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Madness as a Critical Aesthetic Response: Verfremdungseffekt in the Theatre of Yury Pogrebnichko

Being one of the most original theatre directors (and a “living classic”) in contemporary Russia, Yury Pogrebnichko (born in 1939)) makes use of different theatre poetics and post-Brechtian style is one of them. Distilled from its direct political sense Verfremdungseffekt (one of the major Brechtian instruments) turns into a technique that lets the director investigate the peculiarities and idiosyncrasies of a postmodern Russian torn between the present and the past. On the one hand, Brechtian legacy loses its political basis, on the other – politics turns into an ambivalent undercurrent of existence for Pogrebnichko’s contemporaries. Seemingly indifferent to politics on the narrative level, the characters are dependent on it on the visual and musical level. Their appearance, home interiors, music tastes and, moreover, their mental and emotional reality is bound with the previous political regime (the Soviet times). This experience is traumatic but at the same time very productive from the aesthetic point of view. Trauma results in madness on the narrative level (lots of characters are mentally challenged) and creativity on the visual level (they are original artists). Verfremdungseffekt (in its transformed version) serves to translate on stage this creative potential of political trauma