

RETHINKING DRAMA IN THE CRISIS OF DELIBERATIVE COMMUNICATION: THE RADICAL THEORY OF MARTIN BUBER AND GUSTAV LANDAUER

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Abstract: The article presents the basic elements of Gustav Landauer's and Martin Buber's thinking on theatre and drama. It shows they are rooted in the late 19th-century critique of language (*Sprachkritik*), trying to overcome the representational function of language. The author searches for shared elements in both thinkers' philosophies: an integral idea of human personality (inner necessity), spirituality as a superpersonal unity tending towards a communitarian vision of the people, and so on. While Buber emphasizes the unity of opposites, or the union of the characters in the drama while preserving their differences, Landauer focuses on achieving unity with the ancestors and the cosmos through an inner immersion. Both direct their theory of drama towards political meaning. This paper proposes that their concept of drama can be used to rethink communication, transcending the post-politics of consensus, as it preserves difference in unity.

Keywords: drama, theatre, post-politics, stage design, actor, poetry, communication

For decades, social critics have been talking about a communication crisis with a profound political significance. The republic of letters, which was the ideal of the Enlightenment, disintegrated with the rise of mass movements in the second half of the 19th century. Today, this process continues with the emergence of counter-publics.¹ The liberal idea of rational deliberation (or the communication utopia²), eliminating antagonisms through impersonal procedures of the global village, has led Western civilization into the crisis of post-politics, including the proliferation of individualism and fundamentalism.³ It is not the right- or left-wing polarizing propaganda that threatens deliberation. Our trust in communication as the independent arbiter of politics and everyday life stirs up the crisis.

In drama, speech appears in a specific situation. It does not serve primarily as a representation of the world, as a carrier of messages or arguments. Perhaps only in the Socratic dialogue (if we subtract the peculiar Platonic irony), or in later philosophical allusions to it, we find dramatic form in the service of dialectic. However, in the European tradition, which defined drama on a Greek basis, the term denotes a particular poetic genre that presents people acting.⁴ A dramatic situation is impos-

¹ HABERMAS, J. *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*. Frankfurt am Main : Suhrkamp, 2001; DOWNEY, J. – FENTON, N. New media, counter publicity and the public sphere. In *New Media & Society*, 2003, Vol. 5, Issue 2, pp. 185 – 202.

² BRETON, P. *L'Utopie de la communication : Le Mythe du "village planétaire"*. Paris : La Découverte, 1992.

³ MOUFFE, Ch. *On the Political*. Abingdon : Routledge, 2005.

⁴ I take a lesson, then, from Florence Dupont's critical analysis of the unacknowledged Aristotelianism that she exposes in contemporary theatre (though it loudly proclaims the overcoming of the dramatic). If she argues that our conception of theatre is ethnocentric because we consecrate our ideas about it as „timeless

sible without dramatic tension and interpersonality. It depicts the world in “what is between” the characters in their difference. There is no separation of public and private in drama (as it is in liberal politics). In drama, the private concerns influence the public decisions, such as in Sophocles’ *Electra* or Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. This anthropological integrity interested Martin Buber and Gustav Landauer, who considered it a solution to the language crisis and the crisis of the representational and communicative function of speech (Sprachkritik).

From the perspective of the contemporary radical artist, drama appears as a bourgeois genre that in its original form is suitable only for deconstruction – as in the case of Susanne Kennedy adapting Chekhov’s *Three Sisters* into a cyclical, fragmentary and highly visual form that demonstrates a total distrust of the possibility of interpersonal communication. In this essay, I want to rethink drama in order to overcome our profound communication crisis.

Buber’s and Landauer’s thoughts on theatre are now almost forgotten in theatre scholarship and dramaturgy. However, their radical political horizon shows that even in the time of the incipient crisis of drama in which they had lived, it was possible to find arguments to defend the genre. Why, then, for the same radical reasons, should we not be concerned with drama as we experience a deepening communicative crisis in entirely new conditions?

The Modern Crisis of Communication

In the 19th century, linguistic criticism (Sprachkritik) emerged as a normative evaluation of language. Following Jacob Grimm, the criticism differs from linguistics. It renounces descriptions in favor of evaluations, stating rather “what should be” than “what is”. The criticism should occupy the field of practice, applying linguistic knowledge to the problems arising from language use.⁵ At the beginning of the 20th century, the criticism, originally based on the concept of language as an organism, shifted under the influence of structuralism, employing the postulate of language as a rule-based system of arbitrary and conventional signs. From the 1960s onwards, the critique of language became more closely linked to social critique, especially where it drew on the Marxist or psychoanalytic tradition. The language itself is ideological.⁶

At the turn of the 19th and 20th century, the question of the relationship between language and reality resulted in a crisis that has not been overcome. From the early 1900s onwards, this “Sprachkrise” in the German-speaking world was characterized by a distrust of language’s representational function or the possibility that language

truths,” I agree that this is a mistake. I understand drama as a particular historical and cultural form, just as Buber and Landauer openly drew on specific cultural traditions (Greek, German and Jewish). I think it only makes sense to talk about drama in the European context and not identify it as theatre in general. If we want to give meaning back to drama, it must be re-rooted in our culture, and we have to identify with it – fully aware of its particularity. The Aristotelianism of this essay in relation to drama is thus fully acknowledged. DUPONT, F. *Aristote ou le vampire du théâtre occidental*. Paris : Aubier, 2007.

⁵ KILIAN, J. – NIEHR, T. – SCHIEWE, J. *Sprachkritik : Ansätze und Methoden der Kritischen Sprachbetrachtung*. Berlin – New York : De Gruyter, 2010, p. 15.

⁶ BARTHES, R. *Empire of Things*. New York : The Noonday Press, 1989, p. 8.

can adequately express reality.⁷ That is why in contemporary liberal ideology, the truth is “discussed”, i. e., constructed by public argumentation.

Fritz Mauthner, who profoundly impacted both Landauer and Buber, argued that our world is constructed by language. For instance, there is no “going” in reality because what we understand by the verb “go” is built by our language system.⁸ The language is arbitrary and hardly has any plausible epistemological value. In its abstraction, language reflects human thinking, not reality. Words can perform anything “real” only in a particular speech situation. Words as “social reality” present “social illusion” as well: “Language is a game and as such without any relation to reality, an ordered system of rules that gains meaning only in use.”⁹ This philosophical criticism of language anticipated Wittgenstein’s theory and Foucauldian discourse analysis. Still, it was more radical as it promoted the necessity of “mysticism of silence” as language cannot mediate anything beyond itself.¹⁰

But how can we understand each other in such a disintegrated universe? And on what basis can we create a vibrant community, a politically sustainable and just system from such an understanding? This “Sprachkrise” can lead to nihilism, but for Buber and Landauer, it was the opposite: it brought hope. In line with the ideas of “Lebensphilosophie”¹¹ and Friedrich Nietzsche’s creative voluntarism,¹² the fundamental step that both took was the shift from the perspective of language as the universal system to the language as an individual’s creative performance. Truth is not to be produced by discourse but by the integrity of the individual. The problem of “how to tell the truth” changes to the question “how to realize [Verwirklichung] a personality whose every movement is true.”

In 1900, this theme led the two to the New Community (Die Neue Gemeinschaft), an artistic and intellectual settlement founded by the Hart brothers in Berlin-Schlachtensee. They met there¹³ and soon established a lifelong friendship that was only cut short by the sudden death of Gustav Landauer during the revolution after the First World War.¹⁴ Although they had different life experiences (student Buber

⁷ SJÖBERG, S. *Mysticism of Immanence: Lettrism, Sprachkritik, and the Immediate Message*. In *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas*, 2013, Vol. 11, Issue 1, pp. 53 – 54.

⁸ MAUTHNER, F. *Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache: Erster Band: Zur Sprache und zur Psychologie*. Stuttgart – Berlin: J. G. Gotta’sche Buchhandlung Nachfolger, 1906, pp. 231 – 232.

⁹ KÜHN, J. *Gescheiterte Sprachkritik: Fritz Mauthners Leben und Werk*. Berlin – New York: De Gruyter, 1975, p. 53.

¹⁰ SJÖBERG, S. *Mysticism of Immanence: Lettrism, Sprachkritik, and the Immediate Message*, p. 54. That is why Mauthner’s position is more akin to Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* than to *Philosophical Investigations*.

¹¹ This dominant philosophy of the fin-de-siècle placed life and the immediacy of experience at its centre as a value and source of meaning. Its emphasis on human being as becoming (Werden) developed the legacy of German Romanticism and foreshadowed existentialism. See BOLLNOW, O. F. *Die Lebensphilosophie*. Berlin: Springer-Verlag, 1958.

¹² RODLAUER, H. „Der werdende Mensch“: Buber, Landauer und Werfel. In *Brücken – Germanistisches Jahrbuch Tschechien-Slowakei*, 1995, Vol. 3, Issue 1 – 2, 1995, p. 25.

¹³ The prevailing opinion is that they first met in New Community, as stated e. g. by Paul Mendes-Flohr. See MENDES-FLOHR, P. *Martin Buber: A Life of Faith and Dissent*. New Haven – London: Yale University Press, 2019, pp. 51 – 52. However, there is also a different opinion, e. g. Gertrude Cepl-Kaufmann writes that in 1900, they already knew each other from Neue Freie Volksbühne. See CEPL-KAUFMANN, G. *Gustav Landauer and the Literary Trends of his Time*. In *Gustav Landauer: Anarchist and Jew* (Eds. P. Mendes-Flohr – A. Mali). Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015, p. 111.

¹⁴ It should be noted that Landauer’s brutal death (he was murdered by Freikorps in 1919) had a pro-

had been involved in the Zionist movement and was just entering the literary world, whilst slightly older anarchist Landauer had already had a long political, journalistic and literary experience, including imprisonment), they joined the group with a similar vision of life reform (Lebensreform). Both felt uncomfortable in the movements of the time; both tried to find a new path for themselves, unable to fit into the literary and political trends of fin-de-siècle.

The ideology of the New Community was based on the integrative, monistic approach aimed to combine scientific knowledge and technical practice under the guidance of artistic discourse. Thus, an organic "inner culture" – "Innenkultur" was to be formed¹⁵ (leading to personal liberation – "Innenbefreiung" in Landauer's terms¹⁶). The way out of the confusions of the epoch was through the integrative development of the individual, who should take part in an all-encompassing community. However, the group was short-lived, and both Buber and Landauer were members only for a short time and soon left it because of its elitism and almost sectarian character. They wanted to seek life's reform in the concreteness of human life. The community was not perceived as a project of an artistic elite or a mass movement (Landauer left the mass workers' movement, but he also opposed the "art for art's sake" of symbolism or decadence and sought his own path to cultural socialism¹⁷), but a spontaneous cultural formation based on people's concrete lives.

"Der werdende Mensch"

Before the war, Buber and Landauer shared many beliefs and strongly influenced each other, although Landauer's influence on Buber (especially in mysticism, communitarianism and politics) is evident.¹⁸ They shared, above all, the idea of culture as a spiritual union that arises organically in the human everydayness and an interest in art and its importance for this union (this led to Buber's cultural conception of Zionism and his abandonment of the political vision of a Jewish state). One can further observe a shared interest in the critique of language and ideology, logically linked to an interest in mysticism and a vision of man as an integral being that can only be understood from his concrete life, not some abstract categories or social classification.

They conceived man not as a fixed reality, an essence to be fulfilled or, on the contrary, as a free material to be constructed, but as an organism embedded in history, culture and nature, which is to develop ("become") to its proper ("natural") shape. The goal of cultural and individual integration was a unity that does not overcome differentiation but preserves personal freedom. The fact that this realization (Ver-

found impact on Buber and he suffered by it for the rest of his life, especially after the death of Landauer's eldest daughter Lotta in 1927. Lotta was Buber's link to his friend not only in the last moments of Landauer's life („Father is out of danger“, she telegraphed to Buber shortly before the murder), but also – spiritually – after his death. FRIEDMAN, M. *Martin Buber's Life and Work: The Middle Years, 1923–1945*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988, p. 128.

¹⁵ WÜLFING, W. – BRUNS, K. – PARR, R. *Handbuch literarisch-kultureller Vereine, Gruppen und Bünde 1825–1933*. Stuttgart – Weimar: J. B. Metzler, 1998, p. 360.

¹⁶ CEPL-KAUFMANN, G. *Gustav Landauer and the Literary Trends of his Time*, p. 113.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 109 – 110.

¹⁸ Paul Mendes-Flohr argues that Landauer "(...) helped refine Buber's nascent interest in mysticism, and especially his own understanding of community," revealing to him the significance of the mystical „Gemeinschaftsgefühl“. MENDES-FLOHR, P. *Martin Buber: A Life of Faith and Dissent*, pp. 53 – 54.

wirklichung) cannot be put into words but must be realized in concrete life represents their shared conviction about overcoming the crisis of language.

However, their attitude towards language differed. Buber expressed his idea of realization as integrating human individuals around the transcendental axis in the dialogical essay *Daniel* (1913)¹⁹. Influenced by the Jewish tradition, he understood speech in the biblical sense as a creative tool of a transcendent nature. The critique of language was to lead to the purification of speech rather than to its negation. Landauer, by contrast, turned to immanence. For him, speech became an instrument revealing the unity of necessity behind multiplicity – words being as music expressing the unspeakable.²⁰ “Music is the only art where talking is still allowed,” wrote Landauer in his unpublished dialogue *On the Speech of Poet* (undated).²¹

Despite the initial individualism (reflecting the influence of Nietzsche’s philosophy), both Buber and Landauer understood that authentic speech uniting a free community in a common spirit could not be achieved through simple personal development (although this was their focus). Landauer exposed the obstacles to individual and communal development posed by capitalism and parliamentarism, as well as Marxist determinism. Buber later built on his ideas to highlight the systemic challenges to “Verwirklichung” in his *Paths to Utopia* (1950).²² Both espoused socialism, and both understood the individual’s “realization” in mutuality with other people as conditioned by social revolution. Hence their conception of art, including drama, bears a political significance – although the word “politics” in their work should hardly be understood as parliamentary democracy or public debate.²³ Political machinery itself is meaningless because it is based on the erroneous idea that unity can be achieved through power competition or argument. The unity should arise from the concrete mutual life of individuals, and culture is the cement of ordinary life. Therefore, the ideal can be Greece in which drama has become the organic centre of the life of the polis, without propaganda;²⁴ or medieval society that allowed a radical multiplicity of autonomous ways of life, and art permeated the everydayness rather than being the province of an intellectual elite.²⁵ For Buber and

¹⁹ BUBER, M. *Daniel* : Gespräche von der Verwirklichung. In *Martin Buber Werkausgabe 1 : Frühe kulturkritische und philosophische Schriften 1891–1924* (Ed. M. Tremml). Gütersloh : Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2001, pp. 183 – 245.

²⁰ LANDAUER, G. *Skepsis und Mystik : Versuche in Anschluß am Mauthners Sprachkritik*. Berlin : Egon Leichel & Co., 1903, p. 153.

²¹ LANDAUER, G. Von der Sprache des Dichters. In *Gustav Landauer als Schriftsteller : Sprache, Schweigen, Musik* (Ed. C. R. Kaiser). Berlin – Boston : De Gruyter, 2014, p. 357. This approach to language clearly reflected the critique of the naturalism and rationalism of the Romantic intellectuals at the turn of the 18th and 19th century (Schiller, who opposed the notion of art as imitation, elevated the value of instrumental music which expresses the spiritual unity of man and the world. See BONDS, M. E. *Music as Thought*. Princeton – Oxford : Princeton University Press, 2006.

²² BUBER, M. Pfade in Utopia. In *Martin Buber Werkausgabe 11 : Schriften zur politischen Philosophie und Sozialphilosophie : Teilband 2 : 1938–1965* (Ed. M. De Villa). Gütersloh : Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2019, pp. 117 – 259.

²³ “Within the political machinery, it is impossible to get to the factual.” BUBER, M. *Abstrakt und Konkret*. Ibid., p. 283. On Buber’s explanation of the political see BUBER, M. *Zwischen Gesellschaft und Staat*. Ibid., pp. 261 – 271.

²⁴ BUBER, M. *Staat und Kultur*. Ibid., p. 308.

²⁵ LANDAUER, G. *Revolution*. In *Gustav Landauer : Revolution and Other Writings : A Political Reader* (Ed. G. Kuhn). Oakland : PM Press, 2010, pp. 131 – 135.

Landauer, art was a place where particularities could be overcome without losing the differentiated human experience, revealing the social spirit. Drama is a model of such unity.

Although neither presented their theory of theatre as a coherent system (consistent with their belief in the inadequacy of systems), they described their ideas in letters, art criticism, several essays, and their active involvement in theatre life in Düsseldorf or Hellerau.²⁶ Both influenced active artists of their time, such as Hugo von Hofmannsthal or Louise Dumont-Lindemann.²⁷ Theatre was at the centre of their artistic interest. After all, in Buber's own words, it was the stage of the Burgtheater where he first experienced the "vibrant word", which became the main theme of his *I and Thou* (1923).²⁸ It was Shakespeare and dramaturgical work for the Schauspielhaus Düsseldorf to which Landauer devoted himself in the last years of his life in the revolutionary ferment of the ending world war.

Landauer: Drama as the Music of Inner Necessity

Landauer was more interested in drama than in theatre, at least in his critical writings. In his letters and short articles, we can see that he understood theatre as a place for spiritual renewal and communal encounters rather than an experimental artistic institution. His rather conservative taste revealed these tendencies – he saw Shakespeare and ancient Greeks as the major dramatists without contestants. "What a drama for our time!" he wrote in November 1918 to Louise Dumont-Lindemann on

²⁶ Buber was a dramaturge to Hellerau production of Paul Claudel's *Annunciation* (in original *L'Annoce faite à Marie*, produced in Hellerau as *Verkündigung*), being an advisor of the director Emil Strauß (Max Reinhardt had also been discussed for this post) in 1913. With Jacob Hegner, Emil Strauß and Wolf Dohrn, Buber founded the group Hellerauer Schauspiele and became its president. Strauß and Buber emphasized the simple and authentic speech, but after his arrival (only a few days before the premiere), Paul Claudel dramatically changed the acting style towards engaging more grandeur in diction. The differences in opinion concerning directing finally led to the withdraw of Strauß and Buber from the production. They did not even appear on the premiere and misunderstandings continued to intensify. (See BILSKI, E. D. – BREITENBACH, H. – ROKEM, F. – WITTE, B. (eds.). *Martin Buber Werkausgabe 7 : Schriften zur Literatur, Theater und Kunst : Lyrik, Autobiographie und Drama*. Gütersloh : Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2016, p. 748 – 751; FRIEDMAN, M. Martin Buber and the Theater. In *Martin Buber and the Theater* (Ed. M. Friedman). New York : Funk & Wagnalls, 1969, pp. 3 – 25). Gustav Landauer was among the founders of Neue Freie Volksbühne in Berlin in 1892 and was a member of the group until 1917, hoping that he can be involved in the theatre productions. In 1916, Landauer met Louise Dumont and Gustav Lindemann, the principals of Schauspielhaus Düsseldorf, where he was invited to lecture by the then dramaturge Hans Franck. In the following years, he consulted both the theatre organization and production, and collaborated on the publication of magazine *Masken*. In 1918, he replaced Franck as the theatre's dramaturge – but only for a very short time. Landauer was murdered the following spring, and his grand plans for a spiritual theatre for the people remained mostly in the form of ideas and proposals. (See DAVID, A. Gustav Landauer's Tragic Theater. In *Gustav Landauer : Anarchist and Jew* (Eds. P. Mendes-Flohr – A. Mali). Berlin : De Gruyter, 2015, pp. 92 – 106; MATZIGKEIT, M. *Literatur im Aufbruch : Schriftsteller und Theater in Düsseldorf Zwischen 1900–1933*. Düsseldorf : Verlag der Goethe-Buchhandlung, 1990, pp. 99 – 150). See also SHAHAR, G. *Theatrum judaicum : Denkspiele im deutsch-jüdischen Diskurs der Moderne*. Bielefeld : Aisthesis, 2006.

²⁷ The Buber's influence on Hofmannsthal's work was revealed by Maurice Friedman, see: FRIEDMAN, M. Drama and the Theater : Buber and Hofmannsthal. In *Martin Buber and the Theater* (Ed. M. Friedman). New York : Funk & Wagnalls, 1969, pp. 26 – 50.

²⁸ BUBER, M. Autobiografische Schriften : Erinnerung. In *Martin Buber Werkausgabe 7 : Schriften zur Literatur, Theater und Kunst : Lyrik, Autobiographie und Drama* (Eds. E. D. Bilski – H. Breitenbach – F. Rokem – B. Witte). Gütersloh : Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2016, p. 272.

account of Aeschylus' *Persians*: "The best piece for the audience, the best sensation is the eternal, which speaks to us in a right moment."²⁹

Analyzing Strindberg's *Dream Play* (1918), he argues that the poet's dramatic work represents a significant "world feeling" (Weltgefühl) nurtured by "the inner necessity", rather than expressing political or ideological ideas. The world is experienced "in the unspeakable sphere of suffering and painful learning."³⁰ As Landauer explains, we do not experience our lives as a peaceful whole but in conflict and fragmented. Dramatic realism should reveal the uniting core beyond, coming to us as love.³¹ Any causal explanation of the characters and actions is "spiritless", we should rely on a teleological perspective: "Everything in nature as well as in history and individual life still has its meaning, a particular sense, relation to the spirit."³²

The "unfathomable, albeit sometimes shining unity" beyond the life's duality is to be properly expressed by drama as music, "in a whole (...) what lives in us. It may soon be that only art can do that."³³ For instance, "spreading out of the colorful carpet patterns of the inner human," Hamlet's monologue expresses the grounding unity of the character and the feeling in its simplicity. The meaning of words is not important (even they can be forgotten), but its overall expression speaks about the unspeakable. Following Nietzsche, Landauer claims: The true aim of poetry is not only to reach "beyond the good and evil", but "beyond the words". This "beyond" means that the poet "takes you out of yourself"³⁴ to the "fourth dimension" in accord with Landauer's radical "epoche" beyond "ego cogito".

This "sparkling unity" presented by drama as music provides not only consolation but freedom, as well. Landauer shows it in his reflections on Shakespeare, who was of an eminent significance for him. Freedom was "awaken" by love in *Romeo and Juliet*, transgressing all the polarities – and reaching the utmost unity in the free (voluntary) death.³⁵

This unification of antagonisms aims to transcend social determination. Comparing Jessica and Shylock of *The Merchant of Venice*, Landauer shows how Jessica is able to leave the curse of the ghetto through her spiritual awakening. Possessing "inner music", she can transgress the instincts of the oppressed – exactly what Shylock is not able to do. If Jessica represents the spiritual unity of humankind, Shylock represents the aversion to the community; there is no music in Shylock.³⁶ Chantal Mouffe explains that the radical change in political identity has more to do with "(...) conversion than a process of rational persuasion." While antagonisms can hardly be eradicated, others are seen as legitimate adversaries rather than enemies to be anni-

²⁹ BUBER, M. – BRITSCHGI-SCHIMMER, I. *Gustav Landauer : sein Lebensgang in Briefen : Zweiter Band*. Frankfurt am Main : Rütten & Loening Verlag, 1929, pp. 286 – 287.

³⁰ LANDAUER, G. Strindbergs Traumspiel. In *Gustav Landauer Werksausgabe : Band 3 : Dichter, Ketzer, Außenseiter : Essays und Reden zur Literatur, Philosophie, Judentum* (Ed. H. Delf). Berlin : Akademie Verlag, 1997, p. 110.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 222.

³² LANDAUER, G. Strindberg. *Ibid.*, p. 108.

³³ LANDAUER, G. *Skepsis und Mystik : Versuche in Anschluß am Mauthners Sprachkritik*, p. 357.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 360.

³⁵ LANDAUER, G. *Shakespeare: Dargestellt in Vorträgen : Erster Band*. Frankfurt am Main : Literarische Anstalt Rütten & Loening, 1922, pp. 16 – 17.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 71 – 87.

hilated.³⁷ Shylock has only enemies, and he can therefore hardly represent the spirit of social transformation.

The strength of Shakespeare's drama, according to Landauer, lies not in presenting the characters as intelligible, psychologically sophisticated and being in causal relationships. Drama makes humans understandable in their wholeness and ineffability. Hamlet's interiority is fully understandable, albeit not transformable to words.³⁸ That is how good drama shows the realization of an individual in the universal unity, transgressing antagonisms, incorporating love. Such overcoming is not done on a conceptual level but in a vibrant word revealing the integrity of the character.

Drama resists any dissociation of the individual to the public and private sphere and keeps its power and will in the decision-making process. As Olivier Jutel argues, the liberal communication ideal of deliberation replaces the ethical and political antagonisms with the fetishism of procedural norms, with communication technology being Lacanian "objet petit a".³⁹ In Landauer's approach, drama unites the individual and places him into the realm of freedom as both a private and a public actor. That is why the death of Romeo and Juliet has actual political consequences, as Prince concludes the play with the address to Capulet and Montague: "See what a scourge is laid upon your hate, / That heaven finds means to kill your joys with love" (Act V, Scene III).⁴⁰

Buber: Drama as the Unity of Polarity

Martin Buber approached theatre from a different angle and held a more interactionist perspective. Although the question of the unity of the personality (especially of the hero) was also important to him, the problem of uniting opposites pervades his essays on theatre. And so, he moves from the issue of speech as expression to speech as conversation.

In his essays *On Heroes* and *Brother Body* (1913 – 1915), he comes very close to Landauer's conception of theatre as the performance of the integral personality. In the former essay, he carries out a critique of the dramatic poems of Gerhart Hauptmann and Frank Wedekind. They have "forgotten their poetic vocation", which is to bear witness to heroes as "revelations of wholeness"; this wholeness is not meant to be the evidence of their exceptionalism, but rather an expression of a generally human, primordial and "law-governing" nature. "Great art roots heroism in the people" – not out of a political idea, but because heroism speaks to every man by its irrational integrity.⁴¹ This inner necessity, analogous to Landauer, is then demonstrated by the example of Nijinsky in the latter essay. Buber shows how the accomplished dancer has merged with his body to such an extent that he has overcome the dualism of soul and body, his movements no longer having a referent other than themselves. They

³⁷ MOUFFE, Ch. *On the Political*, p. 102.

³⁸ LANDAUER, G. *Shakespeare : Dargestellt in Vorträgen : Erster Band*, pp. 190 – 199, 254.

³⁹ JUTEL, O. Post-politics. In *Routledge Handbook of Psychoanalytic Political Theory* (Ed. Y. Stavrakaki). New York – London : Routledge, 2020, pp. 431 – 433.

⁴⁰ SHAKESPEARE, W. *Complete Works* (Ed. W. J. Craig). (The Oxford Standard Authors edition). London : Oxford University Press, 1966, p. 794.

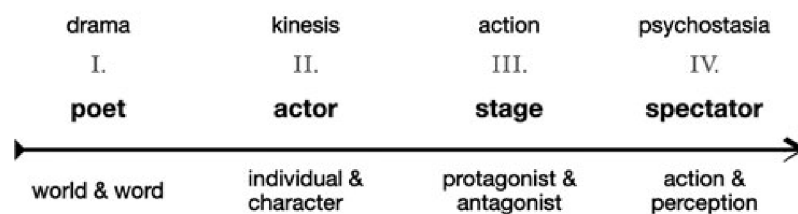
⁴¹ BUBER, M. Helden. In *Martin Buber Werkausgabe 1 : Frühe kulturkritische und philosophische Schriften 1891–1924* (Ed. M. Treml), p. 259.

are not signs or expressions; they only refer to themselves as they necessarily follow one another.⁴²

This loss of referentiality of the gestures is a feature of a fully creative personality. There is no message to be communicated, no argument – the dancer presents himself in the totality of the creative person whose every act is filled with necessity. Later, Buber does not abandon this Nietzschean view, as he develops his theory of dialogue and publicly takes issue with Nietzsche. In dialogue, one “gives oneself whole”, or this primordial, creative integrity “outside the system” is the precondition of any encounter.

However, in *Daniel*, and explicitly later in *Drama and Theatre* (1925),⁴³ Buber shows the importance of drama in transforming interpersonal relationships into a community. His conception of drama thus precedes the elaborated theory of dialogue as he had formulated it in *I and Thou*, and a theory of the community based on the interpersonal. Buber’s interest in drama can be said to have arisen from his interest in dialogue, not the other way around.⁴⁴ Because he values drama for its interactionism, not its communicability, he opens the way to overcoming the crisis of language by making language a means of connection between people, not a representation of the world.

Buber’s conception of drama is rooted in the idea of polarity. The acting itself is not yet dramatic; the character needs to be related to the other, differential pole for the drama to unfold. Unity is achieved so that the relationship between protagonist and antagonist cannot be resolved dialectically, i. e., by logical judgment, by comparing their attitudes, and so on. In drama, there is no good and bad side. All actions are weighed in context against others, so the unified field of the dramatic situation maintains a tension that makes it impossible to reduce the actors’ relationship to one thesis.



M. Buber, *Daniel* (1913)

Figure 1. The unity of polarities in a performance

Thus, drama is defined dialogically, and none of its central elements can be eliminated. In this way, the drama overcomes the limits of language by revealing something “beyond” it. The word uttered by the actors is a vibrant being involved in this polar tension. In this way, it also becomes a creative word because it creates reality on stage: the stage becomes a place of being and non-being through drama. Just as the

⁴² BUBER, M. Bruder Leib. Ibid., pp. 261 – 266.

⁴³ BUBER, M. Drama und Theater. In *Martin Buber Werkausgabe 7 : Schriften zur Literatur, Theater und Kunst : Lyrik, Autobiographie und Drama*, pp. 438 – 440.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 438.

actors emerge from shadow into light (and conversely disappear into it), they repeat the act of creation.

The unity of polarities can also be found on other levels: on the level of the poet, actor, stage and spectator (see Figure 1).⁴⁵ Everywhere it has a transformative character that springs from the fact that it merges connection with distance. That is how the “I of the spirit”, the primal duality, is achieved.⁴⁶ This duality is visible in the relationship between the spectator and the actors. According to Buber, the spectator is supposed to be distant from the action onstage (e.g. by light design) but mentally participate in the action on stage. In this way, both poles are brought together in the theatre experience, elevating the human being above antagonisms without abolishing them. This idea is a key characteristic of drama – the actor must remain an actor, but at the same time fully embrace his role (and not just put on a mask). Equally, the spectator must be aware of the sacredness of the creative action onstage and have distance from it, but at the same time participate in it. The distance has to be maintained to gain any authentic unity (a statement that bears a striking resemblance to Landauer’s notion of isolation as a first step to the community),⁴⁷ including the distance between stage and audience (which makes Buber a potential critic of the immersive or participatory theatre).⁴⁸

This is a radical perspective in the sense of Mouffe’s critique of deliberative communication. Drama is not representing reality, but it creates it (performativity) and does not present the dialectics of ideas or values (to be rationally reconciled). Still, it unites the antagonisms without eliminating the difference by consensus or logic. There are no distinct “public” and “private” spheres in drama, dividing subjects into a pluralism of private beliefs, tastes and drives, and public discourse; drama is defined by the practice of the whole personality transgressed by the unity of the dramatic situation. Therefore, drama is isomorphic with democratic politics, organizing “human coexistence in conditions that are always potentially conflictual,” involving even the existential dimension of human life, which is excluded from the deliberative communication model.⁴⁹

The Spirit of Community

The liberal communication model assumes that no “shared spirit” binds individuals into a community. The impartial procedural rules and public rationality are supposed to ensure the legitimacy of the social bond. Sovereignty is a communicatively generated power that suppresses other forms of power as illegitimate.⁵⁰ Such a community is not based on the free will of the individuals who form it but on rational consent supported by reasoning. In this consensus, all differences dissolve because it

⁴⁵ BUBER, M. Daniel : *Gespräche von der Verwirklichung*, pp. 216 – 234. The problem of stage design and distance was more elaborated in BUBER, M. *Das Raumproblem der Bühne*. In *Martin Buber Werkausgabe 7 : Schriften zur Literatur, Theater und Kunst : Lyrik, Autobiographie und Drama*, pp. 429 – 434.

⁴⁶ BUBER, M. Daniel : *Gespräche von der Verwirklichung*, p. 219.

⁴⁷ LANDAUER, G. *Durch Absonderung zur Gemeinschaft*. In *Die Botschaft der Titanic : Ausgewählte Essays* (Eds. W. Fähnders – H. Schmidt-Bergmann). Berlin : Kontext, 1999.

⁴⁸ BUBER, M. *Das Raumproblem des Bühne*.

⁴⁹ MOUFFE, Ch. *On the Political*, p. 101.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

is necessarily legitimate under the inherent rationality of the discussion, independent of the participants' will in the deliberation.

Both Buber and Landauer understand the spirit as a necessary bond without which no vibrant community is possible. It is not the realization of an absolute spirit, as in Hegel's philosophy, which both sharply oppose. Following the premises of "Lebensphilosophie", on which both build, the shared spirit is the ineffable manifestation of the concrete life of individuals (Lebenssystem): "The life system of every people in the time of flowering is the living unity of all the facets of life and its spheres, spiritual and material, a unity that is based on a principle which is not itself principle of thought, but remains hidden and sensed, never quite fits into concepts and to which conceptually can be referred only in a *consideration*."⁵¹

Therefore, it is supra-personal⁵² and is best understood as a form that shapes the community based on a polar process involving contradictions⁵³. As in Gestalt psychotherapy, the person's figure is projected onto a background without which it cannot be discerned. The spirit forms the backbone of the community. Together with Ernesto Laclau, we can say that this spirit is an empty signifier,⁵⁴ filled with concrete life but never definitive. The power is dislocated (albeit not defused), the throne remains empty, yet it is still a throne leading the people – as in the radical biblical critique of government power in Buber's *Kingdom of God* (1932).⁵⁵

Buber explains that the spirit of culture is grounded in folk rather than in a transcendental idea or principle. Landauer directly defines socialism as the union of self-governing and mutually directed communities imbued with a spirit that gives them both bond and freedom and is the essence of culture. The mutual spirit defines the people.⁵⁶ Therefore, it can be said that art is not an expression of the individual but rather a manifestation of a superpersonal form, which the artist realizes with his skill. Buber directly formulates this idea,⁵⁷ but it can also be applied to Landauer's understanding of the spirit. As he explains in his essay *Through Separation to Community* (1900), we are connected to previous generations by heredity; we can open ourselves to what lies beyond our self, through ourselves. In this way, one is transformed into the spirit of the world (Weltgeist).⁵⁸ Building on the evolutionism of Peter Kropotkin, Landauer understood this microcosm in humans as a continuum with nature and animal ancestors (ontogenetical, hereditary power – "Erbmacht"). His conception of the spirit is thus distinctly ecological and mystical (based on "Gemeinschaftsgefühl" of the primeval community).⁵⁹

⁵¹ BUBER, M. Über das Wesen der Kultur. In *Martin Buber Werkausgabe 11 : Schriften zur politischen Philosophie und Sozialphilosophie : Teilband 2 : 1938–1965* (Ed. M. De Villa), pp. 43 – 44.

⁵² COHEN, A. Aesthetics and Aesthetic Education in Martin Buber's Thought. In *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 1980, Vol. 14, Issue 1, pp. 51 – 73.

⁵³ BUBER, M. Über das Wesen der Kultur, p. 47.

⁵⁴ LACLAU, E. *Emancipation(s)*. London – New York : Verso, 1996, p. 36.

⁵⁵ BUBER, M. Königstum Gottes. In *Martin Buber Werkausgabe 15 : Schriften zum Messianismus* (Ed. S. H. Brody). Gütersloh : Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2015, pp. 93 – 276.

⁵⁶ LANDAUER, G. *Aufruf zum Sozialismus*, p. 3.

⁵⁷ COHEN, A. Aesthetics and Aesthetic Education in Martin Buber's Thought, pp. 51 – 73.

⁵⁸ LANDAUER, G. Durch Absonderung zur Gemeinschaft, pp. 7 – 28.

⁵⁹ LANDAUER, G. Von der tierischen Grundlage. In LANDAUER, G. *Der werdende Mensch : Aufsätze über Leben und Schrifttum* (Ed. M. Buber). Potsdam : Gustav Kiepenheuer Verlag, 1921, pp. 40 – 49. See also CEPL-KAUFMANN, G. Gustav Landauer and the Literary Trends of his Time, pp. 113 – 114.

In his essay *The Journey of the German Spirit* (1916), Landauer explains that the poet participates in the slow flow of human history, which culminates in the utopian future he anticipates in his work.⁶⁰ A great poet, such as Goethe, thus expresses in his work the reality of realization (*Verwirklichung*) as only possible on earth, in institutions and interpersonal relationships. Politics and intimacy are combined in the poet's work, thus involving humans in their totality, merging aesthetic, ethical, political and scientific.⁶¹ This emphasis on wholeness and the relation of the spirit to the entirety of human existence constitutes a radical distinction from linguistic discourse, whether in the liberal conception of the ideal speech situation or Foucaultian analysis.

Art is therefore not meant to be an aesthetic experiment, and theatre work is not meant to be a search for new expressions – which is why Buber and Landauer completely ignore the role of the director, a profession that was beginning to establish itself in the theatre at the time of their work. Poetry, drama, and music are meant to bring people together and express our shared foundation, not to be the vanguard of progress (about which they were both very sceptical – Landauer directly considered progress to be a manifestation of abnormal times). In January 1919, Landauer wrote to Louise Dumont-Lindemann: “We do not flee from man to humanity in pure art; we want to build the work of art of the good life with people; the stage, which at the same time offers art and immediate intercourse with people, is the bridge between the image of humanity as art builds it and the teeming heaps of people that are to become form.”⁶²

Resembling railways, the theaters should be the nod where people meet each other, including their ancestors and people of all nations, in joint work and spirit, rejoicing and celebrating.⁶³ Spirituality means sharing and the communion of all; therefore, artistic institutions should be public not only from the economic point of view. He has no sympathy for the artistic avant-garde, which wants to promote political goals, revolution, or educate the masses with its art: “I am an absolute opponent of the bigheads who call themselves councils of spiritual workers; there should be no more unspiritual workers and nothing that looks like a Hillerian mansion.”⁶⁴

Buber's conception of the spirit of community is more committed to religious foundations. “Socialitas” must be linked to “religio”,⁶⁵ for the personal relationship to God can only be realized with others who bear the eternal You within them. God grants the human community a center, and so, just as in *Daniel*, the integrated and complete individual is oriented (*Richtung*),⁶⁶ the human community must be connected by a relationship to the absolute. Such conception also brings an ecological dimension to Buber's anthropology: not only (as he repeatedly emphasizes) can one enter dialogue with animals or trees, but as *imago Dei*, man is co-responsible for

⁶⁰ LANDAUER, G. Ein Weg deutschen Giestes. In *Gustav Landauer Werksausgabe : Band 3: Dichter, Ketzer, Außenseiter: Essays und Reden zur Literatur, Philosophie, Judentum* (Ed. H. Delf), p. 23.

⁶¹ LANDAUER, G. Goethes Politik : Eine Ankündigung. *Ibid.*, p. 34.

⁶² BUBER, M. – BRITSCHGI-SCHIMMER, I. *Gustav Landauer : sein Lebensgang in Briefen*, pp. 351 – 352.

⁶³ LANDAUER, G. Die Zukunft der deutschen Bühne. In *Masken, 1917 – 1918*, Vol. 13, Issue 1, p. 207.

⁶⁴ In a letter to Buber, November 1918. Writer and journalist Kurt Hiller founded in 1918 Political Council of Intellectual Workers (*Politischen Rates geistiger Arbeiter*) promoting Platonic “logocracy” of intellectuals. BUBER, M. – BRITSCHGI-SCHIMMER, I. *Gustav Landauer : sein Lebensgang in Briefen*, p. 298.

⁶⁵ BUBER, M. Drei Sätze eines religiösen Sozialismus. In *Martin Buber Werkausgabe 11 : Schriften zur politischen Philosophie und zur Sozialphilosophie : Teilband 1: 1906–1938* (Ed. S. Franchini). Gütersloh : Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2019, pp. 230 – 232.

⁶⁶ BUBER, M. *Daniel : Gespräche von der Verwirklichung*, p. 188.

the “glory of God,” or the successful completion of the act of Creation, of which the whole world around him is a part. Therefore, neither art nor culture can be an expression of uniqueness but must be raised to generality by man’s concrete activity – corporal work (עבודה בגשמיות).

Conclusion

Since the time of the interwar artistic avant-gardes, we have witnessed a proliferation of distrust of drama. From Théâtre de la Cruauté to the performative movement, the significance of staged drama is questioned, as it is considered a genre of the “Ancien Régime” that claimed to represent the world through language, yet it had brought mere ideology. The unity is now achieved by “magic exorcism”, shock and violence, expressing the performer’s traumas or substituting lost rituals. Even Jerzy Grotowski, who claimed to be inspired by Buber, abandoned the principle of role-playing and sought a contact between *I and Thou* in paratheatrical work – thus unwittingly abandoning what Buber himself considered a meaningful form of theatre.⁶⁷ The distrust of drama translates into a distrust of the forestage, a distance between audience and actors, the distinction between a role and an actor, a distrust of speech. It was necessary, of course, to purge this experimental period of the 20th century from the bourgeois overlay that had buried the meaning of drama in a “narcotic illusion” (Brecht). Today, however, we no longer face the old regime that demands collective obedience. Nevertheless, theatre must confront the threat of the liberal transformation of politics into a mere communication.

Therefore, even nowadays, drama represents a specific mode of human existence with a profound political significance. We can compare it to the dominant liberal mode and its antagonism, the authoritarian mode (see Table 1).

Table 1.

Authoritarian mode	Dramatic mode	Liberal mode
enemy	adversary	competitor
violence	integrity	dissociation (public and private)
tyranny	the power of oriented will (freedom)	power defused
collective body	relationship	individual
uniformity	unity in difference	consensus
obedience	encounter	argument
unanimity	community	communication
paternalism	dialogue	dialectics

⁶⁷ WOLFORD, L. – SCHECHNER, R. *The Grotowski Sourcebook*. London – New York : Routledge, 1997, pp. 207 – 214.

The dramatic mode connects integral individuals through a dramatic situation, thus binding them into a community. It is impossible to resolve their contradictions by consensus or moral judgment; they must enter a dialogical relationship, which is the solution. Instead of obedience to a higher power or argumentation (as in a debate), they achieve unity by an interaction based on their difference. The intrinsic necessity of their actions arises from free will, which is oriented and thus does not represent a tyranny. On the other hand, the dramatic situation requires power interactions and does not conceal that people manifest themselves in power relations, as the liberal mode does.

The ethos of distrust in the representational capacity of language and traditional art forms was born out of the Sprachkritik during the fin-de-siècle. Baptized by the horrors of the First World War, it resulted in the Adornian question of whether one could still write poems after Auschwitz (the definitive proof that modern rationality was an illusion). Buber and Landauer based their thinking on the same skepticism that can be found in art today. However, they chose a different path than the experimental theatre – they instead embraced drama and dramatic poetry and tried to find a way to overcome the crisis of language.

The key questions posed by Buber and Landauer are: can drama be a model for achieving a community of free, integral individuals? Does dramatic poetry have any relevance for radical critics of capitalism? The answer they provide is yes, albeit their agreement is only partial. For both, communication was a creative act in which a community was created. However, unlike Schechner or Artaud, the meeting of people in the theatre is not guided by a directorial gesture but by the manifestation of the spiritual essence of drama, which is reflected in the rhythm of the words rather than in their content, their ability to bind the characters on stage and to connect the stage with the auditorium. They thus reformulated the notion of spirit from Hegelian idealism to an interactionist perspective.

Therefore, to speak of “vibrant speech” or “vibrant word” does hardly mean calling for a return to the bourgeois public sphere, whose crisis we are experiencing more than ever today. On the contrary, Buber and Landauer’s perspective makes one able to understand the necessity of antagonisms in the social life, departing from the prevailing Habermasian “deliberative” theory of consensus to Chantal Mouffe’s “agonistic” democracy, acknowledging that antagonisms and conflicts should be integrated, rather than suppressed, in any plausible theory of communication.⁶⁸ The paradox of drama (unity in difference) resembles the paradox of democracy (“people” in democracy cannot be united definitively), making an individual’s “inner necessity” significant again, instead of relying on the mechanisms of communication as value-free instruments of the societal harmonization (being “the automatic pilot” of democracy, following Jean-Claude Michéa).⁶⁹

The spiritual sphere of communication aims not to harmonize speech but expresses the “communio”, the community in which speech involves us. Therefore, the power of speech can be restored without returning to the question of its representa-

⁶⁸ MOUFFE, Ch. *The Democratic Paradox*. London – New York : Verso, 2000, pp. 98 – 105.

⁶⁹ See BRETON, P. *L’Utopie de la communication : Le Mythe du “village planétaire”*; MICHÉA, J.-C. *Moder- nité et libéralisme*. In MICHÉA, J.-C. *La double pensée : Retour sur la question libérale*. Paris : Flammarion, 2008, pp. 197 – 207.

tiveness or communicability through poetry and drama. Communication becomes a relationship between humans differentiated as “auteurs”, contrary to the liberal “politique sans auteur”.⁷⁰ In this way, the supra-personal nature of speech is preserved, allowing us to step out of art as a personal expression to art expressing what connects us as diverse, even antagonistic individuals.

This essay has sought to outline the intersections of Buber and Landauer’s ideas about drama and show possible ways to further research their work for the theatre. How, specifically, can drama be given back its dignity is a task of further reflection on these premises but, above all, it should be the future effort of artists.

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