

La Comédiathèque

THEATRICAL DRAMATURGIES

A Dynamic Typology
of Theatrical Genres

Jean-Pierre Martinez



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JEAN-PIERRE MARTINEZ

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The world is an infinity of books.
Fools will read only one.
The curious will read a few.
The mad will try to write their own.

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Foreword

Current “typologies” of theatrical genres tend to resemble a miscellaneous inventory. They adopt primarily a historical perspective, listing the genres that have existed (many of which no longer exist in their original form) and relying both on content and form without articulating the relationship between these two dimensions. These are merely open-ended catalogues that label the diversity of theatrical practice without truly explaining it.

Since Antiquity, very few have attempted to produce a reasoned typology of theatrical genres. Today, we are left with a choice between interminable lists drawn up by theatre specialists lacking specific knowledge of language theory, and typologies reduced to only a handful of genres (comedy, tragedy, and drama, for example) devised by theorists with no personal practical experience in dramatic writing for the stage.

Typologies devoted specifically to comedy are somewhat more precise, but they rely on distinctions between procedures that in practice are almost always extensively combined: comedy of character, comedy of manners, comedy of situation, comedy of intrigue, boulevard comedy, farce, and so on. A successful comedy generally belongs to all these categories at once: it refines character construction, shapes a well-structured plot, incorporates a discreet measure of social satire, and seeks the approval of a wide and popular audience.

This essay proposes a structured and dynamic typology of theatrical genres. The method is neither inductive (observing the diversity of theatrical genres and attempting to classify them empirically), nor deductive (starting from a theoretical organisation designed to generate predefined categories into which the various forms of theatre may be placed), but hypothetico-deductive: constructing a hypothetical model based on the observation of theatrical phenomena, then validating that model by verifying that it is indeed capable of re-generating all the virtualities of theatrical dramaturgy.

This model, broad in scope and deep in structure, may, of course, be refined and supplemented in the future to account for the more superficial dimensions of the theatrical creation process.

From analysis to creation... and ultimately to the analysis of one's own creation

Originally trained as a semiologist, I took part in the 1980s in the work of the Paris School of Semiotics under the direction of its founder, Algirdas Julien Greimas, Roland Barthes's close collaborator and successor as the leading figure of French semiological research. Like Umberto Eco, however, I see myself as both a linguist and a writer. I therefore turned to screenwriting before devoting myself exclusively to theatre.

A prolific author, I have written more than 120 plays over the course of a few decades, forming a theatrical universe that is both original and remarkably coherent, and a literary corpus exceptional not only in its diversity but also in its scope. My works are now performed across the world and studied from secondary school to university level.

In my writing, I rely on the solid foundations I acquired in narratology as a researcher at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales. Yet I also cast, when the occasion arises, an analytical eye on my own theatrical work. It is this linguistic and literary expertise that I wish to share with all those who make theatre today, or who take an interest in it, whether playwrights, directors or actors, but also scholars, teachers, students... or simply passionate spectators.

This short essay is, for me, a way of closing the circle of my professional, intellectual, and even existential journey: from the study of linguistic theory to literary creation... and ultimately to the self-analysis of my own theatrical work.

Part 1

From the Representation of the World to Theatrical Representation

Chapter 1 :

The Process of Theatrical Creation

From a semiotic perspective, theatrical dramaturgy (understood as the process through which a performance intended for an audience is produced) may be analysed as unfolding in three stages:

Selecting a mode of representation

This involves establishing a specific type of language prior to any production of meaning. In other words : what kind of relationship between signifier and signified is chosen to express one's intent ? To speak about the world, theatre (but also literature as a whole, as well as the visual arts) may opt for a mimetic language, or for various other forms of rhetorical relation between signifier and signified (the symbolic mode, for example).

Developing a dramatic project

This is the articulation, both in discourse and on stage, of a specific proposition through the *utterance* (the story being told, which is not unique to theatre) and through the *enunciation* (the manner in which that story is told using the tools and codes specific to theatre). Put another way: how does theatre convey its vision of the world through one particular dramatic text? The expression “dramatic text” should not be taken here in the narrow sense of a written or printed text. It refers instead to the dramatic project as a whole, which encompasses both the text and the envisaged staging, whether the project is entirely written in advance or whether it also involves a form of “devised process” that incorporates aspects of the staging itself.

Producing a theatrical performance

This is the actual transmission of the dramatic project to an audience in the form of a theatrical performance. A key issue here is the interpretative contract established by the theatre with its audience concerning the performance. Pure tragedy relies primarily on denotation and therefore on a first-degree reception, whereas comedy introduces, through connotation, a critical distance from its own discourse: the audience is invited to receive the performance on a second level, as carrying an implicit commentary on both its content and its form.

It is the combination of the choices made across these three dimensions of the theatrical process that allows for the construction of an exhaustive typology of theatrical genres.

1. Modes of Representation

1.1. The Relationship to the World

Theatrical genres belong to a broader history of artistic expression that includes literature as well as the visual arts. It is therefore necessary, first of all, to situate the diversity of theatrical forms within a model capable of accounting for the wider variety of movements that have shaped the history of art as a whole.

To this end, we draw on a model developed within semiotics (the study of sign systems) in order to map, by means of a structured framework, a field of meaning. The semiotic square is a logico-semantic tool that is at once static (it defines positions) and dynamic (it suggests possible pathways).

For any given semantic field, such as the type of relationship human beings establish with the world to which they belong, the semiotic square is organised around an initial axis of opposition between two contraries. In the present case: the utilitarian (pertaining to the practical) versus the identitarian (pertaining to the mythical). The other two positions of the square are generated by applying the logical operation of negation to each of these terms: here, the non-utilitarian (what serves no practical purpose: the playful, the aesthetic) and the non-identitarian (what is deliberately stripped of symbolic charge: the technical, the scientific).

The logical dynamic of the semiotic square proceeds by negating one term and then asserting its opposite. Ultimately, the model thus defines four positions governed by three types of relations: contrariety (between the contraries), contradiction (between a term and its negation), and complementarity (between the negation of one term and the opposite of that term).

This fundamental and highly structuring anthropological model accounts for four modes of being-in-the-world that humanity has experienced, whether successively or simultaneously, throughout its history.

The Practical Mode

Human beings inhabit a world without depth, a world of which they are a part and upon which they act for their own benefit, first simply to survive, and later to construct a comfortable living environment. At this stage, humans do not seek to assign meaning to the world; they simply use and shape it in order to satisfy their material needs. This mode of being-in-the-world is undoubtedly the most primitive, and humanity shares it with the animal kingdom, whose primary aim, whether individual or collective (as in the case of social species), is survival through adaptation to the environment and the optimal exploitation of its resources.

The Playful and Aesthetic Mode

Once survival and a certain degree of comfort have been secured, human beings develop activities that are no longer directly utilitarian, oriented instead toward the pursuit of pleasure, whether playful or aesthetic. Humans no longer merely use the world: it becomes at once a playground and a source of astonishment and wonder. It is at this stage that humanity begins to distinguish itself from animals, notably through the emergence of artistic activity.

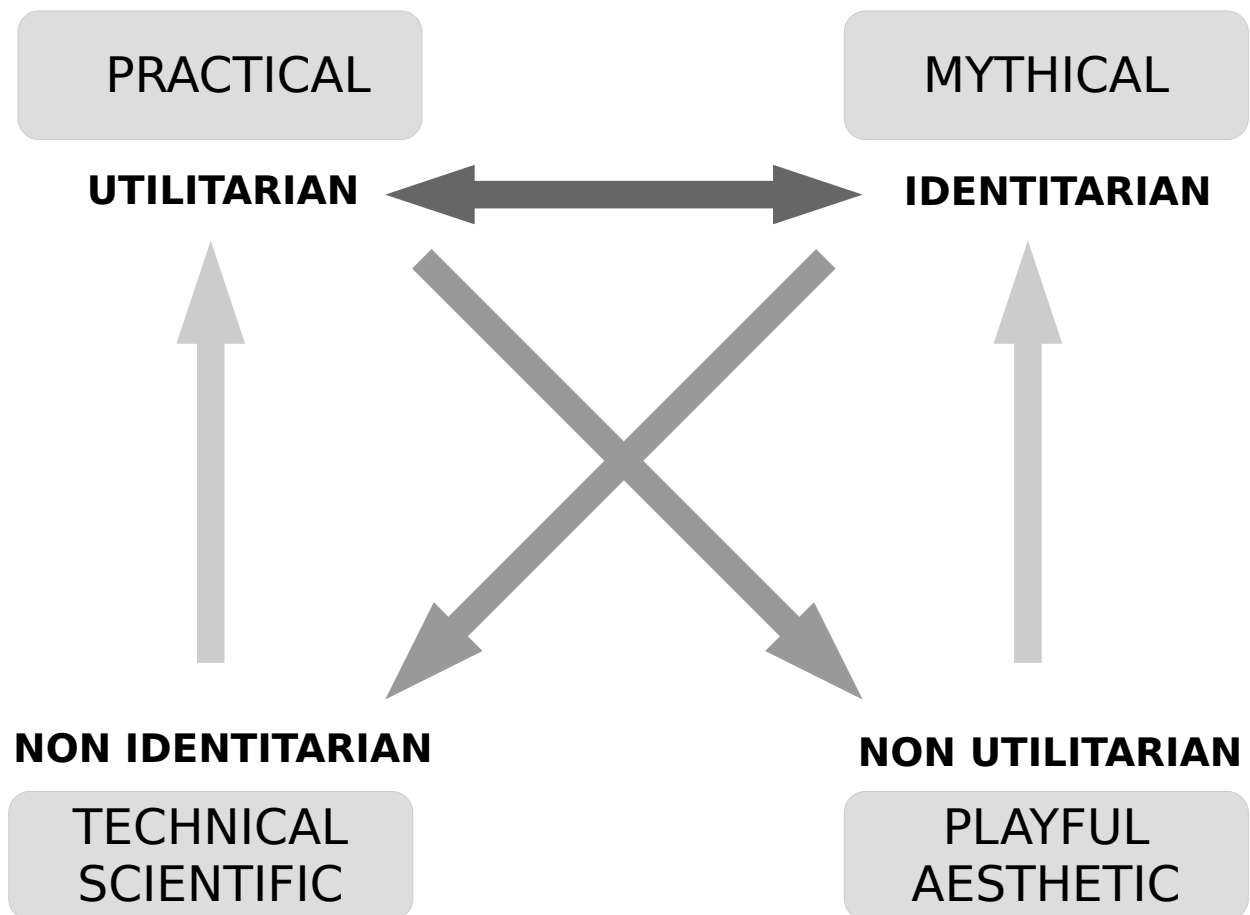
The Mythical Mode

Human beings no longer perceive the surrounding world solely as an environment to be used or as a source of hedonistic pleasure. They begin to question the meaning of their own existence and the possibility of a reality beyond the material world. The world becomes the mysterious signifier of a signified that must be discovered. This marks the birth of philosophy and religion, accompanied by the first funerary rites, which attest to humanity's existential need to imagine an afterlife, beyond the individual after death, beyond this world upon leaving it, and beyond human time once death deprives the present of any future.

The Technical and Scientific Mode

In reaction to this uncertain, perhaps even futile, quest for meaning, human beings may renounce the idea of treating the world as an allegory whose deeper significance must be deciphered, and instead regard it as an object of rational enquiry. This leads to the development of applied technologies as well as the fundamental sciences, in the search for an explanation of the world not through symbolic interpretation but through observation and experimentation.

Using this extremely general model, one can organise the various artistic movements, and their sometimes cyclical historical succession, according to the type of relationship they claim to establish with the world in the broadest sense. For every art form proposes a particular mode of relating to the world it seeks either to represent mimetically or to interpret symbolically.



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1.2. The Representation of the World in Theatre

The four types of relationship that art, and dramatic art in particular, may establish with the world in order to create a language prior to any discourse are the following:

The Realist Mode

Realism (and its tragic variant, naturalism) seeks to reproduce reality more or less faithfully in order to produce an effect of verisimilitude. Realism relies on this effect of the real to offer the audience an edifying and/or critical vision of the world.

The Surrealist Mode

What will be referred to here as surrealism in a broad sense, while taking ordinary reality as its point of departure, aims to make the narrative tip over into the fantastic. Surrealism opens a door onto a realm beyond the real, one considered ultimately truer and more meaningful than the familiar world.

The Symbolic Mode

Symbolism breaks entirely away from reality in order to stage an imaginary world conceived as an allegory of the real one. Symbolism offers an interpretation of reality in the form of a mythical narrative designed to reveal the hidden meaning of the ordinary world, which would otherwise remain imperceptible and incomprehensible.

The Objectivist Mode

What will be referred to here as objectivism constitutes a return to the essence of a reality stripped of all symbolic charge. Objectivism proposes an unfiltered apprehension of reality in order to highlight the nature of things themselves, described with a minimum of artifice.

2. Developing the Dramatic Project

In theatre, each mode of meaning is realised through the development of a theatrical text as *utterance* (what is being told) and as *enunciation* (the manner in which it is told). The chosen mode of meaning also presupposes, upstream, a certain type of relationship proposed to the audience regarding the performance they are about to witness.

2.1. The Realist Project

The utterance is characterised by plausible situations (even if they may appear exceptional): ordinary characters, familiar spatial settings, logical action, and linear temporality.

The enunciation is defined by adherence to the traditional codes of theatre: the staging of fictional characters linked to the plot (thus excluding any onstage incarnation of the author, the director, the stage manager... or the spectators), respect for the fourth wall, and narrative time following the time of the action.

The identification proposed to the spectator with one character (or possibly a group of characters) in the play is based on point of view. The spectator is invited to identify with the character through whose perspective the story is approached. The spectator discovers events alongside them and shares their thoughts and emotions. This is *psychological identification*.

2.2. The Surrealist Project

The utterance is characterised by a disruption of the laws of ordinary reality: strange characters, uncertain spatial settings, illogical action, and disturbed temporality.

The enunciation may also deliberately violate traditional theatrical codes: intrusion of the author (or even of the spectators) into the story, disregard for the fourth wall, and narrative time no longer following the time of the action.

The identification of the spectator with any particular character, though theoretically possible, is destabilised by the unreality of the utterance and the irrationality of the enunciation. The instability of point of view and the incoherence of the characters make it difficult for the spectator to identify with any particular figure. Identification becomes diffuse, multiple, kaleidoscopic. This is floating identification.

2.3. The Symbolist Project

The utterance is characterised by the staging of a parallel imaginary world governed by its own rules, regarding the characters and their physical or psychological traits, the spatial and temporal frame of reference, and even logic itself.

The enunciation does not merely violate traditional theatrical codes: it creates its own. Dance, lighting, or music may partially or entirely take the place of dialogue as the means through which the utterance is conveyed, and the very notion of a separation between stage and auditorium may give way to an alternative configuration, including immersive ones.

The identification of the spectator with a particular character relies not on psychological traits but on ethical values. The spectator is invited to identify with the character who embodies positive values (goodness, justice, truth). Identification is moral and Manichaeian. This is ideological identification.

2.4. The Objectivist Project

The utterance is characterised by a deliberately asserted minimalism: barely sketched characters without psychological depth, schematic spatial settings and absence of scenery, very short narratives. The dramatic work appears as a succession of moments caught in the instant, slices of life, snapshots... It is the sketch, or the series of sketches.

The enunciation likewise adopts a deliberately economical use of theatrical codes: minimal or no lighting effects, no transitions between scenes, fragmentation effects...

The identification of the spectator with any character is rendered impossible by the deliberately established distance from the utterance, producing an objectifying and therefore depassionate gaze. The spectator remains external to the characters and to the story, which they simply observe and analyse. This is neutralised identification.

2.5. From the Intimate to the Societal

Each of these relationships to the world may be approached from either an individual or a collective perspective.

What pertains to the individual and the intimate invites reflection on the life and experience of a specific subject (psychological or psychoanalytic introspection), on the family unit, on the circle of friends, on conjugal life...

What pertains to the collective and the societal invites reflection on life in society (from sociology in the broad sense to the collective unconscious) and on social life in all its forms (professional, communal, political...).

However, the transition from the individual and the private sphere to the collective and the public sphere is, of course, gradual. Between pure introspection, in other words a dialogue with oneself, and societal debate, there may exist all possible intermediate stages. Neighbourly relations, for instance, form the hinge between the private and the public sphere: the neighbour is no longer a stranger, yet not quite an intimate.

3. The Production of the Theatrical Performance

Once a discourse (a dramatic, literary, or pictorial work, for example) is presented to the gaze and judgment of an audience, it inevitably carries, beyond its denotation (its reference to an objective element of the world), a connotation (an additional layer of subjective meaning projected onto it by its recipient). Thus classical tragedy as a whole is regarded as a noble, elitist genre, supposedly addressed to a highly educated audience, whereas comedy in general, and even more so so-called “boulevard theatre”, is considered a popular, even vulgar form.

These traditional connotations of tragedy and comedy, originating in the history of theatre, are not, however, fixed once and for all. While contemporary comedy as a whole is still widely perceived by the theatrical institution and by an elitist audience as a minor genre, the classical comedies of Molière or Shakespeare have, together with their authors, acquired full cultural legitimacy. Conversely, the more modern and popular descendants of tragedy, namely drama, and especially melodrama, carry a popular connotation and are regarded as inferior genres.

By definition, therefore, while the denotative content of any work remains stable, its connotation varies according to period, cultural sphere, and audience. Thus “boulevard theatre”, once scorned by the elites, may itself be ennobled by those same elites as its authors become classics (as in the case of Georges Feydeau or Sacha Guitry) and receive the consecration of the Comédie-Française.

Similarly, theatre originating from the French South, initially dismissed as regional (if not folkloric) by Parisian elites and consequently confined to playhouses in Marseille, was able, through Marcel Pagnol, to gain a degree of national institutional recognition following a triumphant première in Paris, even though Pagnol's theatre as a whole remains unjustly undervalued today and is still viewed with a measure of condescension by certain elites.

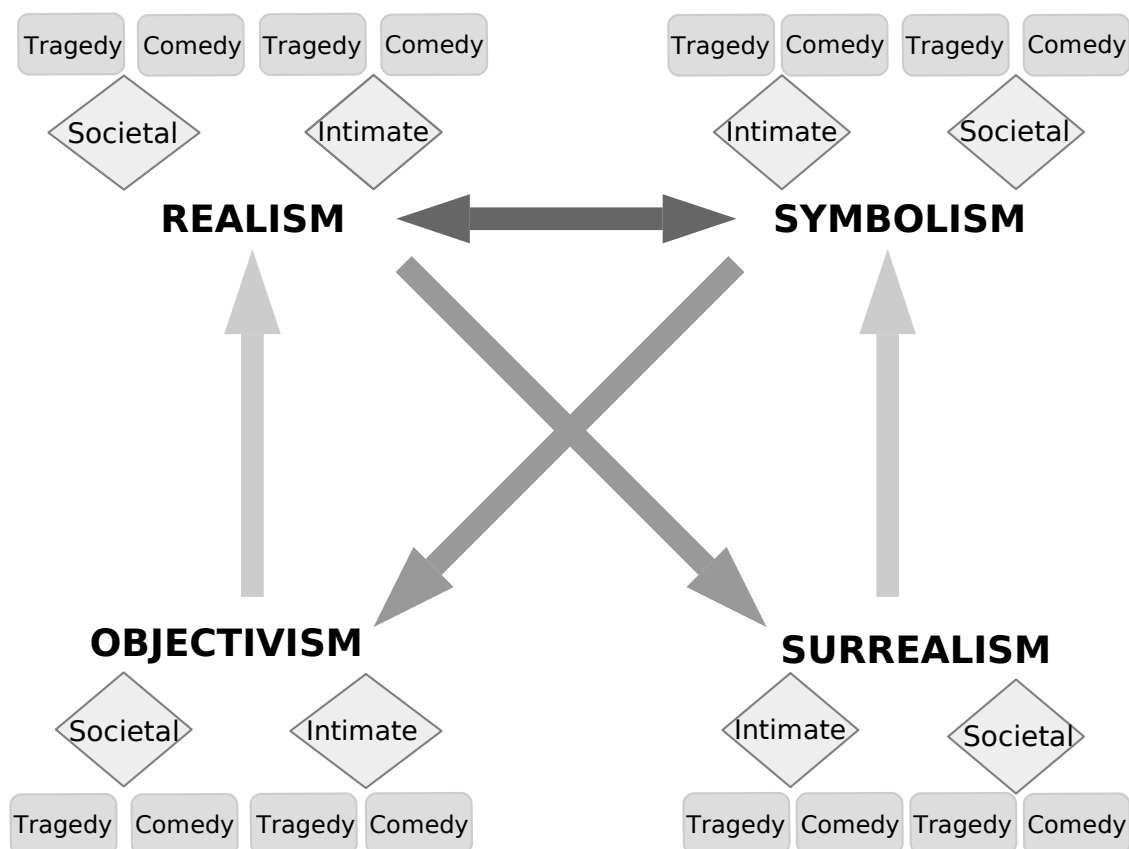
3.1. The Tragic and the Comic

Since connotation is by nature variable, one cannot construct a stable typology of genres on this basis (for example: minor versus major genre, popular versus elite genre, vulgar versus noble genre). By contrast, the distinction between tragedy and comedy remains productive as a set of possible declensions of each mode of theatrical meaning.

Indeed, in theatre, every dramatic text can be realised either in a tragic version or in a comic one, depending on the point of view the author adopts in relation to their project and, consequently, the position they invite spectators to adopt in relation to the performance they are about to witness.

Tragedy is entirely centred on the seriousness of its subject: the narrator adheres fully, without distance, to the narrated and to the narration, to the point of effacing themselves completely behind the story.

Comedy, by contrast, thrives on complicity between narrator and audience, who are encouraged not to take too seriously what they are being told and to derive from the performance a secondary message, sometimes even contrary to its literal meaning (cf. irony).



3.2. The Realist Performance

The realist mode of representation, whether tragic or comic, finds its most perfect illustration in the classical period of European theatre, often regarded as its golden age (the 17th century).

Realist tragedy (or its less fatalistic variant, realist drama) establishes no distance between enunciator and utterance.

By intensifying intimate or social conflicts and by heightening individual or collective passions, the enunciator invites the audience to complete, first-degree immersion in the story and to direct identification with its protagonists. This is catharsis, whose aim is to move and thereby to edify.

Realist tragedy also seeks to preserve the codes of classical dramaturgy, fully internalised by the audience, so as not to draw attention to the artifice of theatrical representation, itself another means of contributing to the effect of reality.

This includes the corpus of classical tragedies, notably French (Racine) and English (Shakespeare), whose narratives unfold within a realistic historical context, often featuring real historical figures and events. Among these tragedies, some focus chiefly on individual destinies, others on collective destinies, the two dimensions generally being closely intertwined, as great history is told through the lived experience of those who both endured it and shaped it. Realist tragedy continues into the modern period with authors such as Tennessee Williams (*A Streetcar Named Desire*, *The Glass Menagerie*) and Arthur Miller (*The Crucible*, *Death of a Salesman*).

Realist comedy, on the other hand, establishes a critical distance between the author and what is being told, offering spectators the same distancing effect in order to provoke laughter. Realist comedy caricatures the situations and passions it depicts in order to ridicule them, leading the audience to condemn and mock them. This is satire.

Parody arises when realist comedy caricatures not only social or psychological traits but also the very codes of the genre itself, as in the case of melodrama.

Molière is, of course, the supreme master of realist comedy. Moreover, many of his comedies, through their deliberate excess, are themselves caricatures of the genre, creating an additional comic effect. Following Molière, the success of realist comedy has never waned, with countless authors around the world continuing to sustain this tradition (Georges Feydeau, Neil Simon, Yasmina Reza...).

3.3. The Surrealist Performance

The term surrealist is used here in a broad sense, encompassing, among other things, the theatre of the absurd. The surrealist mode of representation includes much of modern theatre, especially European theatre from the first half of the twentieth century, which positioned itself in reaction to the themes and codes of classical theatre by reversing them and/or mocking them.

Surrealist tragedy stages the same intimate or societal conflicts and the same individual or collective passions, still received at the first degree, but this time by derailing logic toward the absurd and tipping reality into the fantastic.

Surrealist tragedy may also seek to subvert the codes of classical dramaturgy in order to foreground the artifice of theatrical representation and create an effect of dramatic estrangement. This is what is now called meta-theatre.

Examples include certain plays by Lorca (*When Five Years Pass*) or Vitrac (*Victor, or Power to the Children*). Yet Shakespeare is already, in many respects, a modern author: some of his plays, such as *Hamlet*, which combine the fantastic with self-reflexive structures, belong at least in part to surrealist tragedy.

Surrealist comedy adds a caricatural dimension to this fantastic narrative in order to provoke laughter.

Surrealist comedy may also humorously subvert the very codes of the genre, notably through the use of theatre-within-the-theatre, this time in a comic rather than philosophical register.

One may cite Ionesco's theatre, which simultaneously plays on the shift into the absurd and on the subversion of theatrical codes (*The Bald Soprano*).

3.4. The Symbolist Performance

The symbolist mode of representation, whether tragic or comic, lies at the very origins of Greek and Roman antiquity, as well as of medieval European theatre.

Symbolist tragedy stages intimate conflicts (individual passions) or societal ones (collective passions). In the first case, the effect tends toward a waking dream (oneirism); in the second, toward a dystopia. In both cases, reality is transposed so that it may be questioned and interpreted.

The theatrical codes used in symbolist tragedy (signifying costumes, stylised sets, dreamlike lighting, symbolic colours) contribute to expressing this allegory with its poetic and interpretative aims.

Ancient Greek and Roman theatre, in its mythical dimension, fully belongs to symbolist tragedy. Medieval European theatre does too: the Mystery plays (societal dimension) and the Morality plays (intimate dimension). In the classical period, one may cite Calderón's *Life Is a Dream*. In the modern period, Maeterlinck's *Pelléas and Mélisande*.

Symbolist comedy likewise stages intimate or societal conflicts. In the first case, the result is a comic absurdity; in the second, an exaggerated dystopia, even a parody.

Its codes (excess, transgression, deliberate vulgarity, the grotesque) aim to challenge the conventions of traditional bourgeois theatre.

Greek and Roman comedy (Aristophanes) also participates in symbolist comedy. Medieval soties fully belong to this genre. Medieval farces, which mock the vices of ordinary people, by contrast anticipate realist comedy, which would later reach its full expression in Molière. In the eighteenth century, one may cite Marivaux's *The Isle of Slaves*. In the modern period: Jarry's *Ubu Rex*.

3.5. The Objectivist Performance

The objectivist mode of representation appears only in the contemporary period. Authors who have cultivated this genre exclusively are relatively rare, and works belonging solely to this type are likewise uncommon. Moreover, because of its experimental, nonconformist, even underground nature (cf. Spanish micro-theatre), this form is not well catalogued, and its authors are not necessarily widely known.

Objectivist tragedy seeks to show and dissect individual or social reality in a spirit of testimony and inventory. The utterance is sober and factual. Facts are left to speak for themselves. This includes the minimalist writing found in Spanish micro-theatre.

The enunciation is devoid of all artifice. The codes employed may be borrowed from cinema or documentary in order to produce an effect of objectivity. The narrative is fragmented and fragmentary. Flashbacks or flash-forwards may be used; narrative time no longer follows the time of the story.

To illustrate this recently emerged genre, one may cite Dennis Kelly's *Orphans* or *DNA*, and Sarah Kane's *4.48 Psychosis*.

Objectivist comedy consists of the sketch-like or fleeting evocation of individual or social anecdotes treated in a deliberately summary or partial manner. It is often short, sometimes a brief scene, a sketch, or a sequence of more or less autonomous moments whose combined significance illuminates a single idea.

Its theatrical codes rest on an accentuated, self-mocking minimalism.

Examples include Václav Havel's *Vernissage*, Nathalie Sarraute's *For a Yes or No*, and the sketches of Karl Valentin.

It is important to note that this combinatory semiological typology, though it exhaustively defines the full range of possible theatrical genres, does not in any way preclude an author from mixing genres within a particular work. Indeed, this deliberate blending of genres (especially comedy and tragedy) is among the qualities that mark the modernity and genius of William Shakespeare.

Many authors, over the course of their careers, have explored multiple genres. This is the case of Jean-Pierre Martinez, whose body of work will now be examined more specifically in the light of this typology.



Chapter 2:

The Theatrical Work of Jean-Pierre Martinez

In this singular exercise in self-analysis, the semiologist I once was takes as his object of study the theatrical work of the playwright I have become. Speaking of myself in the third person is therefore not an act of immodesty, but the necessary distancing required of any analyst with regard to their field of investigation. For an identical utterance, this procedure also illustrates the essential role played by enunciation in any discourse. First-person enunciation immediately establishes a sense of complicity between author and reader, who is invited to enter into a kind of confidence, whereas third-person enunciation produces an effect of scientific objectivity, helping to reinforce the seriousness and credibility of the analysis.

In light of this dynamic typology of theatrical genres, the theatrical work of Jean-Pierre Martinez is characterised by a deliberate and almost exclusive anchoring in comedy. The tone is at times that of dramatic comedy, or even tragicomedy, but humour is always present. The author systematically introduces an ironic distance from his subject and from his own dramaturgical propositions, a distance that constitutes both his philosophy of theatre and, to some extent, his philosophy of life.

To account for the theatrical work of Jean-Pierre Martinez, tragedy will therefore be set aside, even though some of his plays contain a tragic dimension, for example by staging the disastrous fate of a humanity doomed to its own downfall.

Jean-Pierre Martinez's comedies, however, whatever genre they belong to, fall either within the sphere of the intimate and the private (personal, friendly, conjugal, familial...) or within the sphere of the public and the societal (professional, communal, political...).

1. General Typology

1.1. Realist Comedies

Realist comedies are without doubt the most numerous in the theatrical work of Jean-Pierre Martinez. It is also the genre he explored most extensively during the first part of his career, for several reasons.

Realist comedy is a genre widely practised by playwrights and highly popular with audiences. It stands within the great tradition of Molière and Feydeau. It is also the theatrical genre whose codes are the most firmly established and therefore the most familiar to an author approaching dramatic writing for the first time. Realist comedy casts an ironic gaze upon the intimate or the societal sphere, and a distanced gaze upon life itself. It is not, strictly speaking, an easy genre, but it is a natural one, grounded above all in the observation of reality. To look at contemporary life with the eye of an anthropologist, a sociologist, or even an entomologist is already to begin writing realist comedy. Having come to writing through television screenplays, Jean-Pierre Martinez moved quite naturally from crafting popular comedies for the small screen to writing so-called “boulevard” comedies for the stage.

Moreover, for a beginning playwright hoping to turn his passion into a profession without first passing through the gatekeeping of the theatrical institution, realist comedy offers an obvious and immediate outlet. Professional and amateur companies are constantly in search of strong comic scripts that will allow them to fill theatres by entertaining their audiences. In selecting a comedy, these companies rely on instinct and on the simple reading of the text, whereas subsidised theatre, privileging drama or tragedy, selects only works by authors already validated by the institution through publication and/or reading committees.

Intimate Realist Comedies

Comedies of this type depict individuals in friendly (*Friday the 13th*, *How to Get Rid of Your Best Friends*, *Back in the spotlight*), conjugal (*One Marriage out of two*, *The perfect son-in-law*, *Strip poker*) or family relationships (*Family Portrait*, *A Cuckoo's Nest*, *Dead End Boulevard*). Naturally, most of these plays blend these three dimensions, friendship, marriage, and family, while remaining within the sphere of the intimate.

Societal Realist Comedies

These comedies portray groups of individuals in a professional setting (*A Simple Business Dinner*, *Reality Show*), a community setting (*Miracle at Saint Mary Juana Abbey*, *Welcome Aboard!*, *White Coats*, *Dark Humour*), or a political one (*The Most Beautiful Village in France*, *The Worst Village in England*, *King of fools*).

Whether they focus on the private or the public sphere, these comedies place ordinary individuals in extraordinary yet entirely realistic situations, thus facilitating audience's identification with the characters.

Many of these realist comedies are also parodic, caricaturing the very codes of the genre to which they belong. *Just Like a Christmas Movie* exemplifies this perfectly, openly embracing its own parodic dimension through its title.

The most successful works of Jean-Pierre Martinez within this sphere of popular theatre belong to intimate realist comedy, notably *Friday the 13th*, *Strip poker*, and *An Innocent Little Murder*.

1.2. Surrealist Comedies

Having perfected his craft and established his reputation through realist comedies, Jean-Pierre Martinez then allowed himself to explore the genre of surrealist comedy. In many of his realist comedies, however, elements of the fantastic are already present, particularly in endings that open onto the irrational and the absurd. His surrealist comedies therefore merely extend the logic of development within this sprawling body of work which excludes no genre but, on the contrary, seeks to experiment with them all.

Intimate Surrealist Comedies

Comedies of this type fall within the sphere of private relationships: friendships (*The Ways of Chance*), marriage (*A Brief Moment of Eternity*), romantic relationships (*New Year's Eve at the Morgue*) or family relationships (*Crash Zone*, *Not Even Dead*).

Societal Surrealist Comedies

These comedies portray groups of individuals in professional settings (*Crisis and Punishment*, *The Joker*, *In Flagrante Delirium*), in social or high-society settings (*Music Doesn't Always Soothe the Savage Beasts*), or within broader societal contexts (*Quarantine*).

Whether situated in the private or the public sphere, these comedies place ordinary individuals in situations that begin in the realm of the banal but quickly shift into the fantastic, into strangeness and the irrational.

Many of these surrealist comedies also transgress traditional theatrical codes to produce an additional comic effect, notably through *mise en abyme*. This is theatre-within-the-theatre (*Is There an Author in the Audience?*, *Backstage Comedy*, *Heads or Tails*, *Preliminaries*), even when this reflexive structure is not central to the dramatic principle or the comic effect of the play (*Is There a Pilot in the Audience?*).

1.3. Symbolist Comedies

It is in the later part of his oeuvre that Jean-Pierre Martinez explored symbolist comedy most extensively, partly because he then had the freedom to devote himself to less commercial plays, but also, no doubt, as the result of a personal journey that led him to reflect more deeply on the workings of the world and on the highly hypothetical meaning of life (drawing far more inspiration from recent scientific discoveries than from the endless and often unfounded speculations of philosophy).

This late interest in the symbolist genre also reflects a shift towards greater pessimism. To mock the flaws of ordinary people, as in realist comedy, requires a certain hope that by exposing those weaknesses one might still lead people to improve. It is a form of optimism tinged with scepticism. Confronting the absurdity of life head-on, as symbolist comedy does, is, on the contrary, to face a kind of despair... only lightly tempered by humour.

Intimate Symbolist Comedies

Comedies of this type belong to the intimate sphere: introspective relationships (*Like a Fish in the Air*, *Happy Dogs*) or conjugal relationships (*Déjà vu*).

Societal Symbolist Comedies

These comedies depict social groups, but this time within an alternative symbolic world (*The Pyramids*, *Horizons*), sometimes anchored in an imagined past (*Stories and Prehistories*, *A Thwarted Vocation*) or an imagined future (*Surviving Mankind*, *Just a Moment Before the End of the World*).

Some of these comedies also employ codes other than those of traditional theatre, for example reverse chronology (*The House of Our Dreams*).

1.4. Objectivist Comedies

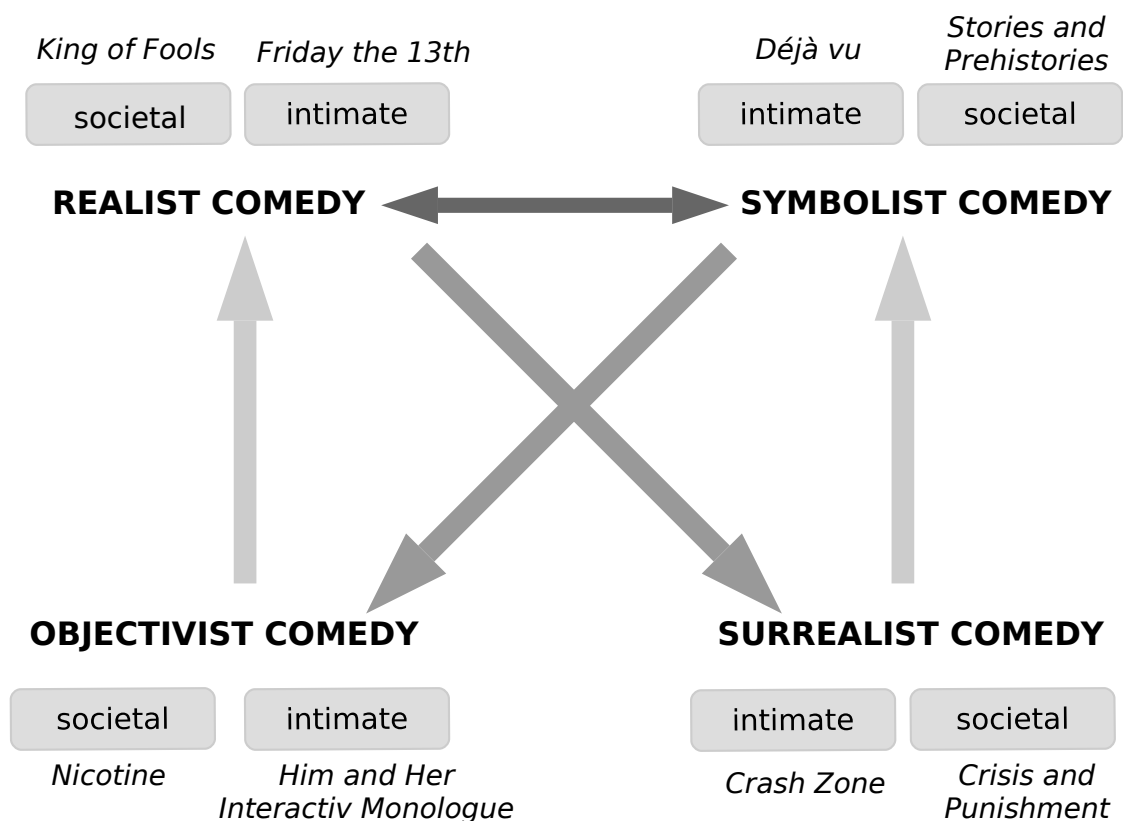
The genre of objectivist comedy has been present in Jean-Pierre Martinez's work from the very beginning, particularly through his many sketch-based comedies. This is an art of lightness and rapidity, allowing fleeting realities and transient situations to be captured in an original style. In sketches, characters generally have no psychological depth. The situation takes precedence, with an extremely brief plot, more anecdote than story, not embedded within a larger narrative, although the accumulation of these flash-narratives may ultimately amount to the exploration of a particular theme.

Intimate Objectivist Comedies

Comedies of this type portray individuals within friendships (*The Rebels*), convivial social interactions (*Open Letters*, *Sidewalk Chronicles*), family relationships (*At the bar counter*), or conjugal relationships (*Him and Her*).

Societal Objectivist Comedies

These comedies depict groups of individuals within professional life (*Nicotine*) or within social life more broadly (*Open Hearts*). Most of Jean-Pierre Martinez's sketch-based comedies rely on the minimalist code characteristic of objectivist comedy. Some of these comedies also belong to theatre-within-the-theatre (*Stage Briefs*, *Backstage Bits*).



2. Eight Comedies Illustrating This Typology

2.1. Intimate Realist Comedy: *Friday the 13th*

In *Friday the 13th*, everything begins with an ordinary situation: an evening among friends in a modest living room, a typical couple navigating the small tensions of everyday life. This familiar framework immediately produces the effect of verisimilitude characteristic of realist comedy, where the plot feeds on daily concerns, habitual gestures, and recognisable interpersonal dynamics. It is precisely within this ordinary context that the extraordinary unexpectedly emerges: the highly improbable coincidence between the announcement of a sudden misfortune (a friend's disappearance in a plane crash) and that of an equally unforeseen stroke of luck (winning the lottery jackpot). This exceptional yet entirely plausible simultaneity disrupts normality and reveals, beneath the veneer of social convention, the deeply human flaws of the characters, treated with humour but without caricature.

The *utterance* of the play rests on a central conflict that exposes each character's passions and generates contradictory emotions: how can one reconcile the duty of compassion toward a friend struck by grief with the selfish exhilaration provoked by the prospect of sudden wealth? The plot unfolds through successive reversals, with good and bad news alternating on both fronts at the rhythm of announcements and their refutations. The result is a comic mechanism built on emotional whiplash: each character shifts in an instant from elation to despair, for the audience's greatest delight.

The *enunciation* remains faithful to realist codes: unity of place, temporal continuity, natural dialogue, and adherence to theatrical conventions. Yet one singular element is added: the presence of a "media chorus" made up of news bulletins and advertising announcements, importing societal pressure into the intimate space. These external voices punctuate the narrative, unsettling the characters' certainties while introducing a discreet but constant critical perspective on contemporary society. Echoing individual selfishness, society's cynicism seems, in part, to explain it...

For while the play primarily explores the intimate sphere (friendship, couplehood, family), it also anchors itself in a highly recognisable social reality: economic precarity, the dream of illusory success, the pervasive role of the media, and the fragility of solidarity in a world dominated by individualism. Here, laughter arises less from artificial burlesque than from the gap between what the characters wish to display (good conscience, compassion, loyalty) and what circumstances awaken in them (greed, selfishness, cynicism).

The *connotation* is therefore satirical but never moralising, for the characters' ridiculousness calls more for amused indulgence than for condemnation. The play invites the audience to wonder whether, in similar circumstances, they might behave exactly like the protagonists. In this sense, *Friday the 13th* is an exemplary intimate realist comedy: a dramaturgy grounded in plausibility, centred on human relationships, attentive to the banality of contemporary life, and in which humour becomes a way of understanding, and to some extent accepting, the contradictions inherent in the human condition.

2.2. Societal Realist Comedy: *King of Fools*

With *King of Fools*, realism is no longer anchored in intimate everyday life but in the mechanisms of the social and political sphere. The play depicts ordinary individuals, the secretary and the driver of a political party, caught in the gears of an electoral machine that far surpasses them. Nothing in this story is fantastic or symbolic: the plot is driven by internal feuds, communication strategies, rivalries among party officials, and personal ambitions... This slightly exaggerated portrayal of the inner workings of a political party firmly situates the play within societal realist comedy. Laughter arises from an unsparing critique of that shadow theatre we call politics.

The utterance is built upon a simple narrative structure with considerable comic potential: through a strategy as Machiavellian as it is haphazard, a rather crude man (a mere driver, and something of a reckless one) is selected by the party to lead it into a provisional defeat meant to pave the way for a later victory. This “idiot” by trade, thrust unwillingly into the role of candidate, finds himself at the centre of a presidential campaign rife with every kind of manipulation, improbable calculations based on contradictory polls, and a cascade of reversals. Comedy emerges from the barely distorted mirror held up to society as a whole. The audience easily recognises, in the situation and the characters, the familiar backdrop of contemporary political life, built on deceit and demagoguery. But they also recognise, in the behaviour of this fictional electorate, their own naïveté and contradictions. One laughs not only at the politicians (which would reduce the play to the populist ideology of “they’re all corrupt”), but also, and perhaps above all, at oneself, at the voters’ fickleness and gullibility.

The enunciation remains faithful to realist codes: unity of place, linear temporality, quick and credible dialogue, and an absence of spectacular effects. We are unmistakably in the atmosphere of a campaign headquarters where political ideology is overshadowed by marketing strategy. The language is performative: each character speaks in order to act, persuade, manipulate, or protect themselves. This “ground-level” writing reinforces the realist dimension: politics is not a grand ideological narrative, but a succession of small power dynamics in which professionals are sometimes overwhelmed by their own improbable calculations.

On the level of *connotation*, the play offers a bittersweet satire of democratic functioning: fascination with image, instrumentalisation of individuals, obsession with results, and the fragility of convictions when confronted with personal interests. Without ever sliding into pamphlet, it humorously exposes the grey areas of a system in which everyone projects their own cynicism onto others. Laughter thus becomes a mode of analysis, introducing a distance from what might otherwise feel too brutal or too disheartening.

King of Fools fully exemplifies societal realist comedy, depicting without real caricature the political world from the perspective of those who pull its strings. A lucid portrait of the comedy of power and of society more broadly, it is also a discreet call to individual responsibility. For in the end, we get the leaders we deserve...

2.3. Intimate Surrealist Comedy: *Crash Zone*

With *Crash Zone*, intimacy is no longer the territory of everyday realism but the starting point of a progressive de-realisation of the world. The play opens on a simple situation, three characters gathered to discuss the disappearance of a relative, yet this familiar foundation very quickly begins to crack. Reality seems to waver under the pressure of language itself: memories diverge, points of reference dissolve, identities blur. This shift from the banal to the strange is the hallmark of intimate surrealist comedy. For the spectator, surprise does not stem from the sudden arrival of an extraordinary event but from the unsettling disturbance that takes root at the heart of the psyche and of human relationships.

The utterance rests on a quest, to understand what happened and to clarify an uncertain family connection, but every attempt at explanation only deepens the opacity. The suspense is not factual; it is conceptual: words, memories, and hypotheses generate the dramatic tension. The progression unfolds less through actions than through fragile revelations, half-truths, and logical slippages. The comedy arises precisely from this instability: a sentence contradicts the previous one, a certainty collapses, an image becomes tangible through the sheer force of enunciation. Laughter emerges between unease and fascination, in that space where language invents uncertain, shifting worlds.

The enunciation amplifies this sense of suspension. The characters exist because they speak, and their speech becomes a lifeline to which they cling in order not to sink into nothingness: the world around them exists only because they are there to describe it, and they, in turn, exist only as witnesses to this fiction. The stage is constructed as a mental space, where elements of scenery (sea, cliff, rain, light) seem to arise directly from the discourse. This is no longer mimesis but the theatricality of language, where imagination replaces representation. The spectator is drawn into a liminal zone between memory, fantasy, and madness.

The connotation clearly aligns with surrealism: a questioning of identity, a dissolving of reality, an irony directed at the contradictions of the human mind. Nothing is truly frightening, yet everything slips away. The play creates a subtle distance that permits both laughter and reflection: why do we so readily believe in our own narratives? How does language shape our perception of the world? How much fiction do we inject into our most intimate relationships?

Crash Zone thus perfectly exemplifies intimate surrealist comedy: a theatre of proximity in which the relational cell becomes the laboratory for an unbridled imagination, yet one always rooted in human experience. The laughter does not spring from heavy-handed burlesque but from the vertigo produced by a confusion of reality. A comedy that, beneath the apparent banality of its dialogue, opens a breach in the real and invites the spectator to embrace the poetic, yet fertile, unease of doubt.

2.4. Societal Surrealist Comedy: *Crisis and Punishment*

With *Crisis and Punishment*, surrealism does not arise from private turmoil but from the derailment of the public and societal sphere. The play begins with an apparently realistic situation: an unemployed actor is hired by a bank on the brink of collapse. But very soon, the logic of reality in general, and of the economic world in particular, begins to unravel. Procedures lose coherence, roles are reversed, decisions slide into absurdity. This progressive distortion transforms a realist setting into a surreal mechanism that exposes, through exaggeration, the everyday madness of the system. This is the hallmark of societal surrealist comedy: a distortion of reality that reveals its most paradoxical dimension.

The utterance follows a simple trajectory: a failed and rather naïve actor is designated as the scapegoat responsible for a financial disaster far beyond his control. Yet at every stage of the story, this sacrificial victim sinks further into a maze of contradictory injunctions and nonsensical procedures, alongside characters who seem just as overwhelmed as he is by the institution they represent. The comedy springs from the constant gap between what ought to be rational (management, hierarchy, economic logic) and what that supposed rationality becomes on stage: a puppet theatre where nothing makes sense anymore, yet everything remains perfectly coherent and even “regulation-compliant.”

The enunciation heightens this distortion of the real. Scenes unfold like the successive stages of an administrative nightmare with Kafkaesque overtones, where every interaction appears to obey a rule understood by everyone... except the audience and the protagonist with whom the spectator is invited to identify, since the story is experienced from his perspective. The realism of the dialogue merges with a kind of shifting dissonance that gradually pushes the action toward the absurd, without ever lapsing into gratuitous nonsense. The surrealism derives from the establishment of an alternative logic that merely reveals the absurdity inherent in ordinary logic.

Through *its connotation*, the play offers a satire of the contemporary world by way of the banking sector: the cruelty of financial capitalism, institutional irresponsibility, the cynicism of power, class selfishness, the cult of performance, and the precarisation of labour. Yet this critique remains embedded within comedy and never slips into militant pamphlet or moralising discourse. The scapegoat himself is not without flaws: through his insignificance and his cowardice, he is partly responsible for what befalls him.

In this societal surrealist comedy, the spectator laughs first at the strangeness of the story... only to realise that the situation is eerily familiar, and that, to some extent, they recognise themselves in this victim of the system. Unless, of course, they recognise themselves instead in the tormentors...

2.5. Intimate Symbolist Comedy: *Déjà vu*

With *Déjà vu*, theatre enters a realm where intimacy is no longer simply a psychological space but a field of symbolic resonance. The starting point appears realistic, though highly unusual: a man and a woman who seem not to know one another meet in a hotel on the eve of their respective assisted suicides and slip into a tentative flirtation. Yet from the second scene onward, the characters, and the audience with them, are propelled into a clearly dystopian parallel universe. In *Déjà vu*, what happens seems already to have happened, what is said feels as though it has been spoken elsewhere, and even gestures appear borrowed from an earlier scene. This layering of the familiar and the uncanny is characteristic of the distinctive rhetoric of intimate symbolist comedy, where the everyday becomes the raw material of a metaphysical enquiry into identity, time, space, and memory.

The utterance rests on a paradox: the characters attempt to clarify what they are experiencing, yet each attempt merely returns them to the sensation of already having lived through the moment. The plot develops not through twists or revelations but through returns, shifts, and iterations. It is less a detective story than an existential quest: the play investigates how our most intimate relationships are constructed out of individual patterns so deeply rooted in the collective unconscious that they feel as though they have been lived before. Comedy arises from this slightly off-kilter repetition and from the confusion between present and memory, the sensation we call, quite literally, *déjà vu*. Laughter emerges from the realisation that intimate experience is never entirely new, and endlessly reenacts what it believes it is discovering for the first time.

The enunciation intensifies this *mise en abyme*. The dialogue, often simple and pared back, functions like a chain of echoes: one line responds to another that seemed to anticipate it, an emotion surfaces before being justified, an image reappears like a discreet refrain. The stage becomes a space of resonances rather than actions, a place where symbolic depth is woven from voices and silences. Nothing is spectacular: the writing privileges subtlety, suggestion, and resonance over demonstration. Even the set contributes to this atmosphere of doubling: a familiar space that nonetheless feels slightly askew owing to its exaggerated conventionality, as though this ghost-like reality were also the reflection of itself.

The connotation guides the play toward universal questioning: what do we do with our past? How do intimate relationships reinvent themselves, or repeat themselves, despite our attempts to escape their patterns? *Déjà vu* humorously addresses the difficulty of being oneself in a world one believes one recognises, the temptation to imprison oneself in one's own narratives, or conversely the desire to break free of them. Here, laughter becomes almost metaphysical and tinged with melancholy: it probes our inability to grasp what genuinely belongs to the present moment of our singular existence, and what is merely the slightly distorted echo of an eternal return.

Déjà vu fully exemplifies intimate symbolist comedy: a theatre in which the apparent simplicity of situations conceals a metaphysical meditation on the meaning of existence and on the very notion of identity, with comedy serving to diffuse the tragic weight of this impossible quest for meaning.

2.6. Societal Symbolist Comedy: *Stories and Prehistories*

In *Stories and Prehistories*, contemporary society is depicted through a symbolic, and deliberately grotesque, allegory. At first glance, the plot seems simple: a group of rather crude individuals face problems of survival in an archaic environment that appears to belong to a dystopian prehistory. Yet this fictional world cleverly mirrors the realities of contemporary society, not least through its slightly caricatural representation of its own distant origins. Very quickly, the sudden intrusion into this imaginary prehistory of characters from the modern world reveals to the audience that what they are watching is an existential fable rather than a piece of prehistoric heroic fantasy. This tension between a supposedly advanced world and profoundly primitive behaviours drives this societal symbolist comedy, where each scene functions less as a step in a traditional narrative than as a parable about the human condition.

The utterance develops through a series of tableaux, each offering a “little mythology” of everyday life. Whether centred on ego clashes, absurd rivalries, social rituals, or internal group tensions, each situation operates as a symbol pointing to a deeper truth. The comedy arises from the contrast between what certain characters believe themselves to be, civilised, rational, modern beings, and what their actions reveal: primitive, instinctive, often ludicrous behaviour. The humour stems from this reversal of values, in which the most primitive beings, despite their apparently shocking habits (including cannibalism), ultimately prove more human than those initially presented as more civilised. It is a thinly veiled critique of modern civilisation and its evolution into a form of barbarity disguised by polished surfaces.

The enunciation heightens this symbolic treatment by stylising the scenes. The dialogue, elliptical or offbeat, evokes archetypes rather than psychologically developed individuals. The set, scarcely defined, appears as an abstract and timeless space in which human invariants are replayed. This distancing enables the spectator to recognise universal patterns. The aim is not to depict society as it is, but as it symbolises itself through its own contradictions.

In terms of *connotation*, the play situates itself squarely within satire. By portraying contemporary individuals trapped in archaic behaviours, *Stories and Prehistories* questions our relationship to modernity and the highly debatable notion of “progress” in the realm of humanism. The grotesque plays a central role: it magnifies what already exists, humourously highlighting the degree of barbarity embedded in our institutions, habits, and social reflexes. Comedy thus becomes a means of revealing what everyday life tends to conceal: our tendency to endlessly replay humanity's most ancient scenarios.

Stories and Prehistories fully embodies societal symbolist comedy, a theatre in which society is not depicted realistically but deciphered through a constellation of figures, motifs, and symbols.

2.7. Intimate Objectivist Comedy: *Him and Her*

With *Him and Her*, *Interactive Monologue*, intimacy is approached neither through psychology nor through symbolism, but through a radical objectification of romantic discourse. The play relies on an extremely minimalist device: a couple seen almost entirely from the man's perspective, with the woman responding only briefly to the apparently banal, yet ultimately vertiginous, questions posed by her partner. This verbal ping-pong, played out behind closed doors, establishes an intimate atmosphere, but one stripped of any overt emotion: it is not grand romantic effusions or lyrical flights that structure the action, but the mechanics of these exchanges, regulated like the workings of a music box.

The utterance progresses in small strokes: an inventory of the couple's habits, an ironic analysis of their respective quirks, a playful decoding of what makes a relationship function, or fall apart, on a daily basis. The humour arises from this methodical detachment: a silence becomes a clue, an insignificant gesture becomes an event, a banal conversation takes on the contours of a protocol. The protagonist examines his own relationship as one might examine an object, a mechanism, or a natural phenomenon. Comedy develops out of the gap between the intimate nature of the subject (love, cohabitation, seduction) and the apparently clinical gaze that dissects it.

The enunciation reinforces this stance. The dialogue is not confessional but analytical. The man, in particular, organises his lived experience as a set of data or experiments to be interpreted. The staging can remain minimal: a few everyday objects are enough to bring situations into being, questions, frictions, imagined divergences with his partner. Theatre emerges from this factual relationship to reality, from this art of observing without explaining, of looking without psychologising. It is a writing of the minimal, where intimacy expresses itself through facts rather than feelings.

The connotation suggests light, sometimes tender humour, but never sentimentality. It reveals the profoundly mechanical dimension of life as a couple: repetitions, mishaps, perpetual adjustments. Yet this objective gaze does not seek to demystify love. On the contrary, it shows love in its most concrete and most human form. Love appears as a daily construction, made of trial and error, major divergences and minor compromises. Laughter arises from the spectator's constant awareness that this slightly ridiculous couple... resembles their own, at least in some respects.

Him and Her, *Interactive Monologue* thus perfectly illustrates intimate objectivist comedy: a theatre of proximity that favours observation over psychology, simplicity over dramatisation, and concrete detail over metaphor.

2.8. Societal Objectivist Comedy: *Nicotine*

With *Nicotine*, theatre leaves the domain of intimacy to explore the professional sphere, yet still without resorting to psychology, satire or overt parody. The chosen angle is that of objectifying observation: characters are not examined for their deeper motivations but for their behaviours, posture, gestures, ways of speaking and reacting within a given situation and environment. The setting, a smokers' terrace on the roof of an office building, becomes a social laboratory in which the standardised behaviours and discourse of today's white-collar world can be observed as though under a microscope. Whereas *Him and Her* focused on the routine of coupledness in private life, *Nicotine* casts an objective eye on the micro-rituals of office life.

The utterance does not seek to offer a traditional plot sustained across the length of the play. Instead, it unfolds in small strokes that ultimately form a composite tableau, in which a multiplicity of largely interchangeable characters cross paths. As in a cubist painting, the same reality may be approached successively from different angles. All these micro-exchanges contribute to a fabric of conversations that touch on nothing essential yet collectively provide a fragmented and fragmentary testimony to the world of modern office work. The comedy springs from this detached gaze, which treats professional life as an observable phenomenon, a system in which individuals, like ants in an anthill, unconsciously perform the precise roles assigned to them.

The enunciation reinforces this device. The dialogues are brief, often elliptical, resembling a series of observational notes. The multiplication of roles (with the same actor playing several characters) heightens the sense of a milieu populated by "types" rather than psychologically developed figures. This procedure creates an intentional depersonalisation, revealing the way organisations sometimes absorb and standardise individuals. The play adopts the tone of a report: no pathos, no judgement, almost no plot in the traditional sense. It simply shows what human relationships have become within a standardised professional environment.

The connotative dimension lends the comedy an objective rather than subjective form of critique. By sketching these workers as mere puppets governed by rituals and absurd exchanges, the play highlights the loss of meaning generated by absolute dependence on corporate norms. Laughter arises from the gap between the apparent lightness of these insignificant exchanges and what they reveal at a deeper level: a society in which the individual dissolves into the collective to the point of becoming a mere cog.

Nicotine thus exemplifies societal objectivist comedy: a theatre that scrutinises everyday gestures in order to illuminate the structures that produce them. A theatre of the minimal, where humour slips into the small malfunctions of an overly regulated system. A theatre that shows how modern society reduces individuals to their function, and how, despite everything, a fragile humanity continues to animate these quasi-mechanical beings.

Part 2

From Modes of Representation to Types of Narrative

The typology of theatrical genres we have just defined is grounded in deep foundations: the opposition, through the semiotic square, of different ways of perceiving and representing the world. It operates at an axiological level, where theatre is understood as a formalisation of systems of values and relationships to reality.

It is nevertheless possible to propose another form of categorisation of theatrical works, more superficial in the structural sense of the term, by shifting the focus from values to narrative. This approach no longer seeks to question what the world is or should be, but rather the way theatrical narratives are organised and the moments of their dynamics that they privilege.

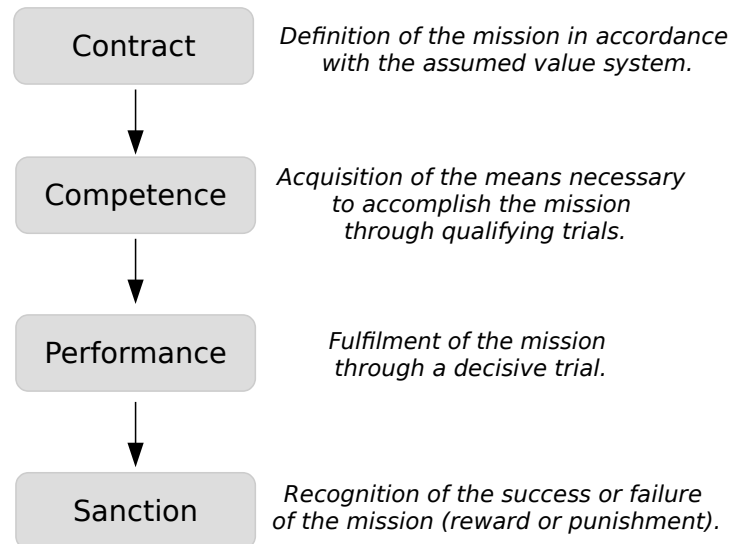
This second typology, necessarily less radical and less general, is no less relevant. It offers a complementary analytical perspective, more specific in nature, focusing on dramaturgical mechanisms.

These two classifications are therefore neither exclusive nor competing, but complementary: the first accounts for the major symbolic and ideological orientations of theatre, while the second explores its narrative and dramaturgical modalities.

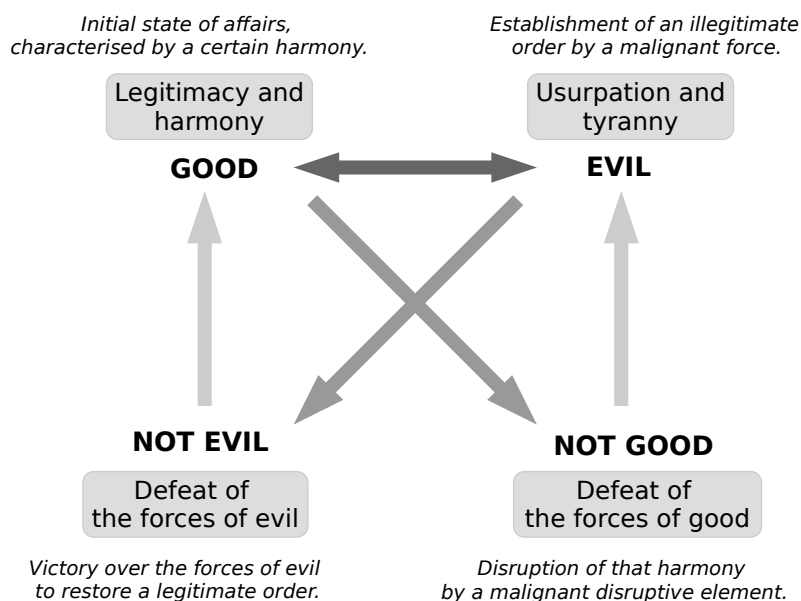
Chapter 1: On the Quadrature of the Narrative Schema

Among the tools derived from Greimasian semiotics, the narrative schema and the semiotic square are those that have given rise to the greatest number of applications, particularly in the field of communication.

The narrative schema describes the dynamics of any narrative through four episodes:



The semiotic square, for its part, organises the system of values structuring a narrative according to a logical model of exclusive positions. In a Manichean ideological system, for example:



It is therefore conceptually tempting to attempt to project the four trials of the narrative schema onto a semiotic square. Yet such attempts have generally proved unconvincing, because the problem has been wrongly framed. The semiotic square belongs to a logical and paradigmatic process, whereas the narrative schema describes a diegetic and syntagmatic process, inscribed in the temporal unfolding of the story. One organises possible positions between which a choice must be made; the other organises episodes to be traversed in the logical progression of any narrative.

However, the hypothesis of a rigorous articulation between these two models becomes viable if we change the level of analysis. Rather than considering narratives of contract, competence, performance and sanction as successive and complementary moments in the unfolding of a story, they can be understood as predominant, sometimes even exclusive, episodes within a narrative, capable of defining a typology of narrative genres. These genres apply both to real narratives (political, social, media-driven) and to fictional ones (video games, cinema, theatre).

Chapter 2: The Four Narrative Genres

1. Contract-Centred Narratives

In contract-centred narratives, the story privileges fidelity to a system of values at the expense of other narrative dimensions. It matters little whether the subject possesses the means to fulfil their ambitions, achieves tangible results, or is recognised for their actions: what counts is adherence to a commitment perceived as superior.

This narrative genre historically structures great heroic and tragic narratives, as well as certain modern political narratives. The figure of General de Gaulle, as it emerged in the collective imagination of the Resistance, fully belongs to this regime: unwavering fidelity to one's values, regardless of the chances of success, immediate results or contemporary recognition. From Joan of Arc to Zelensky, via Churchill or Che Guevara, history abounds with such heroic figures who rise against a far more powerful oppressor or invader, animated by the conviction that when a cause is just, good will ultimately prevail. Every founding national myth includes an icon of this kind.

In contract narratives, ethics therefore prevail over qualification and action, and even potential failure can be excused, on the assumption that history is more likely to forgive defeat than dishonour.

In fiction, these narratives are particularly present in ancient and classical theatre, as well as in modern tragedy. In tragedy, it is precisely the hero's unconditional fidelity to their values that inevitably leads to their downfall.

2. Competence-Centred Narratives

Competence-centred narratives privilege mastery, power and virtuosity—whether physical or intellectual. Competence is valued for its own sake, independently of the ideology it serves, the results it produces, or the recognition it generates.

This genre structures a significant part of contemporary media narratives related to technocracy, economics, technology and innovation. Major figures in new technologies (such as Elon Musk prior to his official political engagement) exemplify this regime: demonstrating omnipotence, pushing back limits, exploring all possibilities before even asking what concrete purpose they might serve.

On the international political stage, Europe also represents this figure of power that fails to translate into meaningful action, due to divisions over values and the absence of a fully legitimised executive authority.

In fiction, competence narratives find a particularly clear expression in early video games, where the essential goal is to demonstrate mastery, progress through levels, and increase power. Largely devoid of genuine diegesis, ideological stakes or symbolic recognition beyond the score, these games rely almost exclusively on qualifying trials and progression through failure. The player's value is measured neither by the correctness of their choices nor by the final outcome, but by their ability to endlessly improve their competence.

3. Performance-Centred Narratives

Performance-centred narratives privilege effective action and the achievement of objectives. The value of an act is measured exclusively by its result. Values, means and recognition are relativised. This is the culture of results.

This genre structures narratives of technocratic management and pragmatic politics. It appears in many managerial discourses and in figures of leaders defined above all by their ability to “make a system work”. On a geopolitical level, Chinese leaders (notably Xi Jinping) emphasise this logic of performance stripped of revolutionary political ideology: stability, growth and efficiency, independently of declared values or external judgement. In contemporary China, as in post-war Japan, performance seems to have become an ideology in itself, and the cult of results a new form of religion.

In fiction, this regime corresponds notably to the action film, where only the accomplishment of the mission matters, action becoming an end in itself, independent of the defence of any particular value system.

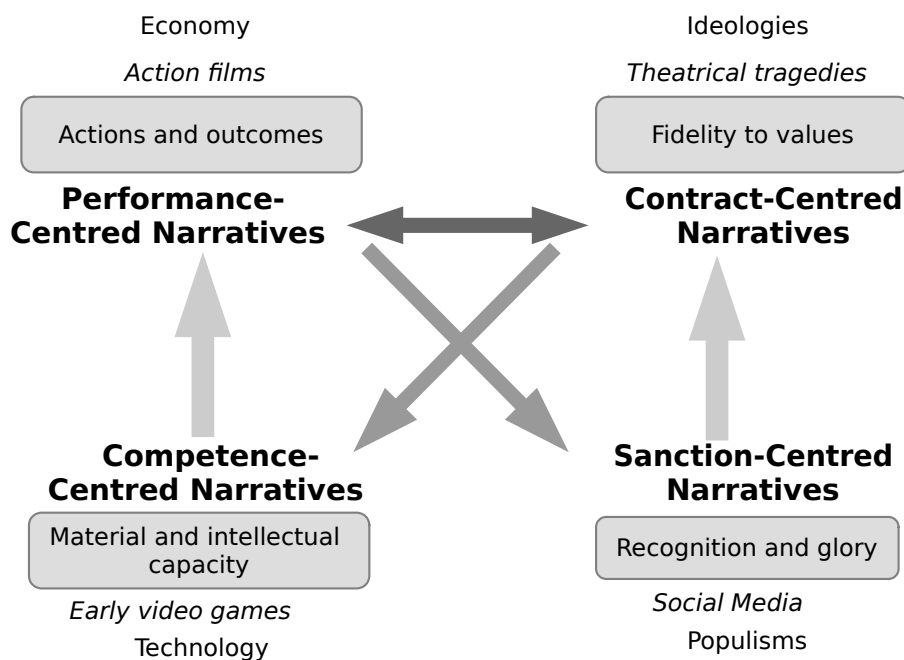
4. Sanction-Centred Narratives

Finally, sanction-centred narratives privilege recognition. Whether the action is just or unjust, coherent or chaotic, effective or not is of little importance: the only thing that matters is the verdict delivered by society and the glory acquired by the “hero”.

This genre increasingly structures contemporary narratives, particularly within the universe of social media, where symbolic existence depends exclusively on the gaze of others. Certain more or less ephemeral celebrities thus appear to be founded solely on de facto notoriety, completely disconnected from values, competence or meaningful action.

This obsession with recognition, born of social networks, has now also invaded the political sphere with the advent of populism, based primarily on unconditional popular endorsement, independently of concrete results, verified competence, or stable ideology. The figure of Donald Trump illustrates this regime well: media recognition, captured attention and symbolic status matter more than ideological coherence, competence, or even objective results. In this genre, sanction is no longer a resolution; it becomes the driving force of the narrative. Action is subordinated to the expectation, provocation or manipulation of others’ judgement.

In this domain, it becomes difficult to distinguish reality from fiction, since everything is done to turn reality into fiction—or fiction into reality. We are here in the realm of conspiracy thinking and alternative truths, inseparable from social networks as organs of information and disinformation, as fictional media, and as political arenas.



Chapter 3: Narrative Genres and Theatrical Genres

These four narrative genres do not merely account for political or media narratives; they also profoundly structure the history of theatre.

1. Theatre of Contract

Contract narratives underpin the great tragic dramaturgies, from *Antigone* to modern figures of absolute fidelity to an ideology. In *The Just Assassins* by Albert Camus, for instance, everything is prepared for an action (an assassination) that ultimately does not take place. The subject of the play is therefore not the unfolding of an action, but the debate over its legitimacy, insofar as the context undermines its moral validity.

2. Theatre of Competence

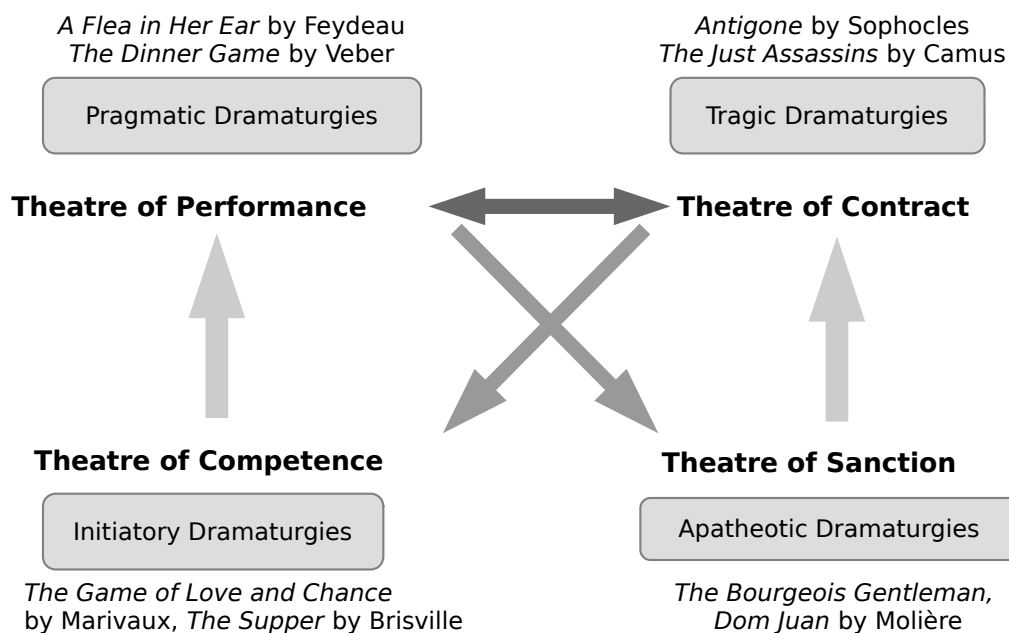
Competence narratives underpin great initiatory dramaturgies: learning about life, mastering emotions, social rules and language. Marivaux, notably in *The Game of Love and Chance*, exemplifies this genre, in which action matters less than the characters' initiatory journey. In a different way, *The Supper* by Brisville relies less on an almost non-existent action than on the linguistic virtuosity of the two protagonists in their verbal duel.

3. Theatre of Performance

Performance narratives underpin pragmatic dramaturgies. In this type of narrative, everything rests on the principle of frenetic chains of causes and effects, actions and reactions, with little concern for ideological frameworks, the protagonists' qualifications, or even the final outcome, which may remain open. This is notably the case in situation comedy, boulevard theatre and farce. The theatre of Georges Feydeau perfectly illustrates this type, with plays such as *A Flea in Her Ear* or *A Tailor-Made Affair*. A comedy like *The Dinner Game* by Francis Veber also exemplifies this genre, based on the principle of an endless chain reaction triggered by a more or less insignificant initial disturbance.

4. Theatre of Sanction

Sanction narratives underpin great apothotic dramaturgies: the pursuit of social recognition, notoriety, celebrity and glory. Many of Molière's comedies are based on this illusory quest for social consideration (*The Bourgeois Gentleman*, *The Learned Ladies*). The represented world functions as a permanent tribunal, where any disapproval is equivalent to a symbolic death. In his own way, Dom Juan is also in search of a sanction—both paternal and divine—like a child whose misbehaviour seeks punishment in order to reassure himself of the effective existence of an authoritative figure.



Chapter 4: Narrative Genres in the Theatre of JP Martinez

The theatre of Jean-Pierre Martinez is distinguished by the fact that it does not occupy a single position, but explores all of these narrative genres.

1. Dramaturgy of Conscience: *The Rope*

Here, conscience is understood as the assumption of a system of values. “Science without conscience is but the ruin of the soul,” wrote Rabelais. In other words, all power—especially when absolute—must be governed by moral principles, or it becomes tyranny. We are here in the realm of the confrontation of ideas and values.

The Rope by Jean-Pierre Martinez is structured around a moral controversy. A doctor and a priest debate whether strict fidelity to the ethical rules of their respective professions should prevail when lives are at stake. In other words, should obedience to the law take precedence over justice in the broader sense? And does one have the right to sacrifice one life to save several others?

2. Dramaturgy of Qualification: *Running on Empty*

This is a theatre of doubt and self-questioning, in which the protagonist questions their ability to continue their mission or is required to prove their competence anew.

Running on Empty is structured around a loss of competence. A playwright at the end of his rope, lacking both inspiration and motivation, is confronted by a mysterious visitor who manipulates him into regaining his creative capacity. The reasons why this author should return to his typewriter are deliberately portrayed as trivial, as is the recognition he might gain from writing yet another play. The performance, the actual writing of the masterpiece, takes place only after the end of the play. The only thing that matters is the restoration of the author’s creative power.

3. Dramaturgy of Action: *The Jackpot*

This is a theatre of situation, intrigue and quest—even (and perhaps especially) when the object of the quest has no significant value. This insignificant grail is what screenwriting theory calls a MacGuffin: that which the hero pursues and which sets them in motion without carrying any ethical or symbolic weight.

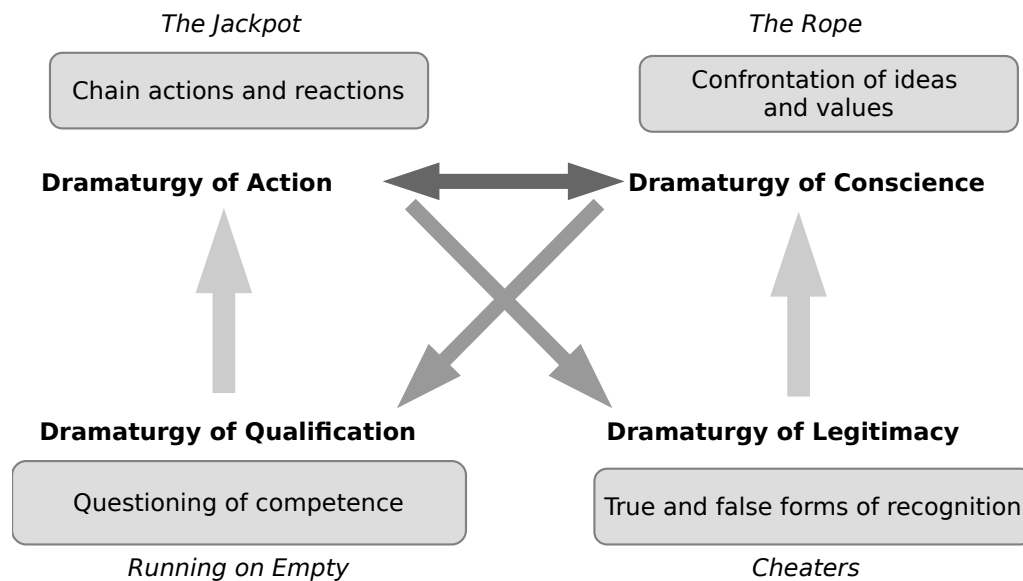
The Jackpot is structured around the quest for a valuable object in the literal sense: a winning lottery ticket, initially lost after its owner's death, and later discovered to have been buried with him. It does not matter what the prize might be used for. It does not matter that none of the claimants have done anything to deserve it. The sole driving mechanism of the play is the infernal chain of actions and reactions that ultimately leads to the discovery that the winning ticket is not at all where it was being sought.

4. Dramaturgy of Legitimacy: *Cheaters*

This is a theatre of appearances and of true and false recognition: overly discreet or unjustly ignored heroes, assumed postures and impostures, undeserved celebrity. Are those whom the media present to us as the heroes of our time truly the most legitimate?

In *Cheaters*, social recognition is the central stake. A successful novelist who has usurped the authorship of a work for which he has just received a prestigious literary prize is visited by a woman who claims to be the true author. Everything now revolves around a debate on the notion of literary glory and fortune. Who truly deserves them? The one who wrote the book, or the one who succeeded in having it recognised as a masterpiece? Truth matters less than appearances, and justice less than those who dispense it.

What gives coherence to Jean-Pierre Martinez's work is therefore not a single style, but an exploratory approach: each play puts a narrative genre to the test, revealing its logic and its comic or tragic effects.



By reconsidering the four episodes of the narrative schema as defining four narrative genres, and by organising them within a semiotic square, it becomes possible to propose a general model capable of accounting for major socio-historical narratives, contemporary media discourse, and theatrical genres alike.

Theatre thus appears as a privileged laboratory in which these regimes are tested, where tensions between value, power, efficiency and recognition are played out. Of course, not all plays exploit a single narrative episode exclusively, but the dominant genre is the one that conditions the primary dramaturgical tension. And it is precisely this dominance that determines a work's affiliation with a given genre—and its originality.

Jean-Pierre Martinez's theatre, through its systematic exploration of all these narrative genres, offers a particularly fertile field of observation.

An Invitation to Travel, in the Form of a Map

At the end of this analysis, it is important to emphasise once again that this typology of theatrical genres is by no means normative. Just as a map does not compel the traveller to take only toll motorways, leaving them free instead to follow country roads or even footpaths, this dramaturgical cartography merely offers a few orienting landmarks. It was only after writing 120 plays that I myself felt the desire, retrospectively, to formalise my own writing process, as a systematic exploration of the possibilities of theatrical form.

One may practise dramaturgy, just as one writes prose, without realising it; but that simply means one is instinctively applying dramaturgical rules. It does not mean such rules do not exist. In music too, one may play by ear without knowing solfège. One may even challenge the Western conventions elevated to dogma by classical music, but one cannot entirely ignore the rules of harmony. What matters is to play in tune, and that the piece composed is pleasant to hear, perhaps even moving or inspiring.

People often refer, somewhat dismissively, to “genre theatre”, as opposed to the supposedly unclassifiable “new theatrical writings” that are meant to serve as the new grail for contemporary playwrights seeking institutional recognition. But every play belongs to a genre, whether ancient or relatively recent. And any play belonging to a new genre, one invented by its author, is destined eventually to become “genre theatre” once the innovations that once defined it have been worn thin by those who believe themselves avant-garde merely by imitating genuine pioneers.

After *Writing One's Life*, an autofiction recounting my path into literary creation, this short essay in self-analysis is also intended as a toolbox for aspiring playwrights. Here is the highly imperfect map I have drawn for you, after exploring for myself this dramaturgical territory of which we are all inhabitants. It is up to you to choose your destination and your route. Bon voyage!

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Plays

Jean-Pierre Martinez has published all of his plays with Éditions La Comédiathèque. He has also chosen to make the full text of each of them freely available for download on his website *jeanpierremartinez.net*. A list of his 120 plays, together with their summaries, appears in the appendix.

Appendix: Summaries of the 120 Plays by Jean-Pierre Martinez

Intimate Realist Comedies

A Brief Moment of Eternity, La Comédiathèque, April 2018

Peter, a dedicated researcher, stumbles upon the formula for eternal life. Faced with the potential unforeseen consequences, he contemplates keeping the discovery a secret. Yet, his wife, longing for perpetual youth, and her lover, desiring immortality, are unwilling to make such a sacrifice.

A Cuckoo's Nest, La Comédiathèque, Septembre 2011

On the eve of Christmas, the unexpected return of a grandfather thought to be dead disrupts the routine of an ostensibly ordinary family. A zany and dark comedy about family ties. Go straight to hell... or draw a lucky card.

A Hell of a Night, La Comédiathèque, January 2011

Sloth, greed, envy, lust, pride, wrath, gluttony... How can you indulge in all seven deadly sins in a single evening, without ever leaving the comfort of your home, and without risking a one-way ticket to hell?

A Skeleton in the Closet, La Comédiathèque, Septembre 2015

Alex and Emma are about to sell their house to some friends before heading abroad to start a new life. However, just after the sales agreement is signed, they discover a hitch, a significant one that could jeopardise the transaction.

An Innocent Little Murder, La Comédiathèque, May 2017

Involuntary adultery can easily lead to involuntary manslaughter, but getting rid of the body of evidence is a whole different matter...

All's Well That Starts Badly, La Comédiathèque, Novembre 2022

Alice and Luke have been waiting for years to adopt a baby. Finally, the big day has arrived. The social worker from the Child Welfare agency is expected any minute for a final visit to assess the stability of their relationship, their motivation to adopt, and the child's future living conditions. But disaster strikes as Alex isn't home which risks jeopardising everything. Fred must find a way to handle this delicate situation, made worse by a sudden plumbing emergency. Unless the arrival of the plumber provides part of the solution ...

Back in the Spotlight, La Comédiathèque, March 2005

You all know that famous website facilitating the reunion with long-lost schoolmates... Unfortunately, nostalgia nights can also turn into nightmares. Having invited over to his place two of his "best buddies" from high school whom he hasn't seen since graduation, a friendly loser triggers their unexpected reunion with a girl who has some unresolved issues with them...

Bed & Breakfast, La Comédiathèque, February 2020

Seeking to escape the stress of Parisian life, Adam and Eve moved to an old farmhouse where they set up a bed and breakfast, to break the isolation and make ends meet. But their first couple of guests arrive, and they will soon discover that in this little corner of paradise, hell is other people...

Euro Star, La Comédiathèque, May 2010

A well-known film director and an ambitious actress happen to meet on the Eurostar, seated opposite each other. Both are headed to London for an audition. She is willing to do anything to land the role that will make her a star. He is drawn to her charm but is unsure about taking it further... Suddenly, the train stops in the middle of the Channel Tunnel. The breakdown trick? But in this game of trickery, he is not who she thinks he is. Nor is she who he thought she was...

False exit, La Comédiathèque, May 2014

Jack has organized a small gathering to honour the ashes of his recently departed grandfather. However, due to a mistake by the Funeral Services, his own name appears on the obituary...

Family Portrait, La Comédiathèque, July 2003

Two brothers and two sisters who rarely see each other reunite one last time in the family vacation home to sell it after the death of their mother. However, the issues they need to resolve are not only financial...

Family Tree, La Comédiathèque, February 2023

Khalid meets his fiancée Diana's parents for the first time. Irritated by his future in-laws' condescending attitude and their obnoxious pride for their pure-blood French ancestry they claim goes back to the Middle Ages, Khalid playfully challenges Diana to prove the authenticity of her heritage with a DNA test. They could never have foreseen the chain reaction triggered by the surprising outcome of this test ...

Fragile, Handle with Care, La Comédiathèque, October 2020

After being dumped once again, Fred swore to his best friend that no girl would sleep over at his place until the end of the year. A few months later, he is on the verge of winning his bet and the hefty cheque that came with it. But on the eve of Christmas, one is never safe from a surprise gift...

Friday the 13th, La Comédiathèque, December 2009

John and Christine have invited two of their friends for dinner at their home in London. Natalie arrives without her husband, distraught, having just heard that the plane bringing him home crashed at sea. Together with the potential widow, they wait with bated breath for news confirming whether her husband is among the survivors... and learn that they are the winners of that evening's super jackpot lottery draw. From that moment, the operative phrase becomes "controlling emotions". And that is just the beginning of an eventful evening, filled with twists, turns, and shocking revelations.

Gay Friendly, La Comédiathèque, October 2012

A bag full of banknotes can help to provide a lavish gay wedding for one's son. However, ill-gotten gains never bring lasting benefits...

Hangover, La Comédiathèque, June 2014

Peter and Karen have invited a couple they met at a restaurant, with whom they vaguely get along, for drinks. But since then, they've all had time to sober up, and they realise they don't have much in common to share. It looks like it might be a long evening. Unless...

How to Get Rid of Your Best Friends, La Comédiathèque, November 2015

Sometimes, it's easier to make friends than to get rid of them. Vincent and Julia have always gone on holiday with Patrick and Christine. But now they aspire to mix with a more exclusive crowd, one that can help boost their new professional ambitions. In search of an excuse to ditch these friends who have become a burden, they find themselves caught in their own web of lies. It's not so easy to get rid of your best friends...

Last chance encounter, La Comédiathèque, August 2021

On the platform of a suburban railway station, a man and a woman who don't know each other are waiting for the train that will take them to the new destiny they have chosen for themselves. But this 8:30 train, which they used to take in the past, has been canceled. The next one is only three hours later. This presents them with an unlikely encounter that could potentially change the course of their lives...

Lovestruck at Swindlemore Hall, La Comédiathèque, December 2013

Desperate to regain some of her family's lost prestige, Baroness Swindlemore von Hustlestein is in search of a rich and easily pleased suitor for her daughter, who isn't much to look at. She thinks she has found the perfect candidate...

Ménage à trois, La Comédiathèque, Septembre 2012

When three people live in a two-room apartment, it means there's one too many. But who?

One marriage out of two, La Comédiathèque, November 2011

One marriage out of two ends in divorce... That night, Steven has to tell his in-laws, who idealise him, that he is getting divorced from their daughter, whom he cheated on. It is at that moment that Mabel's parents announce to the couple that they are giving them their house in Kensington to raise their future children. How to reignite the flame without appearing simply interested in real estate?

Perfect In-Laws, La Comédiathèque, January 2013

After inviting the fiancé's parents over to get acquainted and plan the wedding, they soon realize that the parents of the perfect son-in-law don't always make for perfect in-laws...

Running on empty, La Comédiathèque, August 2016

A journalist visits a playwright on the down and out for an interview that could launch his comeback. But in the world of theatre, appearances can be deceiving...

The Castaways of New Year's Eve, La Comédiathèque, January 2016

That little moment of panic on December 31st, when you realise you have no plans for the evening... You're ready to accept any invitation just to avoid ringing in the New Year alone. Even at the risk of having the worst New Year's Eve of your life.

The Dressing Gown, La Comédiathèque, August 2025

Alex and Clara, a bank clerk and a nurse, live a quiet life in their suburban Paris flat. Until one day Alex decides to treat himself, with the €400 he won in the lottery, to a magnificent... dressing gown. Have you ever heard of the “Diderot Effect”? It can be devastating...

The Fishbowl, La Comédiathèque, November 2011

Leaving your apartment keys with a friend during August so they can feed your goldfish – that's nothing unusual. But when that friend is a bit eccentric, and everyone has secrets to hide, it can quickly lead to a cascade of unexpected twists and turns. Especially when Wallonia decides to declare its independence on that very day...

The Perfect Son-in-Law, La Comédiathèque, June 2012

When you abandoned your fiancée a year ago, just days before the wedding, leaving only a post-it note on the refrigerator as an explanation, you better never come back...

The Smell of Money, La Comédiathèque, January 2019

Can money buy happiness? Out of self-respect, Michael, a broke painter, refuses the dirty money left to him by his father upon his disappearance in an airplane crash. But as Michael proudly rejects this inheritance from a father who abandoned him when he was five years old, his decision puts him at odds with his partner and his sister. The two women are less bothered about the origin of this unexpected fortune and both have very good reasons not to let it slip away. But who exactly is this man offering them ten million in exchange for a simple signature, and where does the money really come from? To each their own truth...

Strip Poker, La Comédiathèque, Novembre 2004

Asking the new neighbours over for dinner to get to know them: a risky move that could end up costing more than it's worth and a perfect opportunity for a poker comedy where every player must eventually show their hand.

The Windows across the Courtyard, La Comédiathèque, August 2021

An aging novelist on the brink of suicide is visited by a young woman who claims to have lost her cat. A visit that will change his life...

The Worst Best Man Ever, La Comédiathèque, August 2022

Fred and Clara are getting married in just a few hours, but Max and Zoe, on the brink of divorce, are about to turn this joyous occasion into an all-out brawl. When tying the knot, it's best to choose your witnesses wisely...

Societal Realist Comedies

A Simple Business Dinner, La Comédiathèque, January 2012

A CEO invites a minister to dinner with the aim of getting him to sign a large contract, and hires an escort to help seal the deal. But the escort in question is filling in for a friend who led her to believe it was just a well-paid catering job. She expects to be handing out appetizers, only to find out she's on the menu. Naturally, nothing will go according to plan ...

Blue Flamingos, La Comédiathèque, April 2023

The season begins poorly for Robert and Fanny, who have just opened a hotel called "The Flamingos" in the French village of Saintes Maries de la Mer. A strike causes a fuel shortage, leading to numerous cancellations. To save their hotel from bankruptcy, they must persuade the few stranded travellers to extend their stay and attract new guests. Luckily, the Camargue and its residents have plenty of charm, and the receptionist has a few tricks up her sleeve. This comedy is an irreverent homage to the this mythical French region: the Camargue.

Casket for two, La Comédiathèque, January 2011

When two candidates in a local by-election cremate their spouses on election day, conditions are rife for spoiled ballots and stray bullets. Especially when the funeral director's newly hired temp has a mind of her own...

Cheaters, La Comédiathèque, April 2018

Since his first novel was published and won the Goncourt Prize, Alexander has enjoyed a reputation as a successful author, and is reaping the benefits. He is expected at the Ministry of Culture to be awarded with the insignia of Knight of Arts and Letters. Then, he receives a visit from a stranger who could jeopardize his success...

Christmas Eve at the Police Station, La Comédiathèque, August 2012

On Christmas night, two inspectors are on duty, accompanied only by some lost souls no one is waiting for at home. In an unexpected turn of events, the Minister of the Interior makes an appearance at their police station to pay tribute to the dedication of law enforcement. Clearly, things are about to take an unforeseen twist...

Critical but stable, La Comédiathèque, February 2014

Raymond is in a deep coma following an accident on a Boris Bike. His long lost relatives are called to his bedside to decide what to do and avoid prolonged therapeutic interventions. But this collective decision becomes even more difficult when the patient turns out not to be who everyone thought he was. And is the keeper of a secret that could make everyone very rich...

Dead End Boulevard, La Comédiathèque, June 2016

Robert and Caroline Blanc would love to marry their daughter Victoria off to Stanislas de Coursensac, the mayor's son, who's on the verge of being re-elected. But this boulevard comedy seems to have no way out...

In lieu of flowers ... La Comédiathèque, September 2014

Stanley's cremation is scheduled for 3:35 PM precisely. Only a handful of close relatives are attending the ceremony since the dearly departed left few cherished memories. But, as they say, authors live on through their work. And this funeral may just turn out to be Stanley's greatest comedy ...

Is there a critic in the audience? La Comédiathèque, October 2023

Fred and Sam have always dreamed of participating in the Avignon Festival, and finally, that dream has come true. But in Avignon, dreams can easily turn into nightmares. Right after the first performance, a harsh review discourages the audience from attending this already troubled show. Facing impending disaster, these two endearing underdogs make a daring choice, one that involves great risk. This play is a tribute to all those actors who toil in obscurity, yearning for a glimpse of the limelight, while also celebrating the remarkable power of passion that can elevate even the most profound failures into something extraordinary.

Just like a Christmas Movie... La Comédiathèque, Mars 2019

Kimberley inherits her grandmother's renowned cookie recipe. On Christmas Eve, alongside her best friend Jennifer, Kimberley is on the verge of launching a tearoom at the base of the building where Granny Maggie lived. This endeavour is deeply meaningful to her, and she has poured all her savings into it. However, a ruthless real estate developer is determined to acquire her shop, demolish the building, and replace it with a luxury residence. Can Kimberley overcome these challenges and finally find love? A true Christmas movie plot... but worse.

King of fools, La Comédiathèque, April 2017

As the presidential election approaches, a party plummeting in the polls selects a designated fool to represent them, taking on the responsibility for the impending disaster. Simultaneously, they secretly promote an outsider candidate for their supporters to rally behind after their victory. However, the fool turns out to be unpredictable... and so do the voters.

Miracle at Saint Mary Juana Abbey, La Comédiathèque, December 2015

The abbey's gift shop, which funds the nuns' charity work, is seeing a decline in sales: the abbey's famous Saint Mary Juana's Holy Elixir, a concoction claiming to cure all ailments, is no longer a best seller. That is, until an enterprising nun decides to improve the recipe with a mysterious plant. The potion's renewed success is incredible. Could it be Saint Mary Juana's latest miracle?

Music Does Not Always Soothe the Savage Beasts, La Comédiathèque, September 2014

Mr. and Mrs. Camembert have just bought the dilapidated castle of Moulinrouge, and they have invited the local high society for a dinner concert. They hope this will gain them admission as members of the town's highly exclusive Philanthropic Club. But soon, the pianist's head appears floating in the pool. And to think we're barely at the appetisers...

Neighbours' Day, La Comédiathèque, June 2015

Alex has just inherited a splendid apartment in the upscale neighbourhoods of Paris from an old aunt whose existence he was unaware of. He takes a tour of the property with his friend Clara. However, family secrets are like corpses; they always end up resurfacing...

Of Vegetables and Books, a Philosophical Farce, La Comédiathèque, January 2013

The storefront of a grocery shop, which also serves as a bookstore, sets the stage for delightful exchanges between a philosophical grocer and his quirky customers, each in search of answers to their existential questions. A philosophical farce that blends outrageous situations with reflections on the absurdity of life.

Pentimento, La Comédiathèque, December 2024

Robin, a seemingly unremarkable employee at a rapidly growing tech company, is retiring tonight. Determined to bid farewell to his young boss, he insists on a final meeting. What begins as a simple courtesy soon escalates into a heated confrontation. But in this virtual game of cat and mouse, who really holds the mouse?

Reality Show, La Comédiathèque, January 2014

The host of an obscure cable TV channel is tasked with promoting a politician. But the interview won't go as planned...

Requiem for a Stradivarius, La Comédiathèque, October 2025

Clara is a young violin virtuoso at the height of her fame, while the career of Leo, a pianist somewhat older than she is, lies already behind him. Once her Pygmalion, he is now above all her accompanist and impresario. Today, the couple they form both on stage and in life is in crisis. A quarrel breaks out just as they are about to leave for a concert. For the occasion, a benefactor has agreed to lend Clara a Stradivarius of inestimable value. At that moment, a pair of burglars burst into their living room in a home invasion...

Special Dedication, La Comédiathèque, May 2013

In a small bookstore, a book signing event is being prepared. Charles has finally decided to publish his first novel. Everything suggests that it won't be a bestseller. But in the era of the internet, a miracle is always possible...

The Deal, La Comédiathèque, March 2024

Alex, a struggling playwright, contemplates abandoning his theatrical career as his comedies fail to garner interest. Just as he contemplates a shift to a more conventional job, a renowned Parisian producer contacts him, expressing eagerness to stage his latest play. It's a golden opportunity for Alex to finally gain recognition. The producer plans to visit soon for him to sign an exclusivity contract. However, this unexpected phone call is immediately followed by another. Fred, Alex's friend who already holds the rights to the play, informs him that he is finally going to stage it. He has invested all his savings in renting a small theatre. How can Alex delicately navigate the situation, persuading his amiable but less successful friend to abandon the project without it appearing as a betrayal to their longstanding friendship?

The Jackpot, La Comédiathèque, September 2004

Following a hearse accident, the arrival in a typical French café of a coffin, which turns out to contain a winning lottery ticket, provides the pretext for a highly spirited comedy.

The Most Beautiful Village in France, La Comédiathèque, September 2013

Rocamor-le-Château is on the verge of being crowned The Most Beautiful Village in France. Meanwhile, the second round of local elections threatens to hand the mayor's office to a candidate from the Populist Front. At La Part des Anges, the village pub, the town's key figures are discussing who will win: the current mayor or his opponent. However, a series of unexpected events disrupts the election process, echoing Winston Churchill's famous assertion: Democracy is the worst form of government—except for all the others.

The Rope, La Comédiathèque, March 2024

In a country under the grip of a tyrant, as dissent simmers and repression rages, a doctor and a priest clash over whether the sacred duty of their respective roles outweighs that of the citizens they both are. The stakes are nothing short of the life or death of the dictator and consequently the survival of the regime or hastening its downfall...

The Tourists, La Comédiathèque, October 2011

Two tourists arrive at the villa they rented for their holidays in a Maghreb country, which was on special offer after its recent revolution. However, they find the house already occupied by another couple...

The Worst Village in England, La Comédiathèque, May 2015

The last survivors of a dying village, forsaken by God and bypassed by the motorway, decide to take matters into their own hands and create an event that will drive traffic to their village. But it's not easy to turn the worst village in England into the next must-see tourist attraction...

Traffic Jam on Graveyard Lane, La Comédiathèque, September 2024

The cemetery of Beaucon-le-Château is fully occupied. To accommodate new deceased, an extension would be required. However, the owner of the adjacent park stubbornly refuses to give up even the smallest plot. Faced with this urgent situation, the mayor takes a radical step: from now on, dying will be strictly forbidden within the town's limits, under penalty of prosecution...

Welcome Aboard! La Comédiathèque, February 2012

« Age doesn't matter, unless you are a cheese » said Kim Kardashian quoting Luis Buñuel. Life is like a cruise on the Titanic: whether you're nibbling canapes on the top deck or slurping soup in the hold, at the end of the day we're all destined to feed the fishes. So, as we wait for the inevitable iceberg, those of us who still can, might as well sit back, enjoy the orchestra and the sound of ice clinking in our glasses. A comedy laced with black humour throughout. The first metaphysical sitcom where the action takes place in an assisted living facility.

White Coats, Dark Humour, La Comédiathèque, October 2012

The hospital was almost perfect... The crime too. A darkly humorous detective comedy.

Intimate Surrealist Comedies

Crash Zone, La Comédiathèque, May 2017

They gather at a crash site to pay tribute to their missing brother. But what truly occurred? And who exactly are they?

Happy dogs, La Comédiathèque, February 2017

A man who lost his identification papers due to a simple misunderstanding sets off on a journey to reclaim his identity, but eventually resigns himself to becoming someone else. This short first-person narrative is tragically humorous and can be staged as a theatrical monologue.

Like a Fish in the Air, La Comédiathèque, October 2016

Without delving into philosophy or reclining on a psychoanalyst's couch, during moments of idleness or sleepless nights, we all contemplate the meaning of life. Well, at least the meaning of our own lives. We ask ourselves small questions without substantial answers. Or even big questions without a tiny hint of an answer. Unless the daily routine suddenly derails, sending us, dizzy, to the edge of the unfathomable abyss of meaning. A troubled depth can then surface, revealing, amidst the waves, like a sea monster, a one-way street... which constitutes the tragi-cosmic essence of our everyday existences. A comical dive into the depths of our superficial lives...

New Year's Eve at the Morgue, La Comédiathèque, July 2022

On New Year's Eve, a man is on duty at the Forensic Institute. One hour before midnight, a woman appears in front of him, covered only by a sheet. She doesn't know who she is or where she comes from. And what was shaping up to be a deadly dull New Year's Eve at the morgue turns out to be full of surprises... A comedy with multiple twists and turns, absurdly romantic and darkly humorous.

Not even dead, La Comédiathèque, February 2016

Lying on a hospital bed, a man, having lost his memory due to a life-saving surgery, encounters a parade of the women from his past whom he can no longer remember. Could one of them be the love of his life?

Preliminaries, La Comédiathèque, November 2020

A man and a woman encounter each other daily at a café, discreetly observing one another from separate tables, filled with curiosity but hesitant to initiate conversation. Will they yield to the longing for a rendezvous, uncertain if reality will match their mutual fantasies? While exploring the potential of deepening their connection, they also face the inevitable narrowing of options. Holding onto the preliminary stage of their interaction means risking missing out on what truly matters.

The House of Our Dreams, La Comédiathèque, June 2019

A couple has just bought the house of their dreams at a surprisingly low price. What could have happened in this house that caused it to remain unsold for so long? The previous owners died there under circumstances as dramatic as they were mysterious... A philosophical countdown about the tragicomic fate of humanity in general, and of the couple in particular.

The Ways of Chance, La Comédiathèque, April 2017

At Chance's Café, Thelma and Louise, stranded due to car trouble, encounter Richard and the ghost of Virginia. An odd place for an even odder meeting, feeling like both a reunion and a showdown. After all, chance doesn't always work in our favour...

Societal Surrealist Comedies

Backstage Comedy, La Comédiathèque, November 2012

Just before the opening curtain of the premiere, the actors go through one final rehearsal. However, an unforeseen incident jeopardizes the start of the show. A cheerful farce about the small world of the theatre...

Crisis and Punishment, La Comédiathèque, June 2012

An actor 'in between jobs' finds work at a bank on the verge of bankruptcy, only to discover he is to be, quite literally, a scapegoat. But the nightmare is only beginning ...

Happy Hour, La Comédiathèque, June 2008

In a late-night bar under police surveillance, where officers are hunting a dangerous psychopath, a sinister bartender becomes the confidant of lonely patrons seeking to meet mysterious partners from the internet

In flagrante delirium, La Comédiathèque, October 2015

A corpse in a sauna and a plagiarism case... Captain Dupont is assigned to an investigation that appears to be linked to a state affair. Unless it's all just theatre...

Is there a pilot in the audience? La Comédiathèque, January 2012

On a plane, the director of a sensationalist magazine coincidentally meets an embalmer, who claims to have a bombshell news, making her dream of a record-breaking circulation. Things get complicated because this encounter takes place on a Paris-Tokyo flight: twelve hours in confinement with no way to communicate with the outside world. Holding a scoop but being unable to publish it... A true Japanese torture!

Is there an author in the audience? La Comédiathèque, January 2021

It's been seven years since a health crisis caused the closure of all theatres. Three individuals, presumed to be actors, step on a stage for an audition. Unless it's a public reading. Or it might even be the show's opening ... The problem is that they don't have the script. The author hasn't written it yet. They're going to have to improvise...

Save our Savings, La Comédiathèque, June 2018

Six mysterious characters are stranded on an island due to a ferry strike. They all have a good reason to want to return to the mainland as soon as possible. They board a fishing boat operated by an improvised smuggler. But the price to pay for this crossing will be higher than expected... A humorous fable about the flaws of our society.

The Joker, La Comédiathèque, Décembre 2013

A screenwriter tackling both a creative block and a computer breakdown gets a surprise visit from a strange repairman. Everyone deserves a wild card to play for a second chance.

The Performance is not cancelled, La Comédiathèque, February 2022

The performers of a struggling theatre company are just minutes away from taking the stage to perform a play about Molière's final hours. However, nothing is ready, and more problems keep arising. To add to the chaos, the box office takings suddenly disappear. Now faced with a critical decision, should they cancel the performance, delivering the final blow to their theatre company already on the verge of bankruptcy? Or should they persevere and carry on with the play, no matter the challenges?

The President's Draw, La Comédiathèque, June 2021

In the only bar of a village emptied by rural exodus, the two owners and their few remaining customers create fake news stories to escape their bleak fate—some of which could become self-fulfilling prophecies.

Intimate Symbolist Comedies

Déjà vu, La Comédiathèque, December 2022

In a future where assisted suicide has been replaced by voluntary recycling, a man and a woman, who met just before their reconditioning, reappear in the very ordinary home of the outdated couple they are meant to replace. Is there anything left of love when everything has been forgotten?

Horizons, La Comédiathèque, October 2025

In a desolate no man's land that feels like a purgatory, three characters who have lost their memory stare toward the horizon, searching for answers to their existential questions. But which horizon is it, exactly? A tragicomedy blending science and philosophy, a reflection on the eternal cycle of life and death.

The Costa Mucho Castaways, La Comédiathèque, September 2015

Peter and Mary were strangers until their cruise ship, the Costa Mucho, was shipwrecked. After washing up on a deserted island, they realise that, as the lone survivors, they must overcome their differences in order to survive. Life is a shipwreck ... and the afterlife is an offshore tax haven.

Societal Symbolist Comedies

A Thwarted Vocation, La Comédiathèque, March 2025

Ariel, a young student, has an appointment with the Director of the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts, who will decide on her application. More than a century earlier, the Director at the time, Christian Griepenkerl, rejected the application of a certain Adolf Hitler. A thwarted vocation that would indirectly lead to the disastrous consequences we all know. Can a seemingly trivial decision, by altering an individual's fate, change the course of history? We may never know... unless one could go back and test the outcome of a different choice. This tragicomic play, with a touch of humour, explores the fundamental questions that have haunted humanity since the dawn of time.

Four stars, La Comédiathèque, October 2010

Four passengers who have nothing in common are participating in a tourist trip in space. The cohabitation is going more or less smoothly until the control tower announces to them that due to an oxygen leak, they will have to be evacuated urgently. The problem is: there won't be enough air for everyone. One of them must sacrifice themselves, otherwise they will all perish. They have one hour to find the one who will show « The Right Stuff ».

Just a Moment Before the End of the World, La Comédiathèque, November 2020

Three people who do not know each other are summoned to participate in a jury. At least, that's what they were told. But the place where they have been gathered is not a courtroom. They learn that they are there to decide together how to manage the consequences of an inevitable catastrophe that will strike the world in the very near future. Opinions diverge, and numerous twists and turns keep the debate alive. Throughout this immersive performance, the audience will also be called upon to express their opinions to guide them in their choices, so that they can make the best possible decision to face the worst imaginable situation.

King of fools, La Comédiathèque, June 2020

As the presidential election approaches, a party plummeting in the polls selects a designated fool to represent them, taking on the responsibility for the impending disaster. Simultaneously, they secretly promote an outsider candidate for their supporters to rally behind after their victory. However, the fool turns out to be unpredictable... and so do the voters.

Offside, La Comédiathèque, March 2015

Five strangers with nothing in common wake up locked in an unfamiliar place. Who brought them there, and for what purpose? The arrival of their two kidnappers only raises more questions than answers. Setting aside their differences, the hostages must work together, prioritizing the collective goal to survive and find a way out—carefully avoiding any missteps along the way.

One small step for a woman, one giant leap backward for Mankind, La Comédiathèque, February 2020

A couple of astronauts are on their way to Mars with the intention of establishing a colony and laying the foundations for a new, more humanistic humanity. Following a mysterious accident, this space journey turns into a voyage through time. Between a dystopian future and a past carrying the seeds of impending disasters, it may be tempting to want to rewrite history... and perhaps even the Bible!

Quarantine, La Comédiathèque, February 2020

Four strangers find themselves forcefully quarantined in what turns out to be an abandoned theater. Seated behind an imaginary two-way mirror, they are observed by another group of people (the audience). The allegedly contaminated strangers consider the situation. What virus are they contaminated with? What will happen to them? How and when will all this end? Little by little, we learn that this huis-clos takes place in a near future where Big Brother reigns supreme, and that the reason for this quarantine may not be entirely medically motivated.

Stories and Prehistories, La Comédiathèque, December 2012

Set during prehistoric times that might well be yet to come, Newanderthals and Bohosapiens live together in perfect harmony. But two human species... isn't that at least one too many?

Surviving Mankind, La Comédiathèque, August 2019

On a Planet Earth ravaged by climate change and rendered uninhabitable, mankind is living out its final hours. Two men and two women are set to take off in a spaceship for an unknown planet that might be their only chance for survival. The mission of these four « chosen ones » is to give humanity one last chance to save itself and carry on its evolution. But does mankind deserve a second chance if self-destructive madness caused its extermination? The passengers cannot agree...

The Pyramids, La Comédiathèque, April 2024

In a mysterious, enclosed setting, perhaps a madhouse, or maybe the theatre of the world, a few outcasts who have lost their Faith are being held. Not just Faith in God, but also belief in the principles upon which our society is built. What if the creator himself no longer believed in his creation? These skeptics must be re-motivated before their contagious scepticism triggers the collapse of the entire system.

Intimate Objectivist Comedies

At the bar counter, La Comédiathèque, March 2010

At the counter, at the time for taking stock, a woman claiming to be an author shares significant moments of her life with the bar owner. These fanciful tales come to life on stage in the bar's room.

Blackouts, La Comédiathèque, February 2020

Like black holes, blackouts open into strange and unknown parallel universes...

Don't panic! La Comédiathèque, May 2025

A sketch comedy in the form of a literary game. Each of the fifteen two-character scenes in this collection begins with the same line: Promise me you won't panic... An opportunity to humorously tackle the most absurd topics... often revealing our deepest humanity.

Ethan and Eve, La Comédiathèque, April 2018

A man and a woman in their garden. Are they the first or the last? Are they even a couple? Only God would know if He weren't already dead... A comedy in sketches for one or more couples.

Heads or Tails, La Comédiathèque, May 2022

Mark and Peter are actors, who were once friends but haven't seen each other for years after their friendship turned into a rivalry, both professionally and in their romantic lives. Now one of them has invited the other on the stage of a theatre to rebuild the friendship they lost with their youth. This attempt at a reconciliation will turn into a settling of scores before opening up the possibility of an unexpected collaboration.

Him and Her, interactive monologue, La Comédiathèque, June 2003

About the exciting adventure of living together. Sketchs

Stories To Die For, La Comédiathèque, October 2009

Sketches... to die of laughter

The Rebels, La Comédiathèque, May 2020

In adulthood, our lives are not always as we had dreamed them to be at twenty. Conversely, the idealised memory of our twenties is often quite distant from the reality of our youth. Nestled between our dreamt lives and our actual life is the nostalgia for all the possibilities. The eternal question remains: could we really have lived a different life, or was it all written in advance? This bittersweet comedy sketches, in delicate strokes, the tragicomic portrait of a few characters with thwarted destinies.

Societal Objectivist Comedies

Backstage Bits, La Comédiathèque, April 2025

The ups and downs of the noble profession of acting, portrayed through a series of around fifteen short scenes that humorously highlight the quirks and pitfalls of what might also be considered the oldest profession in the world.

Dramedies, La Comédiathèque, February 2018

If the world's a stage, the play is often little more than a flop. Its author remains unknown, ...

Enough is enough! La Comédiathèque, June 2024

A comedy made up of sketches that humorously tackle ever-relevant topics, starting from this tragicomic observation: when we stay still for too long, we eventually find ourselves somewhere else without realising it, because the world around us has changed...

For Real and for Fun, La Comédiathèque, February 2021

While it can sometimes be hard to tell the real from the fake, there's a certain mischievous pleasure in blending them together. For fun.

Killer Sketches, La Comédiathèque, September 2020

Hitman is a little-known profession, but one of public utility, and very much a career for the future, especially in times of crisis. At a café table, characters from this noble trade cross paths with clients whose motives are as varied as they are surprising. And you? If you could eliminate just one person on this earth with impunity, would you do it? And who would you choose?

Lost Time Chronicles, La Comédiathèque, March 2007

A sketch comedy about time, life, death, love, and the eternal cycle...

Memoirs of a Suitcase, La Comédiathèque, August 2018

If an old suitcase could speak, it might have some funny stories to tell...

Nicotine, La Comédiathèque, October 2013

To work or not to work, that is the question. During a break for electronic cigarettes, a few workaholics exchange hazy remarks.

Now and then, La Comédiathèque, April 2020

From prehistory to the end of the world, a few snapshots of our insignificant lives. A sketch comedy

Open Hearts, La Comédiathèque, August 2019

In a café across the street from a hospital, a decidedly odd landlord serves and observes the fate of his customers looking for hearts to steal... for a transplant or even a relationship.

Open Letters, La Comédiathèque, January 2014

In the lobby of a building, between the mailboxes and the entry code panel, strange characters cross paths without always understanding each other...

Sidewalk Chronicles, La Comédiathèque, March 2014

On the sidewalk of a street, strange stories unfold...

Stage Briefs, La Comédiathèque, June 2022

A theatre can also be the setting for funny stories where the theme... is the theatre itself. 28 very short scenes, each no longer than a page.

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