F@ust vers. 3.0: A (Hi)story of Theatre and Media

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ABSTRACT: The article illuminates Goethe's *Faust* (1 and 2) by tracing the theoretical conceptualization of an intermedial approach to theatre and performance, and argues for a historical dimension to the medial constitution of perception. While Goethe used the Faust-legend in his play to highlight two competitive orders of knowledge and media by presenting, on the one hand, the romantic, electric, and Mephistotelian ways of seeing and, on the other hand, the classic, literal and scientific order of knowledge; the Catalan theatre group Fura dels Baus transfer this conflict to the digital age in their remediation of the Faust-legend on the contemporary stage.

Keywords: intermedial performance, digital culture, Fura dels Baus, embodiment, media theory

RESUMEN: Este artículo propone una relectura del *Fausto* (1 y 2) de Goethe a través de una conceptualización teórica intermedial del teatro y la representación que defiende la dimensión histórica de la constitución intermediada de la percepción. Mientras que Goethe utiliza la leyenda fáustica para subrayar dos órdenes de conocimiento en competencia, por un lado, las maneras románticas, eléctricas y mefistofélicas de observar, y por otro, el orden clásico, literal y científico del conocimiento, el grupo catalán de teatro La Fura dels Baus traslada el conflicto a la era digital en su transducción de la leyenda fáustica a la escena contemporánea.

Palabras clave: espectáculo intermedial, cultura digital, Fura dels Baus, teoría de los media.

> I knew there could be light not moon-light
> start light day light
> and candle light, I knew I knew I saw the
> lightening light,
> I saw it light, I said I I I must have the light,
> and what did I do oh what did I too I said
> I would sell my soul all through but I knew I
> knew
> that electric light was all true [...]
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> *Doctor Faustus Lights the Light!*
> Gertrude Stein

1.0. Prelude

Within his own lifetime, Dr. Georg Fausten (circa 1480–1540) healer, astrologer, alchemist, «magician and necromancer» (Benz, 1964: 3) became part of media history through his magical practices: his skill in handling smoke, crystal balls and other media that he used to foretell the future. The stories that were told about his deeds generated the Faust-legend that has been handed down in countless adaptations and remains active to this day. Fausten provides many starting points for a media-historical analysis because approximately forty years after his death, earlier oral accounts about Faust became the written accounts of the various Faust-stories, which were subsequently published by the typographer Spies in Frankfurt/Main as the chapbook *Historia von D. Johann Fausten* in 1587. Thanks to the infant typographic technology, the chapbook spread quickly – after the Bible it was the second most-read book in Germany – making its way to England where, as a dramatic text it became part of theatre history through Christopher Marlowe's adaptation in 1604. Marlowe started a long tradition of dramaturgic adaptations, theatre performances and puppet theatre, which two hundred years later inspired Goethe to his poetic adaptation (1790-1831). Following Goethe, the Faust material has been adapted many times in literature, theatre, the visual arts,[1] music, opera, ballet, movies and television.

1.1. Preliminary Reflections on Media Theory

There is a problem that is inherent in any historical and any theoretical perspective on media, which is the formulation of a useful and widely applicable definition of media. Current literature reveals on the one hand, occasional synonymous use of the terms technologies and media; and on the other hand, the

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1.   See Wegner (1962).

interdependence of various media and different art genres; or rather, a more or less effective correlation of sign systems inherent in every symbolic representation. This makes it difficult to distinguish clearly between apparatuses, art forms, and media. According to Joachim Paech, the central problem of present research in the field of intermediality is that the presentation of one artistic form in another, for example the film presentation of a novel, is nothing more than a transfer of contents from one container into another.[2] Thus, the distinction between the definitions of artistic form and medium becomes vague because it is uncertain what specific areas are covered by terms such as medium or mediality (Paech, 1998: 17). The major difficulty in defining a medium lies in the fact that «the medium as such cannot be observed since it appears only in the form that the medium itself creates» (Paech, 1998: 23).

While Paech solves this problem by developing an intermedial theory of transformation,[3] which is based implicitly on Niklas Luhmann's concept of form (Luhmann, 1986: 6-15), the German philosopher Sybille Krämer expands Marshall McLuhan's structuralist media-historic approach[4] by saying «Media function like window panes: the more transparent they are, the better they fulfil their tasks» (Krämer, 1998 *a*: 74). Thus she reformulates McLuhan's well-known dictum that the content of a medium is always another medium (McLuhan, 1964: 8).[5] However, at the same time, Krämer criticizes Luhmann's designations of medium and form – a criticism that is based on the observation that Luhmann's concept of medium is neutralized and suspended from any meaning by the medium's capacity to adopt the various forms that he ascribes to it. In addition, according to Krämer (1998 *a*: 77), the system-theoretical point of view tacitly rests on the traditional semiotic distinction between signifier and signified, which inevitably brings any media-theoretical research geared towards the language of materiality to a dead end. Therefore, Krämer suggests a two-step procedure to more adequately define a medium, which is to distinguish it both from the concept of the signifier/signified and from the notion of a technical instrument. She modifies the somewhat simplistic equation of the medium and message by following the tenets of Derrida's philosophy of writing (*écriture*), which leads her to the conclusion that if there cannot be any language that is outside speech, writing or gestural articulation because each of them leave their traces on language, so «The medium is not simply the message; rather, the trace

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2.   See Paech, in Helbig (ed.) (1998: 15). For a discussion of *media switch* see Balme (1999: 154).
3.   «Transformations» are «forms of differentiation operating during the transfer from one form to another, so that the less advanced form becomes the medium of the more advanced one» (Paech, 1998: 23).
4.   McLuhan (1964) defines a medium as everything that serves to extend one's own sensorium.
5.   To explain that the medium is the message even when its «contents» hide the medium's real nature McLuhan (1964: 8-9) uses the example of electric light: light remains «pure information» without «a message» when it does not illuminate, for example, an advertisement text letter by letter, like the projection of a film where the projection surface usually remains unnoticed.

of the medium is inscribed in the message» (Krämer, 1998 *a*: 81). Furthermore, in order to grasp more clearly the instrumental dimension of the media, which assumes particular importance when media are conceived primarily as technical media Krämer (1998 *a*: 84) distinguishes between «"tools", understood as technical instruments» and «"apparatuses", regarded as technical media». However, Krämer does not consider this distinction as any sort of master plan, but rather she embraces its discontinuity. Her primary aim is to differentiate between functions: while technology understood as a tool is a labour-saving device (increasing efficiency), technology regarded as apparatus creates artificial worlds. Crucially, for Kramer (1998: 85), the function of «*world creation* is the productive significance of media technology».

1.2. Media Theoretical Reflections on Theatre

Kramer's definition is important for a media theoretical analysis of theatre insofar as it can help us to clarify the question of a mediality of theatre, which to date remains unsolved.[6] It is striking, for example, that although Joachim Fiebach in his essay on communication and theatre identifies structural similarities between theatre and other (new) media from a historical perspective, ultimately he denies theatre the status of a medium:

> A theatrical event, however, constitutes a fundamentally different reality than a media event. [...] The quasi-grounded corporeality that determines all activity in theatre creates an essentially different communicative situation and mediates different experiences than mediatizations. [...] Under such circumstance theatre could take on a potentially irreplaceable social function – as an immediate interpersonal activity, as an encounter of living bodies that communicate without any machinery distancing them. (Fiebach, 1998: 162, 167)

Here, Fiebach seems to apply an instrumental-technological concept of apparatus to define media, which amongst other things excludes instruments of world creation that are tied to the human body, such as the human voice or gestural articulation and thus automatically excludes theatre.[7] Petra Maria Meyer (1997: 115), in turn, proposes to establish «theatre studies as media studies» especially in view of the fact that – as she rightly points out – no set of analytic devices that

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6. See the most recent clarifications concerning this problem in Chapple & Kattenbelt (eds.) (2006).
7. This limited definition of media leads to the assertion that «oral culture(s) are not medial, because in their case the encounter of bodies is not mediated by an apparatus» (Fiebach, 1998: 103), which locates the beginning of the correspondence between the structural elements of theatre and media at the end of World War One and the wide spread use of electronic image media.

can be used for an intermedial analysis is available for the field of media studies. Like Paech, she resorts to semiotics[8] in her attempt to define a «general theory of medial transformations». Thus, she only partially supports her premise that the immanently «pluri-medial perspective» of theatre studies is the most adequate for a «genuine model of media studies». Her approach virtually annihilates the very «*differencia specifica* that distinguishes theatre from other media» (Meyer, 1997: 120) by theoretically conceptualizing the distinctive features of a pluri-medial theatre performance using an extended textual model of *écriture*.[9] In ascribing a literary theoretical model to an analysis of theatre Meyer turns all media operating in theatre into literature, and thus neutralizes their potential for material difference, with the consequence that theatre becomes defined as a text-based medium.

1.3. Towards an Intermediality of Theatre

When applied to theatre, Krämer's concept of media helps to clarify terminological uncertainties in the debate only as long as theatre is considered simply an «apparatus for creating artificial worlds» (Krämer, 1998 *a*: 85). However, this approach does not allow for recognition of the medial status of theatre, or for the intermedial inter-relations between the specific sign constellations that constitute theatre, to which I now turn. First of all, I suggest that it is not the medial specificity of theatre that leaves traces on the messages of theatre, but rather the interplay of multiple (constantly interchangeable) media (such as gesticulation, voice, music or dance). Second, theatre can integrate a variety of technical apparatuses, for example, film or television in order to create artificial worlds, which it incorporates without losing its status as theatre. Therefore, the intermedial components of theatre need to be analyzed more precisely.

If we start from Müller's assumption that «a medial product is intermedial when it transports the multimedial coexistence[10] of medial quotations and elements into a conceptual cooperation, whose (aesthetic) fractures and dislocations open up new dimensions of sensation and experience» (Müller, 1998: 31), then intermedial configuration becomes the aesthetic transfer of one medium into another. We can then consider McLuhan's «fundamental question» concerning the conditions of «exchange and translation» between media

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8.   Compare Zima (ed.) (1995).
9.   Compare among others: Roland Barthes, *Le degré zéro de l'écriture* (1953); Jacques Derrida, *Die Schrift und die Differenz* (1972); Julia Kristeva *Die Lust am Text* (1974).
10. For more information on multimedial theatre see Patrice Pavis (1996: 222), *Dictionaire du Théâtre*.

(McLuhan, 1962: 13), which is useful as it allows us to narrow down the aspect of translation in the context of theatre. Adopting an anthropological perspective, McLuhan draws a distinction between the mediality of human senses and that of technical tools,[11] which for him includes technical devices such as radio. He claims that no dynamic translations can take place between «these massive extensions of the senses» since technical devices constitute «closed systems» (McLuhan, 1962: 13). Crucially, for McLuhan (1962: 13), the human senses are able to translate experiences from one sensory field to another and therefore they do not constitute closed systems that are incapable of interplay but are open and incomplete configurations that can – due to their rationality – «mutually translate all our senses into one another». Thus, following McLuhan and Müller opens up new dimensions of sensation and experiences in an intermedial cooperation.[12] To this, I notice that theatre relies on the presence and sensorium of the human body, which is able to integrate secondary and tertiary media, and thus functions as an open, dynamic configuration of medial translations (transpositions) for its production and reception. At the same time, theatre is identical with those media[13] that organize their structural elements into a constantly dynamic process that translates countless differentiations within them. Notably, in her philosophical model of intermediality Krämer uses the metaphor of the stage as a key image:

> A medium is always preceded by something; but what precedes it is presented in another medium and never outside a medium. If this is the case, however, then intermediality is a fundamental phenomenon in the sphere of media. Media become «epistemic objects» only at the moment when one medium leaves the «stage» for another medium, which itself becomes a «form-in-a-medium». (Krämer, 2003: 85)

1.4. Theatre as an Intermedial Event and Cultural Practice

Defining theatre as an intermedial event opens up the possibility of conceptualizing theatre within a single universal and ideal framework, while

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11.   In the field of communication theory, compare Harry Pross' (1973) differentiation of media into primary, secondary and tertiary media: I. Primary media: the media connected to the human body, like facial expression, gesticulation, movement, voice and spoken language. Human senses suffice to transport and receive messages. No equipment mediates between sender and receiver; II. Secondary media: they comply with the requirements of mechanical apparatuses / instruments / technologies for the production of messages: signals, optical instruments, print, typography etc.; III. Tertiary media: they comprise mediation processes that require electronic technologies such as radio, telephone or computer.

12.   McLuhan (1969: 13) uses the example of language to explain this process: «Language is metaphor in the sense that it not only stores but translates experience from one mode into another».

13.   These, in turn, include the questions, principles and concepts that were developed in the course of their history, each of them in their own context. See Müller (1998: 31).

maintaining an open form in all its potential configurations: as artefact or as ritualized repetition of particular actions; as pantomime or vocal performance; or as dance or multimedial spectacle. A significant component of this open concept of theatre is the assumption that «we [...] [cannot] categorize things into media and non-media» (Krämer, 2003: 83), and this assumption opens up the way for me to add my reflections on the intermediality of theatre in three important aspects:

 a) Embodiment: the constitutive function of the media
 b) The Performative: the phenomenalizing function of the media
 c) Intermediality as an epistemic condition of media perception

1.4.1. Embodiment: the Constitutive Function of the Media

Media should not be defined in an essentialist manner but rather we should build on Luhmann's form-medium relationship understood as a potential for differentiation and as a structuring repertoire. From this perspective, mediality can be defined as the potential for differentiation and structuring, which reveals itself in the transfer process from one medium into another, during which the aesthetic neutrality (the imperceptibility) of a medium can disappear when it becomes a form: «What counts as a medium and what as a form, when a description is made completely depends on the cognitive interests and the observer's vantage point» (Krämer, 2003: 84). Notably, theatre makes this process perceivable for its audience because visible and audible phenomena reveal their medial nature when they are transferred from one medium to another, for example, when a text recorded on a tape is rendered verbally by an actor. What is decisive is that the very act of transfer shapes and delimits the media. This concept of mediality opens up a descriptive perspective on the world. The medium becomes a figure of mediation, which cannot be measured adequately in semiotic or technical terms because the act of transposition functions as an embodiment in a particular medium. The function of embodiment is a modification of Krämer's idea of the trace that imprints itself on the message of the medium. Embodiment, in turn, should not be understood as a preceding corporeality, but rather as the assumption of a form in the sense of incorporation. In the process of transformation from one medium to another, the form is not a mere container for some contents. Embodiment denotes an alteration or an undermining of the embodied in the act of transposition. One must not analyze media in the secondary sense of a sign *a priori* (as pure containers of messages) nor in the primary sense of a technological *a priori* (as

messages themselves) but rather from a cultural-anthropological perspective which shows:

> [...] how, in an act of transposition that which is transposed by media is at the same time co-created and stamped by them. It is the idea of «embodiment» as a culturally fundamental activity which makes it possible to identify «transposition» as «constitution» and to understand it. (Krämer, 2003: 85)

By guaranteeing the constitutive role of media within cultural practice the historicity of media is also guaranteed.

1.4.2. The Performative: the Phenomenalizing Function of the Media

The assumption that embodiment and transposition are performative elements allows us to consider theatre as an event where theatre is no longer merely a surface of signs that can be decoded or are hidden behind phenomena and therefore invisible. Semiotic perspectives decode and analyze theatre only as a particular form of a pre-existing (cultural) system, which within two-world ontology belongs to a different register of existence. However, an analysis of theatre undertaken from a performative perspective allows the phenomena connected with the constitution of meaning, such as speech and image, to be temporal events. Thus, theatre becomes a medium that «phenomenalizes» through its ability to make something appear and be accessible to the senses, and for this to happen it requires participation. The staging always puts «something» on stage, which must inevitably become «something else» since, «the phenomena are always richer than their conceptualization» (Krämer, 2003: 83). In other words, the performative preserves the surplus of that «something» which is performed. The essence is not invisible and situated behind phenomena. On the contrary, what is essential manifests itself in the performance event. The act of staging becomes a key component of the process of phenomenalization through transposition: «in every manner of creating, in the act of conveying that media allow and reveal» (Krämer, 2003: 85). Thus, theatre fulfils a paradigmatic function for all media theory because it provides the staging and visualization of multiple media

1.4.3. Intermediality as an Epistemic Condition of Media Perception

As media open up and stage perspectives onto the world, and since we perceive, communicate, and recognize everything within and by media, the

mediality of all existing things manifests this perspective. Accordingly, media, with their capacity to differentiate and transpose cannot be treated individually because they can only exist in relationship with other media. This observation is also true for theatre. Theatre as an intermedial event reveals and stages media, which it makes perceivable. It is only when a medium becomes a form and is able to be transposed in another medium that it may become the subject of any theoretical discussion; and so we return to Krämer's contention that «Intermediality becomes an epistemic condition for the knowledge of media» (Krämer, 2003: 82). The intermediality of theatre makes it possible to perceive the medial modalities, within which the visible and the audible, image and speech, are disclosed. Therefore, perception is a mode of theatricality, mediality and part of the epistemic conditions for intermediality.

In conclusion, we can say now that the potential for differentiation that media provide, which is based on the self-revelation of media in the very process of differentiation, should not be interpreted in terms of system construction but rather as a cultural practice. This is because media constitute something, but they do not create anything *ex nihilo* and they are no longer confined within closed systems. Media do not produce anything but they do restructure and stage new interrelations, new perspectives, and new viewpoints of the world. It matters little whether we consider theatre to be art or cultural technology; what is of utmost relevance for a definition of theatre as a medium of vision is that it is a temporal event.

2. Intermedial Faust

In the mass of literature that surrounds *Faust* it is generally accepted that Goethe's *Faust* tells the story of the modern subject of knowledge in search of meaning in an external world. Based on the theoretical background that I have outlined above, the following section concentrates on the media and their representations in this search for meaning.

Faust, the Renaissance-man, turns away from the four cardinal sciences and also from the classical media in which they are taught (namely books and optical instruments)[14] and resorts to the invisible medium of magic to satisfy his thirst

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14. Compare Faust's monologue: «Woe! am I stuck and forced to dwell / Still in this musty, cursed cell? / [...] Hemmed in by all this heap of books, / Their gnawing worms, amid their dust, / While to the arches, in all the nooks, / Are smoke-stained papers midst them thrust, / Boxes and glasses round me crammed, / And instruments in cases hurled, Ancestral stuff around me jammed- / That is your world! That's called a world! / And still you question why your heart / Is cramped and anxious in your breast?» (*Faust*, V. 398-411). This and all further quotes are cited from Goethe, *Faust. The First Part Of The* Tragedy, translated by George Madison Priest, http://www.levity.com/alchemy/faust02.html, [accessed 6-9-2007], unless stated otherwise.

for knowledge. Mephistopheles, the diabolic magician, promises an instantaneous effect of the magic and augurs to overcome space and time as a quasi harbinger of electricity. In a phantasmal way, Mephistopheles puts Faust in arbitrary and sometimes synchronous worlds and sets off projection apparatuses, procures fantastic images and helpful apparitions to satisfy all of Faust's wishes for sense and sensuality. This «classical-romantic media spectacle»[15] takes place in the theatrical space of representation to which the «Prelude» of *Faust I* directly refers, and which the whole work (I and II) repeatedly question.

The central quest in *Faust* for a truthfulness of those contents that are mediated by a medium is formulated in *Geschichte der Medien* by Fassler and Halbach (1998: 35) who ask whether «[...] everything we know results from our perceptions and their transformation into knowledge, and [whether] everything we possess are "constructions"».[16]

Fassler and Halbach's query about a possible symbolic representation of the world, and the status of media as guarantors of truth or deception, reality or illusion in relation to the gaining (true) awareness and knowledge is a central topic of *Faust* that remains pertinent today. Therefore, I move now to analyze Goethe's *Faust* as a model for intermedial theatre by looking at the contemporary, digital theatre production *F@ust vers. 3.0* (1999) by the Catalan group *La Fura dels Baus*. In my analysis, I use the structural model of vision (theatre as configuration of the visual) as analogous to perception (theatre as an apparatus for world creation), with a special focus on images, stage, projection apparatus and digital technology, in order to explore the special intermedial conditions of the realm of theatre.

3. Faust on the Net: *F@ust v. 3.0* (1999)

The Catalan theatre troupe *La Fura dels Baus*[17] makes the medial discourse of Goethe's *Faust I* and *II* the central aspect of their 1999 production *F@ust v. 3.0*:

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15.   In the 18th century a renunciation of typography and industrial machinery began to surface. The romantic counter-reaction helped the discovery of electricity as an instantaneous and non-linear medium. Compare Stafford (1998: 201ff.).

16.   This is a question that Faust asks himself when he sees the signs of the macrocosm in Nostradamos' book, which leaves him ultimately unsatisfied because it is «human imagination not the Being itself» (Trunz, 1998: 517). Faust: «Into the whole how all things blend, / Each in the other working, living! / [...] What pageantry! Yet, ah, mere pageantry! / Where shall I, endless Nature, seize on thee? / Thy breasts are - where? Ye, of all life the spring, [...]» (*Faust*, V. 447-455).

17.   For more information on the history of the troupe see Ingenschay (1994).

> Our Faust is a reading done by end-of-century-dwellers. Persons with a synchronous vision of the world, just like that which is observed when you use the television or computer channels to relate the world [...] Persons, in short, immersed in a different span of modernity from that in which Faust was born, possibly our big brother. (*F@ust v. 3.0* program)[18]

With their radical adaptation of the text[19] through fragmentation, actualization and reduction of the well-known key phrases, the troupe creates a visually and acoustically accentuated intermedial spectacle, which translates the history of the apparatuses of sense-extension: «the bloody pact with technology, the undeniable tormentor in previous eras, whether industrial or pre-industrial» (program note) into the contemporary digital age. Accordingly, the group calls this new project in which they synthesize text, music, video clips, the internet, lighting effect, actors and objects «Digital theatre» (program note). For the duration of their twenty year's history the group have never before performed in a conventional theatre, but for this performance they needed the perspective and point of view proffered by seating laid out in an auditorium where the audience views the spectacle through the proscenium arch:

> It is the spectator, who, from the theatre seat, has to decipher, within themselves [sic], the transcendence of the myth (of Faust) who sold his soul to the devil. A spectator used to the sofa at home, a television format and the infinity of channels on offer, can excitedly visit the keys to their own domestic tragedy. The channel switching will be done by LA FURA. (*F@ust v. 3.0*)

The domestic tragedy unfolds along Faust's travel into the world of the internet and is triggered by the pact with Mephistopheles – a tragedy, that is no longer based on the duality of rational and phantasmagorical knowledge and the striving for true perception by surpassing delusion and deception, but rather on «[...] the surplus of information: fragmentary information that creates the hallucination of absolute knowledge, the vertigo of a false knowledge, an encyclopaedism on a world wide scale», which addresses the inseparability of factual knowledge and phantasmagoria, and «[...] a whole fair of novelties which leads us from the Gutenberg Galaxy to our virtual era» (program).

As a consequence, the group does not categorically separate the virtual worlds of the stage and that of the video projection screen, even though the spatial arrangement of the audience consciously associates a confrontation of

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18. Program for *F@ust v. 3.0*, published by Fura dels Baus, Barcelona, 1998.
19. Gretchen, for example, opens the first meeting with Faust (originally: «My fair young lady, may I make so free / As to lend you my arm and company?» (V. 2605-2606) by saying: «Got a lighter?».

both worlds. However, there is, no imaginary fourth wall (the window that provides in-sight into a constructed illusionary space) to separate the stage and auditorium. Instead, the open, black stage is wrapped in the darkness that usually covers the auditorium[20] and reveals a huge digital screen that is separated into eight rectangular segments, which sometimes create a uniform video image and sometimes shows simultaneous fragments or sequences of images at varying speeds, or alternatively provides glimpses of the actors who perform inside single segments that are opened like doors.

One of the highlights of intermedial screen and theatre composition is the sequence in which Gretchen becomes a murderer: there is a video sequence of Gretchen; of her mother who swallows the nightcap: of watery liquid running down the screen and mixing with «blood» and a baby who is under-water. The video sequences alternate at high speed while Faust and Mephistopheles speak their dialogue and where they seem to be integrated into the screen, although one of them *de facto* is standing on stage and the other is in one of the segments behind the screen – their voices are amplified by microphone, which together with the music, form a linear plot that accompanies the fast-changing, contrasting, sometimes cross-faded images.

Ironic references to the apparatuses of the mechanistic, empirical but also the electrical and digital age that exclusively take place on stage floor indicate that the performance negotiates a confrontation between two systems of knowledge and perception as a synchronous and diachronous history of media. A variety of mechanical and electrical apparatuses, which range up to include a computer as a research tool in Faust's study become a thematic component of the stage aesthetics: a rotating mill-wheel inside a Faraday cage. In particular, the stage lighting appears as an ironically warped symbol of a «light of reason» through its provision of consistently poor lighting with flashlights and, in a few cases, with the targeted use of a spotlight that exclusively covers the faces but only partially reaches the bodies. Wagner, for example, who shows off his complacent faith in knowledge by reciting a litany of digitalization «0-1-0-1-0-1-0» and a praise of «la vida digital» (digital life), is wearing a helmet lamp, which he powers with a crank. If his eagerness to crank up the light is exhausted then Wagner is, quite literally, in the dark.

Faust's monologue of inner conflict: «Two souls alas! are dwelling in my breast;» (V. 1112) is introduced by an image that interprets his suicide attempt

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20. After the DJ enters, the performance opens in complete darkness from which eventually a circling beam of light lifts like the orbit of a comet, but it soon turns out to be the beam of a flashlight in Faust's study that Faust is holding as he is pushed on to the stage tied to a kind of rotating mill-wheel in a Faraday cage.

as a result of desperation in the face of an electric age that, in 1800, was impossible to rationalize; for as he puts a cable around his neck the «cage» is abruptly pulled away from under his feet. Simultaneously, accompanied by Mozart's *Requiem*, the image of an oversized light bulb is projected onto the screen, while the background fills with countless rigid heads. At first, Faust is dangling in front of this image, but at the same time as the light bulb bursts, he falls onto the stage and starts his monologue, during which a spotlight projects his doubly conically tapered shadow onto the projection screen in the background. Only the pact with Mephistopheles removes his desperation and inner conflict, which is achieved by way of an intermedial cross-over of internet and theatre for Faust's affliction with an isolation of vision and the separation of illusion and projection comes to an end which, however, introduces further sufferings:

> The journey begins, and here La Fura proposes one of the great challenges of the performance. The spectators begin to lose contact with their theatre seats, to submerge themselves in realities beyond the stage. Through visual resources the action delves into a video game in which you can operate on a stomach, take part in a visual fight between God and the Devil via blows with joysticks and other possibilities. (*F@ust v. 3.0*)

The fight between God and the Devil, between the «divine» and the «magical eye» no longer takes place in favour of an (illusionary) distanced observer (the isolated visual sense) as guarantor of objective knowledge. Instead, Faust's entanglement «in the Net» is addressed and it becomes most obvious on the symbolic realm of the stage rather than on the screen. Following Gretchen's meeting with Faust, a gigantic net is dropped down from the fly floor, which is quickly tied to the stage floor and opens up the audience's gaze onto the amorous play of Marthe, Mephisto, Faust and Gretchen in the garden. The shadows of the four characters clinging onto the net are enlarged on the digital wall, which now serves as a double of the net. Thus, Faust's desire for sense and sensuality is visualized in an image that not only traps all characters in equal measure, but also completely abolishes the separation of projection and illusion. It was Baudrillard who characterized the effect of digital screens and, respectively, networks:

> Instead of the reflexive tendency of the mirror and the stage a non-reflective surface, an immanent surface exists where operations can unfold, the smooth operational surface of communication. Something has changed, and the Faustian, Promethean (perhaps Oedipal) period of production and consumption gives way to the «proteanic» era of networks, to the narcissistic and protean area of connections, contacts, contiguity, feedback and generalized interface that goes with the universe

> of communication. [...] Little by little, a logic of «drive» has replaced a very subjective logic of possession and projection. There are no longer fantasies of power, speed and acquisition that are tied to the object itself but in their place a tactic of potentialities [...] (Baudrillard, *The Ecstasy of Communication*, in Fiebach, 1998: 132)

Faust caught «in the Net» transmits a tactile eroticization of the gaining of knowledge that «questions the traditional access to visual space and our habitual attachment to a "point of view" by telesensoric, immediate communication» (de Kerckhove, 1997: 166).

Theatre creates a virtual world[21] that captures the computer-generated virtual world within one image and transports it into another symbolic form beyond any idea of the space of illusion. In a synaesthetic interaction with data structures, an immanent surface, the obstructed mental vanishing point of an imaginary spectator, the theatre of *La Fura dels Baus* works towards a tele sensoric image. However, because the laws of inertia and gravity must and do apply on the stage, the production stops the speed of the information-flow on the screen by reflection: the proiecere (throw forward) and reflectare (bend backward) work in opposition and the time-delay in reaction takes effect on the perception of the audience who no longer witness the simultaneous «action and reaction» that is the usual mode of operation of electronic or digital media.[22] Thus, it is the function of the stage that operates between the digital wall and the auditorium; it stops the immensity of images by integrating them into its own, mechanical speed instead of excluding them. However, in achieving this it simultaneously annuls the function of bourgeois theatre as a space of artificial illusion proffered in a linear order of representation. In this case, theatre is not the space for the rivalry of primary, secondary or tertiary medial aspects, but rather it integrates them in the mode of an intermedial transposition.

After Faust goes blind, the process of intermedial transposition culminates in the final image. On the big screen the (Faustian) heads appear that have already appeared in the suicide scene, re-appear as Faust rotates faster and faster on a metal sheet inside the «cage» that is fixed on the perpendicular central axis of the stage. This has the effect of completely dissolving a secure point of illusionary vision. Again, a fragment of Mozart's *Requiem* is played, but the (Faustian) heads do not mirror the perspective of the audience – instead they become larger and larger while they pick up speed and move forward, away from the central vanishing point and towards the spectators, as if the sublime position

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21.   Compare Artaud (1958: 48): «It is that alchemy and theatre are so to speak virtual arts, and do not carry their end – or their reality – within themselves».
22.   See McLuhan (1964)

in which vision is stylized in a spiritual point of distanced (self-) awareness were simultaneously the location of a black hole.

Translated by Götz Dapp

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