



The Will to Move. Finding the Vanishing Point as an Analytical Method

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Abstract: *In 1962 the political elite removed the burden of the directorship of National Theatre from the shoulders of Tamás Major, the parliamentary representative of Hungarian theatre arts. Nevertheless, he continued to determine the artistic conception of the theatre with his French-chic aesthetic sense, his comprehensive and up to date theoretical knowledge, and his imperturbable political communication skills. The repertoire of National Theatre is better defined by the European left-wing propaganda-philosophies than in by Hungarian premieres; Major likes to talk about the impact of leftist thinkers such as Mnouchkine, Strehler or Brook. Giorgio Strehler staged the Weiss-play, “The Song of the Lusitanian Bogey” in 1969, because “the truth should be always told loud”, and Major, who is also “always looking for the essence, horribly tormented with the text”, sets about to revive the idea and form of propaganda theatre.*

The Lusitanian Monster is the first Hungarian rock opera from 1970. In my presentation, I examine the complex perspective that hides this performance within our theatre-historical tradition, I examine our vanishing awareness, that the National theatre has the National director (and the future National actress) play rock.

Key words: *Vanishing point, New Perspectives, Theatre in state-socialism.*

In the call for papers, “vanishing point” was defined as “the principle of organization around a single point (of view)”, however in my own talk, I understand vanishing point primarily as an art historical term, which does not serve as a center but a horizon, an outsider but an organizing model, a line revealing the depicted bodies.

The concept of vanishing point became part of the glossary of performance-theory with Marcia Siegel’s 1972 book, which struggled with the ontological impossibility of defining dance, since in that analysis “there is no form of the arts which is as difficult to define, as difficult to comprehend” (Siegels 1972, 32) as dance. In her onto-historiographical analysis, she adds the perspective lines necessary to create the vanishing point to the realization recorded in the writings of Peggy Phelan and André Lepecki (Lepecki 2015). While “the existence of performance becomes itself through its disappearance” (Phelan 2006, 148.) calls the visualization or reorganization of the perspective lines running into the vanishing point, the discovery of the place of disappearance (or in Freudian terms, submersion) the political model. This political model (Grosz 1994, 147) based on the creation and recreation of the vanishing point forms the subject and methodology of my paper. Drawing the vanishing point presupposes the creation of



a perspective, an act of scholarship that doesn't merely search, but also finds. Therefore the creative scholarly model of found perspective and a found vanishing point in the creative context of found objects, found gestures and found sentences is ontological proof of the active attitude of research.

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In 1962 the political elite removed the burden of the directorship of National Theatre from the shoulders of Tamás Major, the parliamentary representative of Hungarian theatre arts. Nevertheless, he continued to determine the artistic conception of the theatre with his French-chic aesthetic sense, his comprehensive and up to date theoretical knowledge, and his imperturbable political communication skills. The repertoire of National Theatre is better defined by the European left-wing propaganda-philosophies than in by Hungarian premieres; Major likes to talk about the impact of leftist thinkers such as Mnouchkine, Strehler or Brook (Kocsis 1987, 92). Giorgio Strehler staged the Weiss-play, *The Song of the Lusitanian Bogey* in 1969, because "the truth should be always shouted out loud" (Hirst 1993, 15), and Major, who is also "always looking for the essence, horribly tormented with the text" (Kocsis 1987. 92), sets about to revive the idea and form of propaganda theatre.

The Lusitanian Bogey (or *Monster*, in the Hungarian version) describes the colonial atrocities of the Portuguese and the dire plight of the defenceless natives in didactic exchange of dialogs and songs. Peter Weiss's text was published in *Nagyvilág*, November 1967, under the title *A luzitán madárijesztő* [The Lusitanian Scarecrow] in the translation of Gábor Garai. The work is a documentarist drama, raw material for propaganda theatres, a difficult reading in itself. As a propaganda work, it is suitable for improvisation; it structures all the evil of the world by constructing a symbolic figure, the monster.

The monster, as symbolization, shows a lively presence in the theatre culture of the second half of the sixties. The magical fairy-tale of Sándor Weöres' *Octopus* was written in 1965, and a year later Major stages *The Monster*, a piece by László Németh, in National Theatre. This kind of formulation is an outstanding technique of both documentarist drama and symbolist text tradition, as the telling, suggestive *Monster* opens the gates of immediate understanding, and then leaves them open. Major "instigated and entertained at the same time" (Benedek 1970, 4).

In 1970 *The Lusitanian Monster* kept a significant distance from its original subject and encouraged symbolic reading. Few spectators identified Lusitania with contemporary Portugal, especially among those who came with the collective seasonal tickets for work brigades. But it provided the performance with an even more lyrical, more distanced



interpretative uncertainty. So, instead of the comprehension of the dramatic text, it is the unusual effect of the performance that leaves a lasting memory in the minds of critics.

In the dramaturgical sense, the performance uses the song-dialogue-commentary rhythm of Epic theatre, but, instead of Weill or Dessau, it is the more familiar and mundane motives of contemporary pop music that make the spectator more interested (rather than more observant, perhaps). The music of Tamás Daróczy Bárdos and the choreography of Károly Szigeti, with the company of National Theatre in Katona József Theatre, realized the first Hungarian pop-musical that was also a folk play. (Almási 1971, 87).

The cause of the play's instant success lay in its genre that was unexpected in National Theatre, and strange, even in its form, to the political-ideological concept of the leading theatre's canon (Gábor 1971, 30). It followed both from Tamás Major's cultural-political status and Peter Weiss' reputation as a devoted leftist thinker, that such a strong version of the supposedly modern theatre should go to the National Theatre (Gyurkó 1970, 3), but even so the production, "set up as one big concert" (Benedek 1970, 4), overshadowed the significance of the venue and interpreted *The Lusitanian Monster* as an alternative theatrical event. This unexpected, hardly imaginable duality made the play attractive in the eyes of the political leadership (despite its subject, the creation and deconstruction of power); and, on the other hand, domesticated pop music and contemporary dance in the eyes of the spectators, who followed the ideology of the state-socialist era on the stage of National Theatre. The thorough understanding of this process is a complex task for theatrical remembrance, for theatre memory.

The mise-en-scène of Tamás Major, seen from almost half a century later, provided a performance that had well defined questions, that used real teamwork, and that created theatre as an event. His success was guaranteed, besides his theatrical craftsmanship, by his political sensitivity: he managed to balance between the direct statements à la Weiss, and the aggression of ironic double-speak. This is an outstanding feature of the performance (Pályi 1970, 4).

The title character of the performance is a gigantic monster, stitched together from surplus sackcloth pieces by the players in the opening scene. The monster resembles a grotesquely swollen, huge sphere with distorted facial features: based on the creative credo of Weiss and the somewhat normatively orientating program guide the spectators are supposed to identify it as a fascist dictator (Gesztí 1970, 3).

The contemporary audience could meet two significant novelties; the first was that the actors played with their whole body. The players' movements filled the whole stage, they walked the corridors of the auditorium, sometimes even touched the viewers. The reality of the body, its smell, its sweat, its movements, its exhaustion became not only visible, but perceptible with virtually all senses (Bernáth 1970, 6). The second novelty was the choice of the tempo (Gyurkó 1970, 9). They found the 90 minutes long performance pulsating, with its structure of sequences instead of scenes, acts and intermissions (Földes 1970, 11).



Only a few could see, even less could put in writing, what made *The Lusitanian Monster* significant in the oeuvre of Major and the National Theatre. But they gathered their opinions around the performance of one single actress, Mari Töröcsik. One can speak in superlatives of Töröcsik, the not-yet fully accepted actress, and in the same time praise the new, strong, technically genial renewal of Major, without the actually focusing on Major. Töröcsik “isn’t a star. Insignificant. Attracts one’s attention.” (Pályi 1970, 1). Finds the way of the immediate, civilian expression that cuts through the auditorium of Katona József Theatre and still remains open and simple. The role of the Third Speaker is not greater, more ethical or more expressive than the others. But it is Töröcsik who speaks best this language (Pályi 1970, 1), newly christened “circus-theatre” (Kocsis 1982, 5). She is a crier without megaphone, moreover, in a position to distribute judgements, a position that attracts heavy, thesis-like sentences (Bor 1970, 8).

Besides Töröcsik, it is István Iglódi who stands out from the otherwise unified crowd – at least in the eyes of contemporary criticism (Gyurkó 1970, 12). Iglódi, who was in his early twenties at the time, radiates youthful playfulness: this is still obvious from the recordings, even from the perspective of fifty years. This performance brought the actors of the National Theatre together – or at least those who belonged to Major’s circle.

The concept and form of the performance requires empty space (Barta 1973, 13), and the intentionally strange mobility of the space turned the audible tempo into a visible pulsing. Iona Keserű, who designed the stage, the costume and puppetry, was a well-known representative of the neo-avant-garde artists’ generation, a member of the IPARTERV group (Bor 1970, 8). This soft duality of the political structure can obscure the evaluation and comprehension of the creative contexts for decades, and interpretative discourse on the performance’s visual features didn’t even start.

Ropes hanging in irregular distances from the upper riggings define the space of *The Lusitanian Monster*: the view is marked by chaos and simplicity (Benedek 1970, 4). Chaos, because from jungle to jail, from Tarzan-romanticism to modern circus art, a dozen interpretational frameworks encompass the spectacle, and also simplicity, as the multi-functionality of the rope offers playing, and not conflict-seeking, as the task of interpretation (Földes 1970, 11). The colouring creates to dynamic communities: the colonialists wear white linen, freshly (and with difficulty) ironed, somewhat military, while the natives stand on the proscenium in warm earth-coloured, red-brown sackcloth, as a sexless, ageless mass.

The immediate impact of the performance is very strong, as it is measurable on the critical reactions (Barta 1973, 12). The company of the National Theatre needs renewal and refreshment, the kind of intellectual and artistic excitement that stems from the ideological expectations of political power, yet fulfils the desires of the youngest, most dynamic part of the community. After 1968 it seems anachronistic to portrait revolution so that it evokes the uniform enthusiasm of the World Summit of Communist Youth



League. Major refuses to choose a historical example, to use the techniques of double speak or historical parabola, and to turn to the dramatic devices of post-revolution reconciliation (as he, indeed, refused in 1957 as well.) Major, amid the complex conditions of state-socialist theatre, manages to set up the alienating agitation and propaganda theatre of Brecht and Weiss, but with the music and dances of the young.

The long-term historical effects of this performance were made invisible by the Víg Theatre, when in 1973 they premiered *Imaginary Report of an American Pop Festival*.

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