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## The Concept of Sincerity in “New Drama”

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*The article deals with the analysis of “new drama”. A large number of various texts by young playwrights, conventionally united into the so-called “new drama” movement, are distinctive with a specific semantic and pragmatic mindset, intonations, and such fictional consciousness property as sincerity. Sincerity is considered along with such close terms as confession, simplicity, truthfulness, and naïveté. As a concept of the “new drama”, sincerity can be revealed through the analysis of manifests, fiction texts and their stage productions. We pay specific attention to the conditions of turning from the postmodern scepticism and irony to sincerity as a special worldview the “new drama” actions originate from.*

*Keywords: concept, new drama, sincerity, Vyrypaev, Grishkovets, Pulinovich.*

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### Introduction into the problem

Each sociocultural situation has its own vocabulary and comes up with its new dominating categories/concepts and explanation patterns. For us a concept is not an “abstract”, but a “working” notion, productively used for the analysis of a cultural process. As Iu. Stepanov remarks, “a concept is a clot of culture in human consciousness; it is a way for culture to enter one’s mental world. On the other hand, a concept is a way for a simple ordinary man, not a “creator of cultural values”, to enter a culture, and in some cases even to make his impact on it” (Stepanov, 2004: 42).

It is the second time the concept of sincerity attracts attention of Russian philology during

the past century. For the first time it happened at the transition point from Stalin culture to the “thaw”, in the article “On Sincerity in Literature” by Vladimir Pomerantsev (Pomerantsev, 1953). The author insisted on sincerity, understanding it as the essential condition for creation. Pomerantsev wrote: “The level of sincerity, i.e. frankness and directness of a piece, shall be the first measure for evaluation. Sincerity is the main component of the aggregate gift we refer to as talent” (Pomerantsev, 1953). While the aesthetic programme of the late 50-s assumed rejection of Stalinist totalitarian model of culture, targeted at reaching a certain ideal and denying the variety of deviations of such ideal, the emergence of

sincerity as a mindset of the “new drama” marked suspicious attitude to postmodern literature accepting no unique utterances or personal experiences. However, multiple postmodern researchers did not only foresee its end, but also outlined some future scenarios associated with, first of all, the legitimisation of naïve, individual emotion, serving as a base for any sincere expression; for instance, such authors spoke of new Sentimentalism or Romanticism. Thus, in his monograph dedicated to Russian Postmodernism, M. Epshtein suggested that “the 21<sup>st</sup> century may become the sentimental century” (Epshtein, 2000: 432). New sentimentality was also chosen as a focus by N. Leiderman, who underlined that “due to its pathos, it is opposed to the postmodern scepticism and returns to the romanticist system traditions...” (Leiderman, 2002); Neo-Sentimentalism was also recognised by Man’kovskaia (Man’kovskaia, 2000). Sincerity-focused mindset is typical not only for Neo-Sentimentalism; it is paradoxically present in some naturalistic and neo-realistic texts, conventionally referred to as “gore” (Lipovetskiy, 1999). The “new drama” is interesting for us in the aspect of representing sincerity and synthesizing various value mindsets, from naturalist to sentimentalist.

### **Problem setting**

The “new drama” is a conventional term uniting various texts not as much due to semantic and stylistic similarities, but for the pragmatic integrity: according to Mark Lipovetskiy and Birgit Beumers, they are “performative” (Lipovetskiy, 1999). Their common object field is the research of marginal subjects with the main communication language full of obscene vocabulary and physical aggression practices.

Normally the “new drama” is described with such concepts as violence and transgression (Lipovetskiy, Beumers, 2012). Sincerity

representation is another trait common for the playwrights and their works. Sincerity as a dominant of artistic utterance has been mentioned by the “new drama” authors themselves, playwrights, producers, and directors, such as M. Ugarov in his manifest titled “Beauty Kills the World! The New Drama Manifest” (Ugarov, 2004), and E. Boiakov (Boiakov, 2006).

Turning to sincerity as a means of communication is typical not only of drama and theatre, but art in general. For instance, in cinematograph it is found in “Piter FM” by Oxana Bychkova, which came out in 2006; in poetry turning to sincerity was mentioned by Timur Kibirov and Sergei Gandlevskiy, and earlier – by Alexander Kabakov; all of them are quoted by Sergei Chuprinin in his book “Russian Literature Today. Living According to the Unwritten Rules” (Chuprinin, 2007). For the sake of justice let us remark one of maestros of conceptualism, Dmitry Alexandrovich Prigov, who, back in the year 1984, defined the transfer to “new sincerity” as “art of turning to the traditionally established lyrical-confessional discourse” (Prigov, 1999: 64). The main pattern of explaining the reasons for reviving interest for sincerity in the works of the mentioned poets, writers and critics is based on tiredness of conceptualism and rationality, both their own and those of their readers. Naturally, the communication task has been and still is quite acute for the theatre as well.

At the same time, we do realise that the artists/authors and readers/spectators understand the concept of sincerity in a variety of ways. We suppose that the popularity of the “new drama” (with its marginal characters and violence) in Russia and abroad became possible due to the playwrights’ ability to combine the transgression experience with the confiding frankness of the narrating voice. Different representatives of the “new drama” suggest their own sincerity-based communication strategies.

### “New drama”

As a rule, the “new drama” authors are not young people from the capital. The Urals are represented by Presnyakov brothers, disciples of Nikolai Koliada: Vassily Sigarev, Yaroslava Pulinovich, Irina Vaskovskaia; the Volga region is represented by Durnenkov brothers, Yury Klavdiev, Belarus – by Pavel Priazhko, Irkutsk – by Ivan Vyrypaev, Kemerovo – by Yevgeni Grishkovetz, and Krasnoyarsk – by Yulia Tupikina.

The modern “new drama” was shaped due to various seminars, drama awards, competitions and modern drama theatres. The “new drama” genealogy begins from Liubimovka youth drama festival organized by playwrights V. Slavkin, A. Kazantsev, M. Roshchin, and V. Gurkin in 1989. Liubimovka was a unique experiment for education, development and encouragement of young playwrights. The festival, which included various workshops and classes, became a platform for discussions and a meeting point for the new generation playwrights and directors of the same age. The older and the younger generations were both ready for dialogue, and the success of Liubimovka was based on “the altruism of the participants and organizers, and their readiness for inconvenient plays” (Matvienko, 2008: 45). Besides the festivals, “The Syuzhety” and “The Dramaturg” magazines, organized by A. Kazantsev and M. Roshchin, came out; later, the Centre for Dramaturgy and Directing, the major platform for the “new drama”, saw the light. One of its first performances was “Plasticine” by Vassily Sigarev, directed by Kirill Serebrennikov. The play centred around the voice of its protagonist, desperate to speak out against the background of hyper-naturalistic details of everyday life of teenagers in “gloomy and depressive tones, general desire to shock the audience with naturalistic details including sexual abuse” (Lipovetskiy, 2005: 248).

So, by the early 2000-s all around Russia there began a wave of large and small contests, festivals, workshops, awards, targeted at young playwrights and directors; many of those still exist today (e.g. Eurasia, modern dramaturgy contest and award, organized by Nikolai Koliada).

Another important milestone in the development of the “new drama” movement is the year 2002, when Elena Gremina and Mikhail Ugarov established their “Theatre.doc” and put up “Oxygen” by Ivan Vyrypaev, a mono-play performed by the author himself. The theatre found its sincere intonation, for it did not rely only on the voice of the new generation desperate to breathe, but also on some real evidence collected by verbatim method. The situation reminded of the 60-s, when the “Rozov’s boys” opposed the standards in the stable socialism age; similarly, “in the age of happy oil consumerism, the disciples of Mikhail Ugarov and Elena Gremina were the first to recall the role of the theatre as a social institution and started thinking of the social responsibility of a poet” (Renanskiy, 2014). Just like with Sigarev, in the case of Vyrypaev those were not only new characters and their unbearable hardness of being that came to the fore, but the new intonation of sincerity; not the naïve sincerity of the 60-s, but the shamelessly explicit one getting over the cultural taboos and destroying them.

Sincerity as the author’s intonation in the “new drama” is found not only at the literary text level; it remains and it grows as the text is translated into the language of the stage, into an expressive and figurative theatrical text. It becomes possible, since “playwrights often become directors themselves, such as Y. Grishkovetz, M. Ugarov, I. Vyrypaev or Presniakov brothers” (Lipovetskiy, Beumers, 2012: 11). Integration of a playwright, director and an actor in one person gave birth to a new theatrical convention, typical for the stage representation of the “new drama”, the so-called

“zero convention” professional actors began to use. Thus, it was the discovery of new acting behaviour, when sincerity appears to be the natural way of being of the actor.

### **Sincerity concept and its representation forms**

The “concept” is not just a term; it is a “general notion standing for properties, relations and other similar objects” (Karnap, 1998: 55). Sincerity concept lives in the medium of such close terms as truthfulness, originality, frankness, open-heartedness, candour, naïveté, naturalness, confession. Sincerity is an antonym for falseness, hypocrisy, indifference. But if we regard sincerity as an antonym of artificialness, while artificialness, in its turn, acts as a condition for art, it raises the question whether sincerity contradicts the nature of art itself. This contradiction was discovered by avant-gardists; Malevich explicitly claimed that “he struggled any sincerity in artists. Brodthors said he started doing art for he wished to do something insincere. In this context, being insincere means making art, not appealing to any certain taste including one’s own” (Groys, 2013: 4). Denying the concept of sincerity, avant-gardists demonstrated the reason why artist turned to it, which is the sensual nature of art. As Paul Valerie fairly remarked, “in the end, those are only senses that matter” (Valerie, 1976). All history of modernism and avant-garde is history of art neglecting the concept of sincerity. Sincerity comes up when “the speaker is supposed to have a complete and exact account of what he has in mind so that the audience is able to comprehend exactly what the speaker thinks” (Foucault, 2006). Foucault refers to such type of relations between the subject and their speech as *parrhesia*. Parrhesia is a type of sincerity when “the speaker makes it manifestly clear and obvious what he says in his opinion. And he does this by avoiding any kind of rhetorical form which

would veil what he thinks” (Foucault, 2006). Some “new drama” texts work with their readers and spectators with the parrhesia principle.

For instance, the secret of success of performances by Yevgeni Grishkovetz is the special contact with the audience he makes. The sincerity of Grishkovetz can be explained with the term of parrhesia, when every reader and listener goes through the procedure of recognizing the utterances as the truth. The audience recognizes the morning routine from the childhood, the trip to school, the way we hold a toothbrush in a train washroom. The joy of this recognition leads to complete trust for the author. It is important to remark, that when the text goes up on stage, Grishkovetz honestly warns his audience that on one hand, the author and the protagonist are a single whole, but on the other, this integrity is broken by the nature of theatre as such, which assumes tensor relations between the protagonist, the role, and the author. This warning was first announced at “How I Ate a Dog” performance and it has been announced for several decades since then; nevertheless, hundreds thousands spectators still enjoy the way the author’s sincere intonation hits their trust-based expectations system. The uniqueness of Grishkovetz as a writer and an actor is his ability to present his unique personal experience as a common, universal one. D. Bykov described the experience of Grishkovetz as follows: “As it turned out, there was no need to pretend. You can just come out and speak your mind, and if you speak honestly enough, people listen... There are too many obstacles between the man and the world. Grishkovetz wants to reject all these lies and to speak out down to himself, no matter what it takes” (Bykov, 2002: 184). Today it is absolutely obvious that Grishkovetz invented his inherent technique of creating the “sincerity illusion” effect, for the success he once achieved and time turned this author into not a quite

young, but quite a glamorous artist, who knows how to operate the image and the intonation he once discovered.

Sincerity is a property of artistic consciousness of a certain type, or, to be more precise, of its structural element, its artistic outlook. “Outlook is a living, but at the same time generalized expression of people’s spiritual and ethic attitude towards the world” (Zaks, 1990: 146). The value of sincerity actually exists only for the subject himself (the author or the addressee) as a state of experience based on the integrity of human subjectivity, while subjectivity, in its turn, has a specific intonation scale. Therefore, sincerity may also occur as a mindset to the truth, originality, and as a specific intonation of releasing the “spiritual-psychological-physical tension” (Zaks, 1990: 146).

Sincerity became a qualitative property of artistic consciousness when art obeyed to the social order to bear the truth. The truth of the 60-s was the truth of informal everyday routine; the “new drama” sincerity belongs to a different dimension. It is the truth of marginal characters, taboo topics, physical practices ignored by official culture. In both cases the protagonists are young people engaged in a conflict with the world of adults, the world where lies are expected and sought for. This conflict is brilliantly depicted by Irina Vaskovskaia in her play “March”, where the dialogues reveal continuous irritation of a mother with her daughter’s sincerity: “Is it too hard to lie to your mother? At least once, can’t you spin some yarn like normal children do, and say, ‘Mom, I work as an accountant and I’m doing fine, it’s all ok’?” (Vaskovskaia, 2013).

World outlook is based on the ethic model of this or that type of culture; the dominants of outlook are the basic aesthetic values, such the beautiful, the sublime, the tragic, the comic. Thus, sincerity of the 60-s manifested itself in the view of the beautiful with some seldom irony

(poetry of B. Okudzhava, prose of V. Aksenov, cinematograph of G. Daneliya and M. Khutsiev). However, today the beauty-based outlook is typical for mass culture only; the exception is the latest movie shot by one of the “new drama” leaders Ivan Vyrypaev titled “The Salvation”. The trip of a young nun from Poland to a Catholic mission in the Himalayas is elaborated with the narrator’s off-screen voice, whose final monologue may be regarded as a new manifest of sincerity. Vyrypaev comes up with some simple life rules; his voice and his inherent intonation of unworldliness, non-ambitious clarity are the result of a great spiritual and psychological work. The sincerity of Vyrypaev as an author and a protagonist at the same time reveals itself in the demonstration of the hard-won life path, from the confession of ignorant Saniok from “Oxygen” to pantheistic worship to Beauty the name for which is God.

However, generally the dominants of the “new drama” outlook are normally tragic and seriocomic. All characters of the “new drama” intuitively sense the falseness of being, long for something different, for something that is real. “For real” is the main expression characterizing the “thaw” characters, as Vadim Rudnev remarked, comparing post-modern culture of the turn of centuries with the Soviet culture of the 60-s. Being the author of the “20<sup>th</sup> century culture dictionary”, he pays attention to the key words of the epoch: “for real” and “kind of” (Rudnev, 1999: 123). Since world outlook is derived from world understanding, representing certain ethic characteristics of the worlds and its attributes, the post-modern relativism (one of its primary mindsets) articulates itself through the “kind of” expression. All authors and protagonists of the “new drama” suffer the simulative character of post-modernism, though try to keep away from it in their world outlook. The farewell is usually expressed in questions of the characters, their

sincere misunderstanding of the overall logic; that is what the captain cries in "Playing the Victim" by Presnyakov brothers: "Where did you get the gun from?! Where do you get all this?! Where, ... did all of you come from?! For the whole of my life I've never thought I would get in such ...! Where did you all come from, all of you, I have no idea! You went to the same schools, to the same teachers, your ... parents are almost my age, ...! Where did you come from, where?! All of you?!" (Presnyakov, 2005).

Sincerity of the "new drama" characters reveals itself not only in the intonation (for instance, inarticulateness, dudgeon, tense bluntness), but also in the grammar, if the text is a first-person narration. It can be illustrated with the example of the boy's monologue from the play "The bullet collector" by Yu. Klavdiev: "Most of all I want to live the way I want. Most of all I want to die. Because death is the best thing that may ever happen to the living. Most of all I'm afraid of being wrong. Most of all I like watching movies and playing. Most of all I'm afraid that no one will never know about me. Most of all I'm afraid that everything I value will turn unwanted. Most of all I want it to be interesting. Most of all I want my stepfather to die. Most of all I want everything I think to be right. Most of all I want this world to be as I think of it. Most of all I want to be the best. Most of all I want to have a girlfriend. Most of all I want this night to last forever. Most of all I want to live" (Klavdiev, 2006).

The first person singular is caused by the rules of monodrama, the genre of the "new drama" plays, where sincerity turns the dominant of a tragic world outlook (Vyrypaev, Grishkovetz, Pulinovich).

"Natasha's Dream" by Ya. Pulinovich is also a monodrama, a monologue of a teenage orphan girl named Natasha speaking of her life. Pulinovich turns to the technique of mismatch between the fable and the plot, so only at the end

of the play we come to realize that Natasha is the accused trialled at court. Her sincere rejection of her guilt (a little threat of the rival is a normal practice of everyday orphanage life) enhances the tragedy of the story with a distinctive motive of unfulfilled dream. The tragic outlook is created due to the collision of the naïve, inarticulate speech of a teenager, her idea of living "according to the unwritten rules" with the world of a young girl's dreams. The adult experience of violence and social infantilism create the core nerve of the monologue. It combines everyday cruelty and childish idea of happiness as possession, where having parents and some cookies are equally valuable: "She has everything, she has parents, she lives in a house, she has some earrings, makeup, a cell phone, clothes of all kinds, I'm sure she gobbles as many cookies as she wants... What right did she have to take him away from me? Doesn't she have enough? I was the first to find him, I was the first to fall in love!" (Pulinovich, 2009). Confession at court is forced sincerity, for the heroine is convinced that sincerity is ridiculous and dangerous; it is no coincidence that she speaks of her first encounter with the journalist with great irony: "Valera asked me if other kids at school bully me. Yeah, right! I can kick the washroom lock out, am I a douche or something? He also asked about my parents, like, do I remember them, what happened there and stuff. And I'm like, looking at him and saying: "My mother called me an abortion, and I just up and survived". Kind of pretended that I've been round the block a bit, to let him know who he's talking to. Would I tell him of Vadka the pimp who offed my mom or something? And then Valera asked me, "Natasha, what is your dream?" And then I saw he was the one. Because no one had ever asked me of my dream. And he just up and did that, and I said, "Valera, we are adult people! What dreams, we've got to work!" While deep inside, I thought, ask me more. I guess

I dumbed out, I should have told him my dream so that he said, “You are really the coolest girl ever Natasha, be my wife”. But I got scared of that stuff... The recording thing. ‘Cause yeah, I can tell him my dream, but what if anyone hears it?” (Pulinovich, 2009).

If the protagonists of the plays of the “new drama” creators amazed us with their confessions of destructiveness, as it happened in “Playing the Victim” by Presnyakov brothers, in “Oxygen” and “July” by I. Vyrypaev, in “Natasha’s Dream” by Ya. Pulinovich, today’s characters are sincere in their ignorance. Sincere ignorance (intonations of real involvement into the conversation matter and naïveté still remain) of the primitive statements adopted from wikipedia and the extreme opinions, doubtlessly, are caused both by the mass culture replacing the logic of science with that of a myth, and the loss of privacy culture. The latter is connected to the disclosure of private life for discussion in social networks, where dialogues remind of comments.

Thus, Yevgenia Berkovich, a young director from Moscow, a disciple of Kirill Serebrennikov, wrote a text and put up a documentary performance titled “The Same Wind”, telling the story of a rock club in Sverdlovsk. The performance was a part of a large project featuring the underground life of the city called “The Ural Underground”. The main subject of artistic interpretation is the perception of the Ural rock music by modern teenagers from Yekaterinburg. The performance was created with the verbatim technique, preserving the grammar and vocabulary of each respondent. The climax of the performance is the discussion of a poem “View from the Screen” by Ilya Kormiltsev, later a famous song by Nautilus Pompilius, by two young girls. Their sincere (open, emotional, naïve) desire to understand the lyrics causes an endlessly comic mismatch between the text, its meaning and interpretation.

One of the reasons is the absolute inability of the girls to realize the conventionality of an artistic text, the implication, the overtones. We find the ultimate sincere utterance as a condition for openness and trust, without which sincerity is impossible, turning into parody. The girls do not know who Alain Delon is, so the famous “Alain Delon doesn’t drink cologne” line is interpreted as the protagonist’s commitment to healthy lifestyle, and Alain Delon himself is a model or someone else, whose portrait one of the girls saw in her grandmother’s flat. The line “Her mother is learning the phone number of morgue if she’s not home late” is understood with sympathy; one of the girls tries to comment on this: “Well, now we can stay out for longer, all of us have mobile phones”. The line “Love is just a face on the wall” is interpreted through personal experience when one of the protagonists had to turn to some magic to resolve her problem. One of the girls shared a memory of being in love with Justin Bieber, when she drew his portraits to comfort herself.

The heroines of Yevgenia Berkovich, eagerly perceiving information from mass media and retelling it with interest and emotion, are sincere in their naïveté, as though confirming one of the characteristics of modern culture, “priority of sincerity over literacy” (Chuprinin, 2007).

### **Conclusion**

So, the “modern drama” as a phenomenon that appeared in the 90-s of the past century, has been studied from the point of view of its semantics and pragmatics. The common properties of various texts are their performativeness both at the narrative and linguistic levels. All pieces of the “new drama” have a common concept of violence. However, we regarded the “new drama” through the prism of sincerity. We found the sincerity concept as a dominant of tragic outlook to be present in the “new drama” (texts and performances) in all of its possible modifications

(honesty, frankness, confession, naïveté). In the “new drama” sincerity works as an ethic mindset to the cognition of the world, as a communicative strategy, as author’s intonation. In comparison with the “thaw” sincerity, that of the “new drama” positions itself not just as a confessing personal voice, but as a voice of ignorant openness and tragic cruelty.

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## Концепт искренности в «Новой драме»

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*Статья посвящена анализу концепта искренности в «новой драме». Большое количество разнообразных текстов молодых драматургов, условно объединенных в художественное движение «новая драма», обладает общими семантическими и прагматическими установками, интонациями, характеристиками художественного сознания, одной из которых является искренность. Искренность рассматривается в ряду близких понятий – исповедальности, правдивости, безыскусности, простодушия. Обнаружить искренность как концепт новой драматургии можно на основе анализа манифестов, художественных текстов и их сценического воплощения. Мы обращаем внимание на то, при каких условиях происходит поворот от постмодернистского скепсиса и иронии к искренности как особому мироощущению, из которого рождаются художественные события «новой драмы».*

*Ключевые слова:* концепт, новая драма, искренность, Вырыпаев, Гришковец, Пулинович.

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