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THE ROLE OF THE SPECTATOR

PhD Thesis (Extract)

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Introduction

„The pen was sliding swiftly on the paper, the arguments lined up irrefutably, but Averroes's happiness was shadowed by a bit of anxiety. (...) A philological issue, related to a great work – this piece, Aristotle's analysis, was to clear him in front of all people. (...) The previous night he stumbled into two ambiguous words in the beginning of Poetics. These two words were tragedy and comedy. He had met them years before in the third book of Rhetorics; no one was aware of their meaning in Islam. (...) Averroes put the pen down. He said to himself (with little conviction), that whatever we are seeking, it is usually right at hand (...) a tune distracted him from his scholarly entertainment. He looked out through the bars of the veranda: down in the narrow, earth-covered yard there were a few half-naked children playing. One of them was standing on another's shoulders and he was chanting with his eyes closed, obviously imitating the muezzin: »God is one: Allah.« The child standing still was playing the minaret, while another one imitated the crowd of believers leaning forward and kneeling in prayer. The game did not last long; they all wanted to be muezzins, nobody would play the congregation or the tower.»¹

When he stated that whatever we are seeking is usually right at hand, Averroes alias Abú'l-Valid Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Rusd – „who, being confined in Islam, could not comprehend the meaning of tragedy and comedy”² – did not know how close he was to the meaning of Aristotle's ambiguous words, neither did he suspect that he elevated the children's game to theatre and himself to spectator when, driven by the melody, he looked out through the bars of the veranda.

Eric Bentley's minimalistic definition of theatre supposes two activities: A impersonates B, while C watches them. Such impersonation is general usage among children and acting a role does not essentially differ from how children play. Each game creates a world in the world – a self-governed territory –, and among the many enchanted castles built by child-humans, we may consider theatre to be the most durable. This is where the difference between art and life begins.³ The spectator is an indispensable

¹ Borges, Jorge Luis (1998): *Averroës nyomozása*. In: Uó: *A halál és az iránytű*. (Hungarian translation: Hargitai György), Budapest, Európa Kiadó, 262-263

² op.cit., Borges, 263

³ Bentley, Eric (1998): *A dráma élete*. (Hungarian translation: Földényi F. László), Pécs, Jelenkor Kiadó, 123. In English: *The Life of the Drama*, 1964, Atheneum

element in Peter Brook's „famous” theatre definition as well,⁴ as the actual being; the constitution of any artwork is impossible without the community of spectators, without the audience. In the spirit of Hartmann's idea of the real front and unreal background of art works, we can define the receiver executing the mental reception of the spiritual background as the constituent, meaning-endowing element of the aesthetic experience, therefore the unreal background within the real front always requires contemplating consciousness.⁵

This contemplating consciousness – the *C looking* (Bentley), *the other watching* wit (Brook), the spectator seen as a secondary role for a long time, has recently become a distinguished subject of study not only of Semiology or Reception Aesthetics, but of Theatre Sociology as well. At the same time Patrice Pavis denounces the lack of a unifying perspective that would contain all possible means of approach (sociology, socio-criticism, psychology, semiology, anthropology, etc.) according to him, it is difficult to grasp all the consequences of the fact that „the spectator cannot be separated as an individual either from community or from the audience.”⁶

Pavis's opinion about the „the thousand-headed monster” – as the audience is known in theatre-jargon –, though it may seem accurate, does not dwell on how he imagines that unifying perspective containing all the means of approach coming from different disciplines of study concerned with the spectator. One might even question whether we can talk about a common perspective – and if yes, on what common grounds –, whether it is possible to grasp such perspective in the dense intricacy of knowledge of different disciplines referring to/referential to the spectator? Is it possible for such a „collective perspective” to exist? Do not all such attempts become ultimately uncontrollable? First, is there a need for any kind of unification of perspectives? It seems that Pavis claims expectations that will take a long time to be fulfilled, as the tendency of the diversification and specialization of scientific fields shows. Whatever the future of the

⁴ „I can take any empty space and call it a bare stage. A man walks across an empty space whilst someone else is watching him, and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged.” Brook, Peter (1999): *Az üres tér.* (Hungarian translation: Koós Anna), Budapest, Európa Kiadó, 5; Brook, Peter. *The Empty Space* (London: Penguin, 1968) 11;

⁵ v.ö. Hartmann, Nicolai (1977): *Eszztétika.* (Hungarian translation: Bonyhai Gábor), Budapest, Magyar Helikon

⁶ Pavis, Patrice (2006): *Színházi szótár.* (Hungarian translation: Gulyás A., Molnár Zs., Rideg Zs., Sepsi E.), Budapest, L'Harmattan Kiadó, 304 in English: *Dictionary of the Theatre*, 1998, Toronto University Press

research and study of the spectator holds for a certain common perspective, we consider it fascinating to attempt a summary and even a synthesis of approaches towards the spectator. At the same time, avoiding the compulsion to find such a collective perspective by all means, the present study is driven by the intention of a „possible nearing” of the approaches to each other, that we expect to result in questions pointing towards further possibilities.

I attempt to conduct a survey of the four thematic areas or territories related to the spectator and the audience. I hope that the results of my experiences as a director and a teacher will add to my theoretical studies. First, as a short historical summary studying the situation and the role of the spectator, I will enumerate the transformations palpable in more striking turning points of European theatre history. In the second thematic area I will analyze those complex mechanisms governing the receptive process of the spectator, which occur, for example – to mention only a few – in relation to interpretation, identification, the reading of the performance, the structuring of the spectator’s attention, the psychology of art-perception, or even taste and memory. This is followed by a survey from the perspective of theatre-sociology of the questions of spectator- and audience-research. Finally, in the light of artworks that position the spectator in the center of the event, we analyze theatre as the possible space of identity-change, transformation and transgression of borders.

1. The history of the situation of the spectator

1.1 The principles of the historical survey studying the situation of the spectator

Theatre has an ephemeral-shifting nature. Therefore it is quite difficult to draw a precise and thorough picture – only on the basis of sources and documents – about the varieties of spectator-reactions experienced by the performers, their reactions to them, or the ways in which they influenced transformations in theatres of the antiquity, the Renaissance or the end of the 19th century, periods of major theatrical transformations. Erika Fischer-Lichte states this in the introduction to her *History of Drama*. This is not accidental, as in the case of many periods we have some information about the success or failure of certain performances, the general reaction of the audience, the social status of the spectators, common rules of conduct in the theatre, but we know very little about the

impact of the performance on individual spectators. Moreover, the applicability of eligible documents is different, as personal accounts or letters about performances considered more reliable, memories or autobiographies can only be seen as secondary sources and carry an unavoidable subjectivity. On the other hand, the reality of some sources is outright questionable, as they seem to come from the realm of legends.⁷ Pondering this relativity of sources, Fischer-Lichte argues for the writing of the history of identity of the dramatic genre instead of the reconstruction of European theatre history as a history of identity. Because in European theatrical tradition, drama and performance are often inseparable, and this connection defines to a great extent the structure of the dramatic text, we can read the dramas of European tradition as a series of conceptions about identity.

Along this line of thoughts we may say that for the study focusing on the historical shifts in the role of the spectator – along with the dialectic relationship between theatre and audience and the transformations resulting from it – such a reading of dramatic texts would be a useful guide. Naturally, one would also have to take into consideration the facts of the history of society, mentalities and ideas, and above all the memories the writer of which offers an account of the effect of the performance on him or her.

If we only have a *bird's eye view* survey of the main turning points of European theatre, we might probably observe that there is a connection between the transformations of theatrical and dramatic forms and the experiments stimulating the reactions and participation of the receivers. It is also probable that the temporary decline or even oblivion of certain theatrical forms can be often observed in the separation from the audience as well. At the same time we may state that it is impossible to delimitate audience era-specific spectator-reactions as there are no sharp separation lines between changing performance forms of different theatrical periods. Experimental innovations aiming at the stimulation of spectators and the reciprocal effects of receptions build on precedents, forming stations in this process arching over periods as „social expectations force more closed or open communication between performing and receiving parties”.⁸

⁷ the case mentioned by Fischer-Lichte is relevant in this direction: „one (report) which seeks to persuade us of mass conversion of spectators to the monastery after Bidermann's *Cenodoxus, the Doctor of Paris* in the Jesuit theatre of the seventeenth century – which was probably nothing more than inflated propaganda.” Fischer-Lichte, Erika (2002): *History of European Theatre and Drama*, Routledge, 6. In Hungarian: (2001): *A dráma története*. (Hungarian translation: Kiss Gabriella), Jelenkor Kiadó, Pécs, 17

⁸ Sz. Deme, László (2010): *A nézői szerep változása a nyugati színház történetében*. In: *Ha a néző is résztvevővé válna*. Budapest, L'Harmattan Kiadó, 14

Renouncing an analysis of not easily graspable complex connections of transitions and transformations with the unilateral requirements of such a frame, this study only attempts to offer a short historical summary studying the situation and the role of the spectator by going through the transformations palpable in more striking turning points of European theatre history.

1.2. The role of the spectator at crucial turning points of European theatre history

Restricted by the summarizing quality of this abstract of the thesis, we may point out primarily that from antiquity until the beginning of the 20th century, theatrical communication in the logo-centric theatrical tradition exhibits mostly a one-directional character. In fact, in this communication defined by the playwright and the spectator, that may be considered bipolar – and in which the actor can be considered the channel – the spectator was able to meet the dynamics of emotions and ideas concentrated in the dramatic work mostly as an outsider, reacting to the things seen from outside the playing area. Thus, spectator-reactions did not build into the living theatrical process. However, the performances exploiting the possibilities of a separated playing area (stage) and the actors' (traditionally perceived) role-play may be valid today as well. Social expectations can always find their own form of reflection in this type of theatre; we may state without exaggeration that the vast majority of the potential theatre-audience still expects the illustration of classical texts from theatre. Even when they are willing to accept this or that modern staging audiences subscribe for understandable story, sensible connections, cultural reinforcement and touching theatrical emotions⁹, and are not usually governed by the intention to understand even forms of post-dramatic theatre.

The processes initiated at the end of the 19th and continued in the 20th century as well as current transformations are not driven mainly by the unconditional denial of theatrical traditions, but rather by the rethinking and recycling of traditions. Through this, they do not expect the precise understanding and acceptance of theatrical meaning, but they rather offer the possibility of conscious decision taking in the position of the spectator. However, we might say that by means of the continuous confrontation of various

⁹ Lehmann, Hans-Thies (2009) *Posztdramatikus színház*. (Kisfalusi B., Berecz Zs., Schein G.) Budapest, Balassi Kiadó, 13 In English: *Postdramatic Theatre*, Routledge, 2006

conceptions, *inspiring* passions urge the rethinking of theatrical systems of signs, creating thus the possibility for the existence of not just one truth, legalized by a majority, but also for everyone to find their own truth or even give up their search for truth.¹⁰

2. On the paths of reception

Starting with the second half of the 20th century, reception- and effect-aesthetics came with a new conception, discussing the history of literature and the arts as a process in which three elements, the author, the work and the receiver (reader, audience or spectator) were equal participants.¹¹ Theatrical performance – as a complex net or web of different kinds of signs, means of expressions and actions – has to be able to operate with conventions and creator-receiver consensus, which enable the receiver, that is the constituent, meaning-endowing element of the aesthetic experience, to become a participant in the act of reception. Nevertheless, whether the performance carries away, touches the spectator or not, or even exerts a violent effect on him or her, reception always raises aesthetic issues. The circle of mechanisms governing the receptive process of the group of spectators gathered for the sake of the theatrical event is very complex. Let us think of reception, interpretation, or taste to mention only a few aspects. It is not easy to define, therefore, what kind of interpretational premises can the work of art offer to its receivers and how the spectators participate in the process of sense-creation.

2.1. Understanding and interpretation

Understanding and interpretation are in fact re-creation of meaning at the same time, especially in texts and performances in which everything relies on the richness and ambiguity of significant structures and stimuli.

Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics discusses understanding as an active event happening inside the receiver. Referring to understanding and interpretation, he considers

¹⁰ op.cit. Sz. Deme, 2010, 24

¹¹ see: Jauss, Hans Robert (1997): *Recepcióelmélet – esztétikai tapasztalat – irodalmi hermeneutika.* (Hungarian translation: Kulcsár-Szabó Zoltán.) Budapest, Osiris Kiadó. in English: *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, University of Minnesota Press, 1982

that a work of art tells us something in a way that its meaning can never be fully exploited.¹² On one hand, the meaning of the text cannot be fully uncovered, as it is not structurally inherent, but exists only in connection with the reception, while understanding is only partial, therefore, instead of the unique, decodable meaning of the work of art we have to deal with a pluralism of interpretations.

Referring to the understanding of dramatic texts Jauss asserts that the three phases of receptive activity encountered during the understanding of poetry and prose can be also applied to drama: “aesthetic perception” (direct understanding), interpretation (reflexive understanding) and “application”.¹³ The essential difference however is that the reading of the dramatic text does not only mean the literal following of the text, as it is with the reading of a poem, a novel or a newspaper article, but also fictionalizing, the creation of a fictitious or possible world. The reading of the dramatic text requires the imaginative work of putting the speakers into situations.¹⁴

While the written text has an almost indefinite number of possible interpretations, as it has as many readings as readers, the theatrical performance – based on a dramatic work – offers one reading provided by the creators and originating from the given contexts. The spectator has to understand an interpreted and represented text.

2.2. Illusion and identification

Theatrical illusion is the result of theatrical conventions during which we consider fiction real and true. This extends to all the elements of the performance, to the object-world represented (stage design), the story and the stage figures – due to the reality-effect created by the stage. Theatrical illusion requires us to be aware that what we see is *only* theatrical performance. Naturalistic aesthetics constructed on perfect illusion did not take into account the mixed effect of illusion and disillusion, but theatre itself has more subtle possibilities than the alternative between the effect of real and unreal. The spectator is

¹² Gadamer, Hans-Georg (1986): *Szöveg és interpretáció*. (Hungarian translation: Hévizi Ottó), In: Bacsó Béla (szerk.), 1986: *Szöveg és interpretáció*. Budapest, Cserépfalvi Kiadó, 19. In English: *A Bouquet of Later Writings*, Northwestern University Press, 2007

¹³ see: Jauss, Hans Robert (1981): *Az irodalmi hermeneutika elhatárolásához*. Helikon. 1981/2-3. 188-207. In English: *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, University of Minnesota Press, 1982

¹⁴ op.cit. Pavis, 2006, 313.

immersed in the theatrical event of the performance, which triggers the ability of identification and he or she has the feeling of being confronted with actions similar to his or her personal experiences. According to Freud, the phenomenon of identification with the hero is deeply rooted in the subconscious and the pleasure associated to it derives from the cathartic recognition of the other's self and from the desire to appropriate this self but also to separate from it through *denegation*.¹⁵ When the spectator subjected to theatrical illusion has the impression that what he or she experiences does not really exist is a case of denegation. Freud describes the pleasure experienced by the spectator as the satisfaction of "feeling the different parts of the self moving uninhibitedly on the stage"¹⁶ and this experience of danger without risk triggers the process of identification. The actor's identification with the character and that of the spectator with the actor-character is indispensable for the creation of illusion and fiction. The identification of the spectator with the character gives pleasure, as through a proxy he or she can live the adventure without really becoming involved. It is all just a game that cannot breach our personal safety.

Pavis considers that the following typology of identification proposed by Jauss clearly defines the criteria of differentiation and covers the whole range of possible reactions: identification happens through *association, awe, sympathy catharsis* and *irony*.¹⁷ Among these, catharsis and awe have often been criticized; for instance, according to Brecht's critique about the possibilities of identification, the identification with the hero causes the lack of critical judgment. This perspective carries the danger of the loss of balance in the opposition identification/alienation. However, any degree of identification with the hero contains a certain amount of delimitation by denegation, if not for anything else, because of our uniqueness. On the other hand, in order to adopt a critical attitude with the hero one should identify with him or her to a certain extent.

¹⁵ The term denegation, taken from psychoanalysis, means a process which elevates to the conscience certain unconscious elements that we deny at the same time. (for instance: „ Do not think that I am angry with you.”)

¹⁶ Freud, Sigmund (1969): *Studienausgabe*. Frankfurt, Fischer Verlag, X. köt., 167-168, quoted by Pavis, 2006, 50.

¹⁷ Jauss, Hans Robert (1977): *Ästhetische Erfahrung und literarische Hermeneutik. I*, München, Fink Verlag, 220., in: Pavis, 2006, 51.

2.3. The spectator as reader

The reading of the performance means actually the solution and understanding of different sign systems of the stage perceived by the spectator. This is so because the theatrical performance or – with De Marinis' term– the performance text¹⁸, requires a kind of reading in itself. Inspired by Eco's "model reader", De Marinis created the notion of the "model spectator", which the performance anticipates. The model reader is someone who is „supposedly able to deal interpretatively with the expressions the same way as the author deals generatively with them.”¹⁹ With a few modifications, De Marinis applied also Eco's conception about closed and open texts to theatrical performances. Eco, termed the texts which generated precise answers from more or less precise groups of empirical readers *closed*, while those which resulted in less specific answers, *open*. Starting from this De Marinis thinks that theatrical performances can be closed (didactic theatre) or open (avant-garde works). He also considers important Eco's observation that the open works are paradoxically more difficult to access than the closed ones, because the lack of rules available to spectators – the extreme openness – narrows down their numbers to a few "super-competent spectators" willing to take up the challenge of answering the complex questions. The widely known theatrical incidents unambiguously point to the fact that the community of *readers* (interpreters) gathered for the theatrical performances may apply widely different strategies from those of the *model readers*. Moreover, sometimes performances that contradict the expectations of the majority of the spectators attracted passionate displays of disagreement (let us think of *Hernani*).

Arnold Hauser considers *originality* the generally valid criterion of art, while the art work itself can only be understood with a partial renunciation of originality, because apart from new artistic forms we also need a certain amount of familiar elements, conventions, forms that enable the receiver to access specific things.²⁰

¹⁸ Marinis' term does not refer to the dramatic literary text, but rather to the theatrical performance as text, the performance text imagined as a complex net of different types of signs, means of expression or actions. Marinis, Marco De (1999): *A néző dramaturgiája*. (Imre Gyé Zoltán) accessible at: http://www.c3.hu/~criticai_lapok/1999/10/991017.html, accessed : 2008.04.02, in English: *Dramaturgy of the Spectator*, Marco de Marinis and Paul Dwyer In: *The Drama Review: TDR* Vol. 31, No. 2 (Summer, 1987), pp. 100-114

¹⁹ Eco, Umberto (1979): *The Role of the Reader*. Bloomington Indiana University Press, 7.,

²⁰ see: Hauser, Arnold (1978): *A művészettörténet filozófiája*. (Hungarian translation:: Tandori Dezső), Budapest, Gondolat Kiadó. In English : *The Philosophy of Art History*, Northwestern University Press, 1985

2.4. Voluptas or curiositas

Eric Bentley claims that if A who impersonates B-t is an exhibitionist, while C who looks at this is a voyeur²¹, so representation can be linked to the notion of exhibitionism, while watching to that of voyeurism, to the secret desires of humans to be watched and to watch.

After the appearance of the notion of the pleasure of reading introduced by Barthes²², theatre theory attempted to formulate the genre-specific joy of theatre. In her work *Avantgárd-színház-politika (Avant-garde-theatre-politics)* Magdolna Jákfalvi asks the following questions about the pleasure of looking at something: „Why does someone watch that other one, who is playing the part of someone else than himself? Contemporary theatre theory is trying to find the answer to the question of what makes the voyeur-situation – which is otherwise unacceptable from the point of view of individual moral unacceptable – authentic, what gives the pleasure of watching?”²³ In the case of theatre, one of the essential features of aesthetic pleasure is the fact of watching the other.

In his attempt to summarize the history of the notions of pleasure, Jauss mentions Augustine’s point of view, who, discussing in his *Confessions* the desires of the eye (*concupiscentia oculorum*) distinguishes in the use of the senses voluptuosity (*voluptas*) from curiosity (*curiositas*). „ (...) The first one refers to beautiful, pleasurable, tasty, resounding, soft. That is to pleasant experiences of the five senses, while the second one to their opposites as well, such as mangled corpses or the bewildering sight of a lizard catching flies. ”.²⁴ In the case of the theatrical gaze, the aesthetic pleasure derives from a combination of *curiositas* and *voluptas*, although Augustine does not have a positive opinion about the function of *curiositas* within the aesthetic pleasure. However, he admits that: „ From this disease of curiosity are all those strange sights exhibited in the theatre”.²⁵ In the question of the amount of the influence of *curiositas* and *voluptas* on the process of pleasurable watching, Derrida is of the opinion that the in logo-centric theatre “ the sitting,

²¹ Bentley, 1998, 129

²² see: Barthes, Roland (1998): *A szöveg öröme*. (Hungarian translation: Babarczy E.) Budapest, Osiris Kiadó in English : *The Pleasure of the Text*, Editions de Seuil, 1975

²³ Jákfalvi, Magdolna (2006): *Avantgárd-színház-politika*. Budapest, Balassi Kiadó, 10

²⁴ Jauss, 1997, 160

²⁵ Aurelius Augustinus (1987): *Vallomások*. (Hungarian translation: Riedl Károly), Budapest, Gondolat Kiadó, 328. In English: *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*, 1909, P.F.Collier tr. Edward Bouverie Pusey, p.112

passive audience, the audience of consumers, spectators, pleasure-seekers" are mostly voyeurs driven by curiosity.²⁶ Due to the self-reflexive voyeur-situation of avant-garde space construction, walls surrounded the playing area with only small holes through which one could watch the performance peeping in. However, the performances of the 1970's reinforced the *curiositas*-feature by opening home-theatres to signal the preserved (civilian) identity of the performers.²⁷ Jákfalvi considers that this space-construction also made spectators aware of the pleasure deriving from voyeurism.²⁸ We may conclude that in the theatrical process of reception the pleasure of watching is essential, it derives from voyeurism and can only be triggered by that.

2.5. Manipulative strategies in structuring the attention of the spectator

The performance intends to evoke in the spectator a series of specific intellectual (cognitive) and emotional transformations (ideas, beliefs, emotions, fantasies, values etc.) by applying a group of specific semiotic strategies – says Marco De Marinis in his *Dramaturgy of the Spectator*.²⁹ He considers that actual tools – strategies and techniques – can be built into the textual structure of the performance, anticipating a certain kind of reception of the performance, a clearly definable attitude. He distinguishes two equally important and interconnecting elements from these tools applied by theatre creators in the direction of the audience: *the manipulation of the physical relationship between the theatrical space and the performance/spectator* and *the structuring of the attention of the spectator*.

We may consider it a well known fact that the positioning of the spectators within the theatrical space and their relationship with the playing area deriving from that has a

²⁶ Derrida, Jacques (1994): *A kegyetlenség színháza és a reprezentáció bezáródása*. (Hungarian translation: Ivacs Ágnes, Farkas Anikó et al.) source: <http://www.literatura.hu/szinhaz/derrida.htm>, accessed: 2011.12.13, in English: *The Theater of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation*, Theater Summer 1978 9(3): 6-19; doi:10.1215/00440167-9-3-6

²⁷ in his performances in his Dohány street (Budapest) home Péter Halász blurred borders between life and acting by the fact the spectators walked around in the apartment as in a museum exhibition and watched the everyday life of Péter Halász's family. source: Színház 1990. június

²⁸ op.cit. Jákfalvi, 2006, 24

²⁹ in English: 1999 *Dramaturgy of the Spectator*, Marco de Marinis and Paul Dwyer In: *The Drama Review: TDR* Vol. 31, No. 2 (Summer, 1987), pp. 100-114

central role during the perception of the performance. As a result, in the 20th century there have been a number of attempts and experiments to actively involve the audience in the performance, by mobilizing them in a spiritual and physical sense and to promote a more active and creative reception.

Marinis says in connection to the structuring of the spectator's attention that the theatrical relationship is organized and maintained only by the functioning of the *selective* attention of the spectator and it can be imagined only if we combine the two modalities of attracting attention (*faire perceptif*), called by the representatives of psychology attentive focalization and selective attention.³⁰ During a state of selective attention, the spectator is able to browse through the basket of impulses reaching him or her with the help of the mechanism of "concentration-relaxation-repeated concentration".³¹

The psychology of reception and the research projects of experimental aesthetics related to this field study aesthetic behavior as a highly developed form of exploratory behavior. The expression means for psychologists complex activities which serve to provoke, lengthen and intensify the reaction of sensory organs to systems of stimuli that are not inherently beneficial or harmful.³² It has been demonstrated that the collative properties of these stimuli have a precise effect on the exploratory behavior of the subject. Berlyne distinguished the following collative properties (or variables): novelty, surprise, complexity and oddity. According to Marinis the state of interest can be provoked by surprise or shock, in the following evolution:

surprise → interest → attention (with the obvious possibility of feed-back)

Therefore, the performance has to restore to its *destructive* or *manipulative strategies*, meant to destabilize the expectations and especially the receptive habits of the spectator. The performance has to do this by introducing Berlyne's collative properties – the elements of novelty, improbability and oddity – in places where the spectator is habitually accustomed to safety.³³ Because groups of stimuli are judged more favorably when they

³⁰ op.cit. Marinis, 1999

³¹ op.cit. Marinis, 1999

³² Berlyne, Daniel: (1974): *Studies in the new experimental aesthetics: Steps toward an objective psychology of aesthetic appreciation*. Washington, D.C:Hemisphere. quoted by Marinis, 1999

³³ op.cit. Marinis, 1999

are situated at the intermediary level of novelty and complexity, Marinis considers that theatrical experience originates from and is sustained by the uninterrupted dialectics between expectations and frustrations. In the contrary situation, they might become disturbing elements and could be rejected.

In fact, we might say that the question is always to what extent the spectator is able to “receive” the message intended to him or her, or, in other words, whether the spectator possesses the proper codes to adequately interpret and understand it.

2.6. Creation and receptivity vs. reception and creativity

Árpád Kékesi Kun in his study *Recepció és kreativitás a színház(kultúra)ban* (*Reception and creativity in theatr(ical cultur)e*) points to the inseparability of reception and creativity in the activities of theatrical creation and reception. There is only an apparent binary opposition between these two as they are in fact activities depending and leaning on each other.³⁴ According to Kékesi, it is just illusory that the actor’s *impersonating* action is only linked to creativity while the spectator’s *watching* action only to receptivity.

In the moment of creation, receptivity has as an important and emphatic role as creativity. The creation of the performance text is an obviously creative activity, but, since theatrical creation – at least in the literary theatre, a dominant form of European theatre for the last 2500 years – is based on the dramatic text, it is also a receptive activity. Staging requires that the creators interpret the text and we can find the act of reception in this interpretation. Kékesi does not go deal with cases in which the performance text is not based on a dramatic text, but we consider that the act of reception can be found in those processes as well. The performances created through *improvisational workshops* are also based on the (re)-interpretation of – once already individually interpreted – life-event, experiences or acquired information.

At the same time, in the activity of theatrical reception creativity has an important role, because theatrical reception is not only a passive interpretation of visual and acoustic signs but also an activity. While watching a theatrical performance, the perceptive and

³⁴ Kékesi Kun, Árpád (2008): *Recepció és kreativitás a színház(kultúra)ban*. source: http://zeus.phil-inst.hu/recepcio/htm/4/402_belso.htm, accessed: 2008.02.16.

cognitive activities of the spectator are both triggered, although the first one only last until the end of the performance while the second one continues after its end. Interpretation is not only governed and influenced by the signs of the given theatrical performance, but also by the memories of numerous other performances and other art works as well, which define not only interpretation, but also perception, as the receptive consciousness and perception are not *tabula rasa*. In this light, therefore, theatrical reception is undoubtedly a performative activity, the result of which is direction that the spectator naturally inclines to attribute to the director – without having a precise access to any creative intentions – or project it into the performance. However, direction is not given, it is not “inside” the performance, except in a manner expecting “reading”.³⁵

2.7. Artistic reception as the subject of psychology of art

As in many other fields of psychology, in psychology of art cognitive psychology has gained an ever growing role – sates László Halász in the introductory chapter of the volume *Psychology of Art*, coordinated by him.³⁶ He studies the ways in which we perceive (code), transform, store and decode information.

The results of studied found correlations between adequate art-reception activities and such features of cognitive activities as the attempt to formulate independent opinions, and tolerance for ambiguity, for new, unusual, complex stimuli. Anti-conventional individuals with an open set of values and dogmatic, rigid individuals – of the same gender, age and level of IQ – reacted the same way while receiving unfamiliar traditional works of art, but differently with unknown modern works of art. Anti-conventional individuals reacted positively to them, while the dogmatic-authoritarian individuals rejected them.

The accessibility, complexity, ambiguity, power to surprise, variability of information are key words of new experimental aesthetic works. The object of their study is the way in which how the above-mentioned characteristics emerge and exert a motivational influence by the collation of information. The new experimental aesthetics

³⁵ op.cit. Kékesi, 2008

³⁶ Halász, László (1983): *Előszó*. In: *Művészetpszichológia. (Psychology of Art)* Budapest, Gondolat Kiadó, 10

studies initiated primarily by Berlyne differentiate between pleasure and interest and measure the previously mentioned collative variables from as many perspectives as possible, especially from the point of view of their complexity.³⁷ In the light of the measurement results, the receiver might find something too complex to like interesting, because if information is to be judged on account of the power to exert interest, the tolerance margin of complexity is higher. It is worth mentioning at the same time that the level of education is of considerable importance in this sense. It seems probable that individuals with a lower level of education will consider something touching a higher level of the tolerance margin of complexity a mere “strange oddity”³⁸ and will observe it as a outstandingly unusual, without consider the art work their own or without accepting it. This might presumably be the result of the fact that the level of excitation caused is too high, because they associate the quality or importance of a work of art with the pleasure based on a pleasant atmosphere. Opposed to this, more educated individuals will even like collative properties more, liking in fact what they consider interesting. In given conditions this is an important sign of refined taste.

On one hand, we may conclude that receivers reject works of art that they consider too complicated or so conventional that there is nothing to find in them. On the other hand, even during the reception of valuable works receivers have a strong tendency to ensure an intermediate level of excitation, optimal for their needs.

2.8. The historical transformations in the role of taste

The commonplace Latin proverb claiming that there is nothing to discuss about taste – *De gustibus non est disputandum* – is almost unavoidable when engaging in studies related to taste. Of course, the proverb does not express the impossibility of a discussion about *liking* or *not liking* something, or the fact that we are unable to share our judgments of taste, but rather that the endless argument about questions of taste will never end definitely, or, at least, not the way it happens in a science operating with objective notions.

One of the fundamental questions of the discourse about taste is the relationship

³⁷ op.cit. Halász, 1983

³⁸ op.cit. Halász, 1983

between taste and *common sense*³⁹. In fact, both notions carry tensions, because while individual taste is threatened by the relativism of arbitrary content, in normative taste there is the danger of emptiness and conventionality.⁴⁰ The one and a half century debate about taste, which is eventually about nothing else but freedom, started in the 17th century as a result of the strengthening of individual judgment as opposed to authoritarian taste.

The 19th century “drying out” of philosophies and theories of taste may be explained by the fact that historicism and the pluralism of styles gained territory against the universally reigning taste. This does not mean that the importance of taste declined, but only that the homogenous, exclusive taste dissolves because of the pluralisation of taste, as the change in the social layers creates independent cultures and subcultures with very different tastes and extraordinarily rich combinations.

Following this, the 20th century has a renewed interest in the question of taste in its theoretical approach to the sociology of taste especially in the differences between high- and low cultures. With the appearance of mass culture, we can speak about the sanctification of the pluralism of taste. Mass culture is a relative notion defining itself in relation to high culture and this division naturally means the renunciation of a unique conception of taste. At the same time, the continuous dispersive motion of the two cultures prevents any setting of definite and clear borderlines between them, so this procedure is only a question of perspective and taste. As a result, nowadays even the notion of high culture is the subject of radical criticism.⁴¹

Reproduction favors the expansion of mass culture, the appearance of the multiple instead of the unique. The uniqueness and durability of the original work is opposed to the elusive momentariness and repeatable nature of reproductions. Walter Benjamin „... announces “the death of ‘the aura’ of an art work in the age of technical reproduction.”⁴²

Herbert J. Gans refuses the accusation that popular culture brings about the decline of the social level of taste, because it has been demonstrated that the social level of state has grown. Critics answer to this that without popular culture, the levels of taste would be

³⁹ *sensus communis*, introduced by the Stoics as opposed to the subjectivity of personal experience.

⁴⁰ Radnóti, Sándor (2003): *Jó ízlés, rossz ízlés. (Good taste, bad taste)* source: <http://www.mindentudas.hu/radnoti/20030422radnoti20.html?pid=0>, accessed: 2011.11.27

⁴¹ op.cit. Radnóti, 2003

⁴² Benjamin, Walter (1976): *A műalkotás a technikai sokszorosítás korszakában.* (Hungarian translation: Barlay László.) In: Kiss Tamás (szerk.): *Eszétikai olvasókönyv. Szöveggyűjtemény.* Budapest, Kossuth Kiadó, 323 in English: *The Work of Art in the Age of Technical Reproduction*, first English ed.: in: *Illuminations* (1968, translated by Harry Zohn. Ed. Hannah Arendt)

even higher, but there is no evidence to support this.⁴³ Richard Shusterman takes an even more radical stand in support of popular culture, because he considers that society should recognize the aesthetic values of popular culture and the fact that the widened notion of culture includes mass culture as well.⁴⁴

Although in our uniform world fashion or certain ideologies govern taste and transform it into cultic behavior for contemporary communities or followers of tendencies, who surround themselves with distinctive signs thus representing a specific view of the world and commitment, these circles are permeable and taste remains the expression of personal preference.

2.9. The theatre of memory

Borges' accurate thought about memory, according to which: „There is only present. Time is constructed by remembering.”⁴⁵, could be applied to the world of theatre as well. Theatre is built on memory in a double sense, because on one hand in antiquity the theatrical performances (also) had the role of remembering the past, on the other hand theatre has been built from the very beginning on the activity of the performers during which they reproduce movement and text from their memory – considers Péter Müller.⁴⁶

However, the question of memory is also strongly related to the receptive processes of the spectator. Related to this Gerald Siegmund mentions that “the specific time of theatre is pure present”⁴⁷, because the theatrical performance only exists in the presence of the audience as a direct connection of effects and at the end of the performance the direction (Inszenierung) falls apart. As the performance text is an aesthetic text, it is

⁴³ Gans, Herbert J. (2003): *Népszerű kultúra és magas kultúra*. (Hungarian translation: Zsolt Angéla), In: Wessely Anna (szerk.): *A kultúra szociológiája*. Budapest, Osiris Kiadó, Láthatatlan Kollégium, 139 in English: *Popular Culture and High Culture*, 1975, New York, Basic Books

⁴⁴ see: Shusterman, Richard (2003): *Pragmatista esztétika. A szépség megélése és a művészet újragondolása*. (Hungarian translation:: Kollár József), Budapest, Kalligram Kiadó. In English: *Pragmatist Aesthetics: Living Beauty, Rethinking Art*, 1992, Oxford/Blackwell

⁴⁵ Borges, Jorge Luis: *A pillanat*. (Hungarian translation:: Lator László) Elérhető: <http://www.irodalmijelen.hu/node/11812>, Letöltés ideje: 2012.03.09 in English; "Moments", translated by Alastair Reid. *Queen's Quarterly* 99.3, Fall 1992.

⁴⁶ P. Müller, Péter (2011): *Színház és (intézményes) emlékezet*. source: http://www.zemplenimuzsa.hu/03_4/pmuller.htm, accessed: 2011.07.29.

⁴⁷ Siegmund, Gerald (1999): *A színház, mint emlékezet*. (Hungarian translation: Kékesi Kun Árpád), *Theatron*, 1999 tavasz, 36-39. In English: *Theatre as Memory* (Gunter Narr Publ., 1996).

impossible to store it and it only lives in the memory of the spectators and the creators. The text at the basis of the aesthetic experience, that is the performance text can be considered unstable because it is constructed of transient factors (from the human body, to proxemics and lighting), which make its durability impossible.⁴⁸

Eugenio Barba thinks about the struggle against the perishability of theatre that this struggle does not aim at the conservation of performances. „The electronic shadow, as Chinese call film, does not threaten theatre (...) the basic dimension of theatre resists time. Nevertheless, it is not a resistance through congelation, but through self-transformation. The extreme boarder of transformation is in the unique memories of unique spectators.”⁴⁹

2.10. The anthropology of the spectator

The anthropology of the spectator and the performance and of the attitude of the audience towards the performance, their possible participation in it, their use of spectator-strategies are subjects of *the anthropology of theatre*⁵⁰, a discipline of theatre studies and of cultural anthropology at the same time. Pavis considers that performance analysis has to reveal the reactions of everyone present, and the effects of the reactions on the performance. He thinks that reactions are not only isolated moments, but also complete structures of sense which position and organize the whole reception. He claims that such a study of reception will lead to the description of the anthropology of the corporality of the spectator.

There is a significant difference between modes of disposition of the body in the physical environment where it lives, deriving from sensations of comfort, perspective or angle of view. The dislocation of places, multiplication of watching tasks and movement related to them as signs of modernity influence theatrical perception and these changes define spectators' expectations, visual demands, the saturation and stimulation level of the visuals, visibility conditions, proximity.

⁴⁸ Kékesi, Kun Árpád, (1999): *Hist(o)riográfia. A színházi emlékezet problémája*. Theatron, 1999 tavasz, 29-36

⁴⁹ Barba, Eugenio (1999): *Négy néző*. (Hungarian translation:: Imre Zoltán) source: http://www.c3.hu/~criticai_lapok/1999/09/990917.html, accessed: 2008.03.22 in English: Eugenio Barba and Richard Fowler, *TDR (1988-)*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (Spring, 1990), pp. 96-101

⁵⁰ Ungvári Zrínyi, Ildikó discussess in her book *Bevezetés a színházantropológiába* the beginnings of theatre anthropology. Ungvári Zrínyi Ildikó (2006): *Bevezetés a színházantropológiába*. Marosvásárhely, Marosvásárhelyi Színművészeti Egyetem Kiadója

There are four types of spectators or audiences according to Ungvári Zrínyi, distinguished on account of visual and auditive criteria.

The ritual *spectator (audience)* is also a player, as he or she participates in the ceremony with the physical reality of his or her body, and for whom the image created during movement is always positioned in space. In fact, the image is not only represented, but also lived through and the members of the audience are connected to each other as the others are also connected to the image and in the given meaning, “the harmony of the world and the subject” is accomplished.⁵¹

The *perspective-audience* of classicist theatre does not have a direct connection with the visual part and becomes slowly passive, losing their corporality because of the distance from the stage image, to the point of the virtual presence of realistic theatre, when there is only one possibility in the interpretation of the image. That one interpretation is from the optimal angle of watching and the spectator’s body exists as a place, not as a sensorial event.

Avant-garde audiences learn to use a much smaller dynamic image, as the performance decomposes classical schemes of movement. Avant-garde theatre deconstructs the image of illusion-theatre by dividing movement into parts defined by mathematical time, making the classical visual narrative impossible. „The image provokes the spectator, it appeals to his or her body and because he or she is not exposed to the emotions and actions of imagined figures the images, fragments of gestures and movements and the voices related to them have a strong sensorial effect on the spectator who is not a place any more, but the spectator’s body becomes a sensorial event.”⁵²

The *mediatized spectator* of postmodernist theatre – such as Wilson’s theatre of images – also experiences an analysis in sensorial images of the body and movement, in which the represented images transforms into a still image and with the forced slowing of movement the interpretation of the image on dramatic principles disappears. The particular montage-like connection of elements resulting from the deconstruction results in an audio-visual rhythm, about which Helga Finter says that the simultaneous presence of all systems of signs in space and time is extraordinary: representation is experienced as a violent

⁵¹ i.m. Ungvári Zrínyi, 2006, 116

⁵² i.m. Ungvári Zrínyi, 2006, 117

process.⁵³ Image-quotations, image-fragments positioned next to each other make the spectator's body to become an active participant in the interpretative reading and watching of the performance.

3. Approaches of sociology of theatre

3.1. Sociology of art and theatre

Péter Józsa considers that the following groups of themes and the issues related to them are an answer to the question of what exactly is the sociology of art:

1. *The sociology of art forms*
2. *The use of aesthetic creations as social documentation*
3. *The study of the functioning circumstances and conditions of institutions and organizations "mediating" the activity of the artist in society*
4. *The study of the social conditions determining the election of the person of the artist and the conditions of the creation of the artwork*
5. *The study of the audience*⁵⁴

The last thematic group covers two territories:

- a) The first one searches for the identity of the audience – who are the persons going to cinema, theatre, concerts, museums etc.;
- b) The second field of study deals with the *conditions of the reception of artworks*

3.2. The sociological aspects of the social phenomenon of theatre

In the set of arguments of Glynne Wickam's 1985 *History of Theatre*, the human aspect of the theatrical phenomenon gains an emphatic role, with a special attention to the fact that theatre creators and spectators are human beings who live in a given world

⁵³ Finter, Helga (2010): *A posztmodern színház kamera-látása*. (ford. Kiss Gabriella), source: <http://www.literatura.hu/szinhaz/posztmodern.htm>, accessed: 2010. 07.11.

⁵⁴ Józsa, Péter (1978): *Mi a művészetszociológia, és hol tart ma?* In: (Szerk.) Józsa, Péter: *Művészetszociológia*. Budapest, Közgazdasági és Jogi Könyvkiadó, 12

according to or against certain social norms.⁵⁵ Wickam interprets theatre as a social phenomenon: „theatre is essentially a social art, – like literature, music and dance – it reflects and enforces different religious and political systems of beliefs, moral and social ideas.”⁵⁶

The interpretation of theatre as social art is at the same time the basic principle of the sociology of theatre. Georges Gurvitch, the pioneer of the sociology of theatre started from the principle that theatre could be applied to approach the study of social processes, as theatre is basically akin to society, as role-play is an unavoidable element of the social order, and the theatrical element, theatricality is the basic element of social ceremonies. At the same time, Gurvitch stressed the fact that theatre is not the same with everyday life, as there is a demarcation line between theatre and social reality. Theatre is the sublimation of certain social situation, whether *idealizing or ridiculing them*, or *inciting to their transformation*.⁵⁷

Fischer-Lichte shares the perspective of sociology of theatre about the dialogical relationship between the functioning of theatre and society. As we have mentioned before, during the exposition of her basic idea of a connection between theatre and transformations of the identity illustrated in the history of drama, she concludes that in European theatrical tradition drama and performance are often very strictly related and this has a strong influence on the structure of the dramatic text. She also adds that we should not conclude that the transformations occurring in the structure of the drama – related to the appearance of new conceptions about identity – records somehow the actual change of identity in the social layer sustaining theatre.⁵⁸ This is so, because theatre is very seldom stops at the mere representation of social reality, as the relationship between theatre and the social stratum supporting it is always dialectic. As a result we have to imagine theatre as an integrating and at the same time integrated element of social reality, which may exert even radical transformations on social reality by continuously dynamically representing and criticizing a given status or proposing a new status.

⁵⁵ Wickam, Glynne (1988): *Istoria del teatro*. Bologna, il Milano, 23, quoted by Demcsák Katalin (2005): *A színház, mint társadalmi művészet*. In (Szerk.) Demcsák Katalin, Imre Zoltán: *A színház és a szociológia határán*. Budapest, Kijarat Kiadó, 7-13, 7

⁵⁶ op.cit. Wickam, 1988, quoted by Demcsák, 2005, 8

⁵⁷ op.cit. Gurvitch, 1975, quoted by Imre, 2005, 109

⁵⁸ Fischer-Lichte, Erika (2001): *Színház és identitás* In: Uő: *A dráma története*. (Hungarian translation: Kiss Gabriella) Pécs, Jelenkor Kiadó, 7-18, 15

3.3. The limits of sociology of theatre

The pioneering Gurvitch distinguished six different, but interrelated territories of study in the sociology of theatre which propose the research of: (1) the composition of the audience; (2) the theatrical performance; (3) the actors as a social group; (4) the text and social structure; (5) the stage interpretation of the text (*mise-en-scène*); and (6) the social function of theatre.⁵⁹ Shevtsova thinks that one of the reasons of the fact that projects of sociology of theatre have not to the present covered all territories proposed by Gurvitch is that, because the discipline originates from social sciences and not arts or humanities, the sociological methods used in everyday life do not take into consideration the peculiar characteristics of theatre. The other significant reason is that, due to the rigidity of the methods of the sociology of theatre, theatre studies considers it alien.⁶⁰

One of the basic problems of the sociology of theatre is the definition itself: the definition of this field of study that is not autonomous but not secluded, as it is impossible to define what is the sociology of theatre and what is not sociology of theatre – states Shevtsova. To illustrate the problem Shevtsova gives the example the study of the social group of actors and asks when it will cross the limits of sociology of theatre and integrate almost indistinguishably in the sociological study of the work process, or when will the first acknowledge its indebtedness to the second one while still preserving its distinctive features?

Keeping in mind the problems with the sociology of theatre Shevtsova suggested a distribution of areas of interest. They begin with (1) a setting of theoretical principles followed by the study of (2) actors and actresses; (3) directors; (4) stage and costume designers, composers, musician, technical professionals; (5) playwrights (6) administration and finance; (7) politics of theatre; (8) social types of theatre; (9) performance; (10) audience; (11) distribution; (12) theatrical texts; (13) dramatic genres; and (14) theatrical genres.⁶¹ We can see that Shevtsova expanded the possible points of connection between theatre and society to a wider range than Gurvitch. Imre Zoltán considers that by doing so she did not simplify, but rather complicated the creation of an all encompassing

⁵⁹ op.cit. Gurvitch, 1975, quoted by Imre 2005,109

⁶⁰ Shevtsova, Maria (2005): *Színházzsociológia – Problémák és perspektívák*. (Dömötör Edit), In: (Szerk.) Demcsák Katalin, Imre Zoltán: *A színház és a szociológia határán*. Budapest, Kijárat Kiadó, 13 in English: Shevtsova, M., *Sociology of Theatre and Performance*, Verona: QuiEdit, 2009.

⁶¹see: Shevtsova, 2005

sociological research, as the areas suggested by Shevtsova cover a too large, almost infinite territory that is damaging to the precise and detailed study.⁶² He adds however, that the study of the fields suggested may contribute to the disappearance of the dichotomy theatre/society on one hand, and to the development of study of the social, political, cultural and ideological functions of the theatre on the other hand.

3.4. The role of the spectator in the sociology of theatre

The effect of theatre and performance on spectators has been seen differently during the centuries and discourses adopted an almost exclusively theoretical or aesthetic approach. Empirical research only started in the period 1920-30. The area of questions related to the audience is extremely large and it is closely related to issues related to the performance, forms of theatre, theatrical cultures, creators, creative processes, the institutional framework of theatre or the social, political and social background of the (self)governing of companies.

The audience can be described in many ways: with demographic data (age, sex, education, occupation etc.); cultural habits (frequency of theatre-going, comparison to other cultural activities); recreational activities (theatre, cinema, art, reading, folk dance, choir singing, amateur painting, religious activity, sport and excursions); preferences (for certain theatrical genres); or the reasons preventing someone from practicing any recreational activities (fatigue, lack of money, etc.).⁶³

The surveys focus on the composition and cultural attitude of the audience with the help of statistic tools. However, sometimes the disguise of a statistic survey is only the cover for marketing research conducted with the aim to find out what and how an audience consumes and how they can be effectively approached. Audience surveys map spectators as cultural consumers and study primarily the potential market demands. By abolishing the perception of the individual differences of the spectators, they reduce the audience to samples. Thus, the “model spectator” created by economic facts and data appears only as the possible consumer– states Imre.

⁶² Imre, Zoltán (2005): *Színház-szociológia és a néző kutatása*. In: (Szerk.) Demcsák Katalin, Imre, Zoltán: *A színház és a szociológia határán*. Budapest, Kijárat Kiadó

⁶³ Martin, Jaqueline és Sauter, Wiilmar (1995): *Understanding Theatre – performance Analysis in Theory and Practice*. Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell International, quoted by Imre, 2005, 112

Although the knowledge of the composition and cultural attitude of the audience is an indispensable requirement of the study of the spectator, these surveys reveal very little about the methods and tools used by the spectator or about the ways in which the spectator creates his or her own methods. While audience-surveys never ask about what spectators experience during the reception of the performance, the theatrical event, reception-study deals with the „intellectual and emotional experience of the spectator “. ⁶⁴

Within reception-research, we can distinguish the macro and micro aspect. While the former studies the demographic, cultural and theatrical differentiation of spectators with the sociological and statistic models of audience-survey, the later concentrates on the emotional and intellectual reactions going on in the spectator during the experience of the theatrical event, applying psychological, sociological and anthropological models to identify them.

4. Theatre as the space of identity change, transformation and border transgressions

4.1. The theatre of identity change

Stuart Hall considers that identity is not a closed thing, but rather a process of identification.⁶⁵ We only feel that we have a continuous identity from birth to death, because we ourselves weave a comforting story, the narrative of the self around ourselves. Completely unified, perfect, safe and coherent identity is just an illusion. According to Hall, instead of that, through the multiplication of meaning and of the systems of cultural representation, we are confronted with the shocking and ephemeral multitude of possible identities with which we can – at least temporarily – identify.⁶⁶ Based on Stuart Hall's statement it seems logical to think of theatre as the possible place for the identification with possible identities. In the introduction to her *History of Drama* Erika Fischer-Lichte elaborates the principle at the center of which is the connection between theatre and the

⁶⁴ op.cit. Martin, Jaqueline és Sauter, Wiilmar, 1995, quoted by Imre, 2005, 114

⁶⁵ see: Hall, Stuart (1997): *A kulturális identitásról*. (Hungarian translation: Farkas Krisztina és John Éva.) In: Feischmidt Margit (szerk.): *Multikulturalizmus*. Budapest, Osiris Kiadó. In English: (1992). „The Question of Cultural Identity”. In: Hall, David Held, Anthony McGrew (eds), *Modernity and Its Futures*. Cambridge: Polity Press, pp. 274–316.

⁶⁶ op.cit. Hall, 1997, 61

change of identity.⁶⁷ She mentions a letter by Rousseau who indignantly refuses D'Alembert's proposal for the *Genf* entry in the seventh volume of the *Encyclopedia* including the suggestion that Genf, as all other civilized cities, should have a theatre of its own. Rousseau thinks that if men and women started to go to the same theatre together that would represent a threat to the identity of the inhabitants of Genf, destroying it eventually. Rousseau obviously starts from the static c. onception of identity, according to which identity is either given by nature or a value socially fixed once and for all, and which has to be preserved by all means in private and social life, because identity is the basis and guarantee of individual, sexual and cultural differences.

This conception of identity, dominant in European discourse from the 18th century until the middle of the 20th century has by now lost its validity on its journey from the conception of the subjectivity of the enlightenment, through the subject of sociology until the postmodernist conception of the subject. Various disciplines have created identity conceptions, which presume the continuous transformation of the notion of identity, because identity cannot be imagined without the possibility of the elimination of transgression and existing differences. Különböző diszciplínák olyan identitás-felfogásokat alakítottak ki, amelyek az identitás fogalmának állandó változását tételezik, hiszen az identitás nemigen gondolható el a határátlépés és a fennálló különbségek megszűnésének lehetősége nélkül.

Arnold van Gennep demonstrates in his 1908 study, *Rites of Passage*, that all cultures have developed certain kinds of cultural performances, the most important function of which is to operate a change of identity. These performances called rites of passage are composed of such effects inducing change, which provoke the transformation of living individuals, social groups and entire cultures when their statuses change or they are in a state of crisis. Such liminal events are birth, puberty, marriage, wedding, pregnancy, illness, starvation, war and death. During the rite of passage the social energy, flowing among the members of the society is released during performative actions enabling the creation of a new identity and the change of identity.⁶⁸

Fischer-Lichte thinks that not only rites of passage, but also theatre can be considered a genre of cultural performance very strongly related to the process of identity

⁶⁷ op.cit. Fischer-Lichte, 2001, 7-14

⁶⁸ see: Gennep, Arnold van (2007) *Átmeneti rítusok*. (Hungarian translation:: Vargyas Zoltán) Budapest, L'Harmattan Kiadó. In English: *Rites of Passage*, Psychology Press, 1960

formation and identity change, because identity is represented in theatre during performative actions. While in the rites of passage the participants themselves are transformed, theatre enables mostly the spectator to change identity. Thus, if theatre is perceived and described as the space of transgression and liminality, then the history of theatre is the space and history of human changes of identity.

4.2. The space of transformation

In the history of the evolution of the conceptions about identity, transformation itself had an important role in the 20th century. Transformation was a central category in the theatrical tendencies of the historical avant-garde and later in those of the 1960's and 1970's, as a reflection of the desire to blur the borders between theatre and real life. They started from the conception that theatre has to be able to change the spectator while theatre itself transforms into various genres of cultural performance. Although performances and happenings had to acknowledge the constituent role of the spectator, they wanted to change his role: they wanted the spectator to step beyond the limits of watching. This was the aim of involvement, the attraction of spectators into the events (for instance the actions of Richard Schechner's Performance Group), the transformation of the spectator into witness (in Grotowski's conception), or even urging the spectator towards intervention in the course of actions (by transgressing the border between watching and taking action).

Erika Fischer-Lichte thinks that in performance art – and in experimental performances – another aesthetics of performativity evolved, from the perspective of which the process of the transformation is crucial.⁶⁹ At the same time, there are a few basic differences between ritual and artistic performance. Gennep's above-mentioned rites of passage are related to the symbolic experience of the borderline and transition, *liminality and transgression*⁷⁰ and this transformation means a transition from a solid status to

⁶⁹ Fischer-Lichte, Erika (1999): *Az átváltozás, mint esztétikai kategória. Megjegyzések a performativitás új esztétikájához.* (Hungarian translation:: Kiss Gabriella), *Theatron*, 1999., nyár-ősz, 57-65, ltt: 57. In English: *The Transformative Power of Performance*, Routledge, 2008

⁷⁰ Liminality is a place and time situated between two contexts of actions and meaning. The person to be initiated is not who he was and not yet the person he or she will be. Turner, Victor (2003): *A liminális és liminoid fogalma a játékban, az áramlatban és a rituáléban.* (Hungarian translation:: Matuska Ágnes és Oroszlán Anikó) In: Demcsák Katalin és Kálmán C. György (szerk.): *Határtalan áramlás.* Budapest, Kijárat Kiadó

another one (from childhood to adulthood, from illness to good health etc.); but we cannot speak of such transformations in the case of artistic performances. Ritual functions with reference to a common semantic universe, as there are precise and common symbolic meanings accessible to all the initiated members of the community attached to the elements and actions used. The artistic performance is based on the subjective performance of an artist. While ritual leads to a previously anticipated goal and a status generally recognized by society – through transition between two statuses or two identities –, in artistic performance the journey, the state of liminality is the aim. By creating liminality artistic performance opens a playing area for the identity, so that it may experience itself continuously innovatively and differently, in order for it to be able to imagine another *I* over and over again.⁷¹

After, due to the influence of performance art non-theatrical spaces and non-theatrical events got into the realm of theatrical activity, the theatre of the 1960's and the 1970's attempted to reproduce these conditions in traditional theatres, during the staging of dramatic texts (becoming thus the initiators of studio-theatre tendencies), as signs of legitimation and canonization. The theatre integrated and disarmed tendencies aiming to dissolve the separation between life and theatre, thus protecting and reinforcing its own borders.

4.3. Theatrical transgressions

The notion of transgression has become an organic element of the vocabulary of scientific disciplines describing theatrical phenomena. In his article *A határátlépés (színház)kulturális fenomenológiája (The (theatre)cultural phenomenology of transgression)* Árpád Kékesi Kun attempts to explain the notion of transgression in a theatrical context, and he tries to survey “what exactly the borders enticing transgression embrace and close.”⁷² Theatre is the place of transgression, not only because of the transgression associated to the possibility of accepting the identities offered to the spectator. The macro- and micro-level cases of the theatrical aspect of transgression

⁷¹ op.cit. Fischer-Lichte, 1999, uo.

⁷² Kékesi Kun, Árpád (2006): *A határátlépés (színház)kulturális fenomenológiája*. In: Mestyán Ádám és Horváth Eszter (szerk.): *Látvány/színház*. L'Harmattan Kiadó, 65-77, 65

encompass *theatre and life, theatre and other forms of art, and the multitude of theatrical cultures, traditions and languages*, all of which have eventually an impact on the spectator.

Concerning *the borders between theatre and life*, the desire to abolish the border between theatre and life was the strongest in the 1960's – 1970's, as performances and happenings quite often attempted to theatricalize the events and actions of everyday life, transforming them into performative actions and positioning them within theatrical frames. They wanted to alter its function by involvement, the attraction of spectators into the events, the transformation of the spectator into witness (in Grotowski's conception), or even urging the spectator towards intervention in the course of actions (by transgressing the border between watching and taking action).

The tendencies *towards the demolition of borders between theatre and fellow arts* derived from the recognition of the fact that role and function of other arts (literature, music, dance, architecture and arts) was/is not equally acknowledged or was/is affirmed disproportionally in comparison to each other.

As to *the borders between theatrical genres*, due to the indecision deriving from the numerous occasions of cross-breeding⁷³ there still is no generally accepted delimitation of the different genres and types of the theatre performance, but traditionally we can differentiate four categories: dramatic, musical, dance and movement theatre and puppet or animation theatre (with several subcategories) - writes Kékesi.

There have been various attempts towards the transgression of borders between *theatrical cultures, traditions and languages*, the abolishing of their seclusion and towards their dissolution into each other. Starting with the 1960's and 1970's elements of non-European theatrical cultures build into the stage versions of canonic texts of European drama history. Simultaneously, the directions of Ariane Mnouchkine and Peter Brook do not attempt to melt Eastern and Western theatre but rather to theatricalize tensions between different traditions.

Performances of contemporary directorial theatre, which turn over narrative linearity or disobey the logic of role-play and dialogue also provoke transgression and attack the classical model of theatrical representation. All the cases in which the performance leaves the conditions of the proscenium- or box-stage, meant to ensure the existence and independence of the theatrical world by separation from the audience

⁷³ there are performances that can be ranked intermediary, such as cabaret or variety shows, and others which claim the extension of traditional delimitations.

occasionally even with a curtain, can be considered transgression. It is also transgressive to reorganize the structures of playing and sitting area, to diminish distances and separation, or apply scenery that is not metonymical, but metaphorical, not illustrative, but interpretative or even independent.⁷⁴ Lighting that is not intended to create the atmosphere or is neutral also means transgression, and so are gestures not accompanying but counterpointing actions (may they be formal or “restrained”), or acting that does not express emotion and intention. Kékesi considers that these elements “all carry the possibility of interference, because spectators have to cross some kind of mental border/barrier in order to receive the broadcast. They have to go beyond the conditioning created by bourgeois illusion-theatre canonized in Western Europe as the theatrical system. For the spectators any situation implies a transgression if they have to imagine theatre within a personal system: they have to step out of the position designated by the classical order of representation.”⁷⁵

During transgression, demarcation lines do not disappear, but merely reorganize; a new formation is created, which is slowly canonized creating new borders. Transgression does not intend so much the interference of arts, genres and forms, but rather the shattering of the conventional conception of theatre. According to Kékesi, identification of transgression as the freedom of the reception would not only be idealization, but also an error, because it is precisely the borders that make it possible to understand something as something; they make the spectator aware of the constructed nature of borders and of their movable but undeletable character deriving from it. “ Actually borders do not only separate, but they also unite.”⁷⁶

Conclusion

According to Pavis’ idea mentioned in the introduction, research projects of different disciplines lack a common perspective, which would connect modes of approaches to the spectator (sociology, psychology, anthropology) in one unified theoretical field. Pavis does not elaborate on how he imagines this unified perspective and

⁷⁴ op.cit. Kékesi, 2006.72-73

⁷⁵ op.cit. Kékesi, 2006,73

⁷⁶ op.cit. Kékesi, 2006,76-77

out aim was not to find this all-comprehensive point of view, but I think that we still managed to highlight a few basic issues about spectators by “nearing” different approaches to each other.

In conclusion we may state that the theatrical performance has to be able to operate with conventions that enable the receiver, that is the constituent, sense-assigning element of the aesthetic experience to become the participant of the act of reception. Surveying the questions of interpretation and understanding, illusion and identification, the reading of the performance, the pleasure of watching, the structuring of attention, reception and creativity, psychology of art, anthropology of the performance and the spectator, taste and sociology of theatre, transformation and transgression we are faced with the fact that the circle of mechanisms conditioning reception is very complex. Therefore, it is not easy to grasp what kind of interpretative clues can the artwork provide for the receiver and how spectators participate in the creation of sense.

We can be certain of one thing: the mere knowledge of theory will not make anyone an efficient creator of theatre, but until there are children who want to be muezzins, congregations or minarets, as in Averroes’ story, there will also be spectators (to study).

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