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BODY AND SPACE INTERACTIONS IN THE ART OF THEATRE

Abstract:

The dual interaction between body and space has become one of the main issues of the recent architectural debates. While the body is in a state of constant change, the space has been perceived as a stable entity in a conventional manner. In this research, space has been requestioned with its fluidity and instability through the experience revealed with the performance and the performative body in the theatrical space. The performance and the concept of space can not be abstracted from each other in the art of Theatre. Within the scope of this study, it has been examined how our current spatial perception can be varied by the spatial experience of the body. The latest paradigms and innovations that bodily revolution brought to the theatre space have been observed through experiencing the new Turkish Theatre. The dynamics of body and space interactions have been unveiled in the five different cases which are belong to five different experimental theatre communities of Turkey. The components of the space, body-interactive paradigms of the performance and the dynamics between the performative body and the spectator body, have been constructed the main structure of the analyzes. The significance of this study, is to expand the boundaries of the concept of 'space' for both theatrical and architectural disciplines and to unveil the spatial responses of new requests of this field.

Keywords:

Body, Space, Performance, Architecture, Theatre,

JEL Classification: C90

Introduction

In the studies about theatre, we generally see the theatre considered as an art branch. But since religious ceremonies and rituals, theatre also has been an important communication environment for the society. It has evolved around the common values of society and created its own syntax by those who participated in the play. It has maintained its existence around this context for centuries. Therefore, the theatre was influenced and transformed quickly by all kinds of sociological, political and cultural changes which affects the society.

Theatre attempts to create an illusion from the reality of life and in accordance with this attempt, the most essential tool is the actor. Therefore, every innovation in the theatre has changed the meaning of the actor's presence on the theatre stage. Up to the avant-garde movements of theatre in the early 20th century, the effect of speech or an high volume voice with the supportive movements of body has been emphasized in the art of theatre (Erdenk, 2012). For instance, it was important for an actor to have a strong and clean voice in the ancient Greek Theatre. The movement of the body in the stage was very limited. In Renaissance, acting was not important as much as the drama texts and scripts, therefore theatre plays were played by amateur actors. In the 17th century, a theatre community named 'Commedia dell'Arte' emerged in Italy and influenced the theatre perception in Europe. They have developed a sense of theatre which almost relied on the improvisational and physical skills of the actor.

The rationalist movement that emerged in the 18th century searched for ways to show the reality of the theatre through its own perception of reality. In this period of time, it was expected from the actor to speak realistically and actively and also to do character analysis for being reflected in his/her emotions and to be more creative while playing his role (Nutku, 1995). This understanding not only overthrew the previous perceptions of acting, but also deeply influenced the acting methods that will come out afterwards.

The first body-oriented practices in the contemporary theatre pioneered the emergence of a new understanding of the body as a fundamental element of an artistic creation. Adolphe Appia, advocated that the human body can only exist in a three-dimensional theatre space, Emile Jacques Dalcroze, the creator of the 'eurythmie' dance practice that pioneered significant changes in the stage and Gordon Craig, who described theatre as a visual art and the actor as a tool of visual narrative, are the pioneers in contemporary approaches to the bodily perception of the actor (Innes, 2010).

In the new theatre of 21th century, the performative body dominates the theatrical space. In these processes, led by performance and experience-oriented works, the collective bodily creation in rituals has been tried to be revived, so audience's bodily experience is also very essential too. The passive audience –as a result of rationalization- who does

not participate in the performative experience, is being gained to the theatre space with the provocation in the performance or the interactive staging methods in contemporary theatre. In this context, not only the actor's but also the audience's physical presence in the theatre space been considered in the theatre plays which has been examined within the scope of this study.

In this study, in order to understand the new meaning of the body and the theatre stage, the processes of bodily interactions in the theatre space have been explained firstly. Afterwards, the way in which the body transforms the experience and the space, has been clarified with through the concepts of the performative body and the theatre. The implications has been discussed through the experimental (or alternative) theatre works of Turkey. Two experimental theatre plays were examined on the basis of the concepts of body, space and time. Due to these terms, both the theatrical and architectural dynamics of the space have been deciphered and uncovered.

Bodily Interaction in the Theatre Space

The ocular-centric attitude, which still has great importance in the production and representation of architecture today, is an understanding that holds the objective view above all else and advocates that knowledge can be acquired through 'vision'. Pallasmaa (2005) defines this vision-centered architectural production as 'retinal architecture' which considers architecture as a stage decoration or a sculpture and has a very poor and passive relation with the human body. What makes this retinal architecture production a phenomena that needs to be questioned, is that it does not take much into account the physical-bodily relationship established with the space and the bodily memory that this experience gives rise to, and the relationship between body, space and time in the process of experiencing the space.

However, it appears that all senses contact the specialized parts of our body to initiate sensory and perceptual processes. It can not be said that the visualization is not important in the emergence of spatial perception, but it's known that the spatial experience is being emerged with all the senses combined. Merleau-Ponty (1968) explains the relationship between touching and seeing through defining the seeing as "touching objects with gaze" and emphasizes the dominance of touching to other senses.

In addition to all, the tactful sense reduces the distance between the subject and the object and provides a direct relationship with the object. The boundary between the subject and the object becomes transparent and this ambiguity emerges as a situation in the contemporary theatre space where the subject (actor) has to be questioned in relation to the object.

We can see the architectural and theatrical contributions of the sense of tactility to the experience-oriented scene venue set by the performative body. In the new understanding

of staging, we can see that the theatre space, besides being an element that the play takes place, also becomes an instrument of the bodily movements. The experience of the performative body dominates the theatrical space and transforms it with its own dynamics. Nevertheless, we can also say that this body-interactive staging has saved the theatrical space from the coercion of the theatre text.

Avant-garde Theatre and the Performative Body

In the second half of the 20th century, several changes in the contemporary art scene influenced the art of theatre too. While the text-based verbal theater were losing its significance, performance-based experiences gained importance. The theatre 'Aristotelian', which has been running since ancient Greek, has gone beyond the 'three unity' rule and the new theatre has got a structure evaluated with the title 'visual arts'. (Karagül, 2015).

The body-interactive theatre plays which are discussed within the scope of this study, have started to emerge in the theatre history firstly with the avant-garde theatre movements. Human beings have been aware since the very ancient times of history that they can produce meaning by giving several forms to the body, but when it begins to be used as a material of art, the body has turned into a 'language'.

The avant-garde term is used in its simplest form to describe the pioneering line of artistic experience that will become obsolete when it moves one step ahead of the new in a given time period. But Avant-garde is not a concept of neutral value as it is in such uses. It is synonymous with collapse for Marxist critics like George Lukács; is a cultural symptom of unease created by bourgeois society. According to the advocates of this idea, it necessarily defines all the arts of our era, and "modern mind is prone to the Avant-garde." (Poggiali, 1968).

Some pioneer names that lead the performative works by changing the concept of staging in the period of avant-garde theatre production and considering the body as the fundamental element of the artistic creation are; Adolphe Appia, Emile J. Dalcroze, Gordon Craig, Constantine Stanislavski, Oskar Schlemmer, Peter Brook, Antonin Artaud and Jerzy Grotowski (Innes, 2010). During this period, significant theater movements and ensembles emerged that paved the way for performance to become the main paradigm of the space and the play. For instance; Barrault's Total Theater, Grotowski's 'Living Theater', Antonin Artaud's 'Theatre of Cruelty', Schlemmer's theatre researches of body-space relations in 'Bauhaus Theatre', etc...

In the twenty-first century theatre productions, on the one hand, we observe experimental and political theatre plays questioned by body, space and time phenomena's, and on the other hand we can see the plays created by digital instruments and virtual environments by multimedia. The ability of digital technologies to change time-space relationships on

the stage and the sense of space and navigation, and the overlaying of the display on the stage, pioneered a new and productive turn of theatre. In this context, several experimental theatre communities like; Rimini Protokoll, Gob Squat, Berlin Volksbühne and La Societas Rafaella Sanzio continue to do experimental works on the possibilities of digital settings on stage (Candan, 2013).

Body, Space and Time Interactions in the Alternative Theatre of Turkey

According to Karagül (2015), there are two main tendencies that dominate the artistic understanding of alternative theatre communities in Turkey. One of these is to place different experiments out of the formal patterns we can call 'classical' or 'mainstream'. In this understanding, staging, audience-player relations and classical space design are undergoing some changes. The dynamics of this changes show that the Theatre in Turkey was heavily influenced by the in-yer-face theatre movement that emerged in England. The other important trend is to move beyond the translation and adaptation texts to focus on writing contemporary and original texts and to create their own theatre texts. However, Alternative communities write with social and political concerns and these concerns come to the forefront in the design of the performance and also the design of the space. Because the theatre plays translated and adapted from the original texts are inadequate to reflect peoples' individual and social concerns In Turkey. 'Tayf Kolektif' which is one of the alternative theatre communities that wrote their own text or change it in an abstract way, is examined as a case with one of its plays 'Ophelia' as part of this study.

Some other alternative theatre communities that create their own texts, represent the body directly on the stage without the text's rules, through the effects of performative transformation. Another play which is examined as a case in this context is 'Panopticon' from 'Şermola Performans'.

The analyzes have been developed through the notions such as illusion-catharsis, alienation, duplicated space, simultaneity and active-passive with a deconstructive approach that develops around the main concepts of 'body, space and time'.

Significant Notions of the Study

Illusion – Catharsis

As one of the basic concepts of art philosophy, *catharsis* points to the mental and spiritual purification and is seen as a condition of artistic creations. Aristotle places *catharsis* in the essence of tragedy; the place where *catharsis* is to take place is tragedy (Aristotle, 1995). In this case the content of the concept changes; *catharsis* gains a new meaning as a means of art and creation of value. According to Aristotle (1995), the aim of *catharsis* is to recreate, poiesis, and to clean the soul from passion with the pity and fear that it arouses.

Tragedy is the imitation of the real action; so that the tragedy imitates the intentional action and the audience gets himself into the scene with the spiritual refinement.

Actor, writer and director Bertolt Brecht, who pioneered the most radical changes of the 20th century in the all aspects of theatre (audience, actor, stage design, form and content, music, etc.), differentiated the concept of *catharsis* from the tragedy of Aristotle and he redefined it through ‘Epic Theatre’. In Epic theatre, narrative forms has gained importance. The tragedy develops through realistic dialogues between people and it has a dramatic narrative unlike the epic theatre. Epic theatre has narrative episode stops. Unlike tragedy, which has a closed form whole with an origin, a middle point and ending, the epic form shows linear development and is described as an open form.

In the twentieth century, from Wagner to Stanislavski all the theatre producers who have chosen to understand the human beings’ psychological depths have interpreted the concept of catharsis, psychologically. What Brecht actually confronted is a purifying comment that focuses solely on psychology and leaving the social factors edge. For this reason, he wrote about ‘Non-Aristotelian Dramaturgy’. Instead of emotional identification and spiritual purification, what Brecht wanted from the audience is to be able to make a sober, critical assessment about the play and to be able to look from the outside to the reality -with a foreign eye-, instead of losing himself/herself in the illusion (Candan, 2013). Therefore, in his plays he tried to break the illusion of catharsis and alienated the spectators at certain intervals.

Alienation

When we connect and relate to the objects or art works, we build a closeness with them. Alienation is making the invisible (in the art works) visible through an aesthetic distance. Alienation in the art has been a main topic of concern for scholars who are interested in the history of aesthetics. Brecht has applied this method by showing the contradictions clearly in his plays and emphasized the importance of alienation by mentioning “the pleasure of disturbing the order of our habitual connotations” in one of his articles about his own stage theory. According to Brecht (1967); alienation is the act of putting a phenomenon or character into a new shape by stripping it from its naturalness and plausibility which will surprise the audience and wake its curiosity up.

Alienation can be applied with the possibilities of the body, the text and the space. Using the body outside of the natural body gestures and the pauses of the body in the acting causes to perceive the alienation effect in the performance. At the same time, building a relationship between the actor and the audience makes the passive audience active and also alienate the audience with the experience of the audience. ‘Mysteries and Smaller Pieces’ (1964) and ‘Paradise Now’ (1972) plays of ‘The Living Theatre’ set proper examples for the audience-actor relationships. At the beginning of ‘Paradise Now’, actors walk through the audience and invites them to smoke weed and make love with them by using provocative words and behaviors (Innes, 2010).

The provision of alienation in the text occurs when the actor takes an attitude that defines himself from the outside by shifting to the narrator-storyteller position at certain intervals. In order to achieve the alienation effect by using the space's possibilities, the objects and decor play an important role. In the epic theatre stage, the decor does not have to be holistic and realistic. What matters is the functions of objects in the play. The details of the representative space is not necessary. Just a piece of impressions of the representative space is considered necessary. This empty space also facilitates the transition between the virtual and the real in the performance.

Duplicated Space

With the bodily reform on the stage, the spatial distinctions imposed by the traditional theatre approach have begun to disappear. The physical and the fictional distinctions between the audience and the stage are stretched as much as possible and an understanding of a holistic theatre space has been adopted instead of dividing the theatre space as 'auditorium' (audience's space) and 'stage' (actor's space).

In the theatre there are many physical and fictional dimensions of the concept of 'space'. The physical reality of the space (in which the performance is taking place) and the fictional space create different spatial perceptions. In today's alternative theatre spaces, the performance is taking place in the spaces where only the functional qualities of existing objects are used (with no decorations) and the explanations of the space are transformed into the fiction of the space with the presence of the text, the performance, the time and the multimedia. For example, in a stage with a closed-circuit live broadcast, the space on the stage expands and the audience can witness the same spatial situations from the different spatial perceptions. This allows to be able to show the different layers of the story. This concept has been mentioned as 'duplicated space' within the scope of this study.

Simultaneity

In the tragedies, 'time' had a closed structure, which has a origin, a middle point and an ending. In the contemporary theatre, the installation techniques was used with the influence of the cinema, and the sense of 'time' was transformed, reversed and dismantled. The stories that are from the different centuries can be witnessed at the same time on the stage. The tools for this purpose can be the presence of multimedia, the actor's movements and sometimes the decor itself. 'Simultaneity' has been used to mention similar staging methods within the scope of this study.

Active – Passive

These concepts used in the study will be applied from Grotowski's description in his theatre studies. Grotowski claims that the point reached in his works (with his community) has always developed spontaneously with instant communication. However, a guiding technique is based on the exercises Grotowski suggests to his actors. This technique,

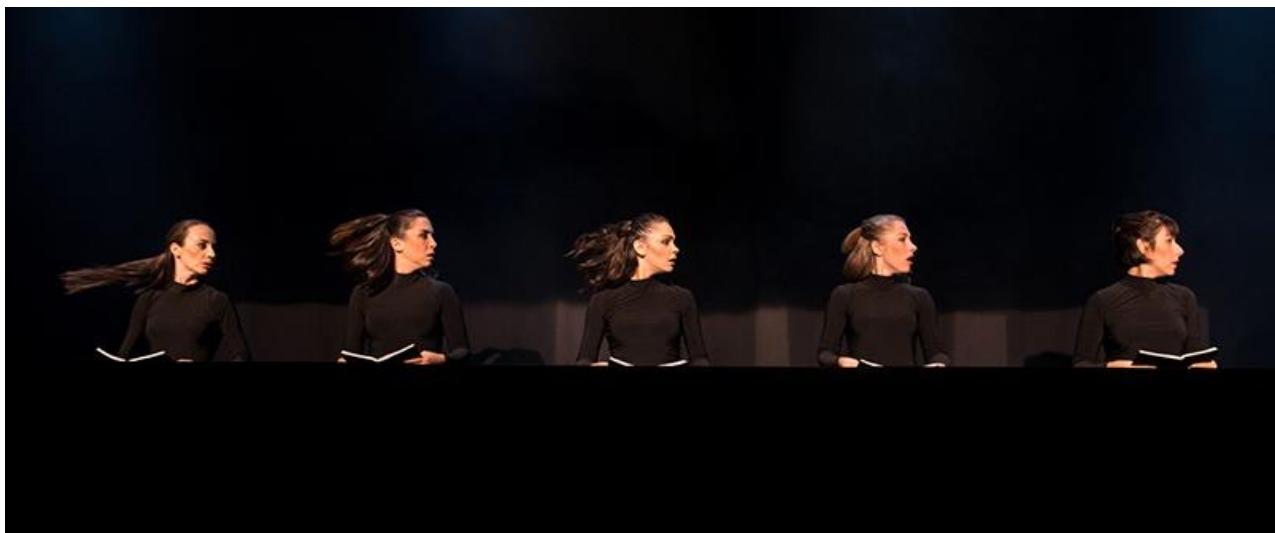
called "Via Negativa" (reverse path), does not include the aim of giving the actor a certain skill. On the contrary, it aims to liberate the actor from the conditioned behaviors, the muscular habitual obstacles, so that the actor can develop free creative reactions of his/her body. This is the reverse path for the conventional acting. Grotowski defines this passive attitude as 'inner-passive' and he explains it as 'giving up to do something' rather than 'doing something'. One of the concepts of Taoism, *wu-wei*, or 'non-doing' also does not mean 'doing nothing', it means 'doing what is contrary to nature' (Kumiega, 1985).

Grotowski claims that the active body of the western mind can be misleading, whereas the edge of all defense against the natural and spontaneous development will lead us to the right action. Therefore, this preparation allows the actor to open himself/herself and it allows him/her to appear a new personal entity in his/her soul and body. Rather than using the mental associations in the theatre, Grotowski always used body's physical possibilities. The emergence of bodily memory by rejecting the natural and conditioned behaviors gives to the actor the freedom to break the text's and the fiction's rules. Actor sets free his/her body with the performance.

Through the aim of this study, 'Ophelia' from Tayf Kolektif (directed by: Umut Kırcalı) and 'Panopticon' from Şermola Performans (directed by: Mirza Metin) has been experienced through the main concepts of 'body, space and time'. Both plays are dominated by bodily performances and both are being played in the alternative theatre spaces, that's why they have been examined within the scope of this work. In 'Ophelia' and in 'Panopticon', woman body is the main entity of the performance. The gender roles, violence and captivity are being criticized in the both performances.

"Ophelia" – Tayf Kolektif

Figure 1: A scene from 'Ophelia'



Source: 'Tiyatrolar' website: www.tiyatrolar.com.tr/tyatro/ophelia (2017)

"The play shapes around Ophelia, the tragic female character of Shakespeare's 'Hamlet', which has undergone numerous academic studies on the history of the theatre. The rewritten text, which is bearing the responsibility of the original story, consists of five episodes as a formal reference to the five-act 'Hamlet'. This rewritten Ophelia which is structurally based on contemporary writing and narrative forms, has the sections of 'waiting, love, madness, death and painting'. With these sections, it catches a narrative correlation with the 'Hamlet's Ophelia. Ophelia is confronted as one of the social memory codes in this project. It centers on the idea that gender roles imposed by the mechanisms of power, have left a different Ophelia story to every woman in the country. Ophelia carries a collective consciousness to the scene of a woman who finds her own story of Ophelia, a story that reminds one of the depths of the subconscious and is suppressed-demolished by men in her past. In other words, Ophelia is reaching women again through this experience and moving their story to the present time with their memories." (Ekin Yazın, 2017)

"Panopticon" – Sermola Performans

Figure 2: A scene from 'Panopticon'



Source: Sermola Performans website; <https://www.sermolaperformans.com/panopticon/> (2017)

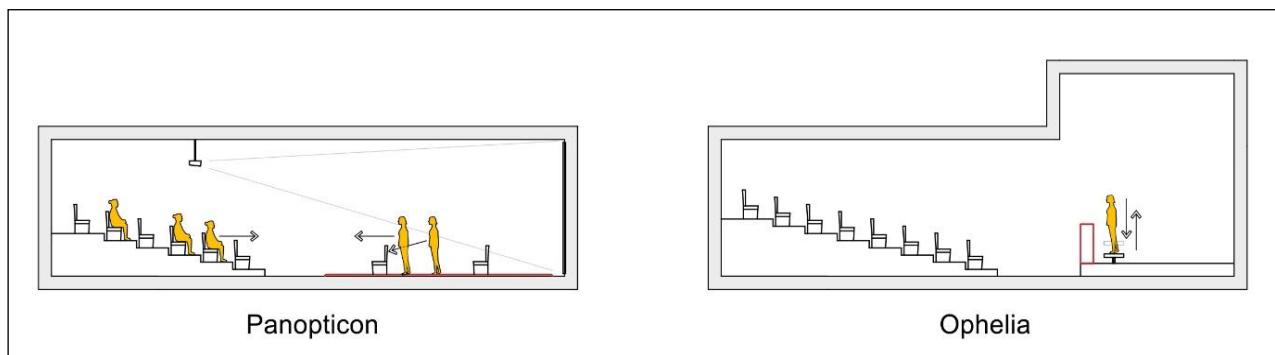
"In Panopticon, audiences are witnessing this era that we observe each other with the social tools under the hand while watching the system tools watching us at the same time. There are five test-subject women in the play. Test-subject women communicates through bodies through a space where talking is forbidden and audiences witness the increase in tension between them. While the games they create are turning to races,

races are turning to a passion for power, and power becomes violence. The audience finds an opportunity to think about how people turn, step by step, into what they have criticized or escaped for the all-time." (IKSV, 2017)

Perception of Time and Space

In Ophelia, time and space is not treated as a physical reality in events, but as a space that accommodates the possibilities of events. Therefore, the imagery of Ophelia's memories do not belong to a certain time period; is trying to reach the collective consciousness of the audience with the possibility that violence, murders, wars, death belong to all the times and places that prevail. In Panopticon, we have a space that represents the physical reality of the prison in a very abstract way, and a sense of time that has a closed structure.

Figure 3: Diagrammatic Section Drawings of the Opening Scenes of Plays (yellows bodies are representing the actors)



Source: Own Drawings based on the bodies, objects, movements and space.

Multimedia was not used in the stage in Ophelia. But in Panopticon, on the back wall of the stage, there is a screen which shows the same space from different angles with live broadcast in the room (Figure 3). Sometimes this camera shows the actors from backwards, and sometimes it shows the audience to the audience. With this 'duplicated space' experience, the audience is sometimes in a position of being watched, and sometimes in a position that watches the actors and does nothing. The audience is actively participates in this experience through the possibilities of duplicated space.

In Ophelia, between the episodes, storyteller informs the audience about which part is going to start, independently of the storyline. Therefore, the illusion is being broken at the beginning of each episode. The audience are being able to be alienated to the play at certain intervals and experience the play without getting lost in the fictional details. From the beginning to the end of the play, the audience is aware that they are seeing a fiction in the stage and they are passively experiencing the performance in their comfort zones. In Panopticon, the audience is stuck in the illusion and showing an active presence in the

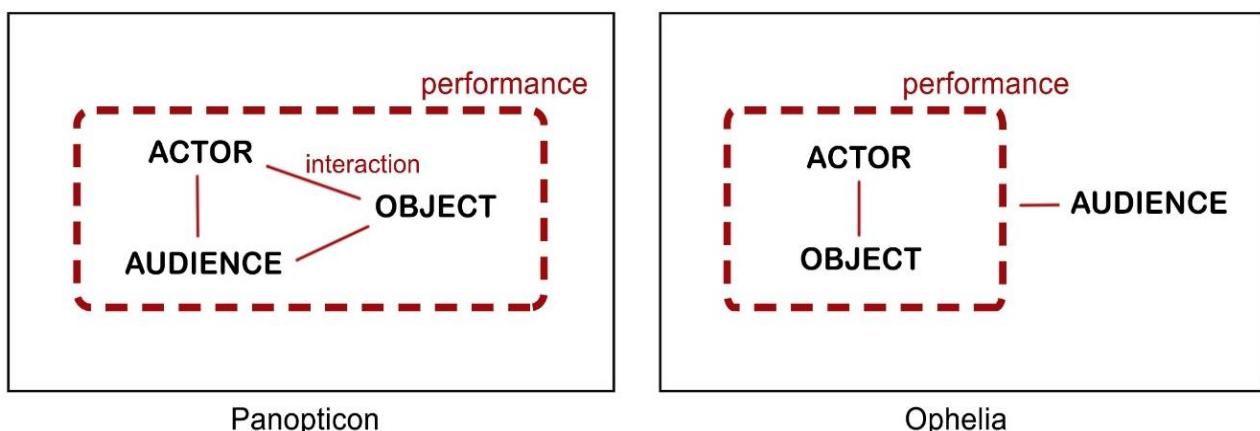
play. The position of the audience is constantly changing from observer to the observed, but they are not alienated from the performance.

Perception of Body and Space

Ophelia, designed in five parts with the vocal segments and instrumental subdivisions, has a nonverbal (not silent) staging. Five characters are representing one Ophelia's experiences with their bodily gestures, movements and reactions in only the vertical direction in the space. Stories being told by the external voice (storyteller) is simultaneously connect to the acting.

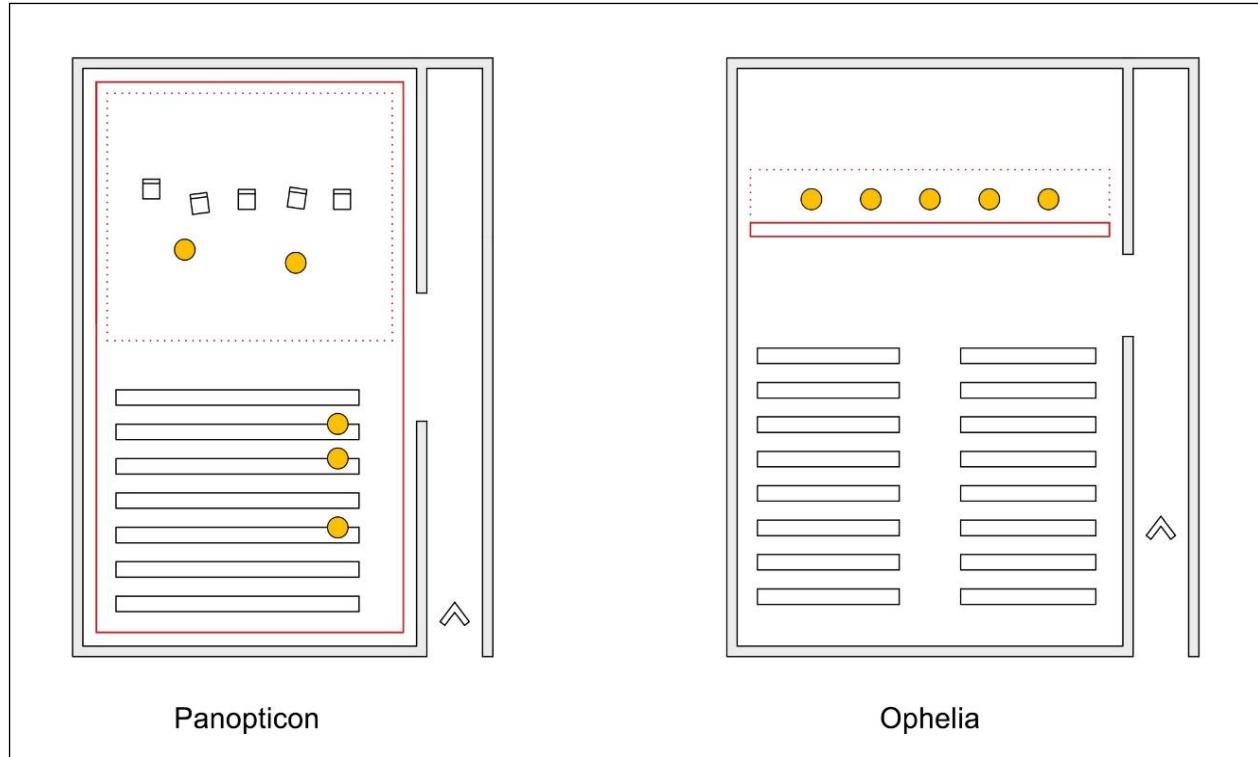
In Panopticon; there is not an oral text, the play is only set up with the bodily performance's possibilities. The relations of the bodies with; other bodies, objects and places constitutes the play's fiction. At the same time, actors make contact with the audience and provoke them to interact with the objects. As a result, a holistic experience is being able to be achieved.

Figure 4: Actor, Audience and Object Relationships in the Performances



Source: Own Implications based on the plays

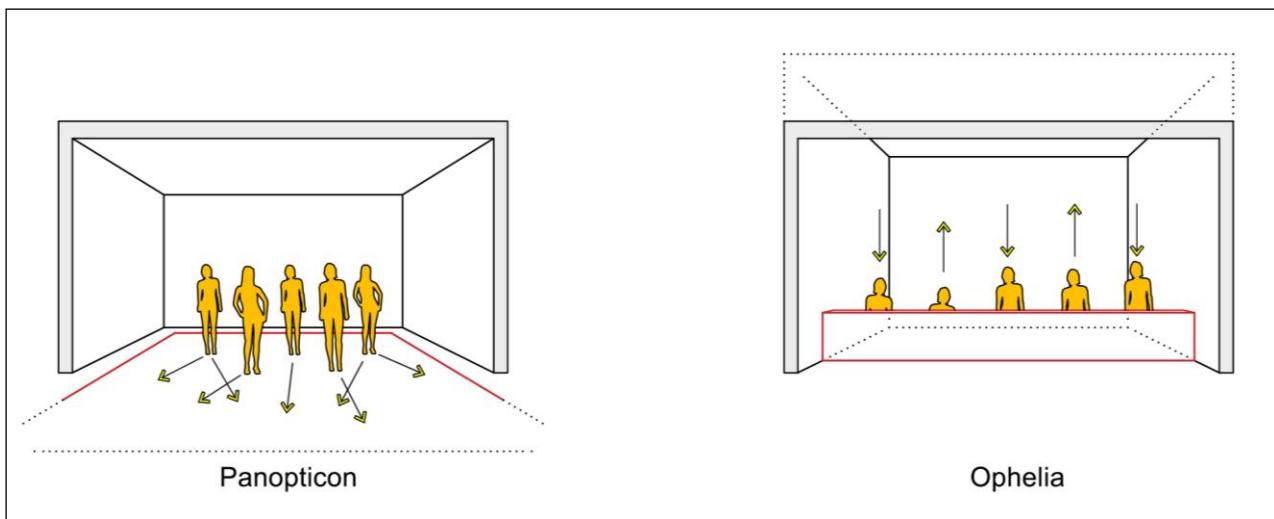
In Ophelia, the space of the play and the space of the audience are sharply separated. The subject (actor) and the object (audience) do not relate. The audience is not participate in the fictional performance. The areas of the audience and the actor are separated from each other by both the stage frame and the wall decor which creating a second boundary. In Panopticon, the area of the audience and the player is perceived as one single space, by the presense of the lineer light source that continues throughout the floor as a border (Red frame in Figure 5). The actors and audience are imprisoned in the same place and actors provokes the audience to give reactions in certain intervals. This blurs the distinction between the subject and the object in the play.

Figure 5: Diagrammatic Plan Drawings of the ‘Panopticon’s and ‘Ophelia’s Theatre Spaces

Source: Own Drawings of the theatre spaces

In Ophelia, bodies move up and down in vertical directions (Figure 6). This movement is accompanied by the rhythm of the music and the progress of the events that the storyteller tells simultaneously. The movement in Panopticon is multifarious and in every direction, so the bodies do not represent a static entity in the stage.

In both plays, there are some elements that create the feeling of confinement. In Panopticon, this surveillance is provided by the live broadcast and the light-border on the floor; In Ophelia, it is provided with the horizontally immobile bodies behind the wall (Figure 5, Figure 6) These mobile and immobile situations of the bodies in the space change the dynamics, and the physical and perceptual meanings of the space. The space is not considered as a static entity, especially when it comes to the ‘stage’, it makes sense with the performative experiences.

Figure 6: Diagrammatic Perspective Drawings of the Plays

Source: Own Drawings based on the stages

In Ophelia, bodies do not expose the body postures that we are familiar with during the performance, the actor is free from his/her conditionings, and uses his/her body outside of the usual forms. The actor creates reactions in harmony with the dramatic fiction of the play with the sudden and foreign bodily postures. These reactions, which occur in harmony with the music's rhythm, sometimes occur in the interaction with the objects. This method, which reminds us of Grotowski's 'reverse path', reveals the bodily memory by reflecting the 'inner-passive' of the body.

Representing one woman's body by using five different female bodies allows to recreate different feelings and memories of Ophelia in the same moment of time. All of the bodies have the same physical qualities on stage. In Panopticon, on the contrary to Ophelia, five bodies are representing five different women. Although women are different from each other, they have gathered around the common events. In this cast, the bodies which react outside of the usual, sometimes make normal relationships with the objects that we are familiar with but sometimes they use the objects with a 'reverse-path' approach. There are five chairs standing on the stage. Actors sit, climb up, go under, stand behind, embrace, and sometimes lie next to them (Figure 7). The relationship between body and chair is constantly changing in the stage.

The red balloons that have spread to the floor in the stage of Panopticon, are the objects that both the actor and the audience interact with. In the last part of the performance, the audience blow up the red balloons with the actors and drop them to the air. They watch them to fall together. We can say that this represents the fact that if we keep watching and do nothing, we are responsible for the things that happen to the women as much as those who harm them.

Figure 7: A Scene from Panopticon which Shows the Body-Object Relations



Source: 'Tiyatrolar' Website: <http://tiyatrolar.com.tr/tiyatro/panopticon> (2017)

Conclusion

The latest paradigms and innovations that bodily revolution brought to the theatre space have been observed through experiencing the new and experimental Theatre in Turkey to unveil the spatial dynamics of the new body-interactive theatre plays. 'Ophelia' from Tayf Kolektif (directed by: Umut Kırcalı) and 'Panopticon' from Şermola Performans (directed by: Mirza Metin) has been experienced through the main concepts of 'body, space and time'. These examinations reveal the spatial and bodily dynamics of the theatrical space.

As the performance of the body takes the theatre space under its hegemony, the need for the decorative stages has diminished. Theatre plays are being performed with almost no objects and stage entities and therefore, they are free to use any empty room as a stage. Only objects in the stage are the ones that the body interacts with. There is almost no visual decor in the alternative theatre productions. The performance which transforms the place with its own presence, also allows the audience to transform the space, and in conclusion they build a space of experience together.

In the plays which have been experienced within the scope of this study, the interaction of the actor and the audience with the space was discussed separately and examined with a deconstructive approach. As a result, we can say that the active or passive presence of the audience in the theatre plays, affects the audience's spatial experience. Although there is still some performances that represent only visual and auditory interactions in the theatre plays, we can certainly say that for today's theatre approach, theatre scene is an

area of experience where the interaction of the audience and the actor is considered as a inseparable combination.

Throughout history, the art of theatre has searched for the ways of telling stories in the most effective and beautiful ways. The effective way of telling stories is the performance in the era that we live in. Without any doubt, changing social venues, political issues and technological developments will continue to affect this form of speech for the theatre. This study was conducted to understand the language of the today's contemporary theatre and the dynamics of the theatrical space. It was investigated how the 'body', which is the most important tool of today's theatre language, is used in the fiction of the play and how it interacts and transforms the space of the play. It can be claimed that this work is significant for both architectural and theatrical disciplines in terms of expanding the boundaries of the concept of 'space' and deciphering spatial responses of new requests of this field.

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