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## IMAGINARY ACTION SPACE IN DRAMA

Drama, a complex art form, composed of elements from many other arts, literature, oratory, mimicry, choreography, music, architecture, sculpture, painting and so on, draws on other semantic systems but constitutes a distinctive structure with its own semiotics. Within this structure, however, each element appropriated from other systems retains its own way of relating the signifier to the signified. As a result, each type of sign is, to some extent, in conflict with all the others, yet, combined in a syntagma, they acquire potentialities which they do not have outside drama.<sup>1</sup> In order to arrive at the structural theory of drama, the system has to be examined in the light of every component, so as to establish its relations with the other components. I am proposing to deal with one component of this complex and specialized semiotic system, to which little attention has been paid by theoreticians so far.<sup>2</sup>

As an introduction I shall quote a scene from a farce performed in the thirties. At that time there was intensive campaigning for the abolition of the so-called theatrical illusion, and for so-called alienation and suppression of the barrier between the stage and the auditorium. There are two characters on the stage, representing, or rather deputizing for two soldiers, waiting for a messenger from their army. Soldier One is lying on the floor, Soldier Two is locking into the wings, or, more correctly, into a gloomy corridor, as there is no décor.

SOLDIER ONE Is he coming?/ SOLDIER TWO I don't know./  
SOLDIER ONE What do you mean? Do you see him or not?/  
SOLDIER TWO I don't know./ SOLDIER ONE Well, what do  
you see there?/ SOLDIER TWO Well, there are some stage  
hands playing cards and the stage manageress is necking  
with the fireman./ MESSENGER (rushing in) Sorry, mate,  
that bitch of a stage manageress didn't call me.

Now, the dramatist, the producer and the actors were fooling themselves if they believed that they had destroyed what they considered the theatrical illusion. The notion in the minds of the

spectators that somewhere beyond the visible stage there was an imaginary army was certainly not destroyed, but what is more, another notion, that somewhere beyond the visible stage some sort of imaginary hanky-panky was going on, was superimposed on it.

According to a theory, proposed first by Taine and later elaborated by others, from Tairov to Bogatyrev, the basic condition for the perception of a theatrical performance as art, i.e. aesthetically, is the varying apprehension by both the actor and the spectator. At a certain moment the spectator is able to perceive the performance not as a simulation but as a unique and unrepeatable reality, and, similarly, the actor can have the feeling of complete metamorphosis into a real individual in a specific situation. These, as Diderot observed long ago, do not need to coincide.

But the view that the spectator alternates between the feeling of perceiving reality and cognizance that he is in a theatre, completely disregards the semiological character of drama. The spectator never imagines that he is perceiving a reality and consequently it never occurs to him that what he perceives is not reality. He is aware that he perceives a reality different from his own reality, but he is also aware that he gradually construes this reality for himself. The reality of the drama, or the dramatic world ( $W_d$ ), to use the term of Keir Elam, is alien to the reality of the spectator, or the spectator's world ( $W_s$ ), by the very fact that it unfolds in time and space which are not those of the spectator's reality.<sup>3</sup> He is, however, able to construe it to a certain degree through the elements recognizable to him and contained in the signs perceived, from the spoken word to the facial expression of the actors, the sum of which constitutes the structure. Thus an observer unacquainted with Chinese theatre would not be able to decode its semiotic system, because the signs would be for him devoid of their referential function. They might, however, appeal to him by their aesthetic function, which a spectator acquainted with the code would consider subdominant. Drama, as an autonomous semiotic system is very resilient, and it can withstand an astonishing amount of deformation before it is nullified. Thus, when speaking of the theatre of the absurd one has to realize that this term is something of a misnomer. All drama is absurd vis-à-

vis the spectator's reality and it would be a mistake to call a certain type of drama absurd, because it seems to deviate from what is wrongly considered to be a norm.

Drama is brought into existence by being realized into a complex structure, which, for the sake of brevity we may call the dramatic space. It is built up of three basic constituents, the stage, the scene and the action space. The action space consists almost entirely of signs originated by the actors, emphasized or complemented by the signs supplied by sounds and lighting. It is the kinetic quality of the action space which gives drama its specific character; yet it does not depend only on its inner tension but also on its confrontation with the spectator.

The correlation between the spectator and the action space is a very special one. The action space and the audience are parts of one totality in which the former is a dynamic, developing component, which is actualized from a latent state and expends itself through its actualization, while the latter is assembled on an ad hoc basis and remains static. This does not mean that the audience remains psychologically inert; a funny episode would lose its meaning, if it was not accepted with laughter and a tragic one, if it was not accepted with silence. But the involvement of the spectator must not overstep the psychological area; involving the spectator in direct action would destroy the whole structure. The action space and the audience have, at the same time, a common and autonomous existence, influencing each other within the structure, yet remaining separated in whatever type of arrangement they are placed.

Basically, there are only two types of arrangement on which the action space can evolve. First, the full or central stage, with the audience all around it, secondly, the partial stage, with the audience either in front of it or also along its sides. There may be different combinations in various theatrical systems, but in all cases the audience must remain separated from the action space by an imaginary line. In some systems this separation may be stressed by placing a physical barrier between the action space and the spectator. What is not realized by the advocates of the so-called involvement of the spectator is that the abolition of this physical barrier does not annul the imaginary line which

separates the action space from the spectator. The very existence of action space is based on this special correlation, on this dialectical contradiction between itself and the audience.

As we have noticed, dramatic space constitutes a kind of field of forces with a considerable kinetic energy. The interplay of these forces results in what is commonly understood as dramatic tension. Yet the energy thus created is severely restricted within a circumscribed space-time continuum. Limitation both to the spread and duration is a general feature of dramatic space. This has been expressed by one of the greatest of dramatic practitioners and theoreticians:

But pardon, gentles all,/ The flat unraised spirit that  
hath dar'd/ On this unworthy scaffold to bring forth/  
So great an object: can this cockpit hold/ The vasty  
fields of France? or may we cram/ Within this wooden O  
the very casques/ That did affright the air at Agin-  
court?

The passage also indicates what seems to be a spontaneous tendency on the part of the structure to break out of its boundaries. It appears to expand outwards and form a kind of twin to the dramatic space. This twin is, however, not identical. It only exists in the imagination of the spectator, and it does not possess all the elements of the dramatic space. But it is a space where action indispensable for the development of drama takes place. In relation to the dramatic space it can be called secondary, indirect, outer, remote or oblique; but since its main function is to carry action, it may be called imaginary action space.

In examining the use of the imaginary action space throughout the history of theatre, one might be led to suppose that it is no more than a spatial extension of the stage. Indeed, it is argued that it is entirely dependent on the type of stage. Stiebitz sees its origin in the Greek theatre which introduced a permanent architectural stage, Bogatyrev denies its existence in the folk-theatre which has no conventional stage.<sup>4</sup> Perger, who divides dramas into "Einortsdramen", i.e. those which take place in one locality, either throughout the whole play or throughout the individual acts, and "Bewegungsdramen", i.e. those which move from one locality to another within sight of the spectator, such as the medieval mysteries, attributes imaginary action space, or what he calls "idealische Bühne" only to the "Einortsdrama".<sup>5</sup>

It is argued that the strict delineation of the stage has pre-conditioned the spectator to presume its continuation beyond its limits. If a scene represents a forest, the spectator automatically imagines the forest continuing at the sides of the stage or behind, if a room, he imagines further rooms, and so on. The relationship of the outer to the dramatic space proper can remain dormant but they can enter into active relationship when the action from the imaginary space invades the stage, when it overflows from the latter to the former or when it is completely relegated to beyond the boundaries of the stage. In these cases the imaginary action space has to be actualized for the spectator by signs. The first requirement is its localization, not only in space but also in time.

As far as place is concerned, there are two types of localization. In the first case the imaginary action space may be situated at the side or at the back of the stage, behind a window as in Hebbel's *Maria Magdalena*, behind a closed door as in de Vigny's *Chatterton*, Gogol's *The Inspector*, Ibsen's *The Wild Duck*, Chekhov's *The Seagull* or Buero Vallejo's *Historia de una escalera*, or it may be freely accessible as in the Chinese theatre. It may be under the stage as in Schiller's *Maria Stuart*, or above as in Shaw's *Misalliance*. It may flank part of the stage as in Ibsen's *The Master Builder*, Chekhov's *Three Sisters* or Synge's *Riders to the Sea*, or it may envelop the whole stage as in Sheriff's *Journey's End* or Langer's *The Mounted Patrol*.<sup>6</sup> In the second case the imaginary action space may be located far away from the stage as in Greek tragedies, Chinese operas, Japanese Noh plays, French classical drama, several of Shakespeare's plays, Pirandello's *Così è, se vi pare*, Cocteau's *La Voix Humaine*, Sartre's *Huis Clos*, and so on. When the imaginary action space is in the close vicinity of the stage, it is actualized either directly by auditory or visual signs coming from the outside, or by signs originated by the actors. Auditory signs can be provided by music, such as the sounds of a lyre from the Hermes's underground cave in Sophocles's *Ichneutai*, dance music from the adjoining room in Strindberg's *The Father*, drums from the jungle in O'Neill's *Emperor Jones*, ships' sirens in his *Long Days Journey into Night*, the sound of axes in Chekhov's *Three Sisters*, the flushing of a lavatory in Graham

Greene's *The Living Room*, incomprehensible speech and shouting in Ibsen's *The Wild Duck*, and so on. Optical means are semiotically less productive; they are restricted to changes in the intensity and colour of lighting or to intermittent flashes of light such as in Shaw's *The Doctor's Dilemma*, or Claudel's *Partage de Midi*. Indirect actualization of the imaginary action space close to the stage depends on the speech or extra-linguistic sounds of the actors and on their physical reactions. In Gogol's *The Inspector* the mayor with his "psst, psst!" accompanied by anxious gestures evokes the illusion that the drunken Khlestakov is asleep in the next room.

When the imaginary action space is distant from the stage, the onus of its actualization falls entirely on the actor. The Greek and French Classical drama used the figure of the messenger. Some modern dramatists and producers have introduced technical aids. But these prove successful only, if the rule is observed that the imaginary action space must be actualized by signs. Such is the case in Cocteau's *La Voix Humaine* or in Genet's *Les Bonnes*, where the imaginary action space on the other end of the telephone line is actualized by the signs provided by the actresses making or answering the call, or in Čapek's *R.U.R.*, where the sudden failure of the electric light suggests that the robots have taken over the power station. On the other hand, Piscator's use of film projections or Shaw's introduction of the video-telephone in his *Back to Methuselah* are failures, because their authors did not understand the semiotics of the imaginary action space. The disadvantage of film projection now so fashionable as a means of shortcutting dramatic action lies in the fact that in practice it cancels the action transference into another medium, i.e. film which is governed by entirely different structural rules.<sup>7</sup>

But paradoxically, the imaginary action space may also be placed on the stage, in which case it will cause a partial or complete suppression of some or all of the other constituents of the dramatic space. The partial suppression of action space and its replacement by imaginary action space occurs for instance in Marlowe's tragedy, if the scene in which Edward is murdered by stamping on his chest and belly, is played out of sight of the spectators. An example of a complete suppression of action space by

darkening the stage is provided in the hospital scene of the mass administration of enemas in E.F. Burian's version of *The Good Soldier Schweik*.<sup>8</sup> An opposite treatment is prescribed by Maeterlinck in his play *Ariane and Barbe-bleue*. Immediately after the scene showing the attempt of Ariane and the other girls to escape from the castle, the author actualizes the imaginary action space on the stage made invisible by what he calls the flood of intolerable light. This effect, technically impossible in his time, could easily be achieved today by dazzling the spectators with psychedelic effects. An example of two imaginary action spaces, one on the stage and one very distant, is found in Maeterlinck's *Intérieur*. The scene represents a garden with a house in the background. Its three windows are lit and through them both the actors in the garden and the spectators see a family. Maeterlinck writes in his stage directions:

Il semble que lorsque l'un d'eux se lève, marche ou fait un geste, ses mouvements soient graves, lents, rares et comme spiritualisés par la distance, la lumière et le voile indécis des fenêtres.

At the same time, both the actors in the garden and the spectators, are aware of a no less important imaginary action space in the form of a distant river, in which one of the girls from the house had been found drowned. The whole drama is based on the conflict between these three constituents; the imaginary space where the tragedy occurred, the dramatic space from which it will be announced, and the imaginary space it will shatter at the end of the play. An interesting and novel attempt at the introduction of imaginary action space onto the stage occurs in the comedy called *The Complete Guide to Sex*. It has only two actors who, supported by a pianist and a dancer, perform a series of sketches satirizing bedroom manners in history and fairy tale. In one of these sketches the stage is left empty and the imaginary action although invisible and inaudible is so effective that it causes the audience to laugh and applaud.<sup>9</sup>

There is one area, however, where the imaginary action space cannot arise and that is in the auditorium. The reason is simple; it is filled with spectators who must remain the addressees and not the originators of the signs within the structure. When the spectators are envisaged as representing something other than

themselves, as in Jerzy Grotowski's productions, e.g. the descendants of Cain in Byron's *Cain*, the inmates of a lunatic asylum as in Słowacki's *Kordian*, or Indian monks and courtesans as in Kalidasa's *Shakuntala*, the device succeeds only in the mind of the producer.<sup>10</sup> From the spectators' point of view they remain what they are - Mr White, Mrs Green and Miss Blue, sitting in the theatre and watching a play.

As far as its localization in time is concerned, imaginary action space usually progresses in the present or in the past. But there are also instances in which it is envisaged in the future. Such is the case in the witches' scene in *Macbeth*, but an even more striking example occurs in Pirandello's *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore*, where the action which allegedly took place in the past is supposed to materialize in the future. Nevertheless, it remains imaginary. As the Step-daughter says in the second act:

Oh, darling, darling, what a horrid comedy you've got to play! What a wretched part they've found for you! A garden... a fountain... look, just suppose it's here. Where, you say? Why, right here. It's all pretence, you know. That's the trouble, darling, it's all make-believe. But it's better to imagine it, because if they fix it up, it'll only be painted cardboard, painted cardboard for the rockery, the water, the plants...

As has already been said, the imaginary action space is actualized by various devices which are derived from the action space proper and which are usually combined. This process of the sign being followed by its explanation by another sign, which combines with it to form a new sign, requiring an additional explanation in the form of a further sign, which Pierce calls "development", is more important in drama than in other semiotic systems. It makes it different from others, in particular from language, as it places the stress not on the result, i.e. the final signatum, but on the process of interpretation. This is important both for the action space proper and for the imaginary action space, actualized through signs originated in the former. These signs do not appear one by one but in clusters: speech plus facial movement plus gesture; a change of lighting plus a gesture; an off-stage sound plus a change of bodily position plus an extra-linguistic sound and so on. Jakobson's principle that combination works not only in sequence but also in concurrence is evident both in the action

space and in the imaginary action space. Yet it has to be emphasized that we do not necessarily arrive at a signatum, as is proved by several plays by Pirandello, Beckett, Genet and others.

Although many signs actualizing the imaginary action space are produced through mechanical means, their main source is the actor. In some dramatic systems he conveys them by mime, without speech. Thus in the Noh play *Sanemori*, a single actor, representing the ghost of the knight Sanemori, conveys the progression of the imaginary action space, as it were, backwards. He conveys the actions of another knight picking up Sanemori's severed head and washing it, the emotions of their knights on recognizing the head, and then the preceding event, the battle in which Sanemori was decapitated. Western drama relies much more on verbal actualization. In Greek tragedy, where the imaginary action space is usually revealed after a lapse of time, the induction itself is impressive but far from concise. In Sophocles's *King Oedipus* the messenger depicts the suicide of Jocasta and the blinding of Oedipus in seventy-eight lines of the most gruesome detail which are only interrupted twice by irrelevant questions from the Chorus. On the other hand, one could hardly find a more concise yet no less expressive verbal actualization of the imaginary action space than in the Czech 14th century comedy *The Unguentarius*. It consists of the short sentence. In this case the sudden emergence of the imaginary action space is more or less accidental but dramatically important. At one point the Quack's assistant, Pustrpalk disappears, probably behind the backcloth. His master calls him, using debased German, obviously for comic effect. Here is a polite translation without any attempt at the obscene rhyme of the original:

THE QUACK Pustrpalk, wo bistu?/ PUSTRPALK Here I am,  
Master, squeezing a nice furry pussy.

The imaginary action space springs into existence in all its complexity as if revealed by lightning. Shakespeare is a master of verbal actualization, combining signs with referential, expressive, conative and aesthetic functions, and his various techniques provide masses of material for the theses industry. Some of them rely on topoi but many are very original:

Full fathom five thy father lies;/ Of his bones are coral made;/  
These are pearls that were his eyes;/ Nothing of him that doeth fade,/ But doeth suffer a

sea-change/ Into something rich and strange./ Sea-nymphs hourly ring his knell:/ Hark! now I hear them - ding-dong bell.

The authors of the French Classical tragedies, on the other hand, are rather heavy-handed in this respect and Molière is only slightly better. English Restoration comedy and Romantic drama use more direct methods, but it is only in modern drama that the potentialities of the verbal actualization of the imaginary action space are mournfully realized by authors such as Ibsen, Strindberg, Chekhov and Maeterlinck. Of the 20th century dramatists Shaw was among the most lacking in this skill. In the contemporary theatre Ionesco is among the authors who best understand the rule about the concurrent working of signs from different categories. In one of his plays there is a scene during which we hear the noise of a beast panting in headlong course and a prolonged trumpeting. The characters on the stage continue their conversation, paying no attention. Then the noise is heard again very close.

JEAN Whatever is it?/ WAITRESS Whatever is it?  
Another man continues speaking as before but Jean bounds to his feet, knocking his chair over, and looks off left pointing.

JEAN Oh, a rhinoceros! / WAITRESS Oh, a rhinoceros!  
Ionesco adds in his stage directions:

The noise of the animal dies away swiftly and one can already hear the words which follow. The whole of this scene must be played very fast, each repeating in swift succession: Oh, a rhinoceros!

Perhaps the most striking verbal actualization of the imaginary action space in contemporary drama is achieved by Sartre in *Huis Clos*. The semantic situation in Sartre's play is very complex, because the constituents of the dramatic space, i.e. the scene and the action space proper, and several imaginary action spaces, exist independently both in place and time, yet merge intermittently and cannot be distinguished from each other. First, there is an imaginary action space closely associated with the stage. One of the three main characters is taken to a room by a valet.

GARCIN Is it daytime?/ VALET Can't you see? The lights are on./ GARCIN Ah yes, I've got it. It's your daytime. And outside?/ VALET Outside?/ GARCIN Damn it, you know what I mean. Beyond that wall./ VALET There's a pas-

sage./ GARCIN And the end of the passage?/ VALET More rooms, more passages and stairs./ GARCIN And beyond them?/ VALET That's all.

This verbal actualization of imaginary space, situated outside our experience, i.e. in a static, eternal and infinite continuum, works perfectly, because Sartre chooses signs which refer to our conception of such a continuum. A claustrophobic room, the scenic constituent of the dramatic space of *Huis Clos* is itself a polysemic sign, open to various interpretations, but gradually we arrive at a definite signatum as we are made to realize that the room is only one unit in an infinite series.

No less satisfying is the actualization of the distinctive imaginary action spaces pertaining to each of the three characters. They remain separated both in place and time not only mutually but also vis-à-vis the action space. To quote an example: Garcin, who has been executed, describes, as if it were happening in the present, how his wife is waiting in front of the military barracks where he is being held. Only a few moments later he speaks of her, again as if in the present, sitting at home with his coat riddled with twelve bullet-holes on her knees. Yet this episode took place some six months after the first. And finally, he remarks shortly afterwards: "My wife died just now. About two months ago." The sequence of signs establishes for the spectator the temporal polarity between the imaginary action space relating to Earth, where time rushes on and the action space relating to Hell, where it stands still.

This complexity of the imaginary action space and of its relation to the whole dramatic space arises whenever the imaginary space plays an important or even dominant part in the play. In Cocteau's *La Voix Humaine* the imaginary action space, created entirely by the voice, gestures and facial expressions of the single actress, suddenly undergoes a dramatic change. In Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape* there is the imaginary action space behind the scene into which Krapp retires from time to time, and several partly defined imaginary action spaces, actualized by his voice on the tapes.

As has already been mentioned, some authors assert that what they call illusory stage, i.e. the imaginary action space, was introduced by the Greeks after the adoption of the permanent scene.

Exceptional actions, actions technically impossible on the stage or actions unacceptable on social, religious or moral grounds had to take place off stage, and finally this became a source of dramatic effect. This, however, is not a valid explanation. Approaching the question, as it were, from the point of view of langue and not parole, we find that the principle of the imaginary action space applies to the whole corpus of drama. We find it in systems unconnected with Greek drama, not only in Oriental drama, but also in medieval liturgical plays. In several of these the Resurrection of Christ is not represented directly, but by the three Marys' reaction of it. Indeed, the main function of the imaginary action space is to raise tension within the structure. The suicide of Hedwig in *The Wild Duck*, of Voynitski in *The Wood Demon*, of Tryeplyev in *The Seagull*, the death of Baron Tusenbach in a duel in *Three Sisters*, Oswald's attempt at rape in *Ghosts* and so on, are much more dramatic off stage.

But as a constituent of the dramatic structure the imaginary action space has yet another specific quality. As a rule, all signifiers connected with it are polysemic. This admits a binary opposition - propitious versus ominous, good versus evil and so on. There is always a certain disquieting ambiguity and mysteriousness. This is felt even in such a relatively simple case as in the opening scene of Wedekind's *Der Erdgeist*, where the circus behind the stage conceals something quite different from what the spectator imagines from the Ringmaster's speech. In Strindberg's *The Dance of Death* the music behind the stage functions either as a signifier for the enjoyment of the guests or for the isolation of those who were not invited. In the two episodes with the boy in *Waiting for Godot* we can never be sure whether there is only one or two imaginary action spaces pertaining to the boy or whether they both or only one or none of them constitute the imaginary action space pertaining to Godot. As Genet says in his notes "Comment jouer *Le Balcon*":

L'existence des révoltés est dans le bordel, ou au-dehors? Il faut tenir l'équivoque jusqu'à la fin.

As in many other art forms, in drama the stress is rather on the signifier and not on the signified and in the imaginary action space the signifiers have free play. There is no automatic refe-

rence to signifieds which causes conflicting interpretation by the audience on the one hand and the characters of the drama on the other. In the old Chinese play *Cho Fang Ts'ao (What Price Life?)* the tyrant Ts'ao Ts'au, on whose head a reward is offered, takes refuge in the house of Lu, who is a friend of his father. Lu orders his servants to kill a pig and goes to the market to buy wine. After he has left, Ts'ao comes on the stage and finds that Lu is not at home. Both Ts'ao and the audience hear the sound of knives being sharpened. Ts'ao suspects that Lu has gone to denounce him and that the servants are sharpening their weapons preparing to kill him. He rushes behind the stage; there is a din of gongs and weapons on the imaginary stage. Ts'ao appears and sings that he has murdered the whole family, only to realize later that his suspicion was unfounded. A similar conflicting interpretation occurs in a even more complicated form in Chekhov's *The Seagull*. When they hear the shot from the imaginary stage the audience guesses that Tryeplyev has killed himself, then, for a moment they are deceived by the doctor and finally they learn that they were right.

We have observed that the action space proper and the imaginary action space remain separate and are brought into confrontation. It is this confrontation which enhances the tension within the structure. There are, however, examples of their being mixed in an arbitrary way. This was quite common in the Greek theatre, where the result of an episode which took place on the imaginary stage, such as a suicide or murder, was shown in the form of a tableau on a platform, *ekkyklema*, pushed on the stage. Aristophanes satirized this practice in his *Acharnians*. Dikaipolis comes to Euripides to borrow a costume but Euripides is busy composing poetry. Finally the *ekkyklema* with a costume is pushed onto the stage from the imaginary action space. In Pirandello's *Trovarsi* the actress, brooding in her dressing room, imagines her triumph on the stage. Suddenly the dressing room is changed into a stage as the back-cloth is lifted and a fictitious auditorium with spectators appears. The imaginary action space is shattered, the tension is diminished and paradoxically, the verisimilitude of the scene is destroyed. Another example proving that mixing the action space with the imaginary action space is not only counter-dramatic but

ridiculous is the revelation of Hedda Gabler's corpse in Ibsen's play. The prerequisites of the separation of the imaginary action space and of its ambiguity are convincingly demonstrated by Bernini. In one of his plays he places on the stage two theatres complete with two auditoria. Two actors, one with his face towards what is supposed to be the real, the other facing what is supposed to be the fictitious audience, enter into conversation and come to the conclusion that the group that each of them beholds is deemed illusory by the other. Then they pull a curtain across the stage, separating the two audiences and say that each will stage a performance for his audience alone. One of the actors disappears behind the curtain in the imaginary action space, while the other arranges a performance in the visible theatre. But the performance is frequently interrupted by laughter from the imaginary action space, giving the impression that the comedy taking place on the imaginary stage is much funnier. At the end the two actors reappear and ask each other how they have fared. The actor from the imaginary theatre says that he has never shown anything more than the audience itself, preparing to leave with its carriages and horses and accompanied by a great number of lights and torches.<sup>11</sup>

At present many producers disregard the semiotics of the imaginary action space, and transfer to the stage many scenes originally relegated to the imaginary action space by the dramatist, not realizing that rape and violence on the imaginary stage are more dramatic and sinister than their simulation before the spectator. But the producer can also improve on the dramatist. In Duhamel's *La Lumière* a blind man stands before an open window through which the spectators see a mountain lake at sunset. The blind man raves about the beauty of the scene though he has never seen it. In Hilar's production at the Prague National Theatre, as soon as the blind man approached the window, the vista turned into total darkness, stressed by the sharply lit window frame. Charles Vildrac who saw this production wrote:

The spectator is put into the place of the speaker - he too becomes a blind man who sees the scene in his mind only.<sup>12</sup>

We have observed that the dramatic structure, restricted in space and time, tends to break outwards. A similar process takes place in painting, where the imaginary space is also actualized by poly-

semantic signifiers. Yet, unlike drama, painting can also actualize the imaginary space in front of the picture, abolishing, as it were, the spectator. One of the most common devices used is the mirror. Perhaps the earliest and at the same time the most complex example is the picture *The Marriage of Giovanni Arnolfini* by Jan van Eyck. There is a mirror behind the couple which reflects not the observer but two additional figures. Moreover, there appear in it two additional imaginary spaces, one suggested by a window, another by a half-open door. This picture has a counterpart in Magritte's *The False Mirror*. The eye on the canvas obviously reflects space in front of it, but all we see is a sky interspersed with clouds. A mirror, abolishing the spectator was also used by Velasquez, in his picture *Christ in the House of Martha and Mary*, and most effectively by him in *Las Meniñas* where the painter at his easel is apparently looking at the observer, but he is in fact facing the Spanish Royal couple whose reflection appears in the mirror on the wall in the background. A mirror adds several new signifiers to the scene in Manet's *Bar at Folies Bergères*. The picture *The Awakening Conscience* by Holman Hunt is exceptionally interesting. The lady, probably the kept mistress of the reprobate playing the piano, is looking out from the picture towards the observer, but what she sees is the garden reflected in the mirror behind her. This is obviously the symbol of the freedom, purity and various other things she has lost. But we may also presume that the imaginary space in front of the picture includes the painter himself, who eyes the lady reproachfully, and any other observer ready to condemn her. Incidentally this picture is literally loaded with symbols - the cheap lamp on the piano, the wall paper, the pretentious bindings of the books, the cat eating the bird, and so on. Another device used in painting to suggest imaginary space is the door. It can be half-open as in Fragonard's *The Stolen Kiss*; an even more dangerous imaginary space is suggested by the door being bolted by the lover or pursuer in the same painter's *The Bolt*. Finally, even in such a frivolous scene as Fragonard's *The Swing* imaginary space is cleverly used to conceal the elusive truth. The incidence of imaginary space in painting is as numerous and manifold as that of the imaginary action space in drama. This proves that just as the

imaginary action space is an inseparable part of dramatic structure, it is also an inherent component of the structure of painting and that both drama and painting have metaphoric essence in common.

But apart from being an indivisible component of the structure, imaginary action space is also the space-time continuum from which the play emerges, in which it continues, if there are intervals between the acts and into which it finally retires. It is, therefore, a permanent entity and in seeking its origin as a permanent constituent of the structure, we must turn to what Preuß calls "der Unterbau des Dramas", those magic rites from the dawn of civilization which survived until recently amongst so-called primitive peoples.<sup>13</sup> Broadly speaking, these were of two kinds, first those concerning the deities or spirits of ancestors and secondly those connected with sympathetic or analogous magic. In these ritual performances and dances there was a complete metamorphosis of humans, not into real ancestors, real demons or real animals but into their spirits, i.e. into their ideas. The shaman left the village, entered another dimension where he took upon himself the substance of the spirit, appeared amongst the villagers and after performing the rite disappeared. Then after having deposited the substance of the spirit he returned as the shaman. In Polynesia, men connected with these magic rites had to be members of a secret society. Secretly made masks were kept in a special hut which women and uninitiated youths were not allowed to approach. Similar secrecy was observed in performing the rites themselves. Catlin describes the fertility rite of the Mexican Indians in which Okihede, the demon of the buffaloes suddenly appeared among the villagers during the festival, and danced. At night he escaped to the prairie pursued by one of the women. At dawn she returned with the phallus of the demon, showed it to the villagers and announced that she was holding the power of creation.<sup>14</sup>

The Baffinland Eskimos used to perform yearly a rite of the fight with Sedna, the Mother of Sea Animals. The success of the hunting season depended on her being killed. The goddess was never seen; she entered the village secretly and hid in one of the igloos. Her fight with the shaman took place in the igloo and could only be imagined by the villagers from the terrible din. Finally



the shaman appeared and showed a harpoon stained with blood. One could quote literally hundreds of such examples.<sup>15</sup> When the belief in the complete metamorphosis of humans into spirits begins to wane, the mask loses its magical power. It changes into a mere disguise and the idea of the spirit of the animal becomes man-animal. Rassmussen reports that in his time the adult Eskimos in King William Land watched the shaman's performance with amusement.<sup>16</sup> The substratum of magic disappears and the spectators witness a theatrical performance. Nevertheless, the residuum of magic survives even if the performance acquires other than magical functions. In the Middle Ages and up to the beginning of the 19th century a peculiar ceremony was performed in North Bohemia before Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve. All the children disappeared from the church and started running round it outside, bleating like sheep. The village shepherd ran after them but not in his normal role - he acted as a ram. This custom, allegedly connected with the Christian religion, was called "the sheep of Bethlehem".<sup>17</sup> But it is not difficult to discern in it a remnant of sympathetic magic, designed to ensure big flocks of sheep next spring. Even in its debased form it retains the important factor of magic rites - only a fraction is enacted; the sheep come from and return to some imaginary pasture, where they graze, copulate and multiply. Most of their ideal life remains a mystery, only vaguely imagined by the spectator.

When a sufficiently large sample from the vast ethnographical material concerning magic rites and ceremonies is analysed for common denominators, one arrives at a model which shows a complete parallelism with the dramatic structure. The main constituents, the stage, the scene, the action space, the imaginary action space and the spectators are common to both, even if the structures differ semiologically and functionally. In both it is the action space and the imaginary action space which are the main sources of energy, generating tension within the structure. The only difference is that in the magic rite structure, the amount of energy engendered in each of them is rigidly fixed, while in the dramatic structure it fluctuates between them. They are seldom in balance; more often one or another is preponderant. Their interrelation changes from one theatrical system to another, from age to age,

from author to author, from play to play.

When one remembers the identity of energy with matter, the action space might be compared to a contracting star which draws outside matter into its interior by its own gravity and on reaching its maximum density shoots it forth again into outer space.

#### Notes

- 1 Cf. J. VELTRUSKÝ, 1976, pp. 553-606.
- 2 K. PRAŽÁKOVÁ, 1921, pp. 390-392; F. STIEBITZ, 1937, pp. 229-242.
- 3 K. ELAM, 1980.
- 4 P. BOGATYREV, 1940, p. 95.
- 5 A. PERGER, 1929.
- 6 F. LANGER, (1888-1965), Czech dramatist. In his *Jízdní Hlídká* (*The Mounted Patrol*) the action takes place in a hut in which the patrol is beleaguered by the partisans and in the surrounding countryside.
- 7 In this short survey it was not possible to deal with the systems allied to some extent to the theatre, e.g. film, television and radio drama. Of these, paradoxically yet understandably, radio drama, relying as it does exclusively on the imaginary dramatic space, remains closest to theatre.
- 8 E.F. BURIAN, (1904-1959), Czech producer, founder of the Prague D34-41 theatre. His dramatization of *The Good Soldier Schweik* was played there in May 1935.
- 9 *The Complete Guide to Sex* by P. BARLOW and J. BROADBENT, produced at the National Theatre of Brent and played at the Lyric Hammersmith (London) in April 1984.
- 10 J. ROOSE-EVANS, 1973, p. 131.
- 11 R. BERNHEIMER, 1956, p. 243.
- 12 Quoted in VELTRUSKÝ, op. cit.
- 13 K.TH. PREUß, 1930, pp. 1-88.
- 14 G. CATLIN, 1851.
- 15 F. BOAS, p. 605.
- 16 K. RASSMUSSEN, 1926.
- 17 A. DOSTÁL, p. 585.

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