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# RECEPTION EFFECTS OF THEATRE IN THE CONTEXT OF TRANSCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

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## **Abstract**

Reception of current theatre and also media arts in the context of transcultural communication is linked mainly to its peculiar expressiveness. The delineated reception effects of authorial poetics of current theatre approaches reflect their expression outreach/effects on recipients. Their description is the result of a long-term examination of various theatre approaches as seen in the tendencies of current staging practice.

*Keywords:* reception effect, transcultural, communication, contemporary theatre

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## **1. Introduction**

It is no wonder that current theatre and media arts have certain communication effects that make them to gain a multidimensional resonance. "By the transmission model of communication, the source (sender, communicator) transmits a message, encodes it using the language or image code and sends it through a transmitter using a certain channel (route, medium) to a receiver (recipient). The recipient receives the encoded message through a certain receiver and decodes it." [1] Mainly, in context of current theatre methods, we can identify a universal way of communication presented by authors in their individual approaches, and their quest to create and achieve the desired effect via their work, etc.

It is obvious that current broad-spectrum theatre approaches (documentary, intermedia, ludic, intertextual, intercultural, etc.) dispose of a large variety of their expression scale. It is thanks to this expression scale that recipients are able to grasp authors' specific staging tendencies by the way of absorbing related expression accents and categories.

A specific expressiveness is being stimulated by a strategic staging method, which is being transformed into an expression result (process result, generative, and reception and communication results). This points to the multidimensionality of theatre poetics, which is present as the very genesis of

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author's creative process (the so-called preliminary phase), through the process of staging generation up to the phase of reception influence on recipients.

## **2. Dimensions of theatre poetics**

### ***2.1. Ethical reception effect***

One of the most dominant reception features of current theatre plays is their expressiveness resulting into moral appeals. This concerns authorial staging strategies with the purpose of delivering substantial ethical messages with the use of appropriate expressions. The sociative aspect of expressions along with their operative use is being placed in the foreground, in order to boost the emotional effect on recipients.

The emotional shock as caused by the theatre work, its message of a moral appeal and an appropriate expression effect stem from the clinical term of catharsis, which has been comprehensively analysed in the theory of drama and has its own parameters of therapeutic expression effects. This situation, appropriately adjusted in terms of expressions, contributes toward a purposeful 'purification' of such passions in a more condense and more dramatic gradation climax. Aristotle in his definition of tragedy views this condition in terms of fear and compassion („...purification of such passions through compassion and fear...“) [2]. Aristotle is not against inducing individual passionate conditions as a matter of principle, as opposed to Plato, who describes this as maleficent. “Then the imitative poetry has the same effect, also as far as the pleasures of love, anger and all covetous feelings are concerned, both painful and pleasant for the soul that accompany each of our activity. It awakens and nourishes and strengthens the feelings, even though it should leave them die away, and makes them masters over us, although they should be mastered in order that we can become better and happier, instead of becoming worse and unhappier.“ [3] Aristotle is doing his utmost to refute this opinion, pointing to positive features of tragedy. According to the American theatrologist Marvin Carlson: “...ordinary interpretation considers catharsis as a Greek medical term, claiming that, as opposed to Plato, tragedy, according to Aristotle, does not stir up passions, but in fact it liberates viewers from them. Therefore, tragedy should work as a homeopathic remedy, which treats problems by applying substances in moderate quantities; in this case it concerns feelings of fear and compassion.“ [4] Czech theatrologist Eva Stehlíková views this rather medical term in several spheres – in irrational and rational ones [5]. This ambivalent level of cathartic effect also obviously concerns authorial theatre. Authors purposefully direct the final reception effect of their authorial plays to this cathartic dimension.

### ***2.2. Educative reception effect***

Along with the ethical orientation of expressions as employed in theatre pieces with the aim of transmitting moral appeals, individual expressions also

clearly contain an educational dimension. Authors via their plays strive to highlight educational goals in applied expression parameters. Achieving this goal is being facilitated significantly by using theatre methods based on reconstructing the subject matter, history and memory of place, and by using unusual authorial updates of dramatic and literary texts, and their intertextual shifts and transpositions. It is not rare to see a staged portrait of a personage and its life, and a staged authorial feature with almost a didactical motivation for staging production.

To achieve the intended educational tendencies of expressions as used in authorial theatre, relevant expression categories are employed and developed traditionally in the staging process itself, as well as in the resulting staging reception effects. This concerns subjectivity, sociativeness, operativeness and an obvious stress on experience. The aforementioned group of categories makes it clear that authors want to inform, instruct and educate the viewer with the use of relatively more striking expressions. By the way of offering a reception experience, they strive to incite interest in knowledge by boosting dramatic effects of the staging form with a more interactive tendency. They thereby contribute toward highlighting what is an obvious communication dimension of theatre piece and of staging means that they have selected. They use a higher dose of illustrative expression, stress on word, clarity, emotional tinge, and subjectivity of experience, repetition and effort to achieve a cognitive (conceptual and rational) effect on viewers. This mostly leads the stage directors to present an emphatic education form of their authorial concepts as part of a strategically elaborated staging form.

### ***2.3. Psychological reception effect***

Another feature of expressiveness as employed by current authorial theatre is its tendency to lead to a psychological dimension of many reception effects. It is again the subject matter that is a source of these expression effects on viewers. Creators of authorial theatre also approach issues such as various mental abnormalities, clinical pathology of mental diseases, and psychological and psychiatric problems, and they also frequently make an intense effort to increase the overall psychological effect of the theatre piece on recipients by using relevant staging means. When it comes to expression categories that they use, it is increased subjectivity, implicitness of expression, or, conversely, intensification of the so-called strikingness of expression. The psychological orientation of the overall reception effect of current authorial theatre stems from authors' motivation to awaken the hidden interior. In other words, in the acting component, they want to externalise mainly psychological contents in appropriate expression appearance by the use of various techniques, and methods of acting presentation (for example, realistic psychological experience, methods of biomechanics, etc.).

The achieved expression effect of a theatre play is most frequently the result of a detailed method, for example of interpretation theatre, which in this case clearly analyses the psychological situation of individual figures. The psychological expression dimension of many plays is understandable, as theatre with its own thematic orientation and conception turns itself toward human person.

Therefore, the perceived expressiveness is very closely connected to the psychological palette of the interior of presented figures in a constantly apparent changeability. After all, theatre is one of the most expressive art forms. Nevertheless, the psychological accents as put forth by authors are frequently not only explicit (clear and authentic in their live presentation), but also implicit (by the way of internal play with deliberately covered interior motives, undertones, etc.). This makes the authorial theatre play a maze of probes examining the internal psychological level of presented figures, these psychological probes being most intimately linked to employed expression categories.

#### ***2.4. Entertainment reception effect***

One expression effect of current theatre and also media arts that must not be neglected is its undeniable orientation on entertainment. This has unambiguously been a legitimate conception of theatre since the antiquity, along with its original, genetically older ritual function. Using the words of Erika Moravčíková, “the media are presenting exciting, even cathartic shows: birth and of life, dangerous and funny situations, diseases of lifestyle – with victories and defeats, natural and human disasters, sights in the Universe and in the interior of our civilisation” [6]. Some makers are often stimulated to staging production by a natural effort to awaken the element of amusement and comicality. This concerns a demarcation of the position of theatre on the boundary of tragicality and comicality. Meanwhile, the category of entertainment belongs to the family of the genre sub-class of comedy.

Therefore, the degrees of entertainment are determined by the extent of comicality of expression employed in the play. Makers seek appropriate ways to make clear and objectify human ridiculousness, sinfulness and stupidity. To achieve this, they use adequate expression and style means. They offer a broad-spectrum entertainment of various sorts, i.e. with various expression effects on recipients. The selected role of entertainment dictates the use of a relevant expression degree on the scale of a relatively broadly stratified comicality of expression. Viewers have various reactions to various kinds of presented authorial entertainment within an authorial theatre piece. This concerns, for example, communal, intellectual, sensationalist, vulgar, perfidious, lewd, naive, primitive, sarcastic, grotesque, tragicomic, folk, snobbish, elitist and mass type of entertainment. A deliberate expression effect that directly influences the recipient is attached to a relatively more extensive enumeration of theatre entertainment elements.

Theatre entertainment and the element of amusement in theatre arts stem from the creative tendency of portraying a comical polarity of the world of human life. To achieve this, makers of authorial theatre use, for example, individual improvisation techniques (Impro League, collective improvisation, authorial dialogical action, etudes, etc.). This way they often scoop up from potential resources of general human comicality, following their own way of creating their peculiar and authentic quality of expression.

### **2.5. Ritual reception effect**

An opposite element vis-à-vis entertainment is an entirely different concept of theatre related to its primordial forms, i.e. rituals. Current theatre approaches reach out to the ritual roots of theatre and theatricality. In ritual, theatre seeks to reinvent collective experience and interactivity of theatre that does not distinguish between actors and the audience. Current authorial staging approaches predominantly draw relevant expression effects from the ritual roots of theatre. In terms of expression system, it is mainly operativeness that gets the upper hand over pictoriality, mainly in the communication sphere of theatre language employed in these authorial staging approaches. It is necessary to involve the audience in an interactive manner, integrate it into what is going on the stage, and create, so to speak, a kind of participation theatre with an accent on ethos, monotony, repetitiveness, etc.

These clearly ritualistic expression components provide a basis for creating a comprehensive expression influence of reception effects of theatre as anchored in reconstructing or even directly initiating ritualistic protoforms. The expression reach is composed of the created structure, composition of the theatre piece, its expressed monotony and principles of repetition. The balancing and, so to speak, unifying effect of the repetitive characteristics of a ritualistic staging approach employed in authorial theatre has a reflexive conclusion. Stage directors in this case attempt to express their own staging concepts in a ritualistic way, i.e. in a detailed manner they use elements of spirituality, religiosity, contemplative tendencies, metaphysics, and universality of the theatre of the world, etc. Reflexive expression effects in the reception sense then sprout from these tendencies.

The ritualistic function of current theatre is related to authors' intense efforts of reconstructing rituals in their immanent theatricality and to viewing rituals as a primordial source of theatre. This has also much to do with authors' quest to introduce an implemented sacral (religious) theme into authorial theatre, and also with the effort of reviving locations in individual staging tendencies, generating and employing principles of expression interiorisation and subsequently exteriorisation of the expression effect as viewed from the reception standpoint. For example, the so-called 'site-specific' theatre approach introduces into current authorial theatre a different level of interactivity, sacralisation of the desacralized, and semiotisation of unusual theatre space by the use of new expressiveness, etc.

## **2.6. Aesthetic reception effect**

The expression influence and reception effects of current theatre in the context of transcultural communication are due to the innate aesthetic potentiality of theatre. Many directors present in their plays significant and peculiar poetics, which also requires capturing parameters of expression quality.

By reflecting poetics, it is possible to penetrate to aesthetically functional expression parameters of the theatre piece. They reflect the aforementioned expressiveness, which is also abstracted from them. Stage directors mostly compose it on constructive composition moulding of a staging corpus. As early as in this early process, it already involves intentional selection and sensitive construction of individual expression tinges. They can be traced back from the structure of the work by the use of an analytical approach. Authorial play works in terms of expression reception effects from the corpus of theatre work. That is why individual aesthetical categories are determined from the nature of functioning and existence of authorial play, from its coherence, or, conversely, from a fragile loose linkage of an integrated stage synthesis.

When it comes to aesthetic expression categories used in such authorial staging approaches, a dominating feature is pictoriality of expression as a superordinate aesthetic expression category, as well as invention (assemblage), analysis, variety, structure and variability. Authors in the staging process put a significant stress on more inventive positions of thematising the staging generation of authorial theatre work corpus. It frequently happens that an authorial play that has emerged shows extraordinary aesthetic postulates from the point of stage component synthesis.

The phenomenon of colour appears to be one of the most efficient aesthetic tendencies of expression effects. Colour in theatre piece has its irreplaceable function in psychological, physiological, synesthetic, associative and cognitive expressions. A colour used in authorial theatre play in serves many ways as a compressed expression shortcut. At the same time, it also transcends toward the universal totality of expression, as by being embedded into the authorial theatre work, it gains a comprehensive expression potential.

## **2.7. Therapeutic reception effect**

Another registered expression tendency of current authorial theatre is its orientation on a special sphere of the so-called dramatherapy or teatrotherapy. Authors in these cases turn their focus on therapeutic purposes and the use of appropriate expression effects. This concerns, for example, many theatres for marginalised groups (homeless, disabled, immigrants, etc.), community theatre groups, minority theatres, etc. Artistic and aesthetic parameters of theatre work are sometimes subordinated to the therapeutic purpose. According to the Czech therapist and pedagogue Milan Valenta, from among all paratheatre systems of therapeutic nature, the sphere of teatrotherapy is the closest one to art [7].

From the point of transcultural communication, the predominating features of staging process include most of all operativeness and apparent sociativeness of expressions with respect to a specific disability. It is disability that determines the degree of expression effects resulting in an increased level of expressiveness, subjectivity, pictoriality, deepened accent on experience, etc.

For example, authorial methods in theatre of the hearing impaired focus on efficient presentation of experience with the use of nonverbal means, gestures and pantomimical speech of hands as part of the acting component. Makers this way in a subtle manner attain expression parameters involving therapeutic effects. Therapy theatre is pretty consequent in composing and creating special expression conditions that contribute toward creating a special and peculiar staging expression and a deliberate rehabilitation of one's own expression.

### ***2.8. Intellectual reception effect***

Finally, reception effects of current theatre can also be reflected in theatre strategies oriented on intentional parameters of thinking. The orientation on a rational reach of authorial play is a transparent bearer of this reception effect of authorial theatre. "This could be explained by the confrontation of the two principles derived from the ancient Greek gods Apollo and Dionysus. The Apollo principle is sober, considerate, intellectual, balanced and harmonic. The Dionysus principle is passionate, excitable, emotional, unbound and conflicting. Both these principles coexist in each of us, but they are rarely balanced." [8]

It concerns making pictoriality of expression present in permanently vivified themes, problems, associations, and on implicit and explicit levels of portrayal. This multiplying expression effect, as part of the overall reception influence, is mostly aimed at intensifying experience and conceptuality, thematising the variety of authorial invention, etc.

Creators apply a more continuous approach in composing their staging idea and follow through with their concept. The authorial play that is being carried out is a place for applying intended projects expressing ideas of its creators. The staging structure in its tectonics then represents a motive source for the reception effect of the entire theatre work. It thereby becomes a constructed model of the maker's theatre thinking, which we, as viewers, are invited to enter.

## **3. Conclusions**

It is evident from the aforementioned reception effects of authorial theatre plays that they are closely linked to specific theatre approaches, methods and authorial strategies. The specific reception effect is then achieved via an evidently symbolic staging approach that becomes a 'rudder' of the indicated expressiveness of theatre play [9].

Reception of current theatre in context of transcultural communication is linked mainly to its peculiar expressiveness. The delineated reception effects of authorial poetics of current theatre approaches reflect their expression

outreach/effects on recipients. Their description is the result of a long-term examination of various theatre approaches as seen in tendencies of current staging practice.

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