

DIALOGUE: Mikhail Volokhov, Nikita Struve – ‘THE THEATRE OF KAIROS IN ESSENCE’ – an essay by Mikhail Volokhov on the theory of theatre and art, on the basis of Nikita Struve’s interview with Mikhail Volokhov.

STRUVE. To begin with, you are a playwright. How many plays have you written?

VOLOKHOV. Nearly twenty. ‘Dead Man’s Bluff’, ‘The Great Consoler’, ‘Chikatilo’s Calvary’, ‘The Immaculate Conception’ – these are like the Four Times Unity. Well, my other hyperrealistic plays, I believe, were written by me at the philosophical figurative level of objectively sincere penetration into Reality – such as ‘The Great Consoler’, ‘Bullets in Chocolate’, ‘Rublyovka Safari’, ‘Chikatilo’s Calvary’, ‘Lesbians Roaring Like a Tsunami’, ‘The Macbeth Chronicles’, ‘Lyudmila Gurchenko Lives’, ‘The Companion’, ‘His Majesty’s Executioner’, ‘Bullets in Chocolate’, ‘Forty-Eighth Degree of Solar Latitude’. I always intend to write a novel, but it turns out as a play. That’s my ‘dramatic organism’.

STRUVE. ‘Dead Man’s Bluff’ has produced the greatest resonance so far.

VOLOKHOV. The French, German and Swiss productions of this play spoke of their own inner anti-spiritual frenzy, about the bloody manipulation of man by man. Nonetheless the performances everywhere turned out to be spiritually significant – I was compared to Shakespeare and ‘Hamlet’ – in the sense that the philosophy of the Truth of the World Spirit of Development is revealed in this play through the absolute Truth of Life. I conceived this play back in Russia, and wrote it in the first months of my life in France. Through the writing of this play, the phenomenon of revealing the real looking glass, the Troubles of Russia, as the most tragic Misfortune of our entire World polluted by thoughtlessness occurred to me spiritually and physically. Then my daughter was born and my beloved French wife was with me – all that was a great inspiration.

STRUVE. The play is, above all, a conflict. What is the philosophical, ‘universal’ conflict of this play of yours?

VOLOKHOV. The fact that in the physical and spiritual reality for people, so-called communism turned out to be more terrible than fascism. That is, as if the good, largely Christian ideas about justice, the pure idea of communism – not to live at the expense of others – turned into their bloody

opposite in Soviet reality – it was literally possible to live ‘with faith in communism’ only at the expense of the ruined lives of their compatriots. Tens of millions were destroyed, and any person in the USSR was turned into a degrader and potential killer who, for the sake of ideas that were unrealizable, virtually phantasmagorical, ideally beautiful and in many ways beneficial, I must admit, was ready in reality to kill his neighbour without a twinge of conscience, as if ‘between two cups of tea’.

STRUVE. And thereby killing himself, you mean.

VOLOKHOV. In many ways there was a spiritual and physical ‘self-mutilation’ of the nation, of Russia – and since Russia is located all over the world (which is very often forgotten by many), then through Russia ‘spiritual mutilation’ occurred throughout Humanity. And in the play this universal anti-human paradox is metaphorically inverted: ‘in good intentions the road is paved to hell’, and an attempt at Redemption is made by debunking this pernicious, absurd, real ‘spiritual damage’ with a Positive Artistic Hyperreal Absurd Image of the whole play.

STRUVE. Do you mean only the destruction of people in Russia, or some kind of internal dehumanization? After all, let’s say for the last fifty years, people have not been physically put to death there. Since Stalin’s death destruction has been very limited. It was still a potential. But there has not been total physical destruction for half a century. What was going on?

VOLOKHOV. The cart moved on. There was a corruptible anti-spiritual decomposition-self-destruction in ignorance. The immoral disease of the nation was on a very pathologically deep and exquisitely corrupting level.

STRUVE. Anthropological, you mean.

VOLOKHOV. Yes — in Russia, all the universal moral roots were cut down. There was a hyperreal over-critical universal negative Absurdity. For decades killing their brothers in the name of ‘communism’ in the largest and most cultured country on the planet was considered the highest good of the ‘saints’. In the name of the inverted ‘holy’ ideas of the social revolution turned upside-down. And all the other countries – their left-leaning intellectual majority applauded Stalin and his ‘foreign’, ‘magical’ deeds, like the Blue Bird from ‘Bluebeard’, as if he had won the war with Hitler, in fact as the Saviour. This is the anthropological, totally fatal sacrilegious global blind looking glass. And ‘Dead Man’s Bluff’ in the form of Theatre plays out and reveals the essence of all this anthropological destruction of the Russian man – as a man of the whole world. Yes, even one philosophical level, the so-called ‘philosophical pillar of the game’, puts ‘Dead Man’s Bluff’ in the category of an anti-Soviet work, as Andrei Zhitinkin told me – a

director who literally 'prophetically – for centuries' staged 'Dead Man's Bluff' with such talented actors as Oleg Fomin, Sergey Chonishvili, Andrei Sokolov and Dmitry Marianov – if we talk about the socio-philosophical aspect of this play. Although the play was written partly so that people would come to their senses after seeing in this drama their potential, inhuman, apocalyptic end from flirting with 'Good Murders for the sake of mind-numbing ideas'. But it seems to me that this play is more about an objective tragic Drama of the World Spirit of Development, which does not save millions in the Name of the future existence of Life.

After all, the fact is that Heaven is not human, not a single prayer has yet been heard, and all revolutions are simply from ignorance. Yet on the other hand, the Last Judgment means that the Light that has entered the World. Death always gives rise to Hope. And when Hope is generated and resolved in knowledge, death, hopefully, will recede. Nothing can be begged for. Prayer is basically spiritual work – a thought hungry for Truth. And the thought of the playwright who creates the Catharsis of the Spiritual Word in the Temple Theatre should become the philosophy of the Cathedral Theatre. I think that as a result 'Dead Man's Bluff' performs precisely this Cultural Temple Cleansing, saying through the Word of the Temple Theatre that fatal, total human thoughtlessness leads to universal, blasphemous death.

STRUVE. Man will thus be tempted. So you envisage a religious action behind art?

VOLOKHOV. In the absolute limit, of course. From God's Spark a Flame should ignite, which will warm our entire World with Goodness. And the Theatre, by and large, should always be a Cathedral, a Temple. The theatre is a small cathedral where people gather in order to contemplate, to see the Truth and ripen as a Fruit in order to reach this Truth and become Mature themselves, for in Maturity lies Knowledge.

Theatre is Creativity and Knowledge. The essence and task of any Creativity and Knowledge is overcoming Death. 'Death Is Corrected By Death.' And this is possible if we have the Gift to create an image of Sacred Death in the Theatre-Temple. It was no accident that Rilke said: 'None of us die our own deaths'. We don't rule over ourselves. We don't know the information space in its absolute entirety. We don't know the culture of Eternity. Its Secretly Explicit Image. We leave, we are dismantled – by one or another life circumstance and in the vast majority of cases in the Theatre, where we are destined to Serve precisely in the Name of Eternity, we nearly always remain mediocre at the level of everyday petty-grudging Schadenfreude. But another Death is destined for us – Death in Eternity,

which is the Highest True Life, and thus with such a Great Death we can overcome earthly temporary death.

There is one single Image – the Image of Eternity, the image of the motionless Mask of Death, the Mask of Eternity. It distributes true guises and disguises – exposing through a disguise. And all the masks and guises in the Theatre-Temple should come only from this Mask of Eternity – only then is a Live Theatre-Cathedral possible. And only then, and only in such a True Theatre, is it possible to recognize all theatrical acting disguises not in their shabby everyday sense, but already in relation to the Mask of Eternity. Because only this Mask is the Measure of all temporary disguises. For only that turns Life into a form of currency. Otherwise, everything turns into a temporary moment, a moment of clamour, then dispersal.

And the basis of theatre is the play. A real Poet of the Theatre should paint the action in the play with bursts of the ninth waves, with accents on Eternity. And the Play itself should act as the ninth shaft, already summing up these ninth shafts with the Idea of Ideas. Then the Play, alive and effective, will live indefinitely, with the Constant of Eternity, all-encompassing in its limitations.

It's necessary to direct people in the Theatre to this kind and level of Conciliar Thought – they are the audience, gathered here, gathered in the Spirit, together, in the Name of the Great Effective Word. They listen to the Word. They are eager to catch the Word through a Big Theatrical Play. And the Word of a Great Theatrical Play is again a Cathedral. And when such a Theatre-Temple With Its Art 'captures' all the apocalyptic pros and cons of 'live real time', melting out of all this a Holy Tragic Philosophical Catharsis – such a Theatre-Temple is able not only to soften morals, but also to make a person Christianly Wiser.

Any word and concept in the Theatre-Temple must be Crucified on the Cross – on the Cross of Conciliarity, on the Cross of Measure, otherwise no one will understand anything again, otherwise His Death would be stupid – His example would be stupid that a Person was crucified and He suffered so much. Christ Is Truly Risen. And the goal of Truth is Life. Such an attitude to oneself, Life and Art dictates our new time of an enriched information field. And a person tempted by such Art, such a Renovated Theatre-Temple, will in any case be able to clearly distinguish human spiritual grains from all kinds of subhuman chaff. Mind, Conscience, Faith and Repentance are the fundamental principles in creativity, as the 'avant-gardists' of all kinds of secondary postmodernizations do not struggle with this.

STRUVE. The beginning of a believing conscience is strong in all Christian literature, and in drama in particular – starting with Shakespeare, ending with Pushkin, Bulgakov, Claudel.

VOLOKHOV. Although the absurdists such as Beckett and Ionesco artificially, as it were, ‘abandoned’ the ‘Mind and Conscience’ – especially they refused Faith and Repentance in their absurdist plays, but indirectly, by the invisible will of the Almighty, the Mind of Conscience is still present in their plays, although Faith and Repentance are not there – it’s just not given. Ionesco, who was a friend of mine for many years during my time in Paris, told me he didn’t see himself as a religious person, but considered Christ the Kindest and Greatest Man on Earth. Beckett, Ionesco and their other ‘generational brothers and absurdists’ ‘devised’ philosophical, cabinet, ‘brain’, anti-gnoseological anti-drama – and the Heartfelt Volume of Life, but they didn’t capture all its Universal Romantic Tragic Juices, Beliefs and Religions. They – the ‘Western cabinet creators’, are simply not spiritually aiming at this with their fractional, private, egoistic, relative, abstruse, powerless forces. The voice of a Western artist, as a Western person, is rationally limited, utilitarian and cowardly. In the West they all work in ‘degrees’, they are ‘stumps’. They aim at the target, but they hit the stump – they arrive at something very similar, but it’s not the main thing, it’s fluid, liquid, relative, certainly momentary and monetary. The nature of Russian Art, Russian Artistic and Globally Philosophically Objective Absurd Writing consists in the discovery of a universal, unified, world, the innermost secrets of human beings, through the creation of Existentially Holy and human voluminous Creations. Like, for example, Dostoevsky’s ‘Brothers Karamazov’. For this ‘silverless universe’ they are drawn to us, the Russians. But at the same time Dostoevsky’s ‘Crime and Punishment’ is already, among other things, the most ‘modern’ Western novel because of the speculative repentance of the murderer Raskolnikov. And in fact, this novel morally resolved our social, bloody revolution.

For the most part Dostoevsky is revealed in the Western world as the most ‘Jewish-Western’ writer – with a psychological, temporary hack – from the point of view that the whole life of our time is in the Spirit – humanly everywhere psychologically Jewish – in the world there is a process of scattering all his brilliantly created stones-creations. I say that in Spirit Dostoevsky was a Jew, although he is an antagonist to them outwardly, in the physical world. And in this case I am not talking about Jews in a substantive way (I am negative about anti-Semites), but only as a kind of philosophical concept of Time, which covers Eternity and is equal to Eternity, but is aware of itself only discretely at the moment, due to the limitations of our universal Consciousness and Being. In this fatal unresolved state, at the moment, of the development of the World Spirit lies the main Tragedy of the World. Russians and Jews are the two most

metaphysically powerful Coming Nations, who are today outcasts of this our physical world. Jews represent the movement of the world, its Physics. Russians are its contemplative unifying static, its Meta.

Our world-famous genius Gogol is the most globally universal Russian-Jewish Metaphysician with his main character, the eternal Jew Chichikov, who buys Dead Souls (something which cannot be bought, which only belongs to God) in Contemplative Russia, where all Dead Souls are essentially Living. In Chekhov, the United Russian Spirit of the Russia of Ranevskaya with its Cherry Orchard becomes like Christ on the executioner's block under the axe of the Russian Jew Lopakhin, the Hassidic love of the Cherry Orchard for dacha silverware. Shakespeare is an absolutely 'Russian' playwright, entirely woven from Real Human Eternal Great Unified Absurdities. There the Russian Contemplative Hamlet is fighting with the temporary worker Claudius, who took power by killing. And another interesting aspect of Shakespeare is that, for example, Macbeth the murderer, like Dostoevsky's Raskolnikov, doesn't repent speculatively. Shakespeare finds forces in life and uses them in the play to destroy the killer Macbeth. In my dramaturgy I adhere to the same Shakespearean principle of punishment for the crime committed.

But all of today's Western philosophy and culture is 'Jewishly' discrete and relative. If they are engaged in God, they are engaged in his self-expression. And self-expression is endless. Their Western philosophy and culture have stopped developing – they are grinding away at the same thing, but this is physical, psychological or often just pathological self-examination. And any great universal divine metaphor is an Eternal Great Universal Metaphysical Absurdity. Ionesco also believes that Shakespeare and Chekhov were the first absurdists. Only Ionesco doesn't say anywhere that the 'absurdity' of Shakespeare and Chekhov was of a different, higher metaphysical, life-affirming, noble-tragic order.

Absurdity is not a one-sided thing – it is masculine and feminine, their act of coupling. In coupling they form a single Word. This is the Heraclitean lyre and bow. And if the Absurd disappears, life itself disappears. The person becomes flat, one-sided, and gradually declines into death. A person is not aware of the Absurd, but lives by it, being at the centre of attention, as if in the middle of these two conjugate poles. Man does not need to understand the absurdity, but he lives and feeds on it. And it is not when he gets into an absurd situation that a person commits suicide (according to Albert Camus), but vice versa, when he is deprived of this situation. Because absurdity is always a dialogue, a clash, a contradiction. Like two banks of the same river. Where life flows and speech itself is built. And so we all live one-sidedly. Everything ends up out of kilter. But we are absurdly carrying two sides forward at the same time. In the same way we have two eyes but

see with the third. One eye is fixed and the other is diffused. And besides the fact that the eye is just a physical body, the eye is also the body of Consciousness. So the right hemisphere of the brain is responsible for the left hand. But at the same time, everything lives in a single organism. Therefore, the Absurd is a unifying principle. Absurdity is the meaning of life and the construction of any form and content taken together. Otherwise, content and form will fall apart. Just like the alphabet – in its essence, like a Mystery, like the preservation of the One, indivisible, but divisible in the endless details of our human mercantile absurdity. The absurd is a ubiquitous global reconnecting metaphor for life. And in a theatrical play, in order to recreate the full scope of Vibrant Absurd Life, the characters should not be artificial, flat puppets that are neither exalted nor belittled. The image is always the Whole, and in the Essence of the Whole lies the Absurd.

Then there is always a double basis in matter. There is the Truth of Beauty and the secret Life of Brotherhood. The world within itself is One. And in secretive life, any objects are absurdly twinned. That's why Western plays of almost any level so strongly smack of vulgarity. They just contain the meaningless ambulation of the world – went there, not knowing where. Created one-sidedly, they simply express the one-sidedness of life. And, for example, it was 'strategically' more important for Ionesco to foster the mercantile claim that it was he, and not Beckett, who wrote the world's first anti-play, 'The Bald Soprano'. Skinny and unfinished – like a Play, but before 'Waiting for Godot', the most metaphysically vulgar, baseless and linear Western play, this is, incidentally, its manic pathological 'genius', and consists of an absolutely mirror physical tracing paper of Einstein's relative theory of relativity, which fails to take into account the Coordinates of Eternity. The mere fact that Beckett wrote an Ionic absurdist play earlier (in relative time, a relative play) brings concrete non-metaphysical money in the West. After all, it is in the 'relative West' that this type of 'relatively previously written play', in the puppet gradations of their mercantile monetary absurdism, is staged far more often. And, incidentally, Ionesco's play 'The Chairs', which appeared at the same time, has an order of magnitude more significant than 'Waiting for Godot'; after all, it is written in the coordinates of subject philosophy: what is the 'table', so is the 'chair'. And, in my opinion, Ionesco's 'The Chairs' is the only worthy masterpiece of the era of the French 'breaking drama'.

Unfortunately, on the whole all subsequent modern Western 'avant-garde' dramaturgical creators 'produce' their 'absurdist masterpieces' in artificial 'tabloid metaphysics', at the pathologically insane, superficial level of all their teachers of armchair absurdity. And so all of their Western postmodern general-uniform, pension-kitchen fuss at the gastric level – the first 'before-after' of the first truly great Shakespearean absurdist became

the first completely monetary-salary, 'puppet' absurdist, which is simply tabloid ridiculous. But that's how these 'Jews from over the hill', these 'mass entertainers' with their 'magic herb' lived in their invented relative anti-world, and go on living. They see the Seven Wonders of the World, but they don't see the Light itself. After all, the weakness of the dramaturgy of Beckett, Ionesco and their other more primitive followers is that the arithmetically generated puppet antiheroes of their plays in their temporary underdevelopment in the course of the play are incapable of anything more than 'knocking out' for the 'anti-spirit' of the play, resetting their entire already impotent set of mutually exclusive matches without reason and meaning. As a result, they simply don't have and cannot have a 'Great Theatrical Performance'. And, for example, in potentially metaphysically universal Russia, the performances of Beckett and Ionesco have no 'Presence' at the Christian Level of even Tennessee Williams. On the other hand, in the Old West, Williams is considered a deeply tabloid, tearful playwright. That is, the physically absurd snake of the sophisticated avant-garde Western discrete mind and heart devoured not only itself in more than one circle, but it also managed to bite with its rotten, 'pseudo-avant-garde', critical fangs the living sprouts of its own potentially real Spiritual, Cathartic Theatrical Art – Light for All, with Blood, Flesh, with Heart, Conscience, Love, Repentance, with the Universal Fullness of Life. This is the real Crazy Aggressive Absurdity of Cultural Humanity – Western pseudo-consolidating relative physical avant-gardism, 'leading' only at the expense of its mathematical, monetary organization.

The oneness of language and thought in the West did not exist and will never exist. They killed the Letter. They are mute, they are all 'Jewish Germans' in a philosophical sense. That's why fascism came from Germany, as a Lutheran act of Human Chastity, a very Human Faith, but in an undeveloped physical world, and it all ended with extensive and insane bloodletting. Because their dynamic, monetary, relatively contractual world cannot be built ontologically on a Static Unshakeable Truth, when anyone can be deceived and divorced for money.

And the Europeans will forever be in a chaotic, dynamic development of their mathematical, monetary degree, since they are very 'exponential', discontinuous, unstable nations. They will never attain a Single Sacred Language of Narration, for they are people of the Digit, not the Number. And the figure is always shifting. They just can't freeze. Freeze for a moment and you're fine. At the expense of which we defeated their fascism, at the expense of the Highest God-bearing Truth and Beauty. But they believe that we have defeated their fascism with an even greater evil. They believe that we, the Russian contemplatives, are connected with evil. That's why they are always restraining and stopping us. This is the Absurd! But they have their own place. And the One cannot exist without their

'monetary degree'. But, on the other hand, this creative Absurd Antagonism of the physical Jewish West and Oblomov's contemplative Russian Russia should in the future give birth to a really worthy 'offspring', who will begin to Save and Sanctify us all, at least in the Theatre.

STRUVE. But won't you get the same paradox of a snake devouring itself with your abundant use of obscene language, the Russian *mat*? Don't you see this as a kind of dead end for expression, don't you use it just to distinguish yourself?

VOLOKHOV. For me, an obscenity is just a very strong figurative Russian word. What is obscene language? On the one hand a deadlock, but on the other a victory. Objective reality is the foundation of everything, a support in which nothing can be changed. And in relation to *mat*, it is no longer obscenity. There is an expression: 'He scolds with all his might'. And to bring to life, to 'raise' a strong, universal, full-blooded, tragic Russian Plot, these sacred words are a Sacred Necessity. The great play is not afraid of sacred words; it matches them. And the sanctity of the Metaphysical Super-Idea in a strong play is so Holy that an attentive person with a 'need for truth' accepts the need for appropriate strong words, especially if all this is a Real Holy Art, which is higher than real everyday physical life. For, without an appropriate, in the case of Fully-Fledged Art, a full-blooded objective *mat*, the sanctity of an objective Super-Idea will simply be perverted. And the conciliatory, participatory person in such a 'Theatre' will have the feeling that he was cursed without obscenity, as always happens in the case of mediocre grey art. And in dramaturgy, sometimes, there is simply nowhere to go – art is moulded from the 'natural juices of the language', 'it is impossible to retreat – Moscow is behind us'.

And *mat* is a very serious thing. The seriousness of it is indicated by the critical moment at which it is used. Of course, *mat* is vulgarized as an insult, but this comes from a misunderstanding of Russian obscene language as a principle. *Mat* is very stingy with expressions, but this is a lofty, capacious concept that carries mathematical criteria – it is possible to swear with a three-, seven-storey obscenity. In *mat* lies the concept of the word atom, meta, death and metaphysics. It is very specific, and a person feels some awkwardness and experiences tremendous tension when he enters such a clear framework. He feels that the *mat* is placed at the conclusion of something. *Mat* is always a measure of responsibility, a very great responsibility that is also moral, as to what we mean – so this profanity should always be appropriate. And, in principle, *mat* lies, as it were, in the sphere of silence, of sacred action – it need not be voiced, the cursing can be apparent. What is the reason for cursing? The hopeless situation a person has inflicted on himself, due to his lack of education. And the *mat* gives a hint – what you are missing. If people say 'Fuck you,' it

means you lack creativity and need to be fertilized. 'You're a cunt...' indicates that you don't have a feminine aspect, you just need to transition. And *mat* is always moralizing, it hints at the way out of a lie. We always 'lie', but we justify this lie in a good way and convert it into the truth, oddly enough, through *mat*. Obscene language is the last extreme hint at how to get out of the situation of lies and lying, which always has a specific temporal meaning, distinct from the Unit of Being. In chess, checkmate is implemented in physics, and the language does not know dead ends, but this is not a concretized chess game or a table, this is the Field of View, this is the whole universe, where there is always a way out – this is the Essence. There is a way out of any situation. And we humans are always concerned about how to get in, but we don't think about how to get out. There is no sin. There is only the vanity of reason. *Mat* is the key, the way out of the situation, the birth of an image associated with Eternity. And if we emotionally experience the deadlock situation, then we get out of this situation by way of Emotions. We interpret, we make sense of it. *Mat* is a sublimation of the highest human qualities accumulated over the centuries – this is an extreme position that is not deaf, it carries a hint. And you need to be able to listen to *mat*. Everything else is a lie, a meaningless hubbub and provocation.

'F... your mother' – you have no memory – you fucked your mother. Some narrow-minded psychologists, educators and writers seem to see here the shadow of incest, the Oedipus complex invented by the ill-fated philosopher Freud, who was always concerned about pathology. But what does incest have to do with it? How can a person enter into a physical relationship with his mother? Only if he is completely unconscious and does not remember who his mother is. This is the whole falsity of the psychology of today, which has pathologically become pathology. No language other than Russian has such a profanity – a return to memory. So, in this sense, Russian *mat* is no longer pathological. The Russian man will, albeit unconsciously, comprehend himself. And the fact that in Russia people often say 'F... your mother' is a clear sign that the nation is at the forefront of humanity, in the sense of self-purification, repentance and constant reminders of the mother, the mother who brings everyone together. No wonder they say 'Love the Motherland, your mother!' In this, Russia is ahead of the whole planet. *Mat* immediately fixes the topic, but also immediately gives a way out of the situation – it is life-giving. And this is only the property of Russian *mat*, because it is genetically justified by language – here lies the basis of the Truth of the Life of language itself. A spring of pure water, but at the same time a key. Philosophers have not yet paid close attention to this fundamental topic because they have failed to understand the basic principle. You can, of course, talk grandiloquently about obscene language, about the vulgarities of the common people, but this does not reveal its essence. *Mat* is a manifestation of the highest

moment of Being. We have a completely false attitude towards *mat*. Everyone swears, but at the same time everyone is afraid – they feel shame. Yes, shame – *mat* discovers this shame. It is not the *mat* itself that is shameful, but what it reveals is the failure of a person. And speaking in obscenities is a situation when the event is most accurately described in its own terms, so the *mat* is impartial, it always offends the eyes and ears – this is the most naked form of human communication.

But *mat* must be very responsibly accurate. It must be learned – it must be understood and correlated with the highest manifestations of the human Spirit. The more we listen to it, and the more accurate and precise it is, the faster we can dispense with our mistakes. If you did something senselessly, then you cursed yourself. But if you did it with meaning, ‘naked with balls’, then you have already pointed out something lacking in society and given a hint of what we lack.

Mat is a theatrical action in the first place. And naked shame protects. And if there is shame and understanding of this, then no *mat* will stick. *Mat* sticks to the person who has no sin. We have a common vulgarized point of view on *mat*, when the *mat* is interpreted without any meaning, without any figurative application to this or that fact. As a result the *mat* cannot achieve its goal, it becomes meaningless. In a meaningful Theatre-Temple the process of Human Purification must therefore be achieved by the creative impetus of the *mat*, its sacred meaning. But, unfortunately, to dismiss it is our ubiquitous vulgar understanding of *mat*. This means that a person has become deaf, mute, waved his hand and walked away from the problem. People don't worry about problems, they get rid of them. And this is the positive essence of *mat*, to get rid of problems. *Mat* thereby strives for self-destruction, and it is used to self-sacrifice. After solving the situation through *mat*, the *mat* can then be withdrawn. Language is sincere – there is nothing in the world more sincere than language. We must trust such a language. And be very sincere yourself, like your language.

STRUVE. That's very interesting. Probably that's why French obscene language experienced certain problems and lost all its colour.

VOLOKHOV. Then in Russia, the people and the intelligentsia are still very far from each other. Life has not settled down. But the differences give life to beautiful waterfalls. You can't step over anything. The spirit of development moves with pace, this is its saving power. If we step over, we will be over the abyss again. And in France there hasn't been such a wild social difference for a long time, it's a relatively small, realistically imagined human territory. In Russia, wherever you throw in all parameters, there are incomprehensible ups and obscene downs. But there's no doubt about what life involves. Let's say, this is the Russian Spirit, its earthly territory.

Then also in drama: Divine Universal Metaphysical Art – in relation to the Spirit of Development of the World, it's necessary to 'earn' by undressing-destroying the 'diabolism of the Epoch' according to the 'highest phallic account'. This is one of the conditions for the whole play to sound like a Poem of Faith, again, according to the Law of the Absurd, created by the female, reincarnated, maternal, all-loving creative principle of the 'male artist', as a global poetic metaphor.

STRUVE. This, of course, is very difficult to achieve in drama, almost impossible.

VOLOKHOV. In this sense, that is why Great Female Poets sometimes achieve, at the expense of their feminine, essential, physiological immediacy, the most significant and brilliant sacred results with their impulsive 'lyrical' poetry, 'their holy inner delirium'. Let's say, even fiercely hating the Soviet system, Akhmatova, like the Motherland, created great lines for the Development of the Spirit: 'And we will save you, Russian speech is the great Russian word.' Because the tongue is the Spirit, the bone that the enemy seeks. But who among the male poets of the 'ardent statesmen of that time', when it was necessary, realized and issued such Majestic Self-Protective lines at this feminine, Akhmatovean, sacral universal level? Although there are also male sacred pearls in line with the same Universal World Russian Spirit of Development – the great Imminent poems of the Russian Jew Mandelstam about the unknown soldier, which he also created in spite of his hatred of the Stalinist system.

STRUVE. Western fascism certainly had a vicious phenomenon, but nevertheless it was the least vicious among other diabolical systems. Italian fascism did not feature such absolute anthropological destruction as German Nazism.

VOLOKHOV. I think that's why in some of my plays the *mat* acted as a living protective factor of anthropological destruction. And especially in art, *mat* is important only in the context of the highest meaning of a literary work. *Mat* is not as an end in itself, but as the objective circumstances offered – the Truth of Life, from which and thanks to which a righteous solution is sought, where the only weapon of struggle, of course, are words, words, words... and different ones, but those should converge in a Single Wise Righteous Word from the Truth. During performances of my plays people literally 'cry with laughter' because the accurate, imaginative *mat* of the Truth of Life has helped them comprehend some of the deepest truths. And I believe that 'Dead Man's Bluff' is the embodied Mystery of Golgotha of today, yesterday and the future. What Rudolf Steiner dreamed of finding. Felix, the hero of the play, is the personification of Luciferic Evil, while Arkady embodies Ahrimanic Evil. These two heroes took all the Evil of the

World on themselves 'in life'. And they redeem it with the whole course of action of a hyperrealistic, tragicomic play. Hence the viewer's cathartic tears.

Even in Paris 'Dead Man's Bluff' provoked the master of the French theatre Bernard Sobel to throw one and a half million dollars to stage a Russian trilogy: Chekhov's 'The Cherry Orchard', Babel's 'Maria' and my play 'Dead Man's Bluff' in his most prestigious theatre, with such superstars of French theatre and cinema as Denis Lavant and Hugues Quester. Sobel then staged 'Dead Man's Bluff' in Germany, and again, as 'Hamlet'. In many interviews Sobel admitted that for him the philosophical and metaphorical level of 'The Troubles of the World through the Troubles of Russia' revealed in 'Dead Man's Bluff', matches the epic tragic canvas of Shakespeare's 'Hamlet'. Joseph Brodsky read 'Dead Man's Bluff' and told me it was all very pertinent. And, in any case, as the French press noted, the level of the Absurdity of Life in the prophetic play 'Dead Man's Bluff' – 'The Golden Dream of Mankind' (as they wrote in plain text) – is an order of magnitude higher than the level of their pensionable classical Beckett absurdists.

STRUVE. You told me you feel close to Shestov.

VOLOKHOV. Yes, very much so.

STRUVE. What do you like about Shestov?

VOLOKHOV. Literally everything. When I start reading him, no matter which page, which work, I have the feeling I'm entering an Eternal Wise Life of Passionate Heartfelt Great Tragic Absurdity, where Faith Saves Everything.

STRUVE. Rarefied mountain air.

VOLOKHOV. The feeling of an Unearthly Paradise. You begin to Remember, See and Understand everything. He simply fascinates me with the pure depth of thought in his wise, kind, fearless, believing, sincere heart, unbanished from paradise. A philosopher-poet. A holy genius. Although there hasn't been a single saint on earth yet. I believe everything he preaches. Ultimately, he preaches Faith in God, in Eternal Life, in the Holy Truth. Since it comes from him, you truly believe it. And I want to write plays like that.

STRUVE. Who is closest to you among Russian playwrights of the 20th century?

VOLOKHOV. Chekhov, of course, the greatest ascetic religious genius.

STRUVE. He's a bit of a whiner in his dramaturgy.

VOLOKHOV. It all depends on the production. Chekhov is a very tough poet of the chaste theatre of the Absurd, who created plays that are metaphors of real, sincere, human Hope.

STRUVE. Music.

VOLOKHOV. Great plays are always music, symphonies.

STRUVE. Have you seen a good production of Chekhov?

VOLOKHOV. Brook's 'The Cherry Orchard'. An 'English' director with finesse to the last millimetre. Like a sniper. With a soul not entirely spoiled by 'half-empty' Western art.

STRUVE. Who do you see as the best 20th-century Western playwright?

VOLOKHOV. I keep going back to Shakespeare. In comparison Brecht, Beckett, Williams, Camus and Genet are simply 'avant-garde mannerists'. And Molière is rather vulgar.

STRUVE. The underground man is a feature in your plays. Did Dostoevsky significantly influence your work?

VOLOKHOV. Kafka admitted somewhere that if he hadn't read Dostoevsky's 'Notes from Underground' at the right time, then Kafka would not have been Kafka. I'd say the same of myself. But I think what I'm doing is, as if in one person, defining the Russian and the world sense of Dostoevschina – or rather, it's still probably my Volokhovschina, and then I try to overcome it with tragic Gogol's laughter, not forgetting Pushkin's declaration that 'Good and Evil are equally stifling'. Although a lot of things influenced my creativity. Until I was 14 I was raised by my grandmother, Anisya Ivanovna Volokhova. In the 'difficult Brezhnev years' she led the local Baptist community. But the list of what influenced my creativity is endless. The Bauman Moscow State Technical University, Tula, Shymkent, Alma-Ata, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Heraclitus, Nikolai Kuzansky, Lao Tzu, Kafka, Pushkin, Gogol, Jung, the later work of Tolstoy – his famous declaration that 'The world is probably not the way we know it, there will be other tools of knowledge – there will be another World'. My father was a volunteer fighting in the Great Patriotic War, a first-conscript Solovetsky sea cadet; my mother was a very poetic woman – she knew hundreds of sayings by heart. But I was also influenced by a mental asylum in the city of Moscow, where my beloved parents decided to get me checked out when I wrote my first free drama essay. Although I was sent to the asylum to be checked for insanity, I also went to seek material for a play about a Soviet

anti-dissident psychiatric hospital. Now I have a beautiful French daughter – she is a talented artist. I have run many marathons. For ten years my coach was Semyon Semyonovich Kuznetsov, marathon champion of the USSR. I nearly drowned in an ice-hole not long ago: I fell through the ice on skis in winter, in the middle of the Moscow Canal. After fifteen minutes fisherman Volodya Shmal dragged an old eight-metre dead tree over and pulled me out. The ‘encouraging’ feeling of real folk life from the series of how to live I haven’t found yet, but I want to explain to Humanity how to Live Eternal Life Freely and with Faith.

STRUVE. And you wrote ‘Chikatilo’s Calvary’ for this Humanity?

VOLOKHOV. ‘Chikatilo’s Calvary’ is the global Kairos Theatre in essence. After all, in the New Testament the term Kairos, ‘kairox’, defines the Eve of the Great Achievements, when even opponents of the Will of God fulfil the Prophetic Right to Reveal the Infinite Truth and Beauty of the Universal God.

Even in the Old Testament, God ‘brutally-savagely’ ‘Tortures’ Job the man ‘Only in Faith’, and the afflicted Job Finds himself ‘Only in Faith’, being Granted Consent with the Absurdity of the Divine World.

The Destroyed Times and the people of Russia of our century, up to the very last stage of the fall of man, ‘Chikatilism’, is nothing but the final, most terrible ‘Torture of God’, ‘Checking by God’ of the spiritual strength of His Human Likeness.

In ‘Chikatilo’s Calvary’ the form of the Theatre-Temple attempted to recreate the transcendent, absurd content, like ‘Torture-Checking God’, and ‘Catharsis Resolution-Exit through Repentance’ from this diabolical abyss into the Cosmic Kairos of Revealing the Substantial Truth, when the most terrible Truth in the most paradoxical, Metaphysical Image becomes Life-Giving Healing.

And in essence, Only Faith remains with Man... on the Earth – in the Idea that is the centre of the Universe.

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