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Doctoral Thesis

JON FOSSE AND THE NEW THEATRE

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Keywords: time, space, spacetime, postdramatic theatre, chronotope, entanglement, figure, repetitions, ceremonies/ dramatic process, silence

Summary:

This thesis, *Jon Fosse and The New Theatre*, focuses mainly on the issue of time and space in Jon Fosse's dramatic texts, but it analyzes other specific aspects as well, such as characters/ figures, the text through its repetition, and the Fossean plot, in which entanglement is what we would call the link between the characters/ figures and the experience of space and time. The research reflects on the possibility of using the two concepts, space and time, as defined in science, as instruments in analysing Fosse's texts. The concept of time is considered as a general context, but also in relation to space, as it is difficult to tackle one without the other. More precisely, the emphasis will fall on how time and space are constructed, so that they become a single four-dimensional space, i.e. spacetime.

Even if there has been several research done on the dramatic texts of Jon Fosse, on time and space both, my thesis starts from the premises that space and time in Fosse's texts can be analysed and understood from a different perspective than the traditional one, related to death, that of spacetime. Time and space are perceived as a whole, as they form a continuum Fosse's distinctive story line ('now' and 'here'), but also the spacetime dimension as described in the philosophy and theory of Quantum Mechanics¹ ("Einstein combined space and time into a single entity, a sort of fabric, known as space–time. It's important to understand, however, that the actual existence of space–time is still speculative."² (Hage 19)

Hence, the structure of my thesis is divided as follows:

There is a first part entitled *Jon Fosse*, so that the reader becomes familiar with the kind of texts he writes and the themes the author explores. There are also details about his life and appreciations related to his contribution to the world of theatre and literature. This research looks at Fosse's plays as books to read, and the analysis will, in spite of the fact one identifies old themes like love, death, communication, relationships, betrayal, regret, suffering,

¹ Here I use the denomination Quantum Mechanics as it refers to putting in equation, but as I will be referring to the theory of the quantum field, the denomination will be either Quantum Physics or New Physics, as they represent the same theory.

² Hage, Stephen J. *Let There be Light. Physics, Philosophy and The Dimensional Structure of Consciousness*. Algora Publishing, 2013, p. 19.

remembering or childhood in Fosse's plays, focus on the way one experiences each of these, as the Fosse's perspective shines a new light on them.

This part is followed by the first chapter *Theoretical Preliminaries*, and to summarize, there has been some detailed research done in the recent years, however, this thesis proposes a different approach. It aims at bringing the discussion closer to the findings and the understanding of space and time in the 21st century. My perspective is indebted to a number of viewpoints expressed by philosophers like Jacques Derrida, Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre and Merleau Ponty, scientists like Stephen Hawking, Roger Penrose or Amir D. Aczel and critics like Mikhail Bakhtin and Hans Meyerhoff, researchers like Hans-Thies Lehmann, as well as others, who were stimulating and enriching for my research. There are references to certain principles and concepts, as they can be inspiring for the analysis of the texts, as for example the perception of time in the view of modern physics (or theory of quanta³). Concepts like the Quantum Entanglement principle and non-locality, or Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle are concepts that work analytically in order to explore the texts. Clearly, we are not claiming a literal application of these analogies from the physical world, but at a metaphorical and intuitional level they point towards a harmony between various levels of reality, and between the figures.

Bakhtin made the first attempt in uniting the two fields of study and created what is now known as the *chronotope*. However, I chose to use the borrowed term *spacetime* from Quantum Physics and proved in my analysis that the features of the spacetime resemble the ones in the Fosse's universe. Henceforth, the importance of Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope is significant as it paves the way of a relation to Fosse's dramatic texts. For Bakhtin it is the events that are structured around the chronotope, for it is the chronotopes that "are the organizing centers for the fundamental narratives...to them belongs the meaning that shapes narrative"⁴. The Fosse's spacetime is structured by the events or encounters, and not the other way around; however, the figures' existence cannot be an existence without a chronotopic value. The plays I chose help exemplify the peculiar spatio-temporality; the spacetime acquires its value according to the emotional charge of each figure's appearance and interaction or entanglement, the figures and their encounter/ appearance transform the spacetime in a place and a time (a 'here' and 'now' or a 'there' and 'now').

³ The smallest excitation of a quantized wave or field, as a photon or phonon.

⁴ Allan, Stuart. "When Discourse is Torn from Reality": Bakhtin and the Principle of Chronotopicity". *Time and Society*, vol. 3, no 2, 1994, p. 250.

The second chapter of my thesis, *Aspects of the Fosse'an dramatic text*, the research goes aspects of the Fosse'an text, from the breakdown of silences, repetitions, ceremonies and what I called the Fosse'an figures. The reason is because the figures are rather representations of someone or something than the classic characters, thus a term I suggested is that of *figures*. By naming all these aspects, an incursion in Postdramatic theatre was a must, as we have seen that some aspects had been grasped by Hans-Thies Lehmann in his study *Postdramatic Theatre*. A new face has been given to *drama* or of what *dramatic* represents. the Fosse'an characters are figures, rather than characters, mostly appearances or states of being.

The way Fosse builds the spacetime affects the very existence of the characters/ figures, the interaction between them and the overall atmosphere. This research does not claim to be the ultimate solution to understanding and interpreting Fosse's plays, but it opens a discussion on an alternative when describing the spacetime of his dramatic texts. The peculiarity of Fosse's dramas is thus built up through repetitions and silences. The monologues and dialogues take place within the structure of the spacetime (even if there is a distance in space or time, present-past-future, the communication is possible within this). The relationship between the figures is facilitated by this spacetime, and the entanglement as a main characteristic becomes visible. Time loses its chronology, there is only a reminder of the past in the names of the characters and with some of the adverbs used, 'now', 'then', 'always', 'never' etc. The fact that all characters find themselves in the same space and time gives an eternal aspect to time.

On account of Fosse's text being first and foremost a literary creation, this thesis explores how the Fosse'an dramaturgy offers a peculiar environment for words and experiences in a literary form that can be something between the *tilstandsdramatikk*⁵ and the *poetic theatre* (in its word-for-word meaning and not what it represents in the sphere of performativity).

The final chapter is entitled *Close reading – The Plays*, and is divided into five parts, each represented by one of the plays under consideration. I chose five case studies, *And We'll Never be Parted* (*Og aldri skal vi skjliast*), *Sleep My Baby Sleep* (*Sov du vesle barnet mitt*), *Sleep* (*Svevn*), *Shadows* (*Skuggar*) and *Sea* (*Hav*). Three of the plays, *Sleep My Baby Sleep* (*Sov du vesle barnet mitt*), *Shadows* (*Skuggar*) and *Sea* (*Hav*) are analyzed in detail, as they are taken from different periods of the author's career. Each of the three plays has four

⁵ In a word-for-word translation, this dramaturgy is a drama of a state or a condition, more than a situational drama, which is the English concept. The Norwegian term also induces a correlation between the two. The dramatic space is created by that feeling of strangeness / discomfort, which in Norwegian is the drama of the state/ condition. However, I choose the English terminology from an instrumental point of view.

subsections: Fosse's characters/ figures, Plot, ceremony or Fosse's dramatic process, Repetitions and Spacetime, Text, communication and entanglement, and ends with a Conclusion on the close-reading of the play. References will be made to other two plays *And We'll Never be Parted* (*Og aldri skal vi skjliast*) and *Sleep* (*Svevn*), just to show that the plays under analysis are not isolated in Fosse's line of dramatic literature. The plays I chose to analyze serve us well in applying my initial hypothesis of spacetime, but to highlight the other specific aspects of the Fosse's text as well. I do not see as my task to place Jon Fosse in a particular current or tradition yet, but what is relevant is to see how Fosse's texts function and to acquire some instruments that facilitate the work, when dealing with the playwright's texts.

This thesis ends with an **Appendix 1**, where I list all the translations into English and Romanian of Fosse's plays and an **Appendix 2** with the interview I had with Jon Fosse on the 6th of February 2015, in Oslo. This was an exclusive interview that only brings some colour to my research. The interview is in Norwegian, but the intention is to translate it and publish it in the near future.

This research proposed investigating concepts related to the field of science and correlate them to the Fosse's universe of dramatic works, through a close-reading of a selection of the playwright's plays. This intentional approach is to show that there is a common ground or a meeting point between the two fields of research. Intuitively, as an artist, Jon Fosse was able to reveal this closeness without even being aware that he is touching upon it. Furthermore, the approach here was to make some analogies and use the terms and concepts to explore the Fosse's dramas. Thus, an adaptation and a basic interpretation can transform the concepts into good instruments to define certain aspects of the literary works, like time, space, being, experience, closeness, far-ness, seeing etcetera. There is room for future research that could develop these perspectives on Fosse's entire dramatic repertoire or even beyond those. For the time being, the thesis only oriented itself on a limited number of works by Jon Fosse, who I believe opened a gate to new challenges and opportunities to enrich the perspective when it comes to research in the literary field.