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CAN MIRROR BE A PSYCHOLOGICAL INSTRUMENT: HOW PSYCHOLOGICAL IS SVOBODA'S USE OF MIRROR GENERATING AS A PSYCHO-PLASTIC AND DIGITAL STAGE?

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ABSTRACT

Josef Svoboda believes that the theatre is a living thing; therefore, scenography should not be fixed and tell all at once. Thus he is associated with the kinetic stage in which he uses mirrors, various lighting and projection techniques overcome the limitations of a proscenium theatre. The mirror differs itself from projectors and lights since he uses the mirror as a substantial element in the stage. More importantly, in his scenography, mirror transforms the stage into a dramatic and digital atmosphere even though it is not a digital device itself (analogue). He explores the digital and technological scenographic spaces by combining mirrors with technological instruments. What is reflected in the mirror is not randomly selected objects but connected to context, history, the memory of the plays because Svoboda gives different roles to the mirrors to refer the inner world of the spectators and their psychology. Nonetheless, he does not elaborately explain why the mirror is helpful to create psychological space or what he found psychological about the mirror is. Considering the psychological meaning of mirror, Lacan finds the mirror as a powerful object to construct identity through the reflection and he categories this self-construction within three orders; imaginary, symbolic, and real. This study examines the mirrors of Svoboda to find out how psychologic his staging is and how Lacanian three orders could be represented by his scenography while investigating the potential of the mirrors to generate psycho-plastic and digital stages.

Keywords: Josef Svoboda, scenography, psycho-plastic stage, mirror, Lacan.

INTRODUCTION

This essay will explore the concept of the mirror as a potential guiding element in the scenography of Josef Svoboda, the renowned Czech theatre designer. Svoboda proposed a psycho-plastic stage to refer a flexible and adaptable performance environment that were equipped with the latest technological and mechanical systems. His aim was to get multiple setups by using the same modules that “would be mobile and able to join in various combinations so as to form a transformable, psycho-plastic space” (Burian, 1971: 34). He mainly used lighting, projector and a set of mirrors as his modules since he believed that “ they would have the further capacity of carrying other objects on and off with them” (Burian, 1971: 34). Consequently psycho-plastic space meant the dynamic and ephemeral nature of mixed media spaces, referring to the important role of the inner world of the spectators. This research analysis mirror as a physiological instrument, it has the potential to carry more meaning on and off them. That is to say; there is one more layer to the use of the mirror in Svoboda’s staging since the mirror could generate different meanings through its material and metaphorical quality. Since Svoboda does not know how or why the mirror is used as a psychological element and why each play is representing the different layers of human psychology through the surface of the mirror I though there is a gap in between the mirror and psycho-plastic means that should be filled by a psychological research to show that they are linked. Therefore by taking the mirror not only as an object but as a psychological device to design psycho-plastic spaces, the main methodological approach of this research will be constructed regarding to human psychology.

Method and Scope

Unsurprisingly, Svoboda finds mirror really dynamic and psychological elements, although he does not comprehensively explain why or how a mirror can be used to reflect the different state of human psychology or what is really psychological about it. Considering theatre plays mostly represent a segment of human lives, Svoboda’s psychological space actually means the psychology of humans, their society or environment. Therefore in this research methodological approach will be chosen as Lacanian psychoanalysis and parallel to his three orders of human psychology, to examine what makes mirror psychological. Taking the statement above “ the inner world of the spectator in the surface of the mirror” as a starting point, the mirror here will recall the Lacanian psychology in which inner world of the self was structured by seeing themselves in the mirror. Lacan proposed the mirror stage to emphasise how psychologically important a mirror was to develop human psyche because introducing the mirror; the human psyche develops imaginary, symbolic and real orders (Levine, 2008: 15-16). Considering the link between the psycho-plastic spaces and the inner world of the self, the scope of this study will be to examine the mirror as a the representation of three orders via the scenographic mirror in four different stages by Svoboda, in *Hamlet* (1965) the *Insect Comedy* (1965), *The Wedding* (1968) and *La Traviata* (1992). While examining them, this paper will attempt to describe their context and assess what the dynamic roles of the mirrors are and why Svoboda chose them to create the key moments in each play, especially in *Hamlet* and *The Wedding*. The stages of the *Insect Comedy* and *La Traviata*,

however, tell a different story, as the mirror has always had a central role in both of these plays. Although the Lacanian orders are interlinked to one another, to help the reader, I will examine *the imaginary*, *the symbolic*, and *the real* order respectively. I will then explain the intricacies of each Lacanian stage and how each stage can be pinpointed in the works of Svoboda to weave more patterns onto the idea of the mirror as a guiding psychological element. Also, it will explore the term of psycho-plastic and technological space in the scenography of Svoboda by showing how a mirror can be adaptable and flexible equipment that can be assigned a different meaning from stage to stage. The mirrors have never lost its importance and become a crucial device of dramatic spaces for years. Hence, this paper will scrutinise contemporary scenographers, such as Robert Lepage who has been inspired by the mirrors used in the Svoboda designed-dynamic stages. In conclusion, this research will look at the idea of the mirror from a new perspective what is this new perspective, giving a hint and exploring further what other possibilities of the mirror there are out there creating physically, as well as psychologically built platforms.

Reflection of the Imaginary Order

Imaginary is the term to describe one of the Lacanian stages in which a child sees their image reflection towards a mirror or a reflective surface for the first time. They recognise the total form of their bodies and identify themselves with this imaginary form that is different from other images as they have independent existence with different exterior images (Homer, 2005: 24). Their fascination with their own mirrored images was the recognition of the concept of ego (“I” or “moi”). Lacan differentiates a child from a monkey because the monkey is not as interested in its own image in the mirror as a child. This self-adoration of the child is called *primary narcissism* that is coined by Freud to describe the affections toward to objects (Storr, 2001, p.57-60). A mirror is associated with narcissism (the Greek myth is based on a hunter who fell in love with his reflection in the water) since it is a device that produces an illusionary “I” image of the person who looks at and starts developing an ego-ideal (an ideal self) then onwards. Ego-ideal (*idealich, moi ideal*) is constructing and projecting an image of one’s own ideal, wants to be or show others (Margolis, 2014: 57). Lacan believes that ego is constructed but do not exist in when we born (Benvenuto and Roger, 1986: 52). While Lacanian imaginary gives the mirror the role of a device that represents self-admiration, narcissism, and ego-ideal through reflection, constructs an imaginary self to show their environment and make them believe this image exists in reality. In that respect, the mirror plays a very similar role in Svoboda’s staging of Hamlet. Needless to say, that story of Hamlet is based on taking revenge of his King father (King Hamlet) against his uncle (new King Claudius) since the ghost of King Hamlet appears and tells his son young Hamlet that his death was not an accident but killed by his brother (new King Claudius). Hamlet has always been the subject of psychology to analyse who the ghost is? Why he only talk to Hamlet although he was visible to some others? Moreover, why Hamlet did not kill his uncle? Directed by Otomar Krejja, Hamlet was staged by Svoboda in Brussel (1965). Krejja believed that “the ghost is Hamlet’s alter ego; not Hamlet’s father, but a fiction created by Hamlet to gain the support of the people and turn them against the usurper. Hamlet talks to himself, he makes the dialogue and persuades himself “ (Svoboda cited on Burian, 1971: 124). Believing in the ghost is Hamlet

himself, Svoboda used a mirror to represent the ghost as a reflected, self-created image of Hamlet. He describes his creative process as: “To symbolise the alter ego concept concretely, a mirror was the only answer” (Svoboda cited on Burian, 1971: 124). His scenic design for Hamlet was a massive wall that was solid but composed, cavities and rectilinear elements, which could slide forward to form different platforms and staircases. Then he hung the mirror by forty-five-degree angles over the full width of the set to reflect the set as seen from above. This dynamic stage became more striking when he placed the mirror as a central element since it duplicated the dynamic movements of the wall beside Hamlet’s reflection above himself (image 1-2). He says “I had the image of two great birds confronting each other” (Svoboda cited on Burian, 1971: 124). The reason for this confrontation is the multiplying effect of the mirror that creates illusory, fragmented images. Lacan points out; there is always a split between their ego-images and living bodies, and also he believes that the painting Hieronymus Bosch can be given an example of fragmented, dismembered, dramatised image of the body (Hall, 2004: 83; Levine, 2008: 72).



Image 1. Bosch, *Garden Of Earthly Delights - Hell* (Detail) Represents the Fragmented Bodies

Hence they can never fully embody their ego-images in the mirror because they do not see themselves from a first-person perspective but from a *third* person perspective (Frymer & Broughton, 2011: 22). Thus they identify themselves with the gaze of another person the same as a conversation between Hamlet and his reflection in the mirror (image 1). Considering his *psycho-plastic approach*, Svoboda could discover how to combine mirror and lighting to devise the text and represent the ghost in Hamlet through the technological devices. Working as a flexible instrument, the mirror is first a physical scenographic element with and without light. Moreover, second, it is the imaginary mirror that is a dramaturgical element to represent the text in which the uncompleted, multitudinous and fragmented image of self which desires to be like someone else. Nonetheless, this desire is broken up by the Symbolic order which regiments the infant through the prohibition of incestuous desire.

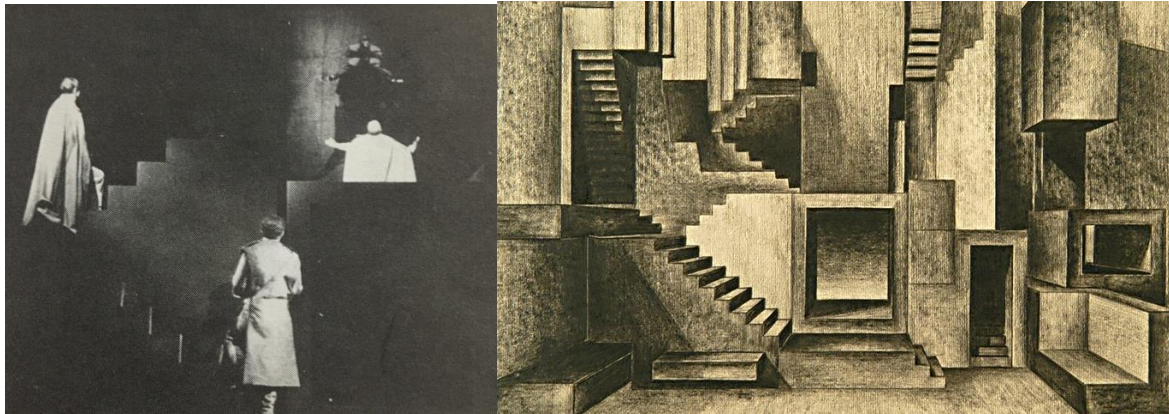


Image 2. Hamlet and His Reflection

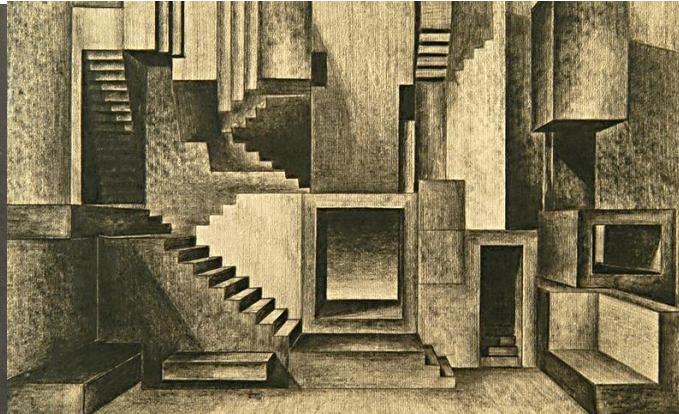


Image 3. Dynamic Walls and the Suspended Mirror

Reflection of the Symbolic Order

At the Imaginary or Mirror Stage, the child has not developed their linguistic skills. By the time their linguistic skills develop, they find themselves in the social order. Levi Strauss believes language, kinship and marriage laws, economics, and religion, all of which are the elements of the symbolic system that constitutes societies. Having been stimulated by Strauss, Lacan developed the symbolic order concerning those who find themselves in pre-established social networks and codes in society before the child's birth (Zafiroopoulos, 2010: 64). *Within the same month in Prague (1965) when Svoboda produced Hamlet, he also produced The Insect Play (or Insect Comedy)*. Unsurprisingly he used the mirror, and its *illusionary and multiplier effect as a scenic element again*. While the mirror represents the internal state of one character in Hamlet, it used to the central and total action of The Insect Comedy (Burian, 1971: 128). Consisting of the external image of the self and sense of I, mirror stands for the "signified" in Hamlet whereas it stands for the signifier in The Insect Play since it signifies the social order. Lacan describes the symbolic order with the rule of the father. It is really similar to the Oedipus complex of Freud in which a boy desires his mother and is against his father (Storr, 1989: 33-37). In Lacanian symbolism, the father is just a signifier for the system, the domain of law and restrictions, rules of communication. (The Unconscious develops with language and narratives in this order. Therefore Lacan maintains that: unconscious is a structure like a language because the language or the words are the signifiers of the web of signification). The symbolic order is the web of signifiers that are meaningful with other signifiers from the same system. Covering all social structures from language to law, Symbolic order is the world of the symbol that represents a photograph of a society with its system of laws, desires and prohibitions. Written by Čapek brothers and published in 1921, The Insect comedy is a satiric story which tells the story of myriad insects and the multi-layered and complex society which binds them after the post-World War Era I. Humankind viewed in the image of an insect world and "Čapek's insects show human passions, instincts and vices, and the bloody lusts which make human intelligence hideous" (Čapek & Porter & Majer, 1999: 10-12). In this symbolic world of the play, Svoboda aimed to deal with representing the relationship among the insects and human kind as he states; "how to reveal the sheer multitudinousness of man, the sheer numbers that make one question the difference between insect and people. For instance, the disturbing or depressing feeling

you sometimes get at a busy railway terminal or airport- how to project this on stage?" (Svoboda cited on Burian, 1971: 118). As his main concept was staging a social play according to the social context of the production, he wanted to represent an insect world covering the earth and sky, the entire cosmos (Svoboda, 1993: 51-52). His stage consisted of a turntable that was covered by different clothes layers with two huge honeycombs segmented mirror. As Svoboda points out "we created space by means of the overhead view provided by the mirrors: two mirror surface in themselves would multiply the image reflected, but their honeycomb segmentation is what chiefly created the effect of space and multiplicity here" (Svoboda cited on Burian, 1971: 118). Not to mention the fact that psycho-plastic spaces of Svoboda were also self-contain energy sources and technologies so that turntable could coherently work and be combined with the mirror to turned it into a digital space in which the live stream movement was produced by the actors and the turntable machines. This time he did not reflect the inner world of man as he did Hamlet, but he reflected an image of the symbolic world of the play. Therefore what the mirror reflected was not the image of the self but the image of the representative world with its political or social systems (image 4-5).

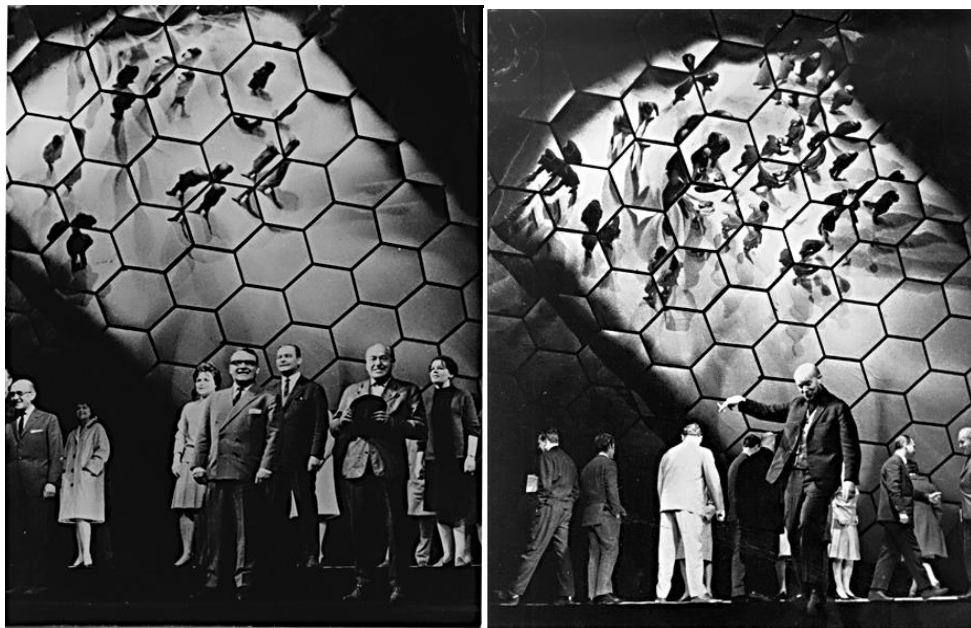


Image 4-5. Honeycomb Segmented Mirrors and the Reflection of The Actors As They Are Insects.

A very similar usage of the mirror can also be seen in *La Traviata* (1992). Written by Verdi, the opera concerns Violetta Valéry, a celebrated courtesan who must choose between her desire for high society and her longing for love in 19th century Paris. It has three settings: the first is the salon (living room) in the heroine, Violetta's house, the second is Violetta's country house outside of Paris, and the third is Violetta's bedroom (Purcell, 2014). Svoboda used vast mirror panels that were tilted 45 degrees at the back of the stage to reflect the floor and the action. A series of floor cloths were applied to illustrate Verdi's era that changes each scene as each layer is stripped away (Burian, 2005: 112) (image 6-7-8). Victorian Opera Artistic Director Richard Mills explains that "the scenic artist is literally holding a mirror up to society's hypocrisy, bringing the audience into

the world of courtesan Violetta Valery and inviting them to reflect on their own stories of love and loss.” (Mills cited on Eslake, 2004: 4) At the end, he put the audiences in a voyeuristic position since mirror functions there as an enormous peeping machine or a telescope as well as a huge digital screen that transforms by the scene.



Image: 6-7-8. Mirror Represents The Symbolic World Of La Traviata

Reflection of the Real Order

After the formulation of the imaginary and the symbolic, the real was formulated with what was left over by Lacan. The real is not a thing, material object or even reality but it is unknown, unimagined and unsymbolic as Lacan emphasis the real as an “impossibility” *vis-à-vis* reality (Homer, 2005: 81-84). The real cannot be reduced in the images and the symbols because it is unexpected, uncontrollable things that could happen in delusion and hallucination (Benvenuto & Kennedy, 1986: 152). Therefore, traumas, pain, nightmares are found to be real, and they can be repeated but not be structured as symbols or rules (Bowie, 1991, 105). The notion that the real can be perceived is highlighted in Svoboda’s staging of *The Wedding* (1968), where he used the semi-transparent mirror on a turntable (image 9). The play concerns a soldier who shifts between the past and present or reality to illusion (Albertová, 2008: 211).

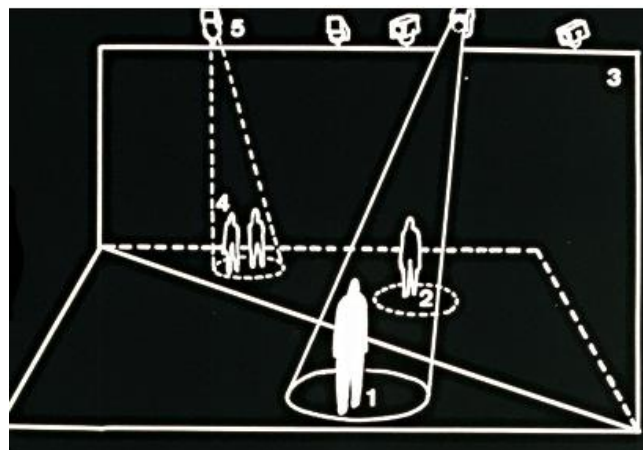


Image 9. 1-Actor In Front Of The Mirror, 2- Mirror Image Of Actor, 3- 50% Transparent Mirror, 4- Actors Behind The Mirror, 5- Lighting Bridge.



Image 10. The Mirror Shows and Hides The Actors Behind It To Represent The Emotional World Of The Protagonist.

A half-transparent mirror helped show the actors, who were behind the mirror, what seemed a rear-projected image on the mirror by the help of the lighting. Objects behind the mirror and the objects in front of the mirror could be aligned in such a way that the frontal objects appeared part of the rear arrangement. Svoboda explains this illusion; “The actor, in short, could be placed within his family circle while also still remaining solitary. The actor could be transplanted from reality to dream, and back again” (Svoboda cited on Burian, 1971: 44). What happened, in reality, was both the adoptable staging of Svoboda and a trick that was provided by the materiality of the mirror that functioned as a transplantation machine with the aid of the lighting. However, what was the real was the real emotional, hallucinatory world or the dream of the character (image 10). Therefore, the real order is different from the imaginary and symbolic order since it does not represent what is pre-ordered. Real is already there without prescriptions of the other two. Lacan used the Borromean node, to demonstrate the relationship among his triad, which is formed of three rings, should one be severed, all three become separate (Levine, 2008: 126). Thus they may not have been mirrored all together in the scenography of Svoboda but what he reflected in the mirror usually corresponded to one of them as Svoboda believes, “the theatre is a living thing that should not to be fixed and told all at once” (Svoboda cited on Burian, 1971: 28). His design approach was appreciated and become a source of inspiration for his later generations. Although the mirror is an analogue instrument, it has been as powerful as other digital technological staging instrument. Svoboda was one of the well-known artists for dramatic digital scenographic spaces, and he discovered the potential of this analogue material to turn his kinetic space into both psychological and digital. Thus he inspired those who wanted to explore digital scenographic spaces. Robert Lepage is one of the scenographers who has traced this kinetic design approach of Svoboda. As Lepage is seen as one of the declared leaders of architectonic scenography, he offers dynamic stage with various technics including video

projections, computerised sets and of course mirrors (Dundjeroviâc, 2007: 109). In his staging of *The Tempest* 1993, he used the mirror since he believes that the mirror is a metaphor to understand the world, and his own personal and cultural identity (Dixon, 2007: 510). For Lepage, usage of the mirror in the scenography of Svoboda was innovative since it provides a cinematic action in its surface even though the mirror itself is not a digital structure itself. Therefore he observes the works of Svoboda to develop his technological staging techniques without refusing but appreciating him.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, Svoboda is a crucial name for the history of scenography due to his contribution to the rapidly expanding field of digital and technological theatre production. In his kinetic stages, he promoted using of the mechanical and technological instrument for the sake of psycho- plastic spaces that identifies the links between three-dimensional space and its ability to relate with the psychological realities both the dramatic action and of the audience (Baugh, 2013: 87). I think choosing a mirror as a scenographic element was not a random choice for him since it is both a powerful physical and psychological device to create different spaces. As I tried to explore in this essay, mirrors of Svoboda can reveal different layers of human state and psychology by challenging Lacanian psychological that reduced the mirror into one phase "ego- imaginary order". Therefore mirror is not just a static material to see the reflection of the self as Lacan declare but rather dynamic and promising for new combinations with technologies. Svoboda maintains "I do not want a static picture, but something that evolves, that has movement, not necessarily physical movement, of course, but setting that is dynamic, capable of expressing changing relationship, feelings, moods" (Svoboda on Burian, 1971: 27). This research was also an attempt to understand Lacanian orders through psycho-plastic spaces of Svoboda and specifically the usage mirror while exemplifying psychological states of text and the dramaturgy that were reflected in the mirror for various plays. What is reflected in the mirror corresponds to different psychological stages of the human and Lacan categorizes them in three orders, imaginary, symbolic, and real that are examined in Svoboda's use mirror in *Hamlet*, *Insect's Play*, *La Traviata* and *The Wedding* to see these orders. All these plays were the written texts that were read by Svoboda to turn into a physical space, and he mainly underlined the sociological and psychological context of the text to represent in the stage. This research shows that theatrical and dramatic spaces are also psychological spaces where actors and props are used to represent a scene that stands for not only a physical environment but also a psychological one. Since scenography is an ephemeral and temporary design environment to represent the play that is story either true or fictional, includes at least one human body in the space. Thus this human cannot be separated from its context, and their psychological situation and this situation is embedded in the dramaturgy of the text that should be read and re-read again and again to get into that world. In that respect, mirrors of Svoboda were to design dramatic spaces that are based on a psychological environment, and he tried to push the limit of this material to teach us what a material can do in the architectural or theatre space.

For the Further Research

Having an architectural and scenographic background, I tried to create an interdisciplinary work between scenography and psychology. The reason why I choose specifically psychology is that space is made for the human body, which exists and unique with its knowledge and behaviour. Therefore space, stage, architecture affect and be affected by human psychology. Moreover, any material, colour and texture may amplify the strength of our memories behaviours or psychological states, so that the importance of the physical environment is enormous. A mirror is just one of these materials, but I guess it is more speculative then we imagine as we can follow it from Foucault. He describes the mirror as “placeless places” since it creates a virtual place where one sees themselves there where they are actually not. Thus it gives the opportunity (of utopia) and the opposite (heterotopia) of seeing where one is absent. (Foucault, 1967: 4). Therefore this research can be developed further to discover other spaces hopefully the digital and technological ones through the mirror while creating a debate between heterotopic architecture and theatrical environment to discuss how mirrors are transforming into architectural space shifters in modern or future architectural scenarios.

PSİKOLOJİK BİR MATERYAL OLARAK AYNA: AYNA'NIN JOSEF SVOBODA SAHNELERİNDEKİ PSİKOLOJİK ANLAMLARI

öz

Çek asıllı ünlü mimar, sahne ve performans sanatları tasarımcısı Josef Svoboda (senograf) tiyatronun yaşayan bir olay olduğuna inanır ve sahne tasarımlarıyla durağanlığı reddeder. Kendine özgü ayna, ışık ve projeksiyon kullanma teknikleriyle Svoboda hareketli sahneler geliştirerek perde önünün sınırlarını zorlar. Özellikle aynayı kullanma stili, ışık ve projeksiyonlardan farklıdır çünkü aynalar sahne tasarımının kendisidir. Bunu ötesinde; aynaların dijital bir doğası olmamasına rağmen Svoboda aynalarla birlikte teknolojik elemanları kullanarak sahnenin hareketliliğine dijital bir boyut kazandırır. Aynalarında görüntüsü yansıyan objeleri gelişigüzel seçmez. Metni ve bağlamı çözümleyerek hedef aldığı sosyal kitleyi ve psikolojiyi yansıtan nesnelere özenle yansıtarak onlara aynalar vasıtasıyla önemli roller verir. Bu sebeple ayna Svoboda için fiziksel olmaktan çok psikolojik bir elemandır ancak Svoboda aynaların neden ve nasıl psikolojik anlamlar çağırıştığını hiçbir zaman detaylıca açıklamaz. Bu araştırma işte tam da bu eksiklikten doğar çünkü fiziksel element olan aynanın psikolojiyle nerde nasıl buluştuğu belirtilmese de psikolojik anlamların inşasında kullanılır. Lacan'a göre kimliğimizi inşa etmeye, aynada kendi yansımamızı görmemizle yani imgesel düzenle başlarız ve sonrasında simgesel ve gerçek düzenle psikolojimizi inşa etmeye devam ederiz. Yani insan psikolojisinin gelişimde de aynı aynanın kullanılması tesadüfi olmamalıdır. Bu makalede Svoboda'nın aynalarının psikolojik mekan tasarımlamak için nasıl kullanıldığı Lacan'ın imgesel-simgesel-gerçek düzenleri metoduyla irdelerken, senografinin bir fiziksel tasarımın ötesinde psikolojik mekânlar olmasının incelenir. Buna ek olarak aynaların fiziksel potansiyellerinin teknoloji desteğiyle ürettiği dijital, tektonik ve esnek mekânlara dair disiplinlerarası bir okuma biçimi sunar.

Anahtar kelime: Josef Svoboda, senografi, psiko-plastik mekan, ayna, Lacan

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Images:

Image 1: Lee van Laer (2013). The Garden of Earthly Delights. [image] Available at:

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Image 2: Burian, JM. (1971) The scenography of Josef Svoboda. Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press. (p.123).

Image 3,4,5: Svoboda, J. (n.d.). Hamlet. [image] Available at: <http://www.svoboda-scenograf.cz/en/productions/> [Accessed 4 Nov. 2017].

Image 6,7,8: Victorian Opera (2012). La Traviata. [image] Available at:

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Image 9,10: Burian, JM. (1971) The scenography of Josef Svoboda. Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press.