

RECURSION AND EQUIFINALITY IN RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FILM AND THEATRE: BEING JOHN MALKOVICH

Peter GETLÍK

ABSTRACT:

The essay focuses on the intersemiotic relationship of film and theatre that inevitably forces a metatextual dialogue of these semiotic systems in artworks. We have chosen the play-element of art to be the centre of our theorising, because we assume that it is often a significant interpretational key to the metatextual dialogue of multiple arts. These metatextual dialogues might be compared to 'artistic games'. They mix multiple 'artistic games' and experiment with the combination of their principles and rules. They are metatextually explaining the rules of 'artistic games' during these experiments by revealing the hidden and hiding the obvious. They try to bend some rules and break some rules without spoiling the 'game'. We observe the types of the play principle in these arts and then we describe behaviour of these semiotic systems through the opposition of recursion and equifinality. We extract models of the theatre fractal and the film net, verifying the legitimacy of this point of view via an analysis of the film *Being John Malkovich*.

KEY WORDS:

actor, code, equifinality, film, John Malkovich, metatext, play, play principle, recursion, semiotics, text, theatre



Mgr. Peter Getlík, PhD.
Faculty of Arts
Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice
Moyzesova 9
04001 Košice
Slovak Republic
peter.getlik@upjs.sk

Peter Getlík is a lecturer at the Department of Slovak Studies, Slavonic Philology and Communication at the Faculty of Arts, Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice. He earned his Bachelor's and Master's degrees in the study programme Mass Media Communication at the same Department. He has a PhD. in Literary Science, focusing on the intersemiotic relationship of literature, film and theatre, which was also the topic of his dissertation thesis titled *Theatrical Techniques in a Film Text*, supervised by Assoc. Prof. Ján Sabol, PhD., ArtD. His most important scholarly works on the topic of intersemiotic relationships include *Kreativita v intersemiotickom preklade medzi tradičnými a digitálnymi médiami* (in English *Creativity in Intersemiotic Translation between Traditional and Digital Media*, 2016), *Perspektívy Rakúskej literárnej teórie (látko, téma, problém, tvar) pri skúmaní filmových adaptácií literárnych diel* (in English *Perspectives of Rakús's Literary Theory (substance, topic, problem, shape) in Film Adaptations of Literary Works*, 2016) and *Divadelné postupy vo filmovom texte* (in English *Theatrical Techniques in a Film Text*, 2017).

Introduction: Recursion and Equifinality Derived from Play Principle in Theatre and Film

For better understanding of the relationship between film and theatre as cultural phenomena and semiotic systems, we have to think about their synthetic¹ or hypercode² nature and ostensive character.³ It is also very important to recognise their core and bipolar relationship from pre-cultural perspective.

1 PAŠTEKA, J.: *Spätný pohľad bez kamery*. Bratislava: Veda, 2005, p. 113.

2 ECO, U.: *Teorie sémiotiky*. Praha: Argo, 2009, p. 158.

3 OSOLSOBĚ, I.: *Principia parodica: Totiž posbírané papíry převážně o divadle*. Praha: Akademie múzických umění, 2007, p. 85.

The pre-cultural core is a play-element in both. Play-element is connected to a type of artistic synthesis (natural and technical). Therefore, the philosophical division between dominant organic principle in theatre (subdominantly mechanic) and dominant mechanic principle in film (subdominantly organic) is a premise of this essay. Studying arts (and perceiving the play-element in them) allows us to understand their basic rules and see how these 'artistic games' are structured. It also enables us to study these semiotic systems from the systems theory point of view and predict their future development. There are two interesting aspects or tendencies that we can observe in these semiotic systems: recursion and equifinality.⁴

Recursion and equifinality in art are in some way in bipolar opposition. We have to set our premise (of organic theatre and mechanic film) in anthropological context to explain why. It is best to point out that theatre is 'born' from natural synthetic character of human action⁵ that existed before theatre and was bound to first cultures, so we can imagine the extent of these tendencies in film and theatre. It is a natural pre-art synthesis. On the other hand, the second kind of synthesis – the technical synthesis that we can see in films – did not exist before this semiotic system. It partially coexisted with the birth of film as a medium; however, it has been fully developed later along with the fixation of the film language as a hypercode and we can name it as a post-art, a technical or a mechanical synthesis. Two kinds of artistic synthesis (natural and technical) are also marked as 'milestones' of human cultural evolution. We talk about separating functions of human action in first pre-theatrical forms but also about rediscovering this unity in a new technical art. Technical unity is even more obvious, for example, in the art of digital games, but it is primarily evident in film.

It is almost impossible not to have an anthropocentric view about art. According to Pavis, it is only understandable that analogically from live science and body, there is a distinction between live arts (theatre, opera and dance) and mechanical arts (film, installation).⁶ Not to overcomplicate the 'philosophical' part of the essay in this point, we can divide them (for now) into organic and mechanic principles, although this division is bind to a perspective of what a part of (human) system is and what is around it in 'eco-system'. We have to keep in mind that these principles intersect with each other. We see these intersections in continuous more 'human' appearance of artificial intelligence or in mechanical extensions of humans (e.g. prosthetics and sensory extensions of eyesight or audition). We observe a similar kind of intersections in hypercodes (theatre using a film code and vice versa), which are very open to assimilate new codes and absorb them into themselves. Intersemiosis of film in theatre was also studied by Miloš Mistrík in his work about mise en scène in *Fanny and Alexander*.⁷ We would like to add our perspective of this relationship from the film point of view (and the theatre dialogue in it); we will illustrate it at the end of this essay on the film *Being John Malkovich*.⁸

It is common to think about an organic principle when something grows out of itself, complicates itself, creates new parts (branches) from a whole and we use a philosophical metaphor of a tree to grasp it in language. A mechanical principle is connected to an abstract model, simplifying and imitating nature; it is a mixture of parts. A philosophical metaphor for it is a clockwork mechanism or a watch.

We want to analyse recursive and equifinal tendencies in artistic dialogue of film and theatre as semiotic systems. It is possible to talk about recursion and equifinality in film and theatre only through using the term "representation" and describe them as tendencies that are close to a specific type of representation. It is more than sufficient within a synchronic approach to two artworks or to contemporary configuration of semiotic systems, but in diachronic approach, we would miss an important factor of art development – competition. Invention as a type of sign production⁹ is essential to the art and to be innovative, it has to compete with itself, and with others. Introducing the best representation, a new depiction, the most useful technology or original approach considerably influence the history of art. The play-element is relevant in every kind of art on a macro scale of semiotic system, together with play-elements that are connected to specific representation in artwork

4 VON BERTALANFFY, L.: *General System Theory*. New York : George Braziller, 1968, p. 137.

5 MUKAŘOVSKÝ, J.: *Studie z estetiky*. Praha : Odeon, 1966, p. 69.

6 PAVIS, P.: *Divadelný slovník*. Bratislava : Divadelný ústav, 2004, p. 456.

7 MISTRÍK, M.: Video and Theatre or a Hybrid Scene: The Case of Theatrical Mise En Scène Fanny and Alexander. In *Communication Today*, 2017, Vol. 8, No. 2, p. 134.

8 JONZE, S. (Director): *Being John Malkovich* (1999, Widescreen Version). [DVD]. Universal City : Universal Studios Home Entertainment, 2006.

9 ECO, U.: *Teorie sémiotiky*. Praha : Argo, 2009, p. 316.

on a micro scale. The hypercode character is the second reason not to theoretically derive recursion and equifinality only from 'representation', but directly from play principle of these arts. It is better to connect it to the concept of (synthetic) play without reducing the natural synthetic quality of theatre and the new technical synthetic quality of film.

The dominant part of the theatre code is an actor¹⁰ (technology is subdominant) and the dominant part of film is a technology (actors are subdominant). In other words, film uses primarily the vision-based (not only visual) code and theatre primarily uses the figurative code.¹¹ We can see these principles in the 'ontogenesis' of production of a simple artwork, but it is also evident in phylogenesis of semiotic systems in the history of arts. For example, film is not centralised only on the current technology that mixes other codes, since the film art develops via mixing technology to fulfil a mechanical model. Pre-film technologies could individually capture visual and acoustic signals or project images, but there was a certain element of 'waiting' until alignment of the best¹² current versions of technology was "ready" (to fulfil demands of the market) and then until the film language emerged with the help of successful acceptance of David W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation*.¹³ The subdominant part of theatre, an actor, is already there and we are 'waiting' for a capable technology to play with – for a dominant code – because the 'real toy of the film game' is slowly merging together. However, we cannot say this about theatre.

The Play Principle in Theatre

The dominant code of theatre, deriving from a play principle, is the figurative representation with acting. It existed before architecture of odeons, curtains, technology of capstan, *deus ex machina* and other extensions.¹⁴ Play-element studies are a part of theatre studies and we can see the play principle connected to ostensive function mostly in the work of Ivo Osolobč. He illustrates the play principle and ostension in theatre in his *Principia Parodica* in a peculiar way that he is known for, on a model of playing kittens.¹⁵ Using animals to demonstrate the play principle in theatre is the best example of the pre-cultural character of play and we can find a lot of examples about it in the book *Homo Ludens* written by Johan Huizinga. Huizinga offers many arguments related to anthropology,¹⁶ law, philosophy, art and linguistics in his 1950s work, which suggests that the play principle is one of the culture-forming factors and not a mere consequence of culture. According to Huizinga,¹⁷ a play brings the rules and creates order, and that is why it is very useful in aesthetics.¹⁸ Game has a dual character.¹⁹ Firstly, it is a competition for something and secondly, a representation of something. We can represent a contest (by duel) or compete for a best representation (with competition of dramatic authors); it was very common in Ancient Greece, as Huizinga shows us, but we can spot these connections also today.

A player is using abstraction and the 'pure play' does not need anything more than a player with abstract thinking and something to compete against (like other players or nature) or something to represent. The 'pure

10 Theatre is older than drama, and we recognise acting as the oldest one from all elements of theatrical art (for more information, see: POLÁK, M.: *Krátke dejiny divadla*. Bratislava : Vydavateľstvo Spolku slovenských spisovateľov, 2004, p. 6).

11 PAŠTEKA, J.: *Spätný pohľad bez kamery*. Bratislava : Veda, 2005, p. 16.

12 Film has always been striving to fulfil the model of the best extension of human senses and it is constantly changing. Every time when it is capable of expanding as a better extension of senses, it does so. We observe this with the creation of sound film (sometimes also called 'talking pictures' or 'talkie'), which changed the film code so drastically that Pudovkin or Eisenstein accepted sound film, but not 'talkies' (see: PAŠTEKA, J.: *Spätný pohľad bez kamery*. Bratislava : Veda, 2005, p. 19).

13 MONACO, J.: *Jak číst film*. Praha : Albatros, 2004, p. 287.

14 There is no reason for systematic disposing of actors in film and technical advancements in theatre. Not to use the current hypercode possibilities creates paradigmatically special connotations (remark by the author).

15 OSOLOBČ, I.: *Principia parodica: Totiž posbírané papíry převážně o divadle*. Praha : Akademie múzických umění, 2007, p. 23.

16 These notes are the most important for us. Studying theatre and pre-theatre forms from the anthropologic point of view has its strong tradition (Artud, Freud, Lévi-Strauss) and nowadays (Barba, Saverse) pursues the ambition to establish theatre anthropology as a new scholarly discipline (for more information, see: PAVIS, P.: *Divadelný slovník*. Bratislava : Divadelný ústav, 2004, p. 78).

17 HUZINGA, J.: *Homo Ludens*. London : Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1980, p. 13.

18 There are also other reasons. Mukařovský connected aesthetic function to three characteristics of the social factor: the ability to isolate an object; the ability to create pleasure; the ability to substitute other functions thanks to its connection with a form (see more: MUKAŘOVSKÝ, J.: *Studie z estetiky*. Praha : Odeon 1966, p. 10).

19 HUZINGA, J.: *Homo Ludens*. London : Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1980, p. 13.

play' is a play of children. As a competition, it is the game of tag or hide-and-seek. As a representation, it is a child's way to imitate objects, animals but mostly social roles. Any requisite has only a complementary function. It is useful, but not necessary. In theatre, which can exist only with actors, we can see 'pure play principle'.²⁰ According to Osolsobě,²¹ the difference between a non-theatrical play and theatre is in actor's character, which is merely a human invention, human discovery. It also applies to a dramatic person (in the opposition with actor, and mostly player). Of course, there is an inclusion in here. A dramatic person is fixed to a specific actor and she or he is, in their nature, a player of the game – theatre.

The actors are not only carelessly playing like children, but they are also competing with themselves (and other actors) to create the ideal representation in order to fulfil the function of their part in theatre. Still, this 'acting-based' play is much more important here than the competition part of the play. A human being has their own flaws; therefore, the function of this competition is a function with its limits and cannot reach its ideal. That is also a reason why equifinal tendencies are secondary in theatre and placed behind the primary recursive nature of theatre that always comes back to be human theatre, to count with mistakes and variations and built its poetics on this natural organic form of game.

The actor is used in this representation as a sign, and as a creator of this sign. She or he is the player and the toy at the same time. In a specific situation she/he can be their only audience.²² An actor-ouroboros is a canvas and paint together, filling themselves and changing themselves in this playful representation all the time. Thanks to the recursive character of this representation we can talk about the 'eternal theatre' never changing in its core, but flexible enough to accept other art forms to its hypercode. The 'eternal theatre' creates a new natural variation of itself mostly in subdominant technical parts without the fear of overcoming itself as a semiotic system and becoming something absolutely 'new'. The recursive character of theatre is also stressed with immediate feedback from audience, but audience's feedback is not the main source of theatrical recursion. The main source is the cyclical relationship²³ between the agents and the patients, the players and the toys.

The etymologic connection of the play principle and stage play is evident in English or in Slovak, but this motivation is not universal in every language. It is common to derivate theatre only from religious rituals outside of theatre studies, but religious rituals have very 'serious' connotations in the Western culture of today. They are often misleading in an interdisciplinary thinking about theatre. To see theatre as a derivate of a symbolic function, as Mukařovský would call it,²⁴ is therefore insufficient. There is no clear division between symbolic or aesthetic (sign) functions and practical or theoretical (non-sign) functions in the early history of culture. This synthesis of functions is evident in animism. We can see the first examples of a theatre in formal manifestation of animism and magic function,²⁵ but it is not only a 'serious' thing. Ethnology uses the concept of "ethnodrama", the connected term for religion, ritual and theatre that also includes a play principle.²⁶ We can see the first 'semi-professional' performer in ethnodrama in a role of a shaman. Before defining a shaman, there was no reason to separate an actor and their audience.²⁷ The role of a shaman is the first step in separating functions of theatre by creating parts from a whole in theatre; however, even after their separation, she/he still has a lot of other functions, being a healer, a teacher and so on.

The belief is now mostly associated with seriousness,²⁸ but the serious and non-serious were not separated in rituals (from today's perspective) when theatre emerged from the play principle. In animism,

there is an evident magical premise (contact magic) that touching objects can transfer characteristics of this object. Today, the belief and theatre are connected through the phenomenon of "denegation". "Denegation"²⁹ is thus a situation when a viewer is a subject to theatrical illusion and has a feeling that what she/he experiences does not exist. Viewers 'play themselves' to believing. Freud uses this psychoanalytic term on a child that is an actor and a viewer at the same time. Relationship between a game and a belief is well explained by Huizinga³⁰ on a game of dice and lottery in ancient civilisations. For us, it is very important to unambiguously connect the emergence of theatre not only to the 'serious' religion function, but also to the 'non-serious' play function. It is the result of synthetic character of functions related to theatre's emergence, and it manifests itself in the synthetic theatre form, in opposition to the arts separated by specific human action.

The Play Principle in Film

Focusing on theatre allows us to analogically describe the play principle in film. Nowadays, there is no such thing as a full artistic technical synthesis³¹ as the dominant code before film as it was before theatre. Film had to fully recover this synthesis in combination of other codes and thus find its own language in montage. All the other subdominant codes "waited for film to combine them" in its model of the best extension of human senses possible. Visual tendencies in film create an "ostensive paradox" with its recording nature that mixes ostension with other types of sign production.³² Film predominantly tries not to use verbal language and not to reduce things that can be shown. At the same time, limitation of our senses does not allow us to perceive 'everything'. To ostensibly perceive a dynamic object is to perceive it in time. To ostensibly perceive parallel dynamics is to perceive them simultaneously or being somehow connected. Therefore, film does not only try to create an extension of senses in space but also in time (with connections of dynamic memories). Of course, there are things that cannot be ostensibly shown³³ and film represents them by stressing its inability to show them. A deep emotional penetrance³⁴ is represented by 'talking with silence' or ostensibly showing other objects with demanded and adequate visual connotations.

To combine something outside of a human is a mechanical principle (with direction from the parts to a whole) and in film, it absolutely requires a role of the director, in other words an external decision-maker who selects and recombines incomes. The director and editor are the main 'players' of this synthetic technical game, where the dominant representation is fixed on a record and not on the players. On the other hand, the organic principle of theatre centralised on actors (as agents and patients) allows hypercode to be fixed inside the human (in direction from a whole to the parts). One man can figuratively use theatre hypercode and play all the roles by herself/himself. It allows her/him to improvise, so theatre does not always require a position of the director as an external decision-maker. The role of external decision-maker only comes to a theatrical play with a higher level of artwork complexity and then it is very important. However, a theatrical director's role is different from the role possessed by a film director, even though their work routines have a lot in common. The theatrical part of directing is to be an 'emitter' (in a model of ostensive situation), to try to get something from an actor and point at it in an ostensive situation; Osolsobě differentiates it³⁵ from communication.³⁶ By doing so he tries to point at communication in a situation which reveals something true; similarly as a sculptor shapes a stone and gets a statue. The film part of directing is to try to communicate different situations that

20 The typology proposed by Caillouis that includes *mimicry*, *agon*, *alea* and *illinx* (*vertigo*) says a lot about the ludic character (see: PAVIS, P.: *Divadelný slovník*. Bratislava: Divadelný ústav, 2004, p. 188).

21 OSOLSOBĚ, I.: *Principia parodica: Totiž posbírané papíry převážně o divadle*. Praha: Akademie múzických umění, 2007, p. 28.

22 For example, auto-referential theatre where participants perform theatre just for themselves (compare to: PAVIS, P.: *Divadelný slovník*. Bratislava: Divadelný ústav, 2004, p. 44).

23 If we translate this auto-reference to the scheme of "ostension" by Osolsobě and we think about the situation and not about the communication here, we can say that the emitter (that is pointing to object) is also the object of ostension (for more information, see: OSOLSOBĚ, I.: *Principia parodica: Totiž posbírané papíry převážně o divadle*. Praha: Akademie múzických umění, 2007, p. 17).

24 MUKAŘOVSKÝ, J.: *Studie z estetiky*. Praha: Odeon, 1966, p. 57.

25 POLÁK, M.: *Krátke dejiny divadla*. Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo Spolku slovenských spisovateľov, 2004, p. 6.

26 PAVIS, P.: *Divadelný slovník*. Bratislava: Divadelný ústav, 2004, p. 151.

27 POLÁK, M.: *Krátke dejiny divadla*. Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo Spolku slovenských spisovateľov, 2004, p. 7.

28 We are referring to Huizinga and his use of the term "seriousness". He defines a non-serious connotation of play from the anthropologic point of view, from which we can recognise seriousness in play (see: HUIZINGA, J.: *Homo Ludens*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1980, p. 5).

29 PAVIS, P.: *Divadelný slovník*. Bratislava: Divadelný ústav, 2004, p. 69.

30 HUIZINGA, J.: *Homo Ludens*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1980, p. 57.

31 We can partially recognise the wide technical synthetic principle in architecture because of its strong practical function connected to technology; however, this strong practical function also forces it to inclusion of aesthetic codes (architecture in theatre or film). Therefore it is not at the same aesthetic, technical and synthetic level as film and theatre (remark by the author). Also, this is not in any way an axiological point of view, but only a semiotic perspective of hypercode spread across these arts. We can adopt a similar point of view to literature as a functional code in the film and theatre hypercode and at the same time absolutely disagree with Čapek who thinks that film is the most valuable kind of art (see: PAŠTEKA, J.: *Spätný pohľad bez kamery*. Bratislava: Veda, 2005, p. 320).

32 ECO, U.: *Teorie sémiotiky*. Praha: Argo, 2009, p. 316.

33 OSOLSOBĚ, I.: *Principia parodica: Totiž posbírané papíry převážně o divadle*. Praha: Akademie múzických umění, 2007, p. 17.

34 RAKÚS, S.: *Poetika prozaického textu: Látka, téma, problém, tvar*. Bratislava: Slovenský spisovateľ, 1995, p. 62.

35 We can see a similar differentiation when Eco talks about communication and signification. Communication always requires signification, but it is not the other way around (for more information, see: ECO, U.: *Teorie sémiotiky*. Praha: Argo, 2009, p. 48).

36 OSOLSOBĚ, I.: *Principia parodica: Totiž posbírané papíry převážně o divadle*. Praha: Akademie múzických umění, 2007, p. 13.

are remote in time and space and create a meaning like an audio-visual modeller. Theatrical and film directors alike use both principles, but in a different ratio. Now we can say, hopefully without any contradictions, that the objective goal of the technical principle in film is to extend senses in time and space. To do this is in a visual way is the rule (or the principle) of this 'game' (that can be poetically broken). The vision-based principle fulfils the film-play's demand to ostensibly show everything it can and to offer more ostensive ways to connote anything that is behind the reach of senses. Systematic breaking of the visual principle in a film or the figurative principle in a theatrical artwork in an extreme way is a 'game-spoiling' process and therefore it can lead to changing or destroying the 'game'. We can say that the recursive principle in theatre that always forces it to come back makes theatre more immune to any radical game-changing. It once pushed itself so hard that it helped create film, but it came back to itself with the self-reflection applied by Brecht or Artaud.³⁷ They tried to distinct it from film and rediscover the essence of theatre.

Film does not possess this strong immunity to radical changes in its dominant code. On the contrary, it welcomes such radical changes, especially if they lead to a wider spread of hypercode and to better extension of senses (in space and time alike). Therefore, these dynamics are not random. System theory offers us the term "equifinality"³⁸ for reaching the same final state regardless of starting point or different paths taken. Film as a system has a strong tendency to equifinality that derives from the same function any communication tool or technology has – to help humans in any way possible, to be the best mechanical extension of human beings.

We have used clockwork as a metaphor for the mechanical principle. There is no ideal technology that tells time precisely, but every clock tries to do so. We recognise a sundial, hourglass, 'classic' clockwork or an atomic clock. Technology used in them is very different, but the last one is supreme because it better represents the idealised model – it is closer to an ideal, precise 'time-teller'. The same analogy works in case of film. Cinematic technology varies from 'traditional' film material to digital recording tools, from silent to sound film, from black and white motion pictures to full-colour films. We have animated and now also fully computer-generated films to consider – these are completely different in terms of the sign production technologies they use, but they still "imitate conventional film in other ways" to fulfil preferences of their percipients. 3D films are very popular as well, and one of the few reasons why they have not become a standard yet³⁹ is the need to use a separate technology of glasses to watch them.⁴⁰ Film's dominant hypercode and poetics have changed a lot due to these technological advancements.

In connection with film equifinality, we have to mention Barjvel⁴¹ who already predicts 'cinéma total' that will not have a projection screen, but a projecting space. According to Barjavel, 'total film' will 'materialize' objects with electromagnetic waves. We call this innovation the hologram; although there already is a publicly available technology of creating 'simple' holograms,⁴² it is still rather clumsy and technologically imperfect. Other paths to this 'total film' lead through virtual reality (VR) technologies or augmented reality (AR) technologies. It is very hard for theory to classify such experiments, but once one of these technologies will be efficient (and economically relevant) enough, able to create a better extension of senses, it will paradigmatically change the dominant part of film's hypercode again as it has already happened many times before.⁴³ New technologies also shape today's theatre; they may significantly change the subdominant part of the theatrical hypercode, but will not deconstruct theatre's universal figurative code.

37 MONACO, J.: *Jak číst film*. Praha: Albatros, 2004, p. 47.

38 It is also usual to use the Greek word *isotelis* that means "pursuing the same goal" (remark by the author).

39 It is almost a standard for Hollywood blockbusters now (remark by the author).

40 Contemporary arguments against 3D films are not so different from Pudovkin's or Eisenstein's criticism on sound films including the spoken word. 3D film technologies are changing the current poetical restriction and many directors still think that creating the illusion of depth in 2D is better than '3D cheating'. This also applies to the debates about CGI techniques versus practical effects that we have witnessed several years ago. Now a lot of films use CGI and it is a standard practice. We refer to practical effects by using the phrase 'they did it in a traditional way', and thus we conventionally imagine more work behind it. However, for an ordinary spectator it is very hard to recognise good CGI today. That is why we think that if 3D films did not require another camera and could be watched without glasses, they would become common really quickly (remark by the author).

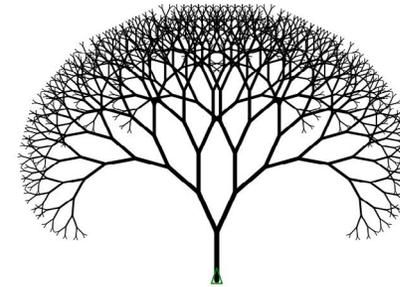
41 PAŠTEKA, J.: *Spätiny pohľad bez kamery*. Bratislava: Veda, 2005, p. 12.

42 *Amazing 3D Hologram Using Any Smartphone!*. [online]. [2018-10-09]. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hM_M4XEzjxw&t=8s>.

43 Until it comes to equifinal stage similar to an atomic clock; then we will not be able to identify the difference between watching a 'total film' and dreaming (remark by the author).

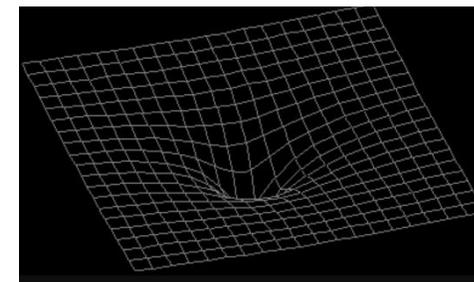
Models of Theatre Recursion and Film Equifinality: Fractal and Net

Now, we try to move from trees and clockworks as metaphors for the organic and mechanic principles and draw a model for primarily recursive theatre and primarily equifinal film. Using a diachronic approach, we can assign a model of fractal to the evolution of theatre and a model of net to the development of film.



Picture 1: Theatre fractal

Source: *Tree Similar Fractal*. [online]. [2018-10-09]. Available at: <<https://i.stack.imgur.com/Rz4DA.png>>.



Picture 2: Film Net

Source: *Curved Space*. [online]. [2018-10-09]. Available at: <<http://www.quantum-field-theory.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/curved-space.gif>>.

We purposely use a 'tree-like fractal' to remind us of little variations of patterns that are typical for the organic principle. These variations point to localising tendencies in theatre that restrain it from becoming a mass medium. We can compare them to globalising tendencies of film. We must say that every bipolar opposition is, in fact, a manifestation of the same phenomenon and we can see an interference of these principles. It is still useful for us to simplify it in order to better understand artworks that mix film and theatre. We already know a popular "net model" as a simplification of the theory of relativity. It explains gravitation as a curved space-time bending conditioned by the present mass, and as the mass moving in a way that this curved space-time allows it to.

We can recognise "film equifinality" as a process in which a net-like space collects all the available technologies. The stretched net represents the beginnings of film technologies' emergence. At the beginning, every technology is, in a way, equal to others. They combine and recombine with each other. Sometimes they are latent until there is a way for them to connect. Sometimes they are replaced by a better technology and move to periphery, waiting to be used as a poetic deformation of the standard model. If some of them 'work', more people use them and we can see them slowly merge into one heavy 'object' that may set the course of motion.

We can describe the final stage of equifinal semiotic system as a black hole which is so heavy (in an economic⁴⁴ or poetic way) that it would be irrational to use any other code that is close to the standard code. We must go very far away from this ‘black hole’ and even then, there would not be a potential in any development, if it tries to accomplish the same goal as the previous forms.

We can connect these models through an anthropocentric perspective. We can imagine the fractal ‘tree trunk’ to grow out of the net-shaped ‘black hole’. They are connected through a human in a way that theatre is growing out of them to local variations, and film is mechanically merging to become a global invariant heading towards a human in order to be an efficient extension of their senses in space and time.

These ways of thinking and the current trends in producing digital games and interactive films inevitably force us to think about ‘the future of passive film’ as a part of digital games hypercode or other interactive hypercodes. Cutscenes (or in-game cinematics) are already substantial elements of the digital game hypercode’s paradigm where the passive is subdominant to the active part. Interaction and narrative tendencies are competing in every digital game based on storytelling. There are digital games with several hours of cutscenes, so we can argue that ‘passive’ film’s hypercode possibilities have already been overcome by digital games. Of course, we do not think that ‘passive film’ will ever disappear, because it offers a pure visual narration and its external passiveness can lead to very active and innovative approaches to interpreting films. It can also stay primarily passive with a limited extent of interaction; like today’s interactive film.⁴⁵ In this way, it includes the code of digital games into its hypercode.

Still, all the arguments mentioned above are concluded from and connected to the premise of play-element present in the pre-cultural synthetic nature of human action. Given this premise, it is only natural to find this play-element at the bottom of the ‘technical synthetic black hole’, i.e. in the form of fully immersive digital games. The concept of play-element in arts connects equifinality with recursion in these semiotic systems as manifestations of the same principle. We tend to think that it implies that the ‘recursive system’ is also equifinal, and always in its final stage, at every level of complexity; moreover, ‘equifinal system’ is, outside of our discrete perspective, probably a part of bigger recursion.

Being John Malkovich

The previous theoretical distinction between the recursive theatre and the equifinal film can be useful only if we can apply it to a specific artwork. Considering the outside tendencies in a semiotic system, it is sometimes efficient to use formalistic approach, for example that applied by Schklovsky.⁴⁶ It is applicable mostly when we want to point to an explicit usage of a certain technique. We see this ‘theatre in film’ when we see curtains, theatrical architecture or sceneries. It is also explicit when we see, for instance, theatrical approaches to film space such as those in *Dogville*⁴⁷ or *Anna Karenina*,⁴⁸ lateral or continuous camera sights present in *Birdman*⁴⁹ or theatrical types of acting in *A Doll’s House*.⁵⁰ Of course, such formal theatrical techniques possess certain meanings in these films and these explicit ‘theatrics’ give us a strong interpretational key to understand them. However, there are plenty of films, which combine metatextual dialogues of film and theatre, but they mostly use rather implicit ways to present these dialogues. This approach to hiding ‘outside techniques’ in a semiotic system aiming to emphasise the core code of the system in theatre is mostly used by Bertold Brecht in order to present new epic tendencies in conventionally dramatic theatre. Brecht⁵¹ thinks

44 It is evident that economic problems are a more substantial production factor in case of making films than, for example, in terms of writing literature (remark by the author).

45 It uses some visual and sound clues as a light or surround sound. They have the same deictic function as detail (remark by the author).

46 ŠKLOVSKIJ, V. B.: *Teória literatúry: Výber z “Formálnej metódy”*. Bratislava: Pravda, 1971, p. 56.

47 VON TRIER, L. (Director): *Dogville* (2003, Widescreen Version). [DVD]. Santa Monica: Zentropa Entertainment, 2003.

48 WRIGHT, J. (Director): *Anna Karenina* (2012, Anamorphic Widescreen 2.35:1). [DVD]. Universal City: Universal Studios Home Entertainment, 2003.

49 INARRITU, A. G. (Director): *Birdman or The Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance* (2014, 16:9 Letterbox). [DVD]. Los Angeles: Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2015.

50 GARLAND, P. (Director): *A Doll’s House* (1973, 4:3 FULL FRAME). [DVD]. Santa Monica: MGM Home Entertainment, 2015.

51 To find out more about interpretation of Brecht’s poetic thinking, see, for example: PAVIS, P.: *Divadelný slovník*. Bratislava: Divadelný ústav, 2004, p. 317.

that if authors do not hide these techniques, they give up the illusion and identification. We think that the opposition dividing recursion and equifinality is a suitable semiotic tool to uncover exactly these hidden metatextual, intersemiotic dialogues, and we would like to demonstrate it on the motion picture *Being John Malkovich*.

The film’s original screenplay written by Charlie Kaufman wandered around several directors and producers as a ‘screenplay that cannot be filmed’. Kaufman’s screenplay poetically leads to an unmapped territory of feature film production; the author’s focus on the narrative and his precise approach to motivations of characters that drive their actions is drawn from a fantastic premise: what if there was a portal to John Malkovich’s head? Of course, the inevitable visual problem of this film can be summarised by a quotation originating from the film itself:

“*What happens when a man goes through his own portal?*”

“*We will see...*”

We can interpret a subtle theatre-film dialogue included in the equifinal motivation of the main character. The story is about a talented but unsuccessful puppeteer named Craig who finds a portal to Malkovich’s head. His name refers to Edward Gordon Craig, a theatre theoretician, the author of the “über-marionette” concept⁵² that represents the ideal performer. This ‘doll’ would replace the actor, so the theatre sign could be fully controlled to reach the required form (like it is in film). The theoretical concept of “über-marionette” is often misunderstood as a relevant practical path theatre uses to get theatrical art closer to its perfect form. Unlike in film, which actively tries to reach *cinéma total*, this equifinal concept of the perfect and final state of theatre does not represent theatre evolution. As we have already discussed, recursion (that derives from the organic play principle) is the main driving force in theatre and the (mechanic) equifinal tendencies are only subdominant here.

In the analysed film, Craig wants to reach artistic perfection with a total control of the form, but he does not want to accept that it is in contradiction with live theatre. Live theatre draws its life from the moment, sometimes from mistakes or improvisation; theatre becomes organically perfect in oscillation with the viewer. Craig uses audio records in his puppet theatre, so everything is just under his control. We can see him ‘perform only to himself’ even in public and it is clear that he only wants to ‘communicate’ with a viewer in one-way (like in a film) and he does not wish to induce a “theatrical situation”, as Osolsobě calls it. He only wants appreciation at the end. His hopeless battle to reach ‘maximal control’ is also represented by his effort to make his colleague, Maxine, fall in love with him. He is able to fool her for a while, but the state of absolute control cannot last forever. He even literally locks his own wife (Lotte) in a cage and threatens to kill her to manipulate Maxine. His manipulateness is evident from the moment he finds out that not only he can enter Malkovich through the portal and be a silent observer, but he is also able to control his speech and body movement:

“*It is just a matter of practice, before Malkovich is nothing more than another puppet hanging next to my work table,*” says Craig.

This is a dream-come-true situation for Craig. He has got his own ‘über-marionette’ with a human body – his perfect extension. Craig keeps occupying Malkovich’s body and mind for several months but, after a ‘blackmail confusion situation’, he is tricked to leave John Malkovich. This again shows us that the flaw of the seemingly perfect ‘über-marionette’ is the imperfect human that operates it. Craig does not want to accept that the ‘total theatre’ is a dead end in this kind of art and after his failure, he forces his way through the portal again, but ends up in the body of an unborn child (of Maxine and Lotte, while she was in Malkovich’s body). Craig is unable to control this body and he is doomed to be a passive percipient of someone else’s life. The last scene shows Craig unwillingly watch Maxine and Lotte as a desperate and envious viewer. We can interpret this as a sudden change from scene to auditorium, but also as a leap from ‘active theatre’ to ‘passive film’.

52 CRAIG, E. G.: *O divadelním umění*. Praha: Divadelní ústav, 2006, p. 48.

Craig's sin was that he ignored the dominant organic principle related to theatre and forced his (mechanical) equifinal view on theatrical ways of expression. Craig's punishment reminiscent of Dante's *contrapasso* puts him to a specific circle of eternal⁵³ hell (into a 'film net') where he reaches equifinality; naturally, as a viewer, i.e. in a passive 'film' style. If a theatrical drama had a full control of a form, it would take this control away from a viewer and become a film.

The other side of this intersemiotic metatextual dialogue is the film actor, John Malkovich, who discovers inherent recursion of the theatre play principle. Malkovich feels that somebody possessed his body. This is the film principle; an actor does not act figuratively, but a director has a power over his body, applying the visual film code. The director could do 'whatever she/he wants the actor to do' in postproduction. Directors can make actors say things they otherwise would not say. The submissive character of Malkovich is emphasised at the beginning and we think that this is the reason why he is such a good 'doll' for Craig to play with. Of course, this is natural in film production, but not in Malkovich's life; that is why he tries to find out what is going on. He discovers the portal and enters his own mind. In this moment, Malkovich does not allow others to 'play with him' and he is going to be the toy, but finally also the player. This recursion is shown by the 'acting fractal' where the mind of Malkovich, represented by his head, is an invariant part of the fractal with a big variety of bodies. Malkovich is transported to a restaurant where everyone is John Malkovich.



Picture 3: Acting Fractal
Source: JONZE, S. (Director): *Being John Malkovich* (1999, Widescreen Version). [DVD]. Universal City : Universal Studios Home Entertainment, 2006.

Language is reduced in form (and expanded in meaning) to absolute tautology of 'Malkovich'. Everyone can say only 'Malkovich' and menu is full of meals named Malkovich. This language reference also shows us semiotic opposition of recursion and equifinality. According to Rakús, the tautological definitions of roles, for example, 'a mother should be a mother', are the most suitable, because they are fulfilled in perception.⁵⁴ However, it is an 'organic definition', which is useless without context. It requires a repetition of ostension, so the invariant parts of a fractal would be noticeable. On the other hand, 'mechanical definitions' try to get close to an 'ideal model' of what/who is 'mother' enumeratively – from the parts to the whole. It does not matter where we start this list of attributes and functions of a mother; it is always closer to its equifinal state (but, of course, practically never reaches it). When Malkovich can express only through himself, he is forced to count on contextuality. This is the dominant theatre principle. For example, the figurative acting relies on the context and allows viewers to fulfil the missing parts of visual information with a help of denegation. One form – an actor – can be anyone and anything. This perfect recursion is too much for a film actor and too much for a

53 Craig is not able to re-enter John Malkovich, because the portal has changed its direction to the next generation (Maxine's daughter). There is a subplot, in which a group of friends plan to live forever by skipping bodies every generation, so it is probable that Craig will be 'passive forever' (remark by the author).

54 RAKÚS, S.: *Poetika prozaického textu: Látka, téma, problém, tvar*. Bratislava : Slovenský spisovateľ, 1995, p. 68.

film viewer. It is normal in theatre in case one actor plays everything, but to show this in a visually determined way typical for film is so ridiculous that this scene has become one of the most recognisable moments in the film history. Malkovich cannot stand this oscillation between agents and patients and he runs out of the restaurant screaming his own name.

Conclusion

Malkovich's fractal is a hyperbole of an asymmetry between an actor and a role and it can point to the deep theatre principle hidden in this kind of asymmetry. We can apply this knowledge to more implicit cases⁵⁵ to uncover intersemiotic relationships. We can follow these structures as they mix with explicit theatrical techniques in film, but it would also be interesting to use this point of view in a theatrical art involving some film techniques. To identify representations of the film net and the theatre fractal we have to think about recursive and equifinal tendencies present within both semiotic systems. We cannot forget that these are only theoretical concepts derived from the organic and mechanic principles and that these principles are in a rather dynamic opposition. They interfere a lot in practice, because the artist's goal is to be innovative, to try to 'break conventions'. These organic and mechanic principles are, in fact, reflections of hypercode types or types of synthesis used in film and theatre, and we have deduced them not only from the type of representation but also from the play principle where competition is included.

This competition in *Being John Malkovich* is represented by the character of Craig. However, he is not willing to respect one of the most important rules related to theatrical art – the figurative illusion is more important than the 'real thing'. It applies, for example, to an illusionary space but also to an illusion of control. Craig does not create an illusion of controlling a body in the same way as if it was an inanimate puppet; he creates the real control, taking over another human being's mind and body. He does not cheat or 'bend the rules', but he disrespects them and thus spoils the 'game'. We can tolerate 'cheaters' with a 'do-not-do-it-again' wink, we even love 'cheaters' expressed via different artistic forms. They fascinate us with their ability to bend the rules so much that we are willing to adjust the 'game' a little bit. But 'spoil-sport' is a danger to the 'game': *"By withdrawing from the game, he reveals the relativity and fragility of the play-world in which he had temporarily shut himself with others. He robs play of its illusion – a pregnant word which means literally 'in-play' (from inlusio, illudere or inludere). Therefore, he must be cast out, for he threatens the existence of the play-community."*⁵⁶

We assume that placing emphasis on the play principle of art is the key to understand the metatextual intersemiotic dialogue in film and theatre. We hope that this essay shows that the 'play point of view' can support interesting interpretations of these metatextual dialogues in connection to the opposition of recursion and equifinality.

Acknowledgement: This essay is a partial output of the research project KEGA 022UPJŠ-4/2017 titled Language and Literature in Contemporary Socio-Cultural and Media Context.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

- Amazing 3D Hologram Using Any Smartphone!*. [online]. [2018-10-09]. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hM_M4XEzjxw&t=8s>.
- VON BERTALANFFY, L.: *General System Theory*. New York : George Braziller, 1968.
- CRAIG, E. G.: *O divadelním umění*. Praha : Divadelní ústav, 2006.
- CurvedSpace*. [online]. [2018-10-09]. Available at: <<http://www.quantum-field-theory.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/curved-space.gif>>.
- ECO, U.: *Teorie sémiotiky*. Praha : Argo, 2009.
- 55 See for example: TYKWER, T., WACHOWSKI, La., WACHOWSKI, Li. (Directors): *Cloud Atlas* (2012, Widescreen Version). [DVD]. Burbank : Warner Home Video, 2012.
- 56 HUIZINGA, J.: *Homo Ludens*. London : Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1980, p. 11.

GARLAND, P. (Director): *A Doll's House* (1973, 4:3 FULLFRAME). [DVD]. Santa Monica : MGM Home Entertainment, 2015.

HUIZINGA, J.: *Homo Ludens*. London : Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1980.

IÑÁRRITU, A. G. (Director): *Birdman or The Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance* (2014, 16:9 Letterbox). [DVD]. Los Angeles : Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2015.

JONZE, S. (Director): *Being John Malkovich* (1999, Widescreen Version). [DVD]. Universal City : Universal Studios Home Entertainment, 2006.

MISTRÍK, M: Video and Theatre or a Hybrid Scene: The Case of Theatrical Mise En Scène Fanny and Alexander. In *Communication Today*, 2017, Vol. 8, No. 2, p. 134-154. ISSN 1338-130X.

MONACO, J.: *Jak číst film*. Praha : Albatros, 2004.

MUKAŘOVSKÝ, J.: *Studie z estetiky*. Praha : Odeon, 1966.

OSOLSOBĚ, I.: *Principia parodica: Totiž posbírané papíry převážené o divadle*. Praha : Akademie múzických umění, 2007.

PAŠTEKA, J.: *Spätňý pohľad bez kamery*. Bratislava : Veda, 2005.

PAVIS, P.: *Divadelný slovník*. Bratislava : Divadelný ústav, 2004.

POLÁK, M.: *Krátke dejiny divadla*. Bratislava : Vydavateľstvo Spolku slovenských spisovateľov, 2004.

RAKÚS, S.: *Poetika prozaického textu: Látka, téma, problém, tvar*. Bratislava : Slovenský spisovateľ, 1995.

ŠKLOVSKIJ, V. B.: *Teória literatúry: Výber z "Formálnej metódy"*. Bratislava : Pravda, 1971.

Tree Type Fractal. [online]. [2018-10-09]. Available at: <<https://i.stack.imgur.com/Rz4DA.png>>.

VON TRIER, L. (Director): *Dogville* (2003, Widescreen Version). [DVD]. Santa Monica : Zentropa Entertainment, 2003.

TYKWER, T., WACHOWSKI, La., WACHOWSKI, Li. (Directors): *Cloud Atlas* (2012, Widescreen Version). [DVD]. Burbank : Warner Home Video, 2012.

WRIGHT, J. (Director): *Anna Karenina* (2012, Anamorphic Widescreen 2.35:1). [DVD]. Universal City : Universal Studios Home Entertainment, 2003.

