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Questioning the 'of' in Performance-as-translation: Multimedia as a Subtext in the 2003 Pécs Performance 'of' *Hamlet*

Abstract: This article explores a theatre performance (National Theatre Pécs, 2003, dir. Iván Hargitai) working with a 1999 Hungarian translation of *Hamlet* by educator, scholar, translator and poet Ádám Nádasdy as a structural transformation (Fischer-Lichte 1992) of the dramatic text for the stage. The performance is perceived as an intersemiotic translation but not as one emerging from a source-to-target one-way route. The study focuses on certain substructures such as the set design and the multimedial nature of the performance (as defined by Giesekam 2007), and by highlighting intertextual and hypertextual ways of accessing this performance-as-translation it questions the 'of' in the 'performance of *Hamlet* (or insert other dramatic title)' phrase. This experimentation with the terminology around performance-as-translation also facilitates the unveiling of a layer of the complex Hungarian *Hamlet* palimpsest, which, as a multi-layered cultural phenomenon, consists of much more than literary texts: its fabric includes theatre performance and other creative works.

Keywords: Shakespeare reception, Shakespeare translation, retranslation, *Hamlet*, Shakespeare in Hungary, drama translation, Ádám Nádasdy, intersemiotic translation, adaptation, structural transformation, performance as translation, multimedia performance, performance as hypertext.

This article will explore a way of analysing a (text-based) theatrical performance as an intersemiotic translation 'of' a dramatic text through a case study that, at the same time, has as its 'source text' an interlingual translation, one of the many Hungarian *Hamlet*s (Adám Nádasdy's 1999 translation of the play). By examining a performance of a turn-of-the millennium translation of Shakespeare's play the article will shed light on a stratum of the considerably complex multi-layered Hungarian *Hamlet* palimpsest. The perception underlying my approach is that the ever growing *Hamlet* palimpsest in Hungarian culture (rather than exclusively language) does not only consist of literary texts (translations, rewrites, allusions

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and other forms of verbal intertextuality) but theatre performances, films and artifacts from other art forms as well. The article will experiment with aspects of the language discussing performance as 'translation' (reworking, transformation, adaptation, transmedia transfer[1]) of a dramatic text, using a Hungarian *Hamlet* performance as a case in point that allows for the questioning of the 'of'—a preposition implying an apparent hierarchy and one-way communication between 'source' and 'translation'.

While intending to contribute a chapter to the Hungarian reception history of *Hamlet*, the article will at the same time put a set of concepts to the test of critical application when analysing a Hungarian staging mounted in a professional state-funded provincial theatre in the city of Pécs of a contemporary translation of *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* by poet, educator-scholar and translator Ádám Nádasdy.[2] The performance directed by Iván Hargitai for National Theatre Pécs premièred on 24 January 2003. The perspective to be applied will be drawn partly from Erika Fischer-Lichte's concepts about page-to-stage dramaturgy as identified in *The Semiotics of Theater* (1992): the realisation of a dramatic text in live performance. The triad of concepts about performance as transformation of a written playtext introduced by Fischer-Lichte—linear, structural and global transformation—allow us to interrogate the relationship between the transformed text and the live transformation by indicating degrees of closeness to the main 'source' and modalities of transformation. A term that is particularly helpful is that of the subtext/ substructure employed by Fischer-Lichte as a 'unit' discussing structural transformations. In this particular production it is the setting, the multimedia element of the performance and the character portrayals that constitute powerful subtexts in the translation process. I will discuss the character portrayal, including the importance of multi-roling, on a separate forum elsewhere and here concentrate on the complex visual subtext including the set design and the back projections in a broader intertextual framework. I will incorporate the discussion into contemporary discourse on multimedia and intermedia Shakespearean performance. The article will argue that an in-depth engagement with the subtexts and intertexts of a performance (as translation from page to stage) allows for a multi-layered, palimpsestic reading of a performance text. Rather than attempting to put this forward as an optimal model for critical reception, I propose that such a systematic approach helps unfold the layers of transformation involved in the shape-shifting and

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[1] Chiel Kattenbelt defines transmediality in relation to theatre performance as "the transfer from one medium to another medium (medium change)" (20).

[2] The present reading of the Pécs performance benefits from my own spectating experience (on two nights), a video recording and the script of the production (for access to which I gratefully acknowledge the assistance of the late Artistic Director Tamás Balikó), performance reviews with accompanying photographs, the programme of the production, and interviews published with the cast in the press.

unstable cultural 'artifact' of a performance as the live performance breathes stage life into a written dramatic text. Such an analytical process—strict and limiting as it may first seem—does not exclude the presence of the interpreting subject as any one interpreter of this intersemiotic process and product will identify subtexts differently. The novelty of the article also lies in negotiating between Fischer-Lichte's concepts of transformations on the one hand, and Greg Giesekam's concepts of 'multimedia' and 'intermedia' performance as well as hypertextual and intertextual reading strategies on the other, as it suggests that we can read the mediatized images and the live stage action that is around the spoken drama alongside each other, moving from node to node in a hypertextual manner. The article will argue for the case of the alignment of Fischer-Lichte's structural transformation and Giesekam's concept of 'multimedia' theatre in this case study, opening the scope for the application of these terms when discussing similar relationships between a written dramatic text and a performance transforming it on stage. The article will also question the validity of the 'of' in identifying the ontological relationship between a play and its stage interpretation—an adaptation of sorts where the phrasing 'based on' better reflects the nature of the relationship between adapting and adapted work than the customary 'of'.

Fischer-Lichte's typology of transformations

Among the many theories and conceptual models exploring the relationship between theatre performance and translation as a creative practice and/or metaphor the German theatre semiotician and historian Erika Fischer-Lichte's tripartite system of translation (in a very loose sense of the word) from page to stage is noteworthy. Rather than concentrating on interlingual translation of drama, Fischer-Lichte focuses on intersemiotic transfers from the page to the medium of live theatre and she distinguishes between linear, structural and global transformation in this respect. **Linear transformation** implies a sequential following of the written text in the performance-as-translation. "[T]he process moves from sentence to sentence, from statement to reply, from dialogue to dialogue" (1992: 197). Nevertheless, it is questionable that in such a transformation the meaning is constituted merely from sentence to sentence; one may argue that the cast and creative team, especially the director, should have an overall interpretation. Fischer-Lichte stresses that working out the linkage of these small units is rudimentary to this way of transformation. Having agreed with this, one may still emphasise that a rounded, holistic interpretation of the whole play is just as essential when it comes to staging a play, otherwise the production may fall apart. "The mode of **structural transformation** proceeds from complex substructures such as stage character, space, scene, plot" (1992: 198). These

subtexts, in Fischer-Lichte's definition, are by their nature different "from the corresponding subtexts of the literary text" (1992: 198). Some of them can even become relatively independent:

> The subtext may be that of and structured by a particular spatial conception; an impression created with the colors and forms of the decorations, costumes, and lighting; a specific choreographic arrangement of the figures and a fine musical harmonization of their voices, etc. In this case, an underlying structure is again initially created by theatrical signs used simultaneously, and it is on the basis of this structure that all changes are then introduced and understood. (1992: 199)

As will be demonstrated later, the back projections employed in the Pécs performance can be seen as emerging as a powerful nonverbal subtext, one that almost has a life of its own. A similar observation can be made in relation to the setting and to character formation. Again, the connection between the subtexts, as in the previously described mode, is of basic importance. Regarding the Pécs performance, it poses a hermeneutic crux when in the video sequence some of the images are aligned with the flow of the live stage action in such a way that they do not easily correspond to the verbal text that they are supposed to 'illustrate'. Some of the images are only slightly related to the text by far-fetched associations or suggest various kinds of interpretations when one tries to see them in the context of the whole performance. Indeed, some of them gain a different interpretation when reconsidered in retrospect at the end of the viewing, not only because such a 'rereading' attempts to fit everything together but also because many structural units are repeated in some form within the performance, and these instances can be better pieced together and analysed at the end.

The most creative theatrical reworking of a play in Fischer-Lichte's paradigm would be the **global transformation**. This is what one would call *adaptation* in everyday parlance, since it shapes the outcome of the transformation process to fit the norms and expectations of the receiving community or the individual director to a considerable extent, even to the detriment of the integrity of the 'source text' (or the idea of the 'source text' in the spectator's mind).

There may be numerous theoretical points of connection with this concept, but importantly, Fischer-Lichte's third type corresponds to Fischlin and Fortier's argument on performance as adaptation. Their definition tacitly acknowledges dramaturgical work on a text-based play as adaptive practice:

> Adaptation as a material, performance practice can involve both radical rewritings, and a range of directorial and theatrical practices, from the omission or addition of passages (or even scenes) to suit a particular director's

> requirements to the creation of a material practice that takes into account the public demand for spectacle, one that places Shakespeare in direct competition with the rock concert, sporting event, or cinematic blockbuster. (17)

Treating the previous two types—linear and structural transformation—as "possible subordinate forms of realization", this mode "takes as its guiding principle the question as to the most appropriate way of constituting that meaning as a theatrical sign in a given communicative context which the subjects participating in the performance believe they have found to be the meaning of the literary text" (Fischer-Lichte 1992: 200). Global transformation is a flexible approach that tolerates, encourages even, omissions, additions, the shifting of scenes, soliloquies, or snippets of dialogues around. However, such a performance "can be related to individual elements or substructures of the literary text only with great difficulty—indeed, in some cases it is not possible to establish such a relation" (1992: 200).[3]

The present article applies the typology to a particular performance context as the Pécs *Hamlet* promises to offer a solid ground for the discussion of structural transformation and in particular the substructure provided by some of the visual components (the set and the back projections in particular).

Fischer-Lichte's transformation typology and Ádám Nádasdy's translation of *Hamlet*: Contextualising the Pécs production

The first systematic collective translation of the Shakespearean oeuvre into Hungarian dates back to the second half of the 19th century. There were various waves of retranslation, including a rather significant one by Hungarian high modernists, but it was the 1980s that brought noteworthy changes in terms of the theatre establishment calling for more performable, stage-ready translations of the play into a more contemporary idiom. Ádám Nádasdy, alongside István Eörsi and the late modernist Dezső Mészöly, has been a trailblazer in this respect, with his particularly fresh idiomatic language negotiating the everyday and the

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[3] Fischer-Lichte does not avoid the compulsory excuse made by theoreticians for offering types that do not exist in practice in their clear-cut versions. As she asserts, the modes "are all only thought of as ideal types that will hardly ever be used exclusively in the form described here. Rather, they represent certain dominant trends that may be stressed in respectively different ways in the transformational process" (1992: 201). Fischer-Lichte also points out that these modes more or less dominate certain periods of theatre history: the linear one was typical of German classicism, the structural one characterised Romantic, naturalist and symbolist drama, and although she is not very explicit about this, she hints at global transformation as prevalent in the postmodern, though the latter is not governed by a single dominant theatrical code.

elevated as well as his gutsy translator's rhetoric in interviews and accompanying essays. *Hamlet* was one of his early attempts at translating Shakespeare (preceded by *Comedy of Errors* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and so far followed by seven others), and it has enjoyed popularity with theatres, which is made apparent by the thirteen or so performances for which it has provided the script.

Regarding the first few stagings of Nádasdy's very contemporary-sounding translation of *Hamlet* (up to an including the production under review), the Pécs performance can be located somewhere between the structural and the global type of intersemiotic translation (as defined by Fischer-Lichte), the Debrecen performance (a reasonably straightforward, not particularly radical staging premièred on 15 October 1999) between the linear and the structural, while the one at Thália (a more liberal take on the classic in Nádasdy's translation that premièred on 6 December 2002) is generally of the global type. Out of the three early productions of Nádasdy's translation of *Hamlet*, the one at Pécs has been chosen for a thoroughgoing analysis, since it is an illustrative mixture of the three kinds of translation for the stage identified by Fischer-Lichte; particularly of the last two. The attention devoted to certain substructures is apparent, and the daring *mise-en-scène* and the multiplication of characters for several actors validate it as approaching the category of global transformation.

The Set: A Translation between Eras

The actors of the performance, who work in the psychologically oriented manner of realist and naturalist theatre—a method not uncommon in Hungary—are located in a modest multifunctional setting. The set is the same throughout; however, some of the props and arrangement are multifunctional, and surtitles are also projected onto the background screen in order to name the locations of some scenes—in a Brechtian fashion. The main components of the set are fleecy boxes of orange and grey, with glass panes on them, which are neon-lit with various colours at different points of the performance. They provide an artificial atmosphere—outside of time and space—in contrast with a realist or historical setting. The blocks may also evoke a cemetery atmosphere (cf. Nagy). No wonder the Ghost almost 'lives there': he is a quiet presence onstage almost throughout the whole performance. The labyrinthine aspect of the setting (cf. Zábrádi 26 and Liszka 6) may assert the reading of *Hamlet* as a story of quest, even though the whole performance may not confirm this reading so readily. There is a scene where one of the boxes functions as the site for Hamlet's great soliloquy, then it represents a stage for the visiting company, and later on it also works as Gertrude's bed in the closet scene. There is a green-walled multipurpose pool approximately left-centre on the stage. The reviewer

Nagy (2003) thinks it is predictable at a single glance at the scenery that Hamlet and Laertes will jump into the basin during the final scene, which they do accordingly. There is a staircase on the stage, above which the royal couple is often seated on one of the boxes during the course of the performance. The night watchmen are placed on an upper gallery on the studio stage. Hamlet also descends on a cord from there, as Liszka remarks, exclusively for the sake of the spectacle ("a látvány, és csakis a látvány kedvéért"; 6). The costumes designed by Anikó Kovalcsik are rather low-key and they correspond to the set in their simplicity; they are far from neutral but they are not suggestive of strong readings either. They correspond to the—by now not so innovative—'timelessness' conjectured by the setting. The only exception, when they do signify a specific period, is when the players are clad in Elizabethan-style costume for the mousetrap scene.

In the spirit of *ut pictura spectaculum*,[4] the performance focuses on visuality, which is at least as vital here as the playscript itself, especially due to the video installation screened in the background of the stage. As Mariann Zábrádi observes:

> [A] ma nagyon is divatos háttérvetítés […] a modern, Nádasdy Ádám fordította szöveg, a minimalizált díszlet, az időtlen, kortalan jelmezek szövevényében erős kohéziót hoz létre.
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> [The nowadays very fashionable background screening creates a strong cohesion in the texture woven by Ádám Nádasdy's modern translation, the setting minimalised to the utmost, and the timeless costumes.] (26)

The relation between the modern setting and traditional character formation is a problematic aspect of the performance. As Liszka points out, "a színészeknek nagy segítség lett volna, ha a rendhagyó térhez nem hagyományos használati utasítást kapnak" [it would have been great help to the actors if they had been given non-traditional instructions to go with the unconventional setting] (2003, p. 6). As he argues, "Sokkal jobbak azok a jelenetek, ahol figyelmünket egy-egy arcvonásra, mozdulatra szabad szűkítenünk; ilyenkor tűnik ki a színészek valódi kvalitása" [The scenes where we can narrow down our attention to a facial movement or a gesture are much better] (Liszka 6). This is often an issue with modern-dress productions; W. B. Worthen emphasises the eclecticism of such performances (137). The question can be raised whether such productions can offer anything novel, or they are just replicas of one another in terms of style or

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[4] See Elam 68, where he uses the term referring to nineteenth-century two-dimensional realist theatre with paintings in the background, while the term is used here in a much more general sense: with reference to the importance of image, of the principle of 'showing' in the theatre.

technique. In like vein, Imre Nagy's review sheds light on practical difficulties in the modernisation of *mise-en-scène*, where he sees a clash between text and setting. He hastens to point out inconsistencies between the modern set and the rather less modern plot—something many Hungarian performance reviewers may accept as a convention of 'doing Shakespeare', but Nagy in 2003 is rather critical:

> […] a látvány és a szó folyamatosan összeütközik s viaskodni kényszerül egymással. Mert ha Hamlet levelét például bukósisakos motorosküldönc kézbesíti, nem értjük, miként lehet, hogy ennek viszont 'hajósok hozták' (hacsak nem űrhajósok), s ha ennyire fejlett a technika Helsingőrben (még mobiltelefon is van), ugyan miért kell a függöny mögé bújni, ha ki akarnak hallgatni valakit, ahelyett, hogy Polonius, lehallgatókészüléket telepítene Hamlet szobájába.

> [The spectacle and the word continually clash, and they are driven to fight against each other. If Hamlet's letter is delivered by a motorcycle dispatch rider wearing a crash helmet, we don't understand why it was delivered to him by sailors (unless they were sailors from space); and if technology is so developed in Elsinore (they even have mobile phones), why on earth do they need to hide behind a curtain when they want to overhear someone—rather than Polonius having Hamlet's room tapped.][5]

In fact, the performance does not appear to exploit the potential of Nádasdy's modern idiom. For example, in Nádasdy's version of the great soliloquy the Hungarian for 'razor' (penge) is used as opposed to a dagger (Shakespeare's 'bodkin'). However, the Pécs Hamlet presses a gun against his temple (as early as his first soliloquy).

On the basis of this performance, *Hamlet* obviously does not suggest a Renaissance play. The only time in the performance when the Renaissance is clearly evoked is the mousetrap scene, with the players in Renaissance costume. This is a frequent device in eclectic modern-day performances: the 'quotation' may induce cultural nostalgia by transferring to Shakespeare's time the part of the play that tells us so much about the nature of theatre. It can also be perceived to contribute to a postmodern *mélange* of varied intertexts within a performance-as-translation.

There is a discrepancy between any of the potential English 'source texts' from the turn of the 17th century, and the contemporary Hungarian-speaking performance with a modern-day *mise-en-scène* and nonverbal additions. Is this tension irreconcilable? The performance may baffle the viewer

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[5] It can be parenthetically noted here that Ophelia is indeed 'wired up' in Michael Almereyda's filmic reimagining of the nunnery scene in his 2000 *Hamlet* film.

by its motley style: there are indeed inconsistencies if one wishes to see the production as that *of* a Renaissance play. The performance—a translation from page to stage—is not directly 'based on' Shakespeare's text but on the late-twentieth century translation (the main 'original' of which is a Shakespeare text). Even the assumption that the exclusive source of Nádasdy's translation is an English Renaissance play is debatable; János Arany's canonical translation may also prove to be a source of indirect inspiration, a driving force for emulation or competition. Other intertexts (for example, in this case, Bonnefoy's translation) may also come into the picture.[6]

The Pécs *Hamlet* as structural transformation in the spirit of 'multimedia' theatre

At least since the late 1940s critics have argued how theatrical cinema was in its early days, especially with regard to the development of techniques such as the close-up, fade-in/fade-out, and the static nature of scenes. A. Nicholas Vardac would actually call nineteenth-century theatre proto-cinematic: "attempting to be cinematic without the appropriate technology" (Brewster and Jacobs 1997 cited in Auslander 12).[7] In the case of the current performance the focus is the other way around: on how much theatre learnt from cinema. After books like *Stage to Screen* (Vardac 1949) and *Theatre to Cinema* (Brewster 1997) one can also argue for a strong line of influence in the opposite direction: how theatre is mediatised, impregnated with techniques borrowed from the screen, and groundbreaking publications such as Greg Giesekam's *Staging the Screen: The Use of Film and Video in Theatre* (2007) and Aneta Mancewicz's *Intermedial Shakespeares on European Stages* (2014) establish a firm place for multimedia theatre in the study of performance, including the study of Shakespeare performance. Giesekam argues that the presence of film in the theatre "extends back a century, to very soon after the invention of cinema" (2). Auslander, referring to Pavis, claims that such "attenuated incursion of media technology" (25) in the theatre is often there to satisfy a need for realism (induced by the electronic media).[8] Giesekam however posits that contemporary recourse to mediatisation has its role in articulating a postmodern aesthetics (2). He prudently makes a distinction between 'multimedia' and 'intermedia' theatre performances. In his terms, where "video is employed in a manner analogous to

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[6] As Nádasdy reveals in my interview with him, "Schlegel's German translation from the beginning of the 19th century was of great help, just like Yves Bonnefoy's contemporary French version. The latter was accompanied by a rough translation in German, prepared for guest performances in Germany" (Minier 2002).
[7] For a brief exploration of this see Auslander 11-12
[8] For more detail on theatre engaging with media see Auslander 24-25 and Giesekam.

the way in which lighting, set or costumes are used to locate the action and suggest particular interpretative approaches to it"—performances in which "video is one of many apparatuses that collectively support performances that are otherwise built around fairly traditional understandings of the role of text and the creation of character"—the term multimedia is most apt (Giesekam 8). Giesekam juxtaposes this type with those performances "where more extensive interaction between the performers and various media reshapes notions of character and acting, where neither the live material nor the recorded material would make much sense without the other, and where often the interaction between the media substantially modifies how the respective media conventionally function and invites reflection upon their nature and methods" (Giesekam 8). For such performances the term he suggests is 'intermedia' theatre.[9]

The use of video in the Pécs *Hamlet* is to be seen in relation to the heterogeneity and multireferentiality of postmodernism; these part-visual hypertexts and complex image clusters lend themselves to a postmodernist reading. However, the uncertainty about the code in Hargitai's—perhaps even too polyphonic and heterogeneous—performance does not facilitate a unified and coherent interpretation. This internal imbalance of the performance is an idea confirmed by one of its makers. As Béla Stenczer (Polonius) remarks in an interview:

> Erőteljes, markáns térkompozícióban játszottunk, ami önálló műalkotásként érvényesül. Van egy erős multimédiás háttér, mint kettes számú műalkotás, és mellesleg zajlik egy Shakespeare-dráma is, amit színészek próbálnak eljátszani.
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> [We were playing in a markedly composed setting, which can be considered an artifact in itself. There is a strong multimedia background as a secondary artifact, and incidentally there is a Shakespeare play happening too, which actors try to play.] (Gelencsér 15)

The visual sequences for the background screening of the Pécs performance were designed by Csaba Kocsis and Titusz Pázmány. The delectable series of visual effects is rich in allusions. The projected imagery is an integral part of most scenes, rather than mere illustration, although towards the end of the performance it seems to have lost some of its force and coherence. The technique of using multimedia effects is a hallmark of the director, although one reviewer notes that in this production the background screening is not as integrated as it was in his 2001 *Liaisons Dangereuses* (cf. Nagy). The video

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[9] This pair of concepts has served as the basis of much work on theatre in relation to its incorporation of contemporary technologies, although other very helpful categorisations/ conceptualisations have also occurred on the scene, for instance the concepts of intermedial texture, intermedial stratigraphy and intermedial mirror (Mancewicz),

sequences and images facilitate what I call a hypertextual viewing of the performance with innumerable variations of live performance and electronic image. In this hypertext there are two main nodes: what is happening onstage and what is on the screen. The spectator is provided with a number of links; it is hardly possible to pursue all of them. As Jakob Nielsen explains the concept of the hypertext:

> Hypertext presents several different options to the readers, and the individual reader determines which of them to follow at the time of reading the text. This means that the author of the text has set up a number of alternatives for readers to explore rather than a single stream of information. (1-2)

Here, however, we are not concerned with a verbal text only. Nevertheless, 'reading' such a performance text is very similar to what Nielsen describes above: it is a fast-moving activity of selection and combination and ongoing active meaning-making.

Some of the images may serve as a *Leitmotif* introducing the appearance of a character. The ghost's video *Leitmotif* is the *Tetragrammaton*. Liszka links this to Shakespeare's alleged connection with Freemasonry (6). Even if someone does not identify the Tetragrammaton, one can see that the sign consists of circles and triangles—symbols of transcendence—referring to the otherworldly nature of the character. The intertext works differently for different receivers depending on how they identify it. Hamlet himself has a *Leitmotif* in the form of the graphic image of a pistol moving in and out of the screen. (The *Leitmotif* is not so consistently used as in the case of old Hamlet.)

Some of the sequences have a clear, straightforward connection to the spoken text. For instance, there is a short visual sequence featuring soldiers and other war images projected, while the royal couple listen to the messengers' report. During Ophelia's distribution of 'flowers' the background screen displays a meadow with flowers in it. Another integrated image, or rather, image sequence, is when, on Laertes's return, one sees his emergent picture, first in a full-size close-up, then in four smaller ones, and then gradually in smaller and smaller images. It is as if the multiplication or proliferation of images were to translate Claudius's remark into the performance: "When sorrows come, they come not single spies, / But in batallions" (IV/5; 78-79). (This passage is actually missing from this script but likely to be familiar to many in the audience in Arany's translation.) This screening begins before he appears to speak to Claudius.

Other images have an importance that is more along the lines of global than structural transformation in the production as they form 'image clusters' or provide links to other points in the performance. The initial sequence—in the

manner of a visual prologue—portrays the fall of a huge tree, symbolising the death of old Hamlet. During the great soliloquy, when Hamlet ponders on the possibility of suicide (even mimes cutting his veins), some of these pictures are shown again—providing another recurrent motif in the performance.

An expanded and extended sequence of the performance—one of an imaginary reception or ball—starts off before the first court scene (in which Laertes gets permission to leave for France and Hamlet is persuaded to stay on). Pictures of illustrious representatives of the world of Western protocol—celebrities such as Kristin Scott Thomas, Pierce Brosnan (with a 'Bond girl'), the Beckhams,[10] Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Charles—appear on the screen. All of these images are set into the background of a luxurious palace hall. The images of these familiar faces are interspersed with images of the characters raising or clinking their glasses at the same reception; in fact, it is Gertrude's face that one first notices on the screen. (This is even before the character herself appears on stage, so it is only in retrospect, when re-viewing the performance, that one can appreciate the importance of this.) The fiction built up by this device is that we are right in the middle of the reception celebrating Claudius's ascension to the throne and his marriage to Gertrude. This sequence prepares the atmosphere for the actual arrival of the royal couple on the scene; the 'film still' of the arched hall (now without figures) remains projected on the wall when the first court scene begins (and is populated again, for instance, when recorded applause is played after the announcement of Claudius's new decisions, and when the guests are shown dancing while Hamlet is asked to stop mourning for his father). The image of this exquisite hall provides a major background to forthcoming stage events.

Some of the images may challenge trends of interpretation from the reception history of *Hamlet*. When Polonius reads out to Claudius and Gertrude Hamlet's awkward poem written to Ophelia, the young lovers are shown in close-up on the back projection, reaching for a kiss in the midst of a beautiful natural landscape. Behind them one can discern the face of Polonius, wearing spectacles. This instance recalls Celestino Coronado's '*Naked Hamlet*' (1977), which centralises Polonius's peeping. Looking has also been identified as a master metaphor of Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet* (Rutter 55). This might also be identified in the intertextual network around the Pécs performance. This same video installation may also give the curious viewer some direction as to

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[10] The performance plays with the image of 'royalty' associated with the Beckhams. For instance, some audience members will recall that at their wedding the Beckhams were sitting on a throne, and Victoria Beckham was wearing a coronet. The media often refers to their home as *Beckingham Palace*, and so on. Hungarians are familiar with at least some of their celebrity status and self-celebritisation, and may realise as the images are screened that there are different versions of royalty on display.

whether Hamlet has slept with Ophelia—a recurrent question of *Hamlet* criticism. However, as the scene is romantic rather than erotic, the performance does not offer a ready-made answer to whether their passion was consummated or not. This instance in the performance can also be seen as a stylistic intertext, referring to a flashback of Hamlet and Ophelia's love-making in Kenneth Branagh's *Hamlet* film (1996), which informs the viewer of the nature of their relationship. Edward Eaton points out that Branagh's film answers this question leaving no doubt in the viewer (54). Here we witness how far-reaching the influence of Shakespeare films can be on performances.

When the king and the queen leave Polonius alone with Hamlet, the image of Polonius's head crops up on the left hand side of the screen (this is the direction the royal couple took to exit) emphasising that he stays on with a specific 'mission'. This links to the previous image of the inquisitive, watchful Polonius. As a continuation of this, a humorous and inventive sequence accompanies the preparation of the nunnery scene. In a playful video installation sequence the layout of the setting appears on the screen, together with the heads of Gertrude, Claudius, Polonius and Ophelia, in accordance with their order of appearance in this scene. The heads are seen gradually disappearing from the screen as the characters exit. First they send Gertrude out, then Claudius and Polonius take their hiding places, and it is only Ophelia who remains onstage, reading downstage right while Hamlet is speaking his great soliloquy. The heads of the two eavesdroppers appear every now and again on the screen during the nunnery scene. This provides the punchline for this visual joke. The device is by no means new. As Greg Giesekam reminds us, "in 1941 Robert Edmond Jones advocated using film to depict the subjectivity of onstage figures—their dreams, fantasies, and memories, suggesting it could qualify or contradict the onstage action" (11). Yet, the device comes across as a valid and integral part of the fabric of the performance. The reason why it does not bring the performance much closer to what Giesekam identifies as 'intermedia' is that it is possible to meaningfully spectate the performed sequence without the video sequence, although the video sequence clearly enriches and enhances the overall interpretive potential of the performance.

During the nunnery scene, there is another, though less clearly motivated sequence screened about the perishing of a doll or effigy. This invites various interpretations: it may be referring to the loss of the possibility of a child for the couple; it may also indicate the shattering of Hamlet's puerile, unconditional trust in Ophelia. Both readings can be justified, since Hamlet arguably loses faith in Ophelia in this scene.

When Polonius leaves after testing Hamlet's sanity (II/2 in the drama), a stylised, impersonal drawing of a human figure comes up on the screen. It has a few circles around the pectoral area, as if it were a dartsboard. Hamlet takes his

gun, and shoots at it several times. The shots are indicated as dots around the circles. He moves his gun towards the right, and gets ready to shoot, but that is the moment he realises Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are arriving. At the beginning of Hamlet's conversation with the two of them the image of a pistol is moved in and out on the screen, against the backdrop of the palace interior.

During the mousetrap scene we see the members of the stage audience in pre-recorded close-ups, being bored, surprised, agitated, and so on. These pictures are not coordinated with the faces the actors are making on the stage when the sequence is shown (except, for instance, in Rosencrantz's and Guildenstern's case, who are immensely bored; they are sipping drinks noisily, and Rosencrantz's mobile phone rings). Most of the actors do not even attempt to make the same facial gestures on the stage as on the recording. Thus, the viewer assumes this is intentional. In the case of some characters, most typically Claudius, the sequence illustrates what could be taking place in his psyche. As a character on stage, Claudius is very disciplined, he succeeds in covering up his anxiety, while the video material betrays his turmoil. If the performance were to emphasise the metatheatrical aspect, inherent in the scene faces from the 'ordinary' audience could be shown, too.[11] However, this kind of auto-mirroring was a principle dominating the *mise-en-scène* of Szilárd Borbély's *[kamera.man]* (1999, Debrecen, dir. István Pinczés), and a varied repetition of the same technique might come across as less than innovatory reminiscence. The European stage history of *Hamlet* records at least one preceding 'media *Hamlet*' that I was conscious of at the time of viewing, namely Hansgünther Heyme's 1979 *Hamlet*, which had eighteen monitors on stage (cf. Hapgood 81). This should certainly not be a barrier for Hungarian directors of *Hamlet* if they wish to experiment with the metatheatrical aspect of the play in a more pronouncedly mediatised way, partly because Hungarian audience members in Pécs are unlikely to be familiar with this performance, and partly because metatheatricality can be addressed in a variety of ways. However, as indicated further above, this performance of *Hamlet* does not reinforce any strands of interpretations from the reception history of *Hamlet*. It offers a cleverly shortened abridgement—a digest of sorts—, which leaves you with a sense of wholeness.

Let us examine one further example of how the screened images form a hypertextual link to the spoken text. When Hamlet talks of "this goodly frame the earth" (II/2; 298), the globe is shown in the background (while the beginning of the 'Minuet' from Händel's "Music for the Royal Fireworks" is being played). This is a pun using the polysemic and connotative ambiguities of the Hungarian noun *föld*, meaning 'earth' as well as 'globe'. The pun works on the verbal as well as the visual and physical levels, as Hamlet also caresses

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[11] For a detailed discussion of *Hamlet* as a metaplay see Abel (1963) and Calderwood (1983).

Rosencrantz's head while he is saying "ez a remek alkotmány, a Föld csak kopár hegyfoknak tűnik" [this fine creation, the earth/globe only appears a barren mountain top] (Shakespeare 2003: 30).

At the beginning of the second part of the performance, the background screening starts off with Hamlet using a remote control. This is a clever device for two reasons: his procrastination in front of the screen provides continuity with the end of the previous part when he was troubled about his vocation, and now, as a coping mechanism, he tries to get away from the 'real world' with the aid of the television; it involves the video installation in the action itself in a diegetic manner, making it more integrated. The background screen thus overtly features as a television screen now, which is another example of the multifunctionality of the props, and, in general, the signs in the performance. As he plays with the remote, snippets of different programmes, such as the news, one of the popular afternoon talk shows of the time (*Claudia*), a few filmic images, a cartoon, and so on, flash up on the screen for a few moments.

While the stage action would make sense without the projected image sequences, these back projections add to the live action, they punctuate it and signal possible interpretive contexts. This suggests that the performance is closer to what Giesekam terms multimedia theatre than to his concept of intermedia theatre. This technology-infused polyphonic strategy of building the performance (as 'translation' of the stage play) in the case of the 2003 Pécs *Hamlet* corresponds to the way Fischer-Lichte's structural transformation functions. The Pécs direction of *Hamlet* can be characterized as a multimedia theatre performance that is a structural transformation of its main verbal source (a contemporary interlingual translation of *Hamlet* with dramaturgy by Győző Duró).

Performance-as-translation as intertextual and intermedial palimpsest: Conclusive remarks

Fischer-Lichte emphasises that the makers of an individual production are in charge of the performance as an artifact, and may be inspired by other works "or context of life" (1992: 200) as opposed to being bound by their main source:

> Actors or directors can of course draw on different dramatic texts or on any other sort of text as material if they wish to produce in the course of the performance some notion or idea, series of actions or forms of behavior, conviction or thought. (1992: 200)[12]

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[12] However, such a notion of theatre-making in which everything seems to be disciplined, carefully and consciously planned out with adequately logical reasoning, does not seem to allow for intertextual encounters that the makers may be unaware of, but some receivers may identify.

Without using the term, Fischer-Lichte appears to be referring to a kind of intertextuality in the theatre, even though she refrains from the term, which is persuasively used in a similar context by Daniel Fischlin and Mark Fortier:

> Theatrical adaptation is an intertextual apparatus, a system of relations and citations not only between verbal texts, but between singing and speaking bodies, lights, sounds, movements, and all other cultural elements at work in theatrical production. (7)

As Fischer-Lichte argues, "They [actors and directors] may then extract certain individual elements as set pieces from different dramatic texts in order to mount these at some random point in the performance in the context of specific functions" (1992: 200). In the case of the performance under scrutiny it is filmic or television intertexts (film *Hamlet*s, especially Branagh's, news programmes, talk shows, and so on) rather than references to other plays that are crucial to a possible reading—or piecing together—of the performance text.

Given that the 'subtexts' are in an unresolved relationship with one another and with the whole of the performance, the Pécs *Hamlet* seems to rule out the possibility of any consistent readings, despite signposting several generic readings.[13] Overall, the performance invites a postmodernist reading, questioning the heterogeneous nature of this dramatic text. This puzzles some of the reviewers, who might have expected the production to help them construct a meaning. For example, Zábrádi mentions two main contexts in which *Hamlet* has been interpreted so far, and demands that the performance reinforces one or the other of these readings:

> Hogy a pécsi előadás a Hamlet társadalmi drámai vonalát, vagy inkább a személyes, emberi tragédiát hivatott inkább kiemelni, arra talán megvan a válasz, kizárásos alapon. Bár a szövegben sokat beszélnek országos gondokról, a nép/udvar/polgárok/emberek/tömegek – költségkímélés, helyhiány miatt – nem jelennek meg. A gonosz hatalmi jelenlét Claudius egyszemélyes terhe, ezért bátorkodom arra következtetni, hogy itt az individuum igazi lét, nem lét problémája kerül inkább boncasztalra.

> [The question whether the performance at Pécs emphasises the social drama about *Hamlet* or rather the personal human tragedy can perhaps be answered, because one of the options can be ruled out. Even though they speak a lot about the troubles in the country, the people/court/city-dwellers/crowds do not appear – because of a shortage of funds and space. The presence of wicked authority is solely Claudius's burden; this is why I dare to say that it is rather the real problems of existence and nonexistence that are under scrutiny here.] (26)

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[13] These include the drama of quest, the detective story and the ghost story.

The fact that the visual code seems to be overdomineering in the performance is not a unique phenomenon in our day. As Ralph Berry puts it, "In the past, critics reviewed actors; more recently, directors. Today one reviews the designer" (Berry 1989 cited in Rutter 104). Carol Chillington Rutter traces this practice back to the 1960s, at least in Britain:

> Since the 1960s the design style that has come to dominate at the RSC as designers have moved away from consistency and scenic decoration toward non-illusion is what the theatre critic Michael Billington calls 'eclecticism', design for a post-modern stage that works by pastiche to deconstruct the notion of the self-contained playworld. Eclectic design mixed fantasy with realism, nostalgia with the avant-garde; the play becomes a palimpsest of its previous productions. (107)

With reference to the Pécs *Hamlet* the performance does indeed become the palimpsest of other productions and reworkings of the play. This is not to deny that the dramatic text itself is also a palimpsest, but in this context the palimpsest-aspect of theatre performance is more pertinent. Dennis Kennedy's term *neo-pictorialism* (which he associates with Robin Phyllips, Liviu Ciulei, Adrian Noble, Ron Daniels, Michael Bogdanov, JoAnne Akalaitis and others) sufficiently describes this visuality-centred performance.[14] Liviu Ciulei's words, accompanying his direction of *The Tempest* (1981), could be relevant to a critically benevolent reading of the Pécs production:

> In our time, more than ever before, the traditional and the new coexist, creating an eclectic landscape of forms. Our own style has not yet crystallized, but is rather an in-gathering of a variety of styles. Thus the setting, costumes and acting styles of this production are deliberately eclectic. (1981 cited in Kennedy 291)

This production is an instance of *Gesamtkunstwerk* with *Leitmotif*s, bringing together different arts, abounding in nonverbal and verbal constituents (in this order of importance). This example of intersemiotic translation has demonstrated that translation, even on an intersemiotic level, is a complex, multi-layered intertextual phenomenon, where not only the main 'source text' (Nádasdy's translation with dramaturgy by Győző Duró) informs the 'translation' (the Pécs production) and its reception, but numerous other intertexts, including other work by the makers of the performance, other reworkings of Shakespeare's play, as well as intertexts seemingly 'independent' from *Hamlet*.

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[14] For a detailed discussion of neo-pictorialism see Kennedy 287-302.

From a cultural perspective following such systems point by point may appear to be dissecting rather than investigating a performance, indeed, making it into a lifeless object. Indeed, strict semiotic analyses often exclude historicity (although Elam's 1980 model includes a historical aspect, too), and such an approach has not been pursued in the present article. Yet, insights from semiotics on the complexity of theatrical language (mainly Erika Fischer-Lichte's notion of subtext) have informed this reading of the Pécs performance which experimented with bringing together various critical perspectives while using Fischer-Lichte's tripartite concept of page to stage transformation—a translation of sorts—as a framework. The digest-like, streamlined textual dramaturgy gives the Pécs *Hamlet* performance a sense of linearity, the video installation renders it close to what Fischer-Lichte conceptualises as global translation, and the fact itself that certain subtexts have proven crucial to the skeleton of the performance underlines the relevance of structural translation to a great extent.

On Metalanguage as Translation: Coda

In a chapter of *The Transformative Power of Performance* (2008) entitled "The Emergence of Meaning" Fischer-Lichte elaborates on the limits of (verbal) language in analyzing theatre performance especially, but not only in cases where nonverbal constituents of the performance are significant. Coterminously or retrospectively translating into verbal structures of meaning (or, as I prefer to emphasise, interpretation)—in the form of academic writing—aspects of a live performance that are transitory as well as not (exclusively) verbal does in itself constitute a translation process that has its losses and gains. How could language express with full equivalence what—for instance—colours, shapes, tunes express on their own terms and in conjunction with each other? The present article has been conscious of the limitations of prioritizing verbal language as a master discourse when responding to a very complex and multi-modal performance language (that of the Pécs performance 'of', or rather, 'based on' Nádasdy's *Hamlet* and in particular, the visual subtexts of that performance). Other than the performance being multi-modal, a viewer's responses themselves are unlikely to be fully verbal in their inception but rather in part they may be more of a visceral or physical nature (as in responding with a certain bodily movement to a certain moment or element of the performance), even if some of these 'gut' responses may find almost immediate translation in the perception process into verbal discourse. With awareness of all the above, it is still very fruitful to turn to the Fischer-Lichte typology even if only for a specific performance analysis where the typology helps identify and highlight how the performance translates or adapts the verbal text that is the main but not exclusive

source text of the performance-as-translation. Using the transformation typology as a point of reference helps identify how moments and components of the performance punctuate the interlingual translation itself (in this case, Nádasdy's text) and from another perspective, also emphasise how the very contemporary register of the interlingual translation lends itself to a contemporizing approach to directing and designing in a complex intertextual framework of referentiality across media and cultures enriching the Hungarian *Hamlet* palimpsest.

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