differences, allowing everyone to speak equally, hence silencing them equally.

## Photos



Scene from *Sad Sam Lucky* 1. Photo: Nada Žgank



Scene from *Sad Sam Lucky* 2. Photo: Nada Žgank



Scene from *Sad Sam Lucky 3*. Photo: Nada Žgank



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Leo Rafolt

### Intersemiotički modernizam: *Sad Sam Lucky* Matije Ferlina između poezije i njezina utjelovljenja

SAŽETAK | *Sad Sam Lucky* je solo izvedba koreografa i performerera Matije Ferlina, osmišljena u sklopu njegova trajnog neplesnog i nekazališnog konceptualnog projekta *Sad Sam*, započetog u siječnju 2004. u Amsterdamu, gdje je praižveden prvi dio. Ferlinova predstava donekle je specifična u autorovu opusu, ponajviše zato što nastoji utjeloviti fizički odgovor na djelo slovenskog avangardnog pjesnika Srečka Kosovele (1904—1926), prevodeći ga i transponirajući u isto vrijeme, između jezika i dijalekata (slovenski, hrvatski, istarski i/ili engleski), te između performativnih režima (utjelovljeni odgovor i pseudorecital). Kosovelova ispovjedna poezija, dakle duboka, suvremena, napeta u stilskim slikama, a istodobno gotovo revolucionarna u svojim idejama, izvodi

se stoga kao živa stvar jezika, vođena glavnom Ferlinovom idejom — ne raditi kazalište, ne plesati, ne prevoditi, nego intersemiotički utjeloviti Kosovelove stihove i njegova melankolična proročanstva, stvarajući tako formu izrazito fizičkog, burnog i emotivnog pseudoteatra, hommage ovom vrlo jedinstvenom avangardnom autoru.

KLJUČNE RIJEČI | prijevod, Srećko Kosovel, transpozicija, suvremeni ples

LEO RAFOLT | graduated and received his PhD in theatre and performance studies at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb. He worked at the same Faculty until 2017. Currently he teaches performance studies, cultural theory, and theoretical dramaturgy, as a full professor, at the Academy of Arts and Culture of Josip Juraj Strossmayer University in Osijek. He has been a guest professor at many European, American, and Asian universities. On several occasions he had fellowships in France, Hungary, Poland, Italy, USA, UK, Slovenia, Norway, Finland, and Japan. He has written more than a hundred articles for encyclopedic and lexical editions and edited several collections of works (*Odbrojavanje: antologija suvremene hrvatske drame*, 2007; Miljenko Majetić, *Između Hekube i Rabbija: dramatski, teatrološki i ini spisi*, 2017; *Public Sphere between Theory, Media, and Artistic Intervention*, 2019; Joseph Texte, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau i ishodišta književnog kozmopolitizma*, 2019; Jean-Luc Jeener, *Kazalište na samrti*, 2019, Mika Hannula, Juha Suoranta, Tere Vadén, *Umjetničko istraživanje: teorije, metode i prakse*, 2021; Dubravko Mataković, monografija, 2023). In addition, he is the author of a number of scientific papers, essays, reviews, critiques, as well as the following books: *Melpomenine maske: fenomenologija žanra tragedije u dubrovačkom ranonovovjekovlju* (2007), *Drugo lice drugosti: književnoantropološke studije* (2009), *Priučeni na tumačenje: deset čitanja* (2011), *Odbačeni predmet: između filologije i izvedbe* (2017), *Tijelo kao glagol: japanski budo, transkulturalne tehnike i trening za izvedbu* (2019), *Virus in fabula* (2021), *Preskočene niti* (2022), *Montažstroj's Emancipatory Performance Politics: Never Mind the Score* (2022), *Tijelo nacije: uvod u japanski budo* (2023). For his research he received the State Award for Science (2008), the Annual Award of the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Zagreb (2009), "Judith" Award (2009), and "Zvane Črnja" Award.