



Hacettepe University Graduate School of Social Sciences

Department of English Language and Literature

**THE PROBLEMATISED CONCEPT OF AUTHOR-ITY IN TIM  
CROUCH'S *MY ARM, AN OAK TREE AND ENGLAND***

Yağmur ATLAR

Master's Thesis

Ankara, 2022



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## KABUL VE ONAY

Yağmur ATLAR tarafından hazırlanan “The Problematised Concept of Author-ity in Tim Crouch’s *My Arm, An Oak Tree* and *ENGLAND*” başlıklı bu çalışma, 03.06.2022 tarihinde yapılan savunma sınavı sonucunda başarılı bulunarak jürimiz tarafından Yüksek Lisans tezi olarak kabul edilmiştir.

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## ÖZET

ATLAR, Yağmur. Tim Crouch'un *My Arm*, *An Oak Tree* ve *ENGLAND* Başlıklı Oyunlarında Sorunsallaştırılan Otorite Kavramı, Yüksek Lisans Tezi, Ankara, 2022.

Yirmi birinci yüzyıl İngiliz çağdaş ve özellikle postdramatik tiyatrosunda seyircinin giderek artan şekilde merkeze konulması ve sahnede aktif olarak rol alması tartışmalı konular olarak ortaya çıkar. Tim Crouch (1964- ), seyircinin entelektüel katılımını teşvik etmek için oyunlarında kullandığı teknikler açısından çağdaş İngiliz tiyatrosunun en önde gelen oyun yazarlarından biridir. Crouch, seyircisine özerk katılımcılar olarak yetki verirken sahne ile oditoryum arasındaki sınırları belirleyerek seyirci kavramına özgün yaklaşımıyla öne çıkar. Yazar, izleyicilerinin çoğunlukla oditoryumda kalmasını sağlar ve onları özgürleştirmek için mekânsal sınırlamalar kullanır. Bu tür kısıtlamalar Crouch'un yazar, oyuncular ve seyirciler arasında eşit bir ortak yazarlık dinamiği yaratmasına izin verir. Bu tez, *My Arm* (2003, Kolum), *An Oak Tree* (2005, Bir Meşe Ağacı) ve *ENGLAND* (2007, İNGİLTERE) başlıklı oyunlarını analiz ederek Crouch'un seyircinin aklında gerçekleşen eylemi ön plana çıkaran eşit ve katılımcı bir alanı nasıl yarattığı konusunu incelemeyi amaçlar. Tezin giriş bölümü, Crouch'un tiyatro anlayışına ışık tutan çeşitli teori ve uygulamalara odaklanmaktadır. İlk bölüm, *My Arm*'daki temsil kavramına odaklanarak yazarın seyircilerden topladığı nesnelere oditoryumda gerçekleşen derin düşünceyi artırmanın bir yolu olarak kullanmasını konu alır. İkinci bölümde, yazarın *An Oak Tree*'de dönüşüm olgusunu ele alış şekli ve sahnedeki bir hipnoz gösterisi üzerinden "öz-hipnoz" yoluyla seyirciyi zihinsel katkı sağlamaya teşvik edişi yer alır. Üçüncü ve son bölümde ise *ENGLAND* başlıklı oyununda mekânsal dinamikleri ön plana çıkaran bir galeri ortamında yazarın söyledikleri ile izleyicinin yarattığı arasındaki çeviriye nasıl odaklandığı incelenir. Bunlardan hareketle tezin sonuç kısmında Crouch'un oyunlarında özerk algılarını ön planda tutmak suretiyle seyircileri oyunların ortak yaratıcılarına ve kendi hikâyelerinin yazarlarına dönüşmeye teşvik ettiği vurgulanır.

### Anahtar Sözcükler

Tim Crouch, *My Arm*, *An Oak Tree*, *ENGLAND*, Seyirci, Otorite, Tiyatro



## ABSTRACT

ATLAR, Yağmur. The Problematised Concept of Author-ity in Tim Crouch's *My Arm, An Oak Tree* and *ENGLAND*, Master's Thesis, Ankara, 2022.

In the twenty-first century British contemporary and in particular postdramatic theatre, the increasing centralisation of the audience and the spectators' active participation emerge as controversial subject matters. Tim Crouch (1964- ) is one of the most prominent playwrights of British contemporary theatre with the techniques he employs in his plays to stimulate the audience's intellectual engagement. Crouch stands out with his novel approach to the notion of spectatorship; while granting authority to his audience as autonomous components, he also demarcates the line between stage and the auditorium. The writer frequently confines his audience within the auditorium and employs spatial limitations to liberate the audience. Such constraints allow Crouch to create an equal co-authorship dynamic between the author, the performers, and the audience on his stage. By analysing his plays, namely *My Arm* (2003), *An Oak Tree* (2005), and *ENGLAND* (2007), this thesis aims to explore how Crouch creates an equalised and active participatory space that prioritises the action taking place in the audience's mind. The introduction of the thesis focuses on various theories and practises that illuminate Crouch's understanding of theatre. The first chapter focuses on the concept of representation in *My Arm* by analysing the writer's use of objects collected from the audience as a means of enhancing contemplation in the auditorium. The second chapter, deals with the phenomenon of transformation in *An Oak Tree* in which Crouch urges the audience to make a mental contribution through "self-hypnosis" by means of a demonstration of hypnosis on stage. The third and final chapter analyses how *ENGLAND* focuses on the translation between what the author says and what the audience creates in a gallery environment, which brings spatial dynamics to the forefront. Thus, the thesis concludes that by prioritising the audience's autonomous perception in his plays, Crouch encourages the spectators to transform into co-creators and authors of their own stories.

### Keywords

Tim Crouch, *My Arm, An Oak Tree, ENGLAND*, Audience, Authority, Theatre

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## INTRODUCTION

This thesis aims to analyse Tim Crouch's (1964- ) *My Arm* (2003), *An Oak Tree* (2005), and *ENGLAND* (2007) within the scope of the writer's actualisation of the repositioning of the audience with the purpose of rendering his spectators more authoritative, which is a controversial issue in contemporary British theatre. While examining this, the predominant subject matters in Crouch's theatre, such as the notions of transformation and representation as well as the intermedial qualities of his stage, will be discussed along with various theories, namely the death of the author, autosuggestion and emancipation emphasising the importance of the audience's perception in theatre.

Towards the end of the twentieth century, new theories and approaches in the world of theatre started to emerge, which can be attributed mostly to the incessantly changing expectations of the audience. With this novel approach towards theatre in the 2000s and postdramatic theatre, radical changes mostly concerning the phenomenon of realism in the acting and the execution of the plays dominated the stage, along with the changes in their text-based content. These alterations are not merely to meet the audience's expectations, but also to ascribe a new objective to the controversial status of spectatorship, which may be considered a revision of the notion of passive contribution. With these reforms on stage, the change in the conception of the connection between the play, the author, and the audience can be said to appear as one of the most conspicuous cruxes of the 2000s theatre, which has altered the classical phenomenon of spectatorship. Jacques Rancière (1940- ) emphasised the significance of this transformation by asserting that "[w]hat is required is a theatre without spectators, where those in attendance learn from as opposed to being seduced by images; where they become active participants as opposed to passive voyeurs" (7). On this view, in technical terms, the repositioning of the audience can be expressed not merely as a change in the auditorium but also as a re-examination of the notion of spectatorship focusing on the way the audience perceives the play rather than how it is acted. Thus, regarding the impact of postdramatic theatre on the concept of spectatorship, it may be asserted that the centralisation of the audience experience is not only a matter of radical adjustment but also a revision of the act of

watching by focusing on its “antiretinal”<sup>1</sup> significance. As Karen Jürs-Munby contends, “[t]he spectators are no longer just filling in the predictable gaps in a dramatic narrative but are asked to become active witnesses who reflect on their own meaning-making” (6), and this meaning-making process grants them the authority not only in the auditorium but also on stage in a roundabout way.

According to *The Oxford English Dictionary*, deriving from the etymon “auctor” in Latin, one of the definitions of “author” is “a creator, cause, or source” (“Author”). As for the word “authority,” it is defined as “[p]ower to influence action, opinion, or belief, or a party possessing it” (“Authority”). When the revision of the notion of spectatorship in postdramatic theatre is taken into account, the spectator is given the power to “influence the action” and even, to a certain extent, the dynamism to create it. While this incremental authority of the audience places them in a neoteric position, the broadening of the limits of the auditorium somewhat restricts the audience, making the notion of emancipation a questionable and problematic subject. Tim Crouch has become a distinguished name with his innovative execution of this paradoxical situation and the techniques he employs to increase the spectators’ mental contribution to his works without making them feel obliged to any physical participation.

Tim Crouch is one of the most prominent contemporary playwrights of the twenty-first century due to his techniques which give the viewer more authority in his plays. However, while using these elements, he does not completely relinquish the conventional dramatic structure of theatre (Biçer 150). In this context, it may be asserted that Crouch’s theatre directly correlates with Lehmann’s assertion about the scope of postdramatic theatre. Lehmann says: “Postdramatic theatre thus includes the presence or resumption or continued working of older aesthetics, including those that took leave of the dramatic idea in earlier times, be it on the level of text or theatre. Art in general cannot develop without reference to earlier forms” (27). Under this statement, the way Crouch blends elements

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<sup>1</sup> Marcel Duchamp (1887- 1968), as given in Pierre Cabanne’s *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp* (1979), refers to conceptual art depending on its visuality as retinal art, and antiretinal, when it “depended on things other than the retina” (39). Therefore, the “antiretinal” in this statement refers to the perception of the audience through the mind rather than the visual aspects of the play.

of contemporary theatre with earlier forms renders him a distinguished playwright in contemporary British theatre. What Crouch specifically has contributed to the theatre of this era is his placing the audience at the centre of his plays by means of his various techniques that prioritise the spectators' intellectual participation which will be scrutinised in the following chapters of the thesis. He has changed the audience from participants to active partners without whom, Crouch believes, there would be no art. In that sense, he centralises and prioritises the perception of his audience, rather than determining himself, the playwright, to be the central figure. His plays, namely *My Arm*, *An Oak Tree*, and *ENGLAND*, reveal how Tim Crouch focuses on the audience and their perception, instead of reflecting his own perception and authority as the playwright. More importantly, by deconstructing the prevalent principles of theatre and breaking the generally accepted concept of the reality of theatre, he achieves authenticity on a different stratum that can be considered more realistic than the traditional concept of realism in terms of the impact of his plays on the audience. In other words, on his stage, Crouch creates a sense of reality through rather unrealistic concepts, acting, and stage properties. However, since he prioritises the perception of the audience, he creates a world in which the audience can discover their own reality, and this makes them the most significant components of his plays.

Born in Bognor Regis, UK, in 1964, Tim Crouch, started his drama education at Bristol University. During his second year at the university, he co-founded Public Parts Theatre Company in Bristol in the late 1980s (Pilný 131). As Seda İlter relates, with seven people, including Crouch's wife Julia who was the director of the company, they performed mostly improvised works. Crouch then received acting courses at the Central School of Speech and Drama in 1993 (398). There, while working as a professional actor, as Dan Rebellato affirms, he "found the structures of conventional theatremaking blocked the ability of the actor" (127). This experience and dissatisfaction motivated him to enter a new intellectual phase in his life in which he aspired to write his own plays with the purpose of removing the restrictive elements for the actors, and most importantly, for the audience. Later on, he maintained his career by teaching drama and started to write plays, which he considers "a very late development" (İlter 398). Crouch's first-ever play, *My*

*Arm*, written for an adult audience, is important in the sense that it marks his first appearance on the stage as a playwright.

*My Arm* was staged in August 2003 at the Edinburgh Festival at the Traverse Theatre for the first time and awarded a 2006 *Prix Italia* for Best Adapted Drama in the Radio Drama category. As Crouch points out through his note for the audience, “*My Arm* is partly about giving ordinary things extraordinary significance” (24), which he wrote as a “provocation, as a challenge to a dominant culture in theatre” (İlter 398). In his aspiration to challenge the notion of realism concerning acting, the prime incentive was his previous experiences as an actor, and within this scope, considering the objects, which function as the actors’ surrogates, collected from the audience members at the beginning of the play, *My Arm* can be regarded as a manifestation of the writer’s desire to bring a new aspect to the theatre, acting, and most significantly, to the conception of spectatorship.

Crouch’s second play, *An Oak Tree*, brought many awards to his name, respectively the 2005 Herald Angel Award, 2006 Brighton Festival Best Male Performer Award, and 2007 OBIE Special Citation Award. Crouch involves the audience in the play intellectually in a multi-layered way as the audience of the play and the participants of a hypnotism show. Before the play begins, the audience is told that the second actor, the father character in the play, has never seen or read the play before. The second actor acts in accordance with the directions given by the Hypnotist, the first actor. This signifies that preceding the beginning of the play, Crouch subverts the understanding of the traditional theatrical reality and the credibility of the acting. In that sense, while challenging the conventionalities of the theatre, the playwright also foregrounds the audience’s perception by creating an atmosphere for them to contemplate throughout the play.

*ENGLAND* is another play with which the writer won several awards such as the 2007 Total Theatre Reward, 2007 Herald Archangel Award, and 2007 Fringe First Award. *ENGLAND* is, in Andy Smith’s words, “a play that has been transplanted into a gallery” (413). The avant-garde setting of the play propounds Crouch’s extraordinary execution and reveals how he alters the concept of theatrical reality to achieve a more realistic atmosphere. At some part of the play, the audience is positioned as one of the characters

through which Crouch enriches the multi-layered structure of the play and unveils the substantial function of the spectators which is far beyond the act of watching.

Crouch's fourth play, *The Author* (2009), was performed in September 2009 at the Royal Court Theatre Jerwood Theatre Upstairs for the first time. Since the day it was released and performed, it has been considered one of the playwright's most controversial plays due to its display of the themes of violence and sexual assault. The most distinct idiosyncrasy of the play is its "requiring little or no physical or verbal contribution from its spectators – other than to be visibly present, unmasked, as ourselves" (Bottoms, "Introduction" 392). As Bottoms expresses, though there is no physical participation on the spectators' end, their physical presence in the auditorium is of great importance in divulging and questioning the ethical problems reflected and criticised by means of art. Crouch explains one of the most crucial objectives of the play by saying: "One premise of my play (heartfelt by me) is that a representation of an act of violence is, on some level, still an act of violence" ("Response" 416). Therefore, it is possible to assume that *The Author* questions the consequences of the act of authorship on another level.

Crouch's most recent play, *total immediate collective imminent terrestrial salvation* (2019), was staged at the Edinburgh International Festival in August 2019. What renders this play noteworthy is that "[n]ot only is the play a collective reading experience but it can be said to take place both on the stage and on the page" (Rousseau 3). In this play, the writer gives the audience authority through their position as the members of a cult and their direct involvement in the ritual-like event while reading the lines out loud. Crouch analyses to what extent the audience complies with the author as the cult members. At the end of the performance the playwright, as the cult leader, opens his mouth to say something. He nevertheless remains silent, and the play ends. When the ending is focused on, it may be suggested that Crouch once again gives the authority of speaking and interpreting what he does not tell himself to his audience (Costa n.p.).

As for his other works, Crouch also produced several plays for children and young audiences, beginning with *Shopping for Shoes* (2003). In this play, he delves into issues similar to those in *My Arm*, concerning the representation of the actors through objects,

in this case a pair of shoes. By replacing the actors with a pair of shoes, the writer pushes the limits of the young audience's imagination to enable them to create through their own perception. After *Shopping for Shoes* Crouch continued to write plays for children with his cycle of Shakespeare adaptations. His cycle, *I, Shakespeare*, which was initiated with the aim of introducing Shakespeare to a young audience, comprises five solo plays: *I, Caliban* (2003), *I, Peaseblossom* (2004), *I, Banquo* (2005), *I, Malvolio* (2010), and *I, Cinna* (2012) (Soncini 22). By focusing on the marginalised characters of Shakespeare, Crouch encourages the spectators to contemplate the other side of the well-known Shakespeare stories. Lastly, *Kasper the Wild* (2006), *John, Antonio and Nancy* (2010), and *Beginners* (2018) are his plays considered in the category of plays for children/young audiences. Even though Crouch employs more simplified techniques and narration throughout these works when compared to his plays intended for adult audiences, all of his productions mirror his aspiration to evoke the imagination of the audience regardless of their age.

As Crouch's plays set forth, the author does not impose a conclusion on the spectators. His plays are occasionally considered within the category of experimental plays by some critics. However, Crouch does not favour any kind of labelling as it can lead to dangerous restraints because of the prejudice it creates ("Keynote" 3/9 02:00-10). More importantly, instead of the author's experience, the playwright foregrounds the experience of the audience, which is, for him, the fundamental component of the stage. Crouch achieves to put the spectator's experience before the author's through establishing an equilibrium by means of a fixed text and an autonomously adaptable performance. Regarding the integration of the text and the staged performance, David Lane highlights the elements that enhance the experimental efficacy for the spectator as below:

[Julian] Meyrick's [Australian director and dramaturg] adjusted definitions become increasingly appropriate here: his definition of a play text as 'a device for turning information into experience' ... reiterating the need for the playwright and dramaturg to always look forwards to production and outwards to the spectator's journey. The relationship between theme, content, form and intention is a common area of enquiry in script development; and in exploiting the possibilities of live performance as well, the relationship between all of these elements *and* audience experience becomes highly significant. (133)



As is emphasised by Lane, the information provided through the text turns into an experience of the spectator each time Crouch stages his plays. In that sense, there is a transformation eventuating from the written to the performed that prioritises the ultimate recipient source, the audience. The “constancy” of the text depends on the individual formability of the performance. However, this formability prioritises perceptual awareness and activity beyond the physical presence on stage. This is a key factor in Crouch’s theatre which has been made possible through the writer’s counterbalanced employment of his contemporary techniques between stage and the auditorium, and his disposal of certain limitations to annihilate the intellectual limitations constraining the audience. While the problematised aspect in Crouch's theatre materialises through these almost paradoxical transitions, it is crucial to examine the writer’s techniques in detail to fully comprehend the intellectual freedom the audience gains. Therefore, the quasi-experimentalist features of his plays and, more significantly, Crouch’s centring the audience rather than himself as the playwright contributes to his plays to be recognised as products of postdramatic theatre, even though he himself keeps from categorising his plays. However, it is still a must to analyse the features of postdramatic theatre here in order to comprehend Crouch’s techniques.

*Postdramatisches Theater* (1999, *Postdramatic Theatre*), written by Hans-Thies Lehmann (1944- ), has brought a new aspect to the world of theatre. In the book, Lehmann chiefly defines in which context postdramatic theatre differs from traditional theatre as well as from its earlier forms, the different aspects of postdramatic theatre from Brechtian theatre, despite their similarities in terms of breaking the fourth wall and foregrounding the perception of the audience, and finally how postdramatic theatre has changed the former understanding of theatrical aesthetics. In general terms, postdramatic movement has led to many controversies among the critics owing to its analogical features with Brechtian theatre and In-Yer-Face and the conspicuous disparities about its disrupting the textual unity. Deniz Bozer defines the major aspect of postdramatic theatre and its difference from In-Yer-Face Theatre as follows:

Despite bearing similarities with In-Yer-Face Theatre, which came to the fore in the UK in the 1990s, and which is almost offensive subjecting the audience to disturbing events and to the use of violent and obscene language in ways that cannot be ignored

by them, postdramatic theatre is a new theatre aesthetic which prioritises performance rather than being text-oriented. (10)

As also affirmed in Bozer's definition, performance is foregrounded in postdramatic theatre, which transforms the theatre experience into a thoroughly different phenomenon, especially for the audience. However, Lehmann's affirmation regarding how art cannot develop without referring to its previous forms becomes significant in the case of Crouch's theatre. This is so because while it "has postdramatic features in terms of text-based qualities," Crouch's theatre, Ahmet Gökhan Biçer writes, "does not reject the dramatic structure altogether. All of his plays contain a narration in consonance with the dramatic structure" (150). So, one may state that even though his plays bear elements of postdramatic theatre to some extent, the playwright does not utterly renounce the previous forms and the traditional concept of theatre, especially in textual terms. During one of his interviews with Seda İlter, when İlter directs Crouch a question concerning his plays' being "perceived as performance arts, non-plays, or not 'proper' plays or to be categorised under the rubric of postdramatic theatre" (402), Crouch answers by saying: "[I]et's expand our definitions of what a play is, let's not think about it as a post-dramatic piece of performance text; let's just call it a play. A play can accommodate lots of different forms and lots of different styles" (402). When this statement is taken into consideration, the main reason behind the peculiarity of his plays, stemming from their structures and forms different from those in postdramatic theatre, becomes transparent, and thus categorising Crouch's plays turns into a difficult matter. For this reason, though his plays will be analysed here with a focus on postdramatic theatre; the features of metatheatrical, experimental, and performance plays will also be argued in terms of the techniques Crouch uses to centralise the audience as the authoritative figure on his stage. In various media platforms Crouch clearly states that he aims to not delimit his plays into any kind of category or theatre movement. Therefore, the categorisation mentioned in this thesis is merely to achieve a thorough and academic analysis of the plays, as well as to scrutinise the possible effects of the postdramatic period on the audience's perception in Crouch's theatre.

Due to some of their overlapping features, Crouch's plays are sometimes analysed within the frame of metatheatre. Coined by Lionel Abel (1910-2001) in his book *Metatheatre*:

*A New View of Dramatic Form* (Stephenson 115), metatheatre has been widely analysed especially with regard to the plays with a play-within-a play structure. The core phenomenon and ideology of metatheatricality, therefore, prevail within the concept mentioned by Bernhard Greiner: “‘Ist die ganze Welt Spiel, so ist das Theater schon Spiel im Spiel’ (‘If the whole world is play, then theatre is always play within a play’)” (qtd. in Landfester 132). This brings forth the notion of simulation that the theatre experience begets. The events on stage are, in a way, reflections of life itself, and this is paradoxically unveiled in plays with that framework since the many-layered structure is a multi-layered simulation. Crouch makes use of this pattern especially in *The Author*; however, his use of the play-within-a-play concept serves a purpose other than constituting a metatheatrical quality, which is to divulge the intricate and ironic function of art. As it is revealed at the end of the play, the criticised subject matter, the exploitation of art, has been advertised by the play, the artwork, itself. As Vicky Angelaki explains in relation to *The Author*, the play “dangerously blurs the boundaries not between the fictional and the biographical, but between the theatrical and the meta-theatrical – not merely in the sense of a play within the play, but in the sense of critical discourse developing around performance as part of it” (6). One of the most significant aspects of Crouch’s use of this method is that he puts emphasis on “spectatorial passivity” (Angelaki 16) to raise or reinforce the observer’s consciousness to the fact that spectatorship and being witnesses in life are analogous. In this simulation, Crouch correlates the act of watching a play as an audience member with witnessing an incident in real life and abstaining from intervening in, thereby criticising the observer’s passivity.

Although the components of metatheatre and postdramatic theatre generally seem to be intertwined, postdramatic plays are more integrated with the innovations of the modern world, and they deconstruct both the physical and the metaphorical boundaries of stage with relatively disparate techniques. Although the notion of self-reflexivity can be analysed as a common idiosyncrasy in both theatres, postdramatic qualities are more foregrounded in Crouch’s theatre, especially when the way he positions the audience is taken into consideration. Jürs-Munby’s denotation of the word “post” in “postdramatic theatre,” in the preview of Lehmann’s book, becomes significant at this point. The critic explains the use of the word “neither as an epochal category, nor simply as a

chronological ‘after’ drama, a ‘forgetting’ of the dramatic ‘past,’ but rather as a rupture and a beyond that continue to entertain relationships with drama and are in many ways an analysis and ‘anamnesis’ of drama” (2). Therefore, it can be inferred that Crouch’s merging of the conventional with the contemporary by following the traditional scheme in textual aspects and at the same time adopting a modern idiosyncrasy on stage transpires a new theatrical reality. Consequently, despite bearing quasi-metatheatrical qualities concerning his centralising the spectator in a multi-layered structure, which are the auditorium and the story itself, neither metatheatrical nor postdramatic theatre accurately reflects the purpose of Crouch’s theatre. Bottoms accounts for the issue about the categorisation of his plays under postdramatic theatre as follows:

And yet I remain unconvinced that *An Oak Tree* – or indeed Crouch’s other produced plays to date, *My Arm* (2003) and *England* (2007), which play similar games with frames – is indeed postdramatic, if ‘the adjective “postdramatic” denotes a theatre that feels bound to operate beyond drama, at a time “after” the authority of the dramatic paradigm in theatre’ (Lehmann 2006: 27). The seeming contradiction between this quotation and the one cited above (the postdramatic ‘most defini[t]ely does *not* [exist] “beyond” drama’) suggests a certain awkwardness at the heart of Lehmann’s project to bifurcate theatre into drama and not drama. Crouch’s plays further trouble the already – troubled distinction because their ‘ungluing’ of representational elements contributes centrally to his creation of compelling dramatic narratives, rather than functioning to undermine ‘the dramatic paradigm.’ Having worked for years as a jobbing professional actor, Crouch believes strongly in engaging audiences through storytelling: indeed, his first writing projects were solo storytelling performances created for schoolchildren. ‘All my plays,’ he notes, ‘subscribe to the Aristotelian unities, in terms of the nature and structure of the narrative, and that’s very important for me.’ (“Authorising” 67)

Crouch’s theatre, in this view, does not fall within Lehmann’s definition of postdramatic, as instances such as undermining and destroying dramatic unity are not prevalent in his works. The writer achieves novelty through building a more complex unity by maintaining specific signs, referred to as “the representational elements,” in abundance. In this respect, some critics, such as Bottoms, prefer to consider Crouch outside of the paradigm of postdramatic theatre as defined by Lehmann, since the writer’s storytelling and narrative structure adhere to the Aristotelian notion of unity.

Breaking the fourth wall, addressing the audience explicitly, and, unlike in Brechtian theatre, including the audience as an active participant in the performance are all major

characteristics of postdramatic theatre. Though one of the reasons why Crouch's plays are frequently classified as postdramatic theatre is the increased prominence of spectatorship, which is common in both postdramatic theatre and Crouch's theatre, his method of authorising the viewer is rather unusual and experimental. There has been a controversy over the idea of centralising the spectators since many critics believe that this has altered the technical aspects of stage completely. Janine Hauthal describes this deconstruction by saying:

According to Andrzej Wirth [Polish Brechtian theatre critic], post-Brechtian drama and theatre reveal a gradual vanishing of conversational dialogue in favour of anti-conversational forms of dramatic discourse. Consequently, the implicit audience address of conventional dramatic dialogue is made explicit and the play's *Sprechraum* or space defined by speech is altered. Whereas the *Sprechraum* of conversational dialogue is identical with the stage--- detached from the auditorium by the so called fourth wall--- the *Sprechraum* of discourse includes both stage and auditorium. (177)

As can be discerned from Hauthal's reference to *Sprechraum* about stage limits, with the implementation of postdramatic qualities, theatre has transcended the constraints of stage and has become the inclusion of the audience per se. This has also caused the auditorium to become a part of stage, rendering the audience a character unaware of the situation. Rancière propounds the necessity of such a transposition as follows:

The separation of stage and auditorium is something to be transcended. The precise aim of the performance is to abolish this exteriority in various ways: by placing the spectators on the stage and the performers in the auditorium; by abolishing the difference between the two; by transferring the performance to other sites. (15)

The abolishment of the abstract line segregating the performers from the audience does not merely facilitate the corporal interaction; it also amplifies the intellectual interplay between the two.

About Wirth's *Sprechraum*<sup>2</sup>, Lehmann expresses that "[Wirth] put the emphasis on theatre turning into an instrument, as it were, through which the 'author' (director) addresses 'his'/'her' discourse directly to the audience" (31). In light of this, particularly

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<sup>2</sup> Lehmann elaborates on Wirth's *Sprechraum* by saying: "The salient point of Wirth's description is that this model of 'address' becomes the basic structure of drama and replaces the conversational dialogue. It is no longer the stage but the theatre as a whole which functions as the 'speaking space' (*Sprechraum*)" (31). Thus, it can be said that the integration of stage and the auditorium also creates a dynamism between collectivity and individuality due to its plurality in one.

when Crouch's centring his audience is considered, it becomes possible to assert that the playwright utilises stage as an instrument. He includes the audience in the play by means of rather unconventional and unusual techniques; however, while contriving this, he devises a stage that prevents an intervention by the audience that might disturb the flow of the play. In doing so, Crouch's theatre differs from performance plays to which postdramatic theatre is often compared. Lehmann asserts that in postdramatic theatre, plays are deprived of a dramatic structure and on the verge of morphing into performance acts. He further elaborates on the audience's role in this transformation:

The fundamental *shift from work to event* was momentous for theatre aesthetics. It is true that the act of viewing, the reactions and latent or acute 'responses' of the spectators, had always been an essential factor of theatrical reality. Now, however, they become an active *component* of the event, so that, for this reason alone, the idea of a coherent formation of a theatre 'work' necessarily becomes obsolete: theatre that includes the actions and utterances of the visitor as a constitutive element can practically and theoretically no longer be self-contained. The theatre event thus makes explicit the nature of process that is peculiar to it, including its inherent unpredictability. ... In this turn to a performative *act*, in place of a well-made *message*, one can see an updating of the early Romantic speculations about art, which sought a 'sympoetry' of reader and author. This conception is incompatible with the idea of an aesthetic totality of the theatre 'work.' If we wanted to cite the ancient image for the symbol – a shard of pottery is broken in two and later the edge of the fracture on the one half identifies its bearer as 'authentic' when it joins the other edge – the theatre likewise manifests itself only as the one half and awaits the presence and gesture of the unknown spectators who realize the edge of the fracture through their intuition, their way of understanding, and their imagination. (61)

As can be understood from Lehmann's statement, spectatorship has always been evaluated as an act of viewing, and the audience has been envisaged as a source of "response." However, with this shift in theatre, rather than having a unilateral impact, the audience starts to have a correlative influence in the auditorium, which renders the spectators "active component[s] of the event," rather than being static viewers of the work of art. This transition has been described as "sympoetry"<sup>3</sup> since, as suggested by Beth Dempster, *sympoiesis* refers to "collectively-producing systems that do not have self-defined spatial or temporal boundaries. Information and control are distributed among

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<sup>3</sup> Lehmann uses the term "sympoetry" within the context of Schlegel's notion of "Romantic Poetry," which is explained by Wojciech Hamerski as "the art of 'fusing together individuals' consisting of, among other things, 'tempting' the reader, as someone 'alive and critical' ... to participate in creating the work. The concept of sympoetry completes the theory of progressive poetry with an element of *team spirit*, though it simultaneously decrees the idiosyncrasy of the act of reading" (12). Based on this definition, it can be suggested that Schlegel's sympoetry is directly related to the above-mentioned explanation of sympoiesis, which basically means "making-with" (Haraway 5).

components. The systems are evolutionary and have the potential for surprising change” (qtd. in Haraway 61). Pertaining to Lehmann’s reference to sympoetry and Dempster’s definition, it can be suggested that according to Lehmann, with the momentous change in theatre, the “self-contained” structure of theatre has altered since sympoiesis lacks “self-defined” spatiality and temporality in terms of boundaries, and thus this alteration does not conform to the “aesthetic totality of theatre” due to the versatility of the information the spectators receive. Nevertheless, Crouch’s theatre in general presents “self-produced boundaries” (Dempster 7) rather than initiating a collectively-producing system without any boundaries, since with the authority granted to the individual each participant in the auditorium may generate their own intellectual frontier. Thus, it may be plausible to assume that Crouch’s theatre is more likely to be autopoietic than sympoietic.

Haraway explains autopoiesis referring to Dempster by saying: “[b]y contrast [to sympoiesis], autopoietic systems are ‘self-producing’ autonomous units ‘with self-defined spatial or temporal boundaries that tend to be centrally controlled, homeostatic, and predictable’” (qtd. in Haraway 61). Based on this definition, when the notion of self-productivity as well as the existence of spatial and temporal boundaries are considered technically, the way Crouch positions his audience seems to coincide with how an autopoietic system works. The quasi-autopoietic system devised in the auditorium directly manifests the problematised concept of authority in Crouch’s theatre since a “self-produced boundary” still implicates an idea of restraint due to the concept of boundary. Although Crouch’s plays put a priority on the spectators’ contemplation and autonomy, the audience does not have control over the flow of the play. However, despite having limitations in corporal terms, the audience is completely set free intellectually. This situation might be problematic due to its blurring of the audience’s freedom and authority, since having cognitive freedom in a place the spatial borders of which are set by the author might still be restrictive for the spectators considering their being spatially constrained to the seats in the auditorium. Nevertheless, this restriction genuinely serves to achieve a more abstruse autonomy for the audience in intellectual terms because spatial boundaries are effective in preventing the possible perceptive complexities among the audience so that the viewers can contemplate without feeling any extrinsic pressure.

Crouch weaves the audience's authority in such a subtle manner that the spectators feel neither invaded nor compelled into a position and they can experience an aesthetic involvement in a theatre play while also being liberated from clichéd restrictions such as being confined to the auditorium passively or being constrained to active participation. This can be said to constitute one of the most distinct aspects determining the position of Crouch's theatre in the line between postdramatic and performance plays. Crouch's audience can experience the play with freedom in the intellectual sense in an auditorium designed to stimulate a quasi-autopoietic system. However, this very same phenomenon also unveils the reason why the authority of the spectator can be regarded as a problematised concept, which renders the notions of freedom and authority controversial ones. Consequently, the rationale behind Crouch's employment of such a technique will be thoroughly analysed in the main chapters of this thesis by focusing on the antithetic structure of the emancipatory boundaries and the restrictive liberty on the stage.

Crouch grants his audience the authority without dragging them into a state of turmoil. The incremental authority given to the audience provokes a controversial discussion among the critics due to some of the inconvenient situations it brings forward, which are mostly related to the possibility of an adverse effect on the experience of the viewer. Thus, due to such diversions and the incremental emergence of performance plays, the theatre experience might be a precarious event for the spectators occasionally. Gareth White explains this speculative situation by asserting that

[t]here are few things in the theatre that are more despised than audience participation. The prospect of audience participation makes people fearful; the use of audience participation makes people embarrassed, not only for themselves but for the theatre makers who choose to inflict it on their audiences. (1)

Based on this assumption, it may be argued that audience participation can be considered an intricate and delicate issue due to its complex, and even paradoxical, nature since an attempt that will render the audience authoritative might also become an unintentional abusive practice, which might result in trespassing on the viewer's personal borders in the auditorium.



Transcending the limits between stage and the auditorium not only conceives a spatial interference but also initiates the interaction between the actors and the audience. Sophie Nield refers to this type of theatre as “immersive theatre,” and in immersive performances, stage grows into a shared space of both the audience and the actors (532). It is, in a sense, “inhabited” by the spectators, and “[i]n this, it follows the model of immersion created by museum curators and designers through the 1980s and 1990s, as they increasingly positioned the visitor inside an ‘experience’ rather than at an exhibition” (Nield 532). Interestingly, this shared experience also constitutes a surrounding for each spectator to have an individual experience in Crouch’s theatre. It is also comparable with to visiting an art exhibition. Although the visitors observe the same paintings, each one of them has a unique interpretation, while there is also a shared experience among the visitors. Though the concept of exhibition can be perceived as the audience having an individual experience in an unrestricted environment in some of Crouch’s plays, such as *ENGLAND*, there is an imperceptible line within the space employed as stage. This convoluted interaction and the phenomenon of individual contemplation interwoven in the collectivity of the experience is clarified by Rancière as below:

The collective power shared by spectators does not stem from the fact that they are members of a collective body or from some specific form of interactivity. It is the power each of them has to translate what she perceives in her own way, to link it to the unique intellectual adventure that makes her similar to all the rest in as much as this adventure is not like any other. This shared power of the equality of intelligence links individuals, makes them exchange their intellectual adventures, in so far as it keeps them separate from one another, equally capable of using the power everyone has to plot her own path. (16-17)

As can be understood from the above-given excerpt, the collectivity of the experience is not because there is a collectively-producing, or sympoietic, system in the auditorium. What makes it a shared experience is the equal intellectual competence ascribed to the audience in consequence of the equilibrium between stage and the auditorium. As explained by Rancière, “[i]ntellectual emancipation is the verification of the equality of intelligence. This does not signify the equal value of all manifestations of intelligence, but the self-equality of intelligence in all its manifestations” (10). Based on this, it is plausible to assert that the origin of the equal intelligence in this context depends on the boundaries of the audience members since turning into self-producing entities, becoming a “component” of the play enables them to enhance their prepotency throughout the play.

Therefore, to execute this, it is necessary to make theatre “the place where the passive audience of spectators [are] transformed into its opposite: the active body of a community enacting its living principle” (Rancière 5). This objective can be considered fulfilled in Crouch’s dramatic works in which the collective power and the individual inference appear in a balanced way; even though the viewers’ intellectual emancipation appears as a collective power entitled to them, the experience here is unique for each audience member. The exhibition-like structure of the reformed theatre brings forth some complexities subjected to several criticisms, mostly regarding the increased level of confusion in the spectator’s mind due to the multiplicity of signs, which sometimes leads to extravagance. However, it is also of great importance that the use of multifaceted signs on stage also induces the thought processes of the audience in the auditorium. Therefore, the ambiguous nature of using assorted signs on stage may prompt convoluted situations.

As regards establishing a complex interaction on stage, which initiates the audience’s process of perception, Crouch makes the following explanation in his interview with İlter: “I am interested in it [uncertainty] because uncertainty enables an audience to be open and allows questions to materialise that might not otherwise materialise if there was certainty. This is different to confusion. I try not to confuse” (399). As this sets forth, Crouch believes that there is a subtle line between confusing the audience and stimulating and initiating their process of comprehension on an intellectual level. Thus, instead of perplexing the audience, Crouch utilises signs that can evoke a process of profound contemplation and prevents them from disorientation. However, as Bozer states in relation to the use of the media in postdramatic theatre, “since these [media] elements do not complement each other but exist independently, they do not serve the text either” (17). Even though the employment of the media does not serve the purpose of enriching the text, it enhances the viewer’s contemplation process during the performance. Despite Lehman’s assumption that the use of such media causing uncertainty is “de-dramatization” (49) in the sense that it subverts the theatrical illusion and is of no use for the text, it stimulates the audience to discover various autonomous realities on stage. At the same time, as well as triggering a shared experience among the audience, integration of the media into the play also blurs the line between authorship and spectatorship. Since the image that is conceived by the author and presented to the viewer by means of the

media is left to be interpreted by the spectators, the audience, too, is, in a sense, given the chance of being the author.

Therefore, another subject that can be often encountered in Crouch's plays and a highly remarkable postdramatic theatre device is the media. Concerning the use of the media in the foreground in postdramatic theatre, Lehmann states that

[t]heatre here demonstrates its technical possibilities dissected into individual components. The theatre machinery is clearly visible. The technical workings of the performance are openly exhibited: cables, apparatus, instruments are not shamefully hidden or masked by lighting but integrated like props or almost like actors in their own right. (168-69)

Within this scope, it is conceivable to affirm that the technologies of the modern world have affected the art of theatre immensely and have become a prominent stage apparatus, specifically in postdramatic theatre. Additionally, Crouch employs various media devices to reinforce his plays musically and visually. However, it can be argued that most of the time when Crouch utilises the media to subvert the concept of reality, stage is transformed into a multi-layered simulation. Therefore, Crouch predominantly aims at subverting the theatrical reality rather than enhancing the credibility of the performance by adopting the media. This also raises the viewers' awareness of the fact that they are merely watching a play. Nevertheless, this approach paradoxically renders the play more realistic. It might also be stated that the use of the media compensates for the absence of a unified structure in postdramatic theatre, as mentioned in the case of sympoietic systems, and this problematic structure also concerns the issue of narrativity due to its close connection to audience comprehension. Rachel Fensham explains the fragmentation within the narrative in postdramatic theatre by stating that

[the] theatricality of much postdramatic performance, whether disruptive or flamboyant, relies heavily on interpellation of the audience as a self given over to the progress of events. This subjective focus has implications for both the construction of narrative and the effectiveness of modes of address to the audience. Since the narrative function is less concerned with formal coherence, narrative is broken into fragments, sometimes resistant to interpretation, and includes casual communications or reports on events that may be external to the presented reality. Frequently this story-telling function of postdramatic theatre 'manifests direct contact with the audience,' however, since different rhetorical acts are distributed, sometimes randomly, to people watching, their performance does not unify the audience. (n.p.)

The fragmented and disjointed narrative structure may be puzzling for the audience during the performance since it might impede the process of decoding rendering it more complicated. The importance of enriching the use of the media on stage might be considered a method that partially ameliorates the confusion of the audience, which even enables them to go through a unified and personal comprehension process. As Jürs-Munby asserts the advance in media use on stage is a consequence of living in a “mediatised society” (10), and since theatre is, in a way, a reflection of reality, it is conceivable for contemporary playwrights to incorporate the media into their stages. Regarding how the media adoption on stage influences the audience’s perception, Denis McQuail’s statement about the terminology of Thomas R. Lindlof, which is “interpretive community” as the “study of audience” becomes critical since as McQuail states that “this concept refers to shared outlook and modes of understanding, often arising out of shared social experiences” (19). When the referred “shared social experience” is correlated with Crouch’s use of the media, it can be observed that both the auditory and visual media apparatus on his stage, as well as the exterior spaces which he employs as stage occasionally, stimulate the emergence of a shared experience for the audience. However, this enhanced use of the media may lead to adverse outcomes for the audience due to its exhaustive impact on the viewer’s perception from time to time a result of what Lehman calls the “density of signs” (86), which is quite prevalent in postdramatic theatre. About the usage of signs on stage, Lehmann affirms that “[t]here is either too much or too little. In relation to the time, to the space or to the importance of the matter, the viewer perceives a repletion or conversely a noticeable dilution of signs” (89). On this view, the excessive as well as scant use of signs in postdramatic theatre sometimes disrupts the balance and the circuit for the audience. They are either suffocated by the quantity of the signs or exposed to frivolousness when there is a deficiency of signs, which can become an exhausting factor for the audience.

The use of the auditory and visual media might lay the groundwork for the spectator to conceive the decoded meaning, as well as contributing to the progression of the play. In that sense, it reinforces the authority of the audience allowing them to interpret within the limits of their own perception, not merely the author’s. Therefore, in the actualisation of this concept, the use of the media and the signs are of crucial importance. However,

regarding the transmission and decoding process, intermediality enriches the autopoietic construction on stage. The intermedial quality of his plays therefore is quite functional in Crouch's theatre in two ways: the integration of various media devices generates a sphere for the audience's contemplation by stimulating their perception with the aid of audio-visual media, and also through these apparatuses the conversion of the audience to the author figure is achieved. Concerning this momentous change in relation to the notion of intermediality, Lehmann suggests that

[t]heatre, the art of the event *par excellence*, becomes the paradigm of the aesthetic. It no longer remains the relatively narrow institutional branch that it was but becomes the name for a multi- or intermedially deconstructive artistic practice of the momentary event. Yet it was technology and the separation and division of the senses in media that first called attention to the artistic potential of the decomposition of perception, to what Deleuze called the 'lines of flight' of the 'molecular' particles compared to the 'molar' structure as a whole. (83)

As can be discerned from the excerpt, singularity and the mass phenomena of the contemplation process, similar to autopoietic and sympoietic systems, and this "cognitive import" (Elleström 12) might be suggested as the juncture for the intellectual contemplation of the audience. Based on this, the increasing intermedial orientation in theatre further stimulates the singular and unilateral perception of the spectator, enriching both the complexity of the thought process and the unconscious imagination at the same time. Lars Elleström proposes the terms "'producer's mind' and 'perceiver's mind' to refer to the mental places in which cognitive import appears" (12). During the conveyance of messages, the producer's mind initiates the message to be delivered. However, as the signified changes according to the perceiver, the singularity of the producer's message becomes multiplied the moment the import process begins. The use of the media on stage also manifolds this signifying process as the enhanced stimulation allows the viewer to perceive the message in an autonomous way. Mary Simonson explains the collective consequence of using various media in a work of art by asserting that

[b]y creating space for and highlighting these gaps – these moments that withhold as much as they communicate, and that communicate withholding – artists and performers generate a wealth of new expressive possibilities. These new modes of expression, in turn, promise new affective and perceptual experiences for performers and audiences alike. (5)

By diversifying the modes of communication and the signifying process, the producer's message to the crowd becomes a message to be received individually via such multiplied communication channels. Simonson further emphasises the important aspect of the utilisation of intermediality on stage in terms of its close connection to the perception of the audience as below:

Peter Boenisch notes that intermediality is not just about transmission of messages, but also about activating audiences, inviting them into complex imagined worlds; it is as much a perceptual effect generated in performance as an inherent quality. Perhaps, then, intermediality is most potently generated in performances that challenge—and at times confound—the audience's expectations and understandings of media. (26-27)

Based on Boenisch's assumptions the subtle distinctness between causing confusion in the audience and putting forward uncertainty for them to enhance their cognitive insight is also contingent on the employment of the media, and thus implicitly, intermediality. Technicalities aside, Crouch achieves intermediality by means of merging the art of theatre and elements of the media, and he portrays, through the use of the media, how the authority is granted to the audience by repudiating the dictating image of the author. In that sense, Crouch's intermedial approach both enhances his themes and allows him to reposition his audience. Hence, the way Crouch interweaves postdramatic techniques and intermedial aspects together will be thoroughly discussed and illustrated in the chapters of this thesis.

“Virtualization,” as proposed by Christoph Henke, is another phenomenon that Crouch achieves in granting the authority to his audience. He suggests that what Crouch establishes in his play, specifically in *The Author*, is a “virtual agency” for the audience (77). By means of this virtual agency, Crouch achieves the process of “actualisation” on stage and lays the groundwork for constructing a materialisation on another level. As Gilles Deleuze (1925-1995) contends, “[t]he actualisation of the virtual, on the contrary, always takes place by difference, divergence or differentiation. ... In this sense, actualisation or differentiation is always a genuine creation” (212). Thus, it can be suggested that Crouch creates an altered version of reality on his stage, on which the audience can experience a more individual reality, by producing a multi-layered virtual experience. This merging constitutes a reciprocal actualisation process, since “the

spectators' participatory actions *actualise* the virtual agency granted to them" (Henke 82) through the techniques Crouch employs to intellectually stimulate the audience. Thus, mutual interaction is made possible, and the line between authorship and spectatorship is once again blurred. Accordingly, it is proven that the audience exerts an influence upon the play as much as the author has on the viewer, and as the reciprocal influence of the audience increases, so does their authority. In this case, Henke explains the state of the audience as an agent of "feedback loop" and further indicates that they "may have a genuine impact on the course of performance" (82). This situation can be interpreted as the signifying process in the transformation of theatre from a unilateral to bilateral structure since the message conveyed as a sign is thus not only limited to being from stage to the auditorium but vice versa as well. This conveyance comprises not only cerebral interaction but also corporal presence in the auditorium, which grows in proportion to the audience's activity coefficient. As explained by Elleström, "even though the mind and its cognition are founded on cerebral processes, mental activities are in no way separated from the rest of the body. On the contrary, I subscribe to the idea that the mind is profoundly embodied – formed by experiences of corporeality" (13). Therefore, once the intellectual interaction of the viewers is enhanced, their physical presence also gains recognition, and the audience's activity is increased without their actual participation on stage. White explains this interaction with the following words:

In all of these, the invitation to the audience member to take an active choice-making part in the performance – what Fischer-Lichte calls role reversal – acts as a 'magnifying glass' on the feedback system of performance and their importance within it. More than this, by redistributing power to these audience participants, this technique raises the feedback loop to the level of autopoiesis. (163)

The "feedback loop" discussed by both White and Henke reveals the notion of a reciprocal circle and emphasises that it reinforces the self-producing process alongside the autonomy of the spectators. On the basis of this analogy, aside from the change in the traditional role of spectatorship, a spatial transformation also becomes detectable in the auditorium because autopoietic systems have self-defined spatial borders. Fensham and Henke refer to this change regarding spatial boundaries in theatre, and Fensham explains it by saying: "this means also a critical shift in the structure of spatial relations, since the actors and the audience most often inhabit a 'shared space' which in turn is constituted in

the most palpable sense by proxemics and co-presence” (n.p.). This explanation has parallels with the above-mentioned common space concept of *Sprechraum*, and while it establishes a sphere that expands the boundaries of stage in a way that will include the audience, it also transforms into a shared space for the author as well, restricting his/her personal space in terms of intellectual interference. The exact process of this transmission is explained by Erica Fisher-Lichte:

Spatiality is generated through the movements and perceptions of actors and spectators. While the first strategy focuses on the process through which the autopoietic feedback loop brings forth spatiality, the second directs attention to the affective potential of the circulating energies. Finally, the third strategy engenders spatiality as a blend of real and imagined spaces. It identifies the performative space as a “space between.” (*Transformative Power* 114)

As this explanation suggests, the performativity of stage increases parallel to the spatial activity of the audience, and the interaction between the author/actors and the audience changes radically not only in situational terms but also in terms of spatial conditions. In the augmentation of the performativity in the auditorium, virtualisation plays an important role due to its relevance to enhance the viewers’ cognition. Regarding virtualisation in participatory theatre, Henke places emphasis on the probability of its procuring unpredictability on the side of the audience, which may trigger some problematic situations in turning the spectators into participants, a component of the work “due to the unpredictability of the virtualization” (82-83). However, while applying this, Crouch includes his spectators in the play in such a way that the audience’s involvement is mostly limited to the intellectual level, and this can be said to increase the predictability of the reciprocal interaction. Therefore, besides allowing reality to take precedence in Crouch’s theatre, the spectators’ physical inactivity on stage precludes extrinsic effects that might disrupt or change the progression of the play and confuse the audience.

Virtualisation and consciousness are intertwined with each other since the signs are conveyed to the audience by means of their cognitive abilities and the objective of the virtualised subject is thus achieved successfully. As the understanding of the viewers depends on how they perceive the conveyed messages, perception appears as a crucial experience in Crouch’s plays given his direct interaction with the audience. It may be asserted that what the playwright attaches special importance to is the perception of the



spectator. He seems to consider it even more than his perception as the author since the individual experience is directly linked to how and what the audience perceives throughout the play as well as to the way they interpret it. He generally accomplishes the necessary equilibrium between the performers and the audience by designing a plain stage with minimum properties and by minimising the factors possible to distract or confuse the spectators. Concerning the way Crouch constructs his stage, Bottoms states that

[b]y minimising staging apparatus, and thus allowing the unadorned sites to ‘speak for themselves’ within the context of the playframes he temporarily layers over them, Crouch opens up the possibility for audience members to make circumstantial interpretations of their own. This is part and parcel of his concern to individualise spectatorial response – to authorise his audience. (“Materialising” 448)

So, through the reduction of stage apparatus to a minimum and the enrichment of signs with media devices rather than palpable properties, the spectators’ cognitive and intellectual capacity and, albeit indirectly, their command over the play are enhanced. Therefore, in relation to the notion of spectatorial response on the intellectual level, White writes that “the participant is simultaneously *the performer*, the one who enacts the performance through choice, *the performance* that emerges from their own body *and the audience* as they view it” (161). Consequently, one may state that the phenomenon of perception and the unconscious of the spectator are of crucial importance in Crouch’s theatre in this fluctuating transition between the participant and the performer.

The theory of autosuggestion, proposed by the French pharmacist and psychologist Émile Coué (1857-1926), is one of the most determining influences on Crouch’s perspective on his audience since it focuses on the alternating individual perception. In light of the stated aspects of his writing, Crouch’s plays demonstrate how the subject material itself can replace the author through the audience’s active contribution to the play on stage, and the spectators can deconstruct or reshape the play as self-producing components. To comprehend how Crouch implements the notion of autosuggestion on his stage, it is critical to examine Coué’s definition of suggestion, which is “the act of imposing an idea on the brain of another” (9). Even though this explanation seems to imply a kind of passivity attributed to the audience, autosuggestion can be claimed to set forth almost the opposite because “[s]uggestion does not indeed exist by itself. It does not and cannot exist

except on the sine qua non-condition of transforming itself into autosuggestion in the subject. This latter word may be defined as the implanting of an idea in oneself by oneself' (Coué 9). Thus, as autosuggestion is the implementation that is performed by the self, this technique in a way renders the spectator more authoritative concerning the notion of cognition. This interaction between the audience and the author can be further analysed within the scope of the way the comprehension process takes place in the auditorium. White elaborates on the idea of self-implementation as below:

The experience of perceiving and accepting an invitation is, at basis, an experience of self-agency, but it will often contain moments when an intuition occurs that a route has been pre-planned for us, that our actions have been pre-conceived. At moments like this self-agency is inflected with something different, with a feeling that it is diluted, an intentionality based on an awareness of another's influence in shaping our actions. (185)

When the author initiates the signifying process for the viewers, it is the perception of the audience that enables them to perceive the suggested idea through both linguistic and visual receptors. While doing so, they shape the signs unconsciously in accordance with their own perception as a result of the interference of the unconscious with the conscience. Therefore, it is also crucial to realise the function of the unconscious to control the process of autosuggestion. Within this context, Coué draws a strong connection between the unconscious and autosuggestion. He states that

as it is the unconscious that is responsible for the functioning of all our organs but the intermediary of the brain, a result is produced which may seem rather paradoxical to you: that is, if it believes that a certain organ functions well or ill or that we feel such and such an impression, the organ in question does indeed function well or ill, or we do feel that impression. (4-5)

In Coué's mind, the unconscious is such a strong mechanism that its effect is explained through how it affects the bodily organs. In Crouch's theatre, the unconscious bears great significance in terms of the audience as well, almost as if their perception is responsible for the functioning of the theatre. Hence, it is plausible to state that Crouch makes use of theatre as an organ that interferes with the subconscious of the receiver or perceiver. However, while doing this, instead of forcing on his own thoughts, he allows the audience to experience autosuggestion by activating their own unconscious.

Coué emphasises that in the functioning of autosuggestion the most effective and significant device is the imagination. Accordingly, the techniques Crouch employs on his stage are mostly designed to stimulate the audience's imagination. However, the most significant result of Crouch's employment of autosuggestion is triggering the spectators' imagination in a peculiar way so that it functions as an individual perception rather than a collective one. Consequently, he enables them to feel unfettered during this process instead of experiencing a thought process dictated and limited by someone else. Coué explains the conflict between the imagination and will by asserting that "we who are so proud of our will, who believe that we are free to act as we like, are in reality nothing but wretched puppets of which our imagination holds all the strings. We only cease to be puppets when we have learned to guide our imagination" (8). Within this scope, Crouch guides the audience to have control over their own consciousness by using this phenomenon of autosuggestion effectively and equalising the interference between the auditorium and stage on an intellectual level.

More importantly, while doing this, Crouch also criticises and questions the above-mentioned problematic situation of being the puppets of the author, which allows the imagination to function only within the limits of the written and staged. Therefore, Crouch creates a space where his audience is encouraged to realise the power of the imagination, and he further demonstrates how autosuggestion can tamper with the perception of the individual. Most importantly, he provides them with a space in which they can comprehend their unconscious and be liberated from being puppets. Within this scope, Roland Barthes's (1915-1980) theory "the death of the author" can be discussed in relation to Crouch's theatre. Barthes criticises limiting the meaning of a work only to its producer by stating, "as if it were always in the end, through the more or less transparent allegory of the fiction, the voice of a single person, the author 'confiding' in us" (143). Thus, he foregrounds the idea that what a work signifies is not limited to what the author suggested; the perception of the receiver should also be counted. Therefore, he propounds this need for the "desacrilization of the image of the Author" (144). This is indeed what Crouch foregrounds while writing and staging his plays. By "desacralising" himself as the author, he manifests how the perception of the audience can influence what the author has produced.

Although Barthes lays emphasis on this phenomenon from the perspective of the reader and the novel writer, it also applies to the ideology that Crouch highlights. Barthes explains the development of this situation as follows:

Classic criticism has never paid any attention to the reader; for it, the writer is the only person in literature. We are now beginning to let ourselves be fooled no longer by the arrogant antiphrastical recriminations of good society in favour of the very thing it sets aside, ignores, smothers, or destroys; we know that to give writing its future, it is necessary to overthrow the myth: *the birth of the reader* must be at the cost of *the death of the Author*. (148, italics mine)

Considering Barthes's statements, it can be asserted that what gives meaning to the text lies in the totality of the meanings occurring in the reader's mind. Therefore, if this theory is to be applied to the way Crouch's plays interfere with the spectators' perception, what constitutes the meaning of the play is what the audience comprehends more than what the author has written. In this sense, how Crouch "redefines" theatre gains crucial importance. As Ilter suggests, "[i]n essence, Crouch redefines 'the subject of theatre [as] what happens in the audience; and the object of theater [as] what happens on the stage'" (395). Thus, the flow of conveyance shifts from the auditorium to stage, instead of vice versa, rendering the audience the transmitter source and stage the recipient space. As a result of this alteration, the emancipation of the audience is achieved as the authoritative components in the theatre. As Rancière puts forward,

[e]mancipation begins when we challenge the opposition between viewing and acting; when we understand that the self-evident facts that structure the relations between saying, seeing and doing themselves belong to the structure of domination and subjection. It begins when we understand that viewing is also an action that confirms or transforms this distribution of positions. ... She participates in the performance by refashioning it in her own way – by drawing back, for example, from the vital energy that it is supposed to transmit in order to make it a pure image and associate this image with a story which she has read or dreamt, experienced or invented. They are thus both distant spectators and active interpreters of the spectacle offered to them. (13)

Crouch revises the objective of the audience by activating the dormant function and value of viewing, rendering them authoritative components capable of defining their own personal spaces as "distant spectators" and modifying the proposed message as "active interpreters." The writer strikes a balance between the two binaries of being passive, or distant, and active successfully by respecting the audience's personal space in the

auditorium and encouraging them to transcend beyond the boundaries imposed by the author on an intellectual level. However, as mentioned above, with postdramatic theatre, not only spectatorship as a concept but also stage as a space is revised, and the concept of emancipation is thus problematised regarding spatial and cognitive aspects.

For this reason, how Crouch prioritises the audience's perception is addressed extensively within the context of his plays *My Arm*, *An Oak Tree*, and *ENGLAND* in the following chapters of this thesis. In the first chapter, *My Arm* is analysed within the scope of representation, and how Crouch maximises the impact of the minimised stage on his audience is scrutinised by focusing on the techniques Crouch uses such as intermediality, non-coincidental portrayal and spatial/temporal layers. Also, the chapter highlights the idea that by performing the play through the objects collected from the audience, Crouch manifests the critical role of the audience in his theatre. The second chapter analyses *An Oak Tree* by predominantly focusing on Émile Coué's theory of autosuggestion regarding Crouch's implementation of the notion of transformation. It is discussed that by means of self-hypnosis Crouch encourages his audience to discover their own illusions so that they can create their own stories. As for the third chapter, the focus of which is *ENGLAND*, it argues that by transforming the audience into a character in the story, the audience experiences the dynamism between the agency of the actor and the spectators. It is expressed that by giving the spectators the power to translate what the author says, Crouch puts forward the authorship of the audience rather than himself as the writer of the play. Consequently, in all three plays, the transition between the concepts of authorship and authority will be scrutinised by mainly concentrating on to what extent it appears as a problematised and ambiguous phenomenon and using the theories of emancipation, death of the author and autosuggestion.

**CHAPTER I:**

**REPRESENTATION AS AN AGENT FOR SELF-CREATION IN**

***MY ARM***

Art, it is said, is not a mirror, but a hammer: it does not reflect, it shapes.

Leon Trotsky

Different people will understand the same thing in a different way.

Sol LeWitt

*My Arm* (2003), being the first play written by Crouch, marks the writer's transformation from an actor to a withstanding theatre-maker<sup>1</sup>. Though Crouch proceeds his acting career in his own plays, the way he performs on stage is disparate from his preceding experiences in their lacking figurativeness, which is a deliberate omission. Crouch's primary objective is not to convince the audience through the verisimilitude of the acting by employing an authentic exhibition, but to encourage them to contemplate by inducing the viewer to find out their own realities according to their own perception. Ondřej Pilný articulates Crouch's distinctive portrayal while demarcating the line between realism and reality on stage, his "absolute refusal of illusive theatre" (131) by saying that "his work has been stripping bare the fundamentals of theatre and articulating a rejection of verisimilitude in favour of an active employment of the spectators' imagination" (131-32). Through this liberating positioning, the play, "has the potential to allow dissensus, rather than to enforce consensus" (White 24). At that point, the concept of authority comes to the fore as, by constructing the suitable base for his viewer to function autonomously through contemplation, Crouch constitutes an equilibrium of authority. This approach can be analysed in a multifaceted way in his initial play, *My Arm*<sup>2</sup>. Thus, this chapter aims to

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<sup>1</sup>Jack Belloli contends that "his [Crouch's] sustained commitment to collaboration and his preference for describing himself as a theatre-maker rather than a playwright means that this association is too neat in his case" (14). Therefore, even this description shows that the writer does not see himself as the sole creator or authority figure of his work.

<sup>2</sup> The play was first staged at the Traverse Theatre at the Edinburgh Festival 2003.

analyse *My Arm* by primarily focusing on the notion of representation to discuss Crouch's approaches in authorising his spectators and activating the viewers' imagination.

The play revolves around the life of a boy who decides to hold his arm above his head when 10 years old and perpetuates this bizarre act for the rest of his life, even after it becomes a life-threatening situation. This preposterous behaviour that the writer construes as fecklessness can be claimed to evolve from the character's lack of confidence, as he unwittingly seeks to restore his faith by pushing the limits of his body. Surrounded by deprecating people in his circle, the character finds a way to get people's attention by being eccentric. Crouch explains the motivation behind this act by saying that "[t]he boy does it subconsciously. Does not have a rationale. Need to be recognised as putting hand up is a very universal gesture for recognition. It means 'See me'" ("Athens" 00:03:20 – 28). Therefore, being referred to as "the boy with the arm" (*My Arm* 32) starts to feel like an achievement the more he is noticed by the people around him. As the protagonist's health begins to deteriorate due to the complications developing in his arm, his value not as a human being but as an art object commences to rise proportionally and quite ironically. Crouch adverts to various facets of artistic approaches by means of the boy's brother, Anthony, who becomes an art student but fails to monetise it, and their friend, Simon, who pretends to be an art student and contrives to make a fortune as an "artist." This ironic reverse turn in Anthony and Simon's occupation is significant regarding Crouch's emphasis on the economic and representational meaning attributed to artists and art. The arm of the boy is the embodiment of this subject matter containing the art and the artist within.

*My Arm* opens with the performer collecting various objects from the audience pinpointing that they "are in no way representational" (*My Arm* 24). In the note part provided to the audience, Crouch remarks that "*My Arm* is partly about giving ordinary things extraordinary significance" (*My Arm* 24). By this, he accentuates the viewer's tendency to ascribe meaning to the objects collected from them. Also, the play itself revolves around the arm to which "extraordinary significance" is given by the end of the play. Therefore, *My Arm*, with both its technical qualities and story, can be said to be based on the above notion Crouch highlights. The author adverts to the narration he employs during the performance in an interview with Aleks Sierz by saying that "*My Arm*

is really a very traditional piece of work, it's a storytelling piece. I wander on the stage, usually from the audience as much as possible, and I tell an autobiographical tale, in the first person, about me living with one arm above my head until I die" (65). The play's enunciation as an autobiographical one causes the audience to suppose that the performer, Crouch, is narrating his authentic life story. As İlter points out, "[t]he shared characteristics between Crouch and the fictional character coincide with his first-person narrative to lead many in the audience to assume that Crouch is telling an autobiographical story" (396). Creating such an impression even before the beginning of the performance, Crouch unveils his objective to produce an environment for the spectator to construct meaning autonomously. While the similitudes between Crouch and the fictional character induce the spectator to surmise the play as an autobiographical one, the distinct features enhance the degree of uncertainty felt by the audience. İlter highlights this deliberate uncertainty by saying, "[t]his [the audience's assumption that the story is an autobiographical one] is despite the fact that Crouch never raises his own arm above his head. He eventually dissolves the audience's uncertainty by showing off a finger that has supposedly been amputated" (396). While "dissolving" the uncertainty caused by the issue of categorisation, the presence of the finger initiates a new type of ambiguity; as the viewers fathom the fact that the story is not autobiographical, they are dragged into a suspicion about the reliability of the narration, which Crouch explains as below:

Obviously my finger has, of course, not been removed. And it might be for some, or for many who do not know my work or do not know me, it might be the first time they understand the story might not be true. And this is a quintessential moment of theatre for me. This is the moment of theatre which is a transformation that has a physical container that looks nothing like the thing it says it represents. In this playful nature it's actually a finger representing a non-finger, which is as pure as you can come, almost, in that relationship. ("Navigating" 66)

In this respect, the writer delves into the layers of representation with miscellaneous conduct, thereby dealing with not only the transformed representations of the existing articles but also the transformation from absence to presence in relation to the phenomenon of representation. Being a "quintessential" moment for him, one of the most compelling aspects of such a transformation is about how this shift is achieved on the auditorium's end, instead of taking place on stage. In relation to achieving representation through the non-existent, aside from the finger, there is also a scar on the back of the



protagonist that forms after the boy goes through an operation because of a ruptured spleen. To show this to the audience, “[t]he performer lifts up their shirt to show their back” (*My Arm* 43). For all that the performer does not have a scar on his back, the audience leans forward with the intention of seeing it there (Crouch, “Navigating” 66). As expected, the absence of the alleged scar on the performer’s back also prevents the audience from getting confused by reminding them that although the play is propounded as an autobiographical one, it is not so. However, these contradictions intensify the uncertainty to a particular level, leading the audience to feel the need to consult their own rationale to be able to figure out the story as also highlighted by Helen Iball:

[W]hen confronted by the evidence that Crouch’s finger has not been amputated, there may be a shadow of doubt. The distancing techniques of *gestus* when combined with confessional/autobiographical performance is unsettling in a particular way, given this uncertainty over whether the actors are speaking about themselves: the status of the stories they tell disturbed by the tone of reported action with its often sunny and reassuring facial expressions and usually calm delivery. This meeting of autobiographical performance and *gestus* interrupts audience expectations. It is a key means by which empathy is sidestepped. ‘Tim’s’ confession, if we recognise that it is not Tim’s confession, is the kindling of our shame. (440)

The specific type of shame Iball mentions above looms out of a sense of responsibility based on “the informed or engaged understanding” of the actor and the spectator (Mumford 64). This creates uncertainty among the spectators as the narrated feelings are endorsed disparately from their expectations. In this regard, Iball calls attention to Crouch’s inspiration from Brecht’s concept of empathy (440), which Mumford explains as the “socially critical actor” that emerges “when the epic spectator and actor have an emotional response that is diametrically opposed to that of the character” (65). Crouch, too, alienates the performers from emotions; however, while doing this, he estranges the performers from much of the action as well. By rendering his audience more responsible over the action taking place on stage, Crouch expects his audience to be more active, and the missing scar on the performer’s back, the presence of the finger that is allegedly cut off and most importantly, the performer’s not raising his arm are significant indicators of this objective. Crouch’s playfulness concerning the discrepancy between what is orally articulated and physically performed initiates the audience’s agency of contemplation as they are supposed to deconstruct the signified, instead of passively observing the action on stage. Therefore, one may assume that Crouch attempts to permute the inactivity in

the auditorium through the non-enacted act of the performer. In one of his keynotes, the writer explains that he is “interested in the distance between what we say something is and what it actually is” (“Keynote” 4/9 00:02:19 – 25). When the arm is enunciated to be raised but not physically raised, or the supposedly amputated finger is revealed, it is not only about the distance between the enunciated and the demonstrated but also the distance between the signified and the perceived. Thus, the distance resulting from the similar/distinctive features and the actions between the performer and the boy has a direct influence on the spectators regarding the distance between the signified and the received message. Creating such a distance intentionally, Crouch renders his viewer more active and authoritative in the creation of meaning as what really matters in *My Arm* is what and how the audience perceives the action. Though the main source of action is not usually the spectator in Crouch’s theatre, it is adopted as an instrument for it to be utilised in the auditorium. To elucidate with the writer’s own words, when he (as a performer) lifts his shirt and reveals the non-existing scar, “[t]he audience generates a scar on his back” (“Role” 00:05:24 – 26). With the power to produce something non-existent, he emphasises the audience’s equality in creating. Therefore, just like how the authentic purposes of the collected objects are obfuscated, the viewer witnesses the alteration in the meaning of the autobiographical. To be more specific, as no object serves its main purpose, the autobiographical naming of the story outstrips its main objective and prompts the audience to question the categorisation of the play. Hence, it can be suggested that the minute the play opens, the audience is triggered to “make the journey themselves” (“Keynote” 4/9 00:04:04 – 06). The journey begins when the spectator starts to question what kind of play they are watching, and this scepticism prevails throughout the play.

To determine what type of play *My Arm* is some of its technical aspects can be analysed within the scope of postdramatic theatre; however, it is important to note that the play is not to be directly categorised as a postdramatic work, as emphasised by İlter: “one of the most intriguing aspects of Crouch’s theatre is that it does not easily fit into either ‘dramatic’ or ‘postdramatic theatre’ categories” (396). The objects used on stage are minimised as much as possible, which facilitates the objects collected from the audience to be centralised throughout the performance. While the big screen located at the back of the stage is being utilised to show some clips related to the boy’s early childhood

memories, a small television is connected to a camera through which the spectators see the details shown by the performer. There is also a table onto which the objects collected from the spectators are discernibly placed, along with a doll which represents the boy. The minimal stage equipment allows more room for the audience to observe and interpret in line with their own way of perception. The scarcity of the props conversely indicates the rich potential of the room for the viewers' imagination.

Another significant postdramatic technique through which Crouch broadens the intellectual space for his viewer is the use of silence. He says: "For that moment, we have to go to the Great Silence of 1973. *A silence far longer than is bearable*" (*My Arm* 28), also expounding the rationale behind this long break:

In my work, I am trying to minimise the division between the stage and the audience. Whilst the performer is in a prominent and active performance 'mode', there is a clear status division. When that prominence is reduced, when physical transformation is limited, I hope that this status division somewhat flattens out and that the relationship becomes more democratic. I don't time the silence in *My Arm* – it was once five and a half minutes in Ireland. When I wrote the stage direction for that moment, I was excited that I should be able to allow audience members to look out of that silence and not feel that I have to do anything. I think it is OK for people to sit in silence for a few minutes. Also, there are expectations when you go to the theatre that the performers should be working very hard for your entertainment; I want to question this. This theme of actors' agency versus audience agency is present in all my work. (399)

Calling attention to the word "democratic," through the interactional distance between stage and the auditorium, Crouch divulges his intention to create equilibrium in theatre, similar to what Jacques Rancière suggests in *The Emancipated Spectator*: "equally capable of using the power everyone has to plot her own path" (16). By minimising this "active performance mode," he enhances the viewer's intellectual activity. Correspondingly, the performer's silence in *My Arm* alludes to the elevated voice of the audience in the sense that the minimisation of representation on stage maximises the intellectual authoring in the auditorium. Consequently, the division between the agencies of the actors and the audience appears as a dominant notion regarding the authority granted to the spectator even through subtle indicators such as the silence of the performer.

The doll placed on the table is noteworthy as the performer utilises it as an instrument to enact the action: “[t]he performer starts to pant heavily, moving the doll in time to the breath” (*My Arm* 26). Such gesticulation through the doll, instead of acting of the performer, implies that the centre of action, along with the process of meaning transfer, has been altered, as the performer is not at the centre of it but is rather a contributor to its continuation and deliverance to the spectator. The doll’s corresponding enacting to the narrative also brings forward disparate aspects to the play concerning the phenomenon of representation. This multi-layered issue of representation may raise questions such as: Does the performer enact the doll? Or, does the doll embody the protagonist narrated by the performer? Furthermore, the doll problematises the concept of attribution on another level, as when the boy is given a doll by Mrs Williams, a children’s psychiatrist, (*My Arm* 32), a completely random object is utilised while the actual doll that represents the boy remains on the table: “She gave me a small doll to keep – An object is held up where it can ‘see’ the performer” (*My Arm* 32). Such an awkward and ironic employment shows that not only are the collected objects nullified from their original meanings, but also the permanently used doll, representing the boy, has no function as a doll. Through this many-layered chain of representation, as expressed in the introduction of the present study, Crouch keeps from inducing confusion and aims to ensure a convenient space for contemplation in which the audience would determine the boundaries themselves, rather than constructing a definitive and demarcated space. Hence, the subject matter of representation comes forth as a momentous issue in *My Arm*.

As a theatre-maker, Crouch is not interested in what the objects represent intrinsically. Instead, what really matters for him is what the audience associates with the objects and, even more importantly, how the process of association functions for each spectator in the auditorium. Therefore, the phenomenon of representation bears a duality in its semantic relevance to the thematic framework: first, the assertion of authority endowed to the audience by their individual interpretation of objects and, secondly, the dangerous consequences of meaning attribution in art are dealt with in the play. Crouch touches on both the former and the latter in the introduction part: “There is a measured, haphazard quality to how these objects are given aesthetic significance by the events with which they become involved” (*My Arm* 24). As the protagonist’s arm gains an artistic value

while losing its intrinsic significance and original function along with its aesthetic integrity, the play explores the issues of exceeding ethical limits by means of the defiled function of the arm due to its objectification as an art object. For this reason, the arm itself develops into an effective symbol associated with the theme of representation, almost like a manifestation of the commodification of art. Analogous to the objects collected from the audience, according to Crouch, the arm “is given aesthetic significance by the events with which it becomes involved” (*My Arm* 24). *My Arm*, therefore, presents a multi-layered ramification about the representation of ethical situations concerning art mainly focusing on the exploitation of the art object that enhances its aesthetic significance while reducing the protagonist’s value as a human being.

While the doll’s arm remains above its head until the end of the play, Crouch does not attempt to raise his arm as narrated once. The only time the performer uses his arm is when he demonstrates Anthony’s arm: “This is Anthony’s hand. The hand of the performer” (*My Arm* 27). Yet in order not to confuse the audience with the performer’s demonstration of Anthony, for the viewer not to reach the opinion that the performer is enacting the brother, Anthony is also assigned an object subsequently, along with the other characters. The text reads: “And throughout this period Anthony–Anthony object” (*My Arm* 34). This situation propounds that the arbitrariness in the play is not limited to the objects; the performer almost has equal meaning and function as the objects collected from the audience. Likewise, the performer’s consistent use of “I” language, that is internal language, even when showing their arm as Anthony’s, generates a feeling of uncertainty for the spectators. As mentioned in the introduction, while restraining from causing confusion, Crouch finds uncertainty useful in triggering the spectators’ contemplation. Therefore, he makes use of the notion of representation to create uncertainty on so many levels comprising the doll, the performer and the objects intertwined with one another in terms of the events/things and the characters they represent. As also highlighted by Pilný, “[i]t is clear that while the play is based on a coherent, chronologically ordered narrative, ... it raises a complex set of questions about the nature of theatrical representation” (134). Based on this, it can be inferred that the consistency of the narrative structure is eventually convoluted through the deliberate discrepancies between the narrated and the narrator. The use of “I” language and the fact

that the protagonist is not ascribed a name enhance the complexity of the questions about “theatrical representation.”

Analogously, the issue of lifting the arm creates an interesting depth regarding enacting and narration as Crouch recounts, making some of the audience members ask questions about whether it is difficult to keep the arm overhead throughout the performance. This crux is explained by Bottoms in the introduction part: “[y]et the performer himself never raises his arm above his head—so that a nagging question arises over the relationship between what is described and what is seen” (13). This dichotomy is not merely about the narrated and the demonstrated; what is perceived is also inclusive of Bottoms’s explanation. The deliberate lack in the gesticulation of the arm is one of the subtle indicators in the play that the ideas are not presented to the audience as readymade concepts; Crouch exhorts his spectators to question the displayed and the uncharted simultaneously. He explains his rationale by saying that “the audience is where the action should be in a theatre piece, not in the actors, but in the audience. Not in the art, but in the spectator. Not on the painting but in the viewer; the art should be a trigger for the viewer” (“Athens” 00:09:13 – 30). In other words, Crouch prioritises thinking as the prime action on stage and therefore aspires to trigger the spectators through such indicators as well as through the non-enacted.

As regards the viewer’s confusion about the performer’s arm, the initial source of autosuggestion bears great importance. Is it because the spectator associates the doll with the performer or because the performer tells a story about keeping his arm up, and thus the audience perceives the performer’s arm as if it is raised? Is it because the audience is accustomed to the precise match between what is told and what is shown hitherto, so they perceive the arm as if it is in the air? Although stage does not belong to the viewer physically, it is theirs in the cognitive sphere. In this context, the title reflects the cornerstone of the play. The ambiguity about whether the title “My Arm” is referring to Crouch’s/the performer’s arm or the arm of the fictional boy whose biographical narration is presented also functions as a trigger for the audience. The possessive “my” in the title creates such ambivalence and thus is highly functional in enriching the cogitation among the audience. Also, the fact that the doll’s arm remains lifted while the performer does not gesticulate it brings forth profoundness in relation to another crucial subject in

Crouch's theatre, that is to say acting as a mere device "for delivering the text" ("Role" 00:02:51 – 52). Considering that only the doll's arm is raised up and the title is not "the arm" but "my arm," the performer on stage remains as a transmitter of the signs for the viewer to deconstruct.

Such a role reversal suggests that the unanimated objects in the play are not the mere tools for the message to be transmitted. Actors/performers also function as conveyors. Thus, by means of this reduction in the role of the acting, the auditorium and stage converge by "creating a genuine relationship between the audience and the performer" ("Keynote" 3/9 00:04:49 –50). Consequently, the integral parts in the play like the performer's not raising his arm and showing the non-existing injuries are reminders for the audience of their own improved authority as such indicators contribute to the spectator's transformation from passive observers to active thinkers. As a result, the audience obliquely discerns that they can indeed question the performer and what is demonstrated. Instead of obliging the spectators to believe in the false realism by staying away from mimetic representation and naturalism, Crouch broadens the confines of stage, and the intellectual connection between the auditorium and stage is thus strengthened.

During the scenes where the story is narrated through the random implementation of the objects and photographs collected from the audience, the viewer is constantly reminded that pre-defined meanings are attributed to the objects as inconsequential results emerge with quite random combinations. As the objects collected before the beginning of the play belong to the audience, it is left to them to deconstruct the signs that are spoken and displayed. The text is fixed, and, in this sense, regarding the text-based qualities, the dramatic structure is preserved. However, there is also the suggestion that the dynamism resulting from the diversity of the objects provided by the ever-changing audience produces altered associations and results, that is to say to the spectator per se. Therefore, while the constancy of the text is designed to be stabilised, the performance is based on flexible combinations formed with what the viewer provides. As a result, the concepts of authorship and authority appear as intertwined and rather equal as it is the viewers who generate the main course of the play inadvertently. In this context, unlike immersive theatre and most performance plays, what matters in Crouch's theatre is not the shift in

the function of the audience from observing to acting but the equilibrium in the construction and actualisation of the written.

In implementing such equalised dynamism, spectators are not encouraged to take part physically on stage. However, circumstances that might impede and specify their intellectual interactions are minimised as much as possible. To elucidate, even when the performer alludes to the emotional fluctuations the boy is experiencing, the performer does not attempt to convey the emotions to the viewer physically. The boy's sobbing is narrated but not enacted because an attempted realism would lead the audience to a certain and demarcated emotion. In fact, the performer acts as a mediator between the narrated and the demonstrated by expecting them to piece the conveyed message together autonomously. While conveying the text, which is fixed in technical and dramatic terms but at the same time boundless in its capacity to enhance contemplation, the performer does not attempt to drag the spectator into any kind of pre-defined sensation.

As the writer mentions in various media, Émile Coué's (1857-1926) theory of autosuggestion is prevalent in Crouch's plays, notably in *An Oak Tree*. Nevertheless, *My Arm*, too, is closely connected with the theory of autosuggestion concerning the dichotomy between what the performer demonstrates and what the viewer perceives. To begin with the definition of autosuggestion, Coué basically defines it as "an instrument that we possess at birth, and in this instrument, or rather in this force, resides a marvellous and incalculable power, which according to circumstances produces the best or the worst results" (3). As can be discerned from this explanation, autosuggestion is an innately existing mechanism, which has a powerful effect on the way people perceive and interpret subjects. Such a force, autosuggestion, can be associated with how the audience perceives what the author has created on stage. Therefore, Crouch's attempt to trigger the viewer's imagination can be analysed within the scope of that mechanism which is directly related to consciousness. As for consciousness, Coué demarcates the self into two by asserting that "two absolutely distinct selves exist within us. Both are intelligent, but while one is conscious the other is unconscious" (3). In light of the given statement, one can assume that it is mostly the unconscious self that Crouch tackles in his plays. In order to comprehend the way autosuggestion functions in Crouch's theatre, it is essential to



understand the concept regarding the connection between suggestion and autosuggestion as described by Coué:

What then is suggestion? It may be defined as ‘the act of imposing an idea on the brain of another.’ Does this action really exist? Properly speaking, no. Suggestion does not indeed exist by itself. It does not and cannot exist except on the sine qua non condition of transforming itself into autosuggestion in the subject. This latter word may be defined as ‘the implanting of an idea in oneself by oneself.’ (9)

As can be discerned from this definition, inasmuch as suggestion cannot prevail on its own, during this process, suggestion alternates with autosuggestion, but not the vice versa. Regardless of the origin of the sign, the implementation of an idea is achieved based on self-perception because, as Sol LeWitt contends, “[d]ifferent people will understand the same thing in a different way” (370). In *My Arm*, in the scene where the performer mentions visiting Mrs. Williams, she is randomly assigned an article provided by the spectator: “The performer writes the words ‘Mrs Williams’ on a card and places an object next to it” (*My Arm* 32). As the object next to it changes each time, whichever article is provided by the spectator and stands next to the placard becomes Williams. Thus, even a card is sufficient for the audience to associate an object with Williams, but in each performance different objects will turn out to be the same character, in a different way. When the viewer’s imagination is taken into account, each group of the audience will perceive “the same thing in a different way” both on collective and individual levels. While the performance is conducted the same way, these technicalities based on the articles diversify the process depending upon the spectator’s personal contribution. Even though a specific concept is a unilateral notion, it branches out into a myriad of results, eliciting a quasi-rhizomatic structure. Crouch, therefore, is willing to multiply the branches, so to speak, reaching from stage to the auditorium as well as constructing a reciprocally functioning environment of contemplation. Thus, the phenomenon of autosuggestion can be analysed within the scope of the relationship between the audience and the author.

The viewer modifies the messages unconsciously in consonance with their personal judgment. As pointed out by Rancière, “[t]here is the distance between artist and spectator, but there is also the distance inherent in the performance itself, in so far as it subsists, as a spectacle, an autonomous thing, between the idea of the artist and the

sensation or comprehension of the spectator” (14). Therefore, only through the autosuggestion of the spectator can the suggestion of an author/playwright be rendered valuable. In this regard, the audience assumes that Crouch, as the performer, also raises his arm while he does not even attempt to do so, unconsciously associating the narrated with the demonstrated. The viewer’s imagination completes itself automatically by means of Crouch’s suggestion as he implements the idea that his arm is lifted through words, albeit not through action. Even though this is similar to how any kind of transmission of idea works, what makes autosuggestion specifically important in Crouch’s theatre is that he thrives on making the audience aware of this process and mechanism. This is the reason why the writer favours the theory of autosuggestion and aims to create an environment in which the spectators “implants an idea in oneself by oneself” (Coué 9). Furthermore, the audience becomes conscious of this unconscious and automatic process. Crouch remarks that “[t]he boy’s action is more meaningful to others than it is to himself. His arm becomes the ultimate inanimate object onto which other people project their own symbols and meanings” (qtd. in Freshwater 172). Therefore, the arm manifests the theory of autosuggestion both inside and outside of the play, embodying the fictional characters and the real audience. By this, the collected objects reach significance as the arm loses its original depiction while achieving numerous unusual contexts through the implementation of the fictional and the physical individuals simultaneously. The objects collected from the audience also lose their original substances without the attribution of a new meaning.

The objects utilised on stage are of great importance not in terms of their tangible existence but of their functional complexities since the writer’s main aim is apparently to propound that their function lies in the act of eluding their utilities, which is only possible through the use of imagination. Thus, in the light of this, it can be stated that what the collected objects stand for in Crouch’s play is almost oxymoronic. As Crouch asserted during his interview with Ilter, his intention is not to “try to find a feminine object to ‘be’ my mother or a traditionally masculine object to ‘be’ my father because that’s not the point” (401). Although this act of meaning reduction can also be analysed within the scope of the gender-bending idea, which Crouch uses as a tool in most of his plays, the diminution here is in fact related to the writer’s expectation from his spectators to deploy

their own imagination since he always “prioritise[s] thinking in the theatre” (“Keynote” 2/9 00:05:33 – 35). With such a motivation, what Crouch centralises as the core notion in *My Arm* is how we forget that the audience can perceive the idea that the performing actor is representing something else (“Keynote” 4/9 00:03:45 – 55), and by judging such disdainful patterns he also criticises that “we spend a lot of time trying to make the thing we say it is look like the thing we say it is” (“Keynote” 4/9 00:03:48 – 51). With the purpose of accentuating the viewer’s unexplored capacity, Crouch synchs the random objects/photos with characters. By doing so, he drives his viewer to desist from passivity in terms of mental inactivity, and through the discrepancies between the demonstrated and the narrated he obliquely leaves the stage to his audience, not in a corporal but in an intellectual sense. The reason behind such an attempt is explained by İlter: “Crouch’s theatre aims to undermine those restrictive forms of dramatic representation that rob spectators of intellectual and emotional agency, by attempting to do all the work for them” (398). Believing that a formerly constructed and demarcated space can limit the spectator’s reasoning process, Crouch strives to form an emancipating space through the unfixed as David Lane notes:

What Crouch introduces to the playwright is the option of letting go, to stop providing answers and let the audience’s imagination meander through a sudden lack of form. It introduces unpredictability, the random sitting side-by-side with the crafted and structured, and the playwright not necessarily having to be in complete control of the work’s content. Our use of the word ‘form’ also needs adjusting here: formlessness, shown here in the long absence of a performer or any spoken text on stage, becomes part of the play’s organizing structure. This desire for openness can be aligned tightly with the dramaturg’s role, maintaining an awareness of theatre as a process, ‘open to disruption through both rehearsal and performance’ ... By fixing everything, we remove the risk, and by removing the risk, we negate the play text’s relationship with the anticipated live performance. (133)

Therefore, in *My Arm*, the semantic significance of the objects collected from the audience lies in the technical significance they bear per se, instead of their representative value. The play is construed with the contribution of the audience, and in this way, the objects are detached from their real meanings, highlighting the notion of representation once again. Consequently, the objects articulate the spectator’s presence in the auditorium, and regarding this, a kind of situation which prioritises perception over matter can be said to perpetuate. As explained by İlter, “[i]t is one notion of conceptual art; thus, by saying that something is something, the transformation is created—it is got away with”

(404). The transformation in question is not a physical, palpable one. It articulates the importance of autosuggestion by showing that the power of imagination is sufficient to transform something into something else. Conjointly with the subject matter emphasised by İlter, the phrase “got away with” is of utmost importance concerning the theme of art. Towards the end of the performance, the performer writes down “ART IS ANYTHING YOU CAN GET AWAY WITH” (*My Arm* 37) on a placard and places it on the TV so that the audience can keep it in sight until the play ends. Crouch criticises how art occasionally outstrips the ethical confines, as it can easily “get away with” being a piece of art. Not only the boy is transformed into an object, diminishing his value as a human being but he also starts to be regarded as a piece of art with the arm which is impaired and functionless.

Furthermore, Crouch’s deliberate placement of the placard calls to mind the notion of transformation. Nevertheless, the transformation in question is not materialised within the story only; it occurs on stage in the here and now as well. With the active participation of the spectators the author’s ideas are being transformed into a work of art during the process of transformation concerning perception. Pilný draws attention to this significant process by saying that “[g]iven the aesthetically unorthodox nature of *My Arm*, the sentence becomes clearly self-referential, too, questioning the play as a work of art; this is made explicit by the device being displayed on a placard for the entire second half of the show” (135). The self-referential quality of the play allows the audience to question the work of art they are watching at that moment and the creation process in which they are included.

With the implementation of such a technique, the origin of creation, the owner of the creation of that particular piece of art, seems to oscillate and to have lost its main function as well. Also, an ethical question in relation to the arm’s objectification and its transformation into a piece of art comes to the fore. Therefore, the contradictory transformations between the objects’ reduced meanings, as they turn into functioning props for the play, and the arm’s losing its function to become an objectified work of art have deeper substances within the scope of the ethical boundaries when producing art. To exemplify this process, the arm once again stands out as a key symbol, as the protagonist,

the owner of the arm does not have any control over his arm. It starts to decay in time and becomes an object, an income for other people, like Simon who gains a lot of money by advertising the arm as an art object. The boy is also depersonalised as a research object by several health professionals. Thus, he loses his value as a human being the more he loses control over his body. Similarly, Crouch criticises how art is depreciated by being commodified as a mere economic notion, as well as being ascribed to meanings beyond reality. Anthony treats the letters sent by his brother as objects to explore the “representation of nothingness” (*My Arm* 37) by burning them to “display the ashes between two plates of glass” (*My Arm* 37). Furthermore, after taking several photos of his brother’s face and gluing them onto a canvas to paint them with whitewash (*My Arm* 37), Andrew depersonalises his brother by transforming his feelings and identity into nothingness. Analogously, the way Simon uses the boy in an art exhibition called “Man-i(n)festation” objectifies the boy as he takes photos of him completely naked and exhibits “the texture of his arm and hand with titles such as Death (in Life)” (*My Arm* 41). The semantic playfulness in “Man-i(n)festation” lays emphasis on Crouch’s criticism of man’s “infesting” of the art world, and the boy’s arm becomes the manifestation of this aspect in *My Arm*. As Lane puts it, “[i]n the play it is this ever-expanding force that results in the objectification of the protagonist as a globally recognized work of art. As the mantra of the artist who later befriends him, and places his image within a gallery for the first time, states: ‘art is anything you can get away with’” (130). Hence, Simon gets away with his attempt to objectify the protagonist, while his brother Andrew uses the brother as a tool rendering him worthless.

The milestone in the protagonist’s life, the only time he feels valuable is when Erica, a painter, asks to paint the protagonist for a period of nine months. The part where the boy says, “[s]he didn’t want me to pose, but just to be” (*My Arm* 44) is significant for two different reasons. First, through this statement Crouch emphasises that it is not realism but reality that matters in art since instead of “posing” and focusing on the demonstration of “as if,” performing “as is” generates a more solid ground for him. Duška Radosavljević pinpoints this issue by stating that “realistic representation is not necessary for the audience to ‘buy into’ the illusion” (2), and by keeping away from realistic representation, Crouch focuses on the autonomously constructed perception of the viewer. Second, the

importance of the emphasis on “just to be” enhances the significance of genuine demonstration regarding the object-subject relationship in theatre.

As discussed in the introduction part of this thesis, Ilter mentions that the audience in Crouch’s theatre shifts from object to subject (395). Similar to this, the protagonist, for the first time, becomes the subject of art instead of an object and says, “she wanted to use me as a subject” (*My Arm* 44). When the audience turns into the subject and the act on stage is the object, a transmission process where the spectator’s contribution really matters becomes possible. Also, the alteration in Anthony’s artistic inclination is of importance regarding the dynamic change of his art, as can be seen towards the very end of the play. While using his brother in his art to turn him into nothingness, Anthony eventually creates something substantial out of nothingness as can be seen in the lines, “[h]e said he’d send me a portrait he’d done of me as a small boy. In it, he said, I was watching TV, plump and contented. With my arm around him” (*My Arm* 49). The arm’s transformation into something valuable, as a means of affection for his brother, just before the boy’s death, reveals the appropriate place for the boy’s arm to be. It is not placed in the exhibition, not at a hospital as a research property but around the brother figure. This reverted transformation in Anthony’s artistic perspective is rendered ironic when the arm completely necrotises (Crouch, “Navigating” 66), or disappears, and he paints an unimpaired arm transforming it from absence to presence. As Emilie Morin puts it, “[b]ecause of their embedded specificity, Crouch’s plays raise serious questions about the status of artistic experimentation in an economy aimed at the production of intangibles” (73). So, it can be inferred that while the arm loses its function as a tangible economic art object, in the end a meaning is ascribed to it by the protagonist’s brother as an intangible agency. Thus, while unveiling the immeasurable confines of meaning attribution and representation, Crouch shows the power the audience holds during this process, as well as the ethical problems caused by crossing the ethical lines in creating art. The most important question here is who determines the confines of the line crossed by the artists? The answer is present in the process of deconstruction in *My Arm* which reveals that the audience is responsible for and active in their viewing as much as the artist in their creation.

The setting, which is disclosed as the play is about to conclude, bears crucial importance concerning the question above. Crouch explains the setting of the performance as follows:

There are tiny clues that the story is not being told where you are, the story is being told in a gallery in New York just before his death. You won't know that till just towards the very end. At some point I talk about dollars, at some point I talk about maquettes of my arm being displayed in Birmingham, London and here, I say. So it loses its depth when it is performed in New York. ("Navigating" 65)

The depth Crouch mentions in this statement can be commented on as the distance between stage and the auditorium, as the spectators suddenly realise their changed spatiality, and the enhanced reality of the play since at that point they are positioned as an audience whose presence is really about hearing the boy's autobiographical story and being a component of this chain of economy created through art, which initiates the protagonist's transformation into an object of art. With an increased sense of responsibility, on a collective level indicating a sympoietic unit, the audience arguably experiences a genuine feeling, powerful enough to alter their spatiality on an intellectual level without any corporal change at all.

Mentioning this problematisation in Crouch's theatre based on *The Author*, Christoph Henke delves into the technical and thematic aspects Crouch effectively uses in his theatre to make the viewer aware of the problematic ethical boundaries to which they obliquely contribute. Henke lays emphasis on Ridout's comment on the ethical consequences of theatre by saying: "Nicholas Ridout, for example, highlights theatre's potential for encouraging ethical reflection in a play's audience, as '[w]e watch ourselves watching people engaging with an ethical problem while knowing that we are being watched in our watching (by other spectators and also by those we watch)'" (78). With such a realisation, the other side of the watching as an act has been unveiled, as the watching has usually been considered a one-sided act, while in theatre that aims to make the audience self-aware of their position. Thus, the intellectual activity is no longer unilateral; furthermore, the audience's feeling about being watched enables a second transmission from stage to the auditorium by making this act of watching a bilateral one. As the audience's authority, regarding their perception of the events, increases, "being watched in [their] watching" also equalises the distance between the performers and the spectators. Therefore, the act

of watching which has been regarded as passivity attributed to the spectators, a more subtle aspect of watching has been put forward with such concepts. Rancière deals with the issue of passivity attributed to the spectators with the following words:

What makes it possible to pronounce the spectator seated in her place inactive, if not the previously posited radical opposition between the active and the passive? Why identify gaze and passivity, unless on the presupposition that to view means to take pleasure in images and appearances while ignoring the truth behind the image and the reality outside the theatre? Why assimilate listening to passivity, unless through the prejudice that speech is the opposite of action? (12)

So, in this excerpt, Rancière refers to a factor overlooked in theatre, which is the critical position of spectatorship. Although the viewers' position does not seem to change dramatically, and such an analysis is not a novel action to take on, with postdramatic theatre and Crouch's performances, the audience are made aware of their activity, which was previously presumed to be inactivity combined with passivity. Being aware of their position allows the spectators to transform into active contributors through their gaze. The writer does not transform the viewers into actors or performers acting on stage; instead, he shows that even though the spectators are seated, their presence affects the play as it is their gaze that commodifies the art itself.<sup>3</sup>

Crouch's play "sends out a bleak satirical message not just about the answerability of art, but also about ethical limitations of the subject and postmodern dilemmas of agency" (Henke 78). One of the most problematic agencies in the play is the act of spectatorship, and due to the analogous characteristics of witnessing and watching, it renders one responsible for the act that is being watched. Thus, in theatre with the act of watching and the enhanced awareness of action as a self-response, the viewers' sense of responsibility is increased. For them to gain authority, the audience does not need to be transformed into actors/performers; being informed of the fluctuation between conscious and unconscious perception creates an equalised dynamism between the writer and the spectators. Such a transformation at a cognitive level will enhance the spectators' authority in direct proportion to their level of self-consciousness. Cristina Delgado-García

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<sup>3</sup> Crouch deals with the notion of the spectatorial gaze predominantly in *The Author* (2009).



underlines the dramatic changes in theatre concerning the role of the audience from Robert Abirached's (French playwright and critic) point of view:

Abirached's semiotic account of the production of character is completed by considering the actor the medium that materialises and transmits the character to an audience, in the same way that language is materialised into speech, crystallising one in an infinite number of potential realisations or vocalisations of character ... The communicative circle established by Abirached is closed by the audience, whose role is that of "témoin [witness]." (79)

Put differently, the actor is positioned as the "medium" for the message to be delivered, and while this act turns the performer into the transmitter of a character, the audience becomes more of a witness rather than an observer. Thus, as the performer functions as a transmitter for that specific character, the number of implications signified through that character increases pursuantly. This corresponds to the phenomenon of autopoiesis, mentioned in the introduction part of the thesis, due to the occurrence of an "infinite number of realisations." This notion shares similarities with the transmission of a sympoietic system to an autopoietic one based on their relation to individualism and collectivism. Turner and Behrndt write:

[According to Tim Etchells] the idea of the audience as 'witness' rather than spectator, implicates the audience member in the making of meaning ... Richard Maxwell suggests that performance is a 'shared responsibility' between performer and audience, while Etchells suggests that performance is about negotiation with the audience and 'to feel the fragility of ourselves in the room.' (198)

Similar to Ridout's point on realising the self as being watched, Etchell's suggestion about the delicacy caused by this awareness is a direct influence of the responsibility and the authority of the audience. Differently from the previous forms of theatre in which the audience mostly experiences a rather passive and collective kind of catharsis, such an increased meaning-making process in the contemporary theatre creates a more individual realisation for the viewer regarding both their corporality, as they are made aware of their presence, and their "being watched in [their] watching." Also, the viewer's autonomous perception broadens with the semiotic variety as a result of the enriched rhizomatic structure during the transmission of the signs. Erica Fischer-Lichte mentions this novel structure, stressing spatiality as an integral part of the experience:

In performance, atmosphere is to the creation of spatiality what presence is to the generation of corporeality. Through its atmosphere, the entering subject experiences the space and its things as emphatically present. Not only do they appear in their primary and secondary qualities, they also intrude on and penetrate the perceiving subject's body and surround it atmospherically. The spectators are not positioned opposite to or outside the atmosphere; they are enclosed by and steeped in it. (*Transformative Power* 116)

In the creation of such an atmosphere the issue of perception over matter has crucial importance in *My Arm*. This is because while constructing the convenient space for the audience to cogitate, Crouch avoids a demarcated structure by reminding the spectators to keep asking questions through implementing implicative details such as the doll, the finger, the scar on the back and the non-representative objects. Regarding this issue, Crouch asks and asserts: “‘who am I in relation to you as an audience?’, ‘where am I?’, ‘where is fictional me?’ and ‘where is real me?’. *My Arm* plays with that all the time” (398). Such fluctuations propounded in the integral and spatial orientation of the play also induce the spectators to question their own presence in the auditorium. Ostensibly, the audience's contribution does not seem to be substantial, as their only physically active contribution is providing the objects before the play begins. Nevertheless, the dynamism of the cognitive atmosphere brings forth the “feedback loop,” mentioned in the introduction, along with the notions of “proxemics and co-presence” (Fensham n.p.). Changes in spatiality, being an integral part of the co-presence of the audience with the performer, allow the spectator to feel included in the process of creation, rather than watching an already created and fixed production. Nield also stresses the problematic situation of spectatorship regarding the duality of witnessing and observing:

If its time and space are ‘real’ to it [theatre], if it is immersed in its own cohesion, then who are we; some ghosts, some transient presences? Imagined before we ever arrived, how else can it cope with our difference? It doesn't know who we are. We, the audience, are either the black hole into which theatre pours itself anxiously, or we ... become it [theatre] in the guise of Spectator – exactly as Harry Berger imagined: we are either in it, or absent. (534)

It can be said that what Crouch achieves in *My Arm* is successfully positioning the viewers in the present, in “the now” of the performance, preventing them from being “absent” or devaluating the act of viewing as their value and authority as the spectators are not limited to a collective conscious, though not limitless regarding the individual freedom at the same time. In *My Arm*, the viewers' corporeal presence is limited to the seats in which they are positioned; however, cognitive space depends on the individual limits of

imagination. The implementation of the autopoietic system plays an important role in broadening the space of thought for the viewer. Autopoiesis, as is previously pointed out, renders the auditorium an extension of stage; thus, the audience is a component of the play itself. Thus, the act of viewing turns into an internal notion rather than being an external one. White pinpoints this change by saying:

We might look upon audiences, participants and performers as part of the environment of the autopoietic system, as with the self-sustaining process of a cell, which is [as mentioned by James Thompson]: ‘a thermodynamically open system, continually exchanging matter and energy with its environment’ ... In this sense performance – as an autonomous system – continually exchanges resources with the people that contribute and respond to it. (187-88)

The continuation of this exchange in the resources gives the auditorium an active, dynamic agency, also creating a dualistic experience between collectivity and individuality. As asserted by Pilný, “Crouch thus links his play with exploitative freak show, while simultaneously prompting the audience to consider the voyeuristic nature of their spectatorship” (135). For the spectator to be fully included in the above-mentioned process of exchange, “the voyeuristic nature” is of vital importance as perceiving the transmitted signs and deconstructing them autonomously is contingent on the degree of observation. Aside from the spatiality resulting from the co-presence of the audience, Crouch’s intermedial approach on the stage is also functional in enriching the authority in the auditorium. Thus, as Turner and Behrndt state, “the space of the performance is conceived as a space that is shared with the audience, rather than separated from it” (195). During the process of sharing, Crouch uses various technical media of display, particularly in *My Arm*, which multiplies the transmitter of the signs. The way Crouch uses the video clips reflected on the bigger screen at the back of the stage can be regarded as one of the significant media of display as Pilný also highlights:

Crouch’s use of mixed-media technology in *My Arm*, such as the live projection of objects or the inclusion of a home video of a small boy (created by film-maker and photographer Chris Dorley-Brown) that is projected onto a screen at the back of the performance space several times during the show, points to the same source of inspiration. Most importantly, however, Crouch shares the conceptual artists’ belief that the work of representation is to be done by the spectator. By disallowing straightforward mimesis on the stage, Crouch delegates the audience an active role in the creation of meaning. (134-35)

The projected clips, “the only authentic bit in the whole show” (Crouch, “Navigating” 65), increases the level of complexity and thus uncertainty, as they widen the spatial area to be monitored for the viewer, moving away from the routinised verbal transmission and manifolding the signs for the receptors with visual indicators. Consequently, this perceptual diversity enhances the audience’s intellectual cognition and activity.

Aside from the projected video clips, the quote Crouch writes on the placard, “Art is anything you can get away with,” seems to function as a technical medium of display, as it transgresses the limits of verbal communication and thus the semantic aspect of the performance. By perpetuating the verbal sign by means of transforming it into a visual one, Crouch opens the ways for the spectator to perceive the transmitted message. The play is mainly constructed on the theme of the objectification of art by itself using the arm of the boy whose limb is turned into a piece of art at the end of the story. Simon in the narrated story has got away with the art he created through the protagonist’s arm, and on another level even the placard on which Crouch writes is transformed into a piece of art being an intermedial object. Crouch highlights this irony both thematically and technically while also providing the audience with a multiple choice of transmitters which they can adapt in line with the way they perceive. On this account, it can be suggested that “dichotomous pairs such as subject/object and signifier/signified lose their polarity and clear definition in performance once set in motion they begin to oscillate” (Fischer-Lichte, *Transformative Power* 25), similar to how the placard loses its polarity. The placard placed onto the TV functions as a signifier and an object since it is used as a prop within the performance; however, the moment the spectator signifies it, it is transformed into the signified as the placard contains the concept to be signified on it. In other words, the placard no longer remains an object but is rendered what it is to signify. Furthermore, concerning the object, Crouch reduces it to a singular modality to be perceived as a multi-modal sign.

Through such subtle but potent adjustments, Crouch manages to render his spectator authoritative, but he also tries to avoid possible commotions. For instance, the audience does not interfere with the course of the performance, and the story is conveyed without any interruptions from the auditorium. The adaptability of the play accentuates the spectator’s impact on the stage, which Crouch, too, mentions: “the stuff you supply will

create a major part of *My Arm*” (*My Arm* 39). Although what Crouch specifically emphasises with this statement is the objects collected from the spectators, which point to a tangible and discernible cooperation between the writer and his audience, on another scale this cooperation foreshadows that the way the audience perceives the play will affect or shape it to a large extent. By construing the above note as an important initiation for the audience to realise their significance, Andy Smith suggests that “[i]t recognises the people that are present and requests their participation and trust. It asks for their investment, and it invests in them. ‘. . . [T]he stuff you supply will create a major part of *My Arm*.’ It suggests that they matter; that things matter” (414). The emphasis on the trust of the spectator when they lend their stuff enriches their status of “co-authorship” (Lane 151) as it indicates a mutual trust required for a collaboration.

When describing the details of the objects provided by the audience, Crouch explains that “[t]hey should be any kind of object chosen at random. Ideally, they are objects and photos offered up from the audience before the start. All these articles are left, visible but unlit, on the table top, like actors in the wings” (*My Arm* 34). The simile Crouch highlights here can be considered within the scope of Wirth’s concept of *Sprechraum* referring to both the merging of stage and the auditorium, the extended confines of the spatiality of the audience as well as the idea of Fisher-Lichte’s space between, the amalgamation of the “real and [the] imagined” (*Transformative Power* 114). The assimilation of the articles and the actors waiting in the wings lays emphasis on the role of the performer, “visible but unlit,” as they are not going to be the centre of the performance, but the transmitters of the action. The actors in the wings also represent the performers’ decreased activity proportionally to the equivalent increase in the spectator’s activity, which generates an equalised and democratised “space between.” The real is only rendered possible through the imagination of the audience, in other words, by means of the shift of the focus to the capacity of the audience, which Rancière, too, pinpoints:

It is the capacity of anonymous people, the capacity that makes everyone equal to everyone else. This capacity is exercised through irreducible distances; it is exercised by an unpredictable interplay of associations and dissociations. It is in this power of associating and dissociating that the emancipation of the spectator consists – that is to say, the emancipation of each of us as spectator. Being a spectator is not some passive condition that we should transform into activity. (17)

The notion of equality between stage and the auditorium is neither about diminishing the actor's value nor about increasing the spectator's activity on stage. It is rather about putting the act of watching into the centre of action, instead of focusing on the origin of the acting. Therefore, the performer's function is not quite different from the objects placed on the table; both play a crucial role for the comprehension of the viewer. The spatial significance of the wings is related to the phenomenon of common space where "audiences, actors and angels - each with their own angle - go out and meet on the in-between stage" (Steyaert et al. 94). In-betweenness creates a sense of co-authorship or, as referred to by Steyaert et al., a "multiple authorship – [which] creates the intensity and the surprise that is called theatre" (94). Aside from the focus on the acting and the co-authorship based on their spatial positioning, the multiplied role of the spectators can be said to blur the line between acting and watching as their role in *My Arm* also extends into providing the essential articles through which the performance can continue. White emphasises the active role of the spectator by saying that "[a]n audience participant who is 'endowed' with a role in a piece of fictional theatre becomes, to some tiny extent at least, an actor. They accept an obligation to support a fictional circumstance, and to present themselves appropriately, to move forward with the fiction and move it forward" (170). As it happens with the viewer of *My Arm*, with such a significant contribution they are "endowed with a role," a momentous one, reiterating that without their participation the action would not even start. However, on the other hand, the emphasis on the word "obligation" unveils the problematised aspect of this contribution; regardless of the authority they are granted with, the audience still abides by the general flow of the pre-written text. In that sense, the spectator is encircled by a restrictive agency which is the text itself.

Nevertheless, this very restriction also appears as an emancipatory factor since Crouch does not lead his audience into discomfort by permuting their role from observing to acting. He words the distance between physical participation and intellectual cooperation as follows: "I am interested in audience participation, but I am not interested in members of the audience getting up on the stage and being made to look embarrassed and awkward. I want it to be a more genuine active participation whilst retaining the aesthetic or art aspect of it" ("A Process" 401). Crouch does not totally relinquish aesthetic concerns for

the sake of artistic integrity; however, these concerns are sustained with the purpose of enhancing the genuine participation of the audience.

Hence, it can be inferred that even spatial constraints implemented to maintain the viewer to remain seated ensue as a liberating impetus for the mind to function autonomously. By creating such a rhizomatic structure, not the ultimate meaning or the sign transmitted from stage to the auditorium but the process itself, the crux of this transmission, is given more value. Rancière explains this mechanism saying, “[i]t is not the transmission of the artist’s knowledge or inspiration to the spectator. It is the third thing that is owned by no one, whose meaning is owned by no one, but which subsists between them, excluding any uniform transmission, any identity of cause and effect” (15). In compliance with this explanation, Crouch does not use a “uniformed cause and effect” structure in *My Arm* as the effect is planned to be personal, exclusive to the viewer. Also, this newly generated “third” link between the performer and the spectator, which has no origin as it is “owned by no one,” works as an equaliser between these two by rendering the audience more authoritative than the performer as the distance between them is reduced to the minimum. Once again, the distance at issue is more about the viewers’ introspective placement than their corporality in the auditorium. Thus, the rigidity of the phenomena of authorship and spectatorship becomes more pliant, alongside the ultimate message of the play to be performed.

Ultimately, through the augmented responsibility of the audience and the multiplied sensorial stimulations on a cognitive level, *My Arm* tackles the concept of the authority by unveiling that physical inactivity on stage does not prevent intellectual activity. On many different accounts, Crouch renders his viewers active, even more than the performer on stage, by providing them with the tools to create their own realities. The writer expresses the objective of *My Arm* by saying, “I need to communicate that story to you, so there was skill as a performer in that respect, but it’s not mimetic, I’m not attempting to represent someone other than myself. I am representing somebody other than myself but I don’t need to do it. It’s going to be done by you, rather than by me” (67). Correspondingly, Trotsky’s statement “[a]rt, it is said, is not a mirror, but a hammer: it does not reflect, it shapes” (110) becomes relatable to *My Arm*. As also explained by

Crouch, it is the audience that can shape the performed work of art in accordance with their own realities. With the “hammer” handed over to them, they give the play its ultimate shape, which will be exclusive to each one of them in an autonomous but at the same time collective way.



**CHAPTER II:**

**TRANSFORMATION AS AN AGENT FOR “SELF-HYPNOSIS” IN**  
***AN OAK TREE***

It is an illusion to think that you have no illusions.

Émile Coué

Revolving around concepts and themes analogous to those in Crouch’s first play, *My Arm*, *An Oak Tree* (2005) predominantly tackles the notion of transformation in a more layered fashion. This stratified structure of transformation subsisting throughout the exposition of the play transforms the audience’s spatial and intellectual positioning and renders them more authoritative concerning their control over their subconscious and imagination. David Lane emphasises Crouch’s unique and novel approach in positioning the audience by saying: “[t]he difference in Crouch’s work, and what is exciting from a dramaturgical perspective, is that it is actively asking questions about the authorship of art and theatre through its form and content, resulting in scripted performances that present us with unexpected transformations and interpretative challenges” (131). Thus, the challenge of interpretation conveyed to the audience emerges as a challenge for them to interpret the signs through their individual transformation in both spatial and temporal terms. Pivoting on the concepts of authoritative boundaries throughout, *An Oak Tree* manifests the transformability of art and the aptness of the spectator to materialise this change, once they realise the potential they possess as the most important component of the stage. Accordingly, this chapter argues that Crouch prioritises the spectators’ power to transform in *An Oak Tree* by creating an illusion through which the audience realises the impact of their individual imagination and their co-authorship throughout the play.

*An Oak Tree*<sup>1</sup> centres on a father who loses his daughter, Claire, in a traffic accident. In an attempt to alleviate his anguish, the Father seeks answers by attending a hypnotism

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<sup>1</sup>“Premièred at the Traverse Theatre in Edinburgh in August 2005, following a preview at the Nationaltheater Mannheim in Germany in April 2005” (Pilný 136).

show, as the Hypnotist is the one who causes the accident. The Father believes that his daughter is transformed into an oak tree located at the scene of the accident, which is the epicentre of this traumatic event. While the oak tree embodies the transformation within the story, the audience undergoes a transformation through multiple levels, which will be mentioned in the following parts of this chapter. The most important technical feature of the performance is that the second actor on stage, who plays the Father's part, is expected to perform without having read or seen the script. Though this might be deemed a perilous venture and pressurising act for the performer to undertake, Crouch ensures the volunteered performer that nothing can go wrong during their performance (*An Oak Tree* 54). Moreover, opposingly to inducing a puzzling and precarious feeling in the performer, Crouch affirms that “[e]ach actor who has been in *An Oak Tree* has spoken of a sense of liberation in the process” (*An Oak Tree* 54). When it comes to the aspects the writer presents, the source of emancipation is crucial, as there is nothing decisive that the performer knows more than the viewer: “[T]he story is as new to X [the performer playing the Father] as it is to you” (*An Oak Tree* 56). Consequently, both parties take part in this emancipatory experience in an equal way, and the second actor functions as “the spectator’s surrogate” (Bottoms, “Authorising” 68). Accordingly, the employment of the second actor and the multi-role given to the audience are of utmost importance in terms of the effectiveness of the narration. *An Oak Tree* is also important in its marking the actual co-authorship phase for Tim Crouch, as starting with this play, he collaborates with two co-directors, Andy Smith and Karl James (Love n.p.). This increased contribution during the production part allows Crouch to focus on the notion of co-authorship on the audience’s end, and as Love highlights here, this teamwork “[deflects] authority away from himself as the writer” (n.p.). Thus, beginning with *An Oak Tree*, Roland Barthes’s concept, “the death of the author,” becomes more prominent in Tim Crouch’s oeuvre, not just during the performance, but also throughout the creation process.

In the making of *An Oak Tree*, Crouch’s most important influence is British artist Michael Craig-Martin’s work titled *an oak tree* (1973) (“Authorising” 65). Crouch explains in the introduction part that the play is “reproduced by kind permission of Michael Craig-Martin” (*An Oak Tree* 14). Thus, the phenomenon of transformation begins during the creation of the play; by reproducing Craig-Martin’s conceptual work of art, Crouch

transforms it into a live performance, where this change eventuates by the viewer's end surpassing the creator's. Excerpts from the work are provided to the reader in the first pages of the play, and Craig-Martin defines his work through the lines "[w]hat I've done is change a glass of water into a full-grown oak tree without altering the accidents of the glass of water" (qtd. in *An Oak Tree* 14). The crux of this work of art is Craig-Martin's articulation that he accomplishes this transformation while the glass of water on the shelf remains as it is. Most importantly, he states that "[t]he actual oak tree is physically present but in the form of the glass of water" (qtd. in *An Oak Tree* 14). Bearing an almost paradoxical dynamism concerning its nature, the oak tree's presentation in the form of a glass of water can also imply a conflict between cognition and perception. Thus, an oak tree in the form of a glass of water and the glass of water in the form of an oak tree create two intertwined concepts, as the work is conceptual, not representational. Helena Grehan analyses the signifying process by accentuating the difference between the "Said" and the "Saying," and points out its significance in theatre performances:

The 'Saying' is the space in which each individual subject faces the other and engages in an exchange that occurs in the pre-ontological realm. In this realm the focus is on the tactile, the proximate. It is the realm of openness where the other calls the subject in a way that is not necessarily predetermined by the confines of language or of rules. It is a realm before the closure of the 'Said,' which is the movement into ontology, narrative and ultimately fixity of meaning. This focus on the 'saying' as it occurs in the realm of the sensible is one of the elements of [Emmanuel] Levinas's ethics ... because performance also occurs in or activates this realm. There are myriad opportunities for the 'saying' to rupture the 'said,' to refuse closure, to contradict and to mobilise the realm of the senses in the works addressed here, and in theatre more generally. (13-14)

Consequently, Craig-Martin's conception that he transformed the glass of water into an oak tree exhibits this subtle line between the "Saying" and the "Said" considering the glass of water as the pre-ontological idea and the oak tree as the "movement into ontology." The acquired result depends on the relationship between the viewer's cognition and perception.

Quite similarly, in Crouch's *An Oak Tree*, the dynamism between the "Said" by "the producer's mind" and the "Saying" as the spectator discerns the signified is the fundamental matter throughout the performance. As suggested by Catherine Love,

“[Crouch’s play] hinges on the same transformation [as Craig-Martin’s] that occurs on stage, where any given body or object is always at least two different things at once. But whereas realist theatre attempts to conceal this doubling and transformation, *An Oak Tree* actively foregrounds it” (n.p.). Crouch displays this multi-layered pattern regarding its dualistic nature through the second actor and his presence on stage as the playwright and the Hypnotist respectively. Crouch constructs the narration and the dialogues of the play in a way to transmute these bewildering shifts into ambiguous uncertainties as he explains below:

In *An Oak Tree* I am very precise in delineating when I am me and when I am not me, when I am in character and when I am not in character. That then generates a whole set of bigger questions through a knowingness on the audience’s part that there is uncertainty or there is a vacillation between these two states – the states of ‘real’ me and ‘performed’ me. I think if the audience spends a long time trying to work it out, it will become like a puzzle; and as soon as the energy of a puzzle enters the stage, that’s not helpful for an audience. The questions an audience asks then are not useful questions. ‘Disambiguating’ involves removing ambiguity on that level but generating an ambiguity on a more profound level about how we are represented and how we represent ourselves. That happens, I think, in all the plays. (“A Process” 399)

Crouch utilises ambiguity to disambiguate his audience’s understanding, and while doing this, he avails himself of the transparency of the stage. The playwright’s conceptual dichotomy about his physical presence is functional in encouraging the spectators to grasp the idea that “any given body or object is always at least two different things at once” (Love n.p.). Crouch, as the Hypnotist and the producer, embodies this phenomenon, while the second actor manifests this as the performer and the Father.

The most crucial dichotomous presence here, however, is that of the audience in the auditorium because their spatial and temporal existence exhibits duality intertwined with the notion of transformation. The essential part of the compelling division between confusion and uncertainty lies in the spectators’ consciousness owing to their dual contribution to the play. Bottoms interprets “the fictionalisation of the audience” (Ílter 396) performed by Crouch by saying that

[t]he audience is first welcomed as an audience in whatever theatre space the play is being performed, but is then asked to imagine that the almost bare stage is in fact ‘upstairs in a pub near the Oxford Road. It’s this time next year, say’ ... We are about to witness a cheap hypnotist’s act, played to a drunk pub audience, Crouch explains: ‘In a short time I’ll ask for volunteers but I’m not asking you. I’m asking some people in a pub a year from now. So don’t get up’ ... The spectators are cast as ‘characters’ in the play but simultaneously reminded of their non-coincidence with the spectators they represent – just as they remain conscious that the second actor is non-coincidental with the character s/he is asked to portray. (“Authorising” 66)

By attributing the role of the people in the pub to his audience, Crouch initially alters the spectators’ spatial positions and ascribes a secondary representation to them by verbally changing the place and the content of the show. The casting of the spectators as the people sitting in the pub enriches the layers of representation in the play as the audience now stands for something other than their literal signification. Crouch refers to this dynamism by saying: “The play will make them a character without them having to do anything” (“Theatrical Transformations” n.p.). Thus, the spectators’ inactive contribution is an implication for them to question the verbal instructions and the exhibited indicators once they are referred to as someone else in a different place at a different time. Despite this transformation that may initially be considered a puzzling situation for the viewers, the specification of time as the future allows them to differentiate between their intellectual and corporal, and sympoietic and autopoietic, contributions to the play. Furthermore, the fact that the second actor performs without any rehearsal or even knowledge of the script demonstrates that the realism of acting in theatre is not an essential component regarding the audience’s receptiveness. The unrehearsed show taking place in front of the spectators evokes the moment when an actor receives the script for the first time so that they can act as if. In this case, though, the volunteer stands on stage while blatantly carrying the script around and following the instructions through a microphone and earphones. This extemporaneous nature of the play enhances the equality between the actor and the audience obfuscating the distance between stage and the auditorium.

As soon as the play opens, Crouch breaks the illusion of reality by informing the audience about the nonarbitrary appearance of the second actor on stage:

*‘The HYPNOTIST invites the second actor out of their seat in the audience and onto the stage.’*

‘Ladies and gentlemen. This is X (the name of the second actor). X will be performing in the play this evening. X has neither seen nor read it.’

‘X and I met up about an hour ago. I have given him/her a number of suggestions.’  
(*An Oak Tree* 56)

These instructions in the prologue are necessary because if the writer does not inform the audience that the second actor has been preselected, they may presume that the performer is volunteering at that moment. The volunteered performer, Crouch explains, is “ideally someone [he has] never met before, [who] will arrive at the theatre and [they will] have a cup of tea” (“Navigating” 68). The writer clarifies the process of choosing the second actor as below:

It is essential that they have not seen or read the show. ... [W]e talk about the invitation to tell a story together, we stand in the space together and we read a little bit of text, not from the play, so they get a sense of their voice in the space, and also how the text will be presented to them. Then I ask them to join the audience. They come in with the audience; they sit in the front row. At the beginning of the show I walk on and go, “Would you come up on stage please, this is so-and-so who will be performing in the show tonight, so-and-so has neither seen nor read it.” So I guide them through that performance and they play the father of the child. (“Navigating” 68)

Thus, the impromptu performance of the actor, and therefore the subversion of realism, which is the idea the play embodies, will be unfulfilled. Also, Crouch’s emphasis on the word suggestion and his guiding the performer are other indicators concerning the equilibrium between the actor and the spectators, as both parties function as receptors to deconstruct the signs. The writer puts into words his main aim behind this straightforward approach by saying that “[t]here’s always duplicity, little patterns of subterfuge and deceit, because there’s work that has gone in before the presentation to the audience. And I think *An Oak Tree* goes to the heart of those patterns by putting them up front, by being completely open about them” (“Authorising” 70). Even though Crouch verbally invites several members of the audience to participate in the play, he makes sure that everyone, apart from the performer who will portray the Father, remains seated in the auditorium. His verbal invitation does not indicate a genuine physical invitation to stage; it is an intellectual invitation for the audience in the auditorium and a corporal invitation for the people at the pub. Thus, the spectators are given the chance to make “differentiation” so

that they can make “genuine creations” (Deluze 212). As also emphasised by Ondřej Pilný, “[a] practical reason for distancing the audience of *An Oak Tree* by announcing their fictional status may appear to be the desire to prevent the performance from turning into participatory theatre; indeed, any time spectators might volunteer, ‘*they are gently thanked and guided back to their seats by the HYPNOTIST*’” (138). As mentioned previously, Crouch prioritises the textual unity and prefers the audience to remain seated in his performances with the objective of preventing his spectators from confusion, or more importantly, from unsettlement due to feeling compelled to participate.

Although it seems implausible for a random person with no knowledge of the play and no acting experience to perform impeccably without disrupting the flow or the unity of the play, there is, in fact, almost no difference between the performer on stage and the objects utilised in *My Arm*. The second actor only follows the delivered instructions and performs functioning like a bridge between stage and the auditorium. Crouch emphasises his expectations regarding the acting of the volunteered performer as follows:

I meet each actor an hour before the show. I talk them through ideas of ‘open-ness’ on stage. I say that all I’m requesting is for them to bring their instinct on stage – to respond in each moment to the reality they find themselves in. So, of course, every instinct is different. And I genuinely have no perfect image of the second actor. They are themselves, and whatever they do in the show will be “themselves” – even if they fake it, even if they “put on a show,” even if they fail to connect. Nothing is false. Nothing is a failure, and the play seems to be able to stand up to anything. (“Theatrical Transformations” n.p.)

As this explanation demonstrates, the play rests on the second actor’s and the audience’s impulses. The writer bestows instinctual freedom within the limits of the text. This textual constraint turns into a liberating tool for both, procuring the play “to be able to stand up to anything.” Bottoms interpreted the second actor as “the spectator’s surrogate” (“Authorising” 68) for this reason. In his interview with İlter, Crouch articulates his objective to divulge the interchangeable dynamism between stage and the auditorium by saying that his theatre “generates an understanding that we, as actor and audience, are capable of interchanging; that we could, at another given situation, easily interchange so that the agency of ‘the actor’ is given to the audience and the agency of ‘the audience’ is given to the actor” (400). By displaying the spectators’ and the actor’s proximity to each other concerning their receptive abilities, Crouch creates a “feedback loop,” which

functions as “a self-referential, autopoietic system” (Fischer-Lichte, *Transformative Power* 39). Another vital part is that the second actor is given the same depiction regardless of physical appearance or gender: “The second actor can be male or female, and of any adult age” (*An Oak Tree* 54). At this point, another essential parallel can be drawn between the objects in *My Arm* and the second actor in *An Oak Tree*. In the same manner that each object is given a specific name and identity, even though they vary from performance to performance, the physical attribution and the identity of the second actor in *An Oak Tree* remain the same, while the second actor is different each time:

HYPNOTIST: ‘You’re a father. Your name’s Andy. You’re 46 years old, you’re six foot two. Your lips are cracked. Your fingernails are dirty. You’re wearing a crumpled Gore-tex jacket. Your trousers are muddy, say, your shoes are muddy. You have tremors. You’re unshaven. Your hair is greying. You have a bloodshot eye.’  
(59)

So, regardless of the identity of the second actor, the volunteered performer changes into 46-year-old Andy, which might be considered a transformation and the illusion that Crouch performs as a writer by transforming a random individual into Andy without altering their identity. Nonetheless, it is crucial to note that the Hypnotist’s description must completely correspond with reality: “I’m forty-two years old. I’ve got a red face, a bald head and bony shoulders. (*This must be an accurate description of the actor playing the HYPNOTIST*)” (*An Oak Tree* 58). In this instance, the disparity between the actual description of the Hypnotist and the second actor can be taken as Crouch’s similitude with the Hypnotist, being a critique of the illusion created by traditional theatre. Pilný articulates the author’s deliberate choice in drawing this analogy by saying that “[t]he conflicting double meaning is foregrounded by the role of the stage Hypnotist being played by the author of the drama, whose position would traditionally be associated with springing an illusion on the audience but that is here connected simultaneously with attributing an active role to the audience” (139). In addition to criticising this hypnosis through himself, the contradiction between the second actor and the provided description for him engages the audience’s perception, encouraging them to question the writer. At the same time, it indicates that the viewers’ autonomous perception and subconscious are more powerful and effective than the realism created on the stage.



Another crucial duality in the play is that the second actor performs not only Andy, but also the actor who voluntarily stands on stage, that is, indirectly her/himself, as Bottoms elucidates: “the actor playing the Father is also asked to play the character of ‘the actor playing the Father’” (“Authorising” 66). The change takes place in scene six, and the spectators are informed about this shift through the conversation between the actor playing the Father and the Hypnotist as the author of the play:

HYPNOTIST: ‘You’re doing brilliantly. How are you feeling about it?’

FATHER: ‘Fine.’

HYPNOTIST: ‘Not embarrassed?’

FATHER : ‘A bit.’

HYPNOTIST: ‘You should have said, I’d have stopped.’ (102)

Though Crouch does not break his character completely as the Hypnotist, the performer reveals his acting process in a quite translucent way notwithstanding that the dialogues are still scripted. In this regard, the fact that the second actor does not immediately resemble Andy may cause confusion among the audience when trying to comprehend this abrupt transition. The concept of “antiretinal art,” in the Duchampian viewpoint, comes to the forefront at this moment. Bottoms elucidates Crouch’s decision to minimise the use of spectacles and costumes, which are considered facilitatory elements for the understanding of the audience, by saying:

Viewed in relation to this invocation of modernist art theory, Tim Crouch’s plays appear to measure up poorly. His unadorned emphasis on the actors’ presence in front of an audience entails a near-non-existent use of set, costume and lighting design which seems thoroughly deficient in ‘visual art’ terms – just as Craig-Martin’s glass of water might be thought a little ‘colourless.’ In point of fact, Crouch’s *An Oak Tree* makes very vivid use of colour – but again by utilizing the ‘mind’s eye’ of the spectator rather than visual spectacle. (“Authorising” 69)

In this case, the audience does not need any visible or tangible indicators, such as Andy’s costume, to determine who the second actor is portraying at that moment. It is feasible to comprehend who a character is portraying if the audience thinks through their imagination rather than their eyes. Although the absence of these conventional components in

Crouch's theatre may perhaps give the impression of negligence, the writer demonstrates that the use of these traditional signifiers is not essential; the incompleteness of stage is deliberate for the audience to complete through their minds. As a profound cognition broadens the sight, the viewers must maintain mental engagement throughout the play.

In scene six, the spectators are still referred to as the people in the pub, though this time the Hypnotist informs the audience of their absence: "The show was a failure; they became embarrassed and left. It's what I'm used to. Don't worry on my behalf. For the last three months, since the accident, I've been – I've lost all ability. Like I said, honouring old bookings." (*An Oak Tree* 106). With these lines, the author disambiguates the duality of his presence notifying the viewer about the fact that he is still in his character as the Hypnotist, contrary to the other performer. When the present audience is enunciated as absent, Crouch initiates the spectators to question their own existence in the auditorium and the failure of the hypnotism show. This is one of the moments for the spectators to realise their potential to extrapolate as autopoietic components since when they are absent in the second layer of their representation in the pub, there is an indication of a collectivity, a quasi-sympoietic mentality. The act of leaving, the failed show taking place in the realm of the story therefore refers to collectively acting participants while the audience in the auditorium refers to an autopoietic perception. Susan Bennett elaborates on the importance of the audience's interpretation through (the French theatre historian) Anne Ubersfeld's explanation considering the audience-sign relationship:

[T]he pleasure [felt by the audience] derives from activity, the involvement of the audience in the interpretation of the multiplicity of signs, both transparent and opaque: 'Theatrical pleasure, properly speaking, is the pleasure of the sign; it is the most semiotic of all pleasures. What is a sign, if not what replaces an object for someone under certain circumstances? Surrogate sign, a presence which stands for an absence: ... the stage for an absent 'reality.' Theatre as sign of a gap-being-filled. It would not be going too far to say that the act of filling the gap is the very' source of theatre pleasure. (125-26)

Although Crouch does not attempt to create a sense of realism on stage, the multi-layered narrative in *An Oak Tree* puts forward the phenomenon of "absent reality" to make the audience realise the absence of reality. Therefore, he makes use of theatrical realism through the hypnosis to reveal how it becomes a failed action in convincing the viewers.

Regarding this conceptualised illusion, Love explains that “Crouch plays a hypnotist, with the role alluding to theatre’s own incomplete illusions. When we watch a play, we want to be taken in by the fantasy, but at the same time we are always aware that it is just a trick, a story” (n.p.). The playwright does not try to complete the illusion with the aim of rendering his story believable or real; instead, he unveils the mechanics of stage in a transparent and real way without denying the audience the pleasure of theatre. Regarding his breaking the illusion of theatrical realism Crouch asserts, “[i]n *An Oak Tree*, there are acts of genuine communication between me and the second actor ... These are not rehearsed moments of communication; we haven’t spent six weeks working to make them look real; they ARE real! No pretence, in a piece that is all about pretence!” (“Theatrical Transformations” n.p.). By utilising the ironic and the contradictory concepts between the portrayal on stage and the target message to be delivered to the audience in *An Oak Tree* Crouch reveals the most genuine and authentic reality of the stage through its pretentiousness. Turner and Behrndt note: “[Phelim McDermott] commented that by showing the performer’s shift from everyday persona into the persona of the character, the audiences paradoxically came to ‘believe the story’ more than they might have with a straightforward mimetic-representation” (189). By conveying the story with the transparent and real mechanics of stage, Crouch draws a line between realism and reality, highlighting the most important one as the reality taking place in the audience’s mind. Therefore, the spectators’ intellectual activity allows them to fill those gaps which Crouch deliberately leaves blank so that there is enough space for the audience to complete autonomously. Thus, the failure of the hypnotism show, Crouch’s statement about how the participants left and the script in the hands of the second actor are the most important hints the author gives to clear up the confusion of his audience throughout this interlude-like part.

Functioning like an authentic moment that can merely be experienced behind the curtains of stage, this dialogue between the actor and the Hypnotist does not stand for a moment of relief. On the contrary, it triggers the audience to continue questioning what they see and hear. Such non-coincidental placements throughout, which are puzzling for the spectators under normal conditions, the writer enables the viewer to make a differentiation between their role as the audience in the auditorium and as the people sitting in the pub,

between Crouch's role as the author and the Hypnotist and ultimately between the second actor's presence as the Father and the performer. Lane expands on the play's multiplicity and complexity by focusing on the complex pattern of the narration as below:

The experiments of Crouch in this second play introduce complex challenges to our conception of plot, narrative focus and time. We are watching several narratives emerge on one stage, occupying different temporal frames at first, but then bleeding through the boundary between what purports to be real and what is a fiction of the writer's imagining. First, there is the narrative Crouch has created in the fictional future 'in a pub a year from now' ... of a meeting between the Father and the Hypnotist who ran over his daughter. Second, there is the narrative in the fictional past, of the death of the daughter and how the Father and his family have responded. Third, there is the present 'real' narrative of the relationship between Crouch and his invited performer on the particular night – though it is a simulation of the real, because all of their conversations about the play they are performing in are scripted. Finally, there is the only real present-tense narrative, one that sits outside the fictions Crouch has constructed: this is the story of the performer as he or she encounters and navigates an unknown text. The dialogue may be prescribed, but the choices the performer makes in the delivery are unrehearsed and occurring in real time. We watch this as closely as we watch the other three constructed narratives within the play. (134-35)

As this explanation reveals, by implementing multiple layers concerning the narrative structure of the play as well as the dynamism of the temporal and spatial planes of which it consists, Crouch shows that the act of viewing does not connote passivity, requiring a more compelling activity even than the one performed on stage. "Emancipation," Rancière suggests,

begins when we challenge the opposition between viewing and acting; when we understand that the self-evident facts that structure the relations between saying, seeing and doing themselves belong to the structure of domination and subjection. It begins when we understand that viewing is also an action that confirms or transforms this distribution of positions. (13)

Thus, the stratified narrative containing four different layers the play bears within enables the audience to transform what the writer "distributes" through the signifiers. When the writer is considered the distributor and the audience the creator, this transmission suppresses the author's authority by augmenting that of the viewers.

Collectively, the phenomenon of representation comes into prominence as the issue in question transcends the confines of stage; the audience does not question only the representative value of the signs they see on stage but their own autonomous and

collective representation in the auditorium as well. Regarding the way Crouch tackles the notion of representation in *An Oak Tree*, Love contends that he “blurs the line between representation (one thing standing in for another) and transubstantiation (one thing actually becoming another)” (n.p.).<sup>2</sup> Though the use of the word “transubstantiation” is more convenient considering the crux of the transformation, it is of importance to analyse the way Crouch deals with the issue of representation in relation to art, mostly focusing on the conceptual art in *An Oak Tree*. The writer expands his use of the media in the play, as the main ways of communication with the second actor and the audience, by means of earphones, written scripts, a microphone and musical insertion aside from visual signifiers. Jørgen Bruhn comments on the significance of representation and its relevance to the use of the media as below:

Representation ... is a fundamental part of human communication: it is a process that uses media products to stand in for all sorts of phenomena of material or mental character, including so-called fictive and non-fictive phenomena. According to their definition, representations cannot be completely identical to what they represent, and representation is not devoid of performative aspects, so any representations necessarily function on a differentiating scale from higher to lower precision and effect, depending not only on the media products but also on the context in which the media products are produced and perceived. Language, visual communication, and any other semiotic forms of representation are often very efficient but not impeccable tools of communication. (125)

The spectators’ autonomous perception is enhanced by means of various media forms, and Crouch deliberately and constantly plays around the “fictive and non-fictive phenomena” through the characters’ duality in the play. The music and sound effects Crouch makes use of at regular intervals not only help the audience analyse the layers between “fictive” and “non-fictive,” and between “conceptual” and “physical” (Bottoms, “Authorising” 74) but also trigger their senses by expanding and enriching the audience’s perception. While the Hypnotist is performing his show, “[a] ghastly, jaunty, clownish music” (*An Oak Tree* 76) plays in the background. During her interview with Crouch,

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<sup>2</sup> Catherine Love explains the word “transubstantiation” by providing information about its historical background. She says that “[t]he idea of transubstantiation derives from the Catholic Church, which teaches that during Mass the substance of the Eucharistic offering, wine and bread, is transformed into the blood and body of Christ. The wine and bread while their outward appearance remains the same – do not simply stand in for the blood and body of Christ; they are the blood and body of Christ. This is the idea that Craig-Martin appropriates when he insists on his artwork: ‘No. It’s not a symbol. I’ve changed the physical substance of the glass of water into that of an oak tree,’ adding ‘I didn’t change its appearance. But it’s not a glass of water. It’s an oak tree’ ...” (n.p.). As it is not possible to mention a representation phenomenon within the context of the play, the word “transubstantiation” is selected to underline that a complete transformation has occurred.

Caridad Svich lays emphasis on the impact of the use of that specific music and the effect of phoniness it creates by saying that “there is the charlatan aspect (the Hypnotist and his act complete with carny music) but on the other the more profound idea that there is an element of the charlatan in all creative work. How beautiful and necessary that is to remember” (n.p.). Other musical and sound elements are also functional in enhancing the sensorial perception as well as in elevating the impact of the narration. Crouch effectively uses the hypnotic trance music and the piano sound to reveal the “charlatan aspect” of the hypnotism show. When the Father is given the instruction to play the piano in a trance mode, the Hypnotist says: “The music’s going to play. When it plays you’re onstage at the Albert Hall and you’re going to play...the...piano” (*An Oak Tree* 73). After these words, the trance music stops, and the piano music begins (*An Oak Tree* 74). Though the actor starts to act as if s/he is playing the piano and the piano music is available in the background, the audience becomes aware of the artificialness of the act. In response to this, the Hypnotist says in an acrimonious tone: “They know this isn’t a piano, you know this isn’t a piano. There’s no piano there. There was never a piano. You can’t do this. We don’t believe you” (*An Oak Tree* 74). This scene is transformed into an instance of theatrical realism by the use of the media and sounds, as the Hypnotist realises that it is not convincing to the audience although he gives the actor the illusion that he is playing the piano. This scene reverberates Émile Coué’s comparison between the will and the imagination as he affirms: “the imagination is superior to the will, ... [and] the imagination always wins over the will” (68). Based on this, it can be deduced that the Hypnotist does not have control over the imagination of the audience as the authority figure, and if there is one thing that makes the Father believe in his playing the piano, it is his imagination, not the Hypnotist’s will.

However, there is more to the use of the media regarding the depth it creates about the Father’s trauma through “the sound of passing road traffic” and “a lorry thunder” (*An Oak Tree* 64-65) given in the background at certain intervals. It is possible to interpret these sound effects as the haunting trauma for the Father, while they also reveal the guilt that haunts the Hypnotist as he is the source of the accident. These continuous abrupt transitions between the sounds allow the audience to differentiate between the above-mentioned multi-layers of the play, and they reveal the concept of transformation. These

transformative effects, given through music and sounds, show both the ability of art to transform and the autonomous aspects of this transformation, as the sound of the lorry thunder or the road sounds the same to the Hypnotist and the Father but reveals two disparate haunting memories. Thus, once again the idea that “a body or object is always at least two different things at once” (Love n.p.) comes to the fore as the prominent phenomenon in *An Oak Tree*.

Crouch also utilises Bach’s Aria from “Goldberg Variations.” The music plays towards the end of most of the scenes, and “[i]t is a flawed rendition: faltering but ambitious, failing to resolve until the very end of the play when it moves into the First Variation” (*An Oak Tree* 55). When Svich directs a question concerning his choice of this music, Crouch explains this deliberate choice and its close connection with the materialisation of art by saying:

There is an absent 12-year-old girl in *An Oak Tree*, and she is materialised by a piece of music – Bach’s “Goldberg Variations.” Music is another de-materialised art form. It operates on an absolute level of suggestion. ... In narrative terms, the girl is listening to music when she dies (“You could still hear the music coming from her Walkman”). She’s on her way to her piano lesson. The play suggests that she dies somewhere around the end of the beginning Aria -- and this is the section which is worked and re-worked throughout the play -- faltering, imperfect, the girl herself, at her piano (“I used to love to listen to her, watch her fingers”). It is unable to resolve -- just as the Father is unable to move beyond his loss. (“Theatrical Transformations” n.p.)

The way the Father conceptualises his daughter’s death by attributing it to the music she listened to immediately before the accident exemplifies a distinct type of virtualisation in that it leads to a materialisation and a “genuine” but autonomous creation in the individual’s mind. It also demonstrates the versatility of art’s transformability into other forms, which can happen dangerously easy. As a result, the music fails to reach a resolution until the very end, unless the Father achieves closure about his trauma, and that moment continues in a loop in the Father’s mind to transform into a concept. Love further elaborates on the significance of Crouch’s choice of Bach by asserting that the way the music is described is directly related to the form of the play as can be seen below:

This description [of Bach's Aria from "Goldberg Variations"] mirrors the dramaturgy of the play. It is a piece that builds in its own failures and imperfections, generating theatrical representations that will be inevitably 'flawed', at least by the standards of mainstream, conventional theatre. At the same time, it is exhilaratingly ambitious in the ideas it addresses – ideas about art, loss, creation, representation, transformation and the very condition of living and dying. And it fails – or, rather, chooses to fail – to resolve itself for audiences, reaching only an ambiguous form of closure at its conclusion. (n.p.)

Thus, as mentioned in the above quote by Bruhn, the "impeccable" nature of any form of representation in achieving successful communication directly correlates to the unavoidably impaired quality of theatrical representations. What makes *An Oak Tree* more real than realistic, in fact, is, as Love implies, its intended failure to reach a conclusion. Lane elaborates on this issue by highlighting the audience's power of assumption by saying:

The event from which the story has sprung is finally confronted by both parties, but only through a misted veil of suggestion. Just as *My Arm* requires us to experience an act of creative or artistic projection upon random objects, *An Oak Tree* requires us to experience the Father's confusion by disrupting our own assumptions about the play's logic. The logic is deliberately problematized: the form expresses the content, but it simultaneously requests that we relinquish our desire for a neat resolution. (135-36)

So, Crouch activates his spectators' perceptions by making them deal with the problematised concept practically, instead of conveying the message theoretically in a direct way. The Father's confusion changes into an uncertainty that the audience feels the need to resolve internally. Just like the Father, who is unable to resolve his trauma, the audience experiences difficulty in resolving the play itself. In this context, as Lane also argues, there is a decorum between form and content; the uncertainty on stage is not an illusion but a reality. When the uncertainty disseminating from the Father becomes a collective issue, creating a quasi-sympoietic perception, the unattainability of a single resolution brings into an autopoietic consciousness. Thus, the play's lacking a clear resolution also strengthens the audience's ability to think as autonomous components. While doing this, not only does Crouch expose the illusion of the stage, but also the impaired nature of the notions of communication and representation: "I like the human imperfection -- the tensions, the blocks, the trapped voice, the wonky features. In *An Oak Tree* I try to create a place where those imperfections can be acknowledged and



celebrated” (Crouch, “Theatrical Transformations” n.p.). As a result, the experience turns into a more individual and autonomous one since imperfection and failure are the product of individual perception throughout the process of interpreting the indicated messages.

*An Oak Tree*, therefore, can be considered intermedial due to the utilisation of the multimedial representation on stage, and aside from augmenting the depth of the story, the use of the various devices directly enriches the forms of perception for the viewer. Lars Elleström explains the significance of such medial variety by saying that “the act of perception is brief and quickly channelled into interpretation, which of course occurs in the perceiver’s mind. Nevertheless, the type, quality and form of sensory input provided by the media product, and taken in by the perceiver’s sense organs, are crucial for the interpretation formed by the perceiver’s mind” (18-19). Based on this, in a play which bears a multiplicity of layers in its exhibition, the abundance of the media does not only provide the perceiver with different ways to comprehend the signs. The media also reinforces the impact on the audience due to its direct connection with the sensorial stimulation allowing the viewers to actualise to perform an aesthetic transformation as individual creators. Adam Alston clarifies the significance of this aesthetic experience for the spectators as below:

There is a difference between aesthetic experience and aestheticised experience. Most theatre performances present audiences with aesthetic objects, including the objectified actor, which dynamically produce aesthetic experiences among creative interpreters of a theatrical event. Aesthetic experience does not arise from a fixed and stable meaning imposed on the spectator, but from an active decoding – or refashioning – of plural and malleable meanings attached to aesthetic stimuli. (7)

Based on this analogy, the Father’s materialisation of his daughter via the music and the “transubstantiation” he performs by transforming Claire into an oak tree exemplifies this aesthetic transformation in art while the spectators execute this “refashioning” by deconstructing the signifiers throughout the performance.

Aside from the music and the sounds, Crouch utilises various technological products such as earpieces and a microphone through which he can give instructions to the second actor. Crouch uses this equipment throughout the entire performance, as another illusion-

breaking technique, and communicates with the second actor via the script, directly through the microphone, or by transmitting it to the earphones so that only the second actor can hear it:

They do get instructions through an earpiece that makes my voice silent to the audience. ... I stand at the back of the stage and I'm whispering the speech into their ear and they deliver the speech to the audience. And that's very interesting because in a very short period of time the audience will completely forget that I'm there, or forget the mechanism by which the actor is performing even though the mechanisms in this play are super obvious, super visible and yet there is, like *My Arm*, like this finger, like this bottle of water, there's a human capacity to just go with something and let everything else disappear. So *An Oak Tree* plays on that very much because this is of course not the father, this is perhaps a young female. (Crouch, "Theatrical Transformations" (69-70))

As can be discerned from these lines, the complexity of the ways in delivering the performance does not create an unfavourable effect such as confusion or exhaustion resulting from the abundance of the signs. It rather channels the audience's attention to the abstract instead of the physical so that they can focus on their autonomous perception. The directions delivered via the microphone, the earpiece and the screenplay reveal the transition between the Hypnotist Crouch and the theatre-maker Crouch. This is yet another significant technique of which he makes use through the utilisation of a variety of different media. Even though the Hypnotist seems to be in charge when he gives instructions, the second actor follows the directives of the author inaudible to the spectators. The Hypnotist also fails in this sense because being able to hypnotise requires executive power. To exemplify, in scene two, Crouch instructs the performer through his/her earphones by saying that "[t]he Hypnotist is going to ask you to put your arm down, but I don't want you to. Don't put your arm down until I tell you" (*An Oak Tree* 70). Even in instances where the second actor appears to comply with the Hypnotist's instructions, it is the producer Crouch's demand that ensures the performer abides by, as is apparent in the lines, "Now we're going to have some fun! For the moment now, I want you [to] do exactly what the HYPNOTIST says. Just follow the HYPNOTIST's instructions" (*An Oak Tree* 73). Whilst in the story the authority figure is the Hypnotist, with these words Crouch reveals that the Hypnotist fails in his attempt to control the Father as his precepts do not have any impact on the receiver. Pilný interprets the difference between these authoritative dynamics as below:

[A] hypnotist may be perceived as a particular kind of theatre-maker, whose task it is to make people behave as he suggests. Given Crouch's views on theatre, it is easy to make an analogy between the Hypnotist's show in *An Oak Tree* and illusive theatre, in which the essentially manipulative nature of the latter in relation to the audience is highlighted. Yet, Crouch is very much aware that it is fundamentally the hypnotist's subject who enables hypnosis to succeed; one of the notes he made in the process of creating *An Oak Tree* affirms that 'All hypnosis is self-hypnosis' ... The word 'suggestion', which the Hypnotist uses several times with reference to his act, functions as a pun: it indicates not only falling under the spell of theatre and rescinding one's own will but also an urge to actively imagine something. (138-39)

On this view, the illusory theatre portrayed through the hypnotism show in the story and its "manipulative nature," in the sense that it restricts the audience by constraining them to a set of predefined messages and to passivity, are closely related to the power of suggestion, which can be both restrictive and liberating depending on the way of implementation. Even though Crouch's instructions to the second actor, as the writer, may give the impression that he is the authoritative figure, the main underlying objective here can be expressed through Coué's affirmation which he explains by saying: "I do not impose anything on anybody. I simply help people *to do what they would like to do*, but what they believe themselves incapable of doing. It is not a contest but *an association* which exists between them and myself. It is not I that act, but a power *existing in themselves*, which I teach them to use" (68). This ideology is simply what Crouch aims to achieve in *An Oak Tree*, because as the writer he aspires to catalyse the audiences' power to create and transform "the power existing in themselves."

Even though the stability of the script appears to be a constraining force, as Lane explains, this is a "structural safety net ... that enables the performer to feel secure despite the daunting task" (134). However, the fixedness of the text does not comply with the performance as there is "a paradoxical relationship between the unpredictability of live performance and the relative security of a script's structural framework" (Lane 133). This paradoxical relationship intensifies the pleasure the spectators get from the play as active contributors owing to the ephemerality the "unpredictability of the performance" creates. Based on the conjoint dynamism between the pleasure and the ephemerality, Susan Bennett words that "[t]he theatre audience shares with the spectator of an art work the inability to take in everything with a single look, but, where the art work remains for subsequent looks, the theatrical performance is ephemeral. Pleasure results precisely from that ephemerality, from the necessity of making a selection of the elements offered" (126).

While this “selection of the elements offered” emerges as an emancipatory notion for the audience, it also allows the suggested signs to turn into self-created ideas. This way the suggestion of another can be transformed into the suggestion by the self. *An Oak Tree* also bears this ephemerality in its core, not only because it is a live performance, but also because each performance is performed with a different second actor.

In relation to the play’s proclivity to autonomous perception, Ilter explains that “*An Oak Tree* is all about saying that theatre is something that is created ‘live,’ and it is created through decision-making and choice-taking. Theatre is a result of a whole series of different processes, of choices and decisions rather than a fixed or a given thing” (400). Regarding the emphasis on the word suggestion, as stated in the introduction, Crouch was greatly influenced by Émile Coué’s method of “autosuggestion,” and he constructed the general parameters of *An Oak Tree* on the basis of this idea. “The self-hypnosis” is a reference to Coué’s discourse considering the self-implantation of an idea (9). Coué believes that “[w]e can make, to ourselves, very much stronger suggestions than anyone else can, whoever that person might be” (68), and in *An Oak Tree* each of the multi-layered narratives demonstrates this point in a very straightforward manner. The “transubstantiation” formed in the Father’s mind, the hypnotism show and the play Crouch produced as a writer all mirror Coué’s reasoning. In fact, this is precisely why the Hypnotist fails, as his suggestion is incapable of suppressing the Father’s, the second actor’s, and most notably, the audience’s autosuggestion.

In the scenes where Crouch performs Andy’s wife, Dawn, the power of suggestion and the importance of the audience’s receptivity gain importance because there is nothing palpable about the other characters aside from the Hypnotist and the second actor. Thus, their existence solely depends on the effective reception of the audience. Rebellato elaborates on this by saying:

Dawn’s accusation is that her husband is refusing to accept the reality of the situation, preferring to treat the world around him as a set of concepts and ideas. It is a despairingly sad moment of division between them. Yet it is finely balanced because, in reality, Dawn, Claire, Marcy, the father really are just ideas that exist in our heads. Claire really did not ever exist in the first place. We know so little about Dawn and Marcy that they really are just ideas of a ‘wife’ and a ‘daughter’. In that sense, the moment pushes at the paradox of fiction very hard because, despite that,

the scene appears to be able to evoke in an audience genuine emotion, even while the conversation is drawing attention to the absurdity of responding in that way. (152)

This demonstrates that the conceptualised reality can be formed in the audience's mind without the necessity of theatrical realism, and that reality can be communicated to the audience when their perceptions are effectively stimulated. In one of his speeches, Crouch epitomises Rebellato's approach by saying that "the character appears but not through the retina, the autosuggestion is made: think when I talk of this man that you see him. Theatre is predicated on processes of suggestion and autosuggestion" ("Art" 10:53 – 11:04). As a result, when the suggestion of the producer coalesces into the autosuggestion of the audience, an "artistic transformation" that "resides in the audience" transpires ("Art" 07:10 – 12). Therefore, "the self-hypnosis" takes on a new meaning within the context of the play, considering the Father's hypnotisation by the self in the "transubstantiation" of his daughter into an oak tree. Ultimately, the play tackles the phenomenon of hypnotism with a surprising turn as towards the end of the play the writer elevates the meaning of the act of hypnotism not through the Hypnotist but through the Father's trauma. Within this scope, Lane notes that "the fictional within the Father's story becomes real to him; he actually believes he has played a grand piano. The play presents a near-perfect example of form reflecting content. There is no clear resolution to the fictional future narrative of the Father and the Hypnotist" (135). It is only the phenomenon of autosuggestion that can realise the story of the Father, in other words, the act of hypnotism as Coué suggests: "Autosuggestion is nothing but hypnotism" (22). Therefore, what renders Crouch's story real on the end of the audience is their autosuggestion and their ability to self-hypnotise.

The striking end of the play reveals the ultimate transformation through a bilateral reading. In the final scene, the Hypnotist gives instructions of the moments of the accident from his point of view, while the Father gives instructions to the Hypnotist from the point of Claire seconds before she dies:

HYPNOTIST: 'When I say so, you're driving.'

'You're on your way to somewhere. You're not too tired.'

'You glance at the mirror. You catch sight of the upper left-hand corner of your face.'

‘You’re 42.’

‘You’re driving forward in space and time.’

FATHER: ‘When I say so, you’re walking.’

‘It’s dusk.’

‘You’re on your way to somewhere. You shift your weight. You shift your weight again.’

‘You’re 12.’

‘The air is cold. You’re listening to music. You’re not too tired.’

‘You’re walking forward in space and time.’ (105-106)

The motional parallels between the Hypnotist and Claire allude to the mutual trauma shared by the Hypnotist and Claire’s father in the sense that they both have the similar instincts to alter/cease the moment of the accident. “Going forward in space and time” can also be interpreted from various perspectives within the scope of the multi-layered structure of the play. Since the setting is the next year, and it is known that the accident occurred three months before the hypnotism show, it is plausible to comment that the accident has not yet happened in the realm of the audience’s time, as the actor says in the interlude-like part: “And anyway, it hasn’t happened yet” (*An Oak Tree* 95). What makes this story happen is similar to the problematised existence of Dawn, Claire and Marcy, as discussed above. Their existence as mere concepts does not render their impact to the story unreal. Therefore, the accident and the story are real as much as the characters, who are, as Rebellato affirms, “just ideas that exist in our heads” (152). Thus, once again it is the power of suggestion and the implantation of an idea that feel this final moment of confrontation real as “[i]n the final scene, both of them adopt the language of hypnosis” (Lane 135). Both the Father and the Hypnotist emerge or create an immersive plane of existence to accommodate their mutual trauma. They are not solely painting a picture as they go through spatial and temporal realms and thus transform into each other. Crouch, in this final scene, presents this trauma not as an instance but as a process of transformation. Through the hypnotic suggestions they give to each other, the Father and the Hypnotist induce a reverse empathy so that both can deal with their traumas to be able to heal. For the Father, the recovery depends on being able to say goodbye to his daughter, while for the Hypnotist, it is stopping the moment:

HYPNOTIST: 'When I say sleep, she lifts her hand up.'

'When I say sleep, you say goodbye.'

FATHER: 'When I say sleep, everything stops.'

HYPNOTIST: 'Sleep.'

FATHER: 'Sleep.'

HYPNOTIST: 'When you open your eyes.'

FATHER: 'When you open your eyes.' (107)

As it is apparent in these lines, initially the suggestion evolves into autosuggestion, resulting in the state of hypnosis. Therefore, this scene illustrates the significance of being receptive, as was mentioned at the beginning of the chapter. Crouch expounds this final transformation by saying that "the Father is able to do the thing he most wanted to -- to say 'goodbye.' As these words are spoken the Aria breaks through into the First Variation which plays with an energy which, for me, is the absolute transformative power of art. He says good-bye, and the girl is materialised, his grief is addressed. 'When you open your eyes'" ("Theatrical Transformations" n.p.). Thus, the Father manages to say goodbye to his daughter through self-hypnosis with the help of the Hypnotist's suggestions, and he achieves the final result through autosuggestion.

Consequently, Crouch amplifies the phenomenon of transformation as the "power of art," and as Pilný suggests, "[t]his opens up the way towards a consideration of all art as a form of hypnosis" (139). Therefore, art has both manipulative and rehabilitative power on the individual depending on their receptivity as well as on the way they perceive the suggested signs. Bottoms emphasises the power held by the spectator through Crouch's statement: "If there's going to be a transformation in me, it won't happen in a warm-up five minutes before the show, it'll happen because of the audience. You'll make the transformation in me, not me" ("Authorising" 73). With these words, he implies that the audience possesses the equal power, if not more, of authorship and to transform, equivalent to the author's power to create. This is why the coincidences between Crouch, the author and the Hypnotist are crucial: although both insinuate authority on different layers, suggestion has no force on its own until it operates as autosuggestion. In the final

act, hypnotising the Hypnotist is significant in this respect. Despite the hypnotic nature of Crouch's art, the author can only make suggestions for the audience to interpret autonomously. Those suggestions function as initiators for the spectators to begin their authorship intellectually so that the ideas Crouch propounds can transform into autonomous perception. Ultimately, *An Oak Tree* contrives to hypnotise its audience and originates a "transubstantiation" to manifest their transformative powers. As Coué affirms, "[i]t is an illusion to think that you have no illusions (69), and Crouch reveals this phenomenon by subverting the very illusion per se.



**CHAPTER III:**

**TRANSLATION AS AN AGENT FOR SELF-AUTHORSHIP IN**

***ENGLAND***

An emancipated community is a community of narrators and translators.

Jacques Rancière

Tim Crouch's much-debated, award-winning *ENGLAND* (2007) is a prominent play with its neoteric setting, which is an art gallery. Shifting the focus from transformation to transplantation in this play, the writer does not only centre on the outcomes of the act as it happens with transformation, or "transubstantiation," but also displays the mobility and dynamism during the process itself. Bearing a multi-layered structure, this time the transitions between the layers take place not through the identity-related complexities but through the concepts of corporality and coexistence. As Bottoms asserts, the play "is always performed in galleries and functions as a kind of strategic transplant, or even invasion, of theatre conventions into an art world setting" ("Authorising" 75). Thus, this transplantation can be examined as an expansion from a microcosm to a macrocosm when the conventions the writer uses are turned "into an art world." Contrarily, when the setting as a gallery is considered, this shift also indicates a transmission from a macrocosm to a microcosm as it is a theatre play "transplanted into a gallery." The capitalised title "ENGLAND," therefore, bears both macrocosmic and microcosmic connotations in relation to the "art world setting." Both aspects come together concerning the consumers of art, that is the spectators. Prioritising the audience's perception, Crouch constructs the setting in *ENGLAND* where the spectators will question the act of viewing both as an activity and a passivity outside a theatre building, transcending the confines of the auditorium. Accordingly, this chapter analyses how Crouch positions his audience in *ENGLAND* as the translators of the story through which he creates an emancipated community of authors.

*ENGLAND*,<sup>1</sup> as Ilter highlights, is “a play about ‘one thing placed inside another: a heart inside another person’s body, a culture inside another country’s culture, theatre inside a gallery, a character inside an actor, a play inside its audience’” (396). Bearing a multivalent structure, the play revolves around the story of an English character who is diagnosed with atrial fibrillation and who eventually survives owing to a heart transplant by means of the economic power of his/her wealthy art-dealer Dutch American boyfriend. Consisting of two acts, the play opens in the interior of a gallery building exhibiting one specific artist’s works (it is Alex Hartley in the text, as at the time of the performance the Fruitmarket Gallery was exhibiting Hartley’s works). Nevertheless, it is an intricate matter to ascertain the initial moment of *ENGLAND* precisely as the performance begins the second the spectators enter the building. The play “is already in motion,” asserts Delgado-García, “when actors and spectators briefly experience together the art gallery as a space for social interaction, where the hierarchic distinction between the actor (the maker and purveyor of art) and the spectator (its consumer and silent discussant) is put under pressure” (159-60). The audience’s power to initiate the play implies the idea that without the consumer’s presence, the art’s existence becomes a questionable subject matter. Through this pressurised division, the play tackles the notion of absence/presence, which is innately present in theatre performances. Bottoms elucidates the functionality of the absence/presence paradox in theatre by saying:

[T]heatre uses people and objects that are physically present as a means of invoking other people, places and ideas that are not. This interplay of the present and absent (which pertains to contemporary performance as much as traditional drama) means that theatre, almost by definition, involves a degree of collaborative involvement on the part of the audience: ‘piece out our imperfections with your thoughts,’ suggests the Prologue to Shakespeare’s *Henry V*. (Introduction 14)

Utilising this intrinsic component of theatre with versatility, Crouch does not merely create an absence/presence situation through the physically present and absent based on the distance between these elements. The writer also plays around with the counteraction and interchangeable possibilities stemming from the paradoxical existence it creates per se. In *ENGLAND*, the gallery setting reinforces this fluidity in a complex way due to the

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<sup>1</sup> Directed by Andy Smith and Karl James, “[t]he play is created for and first produced in the Fruitmarket Gallery in Edinburgh in August 2007” (Sakellaridou 25), and it is “originally commissioned by the Traverse Theatre” (Bottoms, “Authorising” 75).

abundance of works of art surrounding the viewers. However, the play exceeds the works of art present in the gallery to such an extent that it creates incompatibilities between what the performers narrate and what the spectators see around the gallery.

The first act, “Dabbing,” begins with two actors welcoming the group of audience members:

‘Thank you.’

...

‘Ladies and gentlemen.’

‘Thank you.’

‘If it weren’t for you, I wouldn’t be here.’

‘You saved my life!’

‘Welcome to the Fruitmarket Gallery here in Edinburgh.’ (109-10)

At first, these two performers, Crouch and Hannah Ringham, give the impression of guides who are waiting to inform the audience about the gallery and the works of art surrounding it. Soon after, however, when the delivery of these two actors begins to intertwine, it becomes evident that they are not gallery guides, but rather two performers representing a single body. The circumstance that raises uncertainty at this point is the dubious identification of the individual whose speech is conveyed. Bottoms interprets this uncertainty as below:

[W]e, the standing audience, are a tour group. We are made very conscious of our physical presence in the gallery ... As the play develops, though, it becomes clear that the central character is strangely absent: the two actors alternate lines in a long monologue, as if they are the same person, leaving us uncertain as to whether this person is male or female, gay or straight. The only thing we can be fairly certain of is that this character – unlike the eternally preserved artefacts on the walls – is dying. He or she is betwixt and between life and death, neither here nor there, and thus not fully present with us. (Introduction 18)

So, the spectators realise that the two actors represent something different from gallery guides, and that they themselves are not a typical theatre audience. With this realisation, Crouch fictionalises the audience, and the main character’s absence problematises their presence in the gallery. As Bottoms suggests, the performers’ constant reference to their

boyfriend also creates an identity-related uncertainty as the source of the voice conveyed by the performers (one male and one female) is totally blurred. Thus, the writer leaves the interpretation of the central character to the audience as the protagonist takes any form the viewers can imagine, while the performers communicate the character's voice.

Aside from the complexity induced by the performers' overlapping voices, the subject matter of the narration begins to merge shortly after the play begins. The transmitted subject changes constantly as the narration shifts from the historical background of the gallery and the artworks to the main character's life, their boyfriend, and their deteriorating health. This not only leads the storytelling to become fluid and intricate, but also compels the audience to question the confines of the gallery regarding spatiality. The word "look" that the writer employs to indicate the fluidity of the narration and the setting allows the viewer to consider the dualities that are present and absent, that are here and there. Regarding the shift in the narration, Delgado-García contends that "at the onset of the play these refer to the art gallery and the works exhibited, these details will progressively be about the protagonist of the story. In short, Crouch's and Ringham's body language and linguistic register are those of two art guides initiating a translation of the artworks for the visitors/spectators" (168). For this reason, throughout the first act, the performers serve as interpreters who translate from absence to presence. The uncertainty about the character's physical identity mirrors the intricacy of their existential status. Lane comments on the focalisation of identity in the play:

The site of performance – an art gallery – enriches further the play's preoccupation with image and identity. Neither the locations within the story nor the characters, other than the [central character] comprising the narrative, are actually present, but are referred to as if they were, through the repeated instruction to us to 'look'. We are being guided through the art gallery as if it were displaying the [character's] life to this point, but the visual and physical components of the story can only ever be present in our imaginations: what form they take is up to us. The form of the play relies on an extreme suspension of disbelief among the audience, with the components of the story (like everything else in the play) subject to displacement: geographical, emotional, biological and now imaginative, through the collective displacement of a hundred spectators' different versions of the story's places and people. (138)

As this explanation demonstrates, the performers convey the discrepancies between the narrated and the demonstrated not just through the character they perform, but also

through the gallery itself. When the performers guide the audience to “look” at the works of art, the spectators occasionally see nothing but an empty wall, or sometimes the performers draw attention to an existing work of art that is non-coincidental to what the performers narrate. This way, Crouch and Ringham stimulate the audience with the imperative word “look,” and the viewers begin to fill the empty walls with their imagination, resulting in “different versions of the story” occurring and thereby transforming into “distant spectators and active interpreters of the spectacle offered to them” (Rancière 13). The spectacles presented to the audience in *ENGLAND* are usually substantial, and this elusiveness stimulates the viewers’ intellectual contribution further.

Despite the performers’ repeated use of the word “look,” which may appear authoritative and manipulative, it is an invitation to the audience to question the non-coincidental signs throughout the performance. Thus, the word functions as a suggestion by the author that initiates autosuggestion on the spectators’ end. Emilie Morin comments on the impact of the word on the audience by saying that the play “pivots upon an intransitive exigency: ‘Look.’ The imperative remains unfulfilled, however, and it is the ear, rather than the eye, that is called upon to appreciate the gallery visit” (71). This unfulfilled act of looking evokes the Duchampian concept of antiretinal art, which allows the viewer to look through the mind rather than the eye. In another layer, the imperative word also manifests the idea that the works of art are consumed through the spectators’ gaze, as it is the eye that validates a piece of artwork (Morin 82). The character reveals the parallel between looking and consuming by saying: “He [the boyfriend] says that good art is art that sells. He’s taught me the difference between looking and seeing!” (*ENGLAND* 130). Therefore, the “difference between looking and seeing” serves two different purposes within the narrative: First, the character’s evident superficiality reveals “a commodification and valorisation of subjective life in globalised capitalism” (Delgado-García 163), and second, it reminds the audience to not solely “look” but to see through the walls of the gallery.

Crouch uses an excerpt from Brian O’Doherty’s (1928- ) *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (1986) “as an epigraph to the text,” which Morin suggests is “a timely reminder of the web of conventions that shape the gaze of the spectator upon

the art gallery, and inviting a consideration of the immediate material context of the art object” (71-72). The immediate material context of the artwork generates a new absence/presence dynamic by prompting the audience to consider the materiality and conceptuality of art. O’Doherty explains the subtle difference between “the Viewer” and “the Eye” as follows:

For the Viewer – literally something you look through – and the Eye validate experience. They join us whenever we enter a gallery, and the solitariness of our perambulations is obligatory, because we are really holding a mini-seminar with our surrogates. To that exact degree, we are absent. Presence before a work of art, then, means that we absent ourselves in favor of the Eye and Spectator, who report to us what we might have seen had we been there. The absent work of art is frequently more present to us. For the Spectator and the Eye are conventions which stabilize our missing sense of ourselves. They acknowledge that our identity is itself a fiction, and they give us the illusion we are present through a double-edged self-consciousness. We objectify and consume art, then, to nourish our nonexistent selves or to maintain some esthetic starveling called “formalist man.” All this is clearer if we go back to that moment when a picture became an active partner in perception. (55)

When “the Viewer” personalises the art object through “the Eye,” it transforms into a presence of autonomous perception. This perpetual paradoxical cycle in Crouch’s theatre underlines the audience’s transformation into the creator. In *ENGLAND*, a concrete instance of this stimulates the viewers’ perception by means of language rather than the tangible signifiers in the form of works of art. While a materially present art object in the gallery becomes absent through the audience’s perception, an absent artwork evolves into a presence through “the Eye.” Hence, it is the audience that transforms the physically absent central character into a conceptually present one. At this point, the spectators become autopoietic components rather than perceiving with a collective understanding.

When comparing the auditorium and the gallery as settings, it can be stated that though the group of viewers indicates a collectivity, the gallery is intrinsically suitable for a more self-producing environment. Looking at the same works of art, the spectators create a myriad of different concepts in their imaginations, which is how Crouch’s theatre operates. Thus, in addition to being a criticism of consumerism and capitalism, the gallery is symbolic in its function to induce self-producing autopoietic contributors. White notes that

[w]e might look upon audiences, participants and performers as part of the environment of the autopoietic system, as with the self-sustaining process of a cell, which is: ‘a thermodynamically open system, continually exchanging matter and energy with its environment’ ... In this sense performance – as an autonomous system – continually exchanges resources with the people that contribute and respond to it. (187-88)

In this sense, the audience’s continuous movement in the gallery may be compared to “the continually exchanging energy,” which turns the viewer’s activity into a signified matter per se. During this process of perception, not only are the conceptualised artworks in the gallery communicated through language but the performers, Crouch and Ringham, also become aesthetic objects for the audience, as Delgado-García explains:

Standing before the works of art within the exhibit, and constantly appealing to our activation of this gaze, this aesthetic sensibility before the world, they become the object of it. They become a living object of art that we are invited to identify and value. This is especially acute in those moments where both performers stand before the works of art without speaking, those long pauses in which they allow themselves to be consumed by the spectators’ gaze – while also gazing back at the spectators. Their seemingly inactive bodies, therefore, are engaged in an invisible labour of characterisation: they figure the subject as capable of being both the agent and the object of this gaze. (176)

In this way, the performers evolve into both the cause and effect of the action they elicit in the audience, and the source of the signifier becomes the signified once more through the act of looking. Therefore, the agent and the agency of the gaze interlace, resulting in the objectification and fictionalisation of the audience. Considering this interconnected object-subject relationship, Crouch asserts that “[t]his theme of actors’ agency versus audience agency is present in all my work” (“A Process” 399). However, the writer utilises the actor’s agency as an apparatus to elevate that of the viewers as it transpires in *ENGLAND*. Also, by objectifying himself and Ringham in the play, Crouch obfuscates the distance between the performer and the audience, and obliquely equalises the creator and the spectators as the complementing components. At some point in the first act, the protagonist addresses the question, “Do I look like an artist?” (*ENGLAND* 116) when talking about how the originality of the work in their house is called into doubt by their acquaintances, and it is assumed that the protagonist created a replica of it. The protagonist is not the only one who asks the question as it “is also posed by Crouch as an artist, who from the beginning of the performance has worked to preclude any distinctions

between cast and audience” (Delgado-García 160). Consequently, the performers function as conveyors, translating not only the absent protagonist but also Crouch as the author.

During the first act, the performers ask the spectators if they have any questions (*ENGLAND* 133). However, they continue to talk without waiting for a response from the audience as Morin notes:

In *England*, an incidental interaction with a necessarily imperfect audience is written into the script; the audience is momentarily invited to respond to the visit: ‘Any questions?’ The illusion that the observer might evolve from the passive into the active is entertained throughout; the audience is eventually ‘translated’ into the performance and becomes a protagonist without active participation. (79)

This can be given as an example of the emancipatory restrictions that Crouch employs for his audience. By posing this question, Crouch prompts audience members to evaluate their role in the play. However, he does not expect active participation from the spectators. Instead, he elevates the spectators’ consciousness regarding their presence in the gallery urging them to realise their fictionalisation by the performers. As White suggests, “we are aware of being audience members even while we are also participant-performers” (160). Thus, with this question Crouch directs to the characters in the play but not to his spectators, the audience, already aware of their spectatorship, realises that they are also characters, and this enables them to continue watching the play with a dual consciousness.

While during the first act Crouch primarily engages the audience intellectually through the gaze, he also demonstrates the correlation between the gallery participant and the conventional theatre audience. As Fischer-Lichte suggests, “[t]raditionally, the role of a gallery visitor or theatregoer is defined as that of either an observer or spectator. Gallery visitors observe the exhibited works from varying distances without usually touching them. Theatregoers watch the plot unfold on stage, possibly with strong feelings of empathy, but refrain from interfering” (*Transformative Power* 11). Throughout the first act of the play, the performers repeatedly prompt the audience not to touch anything (*ENGLAND* 111), which illustrates this distancing implicitly. By doing so, the writer juxtaposes the theatre aesthetics with that of an art gallery. However, while demonstrating this proximity, he also criticises the commodification of art eventuating by means of “the



Eye.” As Bottoms argues, “Crouch, retains the potential to re-fulfil the betrayed promise of conceptual art: ‘You can’t buy and keep a performance of a play, because it doesn’t last, it’s gone. There’s no investment, it’s not going to accrue in value over the years’” (“Authorising” 75). Thus, through the ephemeral nature of the performances, Crouch both highlights the possibility of producing subjectivity in the perception of each audience member at each staging and criticises the materialisation and monetisation of art, which is a major issue in *ENGLAND*.

Towards the end of the first act, while the protagonist’s heart condition deteriorates and the performers depict their boyfriend’s endeavours to keep the main character alive, the sound in the background, which is intermittently audible throughout the act in the form of an underscore, begins to escalate and transforms into “[a] deafening sound of splitting and destruction that leads the spectators out of the first gallery space and into the second” (*ENGLAND* 147). As this grating sound marks the end of the first act, Crouch leaves Ringham’s side and starts walking to another room within the gallery building. While the audience follows Crouch, Ringham walks behind the audience into the room as Lane explains: “When she is finally consulted by a surgeon before her operation, one of the performers slowly exits the space. They leave the ‘other half’ of the [protagonist] behind and take the audience with them, whilst the painful, distorted sound of demolition fills the gallery: an indication of something being wrenched apart” (136). The use of the sound that illustrates something is being pulled or destroyed may first give the impression that the protagonist is dying as the first act ends with the line: “The end of the world” (*ENGLAND* 147). However, it is soon revealed that the character has undergone a successful heart transplant and is about to meet the donor’s wife “in a hotel room, in a remote non-specified Islamic country” (Delgado-García 153). The hotel room setting in the realm of the story and the non-coincidental empty room in the gallery where the spectators sit create a spatial dissonance that is more intricate than the one in the first act. Although no pieces of art or locations named by the performers are genuinely present during the first act, the general gallery setting overlaps the narration regarding the ambiance it insinuates on the spectators. In the second act, there is a spatial change to a different country in an entirely different place creating discrepancies with the narrated. By this, Crouch alters the audience’s physical and temporal presence once more by taking

them forward in time. Walking to another room in the gallery, therefore, “signifies a chronological, spatial and epistemological shift in the story” (Delgado-García 153). Also, Crouch’s and Ringham’s separation is not only functional in leading the audience to the room. When Anthony Giddens’s definition of presence, which is, in Scholl et al.’s words, “the presence of the body while absence is ... the spatial-temporal distance of corresponding bodies” (54), is considered, it can be assumed that Crouch creates another absence/presence situation as his and Ringham’s bodies represent the corresponding body of the protagonist. Thus, Crouch’s walking to the other room creates a “distance of corresponding bodies” while the other half remains in the previous location by problematising the main character’s already present absence further.

The crux of the play is the characterisation of the audience in the second act as the heart donor Hassam’s wife. When the spectators walk towards the room, Delgado-García asserts: “Crouch has started acting already, and is visibly expressing a nervous, moved elation as spectators arrive in the room. This not only poses him temporarily as the English protagonist but aims to silently characterise the audience” (184). This time Crouch’s body, which singly represents the protagonist, is positioned as the English waiting for the widow in a hotel room. Therefore, the moment the audience enters the room signifies the widow’s arrival at the hotel room. When Ringham moves next to Crouch again, this time they do not stand as two in one body, but while one of them demonstrates the English protagonist, the other becomes the translator to translate the bilingual communication between the protagonist and the widow. In the first half of the second act Ringham personates the Translator, and the act begins with the lines below:

ENGLISH: ‘Thank you.’

INTERPRETER: ‘Thank you.’

ENGLISH: ‘Thank you!’

‘If it weren’t for you I wouldn’t be here!’

INTERPRETER: ‘If it weren’t for you I wouldn’t be here.’

ENGLISH: ‘You saved my life!!’

INTERPRETER: ‘You saved my life.’

ENGLISH: 'Look!'

INTERPRETER: 'Look.' (147-48)

The analogies at the beginning of the first and second acts are of great significance regarding the spatial, epistemological, and chronological changes. The sentence "If it weren't for you, I wouldn't be here!" appears in both acts and has two implications concerning the scope of the play. When this sentence is considered within the context of the gallery in the first act, one may get the impression that the gallery and art have no function without a consuming community; however, in the second act, the sentence implies that the English character would not have been alive if it had not been for Hassam. Also, while the phrase "Look" is used as an inducement for the spectators to look at the works of art, in the second act the word bears a connotation to draw the viewers' attention to the protagonist's survival activating the viewer's gaze upon themselves. This association urges the audience to consider the relationship between artworks and human life concerning the capability of the gaze in the aestheticisation of both since "human life and the world at large can be perceived as art if the beholder has an aesthetic disposition (Delgado-García 82). Crouch emphasises the audience's responsibility regarding consumerism by establishing this analogy, as it is the gaze that is responsible in consuming art, the act of "looking." In return, the writer achieves the fictionalisation of the spectators in the second act through the performers' eyes since the protagonist and the translator speak by looking directly into the spectators' eyes.

Once the spectators perceive that they are characterised as the widow, Crouch transforms their collectivity into one, thereby amalgamating the multiplicity of the signifiers into one body, "and thus it collectively stands for a singular subject" (Delgado-García 189). While this transformation is similar to that of Crouch's and Ringham's correspondence as one person, it is the opposite of the idea discussed in the previous chapter, which is "one body representing two things at once" (Love n.p.). The phrase "the collective displacement of a hundred spectators" becomes a significant notion concerning the dynamism of the play between the concepts of sympoiesis and autopoiesis; however, Crouch constructs this shift in a more complex way in this play as the autonomous contribution emerges from collectivity in *ENGLAND*, which is parallel to the concept of shared knowledge. Since

this quasi-sympoietic audience is unable to keep up communication with the English when they are characterised as the widow regardless of their shared and collective emotions, especially concerning the empathy they feel towards the widow, each viewer still translates this allegedly bilateral conversation in an autonomous way. However, the way the spectators' perceptions function in *ENGLAND* can be explained also through "heteropoiesis<sup>2</sup>" and "allopoiesis<sup>3</sup>" as White does:

Most thinking and writing about performance, perhaps, is concerned with the allopoietic and the heteropoietic. But awareness of performance in its autopoietic aspect is useful, especially when looking at audience participatory performance. What it is in danger of neglecting, is that for the experiencing subject performance is always also heteropoietic<sup>4</sup>, having elements devised elsewhere and introduced to us, and always also allopoietic, having elements which we will take away with us and reflect upon. (188)

Based on the problematisation of consciousness produced by the process between "the Viewer" and "the Eye" concerning the perception of the subject, it may be asserted that the audience experiences both heteropoiesis and allopoiesis through the gallery setting in *ENGLAND*. The artworks and the performers' narration present the audience with a heteropoietic system, whereas the viewer "creates things" outside the gallery building. As a result, Crouch uses the heteropoietic framework for the audience to experience the play in an allopoietic manner.

The audience's presence as the widow also unveils another absence/presence situation, as it is the widow's corporal absence that can actualise this fictionalisation. Scholl et al. comment on this absence/presence relationship by saying:

Borges' emphasises that the distinction absence/presence permanently collapses. Indeed, both sides begin to interfere with each other and start to form a complex relationship. Hence, a second (and other) way of interpreting this distinction

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<sup>2</sup> White explains heteropoiesis by saying that "we can see 'heteropoietic' aspects when thinking of how performance is designed and produced from outside itself, when thinking of what performance makers create and rehearse, and what is designed by a procedural author" (188).

<sup>3</sup> According to White, "we can see 'allopoietic' ... aspects of performance, where it creates things other than itself, when it creates meanings and understandings (however incomplete) that audience members take away with them" (188).

emphasises much more the mutual dependency ... between absence and presence. This is a trivial insight: *that people can be present at a particular place and hence in proximity to each other requires the absence of other objects (and people) at the same time.* (55)

In this approach, the widow's corporal absence makes the audience a character in the play, resulting in a dynamic interplay between these two parties. Hence, "Crouch's malleable audience, whose passivity is presented as a quality of activity," transforms "into a performative occurrence" (Morin 79). Within the realm of the story, the audience is present in another time and location, as opposed to the Translator and English, who exist in the same temporality and spatiality. Lane elaborates on this complexity by saying: "*England* explicitly places the process of translation in front of an audience and puts them in the firing line. We are framed as part of a flawed and insubstantial process of communication, taking on the role of the widow who is, in her absence and our presence, both there and not there" (137). It is only through the spectators' perception and imagination that Crouch makes it possible for both parties to be "there" at the same time. Based on the "performative occurrence" taking place through the spectators' fictionalisation, it is possible to assume the widow's situation as a present absence example, as explained by Scholl et al. below:

The absent is not only 'there', it is always 'here,' hence each thinking of that which is present must keep in mind the multiple absences which allow for something to be present and to be in its place; this is why we speak of present absences ... If we talk about present objects and processes it seems necessary to keep in mind that these presences are connected with the ones we regard as being absent in a given and specific situation. (56)

As this explanation reveals, each absence signifies the present absence condition correspondingly to the widow's situation. Furthermore, the viewers' characterisation as the widow multiplies her absence because there is the multiplicity of bodies Crouch attributes to a single character that is not "here." Therefore, the antiretinal aspects become crucial throughout the second act since the audience actualises the character through their intellectual contribution, and it is the present absence situation that makes the viewers' contemplation a consequential act. Regarding the audience's intellectual contribution Crouch explains that "In *ENGLAND*, it is about saying it and not showing it; this generates thoughts, connections and images in an audience. But, if I showed it as I said

it, the audience would [have] nothing to contribute” (“A Process” 403). The predominant mode of transmission, which stands on saying throughout the play, urges the spectators to see, which is the key activity in this particular play while the passivity is simply looking at it.

Although in the first part, two performers exhibit the notion of translation by narrating the works of art to the audience, in the second act, Crouch uses translation as a more explicit device. The first notable detail concerning the Translator is that while translating, they desensitise the English’s emotions, making the character lost in translation as is apparent in the excerpt:

ENGLISH: ‘I’ve brought something for you. A gift to say thank you. Thank you to you!’

‘From me. For me! For my life! For what you did for me!’

INTERPRETER: ‘It’s an honour to meet you. I have a gift to thank you.’ (148)

As can be observed, the Translator’s translation dulls and mechanises the English’s enthusiasm. Aside from that, the frequent silences Crouch employs between translations reinforce the difficulty and the complexity of this failed communication, which may also be interpreted as a complication stemming from the spatial and temporal distances. The apparent reduction in the protagonist’s words by the Translator also obscures the widow’s thoughts and approach to the English. As Lane notes,

[t]he filter of translation creates a cold and clinical tone, diffusing the emotional texture of the widow’s own words. Their delivery through the translator is colourless, distancing the widow even further from the [protagonist’s] efforts to offer a hand of friendship and celebrate a life saved. Language as a theatrical device is exploited by Crouch much more prominently in *England*, and the gulf between the characters’ understanding of the situation is illustrated through the limitations of their communicative apparatus, their separate cultural perspectives, and then through the chosen theatrical form as well. (138)

Crouch attributes the presence of the widow only to the language conveyed by the Translator and the spectators’ hearing. As it is evident that the translation process in the play is unreliable because the English’s statements are translated in a perfunctory and insensitive manner, the widow’s statements create a sense of uncertainty. This may

heighten the audience's sense of desperation, as they are not present before the Translator and hence cannot express themselves in the form of the widow. The decorum between the form and the content thus increases the impact of the audience's characterisation as the widow because through the elusiveness of the interaction enhanced with the silent breaks the spectators genuinely experience this failed communication. Delgado-García argues that

the widow's utterances are inaudible (for the audience in the performance) and incomprehensible (for the English characters in the fiction). Her existence as a subject in the sensible world of the performance is both sustained and overwritten by the interpreter and their translations. *ENGLAND* does not provide any sonic support to the widow's words. The interpreter's words are thus rendered a simulacrum à la Baudrillard: a copy without an original. (191)

Crouch creates this simulacrum through the widow's present absence, thereby problematising the phenomenon of representation regarding the Translator's interpretation of the widow. Crouch and Ringham switch roles in the middle of the second act, and from that point on, Crouch assumes the role of the Translator while Ringham continues as the English. This reversal also demonstrates the discrepancy in the Translator's representation aside from preventing the audience from attributing the English's and the Translator's roles to these two performers. Thus, the ambivalence concerning the protagonist's and the Translator's corporal presence persists until the end of the play.

During these ambiguous exchanges, it becomes clear that the widow was asked to consent to heart transplantation while Hassam was still alive, and she was offered half a million pounds to sign the paper to approve this operation, which is the reason why the widow believes that Hassam is killed. Crouch transforms this anguish into reality by fictionalising the audience as the widow, as opposed to portraying it through actors on stage, as in theatrical realism. Thus, the issue in question is actualised, and it no longer becomes present "there" on stage but "here" in the audience. Delgado-García asserts that "[p]roviding the audience with an unjust situation, this second act implicitly demonstrates the difficulty of interrupting and calling into question a given order – of acting out our alleged freedom, agency and desire for equality" (174-75). Not only do the spectators

directly experience these challenges from the widow's perspective, but they are also prompted to question their own responsibility in contributing to this heart transplantation. Lane expresses this cogitation that Crouch triggers in the audience by saying that “[w]e understand what is happening more clearly through how it is happening to us. This is a dramaturgy that ‘makes us aware of the mechanisms of communication and the artificial construction of imaginary (real) worlds, even while we are moved and engaged by them’” (137). Consequently, by obfuscating the distinction between fiction and reality through the multi-layered structure of the play, Crouch enables the audience to confront this predicament both autonomously and collectively. Delgado-García encapsulates the stratified nature of the play by focusing on the impact it has on the audience as both passive viewers and active participants as below:

To recapitulate, in *ENGLAND*'s first act, spectators – like Crouch and Ringham themselves – are doubly characterised. On the one hand, they are figured as part of a collective reactive subject, enmeshed in a convivial, uncritical and privileged inhabiting of the world. They are incorporated into the collective subject epitomised by the protagonist. On the other hand, they are also understood as an aggregation of autonomous singular subjects whose positioning in the [g]allery stems from a combination of personal initiative, collective inertia, and awareness of the self and others (performers, co-spectators, works of art) in the room. Similarly, audience characterisation in Act Two is once again twofold: spectators are characterised both as the donor's widow in the fiction and as a collection of mis-characterised subjects, as subjects other than the widow or the protagonist, who are exposed to an experience of disidentification. (189)

The emphasis on the word “collective inertia” reveals the complex structure of the play in the sense that though the audience's mobility as gallery visitors in the first act contrasts with their immobility in the second act, audience engagement in the second is significantly greater than in the first. Awareness of the self and disidentification are also in conflict, as the audience, who participates with their own consciousness in the first act, is encouraged to contemplate through the consciousness of another in the second. O'Doherty claims that the impact of “the Eye” is crucial regarding this juncture of the consciousness and asserts that “the Eye is” responsible for both the disidentification and the creation of the illusion on the audience by saying:

[Perception] mediates between object and idea and includes both. Once the “active” artwork is included in the perceptual arc, the senses are called into question; and since the senses apprehend the data that confirm identity, identity becomes



problematic. The Eye stands for two opposite forces: the fragmentation of the self and the illusion of holding it together ... So Eye and Spectator acknowledge the desire for direct experience, at the same time they recognize that the modernist consciousness can only temporarily submerge itself in process. Again the Eye and Spectator emerge with a double function – as much curators of our consciousness as subverters of it. (61)

When the spectator's senses and sense of identity are conflated, disidentification occurs; the eye participates in opposing forces for both the illusion of holding the self together and fragmentation, as stated by O'Doherty. In *ENGLAND*, this fragmentation takes place not just by the audience's own perception and "Eye," but also by external factors, which is the performers' gaze. The performers' eyes are what fictionalises and alters the spectators' identities. Looking at the audience while communicating with the widow results in misidentification; hence, the eye functions as both a curator and a subverter of the audience's consciousness.

The audience's transformation from a group visiting the gallery and consuming the artworks to a character in the play heightens the spectators' sense of responsibility for Hassam's death, given that the heart is purchased by the protagonist's art dealer boyfriend. Thus, the monetisation of art provides the English and his/her partner with this purchasing power. In the second act, the spectators, who experience this consumerism as the providers of it, turn into victims who painfully face the consequences of consumerism. In other words, this indicates their transition from the agents to the objects of the problem. Based on this, it may be asserted that the sound Crouch uses at the end of the first act as "an indication of something being wrenched apart" (Lane 136) is actually Hassam's heart, which is being removed from his body, indicating "[t]he end of the world" (*ENGLAND* 147) for him. Hence, the audience's acting as the widow begins as they start walking towards the room along with the sound playing in the background whereas Crouch's acting "has already begun" when the audience enters the room.

Near the end of the play, the widow brings the English a photo of Hassam to which the protagonist responds by saying, "I will frame it. Put it in a frame – like this! Put it on my wall!" (*ENGLAND* 158). The framing of Hassam's photograph alludes to his transformation into an art piece and his objectification by the gaze. Also, the expensive

work of art that the protagonist wants to give to the widow in return for the life Hassam bestowed upon them leads to his objectification even further:

ENGLISH: 'It's worth a lot of money.'

'It's beautiful.'

'You can do what you like with it. Sell it or keep it. It's yours. A lot of money. For food, or clothes, or water. For your village. For whatever you want.'

'A lot of money.'

'Does she understand? I want her to have it. I didn't have to come here. Nobody made me. This is my gift. My thank you.'

'For my life.'

INTERPRETER: 'A work of art from England.' (164-65)

Bottoms describes this exchange as “art for a heart” (“Materialising” 459), and this reinforces the idea that through the viewers’ aesthetic tendency human life can be considered art (Delgado-García 82). Hassam’s absence, therefore, is what makes the protagonist present in this story, and obliquely, what makes Hassam absent is the consumer’s gaze that is powerful enough to aestheticise a human life. The line “A work of art from England” is also of great importance regarding its dual implication, which Delgado-García contends by saying: “Ringham is claiming here to bear a present for the widow. Yet her lines also resonate with her role as an English performer who has brought the spectators a theatre work from England, and who relinquishes authorial authority and ownership over the piece” (193). Considering this statement, the presentation of “a work of art from England” to the audience as an offering and the protagonist’s suggestion to the widow that “[she] can do what [she] like[s] with it reiterates Crouch’s objective to make suggestions to his audience so that they “can do what [they] like with it.” Also, the play’s finalisation with the question the English poses to the Translator, that is “What’s she saying? What did she say?” (*ENGLAND* 166), can be analysed as Crouch’s leaving the interpretation to his audience.

Through the paradoxical dynamism of absence/presence by means of creating corresponding bodies and turning collectivity into one unity, Crouch utilises the gallery

as a setting where the spectators experience the play autonomously as an “interpretive community arising out of shared social experiences” (McQuail 19). While the gallery setting allows the audience to interact as autopoietic components collectively undergoing a shared social experience, their transformation into a single character in the second act also enables them to individually confront ethical issues such as monetisation of art and objectification of human life during this shared experience.

Consequently, the performers who function as translators in both acts (translating the works of art in the gallery and translating for the English and the widow) are the conveyors for the writer’s suggestions, demonstrating that the ultimate interpretation takes place in the audience’s mind. As Marcel Duchamp claims, “the creative act is not performed by the artist alone; the spectator brings the work in contact with the external world by deciphering and interpreting its inner qualification and thus adds his contribution to the creative act” (140). Such a contribution on the spectators’ end is perhaps the most essential component in *ENGLAND* since the creative act taking place in the play is not limited to the creation of the author but includes the audience’s imagination as well. Through the problematised act of translation, Crouch conceptualises the absent elements in the play; however, as Rancière puts it, “[i]t requires spectators who play the role of active interpreters, who develop their own translation in order to appropriate the ‘story’ and make it their own story. An emancipated community is a community of narrators and translators” (20). The spectators in the play are both narrators as the actor and translators as the viewers, and Crouch creates an emancipated community of spectators who can create individually as the authors. Ultimately, in *ENGLAND* it is the audience that can actualise the story to make it here and present, and Crouch brings about this emancipation in the gallery, confined to walls but unconfined to the spectators’ autonomous translations.

## CONCLUSION

The writing is leaving the writer.

*The death of the author.*

*TIM walks out of the theatre.*

*The houselights are on. The doors to the theatre are open.*

Tim Crouch, *The Author*

With the emergence of a novel understanding in the theatre of the 2000s concerning the audience's centralisation on the stage, spectatorship as an activity and passivity appeared as a more controversial subject matter. Especially postdramatic theatre, put forth by Hans-Thies Lehmann, engendered a new phase where the audience started to take a more active role on the stage. This incremental contribution on the spectators' end has become a problematised issue due to its causing unsettlement and confusion among the audience at times. Tim Crouch is a prominent theatre-maker with his unique execution in authorising his spectators. Despite the present postdramatic, experimental and metatheatrical elements in his oeuvre, the writer detaches himself from being categorised within a certain theatrical movement or form, as labelling is an innately restrictive phenomenon that might intervene in the audience's perception. In this regard, what renders Crouch an avant-garde theatre-maker is his adhering to the earlier theatre forms regarding fixity and to the Aristotelian unity in the textual sense, while also utilising new techniques that enable his audience to be more intellectually active as an integral part of his stage.

Especially in *My Arm*, *An Oak Tree* and *ENGLAND*, as analysed in the chapters of this thesis, the writer exhibits his objective to prioritise the audience's perception while abstaining from interfering in their personal space or making them feel obliged to take part corporally. Believing that any precarious physical freedom given to the audience may have a perverse effect on their liberation, and espousing Jacques Rancière's ideologies focusing on the spectators' emancipation in theatre, Crouch constructs his plays within the frames of emancipatory restrictions instead of constraining liberations.

In his first play *My Arm*, Crouch delves into the notions of representation by narrating the allegedly autobiographic story of a ten-year-old boy who lifts his arm for the rest of his life. While conveying the story of “the boy with the arm” and his commodification as an object of art by artists, Crouch never raises his arm to enact the boy. He tells the story by collecting random objects from the spectators with the aim of making them question the portrayal of the objects attributed to the characters, thereby engaging them in active contemplation throughout the performance. Thus, while the objects to which the viewers give meanings are abstracted from their original meanings, a symbol as ordinary as an arm is unexpectedly distorted in its meaning within the scope of criticism of art. In other words, the objects collected from the audience at the beginning of the play are both a concrete representation of the audience’s contribution to the play and a pointer to the aesthetic significance that each of these random objects gains.

As for his second play, in *An Oak Tree*, Crouch involves the audience in the play intellectually by employing an eccentric technique. With the opening of the play, the author informs the audience that the second actor portraying the Father has never seen or read the play before. The second actor follows the instructions given by Crouch. This indicates that prior to the start of the play, Crouch challenges the conventional idea of theatrical realism and, by extension, the credibility of the performance. The impact of the play, which focuses mostly on a traumatised father whose daughter was killed in a car accident, progressively intensifies as the play proceeds. The Father and the Hypnotist re-enact the moment of the accident so that they can heal through self-hypnosis. As explained by the writer himself, in writing *An Oak Tree* he was greatly influenced by Émile Coué. His book *Self-Mastery Through Conscious Autosuggestion* (1920) is an important source of inspiration for Crouch, and by means of the Hypnotist, the playwright unveils how the audience creates their own reality on stage through the impact of the mind over corporeality. When Coué’s assertion is analysed within the scope of Crouch’s suggestions in his plays, the writer makes use of theatre as an organ that interferes with the subconscious of the receiver, or perceiver. The Hypnotist therefore functions as the embodiment of Coué’s idea of autosuggestion, which implies another source’s control over one’s perception. This can be interpreted as both the author’s interfering with the

audience's perception and the reshaping of the events on stage in accordance with their own comprehension.

In *ENGLAND* the setting is an art gallery, and the play takes place there throughout the two acts. While in the first act the spectators question the acts of seeing and looking in the position of viewers of an art gallery, in the second act Crouch positions his audience as the widow who loses her husband whose heart is given to the English standing before them. By making the audience assume the role of the widow, Crouch enables the audience to feel the widow's pain directly, which is unfathomable for the organ receiver in the play. In addition to the techniques he employs, Crouch's use of the gallery as a setting is an implicit criticism of capitalism, consumerism and art's becoming a product to be sold and consumed gradually, losing its fundamental value with the idea of art for economic purposes. Throughout the play, Crouch questions the impact of theatre and art in relation to the capitalist order and consumerism as well as making the audience question the issue of communication and translation in a multi-layered way.

In addition to challenging the authority of the author, Tim Crouch questions the artist and the author who make use of art as their subject matter. Through this, the audience feels the responsibility of consuming art as well as creating it as co-authors. The writer divulges an aspect of artistic creation that relentlessly exploits its subject matter, emphasising that the process of creation for the author differs from what the receiver infers from the play itself. Within this scope, in addition to Coué's theory of autosuggestion, Roland Barthes's theory of "the death of the author" is a predominant concept in his plays since the granted authority of the audience invalidates the author's control over them through their autosuggestion. In the light of the stated aspects of his writing, Crouch's plays demonstrate how the subject matter itself can replace the author through the active contribution of the audience to the play on stage, which they can reshape the staged by means of their own perceptions.

Representation is of utmost importance in these three plays pertaining to the difference between the conceptual and the representational. In *My Arm*, the audience questions the representative values of the objects and the performer himself to be able to perceive the

autobiographical validity of the performance. In *An Oak Tree*, the phenomenon of transforming something into another problematises the notion of representation, as this change is conceptual and can take place in the mind of the audience. In *ENGLAND* representation comes to the fore through the spatial and corporal existences in questioning the representation of the audience in the gallery and through their position as the widow character.

Transformation is another key issue existing in all these three plays in the sense that Crouch puts forward the audience's power in transforming the signified messages as one of his main subject matters. In *My Arm*, one of the play's central concerns is the arm's transformability into various art forms by losing its original meaning and function. *An Oak Tree* is mostly performed through the notion of transformation. Aside from the "transubstantiation" taking place through the Father's transforming his daughter into an oak tree, the play centres on what the audience captures by means of the transformation taking place in their minds as autonomous components. As for *ENGLAND*, Crouch analyses the dynamics of the transformation through problematising the phenomenon of absence/presence as well as by means of the act of translation. Such paradoxical and contradictory concepts are effective in imbuing the audience with their authoritative power to deconstruct and re-create.

Though implementation of such complexities might appear as a challenge for the audience to perceive the plays, Crouch embeds his plays with signifiers that will allow the viewers to differentiate through corresponding and non-overlapping implications throughout the performance. As a result, these uncertainties function to enhance the viewers' comprehension to make "genuine creations" contrary to operating as confusing complexities. To elaborate, in *My Arm* the non-overlapping attributions of the objects and the characters allow the spectators to realise the non-coincidences between the protagonist and the performer on stage. Likewise, non-overlapping physical features in *An Oak Tree* between the performer and the Father become an efficient discrepancy for the audience to question the correspondence between the writer Crouch and the Hypnotist. In *ENGLAND* the spatial coincidences within the setting as an art gallery and the non-coincidences between the narrated and the portrayed initiate the audience to question the

subject matters of the play, which are consumerism and the power of viewing, beyond the confines of the gallery in question.

Aside from the coincidental and non-coincidental placements, another contradictory approach Crouch perpetually makes use of is portraying the subject he criticises as the subject directly utilised in the play per se. To exemplify, in *My Arm*, he shows that anything cannot be art when it is all about the idea that “art is anything you can get away with.” With a similar approach, in *An Oak Tree* Crouch demonstrates that the suggestion of the other is not more effective than the suggestion by the self through the Hypnotist’s suggestions. Lastly, in *ENGLAND* Crouch invites his audience to question the issue of consuming art by making them consume the art at the gallery by “[making] the story the artistic subject that we look at” (Lane 139). In this way, the writer prioritises the active role of the audience and highlights that the subject of theatre is the spectators by keeping the dynamics of the relationship between the object and the subject in the foreground.

Another useful strategy the writer employs in his plays is the use of silence as a way to stimulate his audience to communicate with their thoughts and to fill these purposefully incomplete sections as autopoietic components of the stage. In *My Arm*, instead of explicitly portraying the boy’s feelings, Crouch demonstrates the communication problems between the protagonist and his family by repeatedly inserting silence breaks. Through these “isolated periods of silence” (Lane 139) the spectators do not merely view the issue from a distance, but rather genuinely experience the boy’s loneliness. In *An Oak Tree*, the silent moments are filled with music and sound effects so that the audience can experience the moment of the accident through the sounds of passing cars. Thus, the haunting trauma of the Father and the Hypnotist haunts the audience throughout the play as well. Regarding *ENGLAND*, the employment of silence can be separated between the silence in the first act and the silence in the second. In the first act, the silent breaks allow the spectators to envision the two performers performing in front of them as a single body, distinguishing their overlapping voices not as those of two different people speaking simultaneously, but as those of one body divided into two. In the second act, Crouch exhibits the communication difficulties between the widow and the English through the use of silence. Thus, the writer presents the audience as the widow, heightening the



viewers' empathy. It also suggests that the viewers are expected to fill in the silences with their own intellectual conjecture. Hence, these silent parts, which Crouch uses in all three plays, show that the audience's voice is as important as the author's, and through the performers' silence, the writer enhances the intellectual participation on the audience's end.

Ultimately, Tim Crouch's plays, *My Arm*, *An Oak Tree* and *ENGLAND* manifest that the author's creativity is not above the audience's perception, and that the audience is the most significant component of the play even if they are not physically involved on stage. Through contemporary techniques and approaches that encourage self-creation, Crouch conceptually moves the audience closer to the stage and the stage closer to the auditorium, revealing that the performance is essentially a co-creation and that the essence of the plays is the concepts which form in the audience's imagination rather than the activity taking place on stage. As Jacques Rancière contends, "[e]very spectator is already an actor in her story; every actor, every man of action, is the spectator of the same story" (16). In light of this, Crouch reveals the equality of stage dynamics and challenges the conventional hierarchical structure of the theatre. By changing the spectators into participants in their own stories within an autopoietic system and by transforming the performer into a spectator, the theatre-maker shows that spectatorship and viewing are the most active aspects of the stage, as opposed to being passive. Just as Crouch concludes his play *The Author*, he utilises the author's death as a stage direction to emphasise that by the end of the play, the creator has become ineffectual after conveying his suggestions, thereby giving the authorship to the audience. As the audience begins to rewrite, "the writing leaves the writer." Finally, the author exits the theatre "with the doors still open" to the audience's autosuggestion to create autonomously.

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İNGİLİZ DİLİ VE DEBİYATI ANABİLİM DALI BAŞKANLIĞI'NA

Tarih: 02/07/2022

Tez Başlığı : Tim Crouch'un *My Arm, An Oak Tree* ve *ENGLAND* Başlıklı Oyunlarında Sorunsallaştırılan Otorite Kavramı

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