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THE ACTUALIZATION OF TIME AND THE CONCEPT OF SPACE IN THE “BREAKING OF THE ILLUSION” IN MILAN KUNDERA’S PLAY, *JACQUES AND HIS MASTER*

It is common to describe time in drama as a chronological relationship between two axes; a horizontal axis of succession, and a vertical axis of simultaneity (Pfister 276). Along the axes of succession, events follow one another to portray a sense of continuity. The axis of simultaneity represents different situations, actions or events depicted in order to create the dramatic situation, or dramatic world (Elam 1980). The simultaneity of events can consist of those situations that are depicted scenically on stage, or are presented verbally, through the dramatic dialogue. These two axes can be perceived as the equivalent to the Russian formalists’ differentiation between *fabula* (‘story’), or the vertical axis, and *sjuzet* (‘plot’) or the horizontal axis.

It is possible to see at this stage, a correlation of this construction of time between dramatic and narrative texts. However, the difference lies in the axis chosen in each genre to dominate the communication. As Pfister suggests, the vertical axis dominates in narrative texts due to the presence of a ‘mediating communication system’, namely, the fictional narrator (5). This would allow for greater flexibility of the rearrangement of time. As dramatic texts traditionally lack this mediating narrator, emphasis is placed on the plot, or the horizontal axis of the succession of events.

In Milan Kundera’s play, *Jacques and his Master*, the horizontal axis of time presentation is present, but it’s dominance in the construction of the dramatic world is restricted to reflecting what Patrice Pavis terms the *dramatic time*. According to Pavis, this is the actual playing time, from start to finish, of the dramatic text. The concept of the dramatic time is fundamental for the drama, as it relates to the genre’s quality of taking place in the actual ‘here-and-now’¹, which is absent from the narrative text. The dominant axis in *Jacques*, is thus

¹ This term is especially used in reference to theatrical texts.

the vertical axis, noting the dominance then of the simultaneity of the representation of events on the temporal level, to be explored below.

Kundera's play *Jacques and his Master* is, what he terms, a 'variation' of the novel *Jacques le fataliste et son maître* by Denis Diderot, written in the latter half of the 18th century. In his introduction to his play, Kundera states the reasons for his desire to utilize Diderot's work as a foundation for his dramatic text. He states: "Diderot's novel is an explosion of impertinent freedom without self-censorship..." (7). The freedom of creation is an obvious area of appreciation for Kundera, who interprets the fragmentary style of Diderot as representing a "lightness, and a pleasure of writing" (Maixent, 2). Kundera appreciates the playful nature of the novel which is achieved through Diderot's structure of presentation. Diderot renounces conventional novelistic tendencies of his time, such as the omniscient narrator, who is able to vouch for the truthfulness of the presented facts. To replace this omniscient narrator, Diderot makes use of a predominantly dramatic tool: the dialogue.

The depicted 'present' of the novel is established as a pretext for the unfolding of numerous stories between the characters. It is through the dialogue, that the reader learns of the relationship between the characters, the geographical location of the novel, as well as a rough idea as to the time of the novel. The reader is not conventionally *described* this information, but must piece it together him/herself, much like the dramatic world of Elam that is a mental construct of the spectator, made possible through the use of theatrical methods of communication (Elam 98-134). The horizontal axis of succession, therefore, is also in Diderot's novel subordinate to the vertical axis of temporal presentation of events.

The function of the omniscient narrator in Diderot's era was to offer the work a sense of truthfulness to reality, to give an illusion that the events depicted actually occurred. Diderot attempted to abolish this notion. The lack of setting, is the first step taken in this direction. The reader then looks for clues in the dialogue, especially between the two main characters, Jacques and his Master, regarding not only the location, but also the theme, or the unifying *story* of the novel. Both the location and the 'theme' are presented through dialogue, as the story unfolds which resembles the dramatic genre. The presentation of this information is constantly interrupted, however, by the fictional author, who addresses the fictional reader and offers surplus information about the characters, other stories, and also plays with the expectations of the reader. This technique expands the space of the novel, and breaks the illusion of a depicted reality. Kundera makes use of these techniques in his variation for the stage.

Unlike the narrative genre, the drama is created with a visual representation in mind. The reader constructs a mental image of the dramatic world created within the text, and it is this world that is actualized visually in the theatrical text before an audience. Both texts, *viz.* the dramatic and theatrical texts, therefore must communicate the concepts of time and space that make up the dramatic, or fictional world. Kundera achieves this with the use of the two axes of time which are spatially realized within his dramatic text. The reader then 'sees'

the spatial representation of the temporal horizontal and vertical axes. It is through the use of this visual representation that Kundera also achieves the effect of breaking the illusion of a realistic presentation, as will be explored below.

Pfister states in his *Theory and Analysis of Drama*, "The concepts of time (and space)² represent the basic concrete categories within the dramatic text" (246), describing this fact as its distinguishing factor from narrative texts. It is in fact the idea of the "superimposition of an external communication system over an internal system" that sets it apart from the narrative genre. The external communication system incorporates the actual space of the stage and the auditorium at the spatial level, and the actual, or 'real' temporal deixis at the temporal level. The internal communication system is the fictional space in which the story unfolds (the spatial level), and at the temporal level, it is constituted by the fictional temporal deixis. With this in mind, the receiver of a dramatic text, which we will call 'audience³' in this study, perceives the text from the reference point of 2 deictic systems. In his *Dictionnaire du théâtre*, Patrice Pavis defines the term 'deixis' as one of the fundamental characteristics of drama and theatre, as it is through this concept that everything on the stage receives its meaning (105). Herman clarifies this notion by stating that it is the orientation around the 'present' that establishes the spatial and temporal coordinates in the dramatic text. The audience perceives this text in their own 'present', which can be described by the 'external communication level' mentioned above, and what they perceive, is of course a fictional world that is based on its own 'internal communication system'. The interaction between these two levels is of great interest to the study of the manner of communication in drama and theatre. It is, in fact, this very notion of the relationship between these two levels that interests us here. We feel that Kundera has made use of the tension existing between the real time-space deixis and the fictional one with the elimination of the so-called fourth-wall dividing the fictional space from the audience's space. The result of this is the increase in the audience's awareness of the fictionality of the performance, or the 'breaking of the illusion'.

Pavis states that the concept of the fourth-wall was created by the 'illusionistic' theatre, viz the naturalist and the realist theatres (315). The purpose of this was to create a scene in which the action unfolded independently of the spectator, in order to obtain a complete division between the spectator and the dramatic space. Kundera's *Jacques and his Master* has the exact opposite effect. The fourth-wall is abolished, thus extending the dramatic space into the 'real' space of the audience. As we will see below, the audience is thus meant to

² Throughout this study, any reference to space will pertain to the spatial construction of the temporal axes unless otherwise indicated.

³ The notion of 'audience' is complex. We feel that both the reader and the spectator both experience a 'visual' realization of the two axes. The temporal deixis, the 'performance' time of the external communication system pertains to both receivers, however, it is only the spectator that experiences the additional superimposition of the spatial coordinate of the external system.

feel as the direct recipient of the action taking place on the stage, thus being presented with the possibility of influencing that action. This is, of course, the result of the techniques used by Kundera along the spatially actualization of the temporal axes to 'break the illusion' of the autonomy of the dramatic communication.

In *Jacques*, the concept of time is portrayed spatially. Herman notes that time is usually conceptualized as a uni-directional course of action, and when it is translated into a spatial concept, it is visualized along a horizontal plane (61). This concept is also used in linguistics when referring to tense systems. In English, for example, the past is distinguished from the non-past in relation to the time of utterance. If we take the time of utterance to mean the present, than we immediately see the non-past as deriving its meaning from its relationship to the present. We can apply this concept to drama, in that the audience is presented with a certain dramatic present around which references to other events and times revolve. This orientation around the present is a deictic one, the time of utterance being placed at the 'deictic centre'.

If the horizontal plane represents the uni-directional course of action, than the vertical plane represents the superimposition of different time spheres. This could be seen as intersecting with the dramatic action on the stage as representing the 'present'. This is indeed the case with *Jacques*.

Both the axes mentioned above are spatially conceptualized in the set arrangement of the stage. Before the characters of Jacques and his Master make their way into the dramatic space, the audience is presented with a stage divided horizontally into two sections by a raised platform. This can be seen as representing the horizontal time plane. We have thus been given a time line, a conceptual uni-directional plane, which has been spatially determined as the horizontal axis. Kundera indicates in the stage directions, that all the events happening downstage, thus *along* the horizontal plane are to be in the present, subsequently giving the reader of the dramatic text (to be made obvious to the spectator at a later time) a point of departure for subsequent action. This refers us back to Herman's statement on the deictic centre. All the actions that will take place along this horizontal plane will be in the present, and hence the deictic centre around which all subsequent actions and references will revolve and orient themselves. This centre is a necessity for the audience in order to allow for a comprehension of the dramatic action.

As stated above, we have a horizontal axis that has been actualized spatially on the stage. The platform represents the horizontal time plane as it is in fact a straight line leading from left to right, and hence a clear horizontal division of the stage.

We are introduced to the two main characters of the play, namely Jacques and the Master as they are making their way across the stage. They are downstage, and hence, are depicted as being in the present. They stop their motion forward upon seeing the audience (a point which will be important later), thus indicating a definite point along the depicted horizontal time line to which we can prescribe the term 'present' (therefore, the deictic centre). The horizontal plane is

still depicted spatially through the division of the stage, and thus signifies the succession of time. Jacques and his Master, having given the sign to the audience that they were moving along this plane, and thus progressing in time, foreground their place in the dramatic present with their cessation of movement. We still have, however, the visual sign, namely, the horizontal division of the stage to signify the succession of the dramatic time. This sign will keep this signification throughout the duration of the play, and can be seen as the backdrop against which the past and future coordinates represented along the vertical axis will be depicted.

We have now established Jacques and his Master as being downstage and in the present. In order for them to communicate the stories from their pasts to one another, however, they must *mount* the *raised* platform, thus moving *upwards* along the vertical axis. There is also a ladder present, which is placed on top of the raised platform, that Jacques uses to portray the extension of the dramatic space which he places along the vertical time axis, in the realm of the past. This notion of movement upward thus allows for a top-to-bottom analysis of the axis. Its three-dimensional aspect lies, however, in the fact that it is not only portrayed from top to bottom, but also from back to front. The time that is referred to on stage is portrayed as originating from the back of the stage (the past), and heading directly into the audience, which represents the future (we will explore this further below). It is important to note that as soon as the characters mount the stage to re-enact the stories of their past, they not only move upwards, but also backwards, away from the audience, as space is inherently three-dimensional. The deictic centre which is placed between the past („up”stage) and the future (the audience) is the present, therefore, the downstage area.

The ladder is placed as far upstage as possible, and thus it is the farthest visible object along the back-front vertical axis. It also is the highest object along the top-bottom vertical axis. Both these coordinates lead us to believe that the ladder signifies a time farther in the past than the platform. This hypothesis is supported in the text. Jacques makes reference to the “attic” where he lost his virginity directly in the opening scene. The concept of the ‘attic’, together with the presence of the ladder on the stage, leads the audience to place them together in one field of reference⁴ before Jacques confirms this in Act One, Scene 3. The attic is, in fact, where Jacques’ story begins, as is seen from the information we learn about him during the course of the play⁵. The referred-to actions that took place in the attic are the catalyst to his presence on the stage. And it is with this story that the dramatic space of the play is shifted from the audience onto the stage, where it is then directed upstage, (and thus into the past) by Jacques’ utterance.

4 The reader of the dramatic text is aware the ladder leads to the mentioned attic before the primary text actually begins, as it is stated in the opening stage directions.

5 The audience is able to piece together a logical succession of events leading to Jacques’ presence on stage. He is the only character for whom this is possible.

The movement along the top-bottom vertical axis is signalled also by the repetitive references to "...on high" which is paralleled by references to "down below". Jacques is the first to establish this frame of reference: "The good and evil we encounter *here below* are written first *on high*" (emphasis mine) (Jacques 18). With the use of the verbal deictic indications Jacques places his location at the spatio-temporal centre (the present). The concept of the movement up and down this axis is confirmed by the notion of the cause and effect relationship between the two coordinates. Jacques states, "...do you know anyway of erasing what has been written?" (18). This interrogative statement develops the notion that what has been "written on high" comes before what happens "down below". This is emphasized by the use of the past tense when referring to what happens upwards: "has been written" (18); "was written" (38). Again, the spatial coordinates of the vertical top-bottom axis are accompanied by the temporal coordinates established with the stage set as discussed above with the example of the ladder. The higher the position on this axis, the farther in the past the object of reference from the downstage location signifying the present.

The placing of the present dramatic time as noted above takes place simultaneously as the extension of the dramatic space along the back-front vertical axis beyond the frame of the stage. This is first carried out by the fact that Jacques stops his motion forward in the very beginning of the play as a result of acknowledgment of the audience. We are not yet aware of being the cause of this change until Jacques points in the direction of the audience while addressing his Master: "Sir...why are they staring at us?" (17). By this action, Jacques has immediately eliminated the concept of the fourth wall. His deictic movement, namely, his pointing to the audience, projects the dramatic space along the vertical axis into the space of the audience. The relation, and hence the approachment of the stage space and that of the audience is confirmed by the fact that he is addressing his Master, who is, of course, located within the stage space, at the same time. The audience then is given a possible dramatic function, or role, as we consider the characters' actions on stage as a direct result of our presence: we have, in fact, had an impact on the stage action. This is further confirmed by the paratext remarks accompanying the Master, which describe him as being, "*a bit taken aback*" (17), and by his subsequent adjusting of his clothes, which is seen as a direct result of the audience's presence. The Master responds to this by trying to direct the focus back to the stage with his lines, "Pretend there's no one there" (17). This attempt at refocussing the attention fails, however, for two reasons. The first is in the intrinsic quality of the utterance. It is dependent on the presence of the audience; it is *in reaction to* the audience that the Master utters these words, thus emphasizing the extension of the dramatic space from the deictic centre, *viz* the location of the two characters.

The second example of the failure of the Master to establish the autonomy of the dramatic space is with Jacques' address to the audience which directly follows the Master's utterance. During the address, Jacques is facing the audience. This position is very interesting for our present study. One can imagine his body

positioned in such a way that he is completely facing the audience, with his back to the stage. We have already indicated that the set behind him, namely, the raised platform, signifies the past, which is projected against the present, which is indeed Jacques' location during the address. With this in mind, we can suggest, that Jacques is then facing the future, which is directly related to the vertical time axis described above. This is supported by his utterances. He asks the audience, "...what do you want to know? Where we've come from?" (17). His previous deictic gesture towards the audience is then paralleled by a second in the opposite direction. In response to this question, he proceeds to point in the direction behind him. According to our vertical spatio-temporal axis, he is pointing in the direction of the past. Again, Jacques' location is in the present, which is located in the deictic centre. The time coordinates are then completed by his next question to the audience, "Where we're going?...Do *you* know where *you're* going?" (emphasis mine) (17). In these two questions, he uses the present continuous in English⁶ which connotes the notion of the 'continuation' of an action, hence its movement into the future. The present continuous tense has its own deictic centre, which is also the present, from which the action then moves forward. By projecting the concept of a movement forward into the space of the audience, Jacques thus places this space along the vertical spatio-temporal axis in that it now signifies the future.

In this opening scene, the audience is thus incorporated into the dramatic space and time of the play through the use of deictic gestures and references. This is the first instance of the actual 'breaking of the illusion' that takes place along the axes. Jacques' role in this scene is similar to that of the epic commentator acting as a mediating communication system between the dramatic world and that of the audience⁷. The difference, however, is that unlike the role of the epic commentator, Jacques is firmly implanted within the time-space deixis of the situation (Pfister, 81). In fact, he has the function of creating this deictic situation from which the play derives its semantic meaning. What the two roles do share in common, however, is the function of extending the dramatic space beyond the stage, and, in so-doing, they bring to the audience's attention the fictionality of the performance. *Jacques'* addition to this function is the attribution of the temporal extension into the audience, in addition to the spatial extension.

The audience's position within the dramatic world has thus been established. There is no mention of the audience made again, however, until the final Act, Scene 1. This time the reference is made by the Master, who re-establishes the audience's position along the spatio-temporal axis. Spatially, this is achieved by the use of a deictic gesture. The stage directions do not specify what this gesture actually is, but they state that he "*indicat(es) the audience*" (69). This can be

6 Kundera wrote two original versions of the play, one in Czech, and one in French. In both these languages, the present corresponds to the present continuous tense in English.

7 This can also be seen to parallel Diderot's address to his reader, and hence the extension of his narrative space.

achieved either by a gesture of the head, or by hand. Either way, the deictic gesture would serve once again to extend the space of the dramatic world along the vertical axis into the audience, and therefore, like the opening scene, would make the audience aware that the characters acknowledge their presence. The audience's position along the vertical axis of time is indicated verbally, through the Master's utterance. While addressing Jacques, he says, "Then they (audience) will believe we haven't got any horses..." (69). The Master is making use of the future tense⁸ of the verb "to believe", and is therefore reiterating the audience-dramatic spatio-temporal relationship established in the first scene. As the audience space has come to represent the future, we can deduce that it can thus signify 'potential' action, stemming from the deictic centre of the present.

Not only does this example serve to emphasize the establishment of the spatio-temporal axes, it is also another example of the elimination of the fourth wall in order to break the illusion of the reality of the performance, hence focussing the audience's attention onto the fictionality of the performance in which they are taking part. This elimination is accompanied by the space-time coordinates that are constructed with the stage set. The audience is now able to orient itself in relation to the ladder mentioned above; they now are aware of the coordinates of the dramatic world, as well as their role within it. The ladder therefore, is a constant reminder of the top-bottom and the back-front axis. The references to "on high" enhances its awareness of the top-bottom axis, creating a deictic centre which is the point of reference to the audience. What these axes serve to develop, therefore, is a means by which the audience can visualize the dramatic time and space. By drawing their attention to these coordinates, by foregrounding these two spheres, exposes the *technicality* of the performance, and hence its *fictionality*.

So far, we have concentrated on the construction of the vertical spatio-temporal axis. We will now focus our attention back onto the horizontal plane mentioned above. This axis is used in *Jacques* as a deictic pointer to the *present* of the dramatic world. The most striking use of this marker is the entrance of the Innkeeper (38). Before her introduction onto the stage, Jacques and the Master are discussing their lack of horses. The Master exclaims, "...let's keep going" (37) and, "You mean I have to walk because of a ridiculous play? The master who invented us meant us to have horses!" (38). These utterances suggest the idea of motion. The characters do not actually 'move' along the horizontal time line, but the use of the verbs, especially because of their displacement quality ('to go', 'to walk'), is sufficient to create a sense of motion. This is immediately confirmed by the entrance of the Innkeeper. She approaches Jacques and the Master, welcoming them. It is then established through the dialogue, that they

⁸ This is supported by the Czech version, where he uses (as well as Jacques) the perfective aspect of the verb 'věřit', "to believe", (uvěřit), which incorporates the future aspect of the verb.

are at the 'Great Stag Inn'. This is indicative of a change of locale⁹. This, of course, has the effect of enhancing the fictionality of the performance as the audience has not been *shown* the succession from point A to point B, it was, in fact, only referred to through the dialogue. In order to create this impression, however, the Innkeeper, moves along the horizontal plane. As stated above, this signifies the 'present'. It should be noted here, however, that the notion of the 'dramatic present' is quite complex. It is constructed of the *here-and-now* of the event, while at the same time reflecting its *past* as well as its *potentiality*. Pfister (1991) quotes Peter Pütz in his discussion of 'succession and simultaneity', "Dramatic action is made up of the *successive* realization of anticipated *future* events and those recalled from the past"¹⁰ (277). This notion of the *succession* of the dramatic action is realized when placed along the horizontal line on stage, drawn by the platform. We thus have the temporal concept of the succession of the action displayed visually and with the depiction of the horizontal plane. The movement of the Innkeeper along this plane is then indicative of the succession of the action. This is reinforced by the waiters' movement along the same plane, as she calls to them to bring out the props. What this scene accomplishes, is the lending of the feeling of continuity to the performance. This is indeed, the first time that real 'action' can be seen as taking place within the dramatic present. Emphasis is brought to the present through the horizontal extension of the dramatic space. The Innkeeper as well as the waiters move along this plane, back and forth from the two main characters, to an off-stage location that is meant to be inferred from the dialogue as an extension of the Inn. The audience is then left to imagine the fictional location of the two characters, with only the movement along the horizontal axis, and the verbal references as indices. This again leads to the 'breaking of the illusion' of a realistic performance, as the audience is given spatio-temporal coordinates from which it is demanded of them to recreate the situation. In other words, there is no realistic demonstration of a change in setting, only an allusion to continuity.

It is the relationship between the two axes that constructs the signification of the actors' movements around the stage space. Once the presence of the axes is identified, the actions on stage are able to be semantically defined. This holds true for the entire performance. However, it is most obvious when we consider Kundera's technique of exposition of past events which he portrays through the device of 'theatre within the theatre'.

Let us first start with the horizontal axis. As mentioned above, this represents the present, as well as the succession of events. Dramatic 'action' *per se* is quite minimal along this axis. The purpose it serves, however, is to provide the deictic centre from which the past events are depicted¹¹. This is established temporally,

⁹ Even though in Diderot's novel, the characters' arrival at the Inn is described by the fictional author, we can see this as representing Diderot's technique of establishing his time-space coordinates through dialogue.

¹⁰ This quote is taken from, Peter Pütz, *Die Zeit im Drama. Zur Technik dramatischer Spannung* (Göttingen, 1970).

¹¹ Kundera is therefore using Diderot's technique of creating a pretext for his narratives.

(present vs. past) as well as spatially (horizontal vs. vertical, up vs. down, and back vs. front). We can perceive this as the dividing line between the audience space and the 'past space'. We then have a three-leveled model. First of all, the actors that remain downstage while a story is developing on the platform, take liberties to comment on the story that is unfolding before them. These comments function as an extension of possible reactions that could be provoked in the audience during the presentation of events. For example, during the Innkeeper's account of the vengeance taken by Mme de la Pommeraye on the Marquis des Arcis, Jacques offers his thoughts about the manipulative character of the Marquise: "Madame Innkeeper, she's a beast, that woman!" (57). This attitude towards the Marquise is paralleled by the Master: "That woman gives me the shudders" (51). It is quite possible the audience also shares such feelings, and therefore the comments of the two actors act as a reflection of the thoughts of the audience. The fact that the actors pronounce these utterances along the horizontal plane while looking onto the elevated platform also supports the hypothesis that they reflect the audience. This is supported if we consider the element of time. The horizontal plane on the stage can signify the dramatic present, while at the same time representing the actual present of the audience, as they take on audience-like qualities. Let us clarify this notion. The platform is elevated, thus adopting characteristics of a stage. It is therefore portrayed as a stage upon a stage. While the actions are taking place along this secondary stage, the actors who remain downstage then are the immediate audience of these actions. The actors on the secondary stage thus take on a second function of character; they are in fact characters within characters, or, *signs of signs*. This however, is made obvious to the actual audience, thus exposing the theatricality of the primary performance they are witnessing. The actors downstage, are thus a sign of an audience. The fact that the actors take on these secondary characteristics is crucial in the concept of the 'breaking of the illusion'. The actual audience is thus watching an audience (on the horizontal plane) watch in turn, a theatrical performance (on the vertical plane). This creates a sense of awareness of their own presence in the auditorium.

This technique of portraying a play-within-a-play, or theatre-within-theatre is known as a useful device for exposing the fictionality of the performance. Brecht's epic theatre made wide use of this technique, especially for the *Verfremdungseffekt*. It was most used in the epic theatre of Brecht, especially. In *Jacques*, there is another common device used especially within the epic theatre in order to create the same effect, namely the mediating communication system.

We mentioned above that this device is normally absent from dramatic texts as it primarily belongs to the realm of the narrative. In the epic theatre, the mediating communication system was most often created with the use of a character acting as the mediator between the "internal dramatic level" (Pfister 75) and the audience. This is achieved verbally in *Jacques* with the use of the narrative technique with which the characters set the setting for their stories. However, it is also achieved spatially along the vertical axis. While the characters are within their secondary roles on the platform, they respond to the comments made by

the actors remaining downstage, or they offer their own comments, which give the two levels of audience information from which they can infer the subsequent events, thus paralleling the function of the narrator in narrative texts. When those characters on the second stage turn to those remaining downstage, however, they are also facing the actual audience, thus reiterating the extension of the theatrical space. Because many of the utterances produced in this position refer to future events, we can again draw a parallel between the extension of the spatio-temporal axis leading into the audience to the signification of the future coordinate. This is supported if we consider, that while the characters are turned to face the audience and therefore projecting the space-time coordinates into the future, their backs are turned to the back of the stage, and thus on the past events they are depicting.

With this last example, we have demonstrated how the intersection of the two axes provokes a further disintegration of the illusion, and hence enhances the theatrical quality of the performance. It is precisely with this intersection that culminates the semantic signification of the presence of the two axes in determining the dramatic world of reference. The play's semantic unity relies on the spatial realization of the time coordinate. This is due to the dominance of the exposition of past events, subordinating the actual 'dramatic present'. The play semantic meaning thus derives from the characters' movement along the axes. It is crucial for them to determine their 'present', so as to depict a temporal anchor of reference for past events. As we mentioned above, this anchor is termed the deictic centre. Deixis, however, is not only a temporal concept. It is actualized in drama through spatial conceptualization due to the visual orientation of the drama. The axes are thus important for a comprehension of the signification of the play.

If one considers the lack of action along the horizontal plane, the significance of the presence of both axes becomes apparent when referring to the Russian formalists' distinction between *fabula* and *sjuzet*, mentioned above. Along the horizontal plane, there is minimal development of *fabula*. It is only in its relationship to the vertical plane that 'action' taking place in the 'present' receives meaning. Even though the simultaneous presence of *both* axes is what allows for the production of semantic signification, emphasis is obviously placed on the vertical plane, with both temporal and spatial coordinates. This can be interpreted as Kundera's interpretation of the playfulness of Diderot's work. Both artists achieve the 'breaking of the illusion' of a realistic presentation in their respective genres by eliminating the foregrounding¹² of the succession of events and place their characters in an unspecified setting, directing the focus onto what can occur through the dialogue between them. In both works, the narrated stories of the characters do little to affect the immediate 'present' of the characters on the horizontal axis, as nothing occurring in the actions presented in the past causes any significant change in the actual situation of the characters, for example, they do not stop their journey onwards. If we consider Kundera's

¹² Not to be interpreted with the Russian formalists' definition of this term.

statement in the introduction to his 'variation', that he "renounces all strict unity of action" (*Jacques* 10) we can deduce that for Kundera, as for Diderot, while they are breaking conventions in their genres, are interested not in *what* is being said, but in the *manner* in which it is presented.

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