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Theatralia. 2014, vol. 17, iss. 2, pp. 250-251

ISSN 1803-845X (print); ISSN 2336-4548 (online)

Stable URL (handle): <https://hdl.handle.net/11222.digilib/130900>

Access Date: 16. 02. 2024

Version: 20220831

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Tomáš Kubart

'O' – Scenographic Video-Essays

'O' – *Scénografické videoeseje* [Scenographic video-essays], Sodja Lotker (curator),
18 Mar–13 Apr 2014, Colloredo-Mansfeld Palace, Prague.

The intermedial and theatrically retro-graphical exhibition 'O' – *Scénografické videoeseje* ('O' – Scenographic Video-Essays), held at the Prague Quadriennale 2014 under the curatorial leadership of Sodja Lotker, became an eloquent statement of terminological interpretation of the term 'scenography', and its shift in recent decades. The exhibition presented an entirely new work created just for this purpose. It is the installation of four Czech designers of the younger generation, who also figure among the leading professionals in their field. Czech, or rather Czechoslovak, stage design exceeded its own departmental boundaries in the past, and very quickly became a part of the postmodern reflection on its theoretical definition. The work of Josef Svoboda and the first years of PQ have been at the forefront of Czechoslovak stage design since 1967.

Stage design plays an increasingly important role in the postmodern conception of theatre and its importance expands and blurs in proportion to the postmodern theatre. With the semantic shifts of 'actor' and 'stage space' the very meaning of scenography (stage design) is changing too – e.g. auditory elements often become components of scenography, etc. Along with this movement we can still feel the movement of the surface: the shifting boundary of expressive possibilities is the transformation of meaning and recording media.

While the possibilities of scenography treatise of space have been extended in the past, it is storage media that still considerably limited creators (voluntarily adopted rules). The second limitation was the given exhibition space of a clearly decaying Colloredo-Mansfeld Palace.

Expanding the scenic space with the help of recording media was a central pillar of the exhibition. With the use of a formal reversal of identities and aesthetic time loops the individual authors did not try to cross the boundaries of the media, but they rather humbly observed a possible extension of the stage design elements – which I consider a very sensible move. It seems that any attempts of further definitions would be just a countermovement against the curator's intentions and against the artists themselves.

Kamila Polívková based her auditory space on an assembly of partial interviews with scenographer Marek Cpin. *Cpin It* (4:05 sec) divides the actor – Marek Cpin – and it lets viewers perceive the two timelines of his actions; each one of them taking place in a different time at a different place. The video shows Cpin trying on various costumes from the *Husa na provázku* Theatre fund, but the soundtrack captures a completely different situation and does not illustrate the scenes that take place on the videotape. "Why should actors understand our point right away?" is one of the questions that echo through the soundtrack.

Marek Cpin installed the environment *Navždy sám* (Forever alone) accompanied by audio recording. He borrowed segments of the environment from the funds of the Studio hrdinů Theatre. These are four columns each consisting of four square mattresses above which a baroque mirror floats on the high ceiling of the Alliprandi building. They call for relaxation. If a visitor gives way to this calling and lies down on a simple bed, his headphones will offer ambient music, and he can be transported on its waves through the baroque period, while watching a series of projected images.

Lucia Škandlíková presented her *LIVE-show* on the footage 9:30 sec. She has combined the experiences of two people presented to her audience by complete strangers. On two separate screens different people then appeared reading parts of an interview between characters named generically Tonda and Petra. Škandlíková opened up the space between the boundaries of identity and the insecurity of particular actors in the presentation of certain quotes helped to address the problem of identification and self-determination.

Antonín Šilar made the critical perspective on theater, and art, subjects of similar analysis and decomposition. *13 minutes of*

Interspace consists of four LCD screens on which the recordings of the following stagings, *Můj romantický příběh* (Petr Bezruč Theatre, Ostrava), *Hospoda na slamníku*, and *Domov Sue Ryder* (Prague, Primary School 'Kostelní', railway station Prague-Smíchov), take place. The recordings of performances are accompanied by audio recordings of dialogues of spectators. They enjoy conversations about the productions either in private, or simply outside the theatre premises. The screens are situated emblematically on old book series, e. g. "Encyclopedia for school and home", to evoke the Czechoslovak tradition of the DIY culture of the fifties.

Each of the installations embraces different means of thematizing the aspects of borders and respecting their limits, not crossing them. It thereby depicts the contemporary Czech stage design at the end of a cycle which started with the successful and experimental 1960s and now ends with a calm art form that no longer strives to cross the boundaries. Rather, it tries to achieve the same quality results by respecting the lines – as if the Czech stage design paraphrased the words of the tragically deceased Czech director Petr Lébl: "There are certain boundaries which I just love to respect."