

The Visual as Part of the Multichannel Performative Narration in Theatre Stagings

With an Exemplary Analysis of Robert Wilson's Staging of the 66th Shakespeare Sonnet

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In this article I provide a narratological method of investigating how different aspects of theatre stagings relate to each other. These aspects I call channels and assign to them diverging degrees of narrativity. The six channels – verbal, visual, auditory, olfactory, haptic, and gustatory – form the Theatrical Representation System (TRS), in which narrative functions can be fulfilled. With the method I designed it is possible to evaluate the diverging narrative impact each channel has on the whole performative narration on stage and explain why sometimes the visual takes the lead (as in the case of Wilson's staging of Shakespeare's sonnets).

1. Diverging conceptions of narrativity

Theatre studies and literature studies do not get along well. Structurally oriented narratological research on the one hand and the hermeneutic or even deconstructionist methods of theatre studies in particular seem to be divided by a wide and deep gap. Tackling the phenomenon of *theatre staging* by means of transmedial narratology and wanting to develop a concise analysis model is, if not a blasphemous approach, at least breaking a taboo for many academics. But this is exactly what I intend to do.

My contribution is separated into two main parts: The theoretical first part will discuss major narratological categories as well as existing concepts of narrativity and I will verify them with regards to their transmedial applicability, more precisely concerning their possibilities to describe and analyse performative narration on stage. The second part will be an exemplary analysis of Shakespeare's 66th sonnet, which is a part of Robert Wilson's staging of Shakespeare's sonnets at the *Berliner Ensemble* (2009) with the previously developed narratological means. The questions here are: a) why does the visual aspect of this staging seem so much more important than the actual texts of the sonnets and b) how can the interplay between verbal, visual and auditory aspects of the staging be judged, taking into account narratological considerations.

Theatre tells stories: Among people working in and around theatres this is much more common sense than among narratologists. In her laudation at the Rolf-Mares-Award 2014 (a theatre award which is granted in Hamburg every year), theatre director Nina Pichler talked about typical rehearsal situations and light-heartedly quoted a sentence frequently used (not necessary verbatim) by directors: "Leave out the handbag, it does not tell anything!" Ostensibly caricaturing the everyday work life of many directors she indirectly referred to theatre's self-conception of narrating stories by performing. And this performative narration may as well contain a handbag, too.

A narratologist would most certainly not utter such a sentence. The reason for that are divergent conceptions – implicitly different definitions – of what *narrativity* is actually about. This now is a problem that has dominated narratological discussions from the beginning: What does it really mean to *narrate*? In order to understand the different conceptions of narrativity it becomes necessary to organise these diverging definitions. During my ongoing work on a Ph.D. project, in which I elaborate a comprehensive narratological model for analysing theatre stagings, I inspected closely the many existing different definitions of narrativity. They can be differentiated into three main groups:

- a) cognitive definitions,
- b) *histoire*-based definitions,
- c) *discours*-based definitions.

The widest definitions are to be found in group (a). Cognitive definitions have in common the idea that narrativity emerges in the head of the receiver. In short: A novel only tells its story when it is read. Without the reader there is only black ink on white paper but no story. Since this is certainly true on the one hand, the basic cognitive assumption (as I would like to call it) is part of many definitions of narrativity that go further.¹ The weakness of this definition is, on the other hand, that it does not have a discriminating function: I can narrativise everything I see, whether it was meant to be a story or not. The handbag-as-narrator probably belongs to this first group of narrativity definitions.

The major definitions in group (b) refer to the elapsing of time as the source of narrativity (which obviously goes back to Lessing's *Laocoon* theses). The change of state is the first condition that has to be fulfilled here.² The leading question is: What is the minimal need for something to be narrative? Gerald Prince answers this question as follows:³

A minimal story consists of three conjoined events: The first and third events are stative, the second is active. Furthermore, the third event is the inverse of the first. Finally, the three events are conjoined by three conjunctive features in such a way that (a) the first event precedes the second in time and the second precedes the third, and (b) the second event causes the third.

Since this is still a very wide definition, Schmid came up with the category *eventfulness*,⁴ which needs more conditions to be fulfilled in order to distinguish between trivial and noteworthy events. The two main requirements for a change of state to become a noteworthy event are, according to Schmid, *factuality* and *resultativity* inside the

1 E.g. Meister 2002, section II; Ryan 2005, 8.

2 Cf. Todorov 1969. 1972; Chatman 1978. 1990; Prince 1982. 1987. 2003.

3 Prince 1973, 31.

4 Schmid 2003, 17–19. 23 seq.

narrative world. Five further features are: *relevance*, *unpredictability*, *persistence*, *irreversibility* and *non-iterativity*.⁵ These conditions obviously depend on an interpreting agent and a lot of discussion is going on here.⁶ All in all, one can observe that these definitions are narrower than the cognitive ones because they focus on aspects of the *histoire*, i. e. the *what* of the story, its contents.

The narrowest definitions of narrativity are *discours*-based, that is to say, they focus on the *how* of the narration. *Mediation* is what is popular here.⁷ Whereas some academics demand an anthropomorphic narrator to be in charge of mediating⁸ between *histoire* and *discours*, Seymour Chatman saw mediation (or narrative transmission) in the fulfilling of narrative functions like selecting, ordering, commenting and presenting the events of a story. Therefore, the narrator (or better: the narrating instance) can be overt or covert and it is possible to detect a “double chronology” of *histoire* and *discours*.⁹ In the revised edition of his 1987 dictionary article, Prince follows Chatman’s ideas and changes his perceptions on mediation, now allowing other than verbal media to be considered narrative.¹⁰

In terms of my own research question, it is important to note that theatre (as well as drama, which should not be confused with theatre and which is not my focus in this article) is able to fulfil all the above-quoted definitions of narrativity, including the narrow definition of narrative mediation. Drama and theatre tend to be mixed up in research (especially in English contributions) and therefore aspects of theatre are frequently touched in works on drama.¹¹ But whereas the dramatic text as such is a verbal product usually written by one author and received later than produced, theatre as a performative phenomenon does not only work verbally but has the opportunity to use all

5 Schmid 2003, 26–29.

6 Cf. Hühn 2008, 148.

7 E.g. Friedemann 1910; Stanzel 1955. 1979; Prince 2003; Genette 1998.

8 Cf. Stanzel 1955. 1979; Genette 1998.

9 Chatman [1978] 1993, 197; 1990, 9.

10 Prince 2003, 58.

11 On the differences between drama and theatre (as well as script and performance) cf. Schechner 1994, esp. chapter 3.

five senses as transmission channels as well. Moreover, it is produced by an authorial collective and received in the very moment of its production. The most popular example for an amalgamation of drama and theatre is Manfred Pfisters ([1977] 2001) *Das Drama*, which has become the benchmark of drama analysis and considers drama to be plurimedial (and there it mingles with theatre studies).¹² Pfister's basic assumption is that drama – in contrast to narrative texts – is unmediated. Even in moments when there is mediation detectable, he adheres to this idea because there is no narrator in charge.¹³ With Chatman we have seen that no narrator is required to make a text (or another medium) narrative – many texts considered generally to be narratives would not be so anymore following this definition – but that the narrative *functions* have to be fulfilled. The narrative functions of selecting, ordering, commenting and presenting are fulfilled in theatre. Most easily, this can be proved with Chatman's "double chronology" of *histoire* and *discours*: The narrated story in most cases takes more time than the (performative) narrating of this story: Faust's and Mephistopheles' journey throughout the world takes much longer than two hours, Macbeth's sanguinary way to the throne and back again did not happen in two hours in his world, and even Phèdre does not commit suicide just two hours after she made the confession of being in love with Hippolyte, and so forth. In a nutshell: Theatre is able to fulfil even narrow definitions of narrativity but it does so by using different means than narrative texts. Theatre narrates with multiple channels, i.e. performatively.

2. Of narrators, narrative instances, and representation systems

Since mediation can be detected in theatre, too, it is also possible to use narratological models of communication to visualise the specific communication structure in a moment of performative narration.

12 I am touching aspects of drama in this section because of this amalgamation of the two phenomena in research. I am focussing on the parts that deal with means of theatre in drama studies. A comparison of drama and theatre and their (maybe different) degree of narrativity is not my aim, though.

13 Cf. especially Pfister 2001, 335 seq.

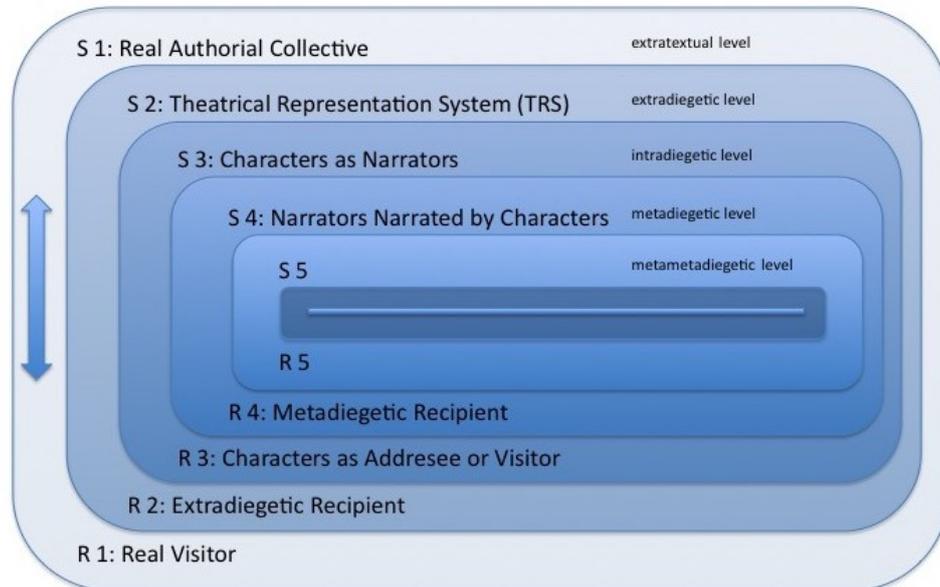


Fig. 1: Narrative Communication in Theatre Performances.

I will not discuss every level of this admittedly complex model in detail here. But I want to emphasise the parallel structure of my model and other narratological communication models¹⁴ and secondly specify what I call the *Theatrical Representation System* (TRS) more extensively.

The *narrator* in contemporary narratological research is frequently called *narrative instance* instead.¹⁵ The intention behind this is to avoid an anthropomorphisation of the narrator since it can also be covert and only detectable through the fulfilling of the narrative functions mentioned above. However, the notion of a narrative instance seems to cause an urge in many academics to talk about its ontological status nevertheless, and as a consequence they deny its *real* existence in the narrative world as well as in our actual world.¹⁶ Being called an *instance* *authority* it nevertheless still seems to be an entity that has to

14 E.g. Schmid 2008, 44; Lahn – Meister 2013, 14; Kuhn 2009, 261; 2011, 83.

15 Kuhn (2009, 2011) even claims two „narrative instances“ to be at work in film, the verbal (optional) and the visual (mandatory).

16 Walsh (2007) is often quoted as the source of this discussion. Cf. Alber et al. 2010, 2013.

have an ontological status. In order to avoid this fallacy, I decided to talk about a representation system in which the narrative functions are fulfilled. A system does *not* have an ontological status, but is highly dynamic and can emerge in different ways during the process of rehearsal for each staging, using the different mandatory and optional narrative channels discussed in the following.

The performative narration on a theatre stage is multichannel. The TRS consists of six channels that transmit messages to the receiving audience: the verbal, the visual, the auditory, the olfactory, the haptic, and the gustatory. The first three are mandatory, the last three optional. Theatre can use all of these six channels because it is live, whereas other audiovisual media (like film) can only use the first three. To differentiate the six channels is an artificial practice, only useful for analytical reasons. That the different channels belong together within the systematic complex can most easily be seen in the fact that the verbal channel works either visual or auditory. *How* a verbal message is transmitted is therefore part of the visual or auditory channel, whereas *what* is transmitted is the issue of the verbal channel in an analysis. All six channels can now be mapped onto the definitions of narrativity¹⁷ presented above, and against this backdrop a *narrativity matrix* emerges (fig. 2).

Though this matrix and its genesis cannot be discussed in greater detail here, it already becomes apparent that the individual channels have unequal narrative potential and therefore are able to influence the general performative narration differently. Part of the ongoing debate concerns the cross in brackets in the auditory-column: The question whether music is or can be narrative has been discussed frequently.¹⁸ The brackets should not indicate that it was impossible to decide for or against eventfulness in auditory means, but that there

17 This discussion, too, will not be part of this article but is going to be a crucial section of my doctoral thesis. Here I only present the results of the discussion.

18 Cf. Chenoweth 1986; Longacre – Chenoweth 1986; Nattiez – Ellis 1990; Abbate 1991; Hatten 1991; Levinson 2004; Maus 2005; Ryan 2005, 13; Meelberg 2006, 2009; Nicholls 2007; Reyland 2007; Schröder 2011; Walsh 2011.

	Verbal	Visual	Auditory	Olfactory	Haptic	Gustatory
Mediation	x	x	–	–	–	–
Eventfulness	x	x	(x)	–	–	–
Change of State	x	x	x	(x)	(x)	(x)
Cognitively Narrative	x	x	x	x	x	x

Fig. 2: Narrativity Matrix.

are different aspects (or modes) of the auditory channel to be considered. For example, the distinction between music and noises seems crucial here. Whereas it is possible to display events with noises (think for example of a car accident) without failing to give the receiver the opportunity to understand what is being narrated, it is not possible to do the same using musical means. There is one more transformation or coding process taking place that cannot be decoded by a recipient who only uses his world knowledge. Music does not work like language, as there are no lexically fixed denotations of musical symbols.¹⁹

The verbal and the visual TRS channel therefore have the highest narrative impact because we can not only state eventfulness here, but also find narrative functions to be fulfilled that define mediation. And this is where we are approaching the title of this article: The visual as part of the multichannel performative narration in theatre is

19 In fact, there are many different modes to be found in most of the TRS channels. The visual channel for example could be subdivided into several modes like stage design, costumes, gestures, gaze, movements, hair, make-up etc. So we are actually talking about a very complex form of multimodal narration when talking about multichannel performative narration on stage. On multimodality cf. Jewitt 2014.

as important and has as much influence as the verbal. It is important to understand the degree of narrativity of the single channels as potential, meaning that for example the verbal and visual channels do not always have to mediate or be eventful, but they *can*.

Since performative narration always consists of two or more channels narrating at the same time, it is now possible to evaluate the relations of the channels inside the representation system. The individual TRS channels can either work together and transmit the same or similar contents and therefore have an *analogue* relation, or they can contradict each other in their contents and therefore have a *disparate* relation.

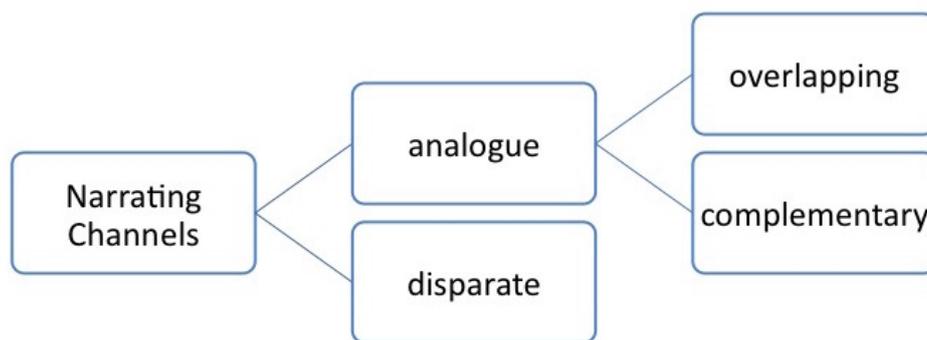


Fig 3: Relation of the Narrating Channels.

The analogue relation can further be divided into an *overlapping* and a *complementary* relation depending on whether the individual channels transmit the same contents and therefore overlap, or whether they present autonomous contents and therefore complement each other.²⁰ If the actors speak about a handbag and a handbag is visually shown, we have at least an overlapping relation. If the verbal channel informs us for example about the content of the handbag which is not shown, we have a complementary relation. In Nicolas Stemann’s rather popular staging *Faust I + II* (2011) at the *Thalia Theater* Ham-

20 The concept is a specification of Markus Kuhn’s work in film narratology (2011).

burg, the actors speak about Margarete's jewel case while several interwoven rope lights hang from the ceiling, obviously representing this very jewel case. Here we have a disparate relation, which seems to be much more interesting for all kinds of interpretation.

The following exemplary analysis aims at clarifying the relations between the used TRS channels, showing the dynamics of this system. The inherent question is why Wilson's theatre is perceived much more in a visual than in a verbal way and whether an evaluation of the degree of narrativity of the single channels can confirm this impression.

3. Shakespeare's 66th sonnet in Wilson's staging at the *Berliner Ensemble*

Tired with all these for restful death I cry,
As to behold desert a beggar born,
And needy nothing trimmed in jollity,
And purest faith unhappily forsworn,
And gilded honour shamefully misplaced,
And maiden virtue rudely strumpeted,
And right perfection wrongfully disgraced,
And strength by limping sway disabled,
And art made tongue-tied by authority,
And folly, doctor-like, controlling skill,
And simple truth miscalled simplicity,
And captive good attending captain ill.

Tired with all these, from these would I be gone,
Save that to die, I leave my love alone.²¹

For his staging of Shakespeare's sonnets at the *Berliner Ensemble* in 2009, Robert Wilson and his staff chose 25 sonnets that are repeatedly spoken or sung and overall embedded in a highly visual setting that seems to overarch everything else, as it is typical for Wilson's theatre. The chosen sonnets appear in English and/or in German in

21 Shakespeare 2009, 72.

the translation of Christa Schuenke. The 66th sonnet is an extract of the whole staging and is about five and a half minutes long. Three people sing the German translation quoted below.

All dessen müd, nach Rast im Tod ich schrei.
Ich seh es doch: Verdienst muß betteln gehn
Und reinste Treu am Pranger steht dabei
Und kleine Nullen sich im Aufwind blähn
Und Talmi-Ehre hebt man auf den Thron
Und Tugend wird zur Hure frech gemacht
Und wahre Redlichkeit bedeckt mit Hohn
Und Kraft durch lahme Herrschaft umgebracht
Und Kunst das Maul gestopft vom Apparat
Und Dummheit im Talar Erfahrung checkt
Und schlichte Wahrheit nennt man Einfalt glatt
Und Gutes Schlechtesten die Stiefel leckt.
All dessen müd, möcht ich gestorben sein,
Blieb nicht mein Liebster, wenn ich sterb, allein.²²

Robert Wilson is internationally known for his *image theatre*, in which he creates visual dreamlike worlds. He emphasises the visual aspect on stage so much that it seems to enclose all the other TRS channels, what makes his theatre a good example to ask for the relations between the visual and the other channels with regards to their different degree of narrativity. Especially in the 1960s and 70s, Wilson created perception changing picture worlds with this method that constituted cultural identity by deviating from the visual appearance of our everyday reality. How was that possible? The stage as a fictional space has a highly developed dynamic so that the postulate of naturalism has much less influence here than in other media. It is not by chance that it is called theatre-like when other media use this kind of visuality/spatiality. Sceneries and styles of staging – like Wilson’s for example – therefore have the possibility to create counter-proposals to the everyday repertoire of sensory influences – especially in visual

22 Shakespeare 2009, 73.

terms. On these grounds the oldest narrative medium builds cultural identity: Through exaggerations, refractions, deviations or deliberate inversions of social phenomena on the one hand it offers the recipient escapist possibilities and on the other hand – and much more frequently – it reflects society in a critical way. Wilson, in contrast to many other contemporary directors, does not deconstruct the pieces he stages, but looks for syntheses. These are frequently displayed visually as it is the case in the sonnets, too. Hence the single sonnets become an overall connected “epic poem”²³. Similar to the visual channel the music, composed by the internationally celebrated singer-songwriter Rufus Wainwright, supplies an important connection between single sonnets.

Shakespeare’s sonnets were scandalous in their time and still seem a mystery. 126 out of the 154 sonnets address a “Fair Youth”, a young man who is not named further, the others a “Dark Lady” and not, as it was common at that time, a light and beautiful fair lady. As there are again and again many theories about Shakespeare’s persona, there are as well ongoing discussions about the addressee of the sonnets (Shakespeare dedicated them to a “Mr. W. H.”) or actual persons that could have acted as models for the characters in them. Be this as it may, what can be stated, though, is that the 66th sonnet is out of the ordinary: It does not only have the very unusual anaphoric line sequence we have seen above, but also deviates in terms of content. Less a lament or declaration of love it is more a politically motivated accusation of society itself and the falseness of its authorities.²⁴

Looking at the TRS, we can state that in this very case neither the olfactory nor the haptic or gustatory channel is used. The TRS in Wilson’s 66th sonnet therefore consists of the three channels verbal,

23 This is how Wilson himself allegedly calls his sonnets staging according to an article by Alexander Wendt in the German magazine Focus (14. 4. 2009). <http://www.focus.de/kultur/musik/tid-13942/vertonter-shakespeare-die-sonette-sind-voller-zeit_aid_%20389657.html> (27. April 2015).

24 Find detailed information about the sonnets e.g. in the critical edition Shakespeare et al. (1944), Volume II.

visual and auditory and it is not the verbal channel that has the highest narrative impact here.

Looking at the narrativity of the language, the 66th sonnet mostly offers a description of state. We can potentially detect a change of state in the last two lines where causality is displayed as to why the speaking character does *not* commit suicide. At this point, fictive characters emerge that interact in a way.

Much more is happening, in terms of narrativity, on the visual channel. The stage setting at the beginning is a huge silhouette of a tree in the middle, one actor (Christopher Nell) in a white dress with a toby collar standing behind it. To the left and to the right of the tree and a bit further to the front there are two other actors sitting on chairs. The (quite old) actor sitting left (Jürgen Holtz dressed as Queen Elisabeth I.) as well as the (even older) actor sitting right (Inge Keller dressed as Shakespeare) do not move during this sonnet but stay on the chairs, singing from there. The curtain rises while strings play a dramatic musical intro. Christopher Nell then leaves his place behind the tree singing the first two lines of the sonnet in a falsetto, carrying an apple in his left hand and a little rubber snake in the other. His voice then lowers dramatically as he goes on singing the following lines of the sonnet. The last two lines are sung in a falsetto again. The other actors just slightly move their feet in the rhythm of the music, Queen Elisabeth, smiling sweetly, is apparently entertained as if listening to some jester. Jürgen Holtz then takes over singing, repeating lines 3–6, but still smiling and not at all indignant, before Inge Keller takes over singing lines 7–10, looking rather neutral. In the meantime, Christopher Nell bites into the apple remorseless and full of relish, chews with a big grin before spitting everything out again. Finally, all three of them sing the last four lines together, Christopher Nell back in his falsetto and again with rather eccentric facial expressions, moving back to the tree again. In the end, he alone repeats the very first line again. With the last notes he resumes the position he had in the very beginning and the lights go out. Summarising the action, we already see that single states are serially transformed into events within the visual channel.

Though there is no double chronology of *histoire* and *discours* detectable (we do not have an acceleration or slowing down of time, nor ellipses, flashbacks or the like and that is why we have to state that this staging is not as much narrative as theatre generally *can* be), the biblical fall of mankind is celebrated as a narrative event, albeit in an abstract way by presenting (or eating) clearly decodable props. Because of providing eventfulness the narrative impact of the visual TRS channel is higher than the one of the verbal TRS channel that only provides a description (or maybe a change) of state in the case of the 66th sonnet. The different degree of narrativity therefore can be used to confirm the intuitive impression that Wilson's theatre is in fact mainly a visual one. The whole biblical or religious context is not part of the verbal channel²⁵ but only narrated visually: We have the tree, the snake, the apple and an androgynous figure in the middle that could be Adam as well as Eve (or one of the Ladies from Shakespeare's sonnets). Since Christopher Nell is the only actor moving—very slowly and not leaving the middle though—the whole stage setting is very static and because of the overall biblical context an idea of Trinity is evolved, too, which most certainly is not done without purpose. It is a question of interpretation to find explanations why Elisabeth is parallelised with the Father, Shakespeare with the Son and Eve (or the Lady?) with the Holy Spirit. I will not do that here since I am more interested in how the visual can narrate and, beyond that, how the different channels relate to each other.

What we have in this case is a complementary relation between the verbal, the visual and also the auditory TRS channel. We will have to talk about the latter later. The verbal and the visual channel each add different narrative contents that are nevertheless overall analogue. An interesting exception is the smiling Queen, who is entertained by this accusation of power—which is in fact her own power—even when she repeats it herself. The disparate relation we have here is able to show how untouchable and absolute her power is: It is her authority that made art “tongue-tied”.

25 Erckenbrecht (2009, 26) calls it a “completely a-religious poem” (translation JH).

It is furthermore important to keep in mind that the 66th sonnet is only a short extract of the whole staging. In this context the white dress of Eve is particularly emphasised in that Christopher Nell usually appears as one of the Dark Ladies on stage, wearing the same dress in black colour. Is this to stress Eve's innocence? Is it a hint that sonnets usually address "fair ladies"? The abstract visuality allows all of these interpretations and maybe more.

What cannot be denied is that the fall of mankind experiences a very different interpretation in a completely different setting. The question to ask is: Why is that the case and how can Shakespeare's 66th sonnet help to come to this interpretation?

It is not only the visual that complements the verbal. The two channels stand in a reciprocal relation: The text also comments on the visually narrated biblical story in a critical way. In his blog *acting out politics*²⁶, Victor Enyutin proposes an interesting hypothesis concerning the 66th sonnet in Wilson's staging: According to him, the biblical story of the fall of mankind does not suit the modern understanding of gender and sex anymore. The gender dualism is obsolete nowadays; between male and female there are many forms of androgynous gender conceptions. And lust is not considered to be a sin anymore, either. The biblical perceptions of gender dualism as well as the sin of lust are as false today as the verbally criticised inconsistencies and falsity of Shakespearean society. In Wilson's staging the original sin therefore is no longer sexual longing (which is not staged as a sin anymore at all), but the inexorable ambition for power, of rising in the social hierarchy based on a false perception of honour and feigned wisdom (as the verbal channel complements). By overcoming gender dualism (which is lead ad absurdum since even the visual channel in itself shows disparate relations²⁷ and the use of the

26 Enyutin 2011, <[http://www.actingoutpolitics.com/robert-wilson-frames-sonnet-66-by-william-shakespeare-with-music-pantomime-and-dramatic-recitation---a-reformulation-of-adameve's-\"primal\"-sin/](http://www.actingoutpolitics.com/robert-wilson-frames-sonnet-66-by-william-shakespeare-with-music-pantomime-and-dramatic-recitation---a-reformulation-of-adameve's-\)> (27.04.2015).

27 This disparate relation is to be found on the level of modes: Costumes, make-up, hair and movements create meaning in another way than real facial features do, providing a tension that in itself is meaningful (cf. Jewitt 2014, 26).

voices adds its part) lust for the opposite sex is no longer experienced as a sin (as it has been in biblical contexts). Rising above another human being and claiming power for one's own takes over the vacant position of sin.

Following the leitmotif of reversal, the relation of the TRS channels used in the performance begins to overlap. The *everything's wrong* characteristic of the text is adopted audio-visually and led to absurdity: Male actors play female characters²⁸, female actors play male characters (not only in the 66th sonnet but throughout the whole staging), Queen Elisabeth (Jürgen Holtz) sings with a very deep voice, whereas Shakespeare (as one might expect accepting the reversal principle) does not have a high female voice, but Inge Keller's voice, too, is comparatively deep. The androgynously performing Christopher Nell then sings with a very clear falsetto as well as flippant baritone, connecting the two poles in another way.

Looking at the voices, we are already discussing parts of the last TRS channel that is used during Wilson's Shakespeare sonnets: the auditory. Since Wilson does not use olfactory, haptic or gustatory means in this staging, they can be neglected in this exemplary narratological analysis. The TRS in Wilson's staging of the sonnets only consists of verbal, visual and auditory means. But music and the use of voices (in speaking as well as in singing) play an important role throughout the whole staging. As we have seen, the auditory channel has – speaking in narratological terms – less impact on the narrative as a whole than the verbal and the visual have. Music and noises can neither achieve a double chronology of *histoire* and *discours* nor fulfil narrating functions like selecting or ordering events, but they achieve their influence by transmitting emotions much more easily than verbal or visual means can. A disparate auditory TRS channel would therefore not have enough impact to undermine analogously working verbal and visual channels. To put this less abstract: We would still believe that the verbal and visual channel tell us what is true in

28 In this regard, one could see a follow-up on Shakespearean traditions since in Elizabethan theatre there haven't been any female actors on stage but male actors played all roles.

the fictive world, even if the auditory channel tells something else. But on the other hand the auditory can be the crucial channel to tell us what really happens in the *histoire* if the two main narrating channels (verbal and visual) themselves tell us different things.

The case of the 66th sonnet in Wilson's staging is much easier, since Wainwright's music does – narratively speaking – exactly what we expect it to do, though it is able to touch our emotions in a very profound way. When Christopher Nell starts singing in his surprising falsetto, musical tremolos indicate something smouldering, whereas the high violin works analogously to Nell's voice. With him deepening his voice drastically, a contrabass takes over, accompanying the Brechtian chant that follows next. The hymn to praise purity and divinity (soprano or falsetto) becomes mundane like the Shakespearean accusation and no longer strives for beauty. Nell's facial expressions act complementary as they quiver in sudden bursts and change into a frightening grin when eating the apple. Furthermore, verbal, visual and auditory channel show a circular structure: Lamentation becomes accusation becomes lamentation; moving slowly, Nell leaves the tree, becomes an uninhibitedly eating snake-like being and proceeds slowly and solemnly back to the tree again; and the hymn-like music and singing turns into a mundane chant, reminding one of Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weil (especially since everything takes place in the *Berliner Ensemble*) and then finally transforms into a hymn again.

4. Conclusion

In this article I attempted to demonstrate how to analyse theatre stagings by means of transmedial narratology. In order to fully account for performative narration being multichannel, I propose to model it in terms of a system – the Theatrical Representation System (TRS) – which includes all possible channels that could affect the narrative. My theoretical premise is that these channels should be distinguished in terms of different degrees of narrativity: The verbal and the visual channel are the only two that can fulfil all conditions of the several definitions of narrativity and therefore their narrative impact is higher than that of the other TRS channels. My second premise is

that the relation among channels can be analogue (that is overlapping or complementary) or disparate. In the example of Wilson's 66th Shakespeare sonnet, we have seen how verbal, visual and auditory channel engage in a complementary relation, each adding individual content and thus forming a rather complex multichannel narrative. The different degrees of narrativity that can be assigned to these three channels provide an explanation of why the visual is more important and overarches the other channels in this very case: While the verbal as well as the auditory channel only show descriptions (or a change) of state, the visual channel meets a more narrow definition of narrativity, that is eventfulness, and therefore has a higher impact on the whole performative narrative.

Thirdly, not every single channel is mandatory for each performance. Rather the TRS is highly dynamic and can be rebuilt differently for each staging. Proposing a system with six different channels and the analysis of performative narration in such terms may seem like a rather complex approach. But the model's strength on the other hand is that it enables us to analyse staged narratives in a (narratologically) satisfactory way. What this model cannot (and does not want to) account for, are aspects such as the aura or the atmosphere of a specific performance. These are highly problematic categories and in my opinion their effect on the narrative, though generally very valuable, cannot be measured and therefore should not be part of a narratological model that looks for operationalisable categories.²⁹

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29 On „operationalizing“ cf. Moretti 2013.

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