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Mediated communication in the theater – relationships between the theater and new technologies shown by selected examples

ABSTRACT

The theater is a meeting, an act of communication, direct transmission of content, image, and emotions. The theater of the 21st century changes an interpretative approach to the issue of theatrical communication by increasing the phenomena of media's presence on stage and theater's in the media. The aim of the article is to analyze the determinants which define a communication process that takes place during a performance with regard to mediated communication. The analysis is based on examples from Krakow's theaters: video screening on the stage, the creation of scenic design with the use of new technologies and new forms of advertising like teasers, trailers or LED screens. The phenomenon is described in the light of previous research in the fields of the theater, new media and audio-visual communication.

KEYWORDS: contemporary theater, multimedia, video screening, intermediality, mediated theatrical communication, promotion of performance, trailer, teaser, outdoor advertising, Krakow theater, new media

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STRESZCZENIE

Komunikacja teatralna zapośredniczona medialnie – o wzajemnych relacjach teatru i nowych technologii na wybranych przykładach.

Teatr jest spotkaniem, aktem komunikowania się, bezpośrednim prze-kazem treści, obrazu, emocji. Teatr XXI wieku zmienia podejście in-terpretacyjne do zagadnienia komunikacji teatralnej poprzez coraz powszechniejsze zjawisko obecności mediów na scenie i teatru w me-diach. Celem artykułu jest analiza wyznaczników definiujących pro-ces komunikacji zachodzącej podczas wystawianego przez aktorów spektaklu w odniesieniu do komunikacji zapośredniczonej medialnie. Analiza oparta jest na przykładach z krakowskich teatrów – projekcji wideo na scenie, kreacji scenografii z wykorzystaniem nowych techno-logii a także nowych form reklamowych jak teasery, trailery czy ekra-ny LED. Zjawisko analizowane jest w świetle dotychczasowych ba-dań z zakresu teatru, nowych mediów i komunikacji audiowizualnej.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: teatr współczesny, multimedia, projekcje video, intermedialność, komunikacja teatralna zapośredniczona medialnie, promocja spektaklu, trailer, teaser, reklama outdoorowa, teatr krakowski, nowe media.

The theater is a meeting. It is an act of communication between the ac-tor and spectator, a direct transfer of content, image and emotion. How-ever, the 21st century is bringing solutions that require a new interpreta-tion of phenomena in the area of theatrical communication. We have seen an expanding range of technical possibilities and a growing pressure on the theater-makers associated with technological development, in addi-tion to the increasing role of new technologies in the activities of the theat-er as institutions. The presence of the media on the stage and the theater in the media are constantly expanding fields for both new forms of crea-tivity and promoting their activities, consequently, providing a new plane for the discourse on the essence of theater. When the media become a kind of mediation between the actor and the spectator, the theater moves away from its traditional way of maintaining a narrative. This is undoubtedly a step in the direction of the 21st-century spectator, who is used to medi-ated communication, but it is also a kind of interference with the tradition-ally viewed theatrical communication.

Mediated communication vs theatrical communication

According to Prof. Tomasz Goban-Klas, each communication process has an intermediate character, as there is always some type of communication means, a *medium*. The researcher sees the term medium as a linguistic property: linguistic signs, sign systems, and codes, on top of technological conditions: signal carriers, equipment for the reproduction, transmission, and reception in addition to media within the meaning of institutions: the press, radio, and television.[1] In this sense, theatrical communication is a kind of media communication, where the media are: the theater as such, the spoken word, and that which completes the spectacle: scenic design, lights or music. The theater is an intermediary action. And this is in a double sense. We shall understand the concept of intermediality differently in the context of structuring the performance, i.e., the elements comprising the final staging, and differently in the context of the transfer of means characteristic of other media such as film or tv, the channels of mass communication, to the plain of the theater. Media communication in the sense of mediality using technological solutions of transmission or registration is a form of mass impact. Goban-Klas notes that it is the use of complex technical instruments that is a distinctive feature of the mass communication. In addition to the mechanical means mass reception, one-way communication and asymmetry are representative for the model, and along with it, the wide range of implementation and distribution of content.[2] Mass media play an extremely important role in modern society. They can be assessed and analyzed in different ways, however, their dissemination and progress guarantee their existence and functionality. Their importance is also evidenced by the penetration in areas of social and cultural life that had so far been characterized by a different communication model, based on the direct image, such as the theater.

Theatrical communication is a term that is used often, albeit not very precise. It signifies the process of information exchange between the stage and the audience. According to Slawomir Świontek, we can distinguish two types of communication in the theater: external and internal communication. In these groups, the following communication processes occur: External communication refers to the relationship between the stage and the audience, and takes place on two channels: 1) actor-spectator; 2) character-spectator. Internal communication happens at the level of

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1   T. Goban-Klas, *Media i komunikowanie masowe,* Warszawa 2004, p. 47.

2   *Ibidem,* p. 110-112.

the relationship between actors, between the characters on the stage, or between the spectators. Świontek attributes the characteristics of bilateral communication to the external communication, while he describes the internal communication as unilateral. This is due to the fact that the actor performing on the stage receives signals from the audience – laughter, applause, whistles, rustling and other sounds that can mobilize or distract. In the second case, the spectator cannot interfere in the fictional world. According to Świontek, internal communication is comprised of all possible message exchanges between the characters, actors, and also the viewers.[3] In traditional terms, the hallmark of theatrical communication is its uniqueness and the singularity of the theatrical experience. This is influenced by various factors such as the changing cast or audience, the technical conditions of the performance and also the psychophysical condition of the creators.[4] The fact of the singularity of the theatrical experience comes largely from the direct relationship between the actor and the spectator. Most researchers agree on the fact that the primary characteristic of the theater that makes it stand out from other forms of art is the presence of actors and spectators, live in direct communication situation.[5]

The use of modern technology in the theater makes room for another kind of stage presence of the actor which raises a number of considerations on the conditions of the theatrical communication situation and creates new "roles" for the actors.

Theater and media

(Multi)Media on the stage

Modern technical solutions have a major impact on the process of perception of the performance by the audience. The use of broadcasting on the stage directs the way of defining the process of receiving communication towards the film-like or television-like reception. In the theater we see

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3   S. Świontek, *Dwanaście wykładów z wprowadzenia do wiedzy o teatrze. Zapis wykładów wygłoszonych dla studentów I roku kulturoznawstwa,* L. Karczewski, I. Lewkowicz, M. Wójcik, Eds. Łódź 2003, cited in: D. Fox, *Komunikacja teatralna,* [in:] *Widowisko – teatr – dramat. Podręcznik dla studentów kulturoznawstwa,* Wyd. Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, Katowice 2014, p. 113-114.

4   D. Fox, *Komunikacja teatralna*, op. cit., p. 115.

5   Cf. M. Dietrich, *Aktor i publiczność,* [in:] *W kręgu socjologii teatru na świecie*, wybór i opracowanie T. Pyzik, E. Udalska, Wrocław 1987, p. 229, cited in: E.M. Nieduziak, *Komunikacja teatralna w zmieniającej się rzeczywistości społeczno-kulturowej,* [in:] Stare i nowe media w procesie komunikacji społecznej, Radom 2003, p. 153.

images in three dimensions, freely selecting any fragment of the stage to focus on. It is different in the case of the application of screens and screening videos. Someone, be it the author of the visuals, the stage designer, the director or the actor, by using a portable camera – imposes the frame of the image received. Additionally, as Jerzy Limon emphasizes in his article *Wstęp do geometrii czasu,* the image we see through the screen is not a space, but a plane. Video content is also a broadcast or a visual aid, not the real presence of a body or an object in the same space and time as the viewer.[6] Janusz Skuczyński in his article *Teatr i film* adds another aspect – the impact of the theater (as opposed to film) also on other senses – smell, and even touch or taste. Video is characterized by the fact that is shows what is invisible in the theater – details, eye expression, facial expressions – video broadcasting can therefore expand the range of perception with the sense which is basic for the theater – our sight[7]. In the context of the listed features of the video images, it is worth asking what conditions a staging with mediated content must meet so that their use is justified. Jerzy Limon highlights the huge creative potential of the multimedia presence on the stage, however, he notes that it is necessary for them to comply with the rules of staging. Such a correlation of mediated messages and events that have occurred on the scene so that the viewer can read the relationships existing between them on top of the meanings produced by them.[8]

The renowned modern theater scientist Patrice Pavis proposes to focus on interactions that happen between the media while analyzing their presence on the stage, to determine the relationship between the live performance and the mediated image (here he sees a compromise in accepting any kind of staging – also without the use of modern multimedia technologies – as a form of mediation between the live content[9] and the medium due to the conventionality of mixing fiction and reality in the theater) and the intermediality of contemporary theater.[10]

Here I would like to make a short discussion of selected examples of performances using multimedia staged in Krakow's theaters in the last few years. I deliberately do not categorize performances due to the type of the technology used, as in many cases they occur simultaneously.

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6   J. Limon, *Wstęp do geometrii czasu,* in: *Amalgamaty sztuki*, *intermedialne uwikłania teatru,* J. Limon, A. Żukowska, Eds. wyd. słowo obraz terytoria, 2011, p. 8-10.

7   J. Skuczyński, *Teatr i film*, [in:] *Scena i ekran. Przestrzeń dialogu interartystycznego*, J. Skuczyński, P. Skrzypczak, Eds. Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, Toruń 2007, p. 15.

8   J. Limon, *Wstęp do geometrii czasu*, op. cit., p. 9.

9   The concept of *liveness* by Philip Ausslander, *Liveness, Performance in a a Mediatized Culture,* London; New York: Routlege, 2011. Cf. P. Pavis, *Współczesna inscenizacja. Źródła, tendencje, perspektywy,* Wyd. Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2011, p. 44.

10   P. Pavis, op. cit., p. 43-45.

Multimedia is a very strong accent in the projects of the director Krzysztof Garbaczewski.[11] An example can be the staging of *Hamlet* (premiere on March 23, 2016)[12] in the Helena Modrzejewska National Stary Theater with video effects by Robert Mleczko. Hamlet's story is shown from the perspective of Horace. In the play we do not see one, but three characters play Hamlet (Roman Gancarczyk, Bartosz Bielenia and Krzysztof Zarzecki). In the set design, a large round mirror that also serves as a screen, catches the eye. It presents live scenes that take place in the foyer, or in the Helena Modrzejewska room, are shown. This does not involve any direct contact with the actors. The use of technical media stresses the unreality and metaphoricality of the scenes. They include e.g. Helena Modrzejewska's (played by Marta Ojrzyńska) conversation with Konrad Swinarski (Szymon Czacki) and Krzysztof Zarzecki about interpreting *Hamlet*. In yet another moment, where Polonius (Paweł Kruszelnicki) climbs the ladder to go inside from the window from the Szczepański Square, the camera that accompanies him broadcasts images from the outside in real time. Passers-by become actors of the performance seen by the audience on the screen. In Garbaczewski's *Hamlet*, one more multimedia theme occurs. Actors present on the stage by using a small camera to show the viewers what is invisible – close-ups of their skin and body parts. The audience intrudes the intimacy of actors, or rather, the characters. This, however, creates the effect of double vision – an actor on stage and an actor on screen. The viewer's point of focus wanders between the presence of real actors and the mediated inspection into the intimate areas of the human body which are invisible to the naked eye. Some consistency in the application of life video broadcasting in the performance is noticeable, with one exception, of a short film showing a little boy playing with his mother. The performance is characterized by a strong multimedia presence and prolonged scenes of broadcasting from outside the stage, which makes it dangerously close to becoming only a film screening. A multitude of media exists in this production in correlation with a multi-thread story.

I would like also to mention one more performance in the National Stary Theatre in Krakow. It is the play entitled *Kwestia techniki* (2015)[13] directed by Michał Buszewski, where equipment operators of the National

11 Interesting analysis of performances of *Gwiazda śmierci* (2010) and *Kronos* (2013) directed by K. Garbaczewski was performed by Joanna Jopek in the chapter *Fabryka realnego. Medium filmowe i telewizyjne w teatrze Krzysztofa Garbaczewskiego*, [in:] *Teatr wobec filmu. Film wobec teatru,* E. Partyga, L. Sokół, Eds. Oficyna wydawnicza Errata, Warszawa 2015, p. 114-127.

12 Information on the premiere and cast come from www.stary-teatr.krakow.pl [accessed: 29.11.2016]

13 Information on the premiere and cast come from www.stary-teatr.krakow.pl [accessed: 29.11.2016].

Stary Theater perform as actors. The title perfectly captures the nature of the use of multimedia in that or other performances by this director. How we make sense of what we see, how the actor maintains a relationship with the audience, is "a matter of technique". From the very entrance to the theater, we can see examples of the use of multimedia. On the side walls, visual projections of haiku quotations are displayed, alluding to the play. After a few moments starts a sequence of previously recorded video-cards of the characters (equipment operators in the National Stary Theater) in the play starts. Another element is live video broadcasting. Actors, on a mock stage imitating the real one they perform on, play out a scene showing how they invented the idea of making a performance about themselves – the equipment operators – using their hands. The viewer watches events that are happening on stage and on one large screen created from joined folding screens. Then, with the help of the same camera, the actors film themselves on the stage, to take the camera with them and leave the room to get on a taxi and come to the chamber stage of the theater. At least so it seems. The moment of transition from live broadcasting to a finished film prepared for the performance is practically imperceptible. Only when one of the actors appears on the stage during the broadcasting, the viewers become aware that they have been manipulated by the technology.

Let us now look at the Teatr Groteska's Adult Viewers' Stage. The staging of *Przemiany* (2014)[14] directed by Adolf Weltschek and Małgorzata Zwolińska with animations by Małgorzata Zwolińska and Emilia Metzel, combines elements of the dance theater and visual theater. Multimedia animations play quite a central role in the performance, mainly due to the fact that the audience are viewing what is happening on the stage through the media. This is due to the design of the stage design: in front of the stage there is a gigantic screen that the video images are cast on. At the time of illuminating the stage, the spectators can see the actors, however, the effect of "vision through the screen" remains. The visuals are kept abstract – interplay of lights and colors, sometimes relating to real-world forms of nature like animated flowers, grass, butterflies or rain drops streaming down a window glass. For the most part, however, the visuals do not have specific shapes, but merely fuzzy features reminiscent of smoke, rocks or waves. In the background of the scene a second, smaller screen was placed. The screens are the extension of each other, and locking the dancers in this multimedia loop highlights the fact that the multimedia are an integral part of the performance. An important visual element is comprised of animations of the characters – the ones seen on the screen, but not only. For example, looking at the dance scene of the actors or dancers impersonating

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14 Information on the premiere and cast come from www.groteska.pl [accessed: 29.11.2016].

the idea of yin and yang in their white and black costumes, we can see on the visuals other similar characters that perform a similar choreography. The theme of the double presence of the dancers on the stage is repeated several times. There is also a scene in which an actress, as it were, performs with characters that appear only in the form of an animation. The performance was undoubtedly prepared with great emphasis on the form of the imaging. The use of the media in such a way seems to be readable, however, it makes it more difficult to focus on the plot of the play.

Another example of the application of the multimedia in the theater are the screenings by Tomasz Wetland used in the play *Szaleństwa nocy* (2015)[15] directed by Iwona Jera, staged in the Teatr Bagatela. Initially, the media narrative is carried out in a classical way as a background for the plot played out on the stage. We see close-ups on restaurant equipment when reference is made to the meeting the characters in such a place; we see Krakow' streets, buildings or the Planty Gardens when the characters are walking around the city. This is complemented by many-colored animations to accompany the song performed by the main character, *Przeżyj to sam*, and the photo of a church vaulted ceiling with a subtitle saying "Rejon Boże dary", accompanying the wedding scenes. The end of the performance is surprising, though, with the words THE END appearing on the screen at the end, followed by end credits with the names of the director, the cast and thanks for those who contributed to creating the performance. Film in the theater. It is tempting to just add that it is positive that the theatrical audience did not start leaving their places as it is the custom in the cinema. They stayed in their seats until the end to sing *Przeżyj to sam* with the actors before they go.

Using multimedia in the form of a staging set is common in many modern stagings. It is worth mentioning, for example, the performances directed by Wojciech Kościelniak in Juliusz Słowacki Theater in Krakow. In *Ziemia obiecana* (2011), multimedia complement the minimalist set design by Damian Styrna. Spinning gears and other technical elements highlight the industrial character of the drama's space, and they interact with the music, using a convention of rhythmic sounds imitating factory noises. In *Solaris* (2016) on the decoration placed under the ceiling reminiscent of a planet, various visuals are shown. This is mainly done by using light and color to create abstract forms which are reminiscent of microscopic samples or a zoomed in image from outer space. In *Zagraj to jeszcze raz, Sam* (directed by Krzysztof Babicki, 2016, Juliusz Słowacki Theater), the audience can watch excerpts from the *Casablanca* (Michael Curtiz, 1942). The farewell scene of the hero and his mistress Linda – the

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15   Information on the premiere and cast come from www.bagatela.pl [accessed: 29.11.2016].

wife of his friend – will be paired with a scene of the film at the airport.[16] In *Kartoteka* by Marcin Kalisz (2015, Teatr Ludowy)[17] 40 small screens imitating old TVs were used. Recordings or broadcasts from cameras installed in rooms adjacent to the stage room, outside of the main stage, are shown on them. It is also worth mentioning a multimedia protagonist-narrator in the play *Baśnie z 1001 bloku* (2016, directed by Magdalena Miklasz)[18] in the Łaźnia Nowa Theater. Next to the presented photographs and documentaries, an animated character appears in the play, based on the modulator (the future human being and the basis for the scale of proportions proposed by Le Corbusier), who tells viewers about data obtained from research. Adam Zapała was responsible for the multimedia used on the stage.

Due to the limited volume of the text is not possible to discuss a larger number of performances that create space with the use of new media, however, it is worth mentioning some new premieres from the last five years, such as: *Sprawa Gorgonowej* (2016) in the National Stary Theatre, *Lot nad kukułczym gniazdem* (2015), *Pitawal* (2016) and *Układ* (2013) in the Teatr Bagatela, *Mały Książę* (2015) and *Inne rozkosze* (2016) in the Teatr Scena STU*, Mroczna gra albo historie dla chłopców* (2011) and *Do dna* (2016) – degree performances of students from the AST National Academy of Theatre Arts in Krakow or *Klub miłośników filmu Misja* (2013), *Kowboj Parówka* (2016) and *Przypadek wg Krzysztofa Kieślowskiego* (2016) in the Teatr Łaźnia Nowa. As can be seen, the topic of using the media in plays staged on Krakow's stages is an extensive field for the analysis of this phenomenon.

Forms of multimedia advertising

The development of the latest technologies is closely linked with the presence of the theater in the area of the new media. Theaters have their websites and social network profiles. Websites devoted to the theater that contain collections of recorded performances the users can access at any time, such as Ninateka.pl, are gaining popularity.[19] Websites serve both an informative and the advertising function.

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16 Information about the premiere and the creators of *Ziemia obiecana*, *Solaris*, *Zagraj to jeszcze raz, and Sam* come from www.slowacki.krakow.pl [accessed: 29.11.2016].

17 Information on the premiere and cast come from www.ludowy.pl [accessed: 29.11.2016].

18 Information on the premiere and cast come from www.laznianowa.pl [accessed: 29.11.2016].

19 For more on this, cf.: A. Krzemińska, *Wirtualne przestrzenie teatru*, [in:] Perspektywy kultury, 12 (1/2015), Kraków 2015, p. 177-190.

Theaters are using trailers or teasers, which had been characteristic of the film industry, to promote themselves. According to the Polish language dictionary the first one is "fragments of a film displayed repeatedly as an announcement", a teaser is used to refer to a "short cutscene preceding the proper lead of a film or television series" or "an advertisement that does not reveal the name of the company or the product being advertised, designed to arouse the curiosity of the recipient". These definitions refer to the film rather than theater. Only for the Polish term *zwiastun*, also contained in the same dictionary, a reference to the theater is made: *Zwiastun* is a "highlight of something, a short film advertising another film or performance, etc.".[20] Theatrical trailers are usually assembled video clips from the play imitating a film trailer, or one longer scene from a given performance. It also happens that the trailer is a visual form completely independent from the performance. The images are not taken from the staging, but prepared for the sake of the trailer. Most of Krakow' s theaters use this type of highlights of their performances, e.g. the National Stary Theater, Juliusz Słowacki Theater, Teatr Ludowy, Teatr Bagatela or Łaźnia Nowa. A popular medium used for this purpose is YouTube. Collections of trailers can also be found on websites devoted to the theater, such as Dziennikteatralny.pl or Teatrdlawas.pl.

Another relatively new form of media in advertising theaters have been LED screens. In the area of Krakow such screens can be seen on the buildings of the Teatr Bagatela and Teatr Scena STU. The ways of presenting theatrical arts are evolving from the traditional placards to attention-grabbing visual presentations. As Dorota Rak note in her article *Reklama teatralna w nowych mediach*, "LED screen advertising is a kind of a bridge between television and static big format advertising. It draws both from the glass screen and posters. Even though there is no sound, the advertisement uses moving digital images, while maintaining a large size."[21]

Summary

The development of new technologies has brought new opportunities to the theater performances. It also provides new means and space to advertise the activities. It penetrates into the spaces where a potential viewer is: urban spaces or the virtual spaces of the Internet. The theater opens more and more to technological innovations that allow it to create new forms of messages – both

20 Definitions of the terms: trailer, teaser, pol. *zwiastun* have been taken from: *Słownik języka polskiego*, http://sjp.pwn.pl/, [accessed: 29.11.2016].

21 Cited in: D. Rak, *Reklama teatralna w nowych mediach*, [in:] Zarządzanie mediami Vol. 2(1)2014, p. 29-49, doi: 10.4467/23540214ZM.14.003.3116, www.ejournals.eu/ZM, [accessed: 29.11.2016].

on the stage where the spectator is a direct participant, and the indirect ones where the spectator's participation is preceded by theatrical trailers or where repeated participation is possible by watching the recorded performance again. Using technical means extends the range of media that make up the theater. The intermediality of the theater is evidenced by phenomena occurring therein, comprising the transfer of content between various media (intermedia exchange) as well as mediation of one medium by means appropriate to the other, which is mentioned as characterizing the intermedia activity by Christopher Balme.[22] In the article *Wielość mediów w teatrze i ich wzajemne relacje – analiza problemu,* Eli Rozik argues for the coexistence of multiple media in one work. According to the author this is possible because all these media are iconic in nature, i.e., they refer to image-based perception.[23]

The intermediality of the theater opens new creative perspectives for practitioners and theoreticians of the theater. Questions that arise in the context of the theme discussed relate to the role of the actor and their presence on the stage. As Paulina Tchurzewska notes in her article *Teatr i media: Wyzwania cielesności*, the presence of the media on the scene highlights the role of the human body as a unique media message.[24] We may ask whether the use of mediated technologies moves us away from the living actor, or perhaps, on the contrary, directs us towards them. The answers to this question are mixed. Only the analysis of the individual performances with mediated content can tip the scales one way or the other.

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22 Ch. Balme, *Wprowadzenie do wiedzy o teatrze*, transl. by W. Dudzik and M. Leyko, Wyd. Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2002, p. 204.

23 E. Rozik, *Wielość mediów w teatrze i ich wzajemne relacje – analiza problemu*, [in:] *Amalgamaty sztuki*, op. cit., p. 19.

24 P. Tchurzewska, *Teatr i media: Wyzwania cielesności,* [in:] *Teatr wśród mediów,* A. Duda, M. Wiśniewska, B. Oleszek, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, Toruń 2015, p. 91.

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