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**Transgressions in the space-time-image system of the theatre**

**Contributions to the hermeneutics of space and image in the theatre**

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# 1. Introduction

„The theatre is image being performed.”

Hans Belting<sup>1</sup>

In the era of audio-visual arts, the theatre tends to neglect word- and text-centred performances, as the word in itself already proves to be telling little, or more exactly, to be too dry and flat. As a completion, it justly requires the spectacle and the musical and dance manifestations inherent in spectacle. The propagation, or restoration of the spectacle is mainly indebted to what is called director's theatre. According to Patrice Pavis, the spectacle tends to regain its place due to the recognition of its crucial role in the interpretation of plays. (Pavis, 2006.). The image-theatre is built up on a strong visual narrative, not on the interpretation of the text and does not aim at the plastic representation of physical deeds (Idem.). Nowadays image and the imagistic are not only meaning-bearing components of alternative and experimental theatrical performances, but they rule the world of the theatre as independent and self-referential, sometimes self-assertive entities. Let us think of Wilson's image- or performance-theatre, which can be traced back to Wagner's influence, that is to say, it was created in the spirit of the wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or of the ontological characteristics of the post-dramatic or post-mimetic<sup>2</sup> drama form. The conception of the theatre as a synthesis of several art forms requires us to undertake a review of those elements that convey meaning and make up the space-time-image system of the theatre. For this endeavour, the elements should be examined and compared to each other separately and yet together, which,

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<sup>1</sup> Hans Belting: *Antropology of Images*. Kijárat Publishing, Bp.,2007.

<sup>2</sup> The term *post-mimetic* is used as a synonym of Lehmann's *post-dramatic* concept, for the reason that *post-dramatic theatre* does not aim at mimetic presentation - mimetic being understood according to the Aristotelian conception -, instead it tends towards performativity, which is quite the opposite of mimesis. See the oppositions between dramatic/post-dramatic and mimetic/performative. In this case, the primacy of Aristotelian mimesis aesthetics is replaced by a set of post-mimetic concepts, which was treated and formulated by E. Fischer-Lichte in her book *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics*" (2008), saying that a new kind of aesthetics is needed, the aesthetics of performativity should be elaborated.

as we will see later, is not at all an easy task, because a kind of transgression can be noticed within the pluralism of theatrical signs.

Within the great change of direction in drama theory that took place in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as well as in the vision and practice of directors' theatre, the different art forms and theatrical sign-systems, instead of being sharply delimited and categorized, these creative units and meaning-transmitting media are seen as merging together, in a process of osmosis, in which the text, or language passes to imagistic narrative, or vice versa, the narrative of the story-image passes to the medium of language, hereby creating the hermeneutics of theatrical images. In other words, the naturalism of linguistic spectacle merges into the symbolism of the spectacle of language.

In this context, the borders between the categorizing, structuralist disciplines dealing with the arts, such as art philosophy, art history and aesthetics, as well as the theatrical art are growing blurred and becoming indistinct, and in this way not only the intermediality and cross-medium configuration of art are to be taken into account, but also the problematics and viewpoints of interdisciplinarity are becoming more and more emphasized.

In the present thesis, the determination of the concept of transgression and its meaning-generating character is attempted to be mainly revealed within the aesthetics of contemporary and performance-theatre, since as it is well-known, the performance-theatre, from an aesthetical point of view, is characterized by the merging of various artistic forms and the confluency of different medium capacities.

## **1.1. Object of research**

In the present thesis we would like to pose some questions based on the inter-dependent relations between two independent artistic forms: the fine arts and theatrical art, then to shed light on the meaning-transmitting role of the image/artistic image, and on the connections between theatrical image, space and text. This system of connections is to be examined inevitably on the frontier zone between theatrical art and the fine arts, not so much opposing the two domains against each other, as revealing the interactions between them, their associative-complementary qualities, focusing on the mutually shared linguistic, communication media of the two art forms, that is to day, on the image/imagistic and theatrical space. The object of present research also answers the questions: how do images or artistic images become theatrical images in a given

theatrical space, what is this caused by? What kind of relationship, or tension is there between these two complementary meaning-generating media, what is their role in the dramaturgy of the play, and how will all this prompt us to think globally about arts?

In this thesis, existence and operation of performative (self-)reflections on mimetic and post-mimetic imagery, as well as the oppositions between these two, sometimes paradoxically complementary theatrical manners of expression are also examined in the 5<sup>th</sup> chapter, which contains analysis of contemporary performances. It is also examined how much these performances, conceived in the tension between the mimetic and post-mimetic manners of expression, can transform the traditional system of relations of drama and theatre.

One of the main purposes of this thesis is to answer the question: can the theatrical image/body image, which is generated within the theatrical performance, be tackled hermeneutically, and if yes, the next question is: which requirements concerning the system of art rules, theatrical conventions, theatrical traditions should be met by a theatrical image and space in order to acquire hermeneutical significance?

Further questions that are posed by the present research are the following: when does the image/theatrical image have an independent, or inter-dependent role and what impact does the world of images have upon the audience during the performance? Does this process of reception end at the same time when the play ends? As it is known, the theatrical product and the theatrical image herein is a narrative visual representation whose reception requires a complex time-horizon. Image is a kind of complex existential process that is prolonged into the subjective time of receivers, in their consciousness and visual memory, generating newer readings, reconstructing (or deconstructing) certain scenes of the performance.

## **1.2. Motivation of topic choice**

Image is a universal language. Since immemorial times, people have defined themselves and the world surrounding them and created by them with the help of images and through the filter of images. Nowadays image can be said to be a tool that entirely rules our life. Visual information, that is to say, an image, is today the fastest and most complex message-transmitting medium, or means of communication, as it is capable of having an immediate effect on us. Visual impacts immediately reach us, because they are not process-like manifestations. As opposed to music and

text, an image has the ontological advantage that while comprehension and reception of music is conditioned by linear time, visual impact is produced immediately. While in the case of texts or musical phrases, comprehension and full meaning is completed only at the end of the phrase or of the musical phrase, in case of images all this is given at the very beginning, it takes a little time only while we read them. An image in itself is not an entity manifesting itself in linear time, gradually revealing itself - instead it is time compactly closed into matter, whose linear temporality is only produced by the act of image-reading, inherent in the process of its reception. It could be said that a steady image or theatrical image, creates a boundless time dimension, which can be controlled by receivers, according to their conscience and skills – its viewing, process of reception can move freely.

Pictures have always had a meaning-homogenizing capacity in the theatre, by which the meaning-contents of different means and forms of expressions are reduced to the same denominator and merged together. Contemporary theatrical performances tend to increasingly neglect plays centred on words and elaborated language. In our accelerated, fastly moving world, the virtual world, the mass media, the fragmented, mosaic-like imagery of computers and television lead to such kind of image-awareness and spectacle-awareness that is decreasing more and more the role of the text and of verbal communication, which is getting increasingly replaced by visual communication. The theatre is basically structured around the act of viewing and looking. The act of viewing seems to link the stimuli of all the other human perceptions and to organize them in a totalizing system, by which the processes of comprehension and interpretation are facilitated to a great extent.

## **2. The theatre as synthesis of several forms of art**

It can be said that theatrical art is closely related to the concept of global art, the above-mentioned Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk*, because it amalgamates forms belonging to several independent art forms, and also their ontological characteristics. It is already a fact that mainly contemporary theatre aims at harmonizing text with visual elements and music, making use of the formal and stylistic possibilities of all these domains. All this is done without violating the boundaries of the „sovereign territory” of any of the arts, and as Patrice Pavis says it, without merging, unifying these components, or reducing them to the same, single denominator (as it is the



case with Wagnerian operas), and this is neither about using these as tools in order to alienate them from each other (as it happens in the didactic operas of Kurt Weill és B. Brecht) – as says Patrice Pavis, in his book published in 2005.

### **2.1. Theatre and the fine arts: Synthesis or sincretism?**

The undivided unity, so to say symbiosis, of elements belonging to diverse art forms is typical of the theatre. In this complex unity – and when we say this, let's think of variety within unity as a kind of sincretism of rules and principles that create composition –, we discover the plurivalence of artistic (self-) expression. When thinking of the sincretic character of the theatre, we by all means have in mind its ancient nature, because sincretism primarily used to be typical of ancient societies, where it referred to the undifferentiated symbiosis of a couple of different art forms.

The manner of acting, the ontological mode and manifestation of the theatre seem to be the best opportunity to illustrate this synthesis, or sincretism, or furthermore, can lead towards the creation of absolute art.

### **2.2. Art and mimesis**

It has become almost a commonplace, but art has not been capable to avoid the concept and principle of mimesis since immemorial times until now. The mimesis principle is one of the oldest and most basic principle that determines arts. Art has been dealing with mimesis, that is, immitation, since ancient times.

It can be justly asserted the fact that art needs mimesis, because it indicates the most palpable connection between life and art.

### **2.3. The mimetic nature of the theatre in Aristotelian conception**

Having discussed about the global artistic and mimetic nature of the theatre, let us admit the hypothesis that the theatre is a kind of Aristotelian *Poetica*, to which those arts (techné-s) belong that are mimetic (immitating), or presenting, illustrating reality - such as epics, tragedy, comedy, dityrambic poetry, dance and music, and theatric art too.

## 2.4. The concept of mimesis and its types

As it is well-known, the classical Greek conception about art and aesthetics in the 5-4 centuries B.C. was built around the basic concept of *mimesis*. With ancient Greeks, mimesis was meant to denominate the imitation of inner and outer forms, features and meaningful contents of reality. Serving imitation, beauty was one of the most frequently examined aesthetic qualities and categories, whose beginnings should be traced back to this very ancient context, so that it can become a process that can be interpreted from the point of view of art theory by posterity too. Mimesis is a layer-structured model of expression whose several types and kinds can be accomplished. It seems to be the most complex in the theatre, as it can be of emotional, verbal, imagistic or non-imagistic nature. It is known that the mimesis that appears within an art structure is a category that will manifest itself in some form in the dimension of meaning-creation.

The sub-chapters **Mimesis as artistic or philosophical category (2.4.1.); Mimesis as sign, and the mimetic sign (2.4.2.); Mimesis as organic part of the entire artistic composition (2.4.3.); Mimesis as artistic and cognitive value (2.4.4.)** will also shed light on the differentiated ontological commitments of the mimesis principle.

## 2.5. Review of mimesis conceptions

The mimesis principle has been changing throughout the centuries. It has always depended on the cultural, aesthetic experience of the given epoch, and the art-philosophical horizon, creative and receptive habits of the spirit of the given time. Consequently, this cluster of issues has been marked in a particular way by every epoch, which added its own mosaic-tile so that finally they have made up a mosaic of conceptions of mimesis – like a pantheon. All this should be viewed as a huge wall covered by a mosaic, or a pointilist painting is viewed – the entire picture can only be seen if it is viewed from the due distance and angle, and as a unity. Consequently, it would be necessary to undertake a review of the mimesis conceptions of diverse epochs. In the sub-chapters **Ancient mimesis conceptions (2.5.1.); Christian and Humanist mimesis conception (2.5.2.); and Nietzsche's conception of mimesis (2.5.3.)** we attempt to reveal the specific traces of mimesis through the mimesis conceptions held by great thinkers that lived in diverse epochs.

## **2.6. Theatrical performances reflected in Aristotle's *Poetica***

Theatrical performances are also built on the basis of the following categories of Aristotle's *Poetica*: *the story* is created through the imitation of a given *deed*. Story is in fact the connected line of deeds. The series of deeds making up the story should be completed and finished, closed between its beginning and its end. Aristotle in his *Poetica* treats works of art as a particularly constructed time and space structure, speaks about the whole and wholeness, about parts that make up the wholeness, and their connectedness. Consequently, a parallelism between Aristotelian categories and the theatrical narrative poetics which sets up a net of constructive, ordering principles by which the cohesion of narrative unities is achieved, seems to be natural.

## **3. Contributions to the hermeneutics of theatrical images**

### **3.1. The role of signs in dramatic art**

The theatre is a system of signs. This system is made up of a layered structure of language- and image-codes which, taken separately, are symbolic systems too .

Any kind of sign is one of the most important basic elements of the theatre. It can be also said that a sign is the smallest representation unit of the theatre. There is no theatrical performance without signs, furthermore, there is no sign without another sign, because in the very moment when a sign denominates something, the denominated entity starts to behave as a kind of sign too, and it is its sign-like quality that attracts attention. Thus, the denominated entity has a sign-like quality too. The sign-signifying-signified triple unity is forged together by the energy of a line of force acting to and fro – it can be asserted that the self-generating sign follows the uroboros-motif-cluster<sup>3</sup>, as it is capable of nurturing and reviving itself.

The sign-like property of the theatre is manifest not only in its relationship with the external world, but also in the very structure of theatrical performances, since all components of a performance bears a kind of particular meaning, which further creates meaning-generating units of increasingly high level, and the final sum of these build finally up the whole complex meaning content (meaning structure) of the work of art.

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<sup>3</sup> In Greek mythology, uroboros is a snake biting its own tail. It is a symbol that represents eternal recurrence and continuous revival. It can also be consider as symbolizing time's cycle.

### **3.1.1. Types of signs**

So that we can better understand the nature of the visual communication which is generated in the theatre, we need to present signs, which is the smallest, but important unit by which meaning and message is transmitted, and which is perceived by sight and hearing in the theatre. Signs, having become existent – heard and seen – have their most important task to communicate a content that is immanent, so it can signify nothing, as a result of its own nature. Signs have three important features: they make up a system, they have a social character, and have a certain meaning. Semiotics distinguishes between three types of signs: index, icon and symbol.

### **3.2. Arbitrary nature of signs or their mimetic value in the theatre**

A sign, by the process of its getting from the signifying to the signified and back to its starting point, to itself – see the above-mentioned uroboros-motif –, it becomes extinct on a certain level, it gets melted in the message-transmitting act. In the theatre, signs often remain arbitrary in their relation to the signified object, that is, they are self-referential. This happens when no similarity or any real relation can be discovered between the sign and the signified object. In this case one can talk about the arbitrary nature of signs.

### **3.3. Signs as mimesis or (self-)expression**

"In the beginning was the Deed!" Goethe: Faust

Taking into consideration Goethe's quotation, we can say that mimetic (self-expressing) deed/ action was already present before the appearance of mankind.

Thus we have reached the question: when does (self-)expression replace mimesis, or, in other words, to which extent does expression exist in mimesis and vice versa, mimesis in expression? Generally, there is a quite sharp borderline between mimesis and expression, however within theatrical art a certain transgression between the two takes place, because actors, while imitating somebody or something, they also express themselves, their own mood. However, post-dramatic, and contemporary theatrical performances are not yet characterized by the aesthetics of mimesis, they are determined by a post-Aristotelian, post-mimetic (self-)

expression and representation instead. It can be asserted, that for instance in performance theatre a personal, that is, „art for art’s sake” type of *expression* prevails, instead of *mimesis*.

### **3.4. Connections between image and scenic space-composition**

We would like to pose questions through the dependencies between the two independent art forms, then to reveal the role of images/artistic images as meaning-transmitter means, and discover the relationship between theatrical image and space. This connection system is to be inevitably examined on the boundaries between the theatre and the fine arts. As it is known, a theatrical image is a complex information-bearing entity which, in the course of its temporal manifestation, gets impregnated in space in a manner that it continuously defines and prevails over space. As a result, images can only exist in a kind of space. Consequently, images should be examined only together with the space they are contained in, because in the process of their impregnating in space, this space also acquires an imagistic quality, so, space becomes part of the image as a unity. In order to make this better understood, in the 4th chapter we will study in more detail the issues concerning theatrical space and its ontological properties.

The two different domains are not as much contrasted as studied from the viewpoint of their interaction, their associative-complementary qualities, focussing on the common communication means of fine arts and the theatre - on image/ imagistic quality and space.

#### **3.4.1. Image and imagistic quality**

Image is a universal language. Visual information, that is to say, images are the fastest and possibly most complex meaning transmitter or communication means, because they can have an instant impact upon us. Visual impact reaches us at once, being not a process-like manifestation. In the theatre, mapping the shared playspace of sight, representation and visibility is one of the most important tasks of devising visual effects.

This chapter attempts to determine and survey the relationship between theatrical image and theatrical space, through the grammar of images. In this survey it is considered inevitable to separately determine these two communication means of the theatre (image and space), and to present these complementary systems in a chronological order, through the main milestones of universal theatrical culture – from the archaic, ancient theatre up to the post-modernist, contemporary theatre.

### **3.4.2. Image concepts – image interpretations**

The interpretations of the concept of image move within a fairly large range: from its strict interpretation as picture, or artistic painting or photo, up to a broad image concept that refers to the not only visible. An image categorizes a variety of phenomena of the world. The sphere ranging from drawings and paintings up to photographs can be considered to be image as much as a poetic image, or a mental image can be such. According to Hans Belting's enumeration, the concept of image can be used with several meanings: as representation, as a product, as means of expression, or as an act and a thing. Adopting a certain image-concept depends on the purpose for which it is used or the motivation and point of view from which it is studied. We attempted to tackle the concepts of image and the imagistic from the objective, material point of view of the real, the "visible image", and within the theoretical framework of visual communication.

From the visual point of view, the theory of images prefers to only deal with the purely artistic images, considering only the bi-dimensional reality-illusion to be an image. Images are complex and exciting entities, which have diverse modes of being from an ontological viewpoint. Images are closely related to the material in which they are embodied, the so-called medium, as a drawing, a painting, a painted décor embodies an object, some kind of material in itself.

Images can be understood as visual varieties of the world created by humans, or the man-made structures of the visible world. They can be interpreted as a kind of necessary evidence, which got a visible form, or was made visible in the course of its creation. In this interpretation, from the perspectives of time and space, images are of several kinds.

#### **3.4.2.1. Images in space**

Every image is primarily dependent on space. From the viewpoint of space, images can be represented in two or three dimensions. Two-dimensional images can exist on their own and also as components of a multi-dimensional complex entity. In this approach, theatrical images – from the décor-image to the actors' body-image – are two- or three-dimensional. Another basic variety of images is the three-dimensional one, which traditionally includes statues, objects, and actors' body-images in the case of theatrical art.

### **3.4.2.2. Images in time**

From the perspective of time, the two basic types of images that have been made visible are: the static and the moving image. These are basically different from each other on the level of perception, so their receptions are also different.

### **3.4.3. Imagistic anticipation**

In many cases, an image of crucial importance or an image-sign urges us to dwell on it. It anticipates a significant, but yet unperformed act or action. In this necessary, contemplative dwelling-on, a kind of meaning-transmission and meaning-anticipation of the image takes place, which should be read in due time so that the theatrical message can be strengthened and the desired catharsis could be achieved. These images have a reference value, because they are certain theatrical, acting moments, anticipations of images bearing important reference meaning, in brief: imagistic anticipations. These imagistic representations are elements of peculiar conceptions of a director, meant to suggest some important action in the play.

### **3.4.4. The (theatrical) image as fetish, or centre of interest**

An image, let it be a painting, a stage-image, or a literary image, is in fact an image-fragment, which has clear-cut margins. Thus it can be justly asked whether image is a fetish or not, as it is a result of the act of decoupage, in which a certain detail, a certain part of surface is preferred to others, is put within a frame. It can be justly asserted that an image fragment can be a centre of interest of full value on the level of idea-content. For instance, the mimicking, the facial expressions of an actor can sometimes be observed apart from the whole body-image, as a framed, independent surface during a theatrical performance. From the point of view of theatrical space-composition, the determination of the centre(s) of interest is one of the most important composition principles, like in the composition process of a painting.

## **3.5. Images as a form of expression**

What is an image? What is a theatrical image? The semantic and hermeneutical study of these questions would be the essence of this chapter. Theatrical images are the central unit of this chapter. Its forms of manifestation and layers of meaning are examined through the universal

ontological peculiarities of images, from semantic and hermeneutical points of view.

An image is a peculiar, compact entity or phenomenon that has an identity of its own, as far as it can't be replaced by language or any other visible thing except for other image. This peculiarity of images hints to the inadequate nature of language, its insufficient quality in the exact representation of reality. After all, the most important hermeneutical characteristics of images are totality and density.

### **3.6. Structure and form of theatrical images**

From the perspective of visuality, image could be considered one of the most complex, independent aesthetical units. Theatrical images make up a unitary sign-system that tries to express itself more and more exactly and credibly, using the available signs and symbols. A theatrical image is a composition in time and space, a closed world, whose wholeness is given by its very close structure. Without knowing this closed composition, one can not discover the secret of the theatrical image. This structure is basically made up of a physical, material and a meta-physical, fine-substantial part. Matter, this unique, unrepeatably system of elements and phenomena taken from nature and life, gets finally visible being embodied in varieties of forms and colors, clothed in diverse human destinies. The artistic message gets condensed in the dynamic and intricate rhythm of these contents. Beyond the spectacle, structures contain the deep, layered inter-relations of these contents, the rhythmic and poised subordinations and supra-ordinations of subtle material proportions and centres of interest. Thus, the structure of theatrical images is not only an external formal framework, or buttress, but instead it is a crowded, artistic meaning-zone, giving and in the same time requiring interpretation and comprehension, and also an ordering principle. Its peculiar structure is not formally defined, but it is based on unity between form and content. At the same time, the composition of theatrical images should also be traced back to systems of moving-images – we refer here to the actors' body-image, as a kind of virtual means of expression or form of expression existing in time and space. One of the most interesting aspects of the structure of actors' body-image is that the simultaneous time and space dimensions – in other words, the musical and plastic-art features – mutually condition and complement each other. The musical, time-conditioned reality gets embedded in a spectacle of fine art quality, and by this it suggests a feeling of condensed „present time” in the audience. Theatrical images include, besides artistically elaborated and visualized, fixed and static images, also series of moving images. This is



a time- and space-consuming compositional process that contain a single longer unity or line of movements.

### **3.7. Comprehension and reception of theatrical images**

The theatre and its interpretation have a par excellence complementary relationship. Interpretation precedes and at the same time follows theatrical performances. The concepts of the latter are shaped by the necessities of the matter-of-fact interpretation, which at its turn can only make significant progress if it makes use of the tools elaborated by hermeneutics.

The mode of being of any work of art gets fulfilled under the auspices of the receptive and interpretative conscience. If we would like to comprehend a theatrical artwork, we should by all means subject it to interpretation too and thus hermeneutics is unavoidable.

Theatrical reception is a fairly complex process, since comprehension and feeling is created from the simultaneity of actors' acting and the audience's reception. The act of viewing and that of comprehension should be closely inter-related, being synchronic processes.

#### **3.7.1. Reading (theatrical) images. Proximity of images to words**

As it is well-known, the relationship between image and language (iconic image and linguistic image) has been re-interpreted for several times throughout history. Literary and art theory have been oscillating between stating the close relation between the two media and attempting to draw a borderline between them. By all means, modern literary and art theory have taken a keen interest in this issue – mainly narratology and hermeneutics, the domains which took shape with the claim to revive Ancient and Renaissance hermeneutical research.

Rivalry of diverse art forms, the *paragone*<sup>4</sup> and Horace's *ut pictura poesis*<sup>5</sup> formula are based on the experimental principle that arts can be compared among each other. This rivalry and categorizing, antagonistic-oriented comparison among arts was introduced into practice by the Horatian „ut pictura poesis” principle, collated with Plutarch's assertion: „The art of painting is mute poetry, poetry is painting that talks”. In the case of the theatre, the different meaning-bearing media are sometimes in a kind of paragonal, rivalric relationship. However, in the process of

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<sup>4</sup> Dispute among arts about that which has more impact. After all, it is nothing else than comparison.

<sup>5</sup> Horace's poetic art: *a poem should be like an image*. He probably meant that poems should be life-like, but it can be understood the other way round, too.

meaning-generation, then in the act of receptive meaning-interpretation, these merge together and complement each other, making up a whole system, and they mutually express each other. Theatrical images are as unavoidable in the acts of meaning-generation and meaning-disclosure, as language is in the description of a painting or picture. Let's recall for instance „ekphrasis” as a picture-description method in art history.

Theatrical images are to some extent also dependent on language in the process of reception, because their interpretation passes inevitably to the medium which is language. Thus it is unavoidable for images to be grasped with the help of language.

### **3.7.2. Theatrical image/view from the perspective of the audience's reflexivity**

In the course of a theatrical performance, the spectacle can be considered as an image fulfilled by itself, which is re-defined through the audience's reflexivity, that is, it takes place again, generating the reading of the image, which is marked by the spectators themselves. This reflexivity supposes that image/spectacle and spectator mutually influence each other, touch each other during the reception/comprehension process. This means that after the object of viewing enters the interpretation horizon of the audience, the comprehension process relies on the image or spectacle, as a starting point, because spectators at first deconstruct the object of viewing on some level, so that they can also construct their own world/world-view within it, as a form of self-justification. Viewers always add a fragment of their own life-history to the artistic product, somehow measuring its truth and credibility against their own life – process by which the object of reception takes place again, that is to say, it gets transfigured. This transfiguration or re-iteration can only take place if spectators include the Derridean de-construction act into the process of comprehension, thus enabling a series of new and inner reflexions to be built up, which reflect the attitude that individual viewers have towards the world. Consequently, within the theatrical performance, images hold a mirror for viewers, since in the act of viewing – and in the reception process – there is a certain amount of reflexivity.

### **3.8. The imagistic nature of actors' body (actors' body-image)**

If in categorizing images, we survey two- and three-dimensional images/image-surfaces (conceived within the paradigm of space), from simulative image-surfaces to physical, objective

images, then actors' body can be justly considered to be an image, or having an imagistic nature within a theatrical performance.

From an ontological perspective, the human body is a unity between its material flesh-and-blood mass and its spiritual, psychological essence. In the course of time – beginning from the days of the ancient Greeks and up to this day – actors have integrated so fully in the plots and image-worlds of plays, that nowadays audiences do not find it odd that actors (actors' body-images) take up the whole stage-space, sometimes acting even in the auditorium too. The actors' body(-image) can be considered as a special surface in which the material meets the spiritual, or as a gate between the inner and the outer world, which can open or close communication between the two worlds by its functioning both in an expressive and in a concealing mode, thus permanently confronting us with the many-sided and ineffable nature of the (naked or clothed) human body. As a result, the questions that have been posed since Aristotle's days about the relationship between an actor's body and personality have remained also valid up to the present day, and most of them have not found an answer. Despite the yet undiscovered connections and doubts, bodies undoubtedly have a certain power to attract visual attention.

### **3.8.1. Connection between space and body: imagistic narrative**

Body images, in their meaning-generating act of taking up the play-space and in their function of shaping space, create a kind of (moving) imagistic narrative, which is an important objective, material and spiritual vehicle of plot, especially in performance theatre. Body acts as a complementary unity between material substance and spiritual essence. It appears as imagistic narrative in the theatrical space that was shaped by it too. As it is known, these (body-)images constitute theatrical space, these complex surfaces create diverse time- and space-structures around themselves, they build up the visual space-image which can change several times in the sight of the audience, they can make up various space-systems. Contemporary theatre, being highly visual in its orientation, naturally lays great emphasis on the narrative of image and space. More exactly, narrative theatrical space integrates into a unitary image-narrative, because play-space is not only an objective, visible location, but also a complex, meaningful image-composition.

### **3.8.1.1. Time and space structure of imagistic narratives**

A play is a visualized and /or narrated story. This complex story-like quality is made manifest and gets revealed in the meaning-generative capacity of the narrative time- and space-structures of the different, mutually complementary media. These meaning-generating, narrative theatrical media are characterized by a kind of complementary, inspiring community mode of being. In this co-existing, half-independent mode of being, the narrative time- and space-structures become strengthened and enlarged, because as it is known, narrative basic units are not only spatial, but also complex temporal units.

Theatrical image-reading, as a temporal process, does not always progress in a linear manner in case of imagistic narratives, because two different time-horizons are interwoven in images: the continuous present time of the narration is unravelled from the fixed past time of the image-story. In the process of reception, to this double time-reference a third is added, the future time of interpretation. The gradual interpretation of the spatial, temporal and cause-effect relations between the events is prolonged into future time.

This complex time-structure – the single time of the narrated story's time, the continuous time of the narration and the interpretation process – builds up the meaning-constitutive narrative of the imagistic time-dimension.

### **3.8.2. Body(-image) as a special object and surface of stage-space**

The human body is perhaps the ideal, but by all means the most widely spread medium by which the aesthetical procedures encoded in a theatrical performance can be transmitted. It is a meeting place of various symbolic and metaphorical contents, which can be embodied in most various forms. Its special role is primarily due to the fact that it is simultaneously a natural and cultural construction, it is at the same time an organic organism and a mechanical structure, and as these features of it have a half-complementary, half-antagonistic relationship with each other, they have a permanent interaction with each other.

As opposed to other visual elements and media of the theatre, an actor's body(-image) is endowed with a highly concentrated sight- and information-content and it creates a complex dynamic between surface depth, external internal, so it is capable of generating several reception and interpretation possibilities.

The capability of an actor's body to express identity and emotions and its role in

communication are as important within a performance as it is the shape, dynamics of actors' body, the global effect of its details, the dialogue between voice and physical appearance – all this can interfere with body-image.

In this sub-chapter, we deal with actors' body/body image and its features, as the most important „object” of theatrical space – however, we don't do this in order to give it a fetish value, neither to put it in a frame, but rather because we are convinced that thus, by studying the nature of actors' body, we could make the process-like, event-like functioning and effect of theatrical performances clearer and more comprehensible.

The body-image of actors is at the same time a natural, external-objective and cultural, internal-subjective model. In order to approach body-image as a complex topic, as an entity having a special form and content, and in order to make this concept more comprehensible, body features are categorized and examined on the basis of four significant viewpoints, namely anatomy, individuality (=object of identification), communication function and beauty as an aesthetic category.

### **3.8.3. Theatrical spectacle, details and global effect**

How does a body(-image) appear in the eyes of spectators? How is a body(-image) perceived within the global image of theatrical space? Do the viewers take the global image to pieces, perceiving separately body-images and the other visual elements of the stage-image, or do they read the entire composition of the global stage-image as a whole, simultaneously the body-images and the other elements, in a synchronic manner? Is this totalizing spectacle-reading possible in case of a dynamical spectacle-composition, in which the actors rapid to and fro movements take up the whole space and make spectators' glances move to and fro? In the background of these questions and of those similar to these, one can discover the productive tension that exists between the exciting formal and communication phenomenon of the permanently moving and changing body and face on the one hand, and the messages and meanings conveyed by it, on the other hand. The global theatrical image is built up of the multitude of its constituent parts, taken and examined separately.

### **3.8.4. The performative body(-image) between mimetic and post-mimetic expression**

Mimetic expression and representation is analytical, referential, socially conditioned, and has a general validity, as opposed to post-mimetic expression, which lays emphasis on the personal, individual manifestations having an affective-imaginative, de-constructive, self-referential dimension. The performativity of bodies (not only in the case of performance-theatre) is a manifestation that combines intensity with a kind of self-reflexivity.

The post-mimetic character of performativity claims another kind of medium for communication. The medium of this form of communication changes, passes from indirect medium to a direct medium. Verbal communication, which is a mimetic-type medium, is replaced by a direct, material, physical language. The actor's body is the most suitable and handiest medium for this direct, material form of communication. It is handy, as actors or performers need not appeal to an external medium, dependent on their own interpretation (for instance, dramatic text and its uttering), instead they simply employ their own body, which is the most direct means of communication for them. In this manner, in post-dramatic theatre „bodies are placed in the centre, but not as meaning-transmitting agents as before, but by means of their own physical aspect and gestures. (...) Post-dramatic theatre is the theatre of *self-sufficient corporality* and this corporality is made visible together with its intensity, potentiality of gestures, auratic „meaning”, inward, and outward tensions” (Lehmann, 2009, 111).

## **4. Contributions to the hermeneutics of theatrical space**

This chapter has as its object a semantic-hermeneutical study of theatrical space, and of images/body-images that determine space. It also contains a survey of the ontological peculiarities of theatrical space, and explanation of the different types of theatrical space-systems, with a view to mapping the co-relation between theatrical space and image. These two meaning-bearing elements are examined one by one but also in their mutual relationship.

### **4.1. Space and tragedy, or space of tragedy**

Tragedy is a meaningful structure that has defined theatre and its space since the earliest times.

## **4.2. Crisis in the comprehension of artistic space-time dimension?**

Before coming to the analysis of theatrical space, we attempt to get an insight into the aesthetic, artistic world of present-day society (into the crisis that exist in the comprehension of artistic space-time dimension) in this sub-chapter.

## **4.3. Theatrical space-structures in the course of theatre history**

In this sub-chapter the structure of theatres is examined from the point of view of physical space. The structure and architecture of the theatre building, the lay-out of the stage, and the usage of décor and costumes are all taken under close examination. Quite naturally, our survey begins with a journey in time. It is self-evident that its first station is at the Dionysian tradition, taking into account that the festivals held in honour of Dionysos were the starting point of the whole phenomenon that is today called theatre, and which more or less has kept its initial form so far. (See: **4.3.1. Space-structure of Ancient theatre**). The next station is medieval theatre, which took refuge in churches, taking the form of mystery-plays, passion and pastoral plays. (See: **4.3.2. Space-structure of Medieval theatre**).

Renaissance meant a true revival for the theatre both form literary and performative viewpoint. This was the epoch when such famous playwrights created their works as Christopher Marlowe and William Shakespeare, to mention only the English ones. (See: **4.3.3. Space-structure of Renaissance and Reformation period theatre**).

In the time of the Republic and Restoration, English theatre became somewhat marginalised, handing over its place to other genres. (See: **4.3.4. Space-structure of English Republican and Restoration theatre**)

However, as all other things in modern era, the theatre also witnessed that structural and expressive many-sidedness, which has tended sometimes to be chaotic. (See: **4.3.5. Space-structure of Modern theatre**).

## **4.4. Types of performative theatre space**

In this sub-chapter the types of performative space are analysed. Having discussed theatrical space exclusively from its physical appearance in the previous sub-chapter, we focus

now more on those types of space that do not necessarily get manifested in a physical manner. Such are for example: **Objective, physical space and stage-space (4.4.1.); Body-space, or space of gestures (4.4.2.); Space of drama, or space of spectacle (4.4.3.); Décor and construction of characters (4.4.3.1.); Textual space (4.4.4); Symbolic space (4.4.5.); and Inner space (4.4.6.).**

## **5. Mimetic vs. post-mimetic mode of being of the theatre.**

### **Post-mimetic strategy of performance-theatre**

In this chapter we attempt to summarize the dichotomy existing between mimetic and post-mimetic modes of being or expressions of the theatre, along organizing principles that are meaning-generating and also some ontological viewpoints. (Also see the chart.)

Earlier in this thesis the mimetic nature of theatre has been already tackled. As it is known, however unavoidable this principle is in art, it is necessary to assert that the mimesis principle can not refer to artistic products created in each and every epoch. Consequently, there are certain artistic products and performances that can not be understood and analysed with the help of the concept-cluster deriving from traditional, Aristotelian aesthetics of mimesis. Such are for instance the performances of post-dramatic theatre, and the performative-type productions of contemporary theatre. In our opinion, to understand and receive these, it is unavoidable to elaborate and apply a set of concepts belonging to a new, post-mimetic aesthetics. When mentioning post-dramatic, performance-type theatrical productions based on post-mimetic aesthetics, we have in mind mainly works of creators such as Jan Fabre, Jan Lauwers, or Robert Wilson, Nadj Josef (Nagy József) or Silviu Purcărete and Mihai Mănușiu, whose creations reflect transgression between different art forms, both as principle and practice, studying the relationship between the theatre and visual arts.

In a culture and art where experiencing and representing authentic reality have become problematic, and have been also subject to diverse forms of manipulation, the place of realistic mimesis has been (or may have been) taken over by post-mimesis. Post-mimetic artistic strategies do not any more intend to present, or to depict authentic reality, but instead they attempt to reveal and let us know that each artistic representation, including the most credible ones, is merely an illusion of reality constructed and made visible by certain people, it is only a material-spiritual



hypothesis for reality. In post-mimetic representation, there is no such thing as authentic reality, moreover, all reality is vulnerable and malleable, and it can be subservient to manipulation on some level or other. This new approach, derived from post-mimetic artistic strategy and mode of expression, does not aim any longer at revealing the general ontological and cultural peculiarities of a form of reality known by masses of people, furthermore, it does not even long for doing this (as opposed to avantgarde art), but on the contrary, one of its most important purposes is to deconstruct authentic reality. One of the tools used in deconstructing general and referential reality is personal, self-referential gesture-manifestations, and the startling effects in the acting of post-modernist artists and performance actors. These startling effects of post-modernist art are methods of deconstruction that unmask referential social reality (see for instance the lack of social gestures). Thus, the self-referential nature of actors' deeds and of the performance created by them stands in the centre of this deconstruction practice. Post-mimetic strategies do not take into account the way in which referential reality and the social and generally valid dimensions of reality were constituted, but instead they focus on the isolated and unique manifestations of an individual's corporality, which combines flesh-and-blood materiality with emotional intensity. As it has been also mentioned above, mimetic expression and representation is analytical, referential, socially conditioned, and has a general validity, as opposed to post-mimetic expression, which lays emphasis on the personal, individual manifestations having an affective-imaginative, deconstructive, self-referential dimension.

It is natural that the two modes of being in theatre, the mimetic and the post-mimetic, can only be distinguished so clearly with a view to methodologic value, because in the theatre within the same performance sometimes elements of both modes of expression can co-exist, clashing or complementing each other.

## **5.1. Analysis of theatrical performances**

In this sub-chapter two performances are analysed, which apply post-mimetic strategies and which serve the purpose of identity-transfer and identity-transformation, generated in borderline, liminoid situations.

### **5.1.1. Robert Wilson/ Rufus Wainwright: Shakespeare's Sonnets**

Staged by *Berliner Ensemble* theatre, 2009.

Directed, décors and light effects: Robert Wilson

Costumes: Jacques Reynaud

Music: Rufus Wainwright

Dramatic advisor: Jutta Ferbers

Wilson's performance entitled Shakespeare's Sonnets is built up on a powerfully visual and imagistic staging. All in all, the performance can be considered as a strange, grotesque, musical, pantomime-like vision. In this performance, Wilson stages 25 sonnets from the 154 written by Shakespeare on love and passion, creating a magical and oneiric image-world. A mosaic-like panorama of diverse Shakespearian characters and figures can be seen on the stage – for instance clowns, fairies, queen, etc. –, whose intense and performative line of movements is supported and sometimes emphasized by the carefully designed music-effect. This is not to say that music would be a representational element subject to movement or spectacle in the play.

The whole duration of the performance (2 hours and 23 minutes) is ruled by the incessant, unstoppable Wilsonian rhythm, following the effects and example of Cage's „time brackets”<sup>6</sup>. As there aren't any intervals during the performance, the concept of temporalness goes extinct, so we are witnessing a continuous event manifesting in a single time dimension.

It is only the softening of lights or the total darkening of the stage lasting for a few seconds that interrupts the compact time-span of the performance and the line of undistinguishable scenes – this technique indicates, on the level of signs, the boundaries between the different sonnets. The curtain does not drop and rise to separate time-dimensions and scenes. Consequently, the performance entitled Shakespeare's Sonnets is characterized by the triple unity of *rhythm–corporality–musicality*. The organization and structuring of the artistic material is given by the above mentioned rhythm. In the performances directed by Wilson, rhythm has a special importance - it harmoniously unifies time and space. It does not only combine time, space and music but it also connects corporality/matter with the wholeness of the representation. Thus, it can be justly stated that rhythm becomes the primary leading principle of the whole performance, it becomes the basic dramaturgical principle of the staging. It is also related to the timing, repetition and recurrence of sign systems and meaning units. It can be also asserted that rhythm is the leading

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<sup>6</sup> Time placed within brackets.

principle of the performance which creates and structures the performative manifestations of actor's body/corporality. The spectacle of this performance does not only actualize the almost inexistent text and the intense emotions of the actors (roars, screams, expressive corporal manifestations, shakings, writhings), but it also visualizes them and makes them entirely visible. The self-referential, post-mimetic expression of feelings and gestures made by the actors is also intensified by the accumulative visual and auditive effects.

### **5.1.2. Nadj Josef: Woyzeck**

Staged by: **Centre Choréographique National d'Orleans (CCNO)**, 1998.

Directed by: Nadj Josef

The performance is a pantomime-play compacted in a single scene, having a grotesque tone. A depressing feeling of decadence is peculiar to the whole performance. This depressing atmosphere is intensified by Nadj Josef's creating a dark and monochromatic stage-image, which is reminiscent of a limpid-dim, low-keyed painting by Caravaggio, with light-shade (chiaroscuro) contrasts.

Woyzeck staged by Nadj is taking place in a closed space, in which the dancer-actors – among them, Nadj Josef too – introduce themselves one after another, in silence. Nadj renounces dramatic text and lays emphasis on corporal performativity in this performance too. Thus, the expressive gestures, mimics and lines of movements become primary means of communication, instead of text. So, the performance is built on a powerful and expressive gesture-narrative, in which the actors play simple-minded, slow-witted, dummy-like parts. The whole performance is an image-theatre compacted in a single scene and in one hour – or it can be considered a sign-theatre, in which the self-referential value of gestures delineate a post-mimetic type of expression. In our opinion, actors act out nothing but themselves, and in their acting, the post-mimetic line of actions and mode of expression generate absurd situations. Summing all up, Nadj lays emphasis not on the story, he does not even strive for telling story-fragments, instead, he juxtaposes heart-rending images.

## 6. Conclusions

The central endeavour of this thesis is the analysis of the complementary relationship between theatrical images and theatrical space. As it has been showed, theatrical images, just like dramatic text, are meaning-transmitting unities placed in space, consequently they depend on time and space. Theatrical space is also an imagery or image-composition exposed to visualization and visibility. So, there is a centripetal mechanism operating between the two.

Our research is made actual and exciting at the same time by presenting the mixture of meaning-transmitter elements and sign-systems making up the time-space-image system of the theatre, and the semantic overlaps and transgressions deriving from the complementary relationship between these meaning-units. This exciting theatrical mode of being is created mainly in the post-dramatic (post-mimetic) theatrical mode of representation, in the borderline-situation caused by a transformation process. This borderline-situation is made manifest in the phase of the identity-transformation and trans-substantiation that takes place between spectators and actors, and between the audience and the performance, during the borderline collaboration between object and subject. All this is due to the rite-structure of performance-theatre.

The present thesis has three larger units: hermeneutics of theatrical images, hermeneutics of theatrical space and analysis of post-dramatic theatrical performances. In the latter, we concentrated on mimetic and post-mimetic theatrical strategies and on the tension between these two theatrical modes of being.

In all of these larger units, we were searching for answers to questions concerning the complementary relation between theatrical image and space, and about the independent versus interdependent mode in which theatrical images/body-images exist. At the same time, we attempted to set hermeneutical and semantic hypotheses according to which the more powerful visual narrative of images (mainly in the case of post-modernist, spectacle-theatre) is able to make the performance-reading easier and has a meaning-totalizing function. These meaning-bearing image-contents are capable of keeping and storing the performance in the memory of spectators for a longer time, to the extent that our consciousness will be able any time to download those inner images, which help us subsequently to reconstruct the content of the performance.

The vicious circle is complete: it is not yet possible to draw a clear-cut border between image, space and text, neither between communicator-communicated-receiver, so we remain only

with the feeling elicited by the presence of a complex and exciting cultural entity. Transgressions of actors into viewing spectators, of spectators into actors' existence, of the story-teller into the world, of the world into the story, of the onlooker into the world of dramatic text and image can be discovered in this type of theatre.

## **7. Closing words**

To sum up, we can state that the theatre – let it be mimetic or post-mimetic in its mode of representation – is a mode of being (or an image of the world) which is measured against and assumed with absolute truth and sincerity. But if sincerity is a basic condition, then the Heideggerian paraphrasis: What does „the image of the world created by theatre” mean: the image of the world or the world conceived as an image? - may not become dependent on different points of view.

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