Modalities or Surfaces: Postmodern Poetics and a Riddle

Janne Tapper

ABSTRACT

This article will examine the playing with aesthetical *surfaces* in postmodern theatre and how it reflects the *poetics* and the cultural logic of late capitalism. Surfaces are examined as aesthetic elements of the postmodern culture of the image. This culture is not neutral as it seems to reject the modern spiritual depth, for instance, sense of history and hermeneutic depth. The article examines the *riddle* concerning how the absence of these aspects of human thought in surfaces generates the spectators' need to produce coherent individual activities, *trajectories*, and eventually a coherent culture. This reflexive mechanism of surfaces is analyzed within the framework of Donald Norman's (2005) cognitive principles of design. Starting from the premise of Gilles Deleuze's and Felix Guattari's (1987) and Lev Vygotsky's (1978) notions of play, it is interpreted that postmodern stage and culture works, metaphorically, like *the plane of immanence*, the way of thinking in which an agent is able to move, make transitions and crossings in a revolutionary way without restrictions of reality's conditions. However, culturally the blurring of boundaries between play and reality may lead to *delirium* and ill-founded practices. Theatre and art examine these ill-founded practices but involve in their *poetics* a strong dimension of *reflexive* level of human cognition. This reflexive level is an explanatory perspective, which helps spectators examine theatre's mechanisms as metaphors of cultural logic, to achieve a critical position extrinsic from the flux of postmodern culture. This poetics is examined in several cases of theatrical representation including Sofia Coppola's film *The Bling Ring* (2013), The NeedCompany's production *The Lobster Shop* (2006), Kristian Smeds' production *The Unknown Soldier* (2007) and in several cases of postmodern art and stage design.

Keywords: playing, surfaces, postmodernism, design, cognition.

BIOGRAPHY

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In this article, I examine the use of aesthetical *surfaces* in postmodern theatre as a characteristic feature of postmodern logic. By the concept of surfaces I refer to a general shift, which Fredric Jameson (1984) has defined as a shift into "the whole new culture of the image".[1] Jameson conceives this culture as a play with codes attached in surface form.[2] Images have become independent entities which function according to a different logic than modern logic. This logic seems to reject the modern spiritual depth, for instance, a sense of history, the chains of significance of progress and the hermeneutic 'depth'. The absence of these aspects in this play seems to me a *riddle*: it, paradoxically, seems to generate meanings and questions concerning them. I examine this riddle in three theatrical performances by adapting theories of postmodern stage design, cultural theories, theories of design and play theories.

Independent logic of surfaces in postmodern stage design has been heightened in stage designer Richard Foreman's style to treat visual appearances of stage elements as images, to manipulate them and mix wildly different scales.[3] Arnold Aronson (1991) understands this independence of the visual forms as a characteristic shift for all postmodern stage design.[4] This independence does not concern only visual aesthetics but also aesthetical *textscapes* (body-text), *soundscapes* and spaces – these elements of *postdramatic* theatre are autonomic and can be understood as surfaces.[5] Culturally speaking, images of designed objects, commodities, personal images produced by the postmodern media industry, and images and icons of the internet on computer screens form "the whole new culture of the image".[6] The overwhelming richness of users' decorative practices in postmodern culture (fashion gear, "landscape of schlock and kitsch" and *pastiche*) is a sign of people's participation in this shift, in which meanings are attached on surfaces.[7]

Surfaces are not neutral aesthetical elements. They can be interpreted as referential to broader philosophical and socio-cultural changes. The use of images in Foreman's frontal design (or proscenium stage design) broke modern theatre's "organic unity" of stage elements.[8] According to Arnold Aronson, modern stage design functioned by "visually and metaphorically placing the specific world of the play within some sort of broader context of the world of the audience".[9] Modern theatre placed the audiences within the *transcendental* philosophical project of modern "metanarratives" constituted by the belief in the historical progress of mankind.[10] This metaphoric connection is blurred, when autonomic images start to live their own life. Already in 1929 Austrian architect, Adolf Loos (1997), the defender of modernist progress, considered the way to attach meanings to surfaces through decorative practices a marker of a negative cultural development. Loos argued that 'decorative' ("ornament" in Loos' thinking) practices in visual arts and architecture indicate a degradation of western moral and progress (ideas of functionality and form) into a level reminiscent of Papuans who tattoo their faces.[11] Partly, Loos' argument seems valid. As Frederic Jameson (1984) has noted, in the postmodern world meanings are attached to surfaces, and surfaces have replaced the

'depth' of modern thought. Furthermore, media and cultural researchers have argued that visual media tends to erase human abilities to create chains of significance.[12]

Furthermore, postmodern theatre can perform a referential play between the world of the stage and the world of the audience: theatre invites audiences to examine culture.[13] As postmodern stage design does not place the audiences within the *transcendental* philosophical project of modern "metanarratives", it seems to refer to the world of present things, and philosophically to the idea of the world as *immanent:* equal presence of all things in the world, and the dominance of the present.[14] *Immanence* is a level of philosophy and a level of doing and thinking.[15] It seems to resist modern thought and even expression. As Jameson argues, hermeneutical models or other philosophical "depth models" are not relevant in analyzing postmodern art and culture, because postmodern subjects do not feel the need to express themselves in terms of transcendent modern philosophy in order to support the modern unified existence.[16] Maybe in this way we can understand why in Pina Pausch's *Arien* (1979) the stage was covered by real water, without any explicit metaphorical meaning.[17] The *immanence* of water seems to generate in *Arien* a transition in which all elements on stage become immanent, their former meanings disappear. Correspondingly, the whole culture of the image seems to indicate a breakdown in the signifying chain which organizes the past and future into coherent experience, and thus resists the modern consciousness of historical progress.[18] This makes Jameson question, "how the cultural productions of such a [postmodern] subject could result in anything but 'heaps of fragments' and in a practice of the randomly heterogeneous and fragmentary and the aleatory".[19]

IMMANENCE AND PLAYING

Jameson finds, however, that the postmodern subject is possibly capable of creating coherent conceptions when confronted with codes attached to surfaces, which seem *alienated* from their historical context. He navigates (literally and culturally) in a new kind of intellectual space constituted of surfaces as if it was, metaphorically, an alienated urban city.[20] The subject is invited to perform a *cognitive mapping*: to map and remap the cartography concerning meanings and to create mobile, alternative trajectories, and to refigure his "sense of place" in a very broad cultural and philosophical sense.[21] Arnoldson notes that postmodern stage design in theatre also keeps a certain distance between surfaces and spectators, and that it aims to stimulate the viewer's own process of connecting elements, even random elements.[22] Jameson refers to some sort of playing: 'depth models' are replaced by a conception of practices, discourses and textual play, which replace depth by a surface.[23]

The level in which either cognitive mapping or playing takes place can be understood as *the plane of immanence*, which has been defined as an existential state (psychological or cultural), characteristic for the Late Capitalism, in which preference is given to the innovative processes of thinking or creative action *per se*.[24] The plane of immanence has been understood as a free state of self-organization in which the mind operates in present time and has no historical memory.[25] From this perspective, surfaces are an interface for playing: a plane for arranging and rearranging elements, ideas, and contents, and their interrelations. This rearrangement can be understood as a metaphor of viewing postmodern theatre's scenic space in which images are moved like visual icons are moved on a computer screen (in *immersive* theatre the spectator's position is already quite similar to the computer user's as he moves and makes choices independently, being stimulated by images on virtual surfaces). Players (or users) cannot actually arrange a complete order of this performance environment, but only perform their singular choices and moves – these become their *trajectories*, which may be meaningful and coherent or not.[26] Every time a singular trajectory is made it becomes an addition to the whole of the surfaces and may be viewed and responded to by other players.

Given that these trajectories may also initiate new rules – culturally, anthropologically and artistically – playing becomes more complex. According to the researchers of play theory, Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman (2004), the complexity in which one 'moves' generates dozens of possibilities and

increases the motivation of playing – but only *if certain rules are maintained*.[27] Correspondingly, in the field of social playing, researcher of cognition and play, Arthur Koestler (1976), considers that the rules of play may be understood as *cognitive matrices:* routines, types of thinking, which people usually engage to, and which they repeat in certain social situations.[28] According to Koestler, practices, which break routines by an unusual type of thinking or social behavior, generate creativity, excitement and pleasure *if new rules emerge*.[29] Recent cognitive theories suggest that if a player can create meaningful trajectories (meaningful and coherent for himself and for others) while navigating in the playground, the postmodern fragmented culture appears coherent.[30] Accordingly, as postmodern culture has rejected the faith in more or less permanent (or transcendent) frames and enacted faith in, more or less, biological processes of constant mutation, the responsibility for cultural coherence is laid on the shoulders of every single individual player.

However, this cognitive mapping also involves dangers. If the existential state of *the plane of immanence* overwhelms the subject, he is in a state of *delirium* (*euphoria* in Jameson's terms) and his trajectory, *the line of flight*, may "go off the rails", leading to absurd meanings.[31] This, however, is considered the locus of the maximum creativity of the human mind and cultural evolution, even though it may lead to destructive impacts (or self-destruction) when it is practiced in the form of social trajectories.[32] Jameson's term, *cognitive mapping*, thus refers to the ethically and socially challenging dangers of postmodern playing. In the following chapters, I will examine three theatrical performances, which adapt this postmodern logic as well as the riddle of and play with the ethical and cultural challenges as defined above.

POSTMODERN SUBJECTS OF *THE BLING RING* (2013)
Film director Sofia Coppola's latest film, *The Bling Ring*, based on a true story and real subjects, portrays 'decoration' as a cultural act of consuming aesthetic surfaces of commodities and media images. The film's characters are postmodern teenagers in

Los Angeles, whose life value is created out of the euphoria of consuming fashion gear, and meanings attached to the surfaces of these items. Characters' lives are constituted of immanent things (clothes, bags, shoes), and intensities involved in their use (media shows about celebrities). Their level of verbal discourse is flat: it consists of utterances like "Awesome!", "Oh shit", "Let's move!". Neither do the characters show interest in any transcendent goals (education in school, knowledge), nor do they seem capable of expressing themselves psychologically (e.g. discuss their loneliness and psychological problems). Only playing with items seems to interest them. The capability of distinguishing between their own acts and fictive acts of the media industry's stars (e.g. Lindsay Lohan or Paris Hilton – who plays herself in the movie) seems blurred. The sense of what is criminal seems also blurred. Their leader invents an exciting idea: she discovers that it is easy to break into the private apartments of stars, and spend time role playing with the stars' fashion gear and stealing their items. The film shows several acts of burglaries – trajectories. Eventually these trajectories lead to the intervention of the police, and the teenagers are sentenced to jail. When the leader is interrogated she refuses to explain why she did these burglaries. She does not seem stupid – her face seems like a surface, a riddle: a hidden logic lies beneath this surface.

The Bling Ring (2013) forms associations to Loos' (1997) moral statement that 'decoration' represents the level of primitive tribal cultures and subjects who cannot distinguish between morality and crime. The culture of teenagers, and more broadly the one of American media, seems like a 'Papuan primitive culture' (from the viewpoint of Loos). The film itself does not refer to any kind of 'depth model': a play with internal and external (internal and external) is absent, psychological depth of characters is absent. Thus, the film itself forms a surface, which seems correspondent to Jameson's interpretation of Andy Warhol's painting, *Diamond Dust Shoes* (1980), the painting about burnt dance shoes in a burnt dance hall. According to Jameson, the painting is empty of meaning, it has no inner content.[33] The film, however, invites the audience to explore not just the cultural degradation, but a *rid-*

dle. If we interpret this world as if it was *the plane of immanence*, we understand that the purpose of the media industry is not to keep up morality, but to create deviating trajectories, as Jameson might have put it. These trajectories, as undertaken by teenagers, can be understood as Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet explain as follows: "A flight is a sort of delirium. To be delirious [*délirer*] is exactly to go off the rails […] There is something demoniacal or demonic in a line of flight. […] Which demon has leapt the longest leap?"[34] However, according to Deleuze and Parnet, this is how maximum creativity works. It is like a revolution, which happens in a state of no historical memory.[35] The film opens a view into such cultural evolution – but it reminds us that this evolution does not necessarily lead to progress (from a modern angle).[36]

The teenagers of *The Bling Ring* seem degenerated at first glance, but their trajectories reflect a challenging nature. Their 'leaps' were so 'long' in a moral and cultural sense, that they pushed the limits of their culture and initiated a critical cultural discussion, which mirrored the life value of the celebrities who they worshipped. They revealed the true nature of American media. In Koestler's terms, they made a performative act, which was based on an unusual type of thinking. Thus, we can detect a signifying chain, which organizes their trajectories into a coherent experience *for themselves*: their wishes are fulfilled as the teenagers became cultural celebrities themselves in the media industry. Thus, their trajectories were culturally accepted because they were the kind of deviations that the media industry could exploit. This vision is culturally challenging *for all*. Coppola's film seems to initiate a second *riddle*: can we rely on such a cultural mechanism, in which 'depth' of culture is absent, and which may contain an aspect of self-destruction? On the other hand, the trajectories of the teenagers could have been understood as radical performances, if they had framed them as such beforehand.

"WANING OF AFFECT" – *THE LOBSTER SHOP* (2006)

As I watched the visitation of Dutch performance group The NeedCompany's performance *The Lob-ster Shop* in the Espoo City Theatre in Finland, many examples of commodity design and 'decoration' seemed to be central for the outward appearance of the production: beautiful, calm bodies created an association to the catwalk; stylized white forms on the background of the stage created an association of a furniture exposition or a wealthy postmodern apartment interior. Circulating movements done skillfully by dancer-performers created an association of stylized shapes and spirals. From the viewpoint of Loos these spiral movements can be seen as "ornaments": the performers constantly 'decorated' the stage space through these spirals. The spirals fueled the machinery of the stage performance, but interrupted the storytelling, making speech and other expressions fragmentary, thereby breaking the signifying chain of the story.

The atmosphere of *The Lobster Shop* seemed to suggest that something terrible had happened. Actually, this was the plot: the story was about a mother and father whose child had died in an accident, and who could not get over the grief caused by this tragedy. The mother especially seemed to suffer a deep depression. It seemed to be at odds in the performance that the mother would break into expressions of explicit emotion. However, her grief was never articulated explicitly; instead her suffering seemed equal to many other spiral movements – it became an element of 'decoration'. Thus, it can be interpreted that the performance aimed to point out an aspect of postmodern condition, which Jameson defines as "the waning of affect".[37] Jameson defines what he means by modern "affect" by using Edward Munch's famous painting *The Scream* (1893) as a canonical expression of the position of the modern, centered subject: "affect" is an emotional response to the centered subject's anxiety of being conscious of the pressure, weight and depth of previous history and the rules of "metadiscourses" dictating how he should act upon this history.[38] Because the modern centered subject neither succeeds to act upon this unity nor to revolt against it, he suffers from anxiety; this is the price he has to pay for his centered position. This anxiety is expressed by the cry, the raw vibrations of the human throat, which seeks to break the isolation of the subject and the rest of the world, outside and inside.[39] Jameson argues that in

The Unknown Soldier (2007), Finnish National Theatre, directed by Kristian Smeds. Photo: Antti Ahonen.

the postmodern world such an "affect" is no longer appropriate because the unity of the subject is no longer constructed through the hermeneutical and other 'depth models'; they are replaced by the 'ultimately visible world', the continuous production of surface appearances and connections between them.[40]

It is possible to infer that *The Lobster Shop* partly explains the absence of the psychological 'depth' of the teenagers of *The Bling Ring*. The mother's grief seems not as important as her participation in the creative process of the theatre's aesthetic production: the grief becomes a spiral among other spirals. Correspondingly, the teenagers do not seem to understand their hidden anxiety, because their personal identities are fragmented, and their trajectories seem meaningful only through the 'spirals' of the media industry.

THE CRISIS IN HISTORICITY: *THE UNKNOWN SOLDIER* (2007)

The theme of blurring the lines between past and present is performed by Finnish theatre director

Kristian Smeds' production of Finnish historical novel, *The Unknown Soldier* [*Tuntematon sotilas*] at the Finnish National Theatre. Smeds' production is an example of what Jameson means by the "crisis of historicity", which he connects with the dominance of surfaces, and immanence of the world.[41] The original novel by Väinö Linna, first published in 1954, is a modern *narrative*, an epic account of the war between the Finnish and the Soviet armies during the Second World War. In most previous stage performances of *The Unknown Soldier* the locus of meanings is a sense of history: the heroic sacrifice of Finnish soldiers in the 1940s guaranteed for Finnish subjects the national independency which Finnish people now enjoy at the present time. This reference connects these stage productions with the modernist transcendental project of building the future of the nation.

It seems that Smeds aimed to break the logic of historicity because rumors about a different kind of stage solution began to circulate before the rehearsals started. Smeds was going to replace the traditional soldier-figures by Finnish novelist and cartoonist Tove Jansson's the Moomin-characters. The

The Unknown Soldier (2007), Finnish National Theatre, directed by Kristian Smeds. Photo: Antti Ahonen.

Moomins are fictive characters of children's tales, whose adventures are seen in television series and read in books all over the world. The Moomins can be understood as aesthetical surfaces, white, smooth shapes, which are 'cute' and easy to approach. One wants to touch them, they raise strong emotions of warmness, kindness and happiness; the existence of the Moomins represents the universal will for peace. The Moomins are like human agents, they are capable of any human practice. They can do what soldiers do in war, but war is not their natural context. This contradictory aesthetic interrelation between the Moomins white, smooth shapes and the acts of violence related to historical war would shift the central focus of the performance to the present interplay of aesthetic surfaces. The surfaces, which highlight this interrelation, would be played in slow motion, stretched, repeated, exaggerated, enlarged, diminished, speeded, slowed, frozen.[42] The result would be that the production would create a suggestive presence of the visible world, which knows no history, but only the present: the plane of immanence.

However, this idea was never produced; it is

probable that the estate of Jansson did not give permission to use the image of the Moomins in a war-context. This did not matter, since Smeds' ensemble achieved a corresponding goal by using the aesthetic surfaces of computer games: on the first night, *The Unknown Soldier* did not look like a production of the original *narrative*, but a computer game. The aesthetical surfaces and effects of audio-visual technology, hectic timing and information overload – the aesthetics of the contemporary game industry – captured the attention of the spectators. By replacing the 'depth' of the historical narrative by the interplay of immanent, aesthetic surfaces of computer games, Smeds' artistic team shifted all the signifiers to the present time, 2007. As it can be done in computer games, the context (or scenery) of Finnish soldiers as computer game characters, or the like, suddenly transformed historical time to contemporary time. Game characters were suddenly seen in the streets of Helsinki, where they continued violence, fighting with a foreign taxi driver – a sort of manipulative shift of frames, which reminded of Foreman's stage design. In the final scene these game players slaughtered surface imag-

es of real Finnish politicians projected onto a video screen. This scene generated public debate about whether or not the production incited terrorism.[43] This blurring of boundaries seems correspondent to the one in *The Bling Ring* where the teenagers broke into the private houses of media celebrities. Thus, the production seemed to convey a weakened sense of historicity, of social rules and of a chain between action and consequences.

The production conveyed also some universal conceptions of play as a psychological state. It appears that Deleuze's and Parnet's notions of *the plane of immanence* have a lot in common with play theorist Lev Vygotsky's (1978) conception of play as a sort of delirium in which lines of flights are made and go off the rails[44] – universally. According to Vygotsky, play's logic is insane from the perspective of real situations because player's behavior is guided by the meaning of the image which the player has in mind, not by an awareness of real conditions.[45] This makes play a state of experimental learning of real life's challenges and rules. If adapted in real life, however, play's logic is, according to Vygotsky, "the first sign of delirium".[46] *The Unknown Soldier* may have intentionally aimed at conveying to the audience the idea of the young generation being influenced by media surfaces and subsequently losing sense of what is the basis of social behavior, play or reality. It questioned the basis of our present culture at large. We cannot be sure of this, because the production did not explicate this message. Like *The Bling Ring*, it functioned on the basis of the absence of all other perspectives except one of images on a surface level. The riddle is: how and why this absence generated my critical thoughts and *cognitive mapping* even though the cultural influence of computer games was the only given impact? This riddle concerns all the three productions, which have been examined above.

THE COGNITIVE PRINCIPLES OF THE POSTMODERN RIDDLE

The postmodern riddle seems to be constituted by the following paradox: the absence of meaning in immanent surfaces makes the beholder produce these meanings *himself*. Do surfaces really offer us enough information to construct meanings? Is Jameson's vision of *cognitive mapping* possible? Researcher of cognition and design, Donald Norman (1993) argues very critically that usually products of design and media industry do not support reflexive aspects (decision making, planning) of thought.[47] However, in his later work, *Emotional Design. Why Do We Love (or Hate) Everyday Things?* (2005) Norman holds the view that this is possible. Surfaces make us creative and culturally reflexive if the three cognitive levels of interface – *visceral*, *behavioral*, and *reflective* – are arranged properly.[48] The *visceral* level stands for the immediate emotional impact of the surface-level of an object, which raises the expectations of the beholder: shape, color, and movement (GET ATTENTION!). The *behavioral* level stands for the functionality of an object in use: for example an axe must be useful in practice (KEEP ATTENTION!). The *reflective* level stands for the object's performative ability to create cultural associations; it stimulates the beholder's abilities to make metaphors and analogues, decision making and planning (REFLECT!).[49] The three levels of design, *visceral*, *behavioral*, and *reflexive* can never compose a perfect balance. On the contrary, their compound seduces the beholder if they are in an intriguing contradiction – one which turns the spectator's cognitive reflective mechanisms on.[50]

Regarding the contradictory interrelationships, which stage design of postmodern performance seems to be based on, correspondingly, we can play with the idea, that they could be analyzed as if they were surfaces of design items. Furthermore, we can understand culture through these levels. In the three performances analyzed previously we can perceive a vital *visceral* level, which raises the interest of spectators (lively shapes and vital bombarding of computer games; the white appearance of elegant surfaces and suggestive repetition of spirals; endless fragments of fashion gear). Their *visceral* level stands more broadly for their cultural level: postmodern culture generates thinking, because it constantly deviates from spectators' former expectations (a historical context is replaced by the aesthetics of computer games; expression of grief is replaced by elegant white shapes). The task of their *behavioral* level, then, is to help spectators to grasp new rules which make

the production sustainable and functional in longer terms. Their most interesting and challenging level is the *reflexive* one: since productions lack a sense of historicity and some levels of human expression, for instance (they are, in Jameson's terms, 'dead'), does this absence generate the beholder's cognitive mechanism to re-construct creatively the missing levels, or at least to stimulate his reflexive thinking?

I can speak only for myself. These 'dead' performances made me think reflexively and productively. They made me think, what is the course of western civilization? What is my relationship to history? Is there space for personal experiences and expression in my life? Can I identify signifying chains which make my experience coherent? I had to construct these contents myself, because the performances communicated only on the level of visual surfaces, and did not offer any message.

I created meanings myself, provoked by contradictory interrelationships of different surfaces. It seems that stage actions and stage design were based on the artists' cognitive processes, but my cognitive processes seemed as important.[51] I rearranged cultural elements in depthless surfaces, which were purposely relieved from their cultural weight. It was my task to restore their weight. I picked information from the level of my knowledge, which operates in a state of long time memory, the historical memory. A sort of model of the inside and outside of my thought appeared: my trajectories extended backwards in time to reveal a coherent history of my experiences.[52] I was capable of doing this. I do not doubt my cognitive capabilities. But I doubt if the level of collective self-organization of my and the other subjects' cognition is capable of creation of a durable culture. If postmodern culture is not just flux, can we detect a collective engagement on the rules of organizing this flux, and name those cultural practices which carry on this task? Theatre and art seem to play an important role in this process – at least to me, because it has made me think reflexively. Is this reflexive thinking in theatre and art, then, purely playing?

The aesthetic production of commodities as a constant flux in postmodern culture may be conceived to represent the *visceral* level. On the other hand, Jameson tends to place art – for instance, Warhol's *Diamond Dust Shoes* – into the *reflexive* level (the level of *metaphors*) as he uses art – or some artworks – to explain what cultural logic is. As the *reflexive* level is related to decision making and strategy planning, and these operations are closely related to *work*, it seems possible to interpret that between play in theatre and *work* there still exists a connection even in postmodernism (as in modernism). One explanation for this seems almost awkwardly simple: the form of an artwork (film, performance) is organized and 'fixed' – even when flexible – in a sense that it can be viewed many times from alternative perspectives[53], whereas the flux of commodity production cannot (statistically this is possible, but the viewing of statistics is very different from human performance). The organized and 'fixed' form helps to achieve a critical position extrinsic from the flux.[54] Such a 'fixed' form places the viewer into a position, where cognitive effort – work – is possible. Play is not "pure", but supports work. Starting from these premises I propose that theatrical playing can be named as one of those cultural practices that help us to grasp the collective engagement on rules of organizing the flux.

CONCLUSION

I have examined cases that help me to understand from either an artistic or an anthropological angle postmodern thinking – or *poetics,* if we like. Postmodern logic is like a revolution, which happens in a state of no historical memory. It seems to be based on rules of play which are not fragmentary and are practiced by many agents in many places – there appears to be a collective agreement on these rules. Postmodern culture seems to be driven by the improvisation of random trajectories, sometimes ill-founded, and cognitive schemas, which restructure them and their interaction into meanings. The absence of many important meanings (from a modern angle) seems to be a purposeful element of postmodernism: it needs such a riddle to fuel its poetics.

Both space (scenic space or cultural space) and the position of subject (spectator, viewer, user) have undergone remarkable changes during the cultural

shift from modernism to postmodernism. This has resulted in a new kind of interaction between them, which functions according to a different logic than modern logic. The depth and organic unity of modern space has been transformed into a surface form, which is like a plane or an interface in which images can be moved, their order can be arranged and they can be connected in every possible way. Artists may make the initial arrangements in the theatre, but it is the viewer who makes the final arrangement (either introspectively or by literally moving the images in immersive theatre). The viewer becomes a user.

The independence of images started this movement which we call postmodern, as I noted in the first page of this article. As a consequence, this shift to the dominance of the visual has led to a structural change of models and principles of theatre. The new ones, then, may be 'borrowed' from the field of design, for instance Norman's theories of design. Industrial design and theatre have come closer to each other. Hence, we learn that one singular structural deviation or addition on theatre's stage may generate a series of changes – and an aesthetic element may carry within it the weight of much vaster changes in a cultural environment.

Indeed, the emergence of independent images seems to be linked, on an anthropological level, with a shift in which people have started to conceive meanings as immanent. Immanence means that elements are conceived as they are in their literal existence, not in relation to modern transcendental utopias. I have demonstrated that once an immanent element is placed on the theatre's stage, it generates a transformation process in which no element on stage can be conceived as metaphorical to transcendent frameworks. This is why the postmodern space can be conceived as *the plane of immanence*.

Jameson, Aronson, Norman and others seem to place theatre and art on the *reflexive* level of human cognitive mechanisms. On the one hand, Smeds Ensemble, The Needcompany and Coppola release elements from their modern meanings. They do not resist postmodernism. On the other hand, their playing creates an awareness of what kind of world we live in and according to what rules we behave.

Regarding play, it is revealed as a basic mechanism: play helps to explain cultural logic. How? This *riddle* may remain unsolved, but is partly explained in terms of human cognition. The *riddle* concerns not postmodernism, but more basically *the poetics of theatre* and *play*.

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