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Exploring the Possibilities of Postdramatic Theater as Educational Means

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Abstract

This paper is based on an inquiry carried out among a small group of children between the ages of 10 and 12 years, who, in the framework of an art-workshop, attended two theatrical performances of the same subject, Homer's *Odyssey*, but of quite different directorial approaches: the first performance had a narrative character following the basic principles of the dramatic model, while the second one belonged to the postdramatic paradigm that tends to subvert all traditional concepts about the structure and the content of a theatrical act. The conversation that followed showed that children have only to gain by their approach to unconventional artworks, as they get stimulated to think in new and diverse directions. As an informed instructor on philosophical and theoretical art-matters is a prerequisite, this paper aims at the construction of a fundamental theoretical framework for the postdramatic model and at the examination of the possibilities of postdramatic performances to function both as carriers of information and as stimulators of new kinds of aesthetic experiences, in an educative manner.

Introduction

Definition of “Postdramatic Theater”

The contemporary postmodern theatrical paradigm has formed new and subversive perceptions about the structure and the form of performances as well as about the role of the theatrical text, of the actor and the spectator. The term “postdramatic theater” which has existed since 1999 (Lehmann, French ed. 2002) defines the theatrical expression that tends to diverge from the traditional dramatic model: the concept of representation has been replaced by one of performance, while postdramatic theater has ceased to refer to the external world and has become more self-referential. Despite the claims of some theorists relating to the present dominance of the postdramatic theater over the dramatic model, up until today both in the metropolis and the sphere of the western world they still coexist. More extended is the presence of the traditional dramatic model in the children’s theater, as directors appear more reluctant to risk experiments and to go off the beaten track.

Description and Aims of the Inquiry and the Paper

The present paper has been written based on my experience as the instructor of a small group of children between 10 and 12 years old, who participated in the workshop of a private children’s educational center in Athens/Greece, aiming at their introduction to modern and contemporary art. Amongst others, they attended two theatrical performances on the same subject, but of a different directorial approach. The subject was Homer’s Odyssey: the first one was “Homer’s Odyssey – The Fairytale of the Fairytales” directed by Carmen Ruggeri mostly in a traditional narrative manner and the second one was “Odyssey” by Robert Wilson who created a performance based to a large degree on the principles of the postdramatic theater.

The children attended the performances fully aware of the differences between both directorial models and with certain expectations. With this approach they gained from each performance much of what it had to offer, were not disappointed by false expectations and had a strong aesthetic experience based on different aspects each time. Afterwards there followed a philosophically based discussion about subjects arising mainly from the different structures of the two performances that led to the addressing of the fundamental questions of the art status, the new ontology of modern and contemporary art, the meaning of aesthetic experience, the relation between knowledge and art and the benefits offered to the perceivers of artworks in all their forms.

Modern and contemporary art in all its manifestations presupposes cognition in order to be understood and to evoke aesthetic experience. Postdramatic theater refers first of all to the senses, but the uninitiated spectator and especially the one that has connected the theatrical act

with the notions of representation and narration may be incapable of realizing the concept and so of enjoying the performance.

This paper aims firstly to construct for the primary-school teacher, who wants to introduce his/her pupils to the contemporary changes in theater, a fundamental framework of information about the dramatic and the postdramatic model, by placing emphasis on philosophical matters concerning the art status and its relation to cognition and information. This knowledge might be necessary in order for the teacher to prepare children for the effective attendance of such performances but also in order for him/her to conduct an efficient conversation afterwards that will help his/her pupils to mentally organize and consolidate the information acquired. Secondly, it aims to show the benefits that children might gain by attending theater, connected both to their aesthetic experiences and to their cognition. It is however to be underlined that knowledge has an ambiguous relation to art: on the one hand it is necessary in order to perceive and understand modern and contemporary artworks, on the other hand it is not a basic element of their ontology thus artworks are not to be understood as information sources. Thirdly, postdramatic performances are to be presented as educational means not because of the information of their content, but mainly because of their relation to philosophy, as they are understood as theatrical transcriptions of basic theoretical matters.

The Basic Principles of Postdramatic Theater

“Postdramatic theater” is a term used for performances that aim to identify with reality and not just to reconstruct it on the stage as the “dramatic theater” does: during a traditional dramatic performance spectators are always aware that they are sitting in front of a construction (Sarrazac, 2004, p.9). Postdramatic theater appeared as an answer to the crisis of the notion of presentation (Fischer-Lichte, 2001) which was the result of many internal and external parameters. The contestation of ratio and of the big narratives of the past as well as the dominance of cinema, allowing fiction to be created better than any other art-form, led to the questioning of the fundamental principles of the dramatic model: its character as a self – positing entity adhered to the unities of place, myth and dramatic time (always being in the present), as well as to the dominance of dialog and interpersonal communication (Szondi, 1987, p.5).

The notion of "postdramatic theatre" was first used by Richard Schechner in the 1970s to describe happenings (1988, p.21), but has been established by Hans-Thies Lehmann (1999/2002), who summarized a number of tendencies and stylistic traits occurring in avant-garde theatre since the end of the 1960s. The theatre which Lehmann calls postdramatic is not primarily focused on the drama in itself, but evolves a performative aesthetic in which the text of the drama is put in a special relation to the material situation of the performance and the

stage. Thus postdramatic theatre is more a striving to produce an effect amongst the spectators than an attempt to remain true to the text, which doesn't, though, imply the elimination of the playwright but rather the limitation of their importance in the name of other parameters of the *mise-en-scène*.

Wilson's "Odyssey" vs. Carmen Ruggeri's "Homer's Odyssey – The Fairytale of the Fairytales"

Next I will try to approach Bob Wilson's "Odyssey" from a postdramatic perspective, as the famous American artist and director is generally recognized as one of the most appropriate representatives of the new postdramatic paradigm. At the same time I will also refer to Carmen Ruggeri's performance, in order to detect the basic differences between the "dramatic" and the "postdramatic" model.

A. Central narrative character vs. partial short narrations

In Ruggeri's performance the viewers attended a rational narration of the adventures of Odysseus in his effort to come back to his homeland after his longtime absence in the Trojan War. The text was based on the well-known work of Homer, rewritten in the manner of playwriting and adjusted to the level and the needs of the addressed audience. Having as fundamental aim the education of the young spectators, Ruggeri was always careful to keep to the facts of the initial work and created a performance characterized by rational consistency and coherence.

The dramatic model espouses the Hegelian position according to which the partial has no meaning but as the part of a whole, while the postdramatic theater is in conflict with Hegelianism and all its manifestations: the concept of the unified structure is sacrificed in the name of short and temporal structures, so that theater appears as the art of the instantaneous event.

Although Wilson was based on a certain historical text, he overcame the principles of mimesis and fiction (Lehmann, 2002, p.156) by disrupting the central narrative character with partial short narrations, of which one of them kept its independence across the others. Each detail on stage gained its own importance in a fragmentary manner and not as a part of the whole. Wilson created a performance dominated by centrifugal tendencies: the different arts (music, dance, narration, lighting) that in the dramatic theater are always to be assimilated in the theatrical act, have become independent with equal presence and importance. The viewers thus create a multifocused perception, which sometimes even turns out to be a selective one, as they are forced to conceive parts of the play that are not coherent but just connected with loosely or even unfamiliar bonds. Lehmann (2002, p. 244) compares this procedure with the

abolition of perspective in painting: perspective and dramatic theater as operative activities belonging to the past, while in our days they are nothing but simulated expressive forms. In both cases an external viewer is presupposed, who attends an artificially constructed slice of life. On the contrary, modern painting and postdramatic theater involve the viewer, who becomes part of the artistic art.

B. The role of the text and the arts on stage

In Wilson's *Odyssey* the text was downgraded: the audience was forced to mentally participate in each stage action separately, which was dominated by the elements of lighting, video art, poetry, narration, dancing and the visual arts. The performance could be described as a kind of cinematographic theater, in which meaning and dramatic coherence were of less importance as they were replaced by videographic, cinematographic and narrative montages and collages (Lehmann, 2002, p.182) On the contrary, in Ruggeri's performance all the above arts had their place on stage but functioned complementarily by creating the aesthetic structure which carries the dramatic plot.

C. The role of language

Another approach used by Wilson in order to downgrade the dominant role of the text was the montage of heterogeneous expressive entities, in which words and sentences appeared contradictory and unfamiliar. There were moments that the meaning was eliminated, as speaking entities were left unfinished or unrelated to the framework, thus the audience was unable to detect any relations of relevance, continuation and causality. Moreover sometimes pauses interrupted the action, which came to a halt for a short time period that was to be understood as a moment of real time disrupting the overall time matrix of the performance. At those moments, which are described by Lehmann as the "intrusion of the real" (2002, p.170-178), the historical/mythological theatrical drama appeared as an unhistorical act of everyday life and gained a kind of a timeless, universal and real character. At the same time it supported the basic aim of postdramatic theater that is to subvert established structures of signification, such as the authority of the dramatic text, and to construct a base for new cultural meanings.

D. Interruptions and methods of acting

Apart from the montage of unfamiliar speaking units, the interruptions with silent pauses and the conscious partial concealment of the historical context, both timelessness and the deconstruction of the traditional character of theater were also achieved by the intrusion of spectacles irrelevant to the plot: a punk-dancer appearing in between the actors without any

logical reason, a chorus of men dressed in white with animal-shaped masks accompanying several scenes, a jazz-singing Eumaios and an “industrial” Odysseus acting and performing mainly through the principles of pantomime and mechanical bodily expression. Different traditions of acting are to be found in postdramatic theater, from the variete, the circus and the street theater to the theater of the Far East and Bali. In Wilson’s *Odyssey* the stanislavskian – strasbergian performing method coexisted with the meyerholdian: on the one hand, Penelope was performed in an emotional and deeply expressive manner according to the principle of the identification of the role with the personal experiences of the performer, and on the other hand Odysseus amongst others appeared as a creature without psychism by showing feelings only in a mechanical manner through certain expressions and movements.

The postdramatic dominance of the corporeal existence as an autonomous element of the act without any reference, instead of the role of the performer’s body as the carrier of a character in the dramatic theater, is not only to be interpreted through the assimilation of the meyerholdian theories, but also as a sign of our times. Contemporary western society has shaped the human body as a kind of social paragon: the mass media have overemphasized its role and especially its ideal form, which appears connected to all activities of the modern lifestyle. Postdramatic theater attempts to deconstruct this situation, either by undermining the dominance of the body (e.g. the artist Orlan) or, on the other hand, by enhancing its effectiveness.

As a result of the mixing of both performing methods, the stanislavskian and the meyerholdian, Wilson’s *Odyssey* evoked an ambiguous emotional atmosphere in the audience. The spectators felt confused as their feelings hovered between the two extremes, from that of absolute emotional indifference to that of intense thrill. Under this aspect Wilson’s *Odyssey* stood in between the dramatic model that, except for the brechtian epic theater, presupposes the emotional participation of the audience, and the postdramatic model that aims to create a “cool” spectator (Lehmann, 2002, p.189) who does not empathize with the performed roles. This elimination of the empathizing function of actors and audience is due to two reasons: Firstly, postdramatic theater ontologically avoids moral implications and pursues ironical and sarcastic relations. Secondly, postdramatic theater is self-referred, since it is not to be understood as a representation but only as a performance; there is not the performed role that is laughing, hurting or crying but an actor who is participating in a theatrical action. Both speech and expression are not used as communicative means between performers neither as a kind of message to the audience, but moreover as prepositional and expressive structures of the theatrical act. In the same manner, the spectator is accepted as attending the performance in a detached, indifferent manner without any emotional involvement.

E. The role of repetition

A dominant role in Wilson's performance is played by the concept of repetition that is also a basic element of the ontology of postdramatic theater. Through repetition, time-flow seems to be compressed. Moreover, as put by Deleuze (1968, p.19), it indicates a peculiar act, during which the actor produces something new that is based on pure forces and leaves indelible traces on the spirit. The act of repetition is a language before words; gestures before organized bodies; masks before faces; and ghosts before characters. In the postdramatic model, repetition is to be understood as a means for "destruction" (Lehmann, 2002, p.254) and for the destruction of the myth, its meaning and its formal entity. The repeated act inhibits or even cancels the evolving scene, as it depends on its resemblance with its preceding one.

"Resemblance" is to be understood as the key-word, as it indicates that the repeated scene is a new one, thus there is, nor in the theater, the possibility of the reduplication of the same thing; it looks like the initial act, but still it is another one with small differences. The audience becomes distracted from the main plot and focuses on the act of repetition and its tiny changes, a situation that leads to a turn of importance from the meaning of the play to its structure, but also to the concept of time and its relevance. Repetitions in postdramatic theater are to be perceived as time-images, gained by the spectators in the same manner as those of the viewers of a painting: time-flow is created by their repeated views (Lehmann, 2002, p.255). On the contrary, repetitions if existing in the dramatic theater, are only used as means for the articulation and the composition of the acts and are logically connected to the plot and its meaning.

F. The role of the voices

Wilson's "Odyssey" was a performance with an intensive audio-visual character: aesthetically impressive "cinematic" images created by color-lit backgrounds were combined with several sounds that often shocked the audience by their intense loudness. Actors screamed producing primordial voices as coming directly out of their deeper souls. The use of the voice is another fundamental difference between the dramatic and the postdramatic model: voices in the dramatic theater are carriers of rational speech and expression while in the postdramatic theater they become screams and yellings independent from the meaning of the act. Language gets destructed and the words appear as a screaming of the acting body (Lehmann, 2002, p.242). At the same time the several qualities of human voices emerge, capable of creating an intense aesthetical experience in the audience.

The Cognitive Value of Art

The kind of information and cognition offered to the audience of a theatrical performance

alters depending on the used stage directive model: dramatic theater might include information in the text that plays a dominant role as the basic structure of the play, while the postdramatic theater can function as information source only in a lateral and secondary manner. First of all, though, it is important to see the possibilities of art in all its manifestations as a carrier of information.

Science vs. Art

Providing and gaining information is the aim neither of creating nor of attending artworks. This goal is connected to the scientific field that consists of three major categories of sciences, according to their methodologies and their aims: the empirical sciences that aim to explain physical and social phenomena by creating theories and trying to disprove or verify them by systematic rational and empirical controls; the deontological sciences that investigate the ways of regulating societies by also creating controllable theories in an explanatory and interpretative manner; the Humanities, having as scientific subject all intellectual creations and as methodological tool interpretation. However, science in all its forms is the intellectual system aiming at information and truth, at the limitation of subjectivity and at the creation of general rules and theories with valid and provisional character.

On the other hand, art is a subjective intellectual act characterized by the limitless freedom of its representatives. Ontologically, art is not connected to rules and theoretical frameworks that however exist and are followed by the majority of the artists of each era either in a conscious or in an unconscious manner. Art is neither defined as an informative or a cognitive source. It aims more to alert the spectator mainly through aesthetic means, and to make him/her think and feel in new unfamiliar directions. However, there might be information gained both from the content and from the form of an artwork.

Facts and Objects in Art

The content of an artwork – even in cases such as postdramatic theater or abstract painting – consists of objects and facts. There are three categories of objects and facts as parts of an artistic content: first, those having a real correspondence to the external world; secondly, the ones that could be realizable in the external world; and thirdly, the utterly fantastic ones that correspond only to human imagination (Feibleman, 1966, p.501-508). The concept of the external world in the first category is not only to be understood as a reference to the physical reality but also to the constructed one: facts and objects of an artwork may also correspond to a written source with either real or fictive content. When fictive facts and objects of an artwork are not primal inspirations of its creator but are just transcribed from one medium to the other, then they belong to the first category and not to the third one. According to this consideration they are real, independent of their fictive character, as they satisfy a fundamental element of the definition of truth, the one of the internal consequence of the parts

of a proposition.

Art as the Carrier of Values

Thus, theater pieces – both in a written and a performed form - with a content corresponding to a precedent written text might be perceived as informative sources for the content of this text. However, there is a problematic dependent both on the ontology of art, and its relation to information in general, and on the type of the artwork, its era and its specific aims. The first part of this problematic concerns the definition of art, previously partly analyzed, as a carrier of aesthetic values aiming at the creation of aesthetic experience and at the renewal of our worldview. Under this aspect, even the facts and the objects of an artistic content belonging to the first category, immediately gain a symbolic and a value-laden character. Thus they cannot be perceived as carriers of truth, which has to be neutral and value-free. The only “information” we gain from art is value-connected, as it directly brings us in confrontation with values that in everyday life have been weakened, and reminds us of the deeper reasons of being. The cognitive value, for instance, of Rembrandt’s painting “The anatomy lesson of dr. Nicolae Tulp” (1632) lies not on the offered information about the anatomy of a human body or on the level of the medical sciences in the 17th century, but on our confrontation with the value of education and of the transference of knowledge; Or, in order to mention the well-known example used by Heidegger (1962) of van Gogh’s painting “A pair of shoes” (1886), old and damaged shoes as the content of an artwork are only to be understood in a symbolic and metaphysical manner: they function as carriers of the labor and the exertion of the poor farmer who has been wearing them and they alert us to the difficulties and the meaning of life.

The content of a theater play that consists of facts and objects that belong to the first category is to be understood in the same manner. They may correspond to the real world or transfer the content of a previous written source to the stage medium, but their importance lies in their potentiality to alert us by creating an aesthetic experience. However, the existence of neutral and objective truth in art is only a matter of choices: if the artist clearly intended to give information through his/her work, then and only then can we approach his/her work under this aspect. In all other cases such an approach would be irresponsible and mistaken, as art is over all a free intellectual act without a truth-commitment. Even if an artwork is based on certain facts of the external world, the artist is absolutely legitimated to diverge or even to change them, in order to achieve his/her purposes.

In the era of the visual arts there has been the category of “scientific artworks”, existing already since the Renaissance (Pyle, 2000): they were complementary images in treatises recording pre-scientific systematic observations not only on plants, animals and celestial space, but also on human anatomy and physiology. However, pure scientific artworks are of a weak artistic nature and moreover function as tools for scientific work.

Dramatic and Postdramatic Theater as Educational Means

Artistic Intention and Truth

It is very important for anyone involved in the field of the arts to know that ontologically art in all its forms is not created in order to transmit information. As has been well articulated by M. Parsons (1987) “art is valued as a way of raising questions rather than as transmitting truths.” Investigations, like the one conducted by the Zerefos-team at the National Observatory of Athens (Zerefos / Gerogiannis, 2007) can only lead to deceptive results: a group of natural scientists used artworks depicting sunsets as sources for gaining scientific information on atmospheric abnormalities after volcanic eruptions (Gemtou, 2011).

Also in theater as in the field of the visual arts, only the explicit intention of the creator of the performance functions as an allowance for us to attend it as an information source. Otherwise, theatrical performances are to be perceived and evaluated with aesthetical criteria, which means with criteria configured on the basis of the possibilities of the structure and the form of the performance to render its content in a complete and appropriate manner. Attention, though, is recommended also in the cases of artworks created with informative intention, as they still belong to the field of the arts and thus a deviation from truth is absolutely legitimate.

The Truth Value in Ruggeri's Performance

However Ruggeri's performance was directly based on the Homeric text. The young audience travelled with Odysseus through his quest to return home. The first scene was at Olympus where the Gods, due to the absent of Neptune, the greatest enemy of Odysseus, found the opportunity to meet and to decide to allow the troubled hero to leave the island of Calypso, where he had been blocked. Mercury undertook to carry the news. Calypso got angry, but gave Odysseus permission to leave. On a raft, Odysseus begins his return journey, but to his bad luck Neptune returns from his journey, raises a storm and breaks up the raft. Odysseus, shipwrecked, comes to the island of Corfu. There he meets the princess Nausica, who gives him hospitality. Odysseus reveals himself and begins to narrate his adventures: first at the Cicones with twelve ships, afterwards at the Lotus Eaters in Eolia and at the Laestrygonians and then at Circe's isle. He also describes his descent into the underworld, the ordeal of the sirens, his passage through Scylla and Charybdis, his journey to the island of the Sun and finally his arrival at the island of Calypso. Touched by his narration, the parents of Nausica decide to send Odysseus back to Ithaka on a magic ship.

“Educational Theater”

Ruggeri is the best known director in Greece for creating a kind of educational theater for children: her performances function as carriers of facts from Greek history and mythology. In several given interviews in the Greek press, Ruggeri defines children's theater as a source for knowledge connected both to the content of the performances and to theater as an artform. She also very often underlines her conviction that children should go to the theater after being prepared in the content of the performance, so that its attendance can work as an experiential consolidation of its facts.

In this kind of theater, followed by Ruggeri and called here "educational", information and knowledge are mostly connected to the content of the performances and play a role both at the level of preparation of the spectator before the attendance and also as gained cognition afterwards. However, as these kinds of performances are content-concentrated and based on the dramatic model that provides an easily understandable narration, preparation is not always needed in order for the children to gain both aesthetic pleasure and information.

Postdramatic Performances and Conceptual Artworks

The relation of postdramatic theatre to the knowledge that seems to be absolutely necessary in order for someone to understand and to enjoy its performances is quite different; let alone gaining information through them. Under this aspect postdramatic performances are to be compared to conceptual artworks. At a first glance this might seem a weird comparison, as conceptual art aspires to disdain the traditionally dominant role of the form in artworks and to provide their concept/content as the most important element of the art status, and on the other hand postdramatic performances are structure/form-concerned, while the role of their content is strongly limited. However, in both cases, an educated viewer who is ready to mentally follow the transfer from the former paradigm to the new one, is required.

Conceptual art, as well as postdramatic theater are strongly connected to language, knowledge and philosophy. According to A. Danto (2006) in the 60s and 70s philosophy and advanced art were ready for each other: artworks could only be perceived and evaluated in a framework of philosophical thought and interpretation. The reference was to works like Warhol's "Brillo boxes", which led the art world into utter confusion (Danto, 1986, pp.81-115) as the problem of redefinition of art became imperative. The traditional definitions were not valid, while questions resulted, such as why Warhol's "boxes" were valued at two hundred dollars, while those of the artist who first created them for the market were of minimal value. An answer was offered through the "institutional theory" of art, which was completely formulated by

George Dickie (1974, 1984). According to him, works of art have to fulfill two conditions: first, they must be artifacts and second, prestigious members of the artistic world must recognize them as belonging to the art-status.

The Role of the Audience

The “institutional theory” is important as it defines art according to the society, the historical era and the institutions which created it and not according to a universal rule (Weitz, in: Neill/Ridley, 1995, pp. 183-193), but moreover because it puts the art perceiver in the arena of the art-status: a work becomes art, if its (educated) audience decides so. Spectators have ceased to be detached watching art through a distance, but have become parts of the artistic procedure. The same is valid for the postdramatic performances: the audience co-creates the performance, its presence is highly intensive, so that a separation between production and perception would be meaningless. There is no differentiation between spectators and actors, as all are to be understood as physical presences: the spectator is asked to coexist and co-act in a theatrical fact, that isn't anymore a fictive creation but more a slice of real life (Lehmann, 2002, pp.198-199)

In order however to achieve to gain a deep and complete aesthetic experience, the audience of a postdramatic performance must be an educated one, knowing what to expect and how to react. It is possibly useless to expect from an uninformed spectator, who is just familiar with the traditional dramatic model and doesn't have any idea about the changes in the theatrical scene and about the new aims and demands, to understand and to enjoy a postdramatic performance. Thus, more than in the case of dramatic theater in which the educational preparation might be mostly connected to the content, in postdramatic theater the viewer must have a basic knowledge on the theory and the philosophy of it, in order to effectively perceive its aims.

Back to the Inquiry: Methodology of the Philosophically Based Conversation

Postdramatic theater is also to be understood as a theatrical transfer of contemporary philosophical enquiries. Under this aspect the attendance of such a performance may function as an appropriated base for philosophical conversation in the classroom, which also happened at the above mentioned workshop: my teaching approach was rooted in Michael Parsons' book (1987), *How We Understand Art: A Cognitive Developmental Account of Aesthetic Experience*, in which the author has created a theory based on the aesthetic responses to works of art of people of all ages from preschoolers to adults. Parsons named five stages of aesthetic progress according to the levels of maturity, frequency and quality of experience with art over time, and the amount of interest and effort that people invest in studying art.

Firstly, preschoolers who revel in every sensory experience expressing simple judgments of liking something or not, without caring if others might feel differently; secondly, elementary students, who are more concerned with skill, realism, and beauty, with their base for judgment

usually rooted in those core concepts. Most people usually stay at stage two through adulthood; third, adolescents who become aware of the uniqueness of aesthetic experience, its qualities and its differences according to the event provoking it; fourth, educated adults who understand artworks as products of a culture and not just as expressions of individual artists; fifth, highly educated adults, who are aware that judgments on artworks and on society are intertwined and interrelated.

My approach was made under the conviction that through aesthetic education, if conducted in a systematic and appropriate way, even elementary students can reach levels three and four of the Parsons' model. I actually followed the schema suggested by Louis Lankford (1992): foundations, vivid cases, and complex issues. Before attending Wilson's "Odyssey" I had taught my students about the characteristics of postdramatic theater, its aims and its differences from the dramatic model. I had also introduced them to the work of Bob Wilson and his tendency to create images by using the possibilities of light and shadow, his influences from the Far East theater, the Bauhaus, abstract art, body-theater etc. Then students attended the two performances on the same subject but of different directive schools and finally had the opportunity to discuss more complex philosophical matters in the classroom that were rooted mostly in the structure of the postdramatic performance.

My method was based on the conviction that philosophy is a stepwise procedure and not a sum of information and material to be passively taught. Thus I tried to lead my students in a playful way to create the questions for themselves. Using concrete examples from both attended performances I let them find out their basic differences which, though, were not new for them, as I had already mentioned them in a theoretical manner before going to the theater. But now they had the experience of the real performances and so they could focus on matters that had impressed them: "Actors played like puppets!", "Actors screamed without reason", "It was funny when Eumaios started to sing and dance like we do today and not like in ancient times!" were some of their comments. I tried to use their own words as triggers in order to stimulate further conversations that gradually passed from the level of the description of their impressions to this of the uttering of their feelings. It came out that they liked Ruggeri's performance more because they could find there all the facts from the *Odyssey* learned in school in an easy and joyful approach. On the other hand they were impressed by Wilson's images, the lighting and the whole atmosphere, but felt there was something weird about the acting of the performers and the inconsistent structure of its content.

Then I showed them pictures of two visual artworks of different styles: a landscape by Claude Lorrain and the M.Duchamp's "In Advance of the Broken Arm", the famous ready-made, which is nothing more than an exhibited snow shovel. I assured them that both are recognized artworks and asked them to find out the differences. Based on their indignation that they

couldn't find anything "artistic" in Duchamp's shovel I tried to show them that art is a process that develops and changes through time. I created a framework for analogous thinking by saying that the system of art is like a human being that grows up and changes both externally and internally in the ways he/she thinks, feels, speaks, reacts etc. In the same manner art follows steps in its development through history by changing forms and subjects. I emphasized that artists always try to find new ways of expression and of the redefinition of the art status: Duchamp exhibited a common shovel to express in an exaggerated manner his conviction that it was time for art to change character and to cease functioning as a carrier of beauty and skills, and also Wilson created a performance that belongs to a sum of contemporary performances that aim to provide new possibilities of theater and thus to contribute to its development through history.

A Concluding Remark

Summarizing, as my above empirical inquiry has shown, the attendance of postdramatic performances might offer important benefits to young audiences: firstly, children become familiar with vivid contemporary examples of the history of modern theater, secondly they get stimulated by the creation of a certain kind of aesthetic experience based amongst others on weird feelings such as surprise and thirdly, they are triggered into creating philosophical conversations that teach them how to think and argue in a rational and a non trivial manner (Cohen/Naylor).

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