

Theatrical Performance in a Semiotic Perspective

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Abstract

Every *théatralité* developed an open system of transformation/transmutation or that transmutation of something in something other (in Bogatyrev 1971: 31 — transformation in different form) which systematized the sign components on the stage and organized the creation of stage semiosis by the actor, transformed into image, through the stage space, costume, musical environment up to the communication with the spectator and his interpretation. This work keeps an attitude towards theatre, as semiotic system, has appeared as configuration by functions; a structure which illustrated other structures and in its own multifunctionality requires a specific communicative environment, representation and aesthetical functionality, what is transform it into a system. In the process of communication between stage and audience that dialectics of the relationships between actor and spectator creates the basic component of performance, and, in the process of representation, theatre manifested its basic function — construction of the architectonics of theater semiosis or whole of this, which we divided on: actor's play and transmutation (stage figure), stage architecture, costume, musical environment, light design, etc.

In that performativity the theatre representation are constructed by a triple-componential utterance, configured by the actor, stage figure (transmutation) and dramatic character or if we defined it by the semiotic point of view — interaction between the subject of performance, its basic theme or concept and the purely authors utterance (speech). The representation of *persona dramatica*, as a structural combination from the autonomous and informational sign structures, characterized the art of performance as a representational, in a sense of presented; and in a same time, the performance has appeared the meaningless images and from that point of view, it is representative art as a combination of these appears on the stage, even in the sense of notations.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Research Object

- Theatrical art ⇔ aesthetical, philosophical, ethical and social problematic ⇔ visual figures and concrete objects of intellectual discussion.
- Theatrical performance ⇔ symbol of histrionics ⇔ basic structural categories and functions of stage signification.
- Denotation of concrete senses and meanings ⇔ cultural discourse of performance ⇔ theatrically-sign interaction ⇔ active semiosis.

1.2. Object

- Theatrical performance ⇔ multilayeredness of significant elements ⇔ visual / intelligible image of every *secondary / other* reality ⇔ stage / perceiving subject.

1.3. Immediate Tasks of Research

- Specification of the question about the semiotic perspective of *théatralité*.
- Decreeing of a theatrical performance as *signifier* and formulating of a signs and sign's constructions on the stage.
- Argue a question concerned *stage figure* as a basic sign attribute of *reincarnation / transformation* at the theatrical reality.
- Structuring of the problem concerned theatrical communication and theatrical code as basic components in the process of activating of contents for *sense/meaning* at the awareness of perceiving spectator.
- Clarifying of the systematic of *absence / presence* of a signs on the stage.
- Defining of the mechanism of *linguistic / paralinguistic* interaction of the components of performance in the process of creation of active signifying convention.
- Enunciate of the aesthetics of theatrical performance as *theatrical text*.
- Determination of the actor's radical significance in the overall semiotic discourse of performance.
- Clarifying of the concrete semiotic function of a stage space as basic component equal of the actor's presence (actor ⇔ stage space ⇔ theatrical performance).
- Defining of the character of *mise-en-scène* as a basic representative principle for the creation of signifying stage convention.

1.4. Remarks over the Semiotic Character of *Théatralité*

- A theatrical text, as literature, is an object of hermeneutic research; a theatrical performance as an action, exist in consequence of that hermeneutics, this is the prime cause of its appearing.
- Theatrical performance ⇔ a product of triple-hermeneutical dependency ⇔ an audience interpret already interpreted essences, senses and meanings, which transformed in a different essences, senses and meanings.
- Constituting of a theatrical *performing* ⇔ primary text (author), hermeneutical discourse over this text-interpretation (director), secondary hermeneutical discourse over already appeared interpretation – over-interpretation (spectator).

- Theatrical act \Rightarrow multiformity of sign-communicative systems \Rightarrow linguistic constructs.
- Theatricality (*théâtralité*) \Rightarrow availability of a different components \Rightarrow verbal expression, gestures, mimics, affectations, bodily and psychological conditions, visual imagery, musically-sound environment.
- Basis of communication \Rightarrow perceived by the contemplator (spectator) and exist on a psycho-cognitive level as a reality \Rightarrow *performative text*, constructed by the multiple signs structures.

2. THEATRICALITY AND SEMIOTICALITY

2.1. Signs and Sign Configurations – The Space of Performance as Signifier

2.1.1. Foundation

- Semiotic investigation a foundational qualities of the sign in practically endless semiosis.
- Basic conception for the types of the theatrical signs.

2.1.2. Theatrical signs

- *Linguistic* (verbal) / *non-linguistic* (non-verbal) (in Fischer-Lichte 1992 figured as *linguistics* and *paralinguistics*, De Toro 1995 follows Peirce, subdivided the signs as *Icon*, *Index*, *Symbol* corresponding with a verbal/non-verbal dimension)
- Linguistic \Rightarrow *auditory* and *visual* / *durable* and *ephemeral*
- Non-linguistic \Rightarrow *ephemeral* and *durable* / *visual* и *non-visual* (in non-verbal category)
- Summary subdivision \Rightarrow *verbal* and *non-verbal*

2.1.3. Inference

- Semiotic approach \Rightarrow micro-world, constructed by the specific theatrical mechanism of signification.
- Specific qualities of the theatrical sign \Rightarrow detailed position on the stage environment \Rightarrow mutual penetration from one sign structure to another.
- Specific sign characteristics \Rightarrow aesthetics of *signification* \Rightarrow theatrical act as a unique phenomenon which is the product of sign interaction.

2.2. Semantics of Transformation – Stage Figure at the Context of Performance

- *Stage figure* \Rightarrow complex product which is a consequence of interrelation between *dramatis personae* towards *represented character* (Veltruský 1976, 1983, also in Mukařovský 1931, 1978 - *dramatic figure*, in Zich 1931, 1986 – *actor's figure*).
- Stage figure \Rightarrow actors sign \Rightarrow complicated structure, synthesis by the elements, *linguistic* and *paralinguistic signs* \Rightarrow system within the system into a whole corpus of performance.
- Semiotic perspective of a *presented* on the stage \Rightarrow *transformation* / basic structural element of performance.
- Theatrical action as *signatum* \Rightarrow producing of *signantia* (Veltruský 1976: 593).

- An actors' presentation on the stage as *sign of the signs* ⇒ foundation of *an acting sign* ⇒ constituting of veritable *théatralité*.
- Theatricality ⇒ open system of *transformation/reincarnation* ⇒ transformation of *the think in something other* (in Bogatyrev 1976: 31 – *transforming in a different form*).
- Systematize of sign components on the stage and constructing of the stage semiosis ⇒ actor, transformed in *image / stage space / costume / music environment / communication with the spectator / interpretation of the audience*.

2.3. Theatrical Communication and Theatrical Code – Aesthetical Sign Convention and Spectator's Perceiving

- That's, what are *transformed* and the basic role of it for the constructing of the stage semiosis ⇒ analysis of stage – spectator communicative system ⇒ coding/decoding by the perceiving spectator of the stage-performative theatrical code.
- Presence of theatrical convention ⇒ relatively uniform communicative language and relatively identical encoding/decoding matrix ⇒ constituting of the communicative environment between *encoder* and *decoder*.
- Every convention as much as possible at the artistic act is a subject of demolition in the stage reality, depends by the level of that encoding/decoding.

2.3.1. Inferences

- Spectators' perceiving ⇒ dynamics of the theatrical signs ⇒ aesthetics of the theatrical signs ⇒ projection of the personal conscious artistic impulse of the perceiver.
- Sign environment on the stage ⇒ spectators' perceiving of objects, sounds and action ⇒ sign systems, communicatively valueless, out of the scope of spectators' perceiving.
- Open theatrical communication ⇒ brightness of the code and theatrical situation ⇒ degree of accepting/disturbing of convention ⇒ level of reproduction of reality on the stage towards level of understanding of the perceiver ⇒ envelopment and complicity of presentation of the very cultural situation.

2.4. Reflection of the Domination – Sign as an *Absence/Presence*

- Semiotics of theatre ⇒ basic role of the audience in the process of performance perceiving ⇒ *absent* and *present* signs on the stage.
- Semiotics of theatrical performance ⇒ interpretation ⇒ presence of significant process.

The problem with semiotics is that in addressing theater as a system of codes it necessarily dissects the perceptual impression theater makes on the spectator (Bert O. State 1985: 7)

- Sign hierarchy within the performance system ⇒ active interaction on the level of sign reflection with the spectator's overall competence (De Merinis 1993).
- Dynamic of absence/presence of the sign ⇒ distributing sign process on the stage ⇒ perceiving of spectator ⇒ dynamic's reflection act of the spectator's semiotic awareness.
- In a hierarchy of the theatrical sign's arrangement a domination of one or few sign systems is possible (Fischer-Lichte 1992).

- Semiotic domination of separate sign or configuration/group of signs on the stage ⇒ distinguishing/decoding process concerning the sign systems on the stage.
- Presence of concrete norm / criterion ⇒ commonly accepted level of perceiver's conventionality/competence.
- Permanent re-formulating of content and domination conditions of theatrical sign ⇒ momentary presenting and distinguishing of concrete sign on the stage

2.4.1. Inference

- Higher degree of mobility and interchangeableness of theatrical signs ⇒ complexity in determination of hierarchical mutual dependency ⇒ theatrical signs are not only physically presented on the stage, they are dependent by the dualistic game of *absence/presence*.

2.5. Linguistic and Paralinguistic Interaction – Sign Transmission, Representation, Active Convention

- *Linguistic/paralinguistic* interaction of theatrical signs in three aspects of representation ⇒ verbal - verbal, non-verbal – non-verbal, verbal – non verbal and vice versa.
- Dependency of a signs by the active convention in concrete sign system and fixed moment from the performance development.
- Verbal/non-verbal performance sign environment ⇒ principle of theatrical signs interaction as transmission of images (integration of the content *image* ⇒ *icon*) and words (also *images* ⇒ *icons*).
- Images (as an iconic element of static/dynamic non-verbal representativeness) ⇒ words (as a product of linguistic verbal environment) ⇒ bearers of a different variations from communicative messages.
- Complex interaction (verbal/non-verbal in unified convention) ⇒ possible variations of sign messages significantly exceed its independent correlations.
- Complex interaction of verbal and non-verbal signs in theatrical performance ⇒ variations of possible significant effects ⇒ active levels of representation.
- Manipulation of a sign-image independently or with a sign-word in combination ⇒ basic principle of transmission of sense in wished message ⇒ perceptive expression of signification in the consciousness of perceiving spectator on semiotic level (linguistic or paralinguistic).

3. PERFORMANCE AND SIGNIFICATION

3.1 Performance as a Theatrical Text – Morphology of a Stage Signification

- Showing of a *sense* and *meaning* in a theatrical environment ⇒ analysis of signification/communication process in theatrically staged reality.
- Semiotic perspective ⇒ an idea for theatrical performance as *theatrical text* ⇒ two aspects of signification: *linguistic/non-linguistic* and *performative* (physically active) ⇒ multiformity of signification on the stage.

- Theatrical performance ⇒ defined codes complex (over-theatrical cultural codes) ⇒ secondary sign systems of performance – literature, music, fine art, mythology, religion, the theatre itself as an art.
- Performative codes (sign systems) at the performance function simultaneously (*paradigmatic*) or linear (*syntagmatic*) ⇒ producing of signification (De Toro 1992: 52).
- Signs ⇒ sign systems in variations ⇒ spectator ⇒ principle of simultaneously/ syntagmatic relation ⇒ signification.
- De Marinis (1993) / De Toro (1995) ⇒ performative text categorization as *macrotext* or *text of the text* (De Merinis 1993: 47-59), which is result by the variations of partial performative texts ⇒ utterance, music, costumes, gestures, dance, bodyness, graceful movements.

3.1.1. Inference

- Element of the general performative text interact and showing itself in united sense ⇒ constructing of theatrical text as performative expression.

3.2. An Actor at the Stage Space – Semantics of Transformation

- Semantics of actor's transformation ⇒ Aristotle's Poetics and Diderot's Pradox of Acting ⇒ *pre-semiotics acting theories* (Quinn 1989) ⇒ basic mediators of the stage figure's conception.
- Actors' transformation (*mimesis*) ⇒ communicative channel and representative language ⇒ languages' presenting form / *narrative* with relation to the spectator ⇒ *stage figure*.
- Stage figure (in Otakar Zich - *actor's figure*) is a dichotomy between perceiving of the actor (*dramatic character*) and perceiving of the audience (perceiving of *stage figure*) ⇒ dynamical dichotomy between a material object and sign (in tradition of general semiotics/ Prague School).
- Actor in role (*dramatic character*) transforms a dual diegetic structure ⇒ *representative* or *sign* (also in Aristotle and Diderot) ⇒ *mimetic construct* (*stage figure* of Prague School, exist also in a practical actor's techniques of Stanislavski 1936, Chekhov 1953, Grotowski 1968, etc.)

3.2.1. Inference

- Theatrical performance has constructed in a principle of transformation or *mimesis* ⇒ an actor imitate/transform and represented stage figure ⇒ concrete semiotic system, structured by the multiple semiotic units (signs/codes).

3.3. Semiotics of a Stage – ME at the Stage Space

- Semiotical uniqueness of the stage space ⇒ intellectually measurable environment concerning an actor and audience ⇒ it isn't only material symbol of the performative text.
- The stage space is burdened with the specific internal sense ⇒ has entirely sign characteristics of a stage architectonics, including in its sign structure of the scenography itself ⇒ in open context is a *dramatic space* (in its forms: *onstage* and *offstage* [*mimetic*

and *diegetic*], as well as *intra-diegetic* and *extra-diegetic* [presented by the actor chiefly on the level of *utterance* and active on the level of *awareness/imagination* in the line of actors-spectators]).

- Stage space as a «**constructed in relation to the actor**» (Ubersfeld 1999: 119) ⇒ intellectual environment in the context of sign semiosis of performance (*performance text*) ⇒ interaction between (actor/stage space) and audience in the frames of theatrical reality.
- Interactivity between the stage space and actor ⇒ representative sign's transfer between stage space/actor and in relation to the spectator ⇒ gradually visual formation of the stage illusion ⇒ significant referential function in the context of *imaginary world* of performance.

3.3.1. Inference

- On the level of theatre semiosis has engendered an *signification* in the field of a visual and sensitive text:
 - a) through the interaction between the actors in/with stage space
 - b) through the interaction between the actors in/with stage space with the audience in theatrical space.

3.4. Mise-en-Scène – The Representative Convention of Performance

- Analysis of the theatrical mechanism of transformation ⇒ *mise-en-scène – to-staging/transforming-something-on-the-stage*.
- *Mise-en-scène* is a structural formation, theoretical construct and radical object of knowledge ⇒ it isn't a profane result from the directing (artistic) intervention concerning the dramaturgical and/or performative text.
- Theatrical performance ⇒ dualistic function of the actor in the process of sign producing (*actor's discourse*) ⇒ semiotic reflection in relation to the stage space action (*stage performance*).
- Reconstruction of the performative text ⇒ a spectator perceive the whole corpus of the system which is configured by the separate sign under-systems with all action components – utterance, gesture/mimics/movement, stage mechanization, sound.
- Theatrical presenting ⇒ semiotical code of the creator's artistic world (director, actors, stage designer, composer, choreograph) presented as *mise-en-scène* and represented as *performative text* (an active matrix for producing of sense).
- *To-staging/transforming-something-on-the-stage* ⇒ existing of preliminary experience knowledge which is transformed by the creators of performance and supposed as understanding (what exactly will be understood by the perceiver).
- Convention: primary semiotical practice of theatrical performance ⇒ transforming of all presented objects in signs / sign configurations which could become aware.
- The role and influence of the collective cultural archetypes over the individual artistic activity and perceiving; treating of those archetypes from the aesthetical perspective.
- The aesthetics of *mise-en-scène*, in the contemporary theatrical practice, are based on the cultural experience which is stratifying in the personal consciousness/unconsciousness of the theatrical artist and spectator.

3.4.1. Inference

- Archetypical reflection of *mise-en-scène* ⇒ harmonization of the roles of individual and collective unconsciousness (or consciousness) ⇒ a complex by the mutually supplement perspectives of open constitution of an optimal sign semiosis ⇒ semiotic perspective on the stage ⇒ coordinated action and strict geometry of the movements ⇒ ordered performative line and technical vision ⇒ significant essence of theatrical performance as a process of communication and representation.

3.5. Theatrical Performance in a Semiotic Perspective - Conclusion

- Theatrical performance in a semiotic perspective ⇒ materialization of the sign ⇒ direct creation of visual conception for *presented* on the stage.
- Co-ordination in the process of analysis of the end-production and perceiving of a sense ⇒ a clear stand of a sign as a basic researching mean of performance wholeness.
- This researching project has clarified the question concerning the semiotical perspective of a theatrical performance and opens a new space for the future research initiative.
- Domination of an idea for foundational role of the audience at creation and promotion of the stage semiosis ⇒ future semiotical approach to *théâtralité* ⇒ investigation of spectator's awareness/perceiving of a theatrical reality.
- Dissection of a *signifying process* at the theatre ⇒ foundational role of the audience ⇒ the problem for perceiving of a theatrical reality ⇒ «...**a new orientation toward semiotic study of the theatre appeared to be developing**» (Carlson 1984).
- Future perspective ⇒ dynamics of the spectator's perceiving as an object of researching ⇒ «...**the analysis of the audience's role in the spectacle, both the pure and simple decoding of the performance sign and the vastly more complex process of interpretation, has been the most neglected area of theatre semiotics and needs much greater attention.**» (De Marinis 1979).

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