



Re-Locating the Spectator – The Squat Theater’s Use of Media and Space

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Abstract: *Based on the concepts of intermediality (Balme, Boenisch and Kattenbelt) and heterotopy (Foucault), my paper investigates the special features of the New York-based Squat Theater: their use of media and space. Focusing mostly on their second major, New York-performance, “Andy Warhol’s Last Love” (1978), I would like to analyze how they created a liminal zone (Turner) in-between times and spaces, which re-located the spectators’ position and re-interpreted their function.*

Key words: *theatre, intermediality, media, space, Squat Theater.*

“Police halted a performance on Friday by the New York-based Squat Theater group when a naked actress portraying a witch began making a ritual circle onstage. Authorities said they were acting on orders from the local prosecutor who considered the play, entitled *Andy Warhol’s Last Love*, offensive. The show includes videotaped segments that can be seen both inside the theater and outside on the street. The prosecutor had said the actress-witch should wear tights and he also wanted to prevent people on the street from watching. Organizers of the Brussels International Festival protested, saying his requests would ruin the spirit of the play, and the theater group called them ‘disguised censorship’, [and did not meet his requests]” (a.u. 1979).

The incident happened at the Squat Theatre’s tour of *Andy Warhol’s Last Love (AWLL)* in Brussel in November 1979. The premier of *Andy Warhol* was nearly a year earlier, in June 1978, at their storefront-theatre in New York. The Brussel authorities’ reaction was probably provoked by the first scene of the third part – *Interview with the Dead* –, in which the naked Kathleen Kendel made her ritual witch-circles on stage. Due to the surrounding mirrors, however, not only a naked female body, but her multi-mirrored images filled the stage. Moreover, her real body and its multiplied images could also be seen from outside on the street. As the company did not modify the performance as requested by the authorities, it was banned. As a result, the Squat Theater



was not censored and banned only by socialist party members in Budapest, but by West-European moral protectors as well. A special distinction!¹

Based on the concepts of intermediality (Balme, Boenisch and Kattenbelt) and heterotopy (Foucault), my paper investigates the special features of Squat Theater: their use of media and space. Focusing mostly on *Andy Warhol*, I would like to analyze how they created a liminal zone (Turner) in-between times and spaces, which re-located the spectators' position and re-interpreted their function.

Intermediality – Squat's times in-between

If it is true that “the culture of an era is defined by the contemporary media available”, (Dessewffy 2004, 76) then the 20th century audiences' horizon was also defined by the media then available. In this sense, Christopher Balme is right, when he claims that “well before the so-called new media were invented, theatre was a technological medium in dialogue with other media”. (Blame 2004, 17) Balme refers both to the technological mediums (revolving stage, electronic lighting, etc.) and the media (newspaper, television, radio, etc.), existing parallel to the theatre in an era. And both – the technological mediums and the media – influence theatre-goers how to experience their surroundings. The heterogeneous mediascape (Appadurai), consisting of the different media available, frames not only the theatre spectators', but also the theatre makers' interpretative strategies.² The media and their perceptive strategies did not stay outside the theatre, as its participants (makers and their audiences alike) take them inside. The Squat became famous partly for their media inventory, and partly for their special arrangement of space (discussed later).³

The Squat's inventory consisted of the following media and technologies:

¹ See the New York scandal in Weisbrod, 1979.

² The term mediascape, used Arjun Appadurai in his 1990 article, *Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy*, refers to the electronic and print media in “global cultural flows” (Appadurai, 1990, 9). For Appadurai, mediascape indexes the electronic capabilities of production and dissemination, as well as “the images of the world created by these media” (Appadurai, 1990, 9). Such imagery comes from books, magazines, television, cinema, and, above all, advertising that can directly impact the landscape (in the form of posters and billboards) and also subtly influence, through persuasive techniques and an increasingly pervasive presence, the way that people perceive reality. Though Appadurai coined the phrase about the 20th and 21th centuries' media-culture, it can also be applied with some restrictions to earlier areas as well.

³ For the use of intermediality in theatre see Balme 2004 and 2006, Boenisch 2003 and 2006, Chapple and Kattenbelt 2006, Dixon 2007, Schröter 2011.



| | MEDIA | TECHNOLOGY | PERFORMANCE |
|--|---|--|--|
| SOUND | radio (live and recorded) | Radio, loudspeaker | Andy Warhol's Last Love (AW) |
| | music (live and recorded) popular/elite | Tape recorder, microphone, loudspeaker, record player, vinyl record | Pig, Child, Fire! (PCF), AW, Mr. Dead and Mrs. Free (MDMF) Kraftwerk, Don Giovanni, Gallows Tree (AWLL) |
| IMAGE (and SOUND) | film | Film projector, screen | AW, PCF, MDMF |
| | television | Television set | PCF, AW, |
| | advertisement | advertisement, television set | AW |
| | video | Video camera, television set | PCF, AW |
| | CCTV (live broadcast) | camera, microphone, loudspeaker, television set | PCF, AW |
| | photo | photo (polaroid paper) | AW |
| TEXT | literature – popular/elite | text (paper), human voice | PCF, AW Kafka, An Imperial message Dosztojevskij, Devils, Stavrogin's Confession, sci-fi, etc. |
| IMAGE, VOICE, TEXT, BODY, SPACE, TIME | theatre | Stage, auditorium, lamps, set, costume, body, voice, etc. | PCF, AW, MDMF |
| | Religion/rite | Witch-ceremony, with a real witch | AWLL |

In *Andy Warhol*, for instance, the different media can be detected quite clearly. As the contemporary critic, Noel Carroll pointed out, “each section of the play corresponds to different media. In Part I, a radio and then a phonograph dominate. Part II is a film. Part III features tape recording and video” (Carroll 1978, 38). And I can add that these media worked together and parallel with live actions.

Apart from the use of different media, we can detect the constant change of media forms as well. In Part II, for instance, titled as *An Imperial Message*, Kafka's short story appears as a radio-piece (from text to radio), while the spectators are watching Crazy



Eddy's popular television advertisement as a silent film on a screen, occupying the shop-window (from television to film). Then, in a black and white silent film, István Bálint masked as Andy Warhol, as the messenger, is riding on horseback in the early morning New York, accompanied by Kraftwerk-music. Finally, he goes into a Chinese restaurant, actually not far from the theatre. While having his breakfast, his face is hit by a cake, and he finds one of the last sentences of Kafka's text at the bottom of the cake box (from text to film): "Nobody could fight his way through here, least of all one with a message from a dead man" (AWLL, 1978).

Apart from the use of different media and the change of media forms, we can find examples when the media technology was directly connected to live action. In one of the scenes of the above mentioned film, "a man had attempted to waylay Warhol. An actress stood in front of the screen and shot him down. As the gun went off in three-dimensional space, the victim dropped in pictorial space" (Carroll 1978, 39). As a result, the Squat-performances did not only use different technologies and media, but they played on and with the contradictions and conflicts between and among these technologies, media and their perceptions.

The Squat-performances draw our attention to a phenomenon which was called by Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin as remediation. They defined the term as "the representation of one medium in another" (Bolter and Grusin 2000, 45). In the Squat-performances, we can detect not only the two basic, but ambiguous motives of remediation: homage and rivalry, but also the double-logic of remediation as well: immediacy and hypermediacy. While immediacy dictates that the medium itself disappears, fostering the illusion of direct access to the things represented; hypermediacy makes the user conscious to the different frames, used at the same time, by different media. [An AW-example to the former is, for instance, the black-and-white movie which gives the illusion that the spectators are also following Bálint-Warhol's ride in New York. An AW-example to the latter is, for instance, the Kafka-text appearing in the film.] As Bolter and Grusin pointed out,

"[...] where immediacy suggests a unified visual space, contemporary hypermediacy offers a heterogeneous space, in which representation is conceived of not as a window on to the world, but rather as 'windowed' itself – with windows that open onto other representations or other media". (Bolter and Grusin 2000, 34).

Hypermediacy is thus realised simultaneously as "two or more sources, images, systems and effects play at the same time in a shared ecosystem" (Levander 2006, 56). The logic of hypermediacy multiplies the signs of mediation, and thus tries to reproduce the rich sensorium of human experience. Moreover, a constant tension exists between hypermediacy (plural, open, and operating with in-between relations) and immediacy (incorporating the spectator directly).



In the theatre, the two dimensional projected images of the performance, for instance, are not just projected, but staged as well. Their staging gives them different status from the one, which they would have in film, television, or in the context of a monitor screen. In the theatre, the different media are not independent, but rather they depend on each other's frames, especially from the live event, the moment of the performance, the three-dimensional scenic space and the theatrical gaze. As Kornélia Deres has recently pointed out, theatre

“[...] is able to reframe the representative techniques of other media, their aesthetic experience, at the same time recalling their different patterns of experience, based on different cultural-historical-ideological contexts, making conscious the complexity of visual experience, and realizing a kind of intermedial position of mediation”. (Deres 2015, 24).

As a result, theatre spectators often find themselves “enjoying (marveling at, drawn in by) the interface between the actual and the virtual, the corporeal and the mediated, at the very point at which (re)presentation becomes artifact” (Levander 2006, 55).

The Squat-spectators also found themselves in such intermedial position, as the performances generated “tension between ‘fiction’ and ‘reality’, while questioning the boundary lines between spectacles, voyeurs, actions, and unwilling participants” (Sterritt 1982, 19). The Squat-performances involved “a transgression of categorical boundaries” (Carroll 1978, 38), a transformation between different media, and a transition between the live and the fixed, the real and the fictive¹, the here and the there, the real and the virtual, the present and the past.² As a result, it is absolutely appropriate to quote a contemporary critical reaction that the Squat Theatre was “a master of multimedia” (Carroll 1978, 41), since their members “have the multimedia skills to blend film, video, and live action into smooth, though puzzling tapestries, at times using all three methods [of the above

¹ Apart from the then famous advertisement figure, Crazy Eddy and the Prague university student, Jan Palach, committing suicide by setting himself on fire, there were other known figures in *Andy Warhol*: Ulrike Meinhof, who supposedly committed suicide in her prison cell a few months earlier, and the then still alive, famous American pop-art idol, Andy Warhol. At the end of the performance, Ulrike shot Warhol, who died. Even this fictive situation had a real-life counterpart, as “the real Warhol was the victim of an assassination attempt in 1968. [...] Valerie Solanis, his would be killer, was an ultra-radical feminist” (Carroll 1978, 40).

² Andy Warhol appeared first on film. By the end of the film, he was walking with Kathleen Kendall from the Chelsea Hotel to the theatre. When they reached the theatre, Warhol took a picture of Kendall with his Polaroid camera. This was also seen by the spectators on film, while behind the screen, set on the stage, the flashlight of the camera was also seen. And when the film ended with the entrance of Warhol and Kendall to the theatre, they were also entering in real life into the theatre through the front door.



mentioned mediums] at once” (Sterritt 1982, 19).¹ Consequently, the spectators of the Squat-performances, with Peter Boenisch’s phrase, inhabited ”Zwischenzeit” (Boenisch 2006, 108): they existed in a “time in-between” mediums, patterns of experiences, realities, virtualities, technologies, and elite/popular references.

Heterotopias – the Squat’s spaces in-between

Michel Foucault argued that “heterotopias are real places, which are something like counter-sites, [...] in which real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested and inverted” (Foucault 1984, 3).

Writing about the principles of the heterotopias, Foucault mentioned the theatre (and film), which “is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible” (Foucault 1984, 6). The theatre brings onto “the rectangle of the stage, one after the other, a whole series of places that are foreign to one another” (Foucault 1984, 6). So Foucault imagined such a heterotopic theatre, where foreign and incompatible places appear one after the other on its rectangular stage.

The places realized by the Squat Theatre, however, did not follow sequential order. The performances did not present the different places one after the other, rather they projected these spaces onto each other by different media, as we have seen in the above-mentioned examples. Apart from that, the performances projected them parallel to each other and at the same time through each other, due to the arrangement of space. The *Andy Warhol*, for instance, demonstrates this kind of space-arrangement. As Richard Schechner pointed out,

“[...] the downstairs stage [...] is Warhol’s Factory: the place he used to manufacture his art-objects. And upstairs the Blue Room [...] is the actual living space of Eva Buchmüller and Istvan Bálint. The street is the 23rd Street, a theatrical environment only by virtue of the casement glass window separating Factory from street. [...] This three-way division of space – contrived as a theatre set, the Factory, selected from ordinary life, the Blue Room, a mixture of the two, 23rd street – is a paradigm for Squat’s aesthetic” (Schechner 1978, 24).

Consequently, the Squat’s special space-arrangement met with their intermedial staging. As Noel Carroll remarked about *Andy Warhol*, “the subdivision of the play by means of different media and different playing spaces gives us an initial set of elements

¹ The Squat-performances avoided from “conventional ‘realism’, not only by creating defiantly unrealistic images, but also by letting the ‘real world’ – rather than a ‘realistic’ representation of it – become a part of its productions” (Copeland 1982, 3).



to consider, including not only four roughly discrete units of dramatic action, but also the juxtaposition of different media and different spaces” (Carroll 1978, 36).¹

These juxtapositions, however, introduced basic changes in the spectators’ role and function. As “the street joins the event, the street literary interferes (through microphones [and a video-camera] on the street) with the events” (Squat 1978, 10), the spectators inside could also see and hear “live” what was happening outside as part of the performance. It was Gautam Dasgupta who summarized the impact of this space-arrangement onto perception. As he wrote, the architectonic openness of the space-arrangement

“[...] not only allows the outside spectators to peer in and looked at the theatrical action inside, but they reduce the inside audience to an entity that is itself placed on stage to be watched. But, in converse, the public outside, by entering either consciously or unconsciously within the window frame, is in turn transformed into ‘performers’. Here, through an ingenious transformation of the mirroring aspect of Squat’s dramaturgy, one audience sees itself mirrored in another, just as that same audience as ‘performers’ see themselves mirrored in the other-audience-turned-performers. Once again, in newer surroundings, the Squat replays the games of narcissistic abandon, of incestuous mirroring” (Dasgupta, 1983, 15).

The rearrangement of the theatre space, the incorporation of the street, changed the spectators’ traditional function: they were not only spectators, but, at the same time, they were also spectacles – they were windowed for others’ gaze. The Squat-spectators could thus watch special spaces, take part in special places and gain special experiences.

It was Peter Boenisch who pointed out that theatre “relies on its observers, [and] intermediality [...] is an effect, created in the perception of observers that is triggered by performance – and not simply by the media, machines, projections or computers used in a performance” (Boenisch 2006, 114). And if Boenisch is right, then the intermedial impact, realized in and by the spectator, is very literally locates the spectator inter-media: the spectator is “inhibiting, blending and blurring traditional borders between genres, media, sign-systems, and messages” (Boenisch 2006, 115). In the case of Squat,

¹ The Squat-performance utilised the spaces of the previous Galaxy 21, the shop-window, the living rooms on the first floor, and they often arranged a cinema or a concert hall on the ground floor, while adding them to the theatre and the street. As a result, the Squat fulfilled Peter Brook’s call that “I can take any empty space and call it a bare stage. A man walks across this empty space whilst someone else is watching him, and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged” (Brook 1968, 1). The Squat took not an empty, but rather a crowded and real space, and called it a stage: those who went through it, behind the glass of the shop-window became performers from the spectators sitting at the back of the shop. At the same time, the inside spectators also became performers from the standing onlookers of the street.



the intermedial impact between the different media received an extra dimension from the heterotopy of the space.

If theatre basically “relies on its observers” and, again with Boenisch’s expression, “functions as a training ground for perception and as a place to observe” (Boenisch 2006 114 and 111), then the spectators in the Squat Theatre could experience one of the significant phenomena of our contemporary world, well before it would have been widely spread. They could experience the phenomenon of being observed, while observing something. Being observed was a constant phenomenon in the everyday life of the Easter-block, and the Squat exported it to the West. Since then, this phenomenon has become an integral part of the contemporary society of surveillance (Foucault 1984 and Debord 1992).

Consequently, the speciality of the Squat Theatre derives from the inventive use of different media-technologies and “the strategic use of their 23rd Street theatre” (Maranca, Rabkin and Birringer 1986, 29). Their performances were realised “in the street and in the shop, among passerby and actors, between actor and audience, and theatre and everyday life” (Goldfarb 1980, 631). Their inventive mixture created such intermediality, which was based partly on time-in-between (Zwischenzeit – Boenisch), partly on space-in-between (Zwischenraum – Zoltan Imre) as well. They created such *Zwischens* – when and where the mutual impact of their performances was realized in a transparent and liminal zone (Turner). They created such times in-between, when the virtual and the real appeared, and at the same time, played with each other. To these, the storefront and the street rendered such a space in-between, where the spectators could find themselves between real and virtual worlds.

Conclusions

Though the Squat used only analogue media, their performances were realized through intermediality. As a result, it is time to reconsider Freda Chapple and Chiel Kattenbelt’s definition of intermediality. For them, intermediality is “the incorporation of digital technology into theatre practice” (Chapple and Kattenbelt 2006, 11). From their definition, it seems as if intermediality appears only in the digital era, due to the use of digital technology in performance. Intermediality is, however, a much earlier phenomenon. If intermediality cannot be confined only to “the presence of other media within theatre productions” (Chapple and Kattenbelt 2006, 11), but it incorporates the mutual impacts of different media, their contradicting possibilities, and their different perceptive strategies as well, then intermediality can be found not only in the digital era, but rather in the entire history of Western theatre from antiquity to the present.

The analysis of the Squat draws the attention to another phenomenon as well. A phenomenon to which Balme also referred, when he pointed out that “if intermediality is to be taken as an historical paradigm, then theatre must be understood in the first instance as a hypermedium that was always capable of incorporating, representing and on occasion even thematising other media” (Balme 2004). In this sense, theatre is not a



constant entity, beyond and above history, but rather it is such an inter- and hypermedium which has always been mediated by contemporary technology and fed upon technological inventions and developments. As a result, “it makes no sense at all to think of an originally pure theatre that has been invaded by technological media” (Boenisch 2006, 113), rather that it “simply never has been a separate history of theatre and media” (Boenisch 2006, 113). Theatre is such a media-technology, which utilises different media for transfers and recordings, while brings onto the surface the various practices of the different mediums of information processing.¹

Theatre can thus be regarded as a hypermedium, where film, radio, television, video, etc. as part of the performance remain still film, radio, television, video, etc., though the images, sounds, texts, and the other signs of these media, are not only screened or played, but at the same time, they are staged. In this sense, they are “not only cinematic, televisual, videographic or digital[/analogue], but at the same time, theatrical” (Kattenbelt 2006, 23). As a result, theatre can incorporate all other arts and media, and offer, open and connect their special characteristics and their perceptive strategies, and at the same time, create and realize heterogeneous times and spaces in-between these media.

Consequently, it is high time to re-write the history of (Hungarian) theatre as the history of technological media which goes beyond theatre, technology, and media. In his lectures on optic mediums, Friedrich Kittler reproached Foucault that he did not to fulfill one of the promises. Kittler wrote that “if Foucault had written his book on painting as the history of the materials available for painting as he had promised, we would know much more about it” (Kittler, 2005, 30).

We know much more not only about the historical use of the materials in painting, but also about its consequences onto perception. And as a result, we would probably think of painting differently. Paraphrasing Kittler, if we write the history of (Hungarian) theatre as the history of technologies and media available in a given period, hopefully, we would probably think of (Hungarian) theatre differently.

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¹ The Squat performances absolutely fulfilled Friedrich Kittler's expectation, referring to Marshal McLuhan, when he pointed out that “the content of a medium is always another medium” (Kittler 2005, 21).



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