

## Limited Visibility

### Maaïke Bleeker

“Whereas modernization as a narrative placed national units on a temporal continuum from ‘backward’ to ‘advanced’, globalization does not presume the historical time of Western progress. Global space entails simultaneity, overlap, coherencies incoherently superimposed. Like a photograph in multiple exposure, it makes sense only precariously, only by blocking out part of the visible field. We are capable of seeing further than is comprehended by our separate, sense-making practices, and what we see limits the legitimacy of what we do” (Buck-Morss, 2003, 5).



27 December 2005. The city of Vienna was startled by the large billboards that provided the exhibition “venues” for *EuroPARTS. Aktuelle Kunst in Europa*. EuroPARTS, which was announced as “the biggest exhibition of young European art ever in Austria,” showed work by young artists from all 25 European Union members. The show was described as a discussion on recent developments in Europe and the resulting new ways of constructing space; specifically, *EuroParts* aimed at contributing to the re-definition of space brought about by the expansion of EU-territory. The use of billboards was motivated by this engagement with space and spatial organization, and the relationship between organization of public space and modes of perception that is typical of consumer society. Placed directly in the life-world of the audience, the billboard artworks were meant to function as “conversation pieces.”

“Conversation” is a modest way of describing the outrage caused by some of the works, in particular the one by Carlos Aires (showing nude models wearing masks of Jacques Chirac, George Bush and Queen Elisabeth involved in an erotic threesome) and the piece shown above, o.T. by Tanja Ostojic. Confronted with public pressure to close the exhibition, Carlos Aires decided to withdraw his work, saying that he did not want to monopolise the collaborative project at the cost of the other participants. Ostojic resisted the removal of her work, calling it censorship, but was overruled.

“The Austrian tabloid Die Krone labeled this work pornographic despite the fact that there are no visible sexual organs on the picture nor has it been created to provoke an excitement of such kind” said Ostojic in an interview about the commotion surrounding the exhibition. She observed that the same publication that denounced her work for being pornographic publishes images of naked women with an explicit erotic intent on a daily basis (examples can be found on her website). She also points out that her image had actually already been shown in Vienna, and had been

published in art magazines, without ever being considered pornographic. Furthermore, she observes, her image is actually much more decent than the original by Courbet, which hangs in the Paris Musee D'Orsay and is celebrated as a masterpiece of modern art. Nevertheless, her work gets rejected as a young and unknown artist's attempt to attract attention by vulgar means.

Was it the size of the image? Was it the lack of patina and brushstroke? Or was it the way this image was staged as part of the life-world of its viewers, lacking the aesthetic distance provided by the respectable Musée? Exhibited on a billboard, the slick hyperrealism of the image allowed it to blend in seamlessly into the public space of consumer society. It did not look like art at all. It did look, very convincingly, like an advertisement.



Sex sells. This can hardly be shocking news for a tabloid which, as a matter of course, utilizes female bodies in erotic poses to sell all kinds of products; this practice is indeed

reason for serious concern. However, this was not what *Die Krone* and others were concerned about. In addition, at least as surprising as their moral outcry over the supposedly pornographic nature of this image is their total lack of indignation regarding much more complicated and confrontational aspects of it.

With her cunning visual pun on the title of the exhibition (EuroPARTS), Ostojic references the myth of Europe's origin: Zeus's abduction of the beautiful Phoenician princess Europa. In Ostojic's image, Europa, reduced to the body part that Zeus could not resist, is dressed in knickers bearing the EU trademark. The way she (her body) is depicted evokes the old and problematic equation of the female body with nature and landscape, the 'other' of civilization. Culture here is reduced to branding, being Europe(an) is wearing the trademark. The female body is the landscape on which the European flag is planted, her cultural identity reduced to the panties that, like a fig-leaf on an antique statue, protects the viewer from seeing what she (supposedly) does not care to hide. This must be civilization. The abstract brand of Europe covers up what we don't want to see (of her, of Europe), a gesture doubled by the removal of the work from public space.

Read as advertisement, the image presents Europe as the promise of voluptuousness, carnal pleasures, and possession, the target of desire marked in the image by the circle of stars at the very centre. Her attitude suggests an invitation, conflating Zeus' desire for Europa's body with her (supposed) desire to be possessed by him. She is available 'to have', suggests her attitude, she is what you want, but she is also the forbidden land, the shiny blue fabric of the union-underwear barring the entrance. Forbidden pleasure but nevertheless for sale, the advertising iconography not only turns this female body into a representation of Europe but reduces female bodies to consumer goods, the consumption of which, of course, woman herself is to be blamed.

*L'Origine du Monde* is the title of the Courbet painting (1866) on which Ostojic's picture is modelled, The Origin of the World. The painting was commissioned by a rich Turkish businessman. Ostojic's image shows the object of Turkish desire wearing European colours, thus presenting an ironic commentary on the controversies surrounding Turkey's potential membership of the European Union. Who the woman depicted is, and whether she was Turkish or not, is unknown. Branding her 'European' and showing this image as a 'promotional campaign' in Vienna just as Austria took over the EU presidency may be read as commentary on the way in which Europeans tend to understand Europe as the sole origin of civilization, denying the ways in which European culture is intimately connected with other cultures, or simply dressing up the fruits of other cultures in European clothes. Ostojic's 'advertisement' shows European identity to be a trademark that can absorb whatever it likes, turning anything into a possession, stamping on its own brand, while at the same time establishing and reaffirming a border between self and other. Who wants to remember the Turkish origins of the Viennese coffeehouses, this famous icon of the cultural capital of old Europe? Who wants to be reminded of it, now that Turkey demands to be recognized as part of Europe?

Nine months later, also in Vienna, Pakistani born and (at that time) New York based director Ibrahim Quraishi, working with Turkish composer and conductor Serdan Yalcin, presented a new version of Mozart's *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* (1782) in the venerated Schauspielhaus. *Mozart alla Turca* was the title of their show, Mozart Turkish style. Mozart's music is rearranged for a combination of traditional Turkish and traditional Western European instruments, and sung partly in Turkish, partly in German, by a mixed cast. Supertitles in both languages allow for both Turkish and German speaking audiences to understand what is being said and sung.

Mozart's opera tells the story of a young, Spanish woman (Constanze) who together with her English maid (Blonde) and a servant (Pedrillo) is abducted by pirates and sold to a Turkish man (Pasha Selim). He adores her but she has already promised her heart to Belmonte, her Spanish fiancé, and is determined to save herself for him. She realizes she will not be able to resist Pasha Selim much longer and, asking for his compassion, she begs him to give her one more day to mourn the loss of her lover. After that, she promises, she will be his. The Pasha grants her what she wishes. In the meantime, with the help of Pedrillo, Belmonte manages to enter Pasha Selim's house and designs a plan to take the captives back home. However, when the four of them try to leave the house in the middle of the night, they are caught by Pasha Selim's servant Osmin, who had distrusted them from the start and now finds his distrust justified. Their fate appears to be sealed, even more so when Belmonte appears to be the son of Pasha Selim's archenemy. Belmonte's father was the one who drove Pasha Selim out of Spain, robbing him of his house, his possessions, and his wife. Belmonte and Constanze, certain death is near, once more declare their love to one another and bid each other farewell. But then, the unexpected happens. Pasha Selim returns deceit with compassion, and sets them free.

The title, *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, evokes images of adventure and abduction and the promise of a happy ending. The references to Turks and Turkish played into the exotic fantasies about cultural otherness of Mozart's contemporaries, an otherness that was perceived as both threatening (a century earlier the Turks had besieged Vienna) and exciting (the harem as projection screen for sexual fantasies). Many have pointed out how "Turks" and "Turkish" in this opera as well as in other musical dramatic presentations of the same period does not so much refer to actual Turks or Turkish-ness as serve as a label for all kinds of fantasies set in or involving characters from the exotic east, often reducing

them to caricatures. Mozart's 'Turkish' music has little to do with authentic Turkish music. Mozart, apparently inspired by some elements associated with Turkish music, used these to his own ends. His 'Turkish' characters are typical examples of what Edward Said (1985) has famously termed orientalism: this system of representations forced upon the east, inscribing it within Western ideological constructs. (*Die Entführung aus dem Serail* is actually one of Said's examples)

This orientalist characters of (especially) Osmin (the barbarian) and, to a lesser extent, Pasha Selim (the noble savage) has made many directors concerned with political correctness rack their brains, to a variety of ends. Some choose to leave out all references to Turks or cultural difference altogether. Others, including a recent staging by Muziektheater Transparant (Ghent) in an attempt to avoid any misunderstanding, choose to expose the construction of otherness by exaggerating it<sup>1</sup>. Quraishi and Yalcin opted for a third possibility, namely that of the deconstructive reversal. In their version, Belmonte, Pedrillo, Constanza and her servant are young Turks, while Osmin and Pasha Selim represent Old Europe. The story takes place not in Pasha Selim's harem but at an undefined place, possibly in Vienna or another old European city. The time is now.

These two art projects, one taking place shortly after the other in the cultural capital of old Europe, were not planned in tandem. Yet, upon closer look, there appear to be some uncanny points of connection. Both use a restaging of a classic of European culture to engage with the ways in which we legitimize behaviour in global space. Both deal with how culturally specific modes of looking mediate in what is

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<sup>1</sup> *Een Totale Entführung*. Adaptation and director: Ramsey Nasr. Musical adaptation and composition: Wim Hendrix. Muziektheater Transparant and the orchestra of the Beethoven Academy. Premiere: 13 September 2006, De Singel, Antwerpen.

considered to be 'self' and what is 'other'. Both use *staging* as a means to engage with the here and now of their audience and to destabilize seemingly self-evident modes of looking. Ostojic not only presents a new version of *L'Origine du Monde*. Crucial to the destabilizing effect of her work is how this image is staged in the city, as a billboard. This staging of the work evoked a response very different from earlier presentations in for example art magazines. Quraishi, it may be argued, more than staging Mozart's opera, put the opera on stage. Instead of criticizing Mozart for doing Turkish music his own way and transforming it into something that is only vaguely reminiscent of real Turkish music, Quraishi follows Mozart's example and takes the liberty to do Mozart's music in a Turkish manner. Composer Serdar Yalcin adapted Mozart's opera for a combination of piano, traditional Turkish instruments and electronics. The result is recognizable as Mozart's composition, yet sounds very different from what we are used to. This new sound confirms that Mozart's 'Turkish' music has little to do with Turkish music. Performed on Turkish instruments, Mozart's 'Turkish' music does not sound Turkish at all, but very much like Mozart, performed on unfamiliar instruments. Instead of absorbing the audience in music that sounds comfortably familiar, this version defamiliarizes the well known sound and invites the audience to listen in different way, highlighting the structural characteristics of the music instead of directing attention to the execution of the well known melodies and aria's.

In similar way, rather than inviting identification with the woes and worries of the individual characters, Quraishi puts the construction of opera on stage, thus inviting reflection on its structure and its implications. His version highlights how the narrative construction of Mozart's opera evokes a reversal of positions and how this reversal creates a tension between the supposedly self-evident story of the woman who has to be saved from the Turks, and a representation in which the good guys are shown to be bad and vice versa. The result

is a displacement that undermines seemingly self-evident visions of what is good and what is bad, what is right and what is wrong, what is self and what is other.

### **Theatrical vs. Theatricality**

“Rather than define theatre as an unchanging identifiable object in the real, we might rethink it as a culturally conditioned mode of staging the construction of the real.” (Freedman, 1991, 50) writes Barbara Freedman in *Staging the Gaze*. The theatrical *apparatus*<sup>2</sup> as ‘vision machine’ stages ways of looking that respond to a particular culturally and historically specific spectator consciousness. Freedman writes about Shakespearean comedy and its relation to the Elizabethan world picture, but her definition of theatre as a staging of the construction of the real seems to be valuable for rethinking the relationship between theatre and audience in other times and places as well. Freedman points to the relationship between theatre and the historical reality to which

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<sup>2</sup> The term *apparatus* originates from film theory, where it refers to the totality of interdependent operations that together make up the viewing situation. This includes: 1) the technical base (the effects produced by the various components of the film equipment, including camera, lights, film and projection); 2) the conditions of film projection (dark theatre, immobility of spectators, the illuminated screen in front and the light beam projected from behind the spectator’s head); 3) the film itself as a ‘text’ (involving the various devices to represent visual continuity, the illusion of real space, and the creation of an illusion of reality); 4) the ‘mental machinery’ of the spectator (including conscious perceptual as well as unconscious and preconscious processes) that constitute the viewer as a subject of desire. The notion of the apparatus thus produces a definition of the entire cinema-machine that goes beyond films themselves and one that places the spectator – as unconscious desiring subject- at the center of the entire process. (see Robert Stam, Robert Borgoyne and Sandy Flitterman Lewis (eds.) *New Vocabularies in Film Semiotics. Structuralism, Poststructuralism and Beyond*. London and new York: Routledge 1992.) The seminal texts in the theory of the apparatus are Jean-Louis Baudry’s “The Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematic Apparatus” and “The Apparatus: Metapsychological Approaches to the Impression of Reality in the Cinema.” In: Philip Rosen (ed) *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology*. New York: Columbia University Press. 1986: 286-318

this theatre belongs but *without understanding theatre in terms of a representation of this reality*. Rather, theatre and reality appear as parallel constructions appealing to similar ways of looking. Theatre presents a *staging* of the construction that is also constitutive of the real. This staging responds to a similar spectator consciousness as implied by the construction of the real, while at the same time it is different; it is a theatrical staging. This ambiguous tension between similarity and difference brings Freedman to a definition of theatricality as:

“that fractured reciprocity whereby beholder and beheld reverse positions in a way that renders a steady position of spectatorship impossible. Theatricality evokes an uncanny sense that the given to be seen has the power both to position us and displace us” (Freedman, 1991, 1).

Theatricality, thus defined, indicates a destabilization of the relationship between someone seeing and what is seen. Freedman writes about theatricality in the theatre, yet such destabilization may happen at other places and other times as well. Theatricality does not even necessarily result from the fact that what is seen is staged. Not every staging destabilizes the relationship between someone seeing (many stagings don't) and what is seen and vice versa, destabilization can also happen in situations that are not staged but nevertheless evoke in the viewer this sense of being implicated in a situation as a result of which one becomes aware of one's position in relation to what is seen, a situation in which one is confronted with ones seemingly self-evident modes of looking. This can be the result of choice, the decision of a viewer to look (at an image, an event, a situation) as if it were staged. It can also be the result of something being staged for us, literally on a stage or by means of other kinds of strategies that put things 'on stage' for us, this way inviting us to become aware of how we are addressed by what we see, and how we are implicated in ways that would otherwise go unnoticed. Like this scene I had not noticed until the photographer (Maurice Bogaert)

used his camera to frame this situation in a way that invites to look at it as if staged.



This situation was not staged. Theatricality is not the effect of its being theatre but results from the way the photograph points attention to the relationship between the man, looking up to the billboard with the image of the blonde woman in white underwear ("For your eyes only") and the announcement "Turkish Decorations" like a caption to this image.

Useful here is the distinction between theatrical, referring to the staged character of a situation, its being theatre, and theatricality, describing the communicative affect that emerges when we perceive something as staged. In common speech, theatrical and theatricality are often used as if synonymous and often in a pejorative way, equating theatrical and theatricality with falseness, make believe. Theatrical and theatricality can be, and are, used both to refer to a particular quality of something – its being 'of the theatre' and therefore staged for a viewer – and to failure, the failure to convince

onlookers of authenticity or truth. Jonas Barish (1981) demonstrates how this relationship between theatre and failure, falsity or inauthenticity keeps coming back in various guises throughout the history of western culture, beginning with Plato.

Yet, if theatrical and theatricality mean the same, why then do we have two terms, wonders Tracy Davis (2003). She traces the emergence of theatricality as a separate term and locates this emergence in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, about the same time as Mozart was writing his *Entführung*. She demonstrates how at that time the notion of theatricality was used to describe the affect emerging from perceiving something as theatre. This 'perceiving as theatre' can be the effect of the address presented to a viewer, inviting to see something as theatre, but it may also be the product of choice.

A similar notion of theatricality (as distinct from theatrical) can be found in Michael Fried. First he uses the notion of theatricality in his early "Art and Objecthood" (1968), in which he argues that art ends where theatricality begins, precisely because theatricality indicates the implication of a viewer. Then, he comes back to the notion of theatricality in his much later *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (1980), in which he historicizes his own earlier anti-theatrical position and brings in Diderot to conceptualize a notion of theatricality that is in many ways similar to the one proposed by Davis. However, what is different in a very interesting way is how Diderot provides a link between theatricality and point of view.

The concept of point of view is central to Diderot's epistemology. As he writes '[t]he universe, whether considered as real or as intelligible, has an infinity of points of view from which it can be represented, and the number of possible systems of human knowledge is as great as that of points of view (Oeuvres Complètes, VIII, 211, quoted in Fried 1980: 216). The claim to understand a given phenomenon, or recognize its truth, involves accepting the responsibility not

only for the explanation, but also for the point of view implicit in the explanation. In this respect, Diderot's observation links up remarkably well with postmodern, feminist and postcolonial critique of the supposedly universal point of view implied by the grand narratives. But Diderot also makes another important observation with regard to intelligibility, vision and point of view, namely that in order to appear as truthful, these points of view implied within visions of 'how it is' must not be too obvious. As soon as they become too prominent the effect will not be truthfulness but artificiality, theatre.

The implication is that theatricality is not the result of whether something is or is not 'theatre,' but that theatricality denotes the inability to be convincingly 'truthful.' In order for an event to appear truthful, the point of view implied within that event must remain invisible, or at least not be too obvious. Address your audience in a manner that acknowledges the subjective point of view from whence this audience sees you (including the presuppositions, assumptions, expectations and desires characteristic of this point of view). The better you are able to absorb this perspective, i.e. the more you respond to the desires, assumptions etc. implied within it, the more convincing your audience will find you. When trying to grasp the implications and complications of theatricality, therefore, the issue is not what could or would be its other, but how theatricality emerges from the destabilization of the binary oppositions that structure and shape what Kaja Silverman terms the 'dominant fiction' that is our reality. This can inspire critical thinking but, as Freedman observes, it may also evoke resistance and rejection.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> For a more elaborate discussion of Fried's reading of Diderot and its use for the theatre see my 'Absorption and Focalisation: Performance and its Double' in *Performance Research* 10.1(2005): 48-60. For a more elaborate discussion of both Davis and Fried's notions of theatricality and their use for today, see my "Theatre of/or Truth" in *Performance Paradigm 3: The End of Ethics? Performance, Politics and War* (May 2007) [www.performanceparadigm.net](http://www.performanceparadigm.net)

Such mechanisms of projection and rejection at work in our ways of looking are explicitly thematized in Mozart's *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*. The curtain opens on the arrival of Belmonte at the palace (Serail) of Pasha Selim, where he is confronted with Osmin, Pasha's servant and guard. The construction of the scene puts us, the audience, right from the beginning, in a position similar to Belmonte, having to find out where he is, who the other person is and how things work in this place. Dressed up in an exotic costume, this other man is staged as not like "us." His unfriendly behaviour, distrusting Belmonte and refusing to help him or let him in, does not invite our sympathy. There seems to be no reason for his behaviour, which seems rather exaggerated and unnecessary. When a little later, Osmin, seemingly without reason, sings out it would be better to hang them right away and put their heads on stakes, we can only conclude this man is biased, without reason, against Europeans.

Osmin is a flat character, reduced to his distrust and the violent resolutions proposed to it. Not a very charming image of Turks and Turkish-ness, indeed. But if something is to be called grotesque here, it is not only the way Osmin presents an image of "Turkish-ness" but also the image of Europeans with which he confronts us. In his vision, Europeans are bad, no question about it. One might argue that Osmin's reduced and negative image of Europeans (as derived from his lines) characterizes him as stupid and short sighted, especially from the point of view of Europeans not wanting to recognize themselves in this image. However, the libretto also does something else: it proves him to be right. *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* shows Europeans to be treacherous, deceitful, without respect, and breaking of their promises. As the plot proceeds, Osmin's prejudices are shown to be to a large extent justified, and everything happens more or less as he originally predicted.

Within the context of the story, the Europeans' bad behaviour is justified as long as one accepts that Constanza needs to be 'saved' from invasion by the Turk and that this end all means are acceptable. But precisely this point of view is also what is questioned and destabilized by the opera itself, with the characterization of Osmin instrumental in causing such destabilization. His aggressive antipathy at first makes it easy to reject his way of looking at the Europeans as the product of a distorted vision, thus othering the image of European self presented by him by understanding it as the vision of a stranger, someone who does not know. However, when finally this image appears to be quite accurate, it is much harder to maintain the distinction between self and other.

This distinction is further problematized by the character of the other 'Turk', Pasha Selim. Selim trusts Belmonte, Pedrillo and Constanza, gives them what they ask for, and in return they betray him. When he discovers how he has been deceived, he is furious and it seems he will use his power to take revenge, confirming the image of the violent Turk earlier presented by Osmin. The discovery that Belmonte is the son of the man who drove him from his belongings in Spain, threatened him, and took his possessions, provides further justification for violent action. But then, not wanting to perpetuate such harmful patterns of behaviour, Bassa Selim decides to let them go. It is therefore not the Europeans that 'save' Constanza (as the title *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* might suggest) but rather Bassa Selim's contempt that sets them free, his refusal to be like them or even to have them near him any longer. They walk because he despises them.

In their staging, Quraishi and Yalcin take this play with reversal of self and other one step further, reversing the situation in the plot. In their version, Belmonte, Pedrillo, Constanza and her servant are young Turks, while Osmin and Pasha Selim represent Old Europe. The story takes place not in Bassa Selim's harem but in a theatre in Vienna or another old

European city. With this strategy, they present a commentary not on how this opera shows the other but on what might be called a blind spot in the vision of self in which this opera invites us, the audience, to identify with. This blind spot is Constanza's role, constructed around her honour that it is her responsibility to keep under all circumstances, although this 'honour' is 'owned' not by her but by Belmonte, her fiancé. In the original libretto, right from the beginning, this honour, and not Constanza's well-being is what is Belmonte's concern. Instead of being happy to see her again and being happy she is still alive, the first and only thing Belmonte is concerned about is if he isn't too late, if Bassa Selim has not taken her already, as if to be sure it still makes sense to rescue her. Furthermore, the anger his doubts about her honour evoke are directed against her, abducted against her will, and not against Bassa Selim. In reversing the roles, Quraishi exposes the uncanny similarities between Constanza's role in this celebrated masterpiece of European culture and ways of dealing with women often criticized in others.

In Quraishi's staging, the time is now and we are here, this is the message to the audience upon entering the theatre. Here too the situation is reversed. The audience enters the theatre room over the main stage, their first vision being the opposite of their usual view from the auditorium. The entire space is hung with black cloth covering the lavish baroque decorations. Instead of being provided with a safe position in the dark from which to peer into an 'other' world through the *finestra aperta* of the proscenium arch, it is up to the audience to choose its own position somewhere around the stage. This stage is built in the middle of the auditorium, turning the auditorium into part of the setting. The actual space of the Schauspielhaus is the Serail and this Serail, hung in black, looks like a gigantic tomb in which Constanza and her servants have gotten stuck. Constanza's place is the raised stage in the middle, the entire piece evolves around this stage, around staging her. In the

middle of it all, she is trapped, just as the characters are trapped in historical Vienna, in a historical theatre with no exits. Above all, Constanza is trapped in a gender role that stages her as the object of desire, like Europa, destined to be abducted and abducted again, while struggling to keep up her status as forbidden land, a status that is simultaneously what caused her to be abducted to the Serail and what motivates her abduction from it.

On 'her' raised stage, the action takes place through a series of poses, or tableaux vivants, rather than a continuous unfolding of dramatic action. This mise en scène highlights one of the structural characteristics that distinguish many opera's from dramatic theatre, which is that the time structure of dramatic action is continuous whereas the time structure of opera is discontinuous. Aria's, duets and choral sections expand on individual moments much beyond the limits of realist representation and the action in between is often reduced to the bare minimum. The result is a structure that jumps from one intensified moment to the next.<sup>4</sup>

Quraishi's staging takes this structure to the extreme, reducing action to a series of poses that explicitly implicate the audience. The characters expose themselves to the look of audience, staging themselves as objects of their vision. The effect brings to mind Barthes comparison of the tableau as it functions in Diderot, to a fetish-object (Barthes, 1977, p. 71). Representation, Barthes argues, is not defined by imitation and therefore cannot be understood from the relation between the representation and the reality it is supposed to represent. Instead '[t]he 'Organon of Representation' [...] will have as its dual foundation the sovereignty of the act of cutting out [decoupage] and the unity of the subject of that action' (Barthes, 1977, p. 69–70). This duality, and not mimesis, is

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<sup>4</sup> See for an extensive discussion of the implications of this structure: Carl Dahlhaus. *From Musikdrama zur Literaturoper. Aufsätze zur neueren Operngeschichte*. München/Salzburg: Musikverlag Emil Katzschichler, 1983.

what constitutes representation. Here the tableau functions as the fetish-object where displacement seems to come to a halt in an image that can be seized by the eye.

For Barthes, Diderot is the theorist of the dialectics of desire as it is at work in representation. This desire is the subject of Quraishi's staging. He shows the characters and events, and by extension the Mozart opera, as fetish objects. The characters are perfectly stylized icons lighting up from the darkness surrounding them, as if cut out from their surrounding and put against a dark background. Idealized and perfectly self-contained, they present the promise of 'displacement coming to a halt'. At the same time, Quraishi's staging comments on this fetish character, highlighting their construction as mirror images. The polished floor of the stage reflects the poses and tableaux, doubling the image and turning the opera into a house of mirrors in which the characters not only present ideal mirror images to the audience but are themselves always already reflections of other images that shape their appearances and through which they are seen. The performance complicates the relationship between the appearance of the characters and their reflection in the mirror-stage, between reality and representation. Bassa Selim is shown to be involved in a constant attempt to become the ideal body image in which he mirrors himself through body building exercises while Constanza assumes the image of *La Grande Odalisque* (1814), the famous painting by Ingres, famous for its orientalist character, but also a reiteration of an older model in which the object is not the orientalist other but Venus. Ingres' oriental other mirrors the image of a European aesthetic model, conflating self and other in an ideal of female beauty and aesthetic composition. This oriental self-other in its turn becomes the image in which Constanza's beauty reflects itself. With her perfectly styled looks and stylized behaviour, Constanza assumes the image presented in the mirror of these paintings, thus confirming a cultural gaze in which self and other are mixed up. Performed by a Turkish Serap Gögüs in

Quraishi's staging, Constanza's appearance presents the reverse of Osmin and Bassa Selim staged as the oriental other in more conventional versions of *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*. Mirroring herself in these paintings while simultaneously mirroring herself in the shiny surface of the stage, she presents the audience with a confusing mirror-image in which self and other are inextricably intertwined.



(Serap Gögüs as Constanza. photography: Nick Mangafas)

Some commentators have argued that the character of Pasha Selim is problematic because his generosity, while presented as Turkishness, is in fact modelled after a Christian example and therefore is not an accurate representation of the other, but rather of self. That is, showing him good in this way is not accurate because this is how "we," not "them," are good, not. Again, one might wonder whether this critique on how Turks are represented in this opera is not in fact a denial of much more complicated or complicating aspects of this representation: how it confronts us with a representation that

complicates the assumptions on the basis of which we distinguish between self and other, and involves a denial of the way self and other are not separate entities but intricately intertwined. At this point, the blatant innocence of Belmonte concerning the (then) recent history of Europe and the role played by his family in this history, reads as a commentary on the incapacity or unwillingness of Mozart's European contemporaries to take into account the history they share with what is perceived as the other, as well as their own less charming behaviour against others and how this will affect what they look like from those others' point of view. A commentary that, unfortunately, has nothing lost of its relevance.

"Modernization as a narrative placed national units on a temporal continuum from "backward" to "advanced," observes Susan Buck-Morss (in the article quoted at this essay's beginning). Yet "globalization does not presume the historical time of Western progress." Could it be that the struggle with Mozart's "Turkish-ness" that has become such an important issue in recent stagings of this opera actually reflects the attempt to reduce globalization to progression, thus retaining our position at the forefront of historical progression? At first sight, the critique of the representation of Turkish-ness may seem to be motivated by increased awareness of the otherness of the other, and therefore indicative of a move beyond naiveté. Such a reading places Mozart (and his librettist) in the position of (relatively) backward and puts us in the position of having to find a solution for what from the point of view of our more advanced position is no longer acceptable. A close reading of the plot however, as I hope to have demonstrated, raises the question whether it might be something else, something "we" don't want to see. The confrontation provided by these "Turks" is not, or not in the first place, how they show otherness, or how they wrongly represent the other, but how the way they are

represented undermines the clear-cut distinctions on which we base our conception of self, of who we are and of how we are different from 'them'. This does not make the representation of "Turks" and "Turkish-ness" in *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* any more accurate. But it may invite a Quraishi's staging suggests that, notwithstanding the ideology of progression underlying modernity, it might actually be Western modernity that has got historically stuck. Ironically, the response of newspaper critics was mainly concerned with the question of whether the representation of Osmin and Bassa Selim as Europeans ventilating politically correct rhetoric was acceptable or not and whether it was acceptable to perform Mozart's music the way Quraishi and Yalcin did. Constanza's role remained largely unquestioned, again.

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