

Postmodern Performances of Ancient Greek Tragedy (Aeschylus' *Oresteia* and Euripides' *Electra*)

By Małgorzata Budzowska*

The paper focuses on the analysis of contemporary performances that re-contextualize the ancient Greek tragedies of Aeschylus and Euripides. The analysis is based on three examples of performances: 'Oresteia' by Michał Zadara, 'Oresteia' by Maja Kleczewska, both from the National Theatre and National Opera in Warsaw, and 'Waiting for Orestes: Electra' by Tadashi Suzuki (the Suzuki Company of Toga). The following aspects will be taken under consideration: 1) the relation between the ancient text and its stage adaptation; 2) the re-contextualization of time and space; 3) the change of the stage characters' system; 4) the change of the myth's identity; 5) the aesthetics of postmodernism in contemporary art; 6) the categories of Classics' mise-en-scène by Patrice Pavis. These considerations allow us to identify the trends in postmodern theatre, which use classical texts to diagnose the contemporary condition of man. By turning to the ancient myth and its canonical textual versions, contemporary performing arts indicate a strong relation between tradition and contemporaneity performed in postmodern aesthetics.

Introduction

Contemporary *mise-en-scènes* of ancient dramas oscillate between two extremely reductionist attitudes. One of them – 'pseudo-intellectual' – defines the stage production only as a loyal 'expression and translation of a literary text', while the other completely rejects the text, treating the stage creation as an autonomous piece of art (Übersfeld, 1999: 5-6). The first one assumes the semantic equivalence of a text and its staging (that is, the dominant role of a text), while the second implies a dominance of stage practice. An intellectual approach, starting from the revision of Ben Jonson, has dominated the theatre practice according to the rule: *nihil in gestu nisi in verbis*. Despite the avant-garde projects connected with the Great Reform of Theatre, together with the reformist changes by Stanisławski, Meyerhold, Appia or Craig, until their extreme manifestation in the theatre of cruelty by Artaud, the practice of the 'theatre of text' was the basis for the *mise-en-scène* of classical ancient texts.

Along with the birth of Jacques Derrida's idea of deconstruction, the text of classical drama began to be considered from a polysemantic perspective.

*Assistant Professor, University of Łódź, Poland.

The deconstruction of classical texts has become a way of inventing the future for tradition, a way that protects heredity against the reproduction of finished clichés (Derrida, 1999). This deconstructive invention has come to be a method of contemporary staging of ancient classical drama. According to Patrice Pavis (1988: 29), current productions ‘are characterized by a mild reversal of perspective and an escape from logocentrism that treats a text as a constant element, which decides on the form of staging.’

To deconstruct a text, which is considered as a stable *logos* of a mythical story described in the ancient drama, contemporary theatre uses postmodern language and technique. The postmodern way of speaking about reality is regarded as a dissipative structure. Visual and verbal signs from present culture create different ‘texts’ by which we can designate and understand reality. They never construct a fully defined and stable form – the postmodern language resigns from a synthetic and holistic approach. From the hermeneutics’ point of view, this way of thinking and expressing thoughts is against interpretation. Moreover, this is a situation when an artist wants to (or must to) formulate his own private language used only for the time of creation. It is not so important if this language will be understood in the time of reception of an artistic work.

The postmodern writer or artist is in the situation of a philosopher: the text, which he writes, the work, which he creates, is not governed by any set of rules and they cannot be judged decisively through existing categories. The text or artistic work tries to find rules and categories, which allow for a judgment. Therefore, the writer and artist work without rules in order to lay down the rules of that, what will be completed. Hence, the text and artistic work are events (Lyotard, 1988: 30-31).

Rules and categories can be discovered *ex post facto*, after the time of creation and, very often, after the time of reception. Such a tactic to use the language of expressing an artistic idea, which is still *in statu nascendi*, has a particular impact on theatre creation.

According to Lehmann (2006), postmodern theatrical techniques are characterized by parataxis, simultaneity, play with the density of signs, excess, musicalization, and corporeality. Parataxis, understood as coordinate conjunctions, implicates a lack of hierarchy. Simultaneity provokes a synesthetic perception, when word, image and music are played at the same time. Excess can be observed in a play with density of stage signs. It is an excess of absence or excess of presence – a stage is significantly empty or cluttered. Corporeality plays a privileged role as the realization and actualization of human existence (Merleau-Ponty, 2012). Musicalization is included in this game, where we deal with a polyphony that is intercultural as well as interspecies. All these postmodern factors mentioned above will be analyzed in the next sections in relation to the contemporary re-contextualization of ancient myths, which exist in its dramatic versions included in Greek tragedy.

Postmodern Staging

In his typology of *mise-en-scène*, Pavis (1988) indicates three main forms of performance in regard to the relation between the text and the stage. Auto-textual staging refers to the internal logic of a text without allusions to the external meta-textual reality, whereas an ideo-textual one focuses on meta-text and tries to change the dramatic text in the new ideological (political, social, psychological) context. However, what becomes most interesting in the scope discussed in this paper, is inter-textual staging, which tends to capture the relations between staging, drama and its stage tradition, aesthetic and social contexts and meta-theatrical reality. *Mise-en-scène*, which is inspired by so many texts of culture, invalidates a dominant role of the dramatic text, suggesting the abolition of all hierarchies. On the other hand, we deal with designed aesthetics of perception, which, according to Stanley Fish's theory (Fish, 1980), sets the recipient as an agent of interpretive community. An interpreter is involved in some system of convictions and interests of his own community and 'reads' the production as an inter-textual variation, which refers to many different aspects of his community life. Pavis explains what should be the main contrivance of staging: 'Disturb on the stage what is quite clear in a text, or clarify what a text had dimmed; such mechanism of ambiguity and designation is the staging core' (Pavis, 1988: 32). Seeing that intertextuality is not only a domain of literature, we can agree that it is strongly linked to a non-discursive medium of art.¹ The literariness and theatricality of the ancient myth become one of the issues in staging, where the stage director is a mediator between the text/texts and stage, and who can complete the deficiency existing in both the literary and theatrical text (Übersfeld, 1999). The mutual filling of gaps in both systems of signs – linguistic of the literary text and meta-linguistic of the theatrical text – is an interpretative gesture of the stage director.

Each concretization of a text on the stage is an event of inventive character, because this is a stage director's countersignature, determined by such factors as: *signifiant* (the work), *signifié* (the aesthetic subject) and meta-text. Meta-textual conditioning defined as the socio-cultural phenomena is a variable which modifies the meanings produced in the act of reading. However, most important seems to be a meta-text existing 'rather not alongside to the dramatic text, but as - in some sense – inside it, as a result of the concretization process (from *signifié* through the social context to *signifiant*)' (Pavis, 1988: 29). Such understanding of meta-text exists only in the form reconstructed by the recipient, so that it is the sum of the division of a 'supplementary ration' (*ration supplémentaire*) intended to supplement the lack (Derrida, 1970). Inter-textual staging emphasizes its dependence on different texts of culture, on an equal scale in both the process of its creation and its reception.

¹Cf. H. White (1978). *Tropic of Discourse. Essays in Cultural Criticism*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. U. Eco (1986). *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

This procedure for staging, however, is often loaded with the mistake of variation, which strongly relativizes the reading and re-reading of a text. Obviously, this political problem is based on the question of how acts of ostension of scenic micro-signs and of the macro-sign of the whole spectacle uniquely direct the attention of a recipient. Not without significance is the potential of the experience accumulated by the recipient, which is a filter for the conceptual formulation of relevance¹. The text's indefinite amount of potential instantiations – 'infinite game of mirrors' – continuously limits itself by the self-conviction about its own inconstancy. Besides, as Antoine Vitez cited by Pavis (1988) has indicated, the art of variation, paradoxically, allows for the selection of certain models of interpretation that enable the minimal construction of the identity of a text. Each director 'appropriates' the text for a moment and renews it in his own way, while remaining in the conditions close to invariant (model) features of the text and its tradition of staging. In the procedures of the strongly subversive character, the director is forced to justify his reading, especially when his staging procedures concern classical texts, which function in the collective imagination. Each repetition, despite its inventive character, resembles a genealogy and tradition: 'The text increasingly is filled with meanings, when the modifications, transfers, contaminations, reevaluations made by the director are added; it becomes more "rich" in readings and productions. It is surrounded by a cloud of dust, which is its singing, history, its value and its fate' (Mesguish, 1985).²

In order to analyze the intertextuality of staging, we need to define three indications of inference. The first one are the presuppositions, which direct us to the distinct formal, aesthetic, artistic, literary models dissimilar than those performed on stage³. As the second, such attributions should be mentioned, which indicate the implication of staging in categories, rules, forms of different various texts and *mise-en-scène*. Finally, the most remarkable from a postmodern perspective is the last intertextual indication, namely anomalies, which are commonly beyond the idiolect of staging and beyond direct suppositions and attributions.

***The Oresteia* by Maja Kleczewska⁴. Intertextuality on Stage**

In the production directed by Kleczewska, intertextuality has additional value. The director refers to several dramas which have adapted the Atreides myth, and *ipso facto* creates a polysemous textual basis for staging. Her production is based on the following texts: *The Oresteia* by Aeschylus, *Hecuba* and *Iphigenia in Aulis* by Euripides, *Cassandra* by Christa Wolf, *Scenes from a*

¹Cf. B. McConachie, F. E. Hart (2006). *Performance and Cognition: Theatre Studies and the Cognitive Turn*. London: Routledge.

²Translation mine.

³Cf. G. Gazdar (1979), *Pragmatics, Implicature, Presupposition and Logical Form*, New York. Academic Press.

⁴*Oresteia* by Maja Kleczewska was performed in the cooperation of National Theatre and National Opera in Warsaw. Premiere: 14.04.2012.

Marriage by Ingmar Bergman, *Macbeth* and *Description of a Picture* by Heiner Müller and *The Hours* by David Hare. By underlining such dynamic trans-textual relations existing between ancient and contemporary interpretations of the myth, the stage director also indicates a difference between significant systems of the medium of text and the medium of theatre. Therefore, we can recognize Maja Kleczewska's production as a deconstructive reading of the myth of the Atreides, and its main objective is to demonstrate an indelible tension between the constative and performative use of language¹. This is a new reading – by moving the center of the mythical structure of *logos* in the Derridian space of "free play" according to the mechanism of 'completion' it fills the gap between tradition and its reading².

As a presupposition in the *mise-en-scène* by Kleczewska, we can consider the myth of the Atreides family, which is a part of common imagination. Even if we realize the existence of a certain number of basic interpretative groups of the myth in different literary texts, we can define an approximate definition of identity markers of this myth. Assuming their full variability, we are able to recognize invariants remaining in the sociolect. The preformatted discourse about a myth is its language, its interpretative tradition³ that is presupposed consciously and unconsciously. The textual basis, of which the stage director speaks, is her conscious presupposition. The *corpus* of texts, which she mentions, consists of some dramas that are not directly connected with the myth of the Atreides. In the ancient mythical circle there are two mentioned dramas: *The Oresteia* by Aeschylus and *Iphigenia in Aulis* by Euripides. In addition, we have the text of *Hecuba* by Euripides, which is a tragedy of a mother who has to watch her children's' death and who is changed into Alastor, the demon of vengeance. In the modern mythical circle connected with Atreides' myth is *Cassandra* by Christa Wolf, while the *Scenes from a Marriage* by Ingmar Bergman, *Macbeth* and *Description of a Picture* by Heiner Müller as well as the *The Hours* by David Hare we can treat as presupposed anomalies, which should be related to the core of the myth, its essential, invariant topic, which is a circle of vengeance. Involving these texts to the basic textual *corpus* of staging the myth of Atreides seems to be a part of the idiolect performed by the stage director, her own language and its *ration supplémentaire* that enriches and deepens the mythical *logos*. It still will be a redundancy, another reflection of mythical *logos*, but, as Durand states (Durand, 1999), myths are observable by their redundancy. The study of such dynamics of the 'work of myth' allows to explore changes and modifications performed by the stage director and to recognize her artistic supplementation, her own gloss to the myth. I think that this kind of staging gives an impression of being a cliché understood not as a structural invariant, but as an object for

¹Cf. Paul de Man (1979). *Allegories of Reading*. Yale: University of Yale Press.

²Cf. J. Derrida (1970). 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences.' In: R. Masksey, E. Donato (eds.), *The Language of Criticism and the Sciences of Man: The Structuralist Controversy*, 247-265. Johns Hopkins University Press.

³Cf. M. Riffaterre, 'Intertextual Representation: On Mimesis as Interpretive Discourse.' *Critical Inquiry* 11 (1984): 141-162.

the regeneration of meanings¹. A modern and postmodern form of discussion about the *logos* of the Atreides myth, which have no references to the mythical signatures, along with the other basic texts mentioned by Kleczewska, create a new semantic of the myth, which still transfers traces of the cultural tradition of the myth.

Together with the intertextuality described above, we deal with the theatrical (formal) attributions of collage, which can be seen as an artistic expression of intertextuality. Quotations and clichés are the basic elements of the collage, whereas their repetition, juxtaposition in different configurations are the main actions that an artist can perform (Spies, Ernst&Gabriel, 1991). The techniques of collage in theatre, more or less directly indicated, seem to be a feature of postmodern staging.

In the *mise-en-scène* of the *Oresteia* by Kleczewska, postmodernism is a formal framework. Parataxis implicates an elimination of hierarchy – all theatrical signs are important, what destroys the traditional structure of central sign and secondary elements. The juxtaposition of signs on the stage appears seemingly as a chaotic configuration. During Kleczewska's spectacle the audience meets a crowd on stage. The spectator simultaneously sees a scene of a dialogue between two characters and a dance of hardly identifiable figures. In the same time, the eyes and ears of the audience are stimulated by TV, which is constantly on. Such a chaotic picture distracts the viewer's perception. To rest from it, a spectator can look at the back wall behind the stage, where the image of a peaceful sea with birds is displayed. Simultaneity of all these scenes provokes a synesthetic, but also distracted perception. It is really hard to focus on the tragedy of Agamemnon's family, which is surrounded by so many characters, creatures, real and unreal. But we can observe the special technique of focusing the spectators' attention. Each scene emerges from the previously dissipative structure. It is like a camera zoom, which focuses on one element of the stage, while the rest are muted, but still in action.

Clytemnestra and Agamemnon are presented as people who play their social roles of the king-leader and the silent slave wife. The portraits of these characters are distinct and clearly written out, but only at the beginning. Kleczewska's whole performance is constructed on the basis of Bergman's drama. Indeed, we handle with different scenes from a marriage and from a family life. The first few scenes between husband and wife are played on the stage, where the biggest requisite is a dead giant deer. At some point, we can see a naked bloody girl, who comes out from the belly of the deer. This grim specter will be present on the stage almost all the time, but only as an invisible ghost. This shade of Iphigenia (as I suppose) seems to be 'a refrain' of the Atreides myth. For the family of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra the death of their daughter, caused by the terror of power, ambition, arrogance and reputation, is the main source of tragedy. The awareness of the cruelty of this tragedy infects the life of the whole family, because Agamemnon's act of murder has annulled the foundations of the family's institution. Iphigenia's

¹Cf. R. Nycz (2000). *Textual World. Poststructuralism and Literary Studies*. Kraków: Universitas. (in Polish).

figure on the stage is a sign of remembrance, whose protector is Electra. The simultaneous acting of three actors, while we deal with two different scenes, creates the parataxis of elements that mutually complement. It is like a silent *parodos*, played by the image of Iphigenia in the background of her parents' dialogues.

In this spectacle, the multitude of scenes with Orestes and Electra moves the *logos* of the myth closer to the relationship existing between brother and sister in the context of psychoanalytical relations. Both, Electra and Orestes, play their roles on the subject of the Oedipus' complex towards their parents. In such a developed plot, corporeality and sexuality plays a privileged role as the actualization of human existence (Merleau-Ponty, 2012). The existence of bodies on the stage is a sign of the mythical involvement of children in the deep relation with their parents. The psychoanalytical background of the relations in Agamemnon's family was introduced into this myth by Eugene O'Neill's drama (O'Neill, 2012), and this tradition is used in the *mise-en-scène* by Kleczewska. Electra is a teenager whose emotions directed to her father are of erotic character and which are covered by her youthful expression of sexuality. She allows herself to reveal her desire only towards her father's corpse, what seems to be a kind of necrophilia. The strong love for her father's dead body is the reflection of the mythical invariant of the character of Electra. This invariant feature locates Electra as a memory guard, whose love for her father is a source of hate for her mother, who has killed him. Obviously, there is an Oedipal basis for this feeling, which is deepened by her love to her brother. In the staging of Kleczewska, we deal with the net of connections between men and women, not between parents and children, brothers and sisters. Electra is a sign of remembrance, because this is her only weapon against her mother seen as a rival. The murder of Agamemnon is the assassination of Electra's first "lover" – her first image of a lover. When Orestes comes back, she starts to protect her new lover, the next image of a man who can be taken by her mother. Her love to brother is underlined by a song of Lana del Rey (*Video Games*) sung by Electra for Orestes.

On the stage, the kinsfolk perform some kind of *dance macabre* over the corpse of their father. Electra and Orestes simultaneously 'dance and sing' their own song for the father – Electra sings a song of love, Orestes – a song of hate. But this division is not evident. Their gestures are lined with despair and incomprehension for their own situation. Squirming over a father's body is their therapy, but it is also an incentive to revenge. The corpse of the father as well as the bloody figure of Iphigenia is a sign of memory and an impulse to vengeance. The mother's death is performed in a quiet, peaceful scene, when Clytemnestra and Orestes lie together in bed and take drugs. Orestes kills his mother with 'a golden shot', who then dies in his arms.

According to Lehmann's formula that 'sensuality undermines sense' (Lehmann, 2006: 162), the staging of Kleczewska inscribes the Atreides myth in the postmodern form of theatre, where a body is not only a signifier but also an *agent provocateur* of an meaningless experience. Corporal demonstrations, including the destruction and decomposition of a body, are emphasized in this

staging. The characters on stage are often broken and a spectator is put in the face of the body of a real actor. Blurring the line between reality and art is a reflection of Artaud's idea of his theatre of cruelty, which has been adapted by postmodern performances.

In this *mise-en-scène*, we can notice some kind of pathology existing in a family, which is a net of connections that cannot be cut off. Family is our *fatum*, is a net of necessities we have to live with. Kleczewska explores the internal worlds of the family members – their Oedipal involvement, that evokes desire and then love and hate. Murderous gestures are very often our internal experiences and *Oresteia* unmasks them and shows cruelty *in crudo*. Cruelty covered by divine sentence and pressure of external *raison d'état* is revealed and continued in the house of Agamemnon. Such awareness of our internal cruel wishes is painful and can be dangerous in postmodern society, which lives under the pressures of the deregulation and violation of all rules (Bauman, 1997). To demonstrate what can lie under the mask of a family is a warning for contemporary social communities.

***Oresteia* by Michał Zadara¹. Ideological Re-contextualization**

Michał Zadara has transcribed the Atreides myth into a new ideological context of communist Poland after the Second World War. From the scenography to the acting, this political background governs all elements of the performance. Agamemnon is a partisan of the underground National Army, who fought against the fascist occupant, but who was pursued by the communist authorities as a traitor of the new political ideology. When he comes back home he finds his wife with her lover, Aegisthus, who is a political activist of the new regime. Therefore, Agamemnon must die from the hand of his wife due to political reasons. His death will be avenged by Orestes, who finds himself in the new, less ideological, times of communism. After that, Orestes will be acquitted by Athena, who is a reflection of Edward Gierek, the communist leader, who has earned a reputation within society through the distribution of goods. This “good uncle Ed” burdened the country with huge debts for the next forty years, but he was seen as a communist savior. Therefore, Athena-Gierek bribes the Erinyes, factory workers in this spectacle, to liberate Orestes. The creation of a parallel between ancient mythological Greece, just after the Trojan War, and Poland, just after the Second World War, seems to be justifiable. In a devastated country the rules of the state must be re-formulated. In Poland, this was a time of the birth of a completely different community and this beginning was connected with fratricidal struggle and murders. Such sacrifice of outsiders had to be made for the establishment of a new political and social system. This dark time of Stalinism is a space, where Zadara locates the death of Agamemnon, so we can consider this murder as a sacrifice for a new beginning.

¹*Oresteia* by Michał Zadara was performed by the National Opera in Warsaw. Premiere: 14.03.2010.

This *mise-en-scène* is based on the concreteness without any symbols or insinuations. The scenography refers to the severe and primitive soc-realistic architecture. On the stage, which represents a country *in statu nascendi*, we can see a complex scaffold, on which the movies with the ruins of postwar Warsaw are displayed. The chorus consists of factory workers, men and women, who are neophytes of communism and its main beneficiaries. Each scene is played under their eyes, as they seem to encircle the protagonists and judge their actions. In communism most important is the voice of the people and Zadara uses this aspect to show the pressure of social gaze exerted on its leaders. This kind of theatre resembles the proletariat theatre of Erwin Piscator, in which didacticism and documentary reality replaced sensuality and fantasy (Willett, 1978: 107).

An additional analogy arises from the music by Iannis Xenakis, whose war biography is strictly connected with communism and with the civil war in Greece, just after the Second World War. Moreover, a lot of Greek communists, who had to flee the country, found rescue in communist Poland. Xenakis, as a participant of bloody struggles in the civil war, had in mind this kind of chaotic situation when the new state system is being established. His music in the *Oresteia* signifies the state of despair and chaos, its stochastic tones perfectly reflect moments of fight and wildness, which exist in the very beginning of every order. Special attention should be paid to the part of Cassandra, which is played by an actor singing alternately falsetto and baritone. Cassandra, who in Zadara's staging is a German woman freed by Agamemnon from POW camp, laments playing on an ancient psaltery. This aria is most thrilling in the spectacle and it corresponds with the atmosphere of chaos and anarchy. However, Xenakis' music seems to be a part completely separate from the visual signs of the performance. This manner of using different system of signs, of works of various fields of art, gives the impression of collage, in which diverse elements are connected by subversive, anti-hierarchical connotations. What seems to be the destruction becomes a new construction. Visual signs and prose, used for the expression of ancient poetry, which are manifestations of ideology of common order, are confronted with auditory signs of chaos and destruction.

The collage technique in Zadara's spectacle communicates its openness to creativity in making meanings and suggests that this performance is dominated by a fortuitous game, which is the source of creative potential¹. At first glance, we are simply supposed to deal with an ideological re-contextualization of the Atreides' myth. Together with the music of Xenakis we realize that the macro-sign of this performance is not clearly perceptible. Only the idea of bloody anarchy, which marks the origin of new order, connects all of the micro-signs of this spectacle. This is exactly a feature of the postmodern manner of staging and the postmodern approach to ancient myth – to destruct, to disassemble and,

¹Cf. J. P. Sarrazac (ed.) (2005). *Lexicon of Modern and Contemporary Drama*. Circé. (in French).

then, to create a new quality, hence, to protect the myth against conventional interpretative clichés.

***Waiting for Orestes: Electra*¹ by Suzuki Company of Toga. ‘All the World is a Hospital...’**

According to the philosophy of theatre formulated by Tadashi Suzuki, leader of the Suzuki Company of Toga, the heritage of ancient Greek drama consists of the idea of ‘engaging foreign culture to examine issues of co-existence’. Thus, acting is an ‘art creatively examining how human beings exist within the systems and groups that maintain social life’². Accordingly, Suzuki refers to the ancient technique of using the animal energy of the human body. All of these issues are important indications to describe and understand the staging of the Electra myth based on Euripides’ *Electra* and Hugo von Hofmannsthal’s *Electra* directed by Tadashi Suzuki.

The most important character in Aeschylus’ *Oresteia* and, generally, in the Atreides myth, is Electra, the protector of remembrance and of the circle of vengeance. This personage in Suzuki’s staging is closed in the mental hospital, but most of all, in her obsession for revenge. As every character on this stage, Electra sits on the wheelchair, what indicates her mental disability. The dark stage signifies a claustrophobic place like a trap, what is exaggerated by the sound of gongs and drums played by a percussionist who is constantly present on the stage. Visual and auditory perception connects each other by the atmosphere of trapping. The mental hospital is a metaphor of oppression, from which man is not able to free himself. It is hard to imagine the worst oppression than our own mind and obsessions created by it. Electra remains possessed by the need of revenge; her desire of matricide is so huge that she cannot express it with words. One time she is silent and the other she sounds like a hurt animal, because only these noises can manifest her anger. Suzuki seems to try to show a human being overcome by the desire of crime. On the other hand, he introduces Clytemnestra, whose obsession is also connected with crime, but with the crime she committed. The mother’s madness is similar to the madness of the daughter through their mutual hatred. Reciprocal hate is a source for their obsessions: they both have ‘Erinyes in mind’ (Soph. *Antigone*, 603). Clytemnestra, because of murdering her husband, tries to escape the remorse, Electra, for the same reason, attempts to incessantly evoke this crime to feed her hatred to her mother. Both women in Suzuki’s *mise-en-scène* create their own narration of circumstances that can be an explanation and justification of their feelings. These creations are displayed by brute noises, chaotic dance and wild music. An additional effect is achieved by the Japanese and Korean languages used by the actors in kabuki technique, which is identified by hyperbolic communication performed by speech and body. Words

¹*Waiting for Orestes: Electra* by Tadashi Suzuki was performed in 2009 by the Suzuki Company of Toga.

²Available at www.scot-suzukicompany.com/en/philosophy [28 April 2013].

screamed out interact with convulsive movements of the body. The attempts of justifying themselves, or rather their own manias are also the efforts to free them from the traps of their minds.

The metaphor of the mental hospital also recalls the associations of social judgment very often connected with rejection. The elimination of those human beings, who cannot control their obsessions, is a social challenge and necessity to protect humankind. The animal nature of the human desire for killing must be put under control, otherwise we have to handle with terror. In his spectacle, Suzuki shows the most horrific invariant of the Atreides myth – terrorism. This mythical family exists under the pressure of society's will. Firstly, as a leader of the Greek army, Agamemnon has to forget about his paternal identity and kill his own daughter as a sacrifice for society's welfare. Such kind of crowd terror always exists in social communities, which need ritual and scapegoats to create or restore order. This social 'reset' always demands the cost of human life¹. Iphigenia's death is a source for the following tragedy, when Clytemnestra kills her husband, but this murder also results from the terror of new beginning, of postwar formation of a new society. Now Agamemnon is the scapegoat sacrificed to the new social deal. Next, Clytemnestra must die from her son's hand because of the social and cultural warrant for avenging one's father's blood. Filial hesitation is overcome by his friend, who is a voice of society, and by his sister, who is a voice of hate born in effect of the rejection by her mother. Electra's attitude, both in the myth and in Suzuki's production, is the reflection of a contemporary fundamentalist terrorist. Her whole life is subjected to the idea of murder, this crime is her life. Her hate can be explained to some point, anger somewhat follows reason, as Aristotle says (*Arist. NE* 1149a 32–1149b 2), and can be justifiable, but only in a world without forgiveness and tolerance. For a diagnosis of the contemporary world and its still lost fight with terrorism, the myth of Electra appears as a warning. In Suzuki's staging of this myth we can recognize society as a trap, again as our *fatum*, alike in its family's or bigger community's form. We are locked in this *fatum* like in prison or hospital, where everybody is dependent on others. Greek drama shows man's tragic involvement in social connections.

In the spectacle of Suzuki, the application of postmodern techniques can be observed from the perspective of deconstruction, which the myth has undergone. First of all, Suzuki mentions the tragedy of Euripides (*Electra*), while his *mise-en-scène* clearly resembles the dark mood of Sophocles' *Electra*. The drama of Euripides is a very realistic story, which inscribes the myth in everyday life and, perhaps, this constitutes a reference for Suzuki's production. In the common story in Euripidean drama, we are still confronted with hatred between mother and daughter. The darkest feelings are born and exist in normal, ordinary life. Suzuki seems to unmask these feelings covered by social conventions and mutual simulations. The director reveals a

¹This aspect of Iphigenia's death was strongly performed in the production by Antonina Grzegorzewska, which was a new reading of the Iphigenia myth. The spectacle *Iphigenia*, performed in the National Theatre in Warsaw in 2008, used all indications of contemporary terrorism, including a chorus of Muslim women with explosive belts and pacifistic claims.

simulacrum, which the story written by Euripides has become, and he has shown the madness of hatred *in crudo*. The ancient Electra and Clytemnestra have taken off their masks and demonstrated their *pathos*, mental diseases, which do not allow them to coexist even in such a small community as family. Tadashi Suzuki has created a new construction of the myth, using ancient myth to build a contemporary myth of the terror of society and of ourselves.

Conclusion

The three performances described above are contemporary adaptations of ancient dramas, but first of all, of ancient myths. A return to myth, to the root of tragic stories adapted in ancient dramas, is one of the methods of contemporary stage application of ancient literary tradition, although Pavis states that such kind of adaptations of the Classics is now forgotten (Pavis, 2012). The return to the *mythos* is of course an audacious attempt to face with and to meet the challenge of understanding it. A myth must be deconstructed to recognize which source elements had created it. Pavis follows the definition of deconstruction proposed by Elisabeth Roudinesco:

To deconstruct is in some way to resist the tyranny of the One, of the logos, of (Western) metaphysics, and to do so in the very language in which it is articulated, by using the same material that one displaces and moves for the purposes of reconstructions that remain in motion. Deconstruction is 'what happens' [ce qui arrive], without our knowing whether it will arrive at a destination, etc. (Pavis, 2012: 159)

Referring to this designation seems to be similar to the Derridian *ration supplémentaire*, which is 'what happens' or rather 'what is coming' to a myth in its new adaptations. 'What happens', then, in the stagings of the Atreides myth presented in this paper? We can again bring up the thoughts of Roudinesco, who recognizes the world of ancient myths in the context of perversion. It was a world, where 'every man was in the same time himself and his contrary – a hero and a waste (...)' (Roudinesco, 2009: 5)¹. In my opinion, the postmodern staging of ancient dramas, which I described in this paper, have introduced their own supplement to the Atreides myth and in every case it was the recognition of human perversion considered in the contemporary background of terrorism. Postmodern techniques of staging, marked by parataxis, simultaneity and following the lack of hierarchy, which create a stage work of dissipative and stochastic character, interact with the ambiguous perversion of the ancient mythical world. In this approach, postmodern adaptations of ancient tragedy seem to be a way to protect ancient heredity in a current and intelligible form.

¹Translation mine.

Bibliography

- Aristotelis, (1882). *Ethica Nicomachea*, Teubner (ed.), Lipsiae.
- Bauman, Z. (1997). *Postmodernity and Its Discontents*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- de Man, P. (1979). *Allegories of Reading*. Yale: University of Yale Press
- Derrida, J.
 (1970). 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences.' In: R Masksey, E. Donato (eds.), *The Language of Criticism and the Sciences of Man: The Structuralist Controversy*, 247-265. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- (1999). *Sur parole. Instantanés philosophiques*. Paris: L'Aube.
- Durand, G. (1999). *The Anthropological Structures of the Imaginary*. Brisbane: Boombana Publishing.
- Eco, U. (1986). *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Fish, S. (1980). *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities*. Harvard University Press.
- Gazdar, G. (1979), *Pragmatics, Implicature, Presupposition and Logical Form*, New York: Academic Press.
- Lehmann, H.-Th. (2006). *Postdramatic Theatre*. London: Routledge.
- Liotard, F. (1988). *Le postmoderne expliqué aux enfants : Correspondance 1982-1985*. Paris : Gaillée.
- Marleau-Ponty, M. (2012). *Phenomenology of Perception*. New York: Routledge.
- McConachie, B. & Hart, F. (2006). *Performance and Cognition: Theatre Studies and the Cognitive Turn*. London: Routledge.
- Mesguich, D. (1985). *La mise en scène ou le double jeu*, Encyclopaedia universalis.
- Nycz, R. (2000). *Textual World. Poststructuralism and Literary Studies*. Kraków: Universitas. (in Polish).
- O'Neill, E. (2012). *Mourning Becomes Electra*. New York: Random House.
- Pavis, P.
 (1988). 'Du texte à la scène : un enfantement difficile'. *Théâtre/Public* 79 (1988): 27-35.
 (2012). *Contemporary Mise En Scène : Staging Theatre Today*. London, New York: Routledge
- Riffaterre, M. 'Intertextual Representation: On Mimesis as Interpretive Discourse.' *Critical Inquiry* 11 (1984): 141-162.
- Roudinesco, E. (2009). *Our Dark Side. A History of Perversion*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Sarrazac, J.P. (ed.) (2005). *Lexicon of Modern and Contemporary Drama*. Circé. (in French).
- Sophocles (1999). *Antigone*. Griffith, M. (ed.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Spies, W. & Ernst, M. & Gabriel, J.W. (1991). *Max Ernst Collages: The Invention of the Surrealist Universe*. New York: Abrams.
- Übersfeld, A. (1999). *Reading Theatre*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- White, H. (1978). *Tropics of Discourse. Essays in Cultural Criticism*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Willett, J. (1978). *The Theatre of Erwin Piscator: Half a Century of Politics in the Theatre*. Taylor & Francis.

