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Switching Significance – The Impact of Historical and Philological Research on Postmodern Theatre Productions.

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This congress – „Filologia – Teatro – Spettacolo“ – will explore how research has changed theatre aesthetics. The sum total of several hundreds of years of research on history and about one hundred years of research on theatre have altered the perception of plays, operas and ballets as they are being performed on the stages of the world. Over many periods of theatre history, performances adopted the machinery, the costumes and make-up, the movement and body language of the time. Not until the 19th century did theatre and opera aim for an illusion of a genuine period atmosphere – when the ensemble of the Duke of Meiningen evolved a naturalistic style and Konstantin S. Stanislavski followed suit with a new psychological realism in acting. Among the diverse theatre styles which have been developed in the 20th century theatre, the historicism of Jean-Pierre Ponnelle stands out: he strove for historical authenticity regarding set, costumes, movement and the use of historic instruments – especially in collaboration with Nikolaus Harnoncourt and his *Concentus Musicus* –, as exemplified, in his legendary Mozart cycle.

Such historicism culminated in the attempted reconstruction of performances of the past, as in Ponnelle’s production of Mozart’s *Mitridate - Re di Ponto*¹, when he had the costumes modelled after baroque originals, the singers act according to baroque rules for gestures and movement, and staged the opera in Vicenza’s Teatro Olimpico – creating a unique document of an archeological stage production.

Yet, in his filmed version of this performance, Ponnelle never showed the orchestra and the audience, but in fact integrated the auditorium into the stage. By filming the action and adding the prerecorded sound in playback, this “document” of theatre archeology was revealed as a product of the late 20th century. The desire to see plays and operas performed in a visual and acoustic environment, illustrative of the period, they are set in, hails back to the aesthetics of Hollywood movies; whereas many stage directors, taking a more intellectual approach, prefer to transfer them to the time when they were actually written or to the present. In an attempt to set the art of theatre apart from the aesthetics of film, documentary or infotainment, postmodern approaches since the eighties opened new perspectives, such as the following: Bringing plays to life on stage, the directors extricated from the plots of plays, operas, operettas and musicals those signs which revealed former states of mind and set them in contrast with the results of historic and philological research. So, the playwright’s poetic output could be regarded as his particular perspective which might differ from what we can identify as their factual basis. Since the market is awash with canned versions of drama, a new production should take a fresh view of a play and get the audience to the box office and into the theatre.

¹ W. A. Mozart: *Mitridate, Re di Ponto*, stage direction, stage design and costumes: Jean-Pierre Ponnelle, DVD by Deutsche Grammophon, UNITEL 1986. Score: http://dme.mozarteum.at/DME/nma/nma_cont.php?vsep=37&gen=edition&l=1&p1=-99 [15.3.2013]

These are some aspects of postmodern aesthetics², based on additional research:

- Deconstruction reveals the hidden sources and actual facts behind a playwright's consciousness and imagination.
- Intertextuality weaves strands of similarity and correspondence between signs of different sign systems, verbal, musical and otherwise.
- Intermediality cuts across the boundaries of the media, incorporating even trans media storytelling, to explore a topic, a motif, a plot against the background of other texts.
- Ambiguity underlines the nature of art as less denotative than connotative and open for different readings.
- Heterogeneity: Opposites should not be equalized, differences not levelled out.
- Discontinuity is a genuine expression of the breaks, inconsistencies and incompatibilities of everyday reality.
- Plurality is an expression of variety, as opposed to standardized norms.
- Postmodern theatrical techniques use ready-mades, confronting the idea that a work of art should be a unique original.
- Fragmented, pictures and signs/icons are used as graphemes.
- Verbal texts are stripped of their semantic contexts.
- Montage or cut, as in film, has also become an instrument of the theatre director including also fragmentations of texts, pictures, words, etc.
- Repetition, too, is no longer a fault but can be stimulating, meditative, stop the regular flow of time.
- Interculturality refers to general globalization and exposes the illusion that isolated bubbles of civilisation could still exist.

The use of such techniques in staging plays or operas leads to changes in what have been considered their traditional messages.

Let me invite you to look at a few examples of such theatre work, focussing on:

1. Works which have been left as fragments and completed by others;
2. Productions which introduce additional material in order to visualize different aspects.

Fragments and completions

A fragment of an opera, left by a composer after his death, is a burden for posterity. Alban Berg chose and condensed Frank Wedekind's tragedies *Erdgeist* and *Die Büchse der Pandora* for the libretto of his opera *Lulu*.³ He did not know Wedekind's first version of which Peter Zadek said, that he would stage no other version but this concept of a naïve, wild girl who unconsciously staggers through her life. When Berg died on December 24, 1935 only 268 bars of Act III had been finished, plus two parts which he had included in the *Symphonische Stücke*. At the world premiere in Zürich on June 2, 1937, after the first two acts these few operatic parts and a pantomime with the music of the last movement of the *Symphonic pieces* were performed. The 2nd act ended after the film, which showed countess Geschwitz liberate Lulu from jail and which marks the symmetric center of the composition of the opera, still followed by Lulu's return to the athlete and Alwa, who confesses his love to her. In the 3rd act Lulu, countess Geschwitz, Alwa and Schigolch live in a London garret, where Lulu now a prostitute lures up the professor, a 'negro' who kills Alwa, and finally Jack the Ripper who kills both Geschwitz and Lulu.

² Alfonso de Toro: *Die Wege des zeitgenössischen Theaters - Zu einem postmodernen Multimedia-Theater oder: Das Ende des mimetisch-referentiellen Theaters?* In: *Forum Modernes Theater* Bd.10/2, 1995, S. 135-183

³ Alban Berg: *Lulu*. Oper nach Frank Wedekinds Tragödien *Erdgeist* und *Büchse der Pandora*. Partitur, hg. v. H. E. Apostel (1963), Wien: Universal Edition s.a.

Cur down like this, the libretto fails to explain the decline of Lulu and her companions.

Friedrich Cerha completed the 3rd act⁴ using analogous parts in the score, fully aware that Berg might have composed quite different variations instead. This completed version had its world premiere on February 24, 1979 in Paris at the Opéra Palais Garnier.

Act III opens in Paris where Lulu ruthlessly exploits everyone around her for her life in luxury. Her criminal and offensive lifestyle exposes her to blackmail by a slave trader, trafficking in girls, and compels her to run from the police. If Berg's original idea was a naïve heroine who is easily victimized and sexually exploited by Dr. Schön, when he finds her young and destitute – a figure whose desire for love could be set to music in choral variations – then this idea seems to evaporate before Lulu's guilt.

The opera's musical structure which is strictly symmetric can only become apparent with the completion of the third act. This is its formal design:

- III Introduction
- III/1 The Paris saloon
 - 1st ensemble (starting in bar 26) (diffuse conversations)
 - choral-variations (from bar 83 onwards) in concert performance, Lulu-Marquis
 - 12 choral variations including the „Song of the slave trader“,
 - the „Song of Lulu“,
 - the Marquis' parlando, Lulu's increasing desperation, her search for help and the slave trader's menace to deliver her to the police, final stretta
 - 2nd ensemble (from bar 231 onwards): Lulu's conversation with the athlete, with Schigolch, the melodrama Marquis-athlete
 - 3rd ensemble (from bar 564 onwards) (inversion of the 1st ensemble "Alle Welt gewinnt")
 - Lulu, Alwa and the Groom prepare the flight
 - four variations including the emotional climax
- III/2 The London garret
 - Alwa and Schigolch, broadside ballad (street organ, rain-tremolo)
 - Lulu's customers (from bar 769 onwards) – in between Alwa and Schigolch, broadside ballad and rain-tremolo.
 - Geschwitz enters (bar 888),
 - the harmonies of the painting, Alwa's hymn (bar 920),
 - modified repetition of the 4th variation
 - rhythm of the 'Monoritmica' (bar 1056) Alwa's death (bar 1095)
 - Geschwitz monologue (bar 1146)
 - Lulu-Jack (bar 1188), theme of Dr. Schön
 - farewell of countess Geschwitz (bar 1279)
 - Jack kills Lulu (bar 1293)

Cerha's completion of the 3rd act is an other artist's rendering of what Berg probably might have composed. Other solutions are possible. Such as Eberhard Kloke's new version of the 3rd act which was first performed on October 15, 2010 in Copenhagen. Kloke still wrote a further version for soloists and chamber orchestra allowing smaller houses to perform the opera. The world premiere was on May 12, 2012 at the municipal theatre of Giessen, Germany.

Another famous fragment is Giacomo Puccini's opera *Turandot*. Franco Alfano completed the 3rd act of Puccini's opera by composing a cautious transformation of the princess after

⁴ Alban Berg: *Lulu*. Klavierauszug mit Gesang / vocal score III. Akt von / by Erwin Stein, revidiert von Friedrich Cerha. Wien Universal Edition 1977, 1978, „Variationen“ and „Adagio“, fullscore Copyright 1935

Calaf's confession of love. Yet, Arturo Toscanini, conductor of the world premiere, cut parts of it in favour of a triumphant finale at the end of the opera. To him the great ado, the state affair and demonstration of power was more important than a believable psychological shift of the female protagonist. Defying Puccini who wrote "poi Tristano" in his score, Toscanini refused to conduct long 'Wagner-monologues' or dialogues which could suggest a timidly budding of love. He preferred the highly theatrical chiaroscuro-effect of a sudden volte-face from hatred to submission. Even though Liù's death and Calaf's declaration of love have awakened Turandot's ability to love, such changes in her frozen heart seemed less important than the closing theatrical climax.

Another reason for Toscanini's choice of such an extrovert finale may have been that in old China the future empress had to save face at any rate. Emperors had to be seen in commanding, not vulnerable, while women were expected to be submissive, accepting their husband's decisions and also their concubines. Only very few women held positions of leadership.⁵ When Calaf had solved the riddles, Turandot had to accept him as her husband and emperor of China. So, Toscanini's brutal cut lets Turandot save her face, singing "Il suo nome è Amor!",⁶ but it definitely diminished Puccini's text and music.

The staging of the opera at the Forbidden City in Beijing in 1998⁷ was an event of high political significance. The government of the republic of China allowed the performance, the Teatro Comunale Fiorentino cooperated with a chinese creative team: Zhang Yimou, winner of three oscars, was the director, the set and costumes were prepared by Gao Guangjian, Zeng Li, Huang Haiwei und Wang Yin, the choreography was created by Chen Weiya. The vocal parts of this Italian- Chinese coproduction of the Maggio Musicale Fiorentino were sung by Italians, only Calaf was Russian. The Chinese government decided that the conductor should be the Indian Zubin Mehta. More than 350 members of the choir and orchestra came from Florence, and many Chinese musicians, dancers and background actors were added to the performance. Performing on the authentic site of the story more than 1000 contributors/actors, the spectacular decoration and costumes made this production the most elaborate and sumptuous mise en scène ever since Puccini chose the Chinese princess for the heroine of his opera.

The political significance of the event underlined the theme of power and the huge dimensions of the open-air performance in the Forbidden City demanded loud and grandiose sounds. The intimate sounds of a budding love, already riddled with guilt had hardly a chance to fill the space. Consequently, in Turandot's duet with Calaf in the third act, altogether 70 bars were cut from Alfano's short version. This is the text deleted:

Il Principe: La tua gloria risplende nell'incanto del primo bacio, del primo pianto.

Turandot: Del primo pianto... Ah...

Del primo pianto sì, straniero, quando sei giunto, con angoscia ho sentito il brivido fatale di questo mal supremo. Quanti ho visto morire

⁵ An exceptional example for a woman in the role of a political leader is the kung fu combatant Wang Songur. In the 18th century she commanded an army of about 100.000 rebels, emerged from the anti-imperialistic society „white lotus“, to battle the imperial army. Her aim was to free China from the power of the emperor, because the cruelty of the sovereigns, high taxes and the corruption of the officers, especially Ha Shen's ruthless personal gain, excited the peasants to revolt. See: *Kriegerinnen - Die wahre Mulan*, documentation by Brigitte van Kann, GB 2003, Discovery Geschichte June 7, 2005

⁶ Puccini, Giacomo: *Turandot*. Opera completa per canto e pianoforte. A cura di Mario Parenti, Milano: Ricordi 1963, S. 303

⁷ Giacomo Puccini: *Turandot*, Libretto: Giuseppe Adami & Renato Simoni. Completion of the 3rd act by Franco Alfano. At the Forbidden City of Beijing, Stage Director: Zhang Yimou, Conductor: Zubin Mehta, Turandot: Giovanna Casolla, Calaf: Sergej Larin, Orchestra & Chorus of Maggio Musicale Fiorentino; www.turandotonsite.com [12.2.2013]

per me! E li ho spregiati; ma ho temuto te! C'era negli occhi tuoi la luce de gli eroi! C'era negli occhi tuoi la superba certezza... E t'ho odiato per quella... E per quella t'ho amato, tormentata e divisa fra due terrori uguali: Vincerti o esser vinta... E vinta son... Ah! Vinta, più che dall'alta prova da questa febbre che mi vien da te!

Il Principe: Sei mia! mia!

Turandot: Questo, questo chiedevi. Ora lo sai.⁸

This is historicism, Hollywood-aesthetics and the Eastern Genre: European singers clad in replicas of ancient imperial dresses, yet without the traditional masks, the 'painted faces' of the Beijing opera, sing Belcanto in Italian with Chinese girls dancing in traditional costumes of the Beijing opera without the 'painted faces' but waving their water sleeves to Puccini's tonal and pentatonic music which also includes original Chinese songs.⁹

Franco Alfano's completion of Puccini's score¹⁰ has been accepted by the international opera community since its first concert presentation in London in 1982. The reception of the opera in the 21st century started with a new version of the end composed by Luciano Berio, premiered in January 2002 in Las Palmas, followed by performances in Los Angeles, Amsterdam and at the Salzburg Festival in the same year.

Berio's version¹¹ is softer than Alfano's glorious finale, but it seems to come closer to Puccini's idea of it. Berio picked up Puccini's musical style in „Turandot“, its pentatonic structures of whole steps, Chinese melodies, ostinati, organ points, quint-bourbons, mixed chords, the orchestration with local colours alternating between major and minor, opening the tonality for atonal sections. Berio's completion does not entirely deny the sound of his own language as a contemporary composer. His finale elaborates the gradual transformation of the princess, her inner conflict between the rigidity of her character, formed by fear of hurt, her embarrassed chastity, her feelings of guilt and regret for the death of Liù and so many men and her new fascination with the power of love. Berio dispenses with triumphant grandeur in favour of a glimpse of the burden which Liù's death will put on the couple.

Inserts in stage productions

Mozart's *La clemenza di Tito* is an opera seria, composed for the coronation of Leopold II in Prague 1791. The plot deals with an episode in the life of Titus Flavius Vespasianus, Roman emperor from 79-81. In his campaign in Palestine he brutally defeated the Jews and destroyed their most sacred sanctuary, the temple at Jerusalem. But he fell in love with a princess from Judaea, Bérénice, he wanted to marry her and invited her to come to Rome. When he found that the Romans would not accept a stranger as their empress he sadly had to send her back. Then he chooses Servilia as his new bride, who dares to refuse him for her lover Annio. Vitellia, daughter of the late disempowered emperor and convinced of her right to become empress, feels rejected by Tito's different choices.

⁸ Puccini, Giacomo: *Turandot*. Opera completa per canto e pianoforte, l.c. p. 291-296

⁹ see Lo, Kii-Ming: *Turandot* auf der Opernbühne. Frankfurt a.M. 1996, p. 298-346, especially: Die Konstruktion einer musikalischen Chinoiserie, p. 325-336

¹⁰ The original version of Franco Alfano has been discovered by Jürgen Maehder. An analysis of the sketches and the two versions of Alfano's completion of the third act in: Maehder, Jürgen: Studien zum Fragmentcharakter von Giacomo Puccini's *Turandot*, in: *Analecta Musicologica*, Bd. 22, 1984 (Studien zur italienischen Musikgeschichte XIII, hg. v. Fr. Lippmann), p. 297-379; Maehder, Jürgen: La trasformazione interrotta della principessa. Studi sul contributo di Franco Alfano alla partitura di »Turandot«, in: J. Maehder (ed.), *Esotismo e colore locale nell'opera di Puccini*, Pisa (Giardini) 1985, pp. 143-170

¹¹ Recording: Giacomo Puccini: *Turandot*, Libretto: Giuseppe Adami & Renato Simoni. Completion of the 3rd act by Luciano Berio. Coproduction of the Mariinski Theatre St. Petersburg and the Festspielhaus Baden-Baden, Recorded at the Großes Festspielhaus Salzburg 2002 (ORF - DVD), Stage Director: David Pountney, Conductor: Valery Gergiev, Stage Design: Johan Engels

Unaware that Tito's most recent proposal of marriage is already on its way to her, she asks her lover Sesto to assassinate Tito, even though he is his dear friend. Sesto is hopelessly in love with Vitellia and tries to do her bidding, but he fails, killing someone else and is taken prisoner. Before his friend is executed, Tito wants to understand why he did betray him. Vitellia confesses her guilt thus enabling Tito to forgive Sesto and demonstrate his "clemenza".

There are consequences to the exercise of power which are the cause of certain deformations of the main characters and the way they behave in love: the powerful have to forego love and those who love, are unable to wield power. For Metastasio/ Mazzolà/ Mozart those who adjust their actions to the laws of power¹² must fail. Up against the realities of life they have to understand that functioning according to those laws will turn them into cold, empty and inhuman beings; that their strategies will lead to death and destruction; that these strategies are obsolete and they have to be given up. In the opera it is Vitellia who will come to advocate this philosophy.

Günter Krämer concentrated on revealing this aspect, of how love can change the character of people, when he staged the opera in Schwetzingen in 2010.¹³ When the performance starts, the curtain is up and a woman in oriental dress crosses the stage speaking in Hebrew. It is Bérénice, reciting a monologue from Jean Racine's tragedy *Bérénice*. She embraces Tito and he kisses her passionately. When she leaves, he is left with nothing but her cloak. Bérénice appears on stage in moments, when Tito has to pass sentence and she encourages his clemency. Tito's memory of her love is palpably present throughout the opera. When Sesto has been condemned to death and laid his head onto the block, Tito covers his friend with Bérénice's cloak. There Sesto, condemned to die, lies for a terribly long time while Tito and Vitellia go through their cathartic changes. When Tito, enraged, lifts the executioner's axe, it is Bérénice who takes the axe away as if to ask: "What would love do?"

When Servilia tries to persuade Vitellia to save Sesto, she does not just make a humble request, but forces Vitellia to take the axe and approach the block to make her see what in fact she is going to do to her lover.

In 2010, ages after the castrato era, Krämer cast Sesto not as a female mezzo but found in Valer Barna-Sabadus a male soprano, who gave a believable performance of Sesto's sexual bondage with Vitellia. Together with Yuriy Mynenko as a male alto in the part of Annio the drama of love, sexual attraction, bondage and abandonment was deeply moving. When Sesto accepts his fate as a victim of Vitellia's manipulation and his naked torso lies on the block for an almost unbearably long time, the audience is reminded of Gandhi's concept of passive resistance: accepting the role of a victim of violence may cause the aggressor to see how sterile and idle, how much against life, his violence has been. So the aggressor may be guided to a higher understanding and willingly adopt a more human attitude.

Postmodern aesthetics open a wide range of new perspectives onto the dramatic heritage of the world. Many interesting performances might be analyzed for the new findings they offer. Others respond to actual social and political conflicts. In his staging of Aeschylus

¹² For further information about Mozart's treatment of contemporary concepts of power see: Renk, Herta-Elisabeth: *Die Zauberflöte*. Mozarts Blick in eine bürgerliche Zukunft? In: Mozart Studien, ed. by Manfred Hermann Schmid, vol. 20, Tutzing: Schneider 2011, p. 135 - 172, especially chapter 7: *Die Zauberflöte* als Gegenentwurf zu *La Clemenza di Tito*, p. 157 - 166.

¹³ Mozart, Wolfgang Amadeus: *La clemenza di Tito*, Neuinszenierung des Nationaltheaters Mannheim beim Schwetzingener Mozartsommer, Premiere: 18.7.2010

Oresteia Andreas Kriegenburg¹⁴ had Aeschylus' text (translated by Ernst Buschor) interrupted by reflections, breaking news and critical disputes over the Gulf War. Confronting Aeschylus' dignified trilogy with the economic interests and the dirty reality of a detested contemporary war closed the gap of 2500 years with evident parallels.

The myth of the Flying Dutchman,¹⁵ has flourished all over the world, but especially in nations with a rich marine tradition. So, an intercultural and transcultural approach was paramount for Christoph Schlingensiefel when he was invited to stage Richard Wagner's *The Flying Dutchman* in the Teatro Amazonas, Manaus, for the XIth Festival Amazonas de Ópera - O Navio Fantasma in April, 20 – 25, 2007.¹⁶ The very special theatre of Manaus, a place in the middle of the jungle, inspired Schlingensiefel to amalgamate Wagner's *Der fliegende Holländer* with the tradition, mythological heritage, history and lifestyle of the local population. He fused the story of *The Flying Dutchman* with elements of regional popular culture, myths and rituals, with the Indio carnival "Boi Bumbá" in Parintins and Samba dances. Before the opera began, the Samba dancers formed a long procession approaching the theatre while the opera singers waited on the balcony in front of the theatre. During the weeks of rehearsal the director filmed the orchestra at a place in the jungle, where it performed a part of Wagner's score thus confronting the wilderness of the jungle (instead of Wagner's stormy ocean) with the artistic sublimation of such elementary forces in Wagner's music. The scene obviously recalls Fitzcarraldo playing records of Enrico Caruso in the jungle and nursing his desire to build an opera house there.

The myths of South America are full of ghosts and spirits. In the Condomblé celebrations the dancers and singers fall in trance and then transmit messages of the spirits who speak with the voices and through the bodies of the dancers. In the Mexican Santería the families gather at the graves of their relatives to celebrate the "Día de muertos" by offering cake, wine and fruit to the dead and dancing all night on their graves. In these cultures a story of a ghost ship and a condemned captain who wants to get in touch with living humans is something very familiar. Schlingensiefel refers to the importance of religion in the Brazilian culture and the syncretism of the Yoruba-cults when he presents Daland as the leader of a sect. His ship is a church, his crew consists of priests and altar servers. Male 'nuns' are the crew of the ghost ship. The coxswain dreams of his girl in the likeness of Snow White in her glass-coffin, almost as if he hoped her to wait for him like a Sleeping Beauty. The films recorded in the jungle are projected upon the scene and the pictures of reality blend into the *mise en scène* and the story told by the opera.

The directors of stage productions who use the tools of postmodern aesthetics may open a wide horizon of impressions, analogies, associations and alterity in the simultaneous time flow of a performance. They offer numerous new perspectives but also occasional riddles reflecting diversity in a globalized world.

English Version: Susanne Vill and Herta-Elisabeth Renk

¹⁴ Aischylos: *Orestie*, Münchner Kammerspiele in der Jutierhalle, 30. 11. 2002, stage direction: Andreas Kriegenburg, stage design: Andreas Kriegenburg, costumes: Ulrike Schulze, music: Laurent Simonetti, dramaturgy: Marion Tiedtke, www.muenchner-kammerspiele.de/programm/orestie/ [12.2.2013]

¹⁵ „Das Geheimnis des Fliegenden Holländers“, video documentation: www.arte.tv/de/wissen-entdeckung/abenteuer-arte/Videos/1279788,CmC=1099696.html [16.9.2007]

¹⁶ www.schlingensiefel.com/projekt.php?id=t060 [12.2.2013]