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## **FROM PAINTED DECORATION TO THE SCREEN. THE TURN IN STAGE ILLUSION IN THE LATE 20<sup>th</sup> AND EARLY 21<sup>st</sup> CENTURY**

**Abstract:** The painted decoration discovered in the Renaissance dominated the European stage for almost 300 years. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the so-called Great Reforms theater challenged this tradition, but it has survived in various guises until the present day. Today we perceive this form as anachronistic, as a quote from the past or an awkwardness of the set designer.

Changing the perception of reality on the screen has also led to a change in the treatment of illusion and stage space. The screen has become not only an element of decoration, but it also shows or in extreme cases replaces reality. The impact of the new media on theatre today results not only from the introduction of technology, but also from the entrance into theater of artists from the world of the media. The new relationship leads in extreme situations to the denial of the basic definition of theater as an interaction between the creator and the recipient.

The purpose of the paper is to show the interrelationships between the actor and the spectator, illusion and disillusionment. It seems that the described change will determine the direction of further development of theater. It remains an open question how the relationships between all of the participants in the interaction will be impacted by the use of screens and other electronic media. Describing and naming the attempts at qualitative change in the structure of the stage is important for the formation of new methodology for analyzing theatrical reality.

**Keywords:** disillusion, illusion, projection, screen, space in the theatre, stage design, theater, turn

The introduction of new media to the stage in the twentieth and twenty-first century caused many problems associated with the traditional understanding of illusion. The appearance of screens, computers, and video cameras on stage has been treated as a technological turn by researchers.<sup>1</sup> Analyzing the changes that have occurred in stage decoration in the context of the history of theater, we note a series of events that initiated a breakthrough in thinking about the iconographic aspect of the reception of theatrical works. Thus, one can ask some questions about the essence of the contemporary turn. What kind of aesthetic change has the turn brought to theater? Has it altered its basic purpose, which has always been the meeting between the actor and the spectator, the director, the author, and the recipient? Are the technologies that create the images displayed on screens situated within theatrical illusion or disillusion?<sup>2</sup>

The last question seems essential in this regard, because the main function of theatrical stage design has always been to create the presented, fictional world, imaginary in relation to the reality of the spectators of the performance. The system of painted decoration that predominated for over two hundred years clearly marked the boundaries of the stage world and the auditorium – even if the viewers were occasionally brought onto the stage (as was the case, for example, in the Baroque era in France). The aesthetics of wings and painted flats informed the viewers about the setting of the onstage action. It entailed a certain type of iconic code, as its principles were derived from Renaissance treaties giving the rules for adapting decoration to the dramatic genre. The audiences had it easy – they did not have to struggle to recognize the play, as it was enough to take a peek at the contents of the painted canvases. When the curtain was lifted to reveal a palace, it meant that they would be viewing a tragedy, while a street signaled a comedy.<sup>3</sup>

Another type of entertainment emerged in the late nineteenth century. In 1895, Teatr Rozmaitości in Warsaw presented the so-called “Parisian innovation”: in *Madame Sans-Gêne* by Victorien Sardou, a “pavilion” was placed on stage as decoration. It was a realistically reproduced room with three walls and a ceiling, with all architectural details replicated, fully furnished. It was an onstage fixture for over a hundred years, used both in the Senator’s Ball scenes

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Zbigniew Majchrowski, „Świat mediów jako wyzwanie rzucone historii teatru” [in:] *Nowe historie 1. Ustanowienie historii*, Warsaw 2010, pp. 95–103, and Katarzyna Fazan, „Czego chce film na scenie? Analiza trzech przypadków”, *Kwartalnik Filmowy* no. 87-88/2014, pp. 114–126.

<sup>2</sup> The term “new media” is used according to the definition introduced by Ryszard W. Kluszczyński in „Paradygmat sztuk nowych mediów”, *Kwartalnik filmowy*, no. 85/2014, pp. 194–205.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Dominika Łarionow *Scenography studies - on the margin of art history and theater studies*, [in:] “Art Inquiry”. Vol XVI (XXV), Łódź 2014, pp. 115–126.

in Mickiewicz's *Forefathers' Eve* and Mrs. Dulka's living room in the play by Gabriela Zapolska. It consisted of painted canvases, accompanied by furniture and numerous props, and each change of decoration required the curtain to be brought down.<sup>4</sup> Over the course of its long popularity, it lost several elements, such as the technically troublesome ceiling. It should be noted that in the period of 1949-1956, in the era of the doctrine of socialist realism, it was the only approved model of decoration, with all its windows, door handles and palm trees in pots. In fact, the idea of arranging the stage space using movable walls and painted architectural practicables that created the illusion of space is still alive today, although it is now regarded as anachronistic. One example would be Allan Starski's design for the play *Wytwórnia piosenek* [Song factory] by Maciej Wojtyzsko and Maciej Karpiński, directed by Maciej and Adam Wojtyzsko (2015) at Teatr Powszechny in Łódź. The play, set in Łódź soon after the war, presents the vicissitudes of the production of the first feature film after 1945. The Academy Award-winning designer built a living room, a film studio, and a street. It was a realistic space, semantically related to the content of the play, which, although it was staged in the convention of a musical, was the story of real figures known from the history of the cinema of that period. Starski's design was a paradox, as the realistic sets he employed certainly work well in films (which he discussed in his book<sup>5</sup>), but in contemporary theater setting artificial walls seems out of place, as they have been replaced by screens. To use the terminology derived from ethnology, one could say that a barter exchange took place here between theater and film. Theater gave film a system of constructed decorations, perfectly fitting such films as Roman Polanski's *Pianist* (2002) and *Oliver Twist* (2005), (to name some of Starski's work). In return, the "tenth Muse" gave Melpomene the screen along with its magic. Thus, one might see it as a full circle, because cinema in its earliest stages, i.e. before it developed its own style, drew upon the experiences of theater. Some examples include films by Max Linder, early Charlie Chaplin, or the illusionary style of Georges Méliès - that Susan Sontag wrote about in her canonical essay *Film and Theatre*.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, we are faced with a paradox: for theater historians, a screen on stage is anti-scenery, while for the researchers of the visual aspects of theatre

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<sup>4</sup> Such type of decoration is called "closed change", as opposed the previous "open change", done "magically" in front of the spectators in order to impress the latter. Technicians entering the stage and openly interfering with onstage reality was unthinkable for the audience of that era.

<sup>5</sup> Allan Starski, Irena A. Stanisławska, *Scenografia*, Wydawnictwo Wojciech Marzec, Warsaw 2013.

<sup>6</sup> "Susan Sontag, "Film and Theater", *The Tulane Drama Review* 1966, vol. 11, issue 1, pp. 24-37, cf. also *Dialog* 1967, no. 3.

it is an integral element of scenery. Artists have shown how to combine these two different media. Already in the 1960s, in plays set in contemporary times, a TV set was a frequent element of a furnished house. For technical reasons it rarely worked and was rather a sign of a character's financial status or an indication that the story was set in modern times. The next step was a working TV set that was part of the plot. One such instance was Krzysztof Kiesłowski's television adaptation of the play *The Card Index* by Tadeusz Różewicz (1979). The TV set stood in a corner, but it was not passive. In the early scenes, Stefan Treugutt, theater critic, appeared on its screen, announcing a broadcast of TV Theater. The featured performance was the previous staging of Różewicz's play, directed in 1967 by Konrad Swinarski. It seemed that the function of the medium would be limited to referencing that famous performance. However, Kiesłowski went a little further: the TV took over the role of the Choir of Uncles from the literary original. In the late twentieth century, comedy performances often featured dialogues with the TV.

In the old times, for example in the Baroque or the Romantic era, decorations consisted of a background painted on canvas, usually featuring a landscape or a building; there were several of them lined up, and to change the view they were either rapidly slid sideways or pulled up. As new technology developed, the transformation of canvas background into a screen became inevitable. It was originally a projection screen with an overhead projector and still photographs, later replaced by film projection, and finally by a large video screen and computer technology. In *Amazonia* by Michał Walczak, directed by Agnieszka Glińska and designed by Agnieszka Zawadowska (Teatr Na Woli in Warsaw, 2011), besides two TVs and a monitor (in the scene of an audition for a TV series), the decoration consisted of a rear projection screen, featuring the Amazonian forest that the characters are dreaming about. However, it was not only the matter of replacing the painted canvas with a screen – in the final scene we see our heroes wandering through the wilderness, which required the use of computer technology – so-called post-production. The screen replaced not only the painted canvas, but also wings, flats, and drops – all the traditional elements of painted decoration, which would have been used in such case even in the late twentieth century.

It would seem that such an employment of a screen on stage should completely eliminate painted canvases. However, theater practice shows that it is possible to combine both techniques: In *Opowiadanie brazylijskie* [A Brazilian Story] by Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, directed by Marcin Hycnar and designed by Zawadowska (Teatr Narodowy, 2015), the setting consists of two massive flats (walls of houses with doors and windows), while a screen in the background shows a Brazilian forest, exotic birds, and sometimes a seashore; the setting is fitted with furniture and numerous props. In this reality we see a compatible

coexistence of the oldest and the newest stage technology, surprisingly uniform in its expression. They are not dissonant – on the contrary, their mutual contexts lend them additional meanings and values.

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In order to analyze the artistic barter mentioned above, it is necessary to digress for a moment. The twentieth century introduced the concept of disillusion into the history of theater. It was important, for example, for the theory put forward by Bertolt Brecht, and later Peter Brook and Jerzy Grotowski.<sup>7</sup> Divesting stage space of large-format painted canvases, thus laying the theater machinery bare, was aimed at making the stage images real to the audience. The main purpose was to focus the attention of the viewers on the problem signaled by the literary text and amplified in theater setting through acting. Other elements of the spatial function of a theatrical work became less important or even reduced to the necessary prop.

The possibility of introducing film or photography into the domain of theater, both as an element shaping the stage image and used to change the function of the illusion of theater, was discovered by artists quite early. One example is Stanisław Wyspiański's 1899 drama *Protesilas and Laodamia*, now almost forgotten. The story is quite simple – it concerns a woman despairing after the sudden loss of her lover. The playwright saw the need for innovative decorations, which were to show some scenes from the life of Protesilas. Wyspiański never really articulated how he wanted the scenery to look. During the world premiere in 1903, the sequences showing the lover while he was still alive were performed as a pantomime in the back of the stage, while the title character was played by Helena Modrzejewska. It seems that the author's intention was to use rear projection. Wyspiański certainly was not present in Paris in December 1895, when the Lumière brothers showed their invention at Le *Salon Indien du Grand Café* on Boulevard des Capucines. We know, however, that the Polish artist exchanged numerous letters with his friends from France, so he was well versed in all the technical novelties. He expressed his comments on the design of the sets in question in a terse statement, saying that there should be shadows on the canvas featuring Protesilas during his life. It can be assumed that he saw the power of the illusion of rear projection.<sup>8</sup> This technique expands the stage space, creating things that do not actually appear

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Krzysztof Pleśniarowicz, *Przestrzenie deziluzji*, Universitas, Kraków 1996.

<sup>8</sup> Such interpretation of the layout of the decoration in Wyspiański's play was also suggested by Zenobiusz Strzelecki in his monograph of the history of Polish stage design, cf. idem *Polska Plastyka Teatralna*, PIW, Warsaw 1963.

in the viewers' field of vision. Thus, it generated the first important distortion of perception regarding the relationship between the actor, the spectator, and the present. The stage reality can be also set at some earlier time and be shown to the viewers. Laszlo Maholy-Nagy, a Hungarian artist working in the 1920s in the German Bauhaus school, even saw the need to downplay the literary aspect of theatre in favor of the images on stage created by photography, film, and photodynamic events.<sup>9</sup> Frederick Kiesler, an Austrian architect, stage designer and initially also a director, approached the medium of film quite differently. In 1923 in Berlin he staged *R.U.R* by Karel Čapek, a very modern play about a rebellion of robots. He used neon lights and large screens. For reasons of safety, there was a water tank under each of them, because local police were concerned about fire breaking out. The production marked the first use of moving pictures as a crucial part of the scenery. However, the artist who employed screens most often was Erwin Piscator, the German theater producer, who used large-format screens in the shows *Reuve Roter Rummel* (1924) and *Trotz Alledem* (1925). The shows were prepared for more than 5,000 spectators as part of political rallies, although impressive projections also appeared in his famous dramatic performances. Analysing the achievements of the avant-garde in terms of its ability to introduce technical innovations into the space of the stage, Piscator points to a different historical starting point. According to him, the trend dates back not to 1895 but to the beginning of the nineteenth century, when gas lighting was introduced on stage, later followed by electric light.<sup>10</sup> It was the first substantial change, which initiated a series of transformations in the aesthetics of theater. It seems that the technological turn that began in the nineteenth century continues to this day. It is a slow but constant process.

Before we discuss the subsequent stages in the history of screens on stage, we need to go back for a moment to the prop that had somewhat magical qualities in theater, namely a real mirror, not a substitute. It showed the reality beyond the frame of the stage. In the Romantic drama by Juliusz Słowacki titled *Horsztyński*, the protagonist Hetman Kossakowski, staying in the titular character's house, sees a servant in the mirror, waiting for him behind the door with a gun. There were also numerous farcical comedies, in which the husband saw a mirror reflection of his wife with her lover (for example *The Kiss Before the Mirror* by Laszlo Fodor). The mirror becomes an active character involved in various vicissitudes, showing the details that the audience cannot see. It also adds depth, multiplies, and, when skillfully illuminated, provokes anxiety with its shimmering and ambiguity. It becomes a favorite element of decoration,

<sup>9</sup> Cf. *The Theater of the Bauhaus*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London 1996.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Simon Hagemann, "La recherche des avant-gardes théâtrales historique autour du progress technique", *Ligeia. Dossiers sur l'Art* 2015, no. 137-140, 2015, Paris, pp. 88-95.

even a hallmark of some directors, such as Maja Kleczewska. In her *Winter Journey* based on the prose of Elfriede Jelinek, co-produced by Teatr Polski in Bydgoszcz and Teatr Powszechny in Łódź (2013), the director constructed a trapezoidal space that was the background for the plot, just like the wings of a pavilion once had been. At some points in the performance, the big mirrors were veiled, thus limiting the space and amplifying the tension on stage. This was extremely important, as part of the plot referenced the case of Josef Fritzl, an Austrian man who imprisoned and sexually abused his daughter for many years. Kleczewska intentionally used the mirror to impair the actor's sense of identity, to confuse the directions in the performance, and to fake the depth of the stage.

In today's theater, the evidently treacherous role of mirrors has been taken over by screens in their new functions: not as an element of the decoration, but as an active protagonist in the spectacle. Film has been used within theater space since the beginning of the twentieth century, but only contemporary artists (in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century) are beginning to discover the advantages and disadvantages of the introduction of new media into the stage space. If we make some generalizations, we can confidently say that in most situations large multimedia screens are used in the stage space in four ways. The first one involves enlarging the face or some other body part of an actor, affecting his or her performance. One example would be Krystian Lupa's spectacle *Factory 2*, produced at Narodowy Stary Teatr in Kraków (2008). It is a story of the so-called Andy Warhol's factory. During the monologue of one of the characters, his genitals were filmed live and displayed on a big screen over the couch where the naked actor was sitting. The second way of introducing a screen has to do with dual reality. It usually appears as an element of scenery suspended above the stage. Such projection shows a detail of the stage action that the spectators cannot see (though it is happening on stage). It can be an actor at the back of the stage, seated sideways or behind someone, who is being shown to the audience *en face*, thus a "situation" which is obscured to the audiences by decoration elements.<sup>11</sup> The screen used in this way completes the image seen by the spectators, and the camera image is transmitted in real time, hence the impression of dual reality. One example may be

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<sup>11</sup> In traditional theater, the situation of the actors blocking one another was referred to as a „drawer” and regarded as an inability to arrange stage situations. When elements of decoration blocked the view of the actors, unless justified by the plot, it was thought to be the result of the stage designer's failure to arrange a layout with proper visibility. Both cases were judged as professional mistakes. Nowadays, especially in the performances staged in non-theatrical spaces (factory halls, film studios), in which the entire spatial layout needs to be constructed, poor visibility (at least for part of the audience) is becoming the norm.



the spectacles directed by Krzysztof Warlikowski and designed by Małgorzata Szczęśniak at Teatr Nowy in Warsaw (such as *Koniec* [The End], 2010, and (A)polonia, 2009). The third way in which screens are used is the opposite situation, related to the need to show what is happening in a different place than the onstage world that exists in the audience's real time. In Poland, this method was employed quite early by Anna Augustynowicz in the spectacle based on Grzegorz Nawrocki's play *Młoda śmierć* [Young death] at Teatr Współczesny in Szczecin (1996). The play is based on a true story of three murders committed by a teenage killer. The entire spectacle was played on an empty stage, while the murder scenes (which had been filmed earlier) were shown at appropriate moments on a big screen, which became an essential prop.

In the case of the three functions of film projection on stage that have been listed so far we can talk about its active role in creating the spectacle, serving mostly to enhance the significance of the individual scenes. The fourth way of using a screen on stage assumes its passivity, limiting its presence only to the role of a decorative object. In this spatial arrangement, the screen is placed above the stage, continuously showing the action that takes place on stage, thus giving the audience an opportunity to choose what to watch: either the stage, or the screen. Such use of video material has caused a lot of controversy among the critics. Michał Zadara, a director representing the young generation, offered an interesting take on the issue, justifying the choice of such form of film projection in his adaptation of *Great Gatsby* based on the novel by Francis Scott Fitzgerald at Teatr Polski in Bydgoszcz (2011). Before the premiere, the director announced that "The scenes at the Buchanans' house will be played in the foyer of the theater and transmitted live on two screens, hanging on either side of the stage. Those scenes will look like a film - but it will not be a film, because the images will not be prerecorded, but broadcast live from another room."<sup>12</sup> Zadara emphasized that the projected images were recorded live, thus touching on an interesting issue of a turn in the concept of stage illusion, which is inseparably linked with technological innovations introduced within the stage space. The artist immediately asked himself the question: "Is live broadcast part of the order of film or the order of theater?" He answered that "The question is only seemingly academic - theater and film function completely differently in relation to the viewer - even if they communicate the same content, their actual, physical presence is so different that the message is not

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<sup>12</sup> M. Zadara, "Adaptując 'Gatsby'ego"; [www.e-teatr.pl](http://www.e-teatr.pl), accessed 20 June 2015. The interior of a luxury living room was arranged in the theater foyer, while the hotel corridors were in fact located backstage.



the same. Simply put: film is a mummification, while theater is a spiritualist séance.”<sup>13</sup> In this interpretation, the screen splits the stage space into areas that the audience cannot see. To see them would in fact mean leaving the performance space, while it is only the actor that makes such an exit. A film may show the viewers some events taking place in a different space. Stage illusion is achieved through simultaneous recording, because its existence is closely linked to the concept of the true reality of the viewer.

All four examples of the use of screens on stage discussed above show that the process of their introduction to the stage space has not been completed, and it is constantly being modified. The use of video cameras has certainly brought an extraordinary change in stage acting, because the actors must remember not only about the audience, but also about the cameraman. Thus, the media in theater generate a change in the way the stage characters are created.

Director Krzysztof Garbaczewski has begun to seek new ways of using media within the stage space, giving them a creative role in the resulting spectacle. In 2012, he directed Witold Gombrowicz's play *Yvonne, Princess of Burgundy* at the Jan Kochanowski Theater in Opole. The literary original was first published in the *Skamander* magazine in 1938, but its world premiere did not take place until 1957, at Teatr Dramatyczny in Warsaw, where it was directed by Halina Mikołajska. The play is one of the most popular works of Gombrowicz, staged worldwide. The author lived to see his play adapted by most important European directors, including Ingmar Bergman. Its plot seems deceptively simple. It is set at the royal court in an unspecified country, where Philip, a young prince, needs to find a wife. Instead of one of the noble ladies of the court, he chooses the nearly mute Yvonne. Her silence, the fear in her eyes, and her passive submission to her fiancé become extremely provocative. This induces a cascade of events, exposing the dark side of life of the so-called upper classes. The whole royal court begins looking for some way of getting rid of the troublesome bride. They organize a feast, during which a crucian carp is served – a type of fish famous for its tiny bones. Yvonne chokes on one and dies.

There are eleven characters in Gombrowicz's play. In Garbaczewski's version, the additional members of the cast are four cameras, a mixer table, and a screen. The structure of the spectacle brings it closer to a multimedia installation, as video cameras become a catalyst for the plot. At the beginning of the spectacle, translucent paper walls separate the audience from the performance space. The spectators can only see a large screen hanging above the proscenium. The play begins with the dialogue between Prince Philip and Cyril, following which the former gestures to the cameraman, inviting him (and

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<sup>13</sup> Ibidem.

thus also us, the audience) into the interior of the palace located behind the paper walls. Philip's action starts the projection, just as in the first scenes of the film *Birdman* by Alejandro González Iñárritu (2014). The director of photography, Emmanuel Lubezki, uses the camera as the eye of a *flâneur* entering the secret interior of a theater backstage.

In his adaptation, Garbaczewski applied an important distinction: as long as all the courtiers and royal family accept Philip's intention to marry the controversial, inappropriate Yvonne, the audience follows the plot only on the screen. However, when first conflicts arise at the court, the paper walling off the stage window slowly begins to tear, exposing the real space of the performance and the characters themselves. This leads to a gradual exposure of the structure of the stage space that will only become fully visible to the audience in the finale. Importantly, as a consequence, the audience has an opportunity to meet the characters, most of whom they had previously encountered only as figures projected on the screen. Garbaczewski's projection breaks with the earlier theatrical tradition, where it was the viewer that decided whom to watch and what to see. In this case, the audience has no choice but to see only the image displayed on the screen. With the destruction of the paper walls, the situation somehow returns to the traditional convention. Reclaiming the sacred division of theater space into the stage and the auditorium is also important for the actors. Moving from a film set to theater, they adapt their means of expression accordingly. After the paper walls are down, the viewers begin to watch the reality of the stage space, starting to see the actors. At the same time, the latter establish an almost metaphysical contact with the audience, which is a constitutive component of a theater spectacle. The performance attains clarity, the actors regain their physicality, trying to construct their characters. Only at this point can we employ the traditional instruments of describing the performance and analyzing its elements.

In the "screen" portion of the spectacle, the actors are clearly aware of their limitations. For example, in the dialogic scenes, they perform **against** their partners, not **with them** (as in the classic theatrical convention) because they perform for the camera as their proper / present partner. It should be noted that the camera is an inanimate object, it does not respond to anybody, it does not feed back any emotions - it is only a passive recorder. One can even go a step further and say that in Garbaczewski's spectacle, the camera takes on the same provocative, silent presence that is a distinctive characteristic of the title character of the play. In total, there are four cameras on stage, two of them mobile. All of them are constantly filming the actors. They know that one camera can show them at the back of the stage, another - partially shadowed, the third one from a distance, and the fourth one in close-up. In consequence, their performance is much more intimate, economical, static: a modest gesture,

little external expression, no sign of what we call a “physical performance.” The actors are aware that in this spectacle, they have become part of the scenery. Their bodies on screen have two functions: on the one hand, they create a variable landscape, while on the other, they are an essential narrative tool.

The main author of the spectacle in Garbaczewski's version is the visual director. He stands at the mixer table and chooses which frame the viewers will watch on the large screen. Obviously, the same footage can be edited in a completely different way. One day, the visual director likes Yvonne, so he makes the spectacle about her; another time, Iza is his favorite, so the spectacle is about Iza, and Yvonne is the negative character. In place of the traditional triad of the actor – the director – the audience, we have an arrangement with an additional element: the actor – the director – the visual director – the audience. Marek Kozakiewicz, the visual director, discussed the technical part of the spectacle in an interview, saying that “the viewer does not realize that in addition to the actors, there are four cameramen on stage, along with their assistants, people whose task it is to make sure that 500 meters of cables do not get tangled, and the operator of the film screen. In total, there are up to thirty persons there.”<sup>14</sup> Such a situation, professionally difficult for the actors, would never arise in a traditional spectacle. We can ask the question about the essence of the world presented in Garbaczewski's version. The actor is not only subjected to constant manipulation of his or her image in the eyes of the audience, which he or she can do nothing about, but also the oppressive nature of the stage action leads to the scenes that are extremely risky to play.

The quintessence of the difficulty of the staging may be the erotic scene between Philip and Yvonne, called “finger – pear – knife” after the content depicted in the stage image (in this case – on the screen). The visual director emphasizes the technological difficulty, because the material is edited live using three cameras. The viewers see it as one shot, one frame. It is more poetic and filmic than theatrical. From the technical viewpoint, a certain boundary of the intimacy of the actors' body has been crossed, which would be impossible in the classical forms of theater. The camera “enters” the physicality of the sexual act, revealing it for the audience. The situation, invented by the director and implemented by the mixer, was undoubtedly extremely oppressive for the actors. The audience were made to watch the intimacy presented in the form they were perhaps uncomfortable with. It seems that performing in this spectacle required tremendous courage and great trust in the director from the actors. They offered him their bodies, agreeing to act as objects and becoming the subject of manipulation. They agreed to a situation in which it was not them as individuals that created their characters on stage.

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<sup>14</sup> I. Kłopocka-Marcjasz, „Tego nie widać z widowni”, *Nowa Trybuna Opolska*, 2014, no. 6.

Garbaczewski's spectacle was a turning point in the use of new media on stage. The director has tried to explore the problem of the future of theater in the world of images, omnipresent screens, computers, and new forms of communication. He seems to be going farther than the otherwise fascinating spectacles, including Genet's *Maids* directed by Staffan Valdemar Holm with stage design by Bente Lykke Møller at the Royal Theater in Copenhagen (2011), with its dual reality. The "true" reality consisted of three actresses aged 60–70, dressed in black, with empty "white cube" as their space, one wall of which was a projection screen for the same story played by three young, beautiful actresses, naked and boasting typically Scandinavian looks. The "screen" reality was set in a living room with sumptuous furnishings, filled with antiques, mirrors, and flowers. Viewers could not choose the world: they looked at the screen precisely **through** the theater; all that was left for them to decide was the interpretation of the formal solution used by the director. The suggestion of the simultaneous existence of the two worlds was reinforced when the "Barbie" actresses (as they were described by the director) came out to take a bow. In the assessment of the viewers (who had come to a theater, not a cinema, after all) the "real" spectacle was much more interesting than the world featured on the screen, although this was against the intention expressed by the director in the program. Undoubtedly, the coexistence of the two realities extended the illusion of theater onto the imaginary world of wishful thinking, captured on multimedia screens.

In his adaptation of Elias Canetti's prose *Eraritjaritjaka* (2004), Heiner Goebbels approached the use of projection in a different way. It was not displayed on a rectangular screen, but on one in the shape of a house. In the first scene, the audience is deliberately misled, because the actor exits the stage and a sequence of film images suggests that he is leaving the theater building to go to an apartment. It is not until the end of the spectacle that it turns out that the whole interior of the house which the actor entered is right in front of the audience, behind the screen. Goebbels introduced two types of projection. The first one was pre-recorded and showed the actor leaving, taking a cab through the city, and entering the apartment. The second one was recorded and shown to the audience in real time.

Another method was used by the Dutch director Ivo van Hove in the spectacle *Roman Tragedy* staged by the Taneelgroep in Amsterdam (2008). The stage space and the auditorium were seemingly treated traditionally, but after the first thirty minutes of the spectacle the audience was given a chance to come onto the stage, where they served a somewhat similar function to that of the French marquis of the Baroque era, who were sitting on the stage, actively commenting on the ongoing spectacle. In the twenty-first century, the audience could move freely between backstage bars that served sandwiches, coffee, or wine, with couches all over the place. The actors stayed in the proscenium.

They could be watched there or on conveniently placed monitors. An additional attraction for all those who chose to remain in the auditorium was a large screen placed in the proscenium. The video cameras were passive and static, recording the action like a TV news segment. An additional element was a ticker displayed on the screen that informed the audience how many minutes were left until the murder of Julius Caesar or Cleopatra's death. Such a solution fit the convention of the spectacle, which lent contemporary character to William Shakespeare's classic plays by setting them in the modern context of power struggle.

In the spectacles mentioned above, the video camera filming the actors in real time, although present, never became the main character creating the image. However, Garbaczewski did use it in such a function, which would suggest a different purpose of introducing a video camera into a theater spectacle. Sasha Waltz, the German choreographer and dancer, made an interesting observation. When asked why she used a screen in one of her performances, she said that she wanted to connect the archaic with the modern. Of course, this provokes another question: what is modern? We can quite easily show that the screens on stage, showing the spaces complementing the interpretation of the spectacle have taken over the function of the large painted canvases of the past. They also constitute a backdrop for the essential action on stage. The situation is somewhat different when the image displayed on the screen becomes a major component of the spectacle. The multimedia turn in contemporary theater aesthetics is not about the introduction of new media into the stage space, but about assigning to them a creative function in the spectacle. Garbaczewski defined the cameras and the mixer table as active characters in the spectacle. The lens watched the action like a *flâneur* and revealed it to the audience. At the same time, the viewer was deprived of the right to choose. The technique forced the actors to work in a different way and to develop new means of expression.

Currently, we are witnessing a fairly significant change in the history of theater. That change affects the essence of what has always been a true meeting between the actor and the audience. In June 2015, a conference important in this context was held at La Sorbonne Nouvelle in Paris, entitled: *L'acteur face aux écrans (Acting Confronted By Technologies)*. Researchers and practitioners of contemporary theater discussed the boundaries of this domain.

Artists are happy to experiment with virtual reality. Young researchers conduct experiments using multimedia headsets, which in the future will allow the viewer to play a dramatic part and to perform / participate in a virtual spectacle. Today, holograms are already appearing on stage. The Belgian artist Kris Verdonck from the Two Dogs Company approached the problem from an interesting perspective: in his 2012 work *M, a reflection*, he put an actor and

his hologram on stage. The spectacle was a monodrama and the viewers had to guess which figure was a living man. It was a kind of game with the audience. Popular culture performers took this a step further: during the Billboard Music Awards in 2014 at the MGM Arena in Las Vegas, Michael Jackson entered the stage. The King of Pop, who had died in 2009, sang and danced. The hologram figure was extremely realistic, and it was accompanied by nearly sixty real dancers, who made the show authentic.<sup>15</sup>

Electronic media cannot be removed from theater, and we have to acknowledge their existence and accept the fact that they have caused perhaps the most important turn in the history of theater. They destroy the traditional understanding of stage illusion, but they also link it with the present. The stage action can show the events recorded earlier by a video camera, it can also show spaces outside the field of vision of the viewer sitting in the audience. Garbaczewski initiated the turn, showing that a unique spectacle can be created not just by the actors, but also by the visual director at the mixer table. His film-theater takes place in real time, as for most artists this factor is still an essential element of a theater spectacle.

Hans Belting, writing from the point of view of an art historian and a cultural anthropologist, observes that the relationship between the image and the medium is not destructive, but rather creative. "Inherent in every medium is its capacity either to catch our attention for its own sake, or just the opposite, to conceal its presence within the picture. The more attention we pay to the medium and its navigating force, the less we concentrate on the image it carries. Conversely, the less we take notice of a medium's presence, the more we are captured by the image, until it seems to us that the latter exists by itself. There is, then, an ambiguity in the relationship between the image and the medium, arising from the fact that their relationship is ever-changing. Today, for example, it is not unusual for an image to acquire appeal because it is presented to us via a seductive carrier medium, perhaps one that presents technological novelty."<sup>16</sup> Thus, perhaps, passing the larger responsibility for the interpretation of the spectacles over to the creators of new media will contribute not only to the revival of theater, but also to the consolidation of its important social and cultural functions.

<sup>15</sup> Boris Kudlička, the stage designer cooperating with Mariusz Treliński at Teatr Wielki – Opera Narodowa (National Opera), also used new technologies in the spectacle *Jolanta / Zamek Sinobrodego* (2013), introducing hologram decorations that greatly impressed the spectators and the critics alike.

<sup>16</sup> Hans Belting, *An Anthropology of Images: Picture, Medium, Body*, transl. Thomas Dunlap, Princeton University Press 2011, p. 16.

Jon Mc Kenzie, American researcher and theoretician of performance studies, had an interesting idea on why it was necessary for the arts to introduce and disseminate technical innovations in society. It should be noted that he was familiar with the practical applications of stage design art because in his youth he was a designer himself. His text "Global Feeling. (Almost) all you need is love"<sup>17</sup> explains the new function of decoration. He writes that in the modern world dominated by gadgets, "performance design may help bridge aesthetics and functionality by providing a common language for designers, engineers, and others involved in creative process, including those others called consumers, audiences, and users."<sup>18</sup> Therefore, he broadens the definition of "stage design", adding new goals and tasks. Thus interpreted gadgets and technological innovations created originally for shows and films (including the aforementioned holograms) are gaining new ground. By assigning to them a function within theatre, stage designers gave them new life. They are used to help people/spectators accustom themselves to new elements in the technological development of civilization. According to McKenzie, it would be interesting to analyze, for example, the accessories used by the famous Agent 007 in the successive parts of the James Bond series. We will then discover that this has always been the function of art. Only now, however, do we begin to notice it consciously.

Not all questions regarding the nature of the technological turn will have definitive answers. The twenty-first century has brought a change in the meaning of theatrical spectacles. Theater arts, known for centuries as an excellent form of entertainment, part of religious rites, or a tool of political demonstration, are constantly looking for new forms of existence. One can somewhat perversely ask whether the new media will absorb theater as a result of the technological turn, or rather the opposite?

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<sup>17</sup> Jon McKenzie, "Global Feeling. (Almost) all you need is love", [in:] *Performance Design*, ed. Dorita Hannah and Olav Harsløf, Musuem Tusculanum Press, University of Copenhagen 2008.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 128. "The emerging field of performance design may be another crucial factor. By providing designers with new concepts, models, and practices for approaching design in performative terms, performance design may help bridge aesthetics and functionality by providing a common language for designers, engineers, and others involved in creative process, including those others called consumers, audiences, and users."



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Our intention has been to show the change / turn taking place in the relationship between the actor/the spectator and illusion/disillusion. It seems that this change will set the tone for the further development of the theater. It is still an open question what kind of interpersonal relationship between all participants of the spectacle will be generated by screens and other electronic media. Describing and attempting to name the qualitative changes in the structure of stage work seems to be crucial for the development of new methodologies for the analysis of theatrical reality.

*Translated by Katarzyna Gucio*

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## **OD MALOWANEJ DEKORACJI DO EKРАНU. ZWROT W ILUZJI SCENICZNEJ NA PRZEŁOMIE XX I XXI WIEKU. (streszczenie)**

System malowanych dekoracji, wynaleziony w późnym renesansie, zdominował sceny europejskie na 300 lat. Co prawda w II połowie XIX wieku zjawisko tzw. Wielkiej Reformy Teatru zanegowało tę tradycję, jednak przetrwała ona w różnych odsłonach aż po dzień dzisiejszy. Współcześnie mamy zdecydowane poczucie anachronizmu tej formy, wręcz odczuwamy ją jako cytat z przeszłości lub nieporadność scenografa.

Zmiana sposobu postrzegania świata z realnego na oglądany za pośrednictwem ekranu spowodowała również zwrot w traktowaniu iluzji i przestrzeni scenicznej. Ekran stał się nie tylko nośnikiem dekoracji, ale również realnym elementem świata przedstawiającego lub w skrajnych przypadkach go zastępuje.

Zwrot multimedialny dokonuje się dziś nie tylko dzięki obecności techniki, ale również poprzez wejście do teatru twórców ze świata mediów. Nowa zależność w skrajnej sytuacji doprowadza do zanegowania podstawowych definicji spektaklu teatralnego rozumianego jako współobecność twórcy i odbiorcy.

Celem naszego tekstu będzie pokazanie zwrotu, jaki zachodzi w relacji aktor/widz, iluzja/deziluzja. Wydaje się, że ta zmiana wyznaczy kierunek dalszego rozwoju teatru. Otwarta pozostanie kwestia, jaką relację interpersonalną pomiędzy wszystkimi uczestnikami widowiska wytworzą ekrany czy inne media elektroniczne. Opisanie i próba nazwania przemiany jakościowej w strukturze dzieła scenicznego jest istotna dla kształtowania się nowych metodologii analizy rzeczywistości teatralnej.

**Słowa kluczowe:** deziluzja, ekran, iluzja, projekcja, przestrzeń teatralna, scenografia, teatr, zwrot