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Image Schemas as the Organising Principle of Direction-scenographic Concept for the Brno Production of Händel's *Alcina*

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Abstract

This paper explores the role of scenography in the meaning-making process in operatic performances, particularly focusing on the 2022 Brno production of Händel's *Alcina* directed by Jiří Heřman. The study employs methodology from cognitive science, specifically image schemas and multimodality, to analyse how scenography interacts with other modalities like music and text to create a cohesive theatrical experience. The paper argues that image schemas are central to organising the perceptual and conceptual structures that convey emotions, particularly in the lamento aria "Ah! mio cor." The scenography's spatial elements are shown to enhance the emotional intensity and thematic depth of the opera, highlighting the significance of cross-modal mappings or correspondences in the audience's perception and interpretation.

Keywords

Scenography, Multimodality, Image Schemas, Opera, Cognitive Theatre Studies, Händel's *Alcina*, Cross-modal mapping, Cross-modal correspondence

Ohrožené srdce: Obrazová schémata jako organizační princip režijně-scénografické koncepce brněnské inscenace Händelovy *Alciny*

Abstrakt

Článek se zabývá rolí scénografie v procesu tvorby významu v operním představení, a to na příkladu brněnské inscenace Händelovy *Alciny* z roku 2022 v režii Jiřího Heřmana. Studie využívá metodologii kognitivních věd, konkrétně obrazových schémat a multimodality, k analýze interakce scénografie s dalšími mody, jako jsou hudba a text, při tvorbě divadelního zážitku. Autorka tvrdí, že obrazová schémata jsou klíčová pro organizaci percepčních a konceptuálních struktur, které zprostředkovávají emoce, což dokládá zejména na základě analýzy lamentační árie „Ah! mio cor". Ukazuje, jak prostorové prvky scénografie umocňují emocionální intenzitu a tematickou hloubku opery, a zdůrazňuje význam tzv. cross-modálních mapování či korespondencí při vnímání a interpretaci díla divákem.

Klíčová slova

scénografie, multimodalita, obrazová schémata, opera, kognitivní divadelní studia, Händel, *Alcina*, cross-modální mapování, cross-modální korespondence

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This article explores the contribution of scenography to the audio-viewers'[1] meaning-making process during an operatic performance. My theoretically oriented research deals with the possibilities offered by cognitive science to theatre studies, specifically to the analysis of (not only) opera productions. In this article, treating opera as a multimodal genre, the cross-modal mappings or correspondences between (across) different modes of operatic production are examined.

Central to this analysis are image schemas, which are examined as key structures that connect various modes, govern the correspondences across them and enable the emergence of meanings during both the creation and perception of an operatic work on stage. Using the 2022 Brno production of Georg Friedrich Händel's *Alcina*, directed by Jiří Heřman and with scenography by Dragan Stojčevski, the study demonstrates how scenography not only co-creates but also directs meaning through cross-modal correspondences, thus enhancing the audience's interpretive experience. Theoretical concepts such as multimodality, image schemas, and cross-modal mapping (correspondence) are introduced and applied, offering a novel perspective on opera analysis through the lens of cognitive linguistics and cognitive musicology.

In this article, I draw on the concept of scenography as it has been shaped over the last fifty years or so in Czechoslovak and Czech reflections on the practice of staging, especially in the work of the scenographer Josef Svoboda and the theorist of scenography Vladimír Jindra (Příhodová 2011; Havlíčková Kysová 2023). In terms of contemporary approaches, my understanding of scenography is close to the characterization of Arnold Aronson as "the total visual, spatial, and aural organization of the overall theatrical event" potentially involving "all the senses" (Aronson 2018: 10) and the approach explaining multimodal nature of this artistic discipline and its capacity to enhance meaning-making operations, presented by Joslin McKinney and Philip Butterworth (2009) in their Introduction to the *The Cambridge Introduction to Scenography*:

"[...] scenography is defined as the manipulation and orchestration of the performance environment. The means by which this is pursued are typically through architectonic structures, light, projected images, sound, costume and performance objects or props. These elements are considered in relation to the performing bodies, the text, the space in which the performance takes place and the placement of the audience. Scenography is not simply concerned with creating and presenting images to an audience; it is concerned with audience reception and engagement. It is a sensory as well as an intellectual experience; emotional as well as rational. Operation of images opens up the range of possible responses from the audience; it extends the means and outcomes of theatrical experience through communication to an audience." (2009: 4)[2]

1 The Czech musicologist Tereza Havelková points out in her recent book (2021) that the opera spectator is an "audio-viewer". I agree with this approach because it emphasises the "multimodal" nature of the cognitive engagement at the spectator/audience's side. Therefore, in this article, when I use any term that refers to the "spectator" or the "audience", I am referring to this concept.

2 In their understanding, scenography refers to the creation of dynamic, interactive stage spaces that contribute to the experience of a performance, focusing on the three-dimensional relationship between space and performers, rather than static or purely decorative elements. For an insightful examination of incorporating a cognitive science perspective in the context of scenography, refer e.g. to the article by J. McKinney (2015).

Fig. 1. Georg Friedrich Händel: *Alcina*, NDB 2022, Pavla Vykopalová (Alcina), © Marek Olbrzymek.

Fig. 2. Georg Friedrich Händel: *Alcina*, NDB 2022, Pavla Vykopalová (Alcina), Ray Chenez (Ruggiero), © Marek Olbrymek.

Theoretical and methodological background

In the first part of the study, I introduce the theoretical concepts I draw on, in particular multimodality, image schemas, and cross-modal mapping or correspondence, and the way I use them to analyse a music theatre production. Further, my analysis focuses primarily

on a particular situation, which can be considered crucial within the production, as it is a scene that manifests a *dramatic situation*. This term is derived from Czech theatre theorist Jan Císař's (2020: 22–26) understanding of *dramatic situation (of a drama)* – as a situation in which a character is thrust, by virtue of even external circumstances and her/his previous reactions to them, into a situation that becomes unbearable for her/him, and s/he tries to change it. The scene analysed in this article is a scene that manifests the core of the drama and the character who is at a crucial moment in her/his (life) story.

In the following analysis of the production of *Alcina*,[3] I identify *image schemas* in the individual modes (music, sung text, scenography, acting, etc.). Then, I identify the image schemas that correspond across different modes as those that organise the direction or direction-scenographic conception of the production. In other words, I identify in the modes the image schemas on which the direction draws on the correspondences (or even identity) to convey the meaning. I analyse correspondent image schema(s) of different modalities that organise(s) the direction concept. In this process, scenography plays a crucial role since it is the mode realised in terms of space and, therefore, can manifest the spatial structures that are the core of the image schema's definition. The "spatial structure" depicted by scenography can substantially contribute to revealing the conceptual structure of the work of art and its ideas.

Multimodality, image schemas, cross-modal correspondence

When experiencing and analysing an opera performance, we perceive different semiotic systems or modes of communication. There are different conceptions of multimodality (e.g. Kress – van Leeuwen 2001, Forceville 2009, Jewitt 2017). In this study, I draw mostly on the concept of multimodality we can find in the works by Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen (van Leeuwen 1999; Kress – van Leeuwen 2001, 2020). They point out that "common semiotic principles operate in and across different modes, and in which it is therefore quite possible for music to encode action, or images to encode emotion" (Kress – van Leeuwen 2001: 2) and define the multimodality as "the use of several semiotic modes in the design of a semiotic product or event" (Kress – van Leeuwen 2001: 20). According to Jewitt (2017: 15), multimodality "proceeds on the assumption that representation and communication always draw on a multiplicity of modes, all which have the potential to contribute equally to meaning". I also draw on the work of Charles Forceville, who has pioneered multimodality and multimodal metaphor (e.g. 2009) and defines *mode* as "a sign system interpretable because of a specific perception process" (2009: 22). Charles Forceville (2009: 21) described several ways of meaning construction and enlisted different *modes*: pictorial signs, written signs, spoken signs, gestures, sounds, music, smells, tastes, and touch. Some of them, not necessarily all of them, can integrate in one genre or media to create meaning. Different scholars identify various numbers of modes. I draw mostly on Forceville's classification (2009), which postulates *at least* the following nine: "(1) pictorial signs; (2) written signs; (3) spoken signs; (4) gestures; (5) sounds; (6) music; (7) smells; (8) tastes; (9) touch" (2009: 23).

In the field of drama and theatre studies, the multimodality approach has already been developed by scholars such as Barbara Dancygier (2016). Opera, as a genre that is "forever and always multimodal," has been analysed by Linda and Michael

3 I attended two performances in the theatre, and then I worked with the internal recording of the National Theatre Brno. (NDB 2022)

Hutcheon (Hutcheon – Hutcheon 2009) or in some of my own recent works (Havlíčková Kysová 2021; 2023), etc.

Scenography itself can be understood as a multimodal (theatrical) discipline. It creates meanings through the interconnection of different modes – for example visual signs in general (specifically pictorial signs, written signs, 3D constructions), but also spoken signs, gestures, sounds, music, even smells etc. The meaning of each mode can be substantially modified by another.

I propose that the modes in a production are often interrelated by mapping or correspondence driven/organised by image schema(s) to convey a meaning of a particular production. The concept and the theory of image schema (schemas or schemata), as I apply it in this article, is bound to the conceptual metaphor theory (CMT) dated back to George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's pivotal work *Metaphors We Live By* (1980). From the cognitive linguistics point of view, *metaphor* is "understanding one conceptual domain in terms of another conceptual domain" (Kövecses 2010: 4). The "traditional" understanding of the term *metaphor* as a figurative element of language having some ornate or poetic function the CMT approach usually calls a *metaphorical linguistic expression* (Kövecses 2010: 4). In analytical "searching for" conceptual metaphor, a set of systematic correspondences, typically referred to as *mappings* (Kövecses 2010: 7), is identified between the two conceptual domains known as the *source* and *target domains*.[4] (See, e.g., conceptual metaphor LIFE IS A JOURNEY, where "life" is the target domain that is conceptualised/understood in terms of the source domain "journey.")[5] As Raymond Gibbs puts it, the CMT shows that "metaphor is not just an aspect of language, but a fundamental part of human thought." (Gibbs 2011: 529) Theatre is the art of metaphor; in modes other than only language, it reveals and conveys ideas and ways of thinking. The research presented in this study explores how concepts and conceptual metaphors are manifested in different metaphorical expressions in different modes of theatrical production, how they relate and what meanings they convey.

Since I deal with multimodal operatic performances, I also draw on the concept of 4E cognition in the analysis of meaning-making in theatrical performances. This approach characterises cognition as *embodied*, *embedded*, *extended*, and *enactive* (Newen – Gallagher – De Bruin 2018; Cook 2018). Embodied cognition suggests that our body plays a crucial role in shaping thought processes; embedded cognition highlights how our thinking is shaped by the environment; extended cognition involves external objects aiding cognitive tasks; and enactive cognition emphasises how action and perception co-create meaning. In the context of theatre, this framework helps to understand how both performers and spectators engage with the performance not only "intellectually" but also physically and interactively. For instance, the physical space of the theatre, the actors' movements, and audience participation all contribute to meaning-making. The 4E model offers a holistic view of cognition that is particularly useful in understanding the multisensory, multimodal and interactive nature of theatrical experiences.

4 A conceptual domain, as Kövecses puts it, can be understood as "any coherent organization of experience" (2010: 4). For example, he explains that "we have coherently organized knowledge about journeys that we rely on in understanding life" (2010: 4).

5 The conceptual metaphor need not be and usually is not expressed in this way when we speak, for example, but we can identify it through speeches such as "I met someone and have been in love ever since" or "Daddy was ill for a long time and has sadly left us". In both cases, life is conceptualized as a journey.


Alcina 2022
1:57:23 / 3:23:59
Scroll for details


Alcina 2022
2:01:38 / 3:23:59
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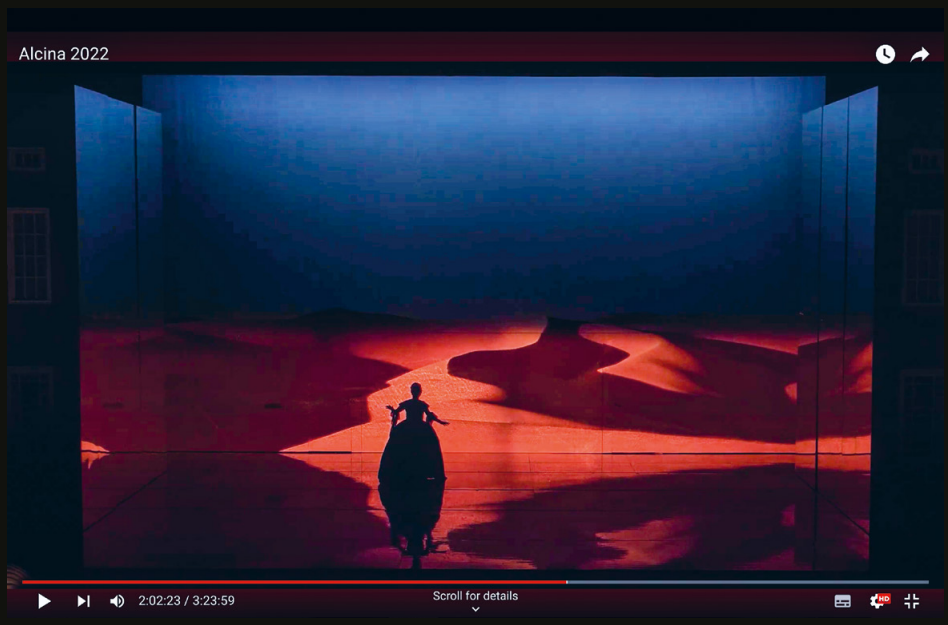


Fig. 3–6. Georg Friedrich Händel: *Alcina*, NDB 2022, Pavla Vykopalová, stills from a sequence showing stage action 1/8–5/8, da capo aria, part A (1/8) and B (2/8–4/8), © NDB.

The concept of *image schemas*, which I use as an analytical tool, relates to 4E cognition by emphasising how recurring patterns of sensory and motor experiences shape our understanding and interpretation of abstract concepts, making them a crucial link between embodied cognition and the way meaning is constructed in theatrical performances.

The *image schemas* can be explained as "supporting structures for human thought and language" (Oakley 2007: 214). They "derive from sensorimotor experience, early in the lifespan as we interact with and move about in the world" (Evans 2023: 225). They are "condensed redescription of perceptual experience for the purpose of mapping spatial structure onto conceptual structure" (Oakley 2007: 215). We can imagine them as patterns that "emerge as meaningful structures for us chiefly at the level of our bodily movements through space, our manipulation of objects, and our perceptual interactions." (Johnson 1987: 29) An image schema can also be understood as "a recurring, dynamic pattern of our perceptual interactions and motor programs that gives coherence and structure to our experience." (Johnson 1987: xiv) Vyvyan Evans, in his comprehensive book introducing the fundamental concepts of cognitive linguistics, has recently presented over ten characteristic features of image schemas. For the purposes of this article, I highlight four of them. According to Evans, the image schemas can give rise to more specific concepts, they are multimodal and subject to transformations (2023: 231) and they "can occur in clusters" (2023: 232).

Johnson (1987: 126) enlisted the following image schemas,[6] that structure our understanding: "CONTAINER, BALANCE, COMPULSION, BLOCKAGE, COUNTERFORCE, RESTRAINT REMOVAL, ENABLEMENT, ATTRACTION, MASS-COUNT, PATH, LINK, CENTER-PERIPHERY, CYCLE, NEAR-FAR, SCALE, PART-WHOLE, MERGING, SPLITTING, FULL-EMPTY, MATCHING, SUPERIMPOSITION, ITERATION, CONTACT, PROCESS, SURFACE, OBJECT, COLLECTION." The list is however not considered as exhaustive. In the course of time, some were "added" or extended by specification. (e.g. Gibbs 2005), some discussed also by Johnson. For example, VERTICALITY as an image schema "that involves 'up' and 'down' relations":

"The VERTICALITY schema, for instance, emerges from our tendency to employ an UP-DOWN orientation in picking out meaningful structures of our experience. We grasp this structure of verticality repeatedly in thousands of perceptions and activities we experience every day, such as perceiving a tree, our felt sense of standing upright, the activity of climbing stairs, forming a mental image of a flagpole, measuring our children's heights, and experiencing the level of water rising in the bathtub. The VERTICALITY schema is the abstract structure of these VERTICALITY experiences, images, and perceptions." (Johnson 1987: xiv)

Almost twenty years ago, image schemas became part of the then-experienced "cognitive turn" in theatre studies reflected (and proponed) by the publication *Performance and Cognition Theatre studies and the cognitive turn* (2007). One of its editors, Elizabeth Hart, explained:

"Image schemas are gestalt-like abstractions of sensorimotor experiences, stored in minimalist – and thus easily retrievable – outlines in the memory. First developed

6 I follow the practice of conceptual metaphor theory in writing image schemas in low capitals.

in infancy, image schemas can become permanent (i.e., neurologically stable) entities from repeated use within a reality (which is always, to some extent, culturally specific) to which they consistently conform. Once developed and stabilised, image schemas are used to structure higher levels of cognition via a process of 'metaphorical projection,' which forms 'primary metaphors' and 'complex metaphors' [...] that enable the brain to categorise and assimilate both familiar and new experiences. Thus, image schemas work with primary and complex metaphors to press embodied form onto thought and language, importantly both enabling and constraining the shapes of higher-level representations." (Hart 2007: 37)

The theory of image schemas can be used in the analysis of a theatrical production (and performance).[7] The image schemas analysis can help us discover what conceptualizations of the world we live in are emerging or dominating not only in art but also in our everyday lives. As Tobin Nellhaus pointed out, image schemas are "fundamental to acting, performance space, dramatic narrative, and audience response" (2007: 76). I want to show how image schemas, or their modifications, which I derive, organise perceptual interactions in a direction-scenographic conception across (trough) different modes to communicate/allow us to conceptualise what we perceive during theatrical performance (and respectively, comprehend the conceptualization of the artistic team).

Interestingly, since image schemas are also defined/characterised (among other things) as spatial structures, scenography, as a spatial discipline, i.e. expressing ideas and meanings through space, is a suitable mode for anchoring meaning created by other modes (e.g. music, text, etc., which are also realised in space, but primarily "unintentionally"). The scenography creates meanings intentionally, the artist adapts the space (and other scenographic elements) to the embedding of meaning. If we view scenography as a discipline that expresses meaning primarily through "spatial structures,"[8] we need to ask how it can influence or change the meaning communicated in other modes. And further, which conceptual structures are mapped onto spatial structures in operatic scenography (and vice versa)?

The mapping between conceptual and spatial structure, the image schema, can be illustrated by a well-known example from Czech scenographic work by František Tröster (1936, National Theatre Prague, directed by Jiří Frejka). For Gogol's play *The Government Inspector* Tröster created the so-called "drunk doors". These doors lacked right angles, were warped, looked more like wings, as if they were trying – in accordance with the story depicting "curved", unstable morale – to gain or regain BALANCE. In opera, one of the most striking examples of the scenographic (metaphorical) expression of conceptual metaphor can be seen in the scenography for *La muette de Portici* (The Mute Girl of Portici), already prescribed in the libretto for Daniel Auber's 1828 opera. When the tragedy culminates in plot and emotional tension, in a situation of battle

7 The application of image schema theory in theatre studies has been addressed by several scholars, often in drama analysis, but usually also in the broader context of staging or theatre production as a whole. Cf. for example: (Freeman 1995), (McConachie 2003), (Hart 2007), (Nelhaus 2007), (Cook 2010) etc.

8 As Elizabeth Hart pointed out, "[o]f specific relevance to a discussion of stage space is the degree to which image schemas are spatial in their content, so much so that Lakoff and Johnson now typically refer to them as 'spatial-relations concepts'". (2007: 37) As scenography is predominantly expressed/created in a spatial mode, it enables the emphasis of a "spatial structure" of a concept, and thus the concept itself.

confusion, the eruption of the Vesuvius is supposed to take place in the background.[9] The scenography is thus based on the conceptual metaphor or metaphors: EMOTION IS A NATURAL FORCE, EMOTION IS A FLUID IN A CONTAINER, EMOTION IS HEAT (OF FIRE) that are described in (Kövecses 2010: 108).

Anytime we attend a theatrical performance we as spectators (audio-viewers) experience multisensory perception. In the armchair of the theatre auditorium, we deal with several modes at the same time or in a relatively short course of time. Different modes are not usually used on stage in a random juxtaposition. Even if this were the case, in any case we will perceive various links or correspondences between them.

Crossmodal correspondence, matching or binding (see e.g. Spence 2011) integrates the percepts from different modes.[10] Crossmodal correspondence, for example, between auditory pitch and visual size, is "where high frequency sounds are associated with small visual objects" (Parise 2015: 11). In the context of a theatrical performance, our activity is usually directed by the production team. We tend to connect stimuli perceived in different modes, to find different correspondences (cf. Spence 2011). I claim that these relationships can be realised or emphasised (and analysed) through image schemas. Moreover, as I will show in the case study of *Alcina* production, we can find certain cultural-historical patterns in human creativity that reflect the bodily experience that structures our conceptualisation of the world around us.

The image schemas theory shows us that we often conceptualise our new experiences or perceptions spatially (cf. Oakley 2007: 215; Evans 2023), i.e. the spatial structures substantially support our conceptualiasations of the world we live in including the theatre. Therefore scenography in its spatiality is crucial for theatre in which complex ideas are communicated. In this context, the genre of opera can be seen as a special case. In general, opera does not make as much use of relatively meaning-specific (concrete) linguistic modes[11] as compared to the spoken drama theatre, which is still dominant in our culture and is more or less based on the staging of a dramatic text. Operatic

9 In the first scene of Act 5, Vesuvius is only seen in the background. But in the third scene, the stage directions prescribe: "At that moment, the sky darkens and Vesuvius, visible in the distance, begins to throw up a few flames."("En ce moment le ciel s'obscurcit, et le Vésuve, qu'on aperçoit de loin, commence à jeter quelques flammes."), and in the seventh scene its activity – in accordance with the plot and emotions – culminates: "Vesuvius begins to throw up whirlwinds of flame and smoke, and Fenella, having reached the top of the terrace, [...] Vesuvius roars with greater fury; from the crater of the volcano the flaming lava rushes down" ("le Vésuve commence à jeter des tourbillons de flamme et de fumée, et Fenella, parvenue au haut de la terrasse, [...] le Vésuve mugit avec plus de fureur; du cratère du volcan la lave enflammée se précipite"). (Auber 2024) Unless otherwise stated, all translations are mine.

10 I also draw on the concept of E. Zoitan, who understands crossmodal correspondences (CMC) as "systematic associations between musical features and 'seemingly unrelated' features of non-auditory modalities" (2015: 1). C. V. Parise both summarises the discussions by drawing attention to different understandings of this concept (CMC), and lists different types of mappings, reflecting different "strong/weak" or noticeable relations between "different sensory cues," distinguishing, for example, "redundant," "relative" and "unrelated" cues (2015: 10). This issue would also benefit from being explored through a comparative analysis of theatrical productions, but there is no room to delve into that in this article. I therefore leave aside the typology of correspondences.

11 The distribution of linguistic modes differs, especially in the amount of spoken text on stage or the written text of the drama. In opera score, the "spoken" text (libretto) is "competed" mainly by music or musical notation.

libretto generally contains less text;[12] this mode is less represented in the form of an opera production. Music, traditionally[13] considered a mode that communicates primarily emotions or affects, is essential. However, the creation and perception of meaning in music is distinct from communication through natural human language and has already been the subject of many studies and theoretical conceptions (e.g. Jankélévich 1961, Abbate 2004, Zbikowski 2017, Antović 2022). Moreover, as some studies have shown, people also "traditionally" conceptualise music spatially – e.g., perceiving a tone as a (small) object moving in space, on a scale (steps or stairs) moving up or down, etc. (e.g. Zbikowski 2002; Maimon – Lamy – Eitan 2021) I argue that scenography is precisely the discipline that facilitates the creation of meaning in an opera production. I will therefore use examples to show, in particular, the crossmodal relations between music and scenography, organised by image schemas. Therefore, I propose image schemas NARROW SPACE/CONTAINER and VAST/BORDERLESS SPACE for conceptualisation of fear or anxiety about a future situation (or situations) and the degree of the emotion.

Image schematic setting of Alcina's lamento aria in Brno production

In 2022, the National Theatre in Brno premiered a production of Georg Friedrich Händel's opera seria titled *Alcina* (HWV 34).[14] It is a story of a powerful sorceress (queen) who attracts men to her island and keeps them there as her lovers. One of them is a brave knight, Ruggiero, who, under the influence of Alcina's spells, has forgotten his fiancée Bradamante. Brave Bradamante comes in disguise as a man to rescue him. Traditionally or predominantly, Alcina is portrayed as a – more or less – cruel being. However, the Brno production directed by Jiří Heřman leans towards interpreting this character as a powerful but unhappy woman (NDB 2022). In the following analysis, in which I will discuss the scenic conception of a dramatically crucial scene, I will show how this meaning (interpretation) is communicated.

I focus on the lamento aria "Ah! mio cor" from the second act of the opera. It is a *da capo aria*, i.e., aria, that follows a three-part structure (A-B-A'). The first part (A) presents a complete musical idea in the home key. The second part (B) contrasts with the first, either rhythmically (in a slow tempo) or harmonically (major or minor key), and textually. The third part is (essentially a literal) repetition of the first part. In the third part, it is usual for singers to embellish this final section with improvisations and ornaments to showcase their vocal skills and virtuosity. With regards to the image schemas as organising principle of the mappings and correspondences across modalities, also the analysis of the direction of acting of Pavla Vykopalová (Czech opera singer) embodying Alcina is of great importance.

From the second half of the seventeenth century until the first half of the nineteenth, aria had been the principal structural element of opera (Colas 2014: 182). Dramatically/dramaturgically, it is supposed to be the highest (or one of the principal) peak of an operatic performance: (1) due to the high concentration of emotions in this dramatic situation and (2) for its high performativity.

12 For example, the roughly eleven-minute aria discussed in this article contains a total of only forty or so words (in two stanzas), although some of these words or phrases are repeated at various times.
13 See e.g. (Zbikowski 2002), (Spitzer 2003), (Zbikowski 2008), (Maimon – Lamy – Eitan 2021), etc.
14 The opera was composed to libretto *L'isola di Alcina* by Riccardo Broschi in 1735.

The aria "Ah! mio cor" under discussion is a *lamento aria* which can be understood as a dramatic situation based on musicalized crying/wailing (Havlíčková Kysová – Shurma – Lu 2025, manuscript). In this type of dramatic situation the director, in close collaboration with the actor/singer, must focus on the basic concepts by which we can express and share the basic human emotion of grief. Therefore, I consider it appropriate to analyse the direction (scenography and acting crossmodally bound to music) of this situation by means of the concepts of image schemas and to observe how the given schema is played out on the level of crossmodal mapping/correspondence. This happens in order to convey the desired emotion in the most intense and focused way.

The scenography by Dragan Stojčevski with costumes by Alexandra Grusková and light design by Daniel Tesař is based on conceptual reminiscence of the Baroque practice. For example, as we will see below, a rear horizon is used in the spirit of Baroque set design but created by projection (and following the Baroque practice). An opulent illusion of Alcina's kingdom is created on stage, full of magic tricks, gorgeous, stylized historicising costumes, set constructions and elements created by up-to-date technology. For example, the rear horizon is used in the spirit of the Baroque scenography system but made up of projections. A set of side sets is also used in this principle, but the "wings" are represented by large sliding surfaces of "mirrors" which reflect the stage space, rear horizon and all the stage actions.

In the Brno production, the starting point of the aria mise-en-scene is the CENTRE-PERIPHERY image schema. The director Jiří Heřman places Pavla Vykopalová (Alcina) to the centre of the stage.[15] From this position the singer moves away during the aria but returns to it again several times (with the exception of the very end of the aria). In this way she keeps the initial audience's perspective almost unchanged and the focusing gaze on her. By means of changes in light design, the director lets Vykopalová's figure stand out in the "full light", here and there contrasting as a silhouette against the background of the rear horizon. The backdrop depicts sand dunes,[16] which in full illumination glow a dominant orange color, tending towards yellow or red in some parts of the picture. It clearly evokes an arid desert. The upper edge of the desert is bordered by the sky – the shades of its colour changes during the aria depending on the light design.

At the sides of the stage, there are the large "mirrored" walls. From the left wall, throughout the first part of the aria and for a while in the second part, a part of the house protrudes with a view of the interior in which Ruggiero and Bradamante sit motionless.

15 The way the audience's attention is directed and focused in this aria from the very beginning suggests the scene's importance (director's emphasis). In contrast to the previous brisk and seemingly less organised movement of the actors' bodies around the stage (the stage 'confusion,' however, corresponds to the message conveyed about the 'betrayal'), the mise-en-scene and lighting design, in particular, organise attention apparently according to a figure-and-ground gestalt: the character (Vykopalová's body) is set as a distinct figure from the background of the other characters and 'literally' from the backdrop of the rear horizon.

16 For example, Karla Hofmanová, in her review of the production, describes Dragan Stojčevski's scenography with the following words: "The alternating surfaces of the endless sea [...], the stunning palace hall with its endless perspective of Versailles, the cultivated French garden and then the *arid dunes of the endless desert* into which the landscape of the island has turned". ("Střídaly se plochy nekonečného moře, ve kterém ztroskotal Ruggiero, ohromovala palácová síň s nekonečnou perspektivou Versailles, pěstěná francouzská zahrada s následnými vyprahlými dunami nekonečné pouště, ve kterou se změnila krajina ostrova.") (Hofmanová 2022) Text highlighting is mine.

Alcina's aria lasts approximately 11 minutes in the performance. The first and the third parts, marked as "A" and "A", last ca. 5 minutes each, and between them, there is an approximately one-minute-long "B" part.[17] This division is based on the more or less stable structure of the Baroque aria, whose structure, especially for its repetitiveness, shows features of a CYCLE schema.

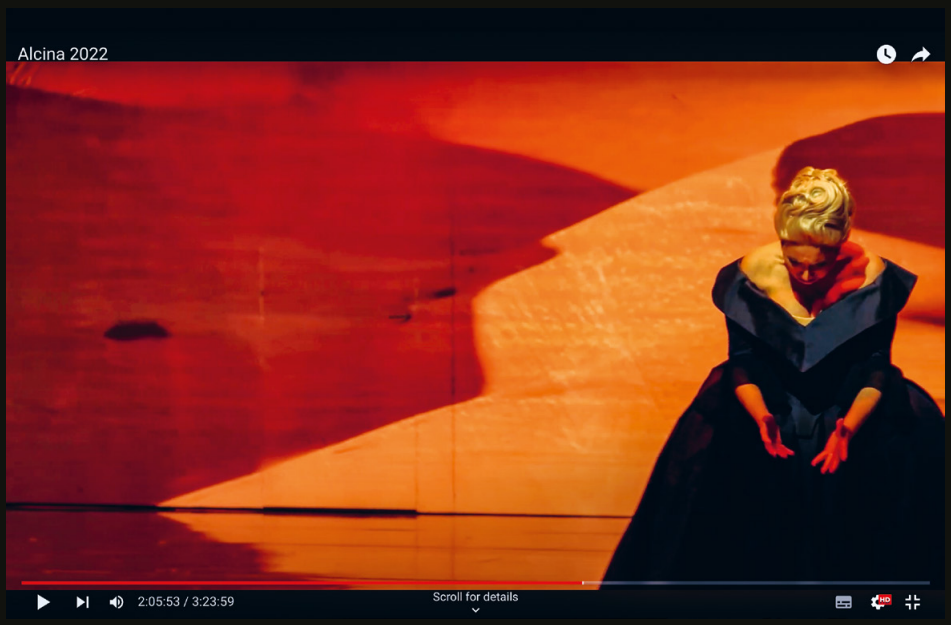
One of the fundamental meaning-making principles of music, on which the aria builds its emotional effectiveness, is repetition. As the British economist and philosopher Adam Smith stated in 1795, "[m]usic frequently produces its effects by a repetition of the same idea; and the same sense expressed in the same, or nearly the same, combination of sounds, though at first perhaps it may make scarce any impression upon us, yet, by being repeated again and again, it comes at last gradually, and by little and little, to move, to agitate, and to transport us." (Smith 1980: 192) The repetition of aria can be "viewed as a metaphor for mental obsession" (Colas 2014: 183).[18] When we recall the basic rhythmic articulation of any lamentation, we also become aware of the repetitiveness that underlies the pattern of this activity. The lamenting person repeats in a certain rhythm and tempo the expression of his or her unhappiness. The repetition enables "to express the grieving lover's [*or any lamenting person's* – ŠHK] perpetual return to misery" (Colas 2014: 183).

The repetition of musical elements in this aria (or da capo aria in general) at a more basic level of meaning implies a cyclic structure (A, then B, and A again). The repetition, or even cyclicality, is also supported by the repetition of the text in the A and A' sections and becomes the starting point for the stage action. Thus, we can see the mapping across different modes through the CYCLE scheme. The REPETITION or CYCLE forms the basis for communicating the emotion of sadness in this aria, as I will show.

When, about six minutes from the beginning of the aria, after the B part, we reach the A' part, the listener can quickly notice that the first part of the aria (A) is repeated musically and textually. Another pattern of repetition can be found in the musical material (e.g. repeating elements of harmony, melody, rhythm, etc.) and again in the textual mode – in the repetition of the words and the lines of part A in A'. For instance, the basso continuo "walks"[19] in a repeating mode. Probably even more evident than that is the repetition in the rhythm. Its repeated pattern (*andante*) is often perceived and interpreted as the heartbeat.[20] This meaning is established and anchored crossmodally (in text and music rhythm) right at the very beginning of the aria, in the very first phrase "Ah! mio cor!" ("O my heart!"). Right after the keyword "cor" ("heart") at the end of it, the rhythm pattern of the music starts up its moving or "pulsing". At ("above") this background of general bass, Alcina vocally concretizes the meaning of the text in various melodic nuances: she expresses the cause and depth of her sadness/sorrow.

17 Hereinafter I indicate the parts of the aria by the capitals either A or B without quotation marks.
18 Colas summarises Smith's ideas presented in (Smith 1980: 191–192).
19 I intentionally chose to use this commonly used metaphorical expression to describe the basso continuo tempo, which signifies the connection between music and the way humans walk. To explore this topic further, refer to various sources such as (Styns – van Noorden – Moelants – Leman 2007).
20 "[T]he universally used musical term andante means literally 'walking pace', and one of the more frequently mentioned 'bioacoustic universals' is the relationship between musical pulse and the pulse or speed of bodily processes such as the heartbeat, walking, or breathing." (Botella 2008: 314). For a treatise on relationships between human body movement and music, including andante and walking or heartbeat, see e.g. (Styns – van Noorden – Moelants – Leman 2007: 770).


Alcina 2022
2:05:38 / 3:23:59
Scroll for details


Alcina 2022
2:05:53 / 3:23:59
Scroll for details

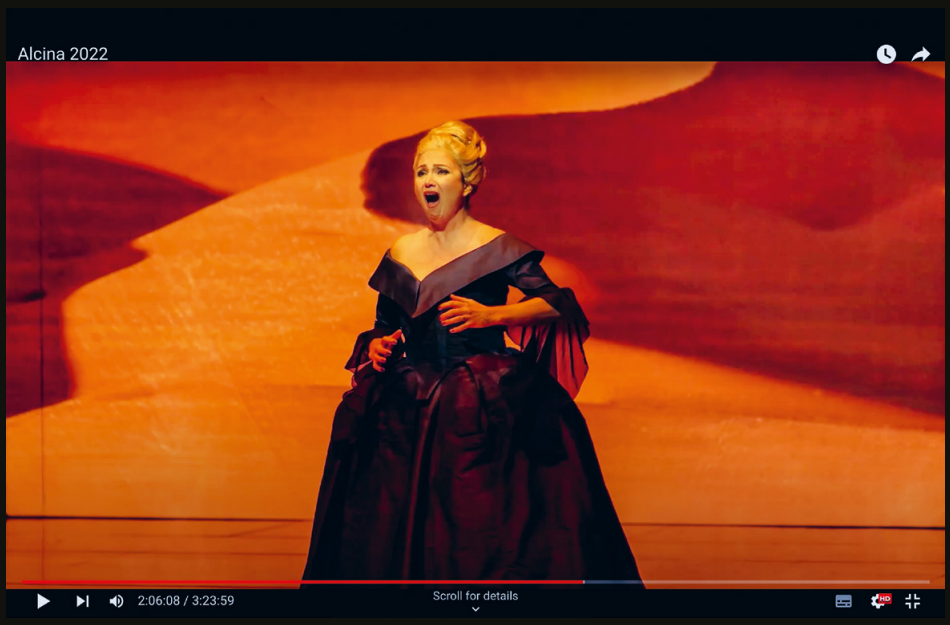


Fig. 7–10. Georg Friedrich Händel: *Alcina*, NDB 2022, Pavla Vykopalová, stills from a sequence showing stage action 5/8–8/8, da capo aria, part A', © NDB.

After part A comes the roughly one-minute-long B section, which is very different, even oppositional in mood. The complete change of rhythm and tempo, from former ("broad", "walking-pace") *andante larghetto* to (fast, "cheerful") *allegro*, corresponds to this mood shift. In the music, together with the lyrics, Alcina encourages herself to realise her sovereign position as queen (singing "I am the queen"). She opposes the negative/sad emotions of part A. In the Brno production, in this section, singing the words "I am a/the queen" (at approx. 2h, 2min. of the recording), Vykopalová indicates with a gesture pushing the fragment of the house with Ruggiero and Bradamante (sitting inside the house) into the left mirrored wall to make them disappear from the stage space. The wall is then closed, displaying an uninterrupted mirror surface. And Alcina stays on the stage alone.

The dramatic importance of the REPETITION or conclusion of the CYCLE is fully revealed in the third (i.e. the repeated first) part of the aria (A'). This repetition, however, is not some mechanical re-performance of the same musical or textual material. As Colas puts it, in the da capo aria, the repetition is "magnified by contrast" (Colas 2014: 183). Alcina "reverts to her original wretchedness after a momentary recovery in the B-section allegro ('Ma che fa gemendo Alcina?')."[21] (Colas 2014: 183)

From a dramaturgical point of view, it is crucial that this repeated part comes after the contrasted (emotional) meaning created in part B. In the third part, Alcina no longer has to present/explain/draw the reason for the depth of her sadness. She falls straight back into this emotional state depicted in part A. The fact that this part returns means that in/with part B, the character has failed to escape from the misery.

The direction of the acting in the third part is therefore very important for completing the emotion. The lyrics and musical material are repeated, but it is up to the performer's skills to convey the meaning, complete the emotion, not "only" to re-perform the beautiful musical material of part A. Vykopalová also partially repeats the movement style, including gestures and eye movement, especially at the beginning of A'.

It's worth emphasising that time is vital in the (da capo) aria. It enables us to perceive a repetition and – more importantly – the variation of nearly the same musical material of parts A and A', which however must not be the same in acting to elaborate and complete the complex emotional situation. The complexity of this performed emotional situation (of sorrow) is driven by the correspondence that crosses and connects various modes: specific Baroque music style, Vykopalová's acting, especially her bodily motion, gestures and facial expression, and the organisation of stage space in scenography.

Image schemas (and metaphors) in Alcina's conceptualization of sorrow

The crossmodal correspondence driving direction-scenographic concept in this production is organised by the concept of NARROW SPACE/ NARROW CONTAINER which I propose as a modification or derivation of the most common image schemas: CONTAINER or even PATH. I determine the image schema that I analyse based on elements from different modes, particularly the music and the complex scenic/scenographic elements, such as movements, gestures, size of the field of view, and posture. We can imagine a narrow corridor, a tight passage or space in which an object/body is situated or through which it moves. These situations involve spatial constraints

21 "But what is Alcina moaning about?"

and boundaries. What is important is the "narrowness" of the space in which the object is located and the potential "tightness" of the boundary parts or surfaces of this space – CONTAINER restricted in width or (narrow) PATH.

With her body and its movement in space, Vykopalová implies/expresses an OBJECT or several OBJECTs of different kinds: her whole body, an object (heart) that she can hold in her hands with a symmetrical gesture of both hands, a posture in which her arms and shoulders are pointing towards each other as if everything is directed inwards (into the body), etc. This OBJECT behaves or is treated as if it were bound and pushed by some FORCE(S) from these boundaries inwards into its own centre/interior. Or as if the OBJECT is moving, coming from the boundaries of the space (CONTAINER) it's assigned to, it can be perceived as narrowing the given space from the CONTAINER into a corridor (based on the combination of the two image schemas PATH and CONTAINER).

In the following paragraphs I will first explain which modes this concept interrelates, and then show how scenography develops the semiosis of this situation by the concept of "VAST SPACE" or "BORDERLESS SPACE", in some ways contrasting to the concept of "NARROW CONTAINER". What is important in my analysis is above all the characteristics that organise these spaces (NARROW CONTAINER AND VAST/ BORDERLESS SPACE): THE NARROWNESS AND VASTNESS/ BORDERLESSNESS.[22]

On the basis of my long-time experience with listening to Baroque music, supported by the treatises focused on theory of affects reflecting the music of this period (cf. Dykast 2005),[23] I argue that in the A and A' parts of the aria under discussion a concept is manifested, which I propose to term as "Baroque music anxiety". It's worth adding that I conceptualised the listener's experience firstly in Czech. The Czech equivalent of the concept of "anxiety" is "úzkost" in this context. The Czech word "úzkost" can also be explained in English as "unease", "angst" or "fear". In Czech, the notion "úzkost" covers an implicit spatial dimension – translatable into English as "narrowness" of the space. It expresses the feeling in a body caused by stress or embarrassment. This concept has bodily connotations as e.g. stomach clenched, inner rigidity, retreating into oneself. Conceptually, the feelings and their bodily "manifestations"/symptoms are conceptualised in spatial terms of "NARROW(ED) SPACE". The English concept of "anxiety" can be etymologically traced via Latin word "anxius", further via "angere", "anguere" (to "choke", "squeeze"), figuratively "to torment, cause distress," to the proto-Indo-European root "angh" ("tight", "painfully constricted", "painful"). (Anxious In *Online Etymology Dictionary* 2024) The complex meaning of "Baroque music anxiety", consisting also of fear, painful sadness, etc. that Baroque music is capable of, correlates with the spatial conceptualisation of the conveyed bodily experience of the emotion of sadness in terms of NARROWNESS (NARROW SPACE).

In the music of the Baroque period, some compositional techniques can be identified that support this kind of spatial conceptualisation. They are based on the closeness of some constitutive elements (typically tones) in space. Since we

22 With this concept I would like to emphasise the fact that one of the most important characteristics of this space is the absence of borders.

23 On the emotions of sadness, anxiety, etc. expressed by the practices of (early) Baroque music, specifically in the case of the "musicalised lament/crying", in the genre of the musical lament and as part of opera, see especially the works by Silke Leopold (2002; 2008) or Ellen Rosand (1991).

conventionally do conceptualise music material spatially,[24] we can characterise (some typical features of) Baroque music in terms of the idea of close spatial proximity of the elements (tones), which are creating the boundaries of a narrow space between them. Among these elements, also appearing in the aria under discussion, I emphasise the following: *chromaticism* (use of semitones that are not part of the basic key of the piece), *minor key* and *dissonance*. For example, chromaticism can evoke (affective) tension (Meyer 1956: 218), uncertainty (Meyer 1956: 221) and sadness (e.g. Meyer 1956, Gabrielsson – Lindström 2010: 374, 386); minor key is often associated with grief, melancholy (Hevner 1935: 103); and dissonance can be used to highlight emotional moments such as pain, fear (Juslin – Sloboda 2013: 596) or generally unpleasant emotions (e.g. Dellacherie – Roy – Hugueville – Peretz – Samson 2011). All three composition techniques share the same basis: They can – among other things – be characterised (mostly at the harmonic level) by the proximity of intervals. In terms of cross-modal correspondence, the distances between the tones are perceived "small"/"close", creating an image of tight/close/narrow space in mind. This results in that feeling of spatial conceptualisation: NARROWNESS.

The image schema of NARROW (possibly also TIGHT) SPACE/CONTAINER is a substantial part of acting in the aria. Vykopalová sings the first and the third parts (A and A') in more or less steady posture. Most of the time she stays right in the middle of the stage. If she leaves the central point, she comes back again later. The direction concept of her eye movement is based on her gaze being performed in a similarly concentrated way, i.e. in the relatively restricted, narrow area. For most of the time in both parts (A, A'), but especially in the A part, she stares straight in front of her, a little stiffly, fixedly. She uses a very narrow part of the field of her own vision. Both of her hands never leave the chest area most of the time. The gestures are often symmetrical, staying close to the heart area like preserving it. The hands define a relatively narrow field and only occasionally move away from (but return to) the heart.

The contrast comes in the short part B. Vykopalová moves almost all over the stage, with large gestures, mostly illustrating – in accordance with the text – the majesty of the queen. Even the gaze leaves the narrowly defined field from the A part. In part B, there is almost nothing left of the established NARROWNESS. Vykopalová leaves the centre, moving temperamentally with big gestures, i.e. opposite to the narrow area depicted by her hands in the A part, in concordance with the change in rhythm and tempo (allegro).[25] The B part also includes the moment in which she pushes a fragment of the house with Ruggiero and Bradamante into the left portal, singing "I am the queen".

At the beginning of the third part (A'), Vykopalová seems to return to her previous "narrow" way of acting, again the "heartbeat" andante is performed by music. However, over time, towards the end of the A' part, the NARROWNESS she has created in part A is gradually decomposed. This is indicated, for example, by the increasing volatility of the gaze, the sudden loosening of the initially precise "stiff" gestures; even the body tension (slightly) decreases compared to the A part. But the movement remains in contrast to the great gestures performed in part B. Gradually, the movement of the whole body relaxes. It is as if Alcina can no longer hold the "pattern", she loses the

24 There is a great deal of work that is concerned with the analysis of specific spatial conceptualizations of music. See e.g. (Zbikowski 2002), (Lu – Thompson 2018), (Maimon – Lamy – Eitan 2021).

25 Also, the music contrasts in terms of "proximity" of the tones.

firmness of her position. With the last notes of the aria, in a completely "decentralised" location, the actress turns her steps and her gaze to the right side, mirrored wall of the stage, subsequently abandoning any pattern and just looking into herself. This closing of the aria with Vykopalová's acting can be clearly explained in terms of conceptual metaphor SEEING IS KNOWING: Alcina (Vykopalová) looks into the mirror to know herself or, more precisely, the current state of her affairs.

The very ornamentation of the tones, typical of the third part (A') of the da capo aria, can also be seen as a symptom of the transformation, the disintegration of the "NARROWNESS". The vocal ornaments seem to disrupt the scheme of uniform tones presented in the first part (A).

The light design also plays an important role in the third part. At the beginning of this part, Alcina is represented only in the form of a silhouette of Vykopalová's body, immersed in the gloom, against the slightly darkened but still contrasting colour of the orange horizon. At the height of emotional tension of this part, the light illuminates the stage sharply and its power is magnified by the "aggressive" tones of the "orange desert" on the horizon, strongly implying aridity. Towards the end of the aria, the scene fades to twilight, but darkens just enough to allow the gaze of Vykopalová/Alcina in the mirror to be seen.[26]

The correspondence across the modes (music, sung text, scenography, and acting) characterised so far was organised by the principle based on NARROWNESS to create and share (multimodally) emotion of sorrow. I will now focus on how scenography modifies this emotion.

The scenography is a bare stage floor, rear horizon/prospectus showing orange shades of sand dunes bordered by a darkened sky in the upper half, and both sides of the stage are made up of huge "mirrors" reflecting the stage space including the rear horizon and the actions.

From the aforementioned pushing of the house fragment back into the left mirrored wall in Part B, the scenography maximises the space visible to the audience: a bare stage floor with no obstructions, a rear prospectus running off the horizon into the "infinity" of the sky, side mirrored walls reflecting the dunes on the horizon and thus enlarging the space even more. The VAST SPACE as Alcina's background is bound to the meaning "already" expressed in her previous actions. Alcina's sorrow or anxiety were represented/conceptualised as the objects (Alcina's body, heart, sight; tones of music etc.) restricted by the boundaries of a narrow space. What does the VASTNESS of the SPACE represent? What addition to the meaning does it provide? We can consider several possible meanings. But all possibilities show or require a cross-modal correspondence.

For example, the VAST SPACE can be mapped onto the quantity of the emotion – the space referring to the notion of a big amount of the emotion (sorrow). The lighting design in the scene works in stark contrasts. Sometimes it plunges Vykopalová and the darkened horizon into darkness or a very subdued blue-black atmosphere in order to leave or gradually make the silhouette fade or stand out. In the most emotionally intense moments, in concert with other modes (the dynamics of the music and singing

26 Her gaze is now focused directly into the mirror. For the STRAIGHT image schema analysis, refer to (Cienki 1998). The mirror, seen as a CONTAINER image schema (Cook 2010), can represent Alcina and her soul. She looks into it to assess her situation, including her emotions, as a concluding point of the scene. The transformation from NARROW to STRAIGHT image schema could also be examined, but it is beyond the scope of this study.

in forte or fortissimo), the colours of the desert dunes are "turned" into a stark (almost reddish) orange. At this moment, the space is not only VAST but gives cross-modally (sight to touch) the impression of heat. Further, the colour and shapes of the dune pattern can be linked to the bloodstream, even to the arteries in the heart. If we bind these visual percepts with the rhythm of the music (andante as heartbeat) and with text in which the key word is "heart".

The emotion of sorrow is conceptualised by the OBJECT squeezed in NARROW SPACE (Alcina's body or the "imagined" object she's holding), presumably the heart, as the keyword and its context imply, together with scenography and acting: The heart in danger is an expressed multimodal metaphor of an OBJECT (heart) being in a NARROW SPACE and squeezed/pushed by its boundaries. It is endangered. This heart is foregrounded against the background of the burning arid desert, reflecting the endlessness (conceptualised in terms of space: VAST/BORDERLESS SPACE) of the sorrow. Moreover, when the light design intensifies the colours of the background, the VASTNESS (of the space, and emotion) arises as well.

All in all, the scenography, particularly the VAST/BORDERLESS SPACE schema contrasting the NARROWNESS schema directing Vykopalová's acting (in congruence with some characteristic "Baroque music anxiety" elements) takes out Alcina's inner space, emotions, embodied feelings.[27] The scenography, as is typical for it especially in opera, manifests the inner, the unreachable, by outer means. The hugeness of Alcina's sorrow is conceptualised as a heart left in a deserted, inhospitable place. Scenography maybe highlights the very characteristics of the state of her heart after being "betrayed", i.e. deserted.

The image schemas that organise the direction-scenographic conception of the production across modes can be observed in other productions of *Alcina* and this particular aria as well. If we focus, at least for a brief comparison, on some other productions of Alcina and specifically on the dismembered aria, we can mention, for example BALANCE, VERTICALITY (Gibbs 2005: 117) connected with up-down orientation. We can recognize the VERTICALITY schema in the scenic conceptualization of Alcina's situation in several different productions, often in combination with the BALANCE schema.

For example, soprano Sandrine Piau in the 2015 Brussells production of *Alcina*, during the aria, interacts with a simple chair on a baroque historicized stage. At the beginning of Part A, the chair (symbol of the throne) is "ready" for her action lying on the ground. Piau interacts with it at first with her eyes fixed on it from a distance, figuring out her situation. She is alone with the chair on the stage, but the central position is closer to the chair, with Alcina standing to the left, off-centre. Her gestures are rather wider, her hands pointing towards the ground, slightly away from her body. Towards the end of Part A, Piau's whole body lowers down to the fallen chair. In B, she sets the chair in its normal (for a chair), vertical position. She is the queen again. The chair remains in this position in part A', but it is Alcina who moves from the horizontal position of her body to the vertical position on the floor: the throne is standing, the queen is not (she has fallen to the ground). Towards the end of the aria, Alcina still slightly rises, stands up, but alone, slowly (as if cautiously) while singing the repeated word "Perché?" ("Why?"). Finally, Piau exits the stage through the back of the right-hand portal, leaving a "de-verticalised" chair.

27 In a documentary dedicated to the production, director Jiří Heřman names Alcina's emotions with the words hopelessness, fear, anxiety. (NDB 2022: 4':51–53'')

The search for BALANCE through a series of "UPs" and "DOWNS" as a direction-scenographic conceptualisation of Alcina's inner torment can also be found, for example, in the well-known 1990 production with Arleen Auger in the title role. The singer also struggles with verticality, she also interacts with the chair (right in part A she falls helplessly on it), etc. It should be noted that in most cases, including those mentioned, the sopranos complete their sadness in the A' section with a fairly developed ornate vocal component. Unlike Vykopalová, who also follows this principle of the da capo aria, but it is as if the "confession" of the anguish has been partly transferred to another mode – the scenography.

Conclusion

In this paper, I examined the image schemas as the organising principle of the direction-scenographic concept of the Brno 2022 production of Händel's *Alcina*, directed by Jiří Heřman. In one of the most dramatically important scenes of the whole work, the director employs a cross-modal mapping and correspondence between different modalities (music, sung text, acting, scenography, etc.) to convey emotions as intensely as possible, driven by the image schemas of NARROW SPACE and VAST/BORDERLESS SPACE.

In this scene, the da capo lamento aria "Ah! mio cor," the direction, scenography and acting are grounded (in relation to the music) in the concept of "NARROWNESS"/ NARROW SPACE, derived from CONTAINER and PATH image schemas. This concept stems from a unique set of compositional techniques within Baroque music, which I propose to term as "Baroque music anxiety." The NARROW SPACE is mapped across various modalities of theatrical production—including music, sung text, acting, scenography, and the passage of time. The 11-minute process of sharing sorrow, performed by soprano Pavla Vykopalová, is driven by these cross-modal mappings and correspondences. This strategy enables the emotional weight of the scene to resonate powerfully, marking it as a crucial turning point in the entire musical drama.

This article explores how image schemas function not only as cognitive frameworks but also as essential tools for understanding the integration of multiple artistic modalities in a theatrical context. By highlighting the interaction between music and other modalities of theatrical performance through the lens of image schemas, the analysis reveals how directors and performers can effectively manipulate spatial concepts to enhance emotional expression. This research also underscores the importance of interdisciplinary approaches in studying opera in performance, emphasising how cognitive theories can illuminate artistic practices. Ultimately, this paper offers insights into the dynamic relationship between space, emotion, and performance, contributing to a deeper appreciation of how contemporary productions can draw on the emotional core of classic works.

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Fig. 11. Georg Friedrich Händel: *Alcina*, NDB 2022, Pavla Vykopalová, © Marek Olbrymek.