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edited by Janelle G. Reinelt and Joseph R. Roach



# Critical Theory and Performance

REVISED AND ENLARGED EDITION

Edited by

Janelle G. Reinelt and Joseph R. Roach

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*In Memory of  
Dwight and Bert*



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## Preface to the Second Edition

In the first edition of *Critical Theory and Performance*, having pondered competing strategies for organizing the material into categories, we wrote, "There is no doubt that a different taxonomy would have produced a different book, but the present plan seeks to provide a preliminary map to the field as it looks to us today." Nearly fifteen years ago, the field changed, in part because it has consolidated some of the methodologies and critical practices that were the focus of the first edition. Relying again on "the field as it looks to us today," we have reworked the sections into which the volume is divided, once again noting continuity and change. We are as convinced as ever of the provisionality of these categories.

We begin with a section titled "Performance Analysis," an umbrella term affording discussion of how actual performances are approached. The sections "Semiotics" and "Phenomenology" address two major theoretical understandings of how performances make meanings, affect audiences, and create innovation. Cultural Studies, which once seemed like a discrete category of emerging interdisciplinary work and therefore was a section in the first edition, has developed until it broadly characterizes a familial affiliation across fields. We have created new sections for "Postcolonial Studies," "Critical Race Theory," and "Performance Studies," where some material from the previous edition appears alongside new essays. The section "Feminism(s)" in the first edition has become "Gender and Sexualities," and we have added a section "Mediatized Cultures," as the burgeoning influence of technological innovation has made serious theorizing of the virtual and the global a necessary part of what we do.

During the past decade, performance studies has emerged in relation to theater studies in such a way that new generations of Ph.D. students engage with scholarship that touches on the many points of mutual interest between these different but fruitfully interdependent terrains. Performance studies now maintains a focus group within the Association for Theatre in Higher Education, is everywhere integrated into programs sponsored by the American Society for Theatre Research, and has its own international organization and journal. Theater studies, meantime, continues to develop, as can be seen from picking up any one of the field's key journals, from *Theatre Journal* to *Theatre Research* or *Theatre Survey*. *The Drama Review (TDR)* continues to emphasize performance studies, but not to the exclusion of scholarship that would be at home in any of the other journals, just as *Theatre Journal* publishes many "crossover" essays. The same authors can be found in *Theatre Journal*, *Modern Drama*, or *Performance Research International*. In academic departments, colleagues who were trained in one or the other tradition teach side by side and frequently collaborate. Indeed, today more of their students than ever are cross-training in theater and performance studies.

If there was a "theory explosion" at the time we were assembling the

first edition of this book, there are now those who think the “age of theory” is over. We do not. Theory has changed and transformed our field by enlarging the very conceptions of performance, returning performance history and criticism to philosophy, and overhauling the traditional delineations between texts and performances, as we described in the first edition. These changes have had long-term consequences for how we think and write and perform. In addition, much of the theory of the past decade has been absorbed into scholarship in such a way that it is taken for granted—not as visible, perhaps, in its conceptual vocabulary and syntax as when we were first learning about these theories and what they could do, in the context of performances, to bring new ideas forward. Theory has provided fresh starting points each time someone begins a research project or rethinks familiar terrain. There is no going back, and we have no doubt that a decade from now, the scholarly and artistic situation will be somewhat different again, while having consolidated many of the theoretical insights of this generation’s work.

When we envisioned the first edition of this book, jotting ideas on a bar napkin in Lawrence, Kansas, in 1988, there was no comparable resource easily available for course use. Creating a second edition, we are aware of other volumes that now provide their own perspectives on the relationship between theory and performance. We hope it will be useful to compare and contrast not only the changes we chronicle, but also the various competing ways of organizing materials in order to construct an intellectual history of the field. For the most part, this book is limited to North American scholars; other regions and nations apprehend the architecture of the field rather differently. The international conversations about these topics have provided both of us with professional stimulation and satisfaction during recent years, and have influenced the character of our own thinking.

—J. G. R. and J. R. R.

# Introduction to the First Edition

To take up a book on critical theory and performance is immediately to encounter the topography of *post*. There are postmodernism, poststructuralism, post-Marxism, postfeminism, postcolonialism—all designating a departure from something prior. Of course, the use of the prefix *post* is incrementally problematic: in the case of *postmodernism* and *poststructuralism* it indicates that there once was a monolith called “modernism” or “structuralism” that is now definitively defunct; in the case of *post-Marxism* and *postfeminism* it marks as “over” certain political theories that are in fact changing but vitally alive. As for *postcolonial*, any informed observer would be justified in wondering what possible accuracy it might have in this presently quite colonial world.

By way of introduction to critical theory and performance, *postmodernism* offers a good starting point. The term reappears frequently in the essays that follow, but it has no chapter of its own. Perhaps this is so because postmodernism represents neither a category nor a method but, rather, as Jean-François Lyotard has observed, a “condition.” The condition it represents reflects the collapse of categories themselves, an implosion that has been attributed to the media-saturated powers of capitalistic production and consumption. Postmodernity has been described as a culture of “hyperrepresentation” in which objects lose their authenticity and become indefinitely reproducible and representable as commodities. “Eclecticism,” Lyotard writes, “is the degree zero of contemporary general culture: one listens to reggae, watches a western, eats McDonald’s food for lunch and local cuisine for dinner, wears Paris perfume in Tokyo and ‘retro’ clothes in Hong Kong; knowledge is a matter for TV games.”<sup>1</sup> Even nature, which it was once art’s theoretical purpose to imitate, becomes a fabrication, a representation of itself, as in the television commercial that shows various species of marine animals joyously applauding petrochemical conglomerates for rescuing the environment from toxic spills. Postmodernism embraces simulations; it distrusts claims to authenticity, originality, or coherence. Postmodernism appropriates the popular debris of retrospective styles; it vacates modernist belief in progress and the perpetual avant-garde. Postmodernism inspires pluralism; it deflates master narratives and totalizing theories.

As editors of this volume, we acknowledge the impact of postmodernism—and of the pluralistic eclecticism it inspires—on critical theories of performance as well as on performances themselves. Performance research and practice both have found in postmodernity a positive stimulus to creative work, an opening out and up of imaginative possibility whereby the emotive and cognitive, the popular and the esoteric, the local and the global can come into play. In his study of the development of performance art, for instance, historian of the American avant-garde Henry M. Sayre substitutes the category-resistant term *undecidability* for pluralism

in order better “to describe the condition of contingency, multiplicity, and polyvocality which dominates the postmodern scene.”<sup>2</sup> In one of the most quoted essays of the last decade, anthropologist Clifford Geertz welcomes the emergent “genre blurring” among collapsing disciplinary categories, and he places performance, which he terms symbolic action, at the head of an agenda for the “refiguration of social thought.”<sup>3</sup>

The exhilaration produced by the blurring of genres cannot be denied, but it makes our necessary task of developing a taxonomy, of organizing the contents of this book and introducing them, a kind of performance in its own right, one that certainly encourages us to leave room for improvisation, but also one that compels us to make choices. We take note here of the ongoing critique of postmodernism by such theorists as Jürgen Habermas, Fredric Jameson, and Christopher Norris, one of the burdens of which is the slackness of its politics amid its play of shimmering surfaces.<sup>4</sup> In face of the postmodern multiplicity of performance research, we accept responsibility for the politics of the categories we have constructed.

These politics intensify most sharply, predictably enough, as we approach the most contested boundaries. Feminism, for example, became a plural section in our first discussions, but equal representation of its divergent positions exceeds not only our grasp but also our reach. We also chose not to develop separate categories on the basis of racial, ethnic, or national differences, though, of course, work pertaining to ethnicity appears throughout the collection. Similarly, we chose not to make a category out of theories of gay male and lesbian performances, though several essays pertain to these topics, including one on the politics and representation of AIDS. We do not intend to efface important differences, but neither do we wish to create taxonomic ghettos to contain them. We did not include a section on the pure aesthetics of performance, transcending the realm of ideology, because we could not imagine one.

Each of the eight sections below begins with an introduction to the major critical theories pertinent to what we inclusively call performance. Each introduction also includes the identification of seminal texts and key terminology, and each is followed by several essays that demonstrate how the critical theory is used by practitioners in the field. Each of the essays collected here, however, might have found an appropriate place in more than one of our sections. There is no doubt that a different taxonomy would have produced a different book, but the present plan seeks to provide a preliminary map to the field as it looks to us today. Three categories—Marxism, feminism(s), and, arguably, cultural studies—derive from an explicitly doctrinal yet interdisciplinary position or set of positions. Others—semiotics, psychoanalysis, and history—organize themselves around their respective disciplinary practices and methodologies. Still others—deconstruction, hermeneutics, and phenomenology—represent philosophically based strategies of reading and interpretation. This is not to say that the discipline of history is without a doctrinal aspect or that Marxism lacks a philosophical basis; on the contrary, it is to recognize that categories overlap in complex networks of influence and affiliation.

We have sought to recognize such affiliations—and at the same time to open up a space for taxonomic improvisation—in three ways. First, we have sometimes included essays with a methodological base in one field within categories organized around another. The essays by Kate Davy (in “Feminism[s]”) and David Román (in “After Marx”), for example, share the topic of gender critique in performances by gay male artists. While Ellen Donkin’s theater historical essay joins the section on feminism(s), Marvin Carlson’s consideration of Mikhail Bakhtin’s theories of dialogic play resides in “Theater History and Historiography”—and so forth. Second, we have provided what we hope is a rigorous system of cross-referencing in which the keywords are appropriately glossed and indexed. Third, we have invited two of our contributors, Herbert Blau and Sue-Ellen Case, to conclude the volume by writing summary essays under the rubric of “Critical Convergences,” momentary sites where ideas come together but do not come to rest.

Much of the turbulence generated by performance and performance scholarship, which has proved productive and frustrating by turns, stems from the divisions created by the diverse institutional sites of research in the field. These include departments of theater, performance studies, communication, literature, media studies, and anthropology—and their respective professional associations. The dialectics that they produce include theory versus practice, history versus theory, dramatic text versus stage performance, performance (as a high culture form like most performance art) versus theater (as a popular form like circus), and theater (as a high culture form like the production of classic plays) versus performance (as popular culture, including rituals and social dramas). Some of these divisions, such as the almost completely separate institutional development of both dance research and musicology, may explain omissions from this book, which we hope future scholars will address.<sup>5</sup>

While it clearly emphasizes the extraliterary, the collection contains a number of essays concerned with traditional dramatic texts. The range and diversity of performance genres do, however, enter the collection in juxtaposition to and in potentially subversive dialogue with canonical and other texts: a Hmong shaman, a *King Lear* in the mode of Indian kathakali, stand-up comics, a circus sharpshooting act, jazz, and performance art—all exert pressure on the dominant status of the text as the privileged object of critical theory and on the exclusivity of high culture forms as its central domain. Yet, while this collection goes beyond the canon, it also remains canonical since part of the appeal of the new theory is its ability to enhance and revitalize traditional texts. Theory has also, we believe, inspired new ways of creating texts and performance events, or, at least, created a new climate for their inception, and some of the essays discuss this work. Indeed, we see an inherently political character to the performance analysis that has emerged from critical theory; it revises, challenges, rewrites, interrogates, and sometimes condemns received meanings.

We have collected these essays, however, with a sense that they belong to a particular tradition. Theory, as a discursive literature devoted to

fundamental principles, has had a longer history in the academic study of theater than in almost any other discipline in the humanities. Venerable anthologies such as Barrett Clark's collection of dramatic theory and criticism introduced generations of theater students to Plato and Lodovico Castelvetro, August Schlegel, and Emile Zola—broad reflections on general theories of art and literature—at a time when English departments emphasized New Criticism, the close reading of particular literary masterpieces.<sup>6</sup> Many theater departments require a course in theory, separate from dramatic literature and theatrical history. In theater and drama studies, the search for general structural principles across a variety of historical periods and genres has produced some significant theoretical statements.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, theatrical performance has assembled an impressive array of theoretical writings concerning stage practices, including, for example, Richard Wagner and Adolph Appia on the social and aesthetic role of the total work of art, Vsevolod Meyerhold and Bertolt Brecht on the political implications of that role, and (prophetically) Antonin Artaud on its disintegration into fragments of autonomous gesture and obsolete languages in a culture with “no more masterpieces.”<sup>8</sup> Many of the theatrical practitioner/theorists, such as Constantin Stanislavski in acting and Robert Edmond Jones in stage design, have exerted a continuing day-to-day influence on the curriculum and pedagogical approaches of theater programs.<sup>9</sup>

Our collection does not prove that there is nothing new under the sun. There has been a theory explosion, and it has had important consequences for both theater studies and other humanities as well. First, it has enlarged the conception of performance in ways not envisioned in the traditional study of drama and therefore reduced some of the separation of specialties between theater history, theory/criticism, and theater practice, a trend strongly reflected by the movement between categories in this collection.

Second, the “new” theory has returned the humanities to philosophy: performance history and criticism, along with other humanities disciplines such as English, modern languages, and history, have returned to a fundamental examination of the underlying assumptions that govern their own methodology in particular and their understanding of objects of inquiry in general. Both epistemological and metaphysical questions have been reopened, and they have forced a reassessment of all that has “gone without saying” for too long. Some of these fundamental issues have involved the nature of representation and its relationship to a reality it doubles/produces/defies; the exact relationship is precisely the question. The twin problems of agency and subjectivity, what constitutes them and how they work, also return studies of performance to philosophical questions of the nature of the self, to what used to be called “philosophical anthropology.” In fact, much of the “new theory” derives from the work of philosophers (or perhaps “post-philosophers”): Jacques Derrida's critique of metaphysics, Paul Ricoeur's phenomenology, J. L. Austin's speech / act theory, and Jean-François Lyotard's conception of the postmodern all constitute traditional philosophical thought or its undoing by philosophers.

Of course, philosophy has always spilled over into other discourses (some think it colonizes all academic disciplines); to this list we can add, among others, Lacan's revision of Freud, Raymond Williams's and Fredric Jameson's revisions of Marx, and Foucault's epistemological critique. Even to begin to make such a list is to realize how intensive and productive the theory explosion has been.

Finally, the new theory has provided a methodology and an impetus to specify the meaning of an old cliché: a text is different on the stage than it is on the page. Theory has done so principally by radically questioning the idea of what a text is. Semiotics, for example, has provided notions of multiple sign systems coinciding in performance. The difference between a playscript and a performance text can be theorized and articulated. The audience can finally be interrogated as to its role in the production of meaning. There are concrete reasons why a show differs from night to night, venue to venue, cast to cast. Perhaps most important, performance can be articulated in terms of politics: representation, ideology, hegemony, resistance.<sup>10</sup> In a way, theory gives theater back again to the body politic.

Ironically, the history of the discipline of theater studies is one of fighting for autonomy from English and speech departments, insisting on a kind of separation from other areas of study. It was necessary, politically necessary, to claim this distinctiveness, even at the expense of becoming somewhat insular and hermetic—a result that unfortunately became true of many departments of theater. Now, however, it is even more necessary to recognize and insist on the interdependency of a related series of disciplines and also on the role of performance in the production of culture in its widest sense.

—J. G. R. and J. R. R.

## NOTES

1. Jean-François Lyotard, "Answering the Question: What Is Postmodernism?" in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 76.

2. Henry M. Sayre, *The Object of Performance: The American Avant-Garde since 1970* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1989), xiii.

3. Clifford Geertz, "Blurred Genres: The Refiguration of Social Thought" in *The American Scholar* 49 (1980), reprinted in *Critical Theory since 1965*, ed. Hazard Adams and Leroy Searle (Tallahassee: Florida State University Press, 1986), 514–23.

4. Jürgen Habermas, "Modernity: An Incomplete Project," in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (Port Townsend, Wash.: Bay Press, 1983); Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1991); Christopher Norris, *What's Wrong with Postmodernism: Critical Theory and the Ends of Philosophy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990). See also Jonathan Arac, ed., *Postmodernism and Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

5. For the stimulating dialogue between dance scholarship, theater history, and performance theory, see Susan Leigh Foster, *Reading Dancing: Bodies and Subjects in*

*Contemporary American Dance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986); and Philip Auslander and Marcia B. Siegel, "Two (Re)Views of Susan Leigh Foster's *Reading Dancing*," *TDR: A Journal of Performance Studies* 32, no. 4 (1988): 7–31.

6. Barrett H. Clark, *European Theories of the Drama* (1918; rev. ed., New York: Crown, 1965); and Bernard F. Dukore, *Dramatic Theory and Criticism: Greeks to Grotowski* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1974).

7. See, for example: Bernard Beckerman, *Dynamics of Drama: Theory and Method of Analysis* (1970; reprint, New York: Drama Book Specialists, 1979); Michael Goldman, *The Actor's Freedom: Toward a Theory of Drama* (New York: Viking Press, 1975); Manfred Pfister, *The Theory and Analysis of Drama*, trans. John Halliday (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

8. Key modernist texts are anthologized in Eric Bentley, ed., *The Theory of the Modern Stage: An Introduction to Modern Theatre and Drama* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968); and E. T. Kirby, ed., *Total Theatre* (New York: Dutton, 1969).

9. For a comprehensive survey of theatrical theory, which charts the boundaries of the subject, see Marvin Carlson, *Theories of the Theatre: A Historical and Critical Survey from the Greeks to the Present* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1984).

10. For a collection of essays that acknowledge the political articulations of performance, see Sue-Ellen Case and Janelle Reinelt, eds., *The Performance of Power: Theatrical Discourse and Politics* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1991).



# Performance Analysis

It seemed to me (around 1954) that a science of signs might stimulate social criticism, and that Sartre, Brecht, and Saussure could concur in this project.

—Roland Barthes

It is impossible . . . to decompose a perception, to make it into a collection of sensations, because in it the whole is prior to the parts.

—Maurice Merleau-Ponty

Perhaps what we do most in theater and performance studies is analyze performances. Large portions of our classroom hours are devoted to discussing texts and performances, and the relationships between them; or between historical performances, and their conditions of production and reception. Underlying many of our debates about the difference between live and mediated experiences of performance is some idea about what constitutes performance and also about what constitutes the experience of attending a, or to, performance. Outside the United States, particularly in Europe, curricula in theater and performance studies almost always include classes in performance analysis. From Sweden to Germany, concentrated attention is paid to the pedagogy of performance analysis. Although this prescription is sometimes not the case in the United States, most North American curricula include introductory level courses in which students are expected to attend and write about performances. We foreground performance analysis in this volume as a preeminent activity of the field, embracing the need to examine tools and processes whereby such analyses are conducted.

Semiotics and phenomenology, long in conversation with each other, have emerged over the last decade as major methodologies of performance analysis. Deconstruction, on the other hand, has become more important for its wide-ranging philosophical contributions than for its earlier analytic deconstructive procedures. We have organized this section using semiotics and phenomenology as key performance tools; other sections of the book, in particular “After Marx,” “Psychoanalysis,” and “Gender and Sexualities,” will be seen to be the home of current reflections on Derrida and deconstruction.

Perhaps the most prolific theorist of performance analysis, French scholar Patrice Pavis, is exemplary of the development of this practice. His books and articles have proposed methods for analyzing all elements of performance, including the *mise-en-scène*, the actor, auditory, visual, and spatial aspects of performance, and spectators' experiences. He was an early proponent of semiotics and a maker of systems and charts, but he also has always recognized their limitations. Pavis acknowledges the need to keep transcending rational and cognitive methods in order to find adequate modes of analysis for the affective and embodied aspects of analysis and spectatorship. In his recently translated *Analyzing Performance*, he develops a narrative in which the 1980s saw a reaction against the segmentation and overly organized categories of semiotics in favor of a "global" reaffirmation of materiality and libidinal investments. Urging the development of a systematic synthetic process for maintaining the cognitive emphasis on meaning in tandem with the embodied experiences of energy and flow, Pavis summarizes the current challenge of performance analysis: "The description of a performance always negotiates the space between a totalizing demand for synthesis and an empirical individualization, between order and chaos, between abstraction and materiality."<sup>1</sup> Before exploring what such a negotiation entails, however, it is necessary to revisit the terrain of theatrical semiotics and phenomenology in order to grasp the specifics of their approaches.

Semiotics developed out of linguistics. Early theoreticians of the sign such as Ferdinand Saussure and Charles Peirce saw that the structure of language was useful for understanding the structure of any sign system. Languages make meanings only differentially; that is, within a given language, words only derive meaning by reference to other words. The particular language system makes meanings possible through rules, conventions, distinctions. Since not only language but also human behaviors and customs are signs that operate within the organizing patterns of social systems, Saussure called for a "science of semiology."<sup>2</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss, doing structuralist anthropology, recognized the affinity between cultural and linguistic analysis and explicitly linked his work to semiology.

Signs, following Saussure, are divided into signifiers and signifieds. The signifier is the sound, or mark, that stands in for the signified, which is the concept, or meaning. Together they point to the referent, which is the actuality referenced. The letters *p e a c h* form a word signifying the concept "peach" and may be used to point to a particular round, yellow piece of fruit. Each of these connections is, however, arbitrary. That is, a different group of markings might just as well serve as signifier for the signified peach. Meanings are therefore conventional. Furthermore, signifiers establish their meaning by reference to what they are not: *peach* is understood as not *apple* or *perch*. Thus, meaning is the functional result of the difference between signs, and always might be otherwise. If meaning is always only present in difference, the stability of any particular sign system overturns. A specific signifier means not only in relation to one other signifier that it is not, but to a whole tissue of signifiers, potentially end-

less, through which meaning moves and slips in an elusive play of signification. From this view meaning is actually always absent, because it never simply “is” present in the sign. Furthermore, the reading is not authorized by any stable center of meaning, any structure or system that is not itself implicated in the play of signification.

A fascinating series of photographs by David Hockney illustrate some of these ideas. Hockney combined a number of separate shots into composite or collage pieces called “joiners.” In “Noya and Bill Brandt with Self-Portrait,” a series of Polaroid photos of Noya and Bill Brandt are on the floor while the figures of Noya and Bill look down at them. Forty-nine photos make up the whole collage, which represents Noya and Bill looking at themselves through the photo fragments. The spaces in between the photos form a grid that simultaneously overlays and undergirds the whole. Each piece of the composition can be assigned meaning in relation to the pieces around it, and, as the eye moves, the composite meanings change—different photos are foregrounded, different ways of seeing come into prominence and recede. Bill has, from one standpoint, two heads; Noya has four feet. They are looking at twelve or thirteen Hockneys. Because of the grid, the edges of the photos are seen as distinct for each individual photo and also as arbitrary in that they do not represent “real” edges. Edges are made or composed, have no transcendent authority. Taken as a whole, the photographs make up a kind of language that can be read, but the units are not stable or fixed. The center of the collage seems to move, and the spaces between emphasize the ephemeral unity of the collage. The eye looking seems to slip, to be unable to “fix” on anything—or is it the surface that is slippery?

In terms of semiotics, the meaning of the whole emerges from the relations between the varying units making up the composition, each of which as a signifier derives its value from its position within the picture-system. However, these signifiers are not stable; each only composes itself into a sign in relation to what it is not—and the mobility of the composition keeps the indeterminacy of the system on view. While the relational aspects of this “system” are the key to discerning meaning, meaning is clearly linked to cognitive processes and reading competencies on the part of the spectators.

However, there is another way to grasp the experience of looking at the photographs, one that stresses the experiential and perceptual aspects of looking, and posits that which is seen as a gestalt of stimuli that is given to be grasped in its partialness by an apprehending subject. This method is phenomenological.

As a philosophical school or movement, phenomenology has developed many versions and emphases as it has evolved historically. The best-known early proponent of phenomenology was Edmund Husserl, who at the turn of the century and into its early decades, based his effort on describing the initial encounter that strikes the senses when subjects meet objects, believing that knowledge comes through bracketing off all presuppositions about the nature of experience in order to focus on the structure of

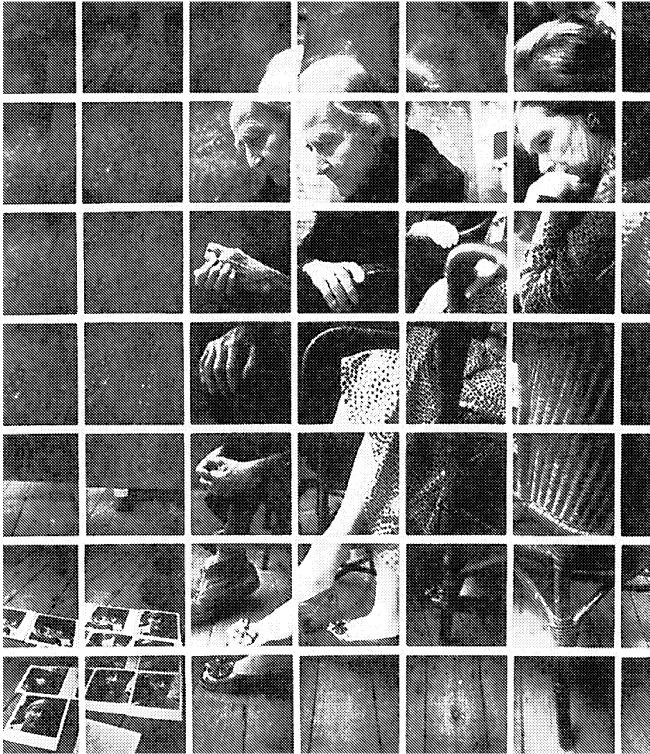


Fig. 1. David Hockney, "Noya and Bill Brandt with Self-Portrait."  
Photo credit: Rogers, Coleridge and White Ltd.

the objects as given to consciousness.<sup>3</sup> Knowledge lies in the relationship between consciousness and its objects, and is not inherent in the object, nor is it a property of a unified preexisting subject. Husserl called this the "phenomenological reduction," and he privileges conceptual and cognitive activity, thus relying on the concept of a transcendental ego.

Unlike Husserl's idealism with its emphasis on mental processes and transcendental subjectivity, Maurice Merleau-Ponty's contribution to phenomenological analysis was to insist on the materiality of the body, and the lived experience of being implicated in a body.<sup>4</sup> As Elizabeth Grosz explains, "Merleau-Ponty locates experience midway between mind and body. Not only does he link experience to the privileged locus of consciousness; he also demonstrates that experience is always necessarily embodied, corporeally constituted, located in and as the subject's incarnation. Experience can only be understood between mind and body—or across them—in their lived conjunction."<sup>5</sup> If experience is relational, then, it is constituted in the encounter between something that is always only partially available to perception, showing itself from a limited given aspect to an embodied subject who is itself constituted through its bodily orientation and its spatial, sensory, and perceptual orientation to the stimulus in question.

Furthermore, the body is both subject and object of consciousness, and while all knowledge comes through the body, the body is not identical to consciousness: it does not totally coincide. Thus, "the body I touch never coincides with the body that touches."<sup>6</sup> Experience is, then, not only the experience of the world; it is also the experience of an aspect of one's own subjectivity—experiencing. It is profoundly self-reflexive and mobile.

Returning to the Hockney collage, we can read it phenomenologi-

cally as well as semiotically. Within the frame of representation, Noya and Bill are seen looking at images of themselves. They are each seeing different versions of the photos, experiencing different relations between themselves as embodied and themselves as images. As a metaphor for lived experience, the collage emphasizes the fragmentation and partiality of both the viewers and the images, but taken as a whole, also emphasizes their coherence, their integration. Moving beyond the mimetic properties of the collage, it is also possible to include the spectator of the collage in the relations under examination, recognizing that any posited viewer is herself an embodied subject grasping in a primary way an experience of looking at, in which the content is also the experience of looking at, and so on, and so on, in infinite regression.

Common then to both semiotics and phenomenology is the notion that the object or mark operates as a kind of signifier that through the hermeneutic process is linked to a signified. In place of this language of the sign, phenomenology uses the discourse of the givenness of phenomena and the apprehension of embodied consciousness.

In recent performance analyses, both semiotic analysis and phenomenological analysis are often unself-consciously embedded within the interpretations offered. A number of scholars have also explicitly used one or another of these approaches and argued on behalf of them. Erika Fischer-Lichte, for example, has developed a comprehensive semiotics of theater, arguing that theater makes use of signs of signs produced by cultural systems.<sup>7</sup> In this metalevel of functioning, theater's signs are not identical to these other signs, but are iconic in relation to them. Theater is thus always a special case. Stan Garner, from a different perspective, argues in *Bodied Spaces* that the opposition between semiotics and other deconstructive theories and phenomenology is falsely predicated on a narrow and non-historical characterization of phenomenology, and urges a reconsideration of the ways the theatrical event is illuminated by analysis of its phenomenological complexity: "From the phenomenological point of view, the living body capable of returning the spectator's gaze represents a methodological dilemma for any theoretical model—like semiotics—that offers to describe performance in 'objective' terms. Alone among the elements that constitute the stage's semiotic field, the body is a sign that looks back."<sup>8</sup>

Both semiotics and phenomenology have by now given rise to highly developed applications to theater and performance studies, not only in the work of Fischer-Lichte and Garner, but in the work of Marvin Carlson, Susan Melrose, Bruce Wilshire, and Bert States, to name the most prominent.<sup>9</sup> In 1992, States was already arguing for the possibilities of seeing semiotics and phenomenology as compatible rather than hostile methods of analysis. Indeed, he cites a passage from an earlier book by Patrice Pavis (*Languages of the Stage*) in order to illustrate that "descriptive methods of semiology and phenomenology are almost equally in evidence."<sup>10</sup> These methods have become the primary methods of performance analysis in our field, and learning to recognize them—whether

they are explicitly associated with one or the other theory, or are implicitly embedded together within an analytic discourse—is a significant and useful task for performance scholars.

In the interests of pursuing this goal, we have printed States's prophetic essay together with a new essay by Marvin Carlson. These two contributions give concentrated accounts of the contours of phenomenological and semiological approaches to theater and performance studies. Following these overviews, two exemplary performance analyses show how these theories can work in practice. Jim Carmody's essay demonstrates a particularly sophisticated use of semiotic analysis to parse a production of Molière's *Misanthrope*. This is followed by an essay by French-Canadian scholar Josette Féral, who in her eclectic and wide-ranging analysis employs techniques from both semiotics and phenomenology as the implicit, embedded substructure of her performance descriptions and analysis.

J. G. R.

## NOTES

1. Patrice Pavis, *Analyzing Performance: Theater, Dance, and Film*, trans. David Williams (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), 18.
2. Saussure's key concepts were published after his death in 1913. See *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Wade Baskin (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966).
3. Key texts by Husserl include *Logical Investigations* (1900), *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy* (1913), *Lectures on the Phenomenology of Inner Time-Consciousness* (1928), and *Cartesian Meditations* (1931).
4. Key texts by Merleau-Ponty include *The Primacy of Perception* (1945) and *The Visible and the Invisible*, published after his death in 1961.
5. Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 95. This is an excellent account of phenomenology and its uses for feminist theory. Much of Grosz's explication is applicable to performance theory.
6. Stanton B. Garner, Jr., *Bodied Spaces: Phenomenology and Performance in Contemporary Drama* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 30.
7. Erika Fischer-Lichte, Jeremy Gaines, and Doris L. Jones, *The Semiotics of Theater: Advances in Semiotics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992).
8. Garner, *Bodied Spaces*, 49.
9. See for example, Marvin Carlson, *Theatre Semiotics: Signs of Life* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990); Susan Melrose, *A Semiotics of the Dramatic Text* (London: Macmillan, 1994); Bruce Wilshire, *Role Playing and Identity: The Limits of Theatre as Metaphor* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982); Bert O. States, *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms: On the Phenomenology of Theater* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), and *The Pleasure of Play* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994).
10. Cf. p. 11.

# Semiotics and Its Heritage

*Marvin Carlson*

Sue-Ellen Case's *Feminism and Theatre* (1988), the first book-length study devoted to the theoretical foundations of a feminist theater, called for a "new poetics," drawing upon a wide range of theoretical strategies to develop alternatives to the traditional patriarchal systems of analysis of dramatic form, practice, and audience response. "For the reader who is unfamiliar with these new theories," Case suggested, "an effective starting-point for the intersection of new theory with performance and feminist poetics may be found in the field of semiotics."<sup>1</sup>

I will return later to consider the significant relationship Case rightly pointed out between semiotics and the development of modern feminist theory in the theater, but I begin with this striking statement by one of the theater's leading contemporary theorists in order to point out that in almost every area of the complex field of modern theatrical theory, as it has developed, let us say, from the 1980s onward, a similar claim might be made. Wherever one looks for an "effective starting-point for the intersection of new theory with performance," one almost invariably comes back to the emergence of semiotics in the late 1960s and 1970s as providing a grounding vocabulary, procedural model, and basic orientation for future work, even work that specifically defined itself in opposition to the semiotic enterprise, such as much so-called poststructuralist and deconstructionist theory and practice.

Semiotics was proposed as a new approach to the study of human social behavior by the father of modern linguistics, Ferdinand de Saussure, in his major work, the 1916 *Course in General Linguistics*. There Saussure called for a "new science" of semiology within the general field of social psychology that would study "the role of signs in social life."<sup>2</sup> The sign, which Saussure proposed as the basic unit of human communication, was a social construct that united a meaning (the "signified") with an abstract representation of that meaning (the "signifier"). Thus in the English language, the signified concept of a particular type of quadruped has been culturally bound to the written signifier *dog*.

Linguistic theorists throughout Europe built upon Saussure's work throughout the following century, but the strategies of his proposed new science also came to be applied to the analysis of a wide variety of cultural phenomena, including the arts. The first major investigations in this area were undertaken between the two world wars by a group of theorists in Czechoslovakia, collectively known as the Prague Linguistic Circle. These theorists became particularly interested in how Saussure's semiotic analysis might be extended to art objects, and a number of them, such as the folklorist Petr Bogatyrev and the avant-garde theatrical director Jindřich Honzl, focused attention upon the semiotics of theater. Two

central concerns—continuing concerns—of theater semiotics were already clearly apparent in the writings of these theorists. One was the multiplicity and variety of signs in the theater, which added to the kinds of linguistic signs explored by Saussure, the visual signs of costumes, scenery, and properties, the auditory signs of music and sound effects, and the most central and complex sign of all, the living body of the actor. The other concern involved the double operations of all such signs, existing simultaneously as present material objects and as signifiers of absent signifieds, so that an audience is aware both of an actor and the character that actor is portraying. Later theorists would characterize these two somewhat contradictory but essential functions as phenomenological and semiotic.

The work of this first generation of theater semioticians was largely forgotten, especially in Western Europe, until the late 1960s, when semiotics reemerged as a major tool in the rapidly developing field of cultural studies. Central to the rediscovery of semiotics was the work of Roland Barthes. Barthes contributed very little directly to the application of semiotics to the study of theater and performance, although he provided a brief but provocative statement concerning the “density of signs” in the theater and the usefulness of semiotics to the study of Brecht within a 1963 interview in what was then the leading French journal devoted to contemporary criticism, *Tel Quel*.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, his very broad definition of the field provided important encouragement for other theorists with a particular interest in theater. In his major work on the subject, the highly influential *Elements of Semiology* in 1964, his laying out of the new field might almost have been written with theater and performance particularly in mind. Here he asserted that semiology “aims to take in any system of signs, whatever their substance and limits; images, gestures, musical sounds, objects and the complex association of all of these, which form the content of ritual, convention or public entertainment: these constitute, if not *languages*, at least systems of signification.”<sup>4</sup>

The appearance of Barthes’s *Elements of Semiology* inspired a number of French theorists to explore the possibilities of a semiotic analysis of theater, and during the late 1960s and early 1970s almost all the writings in this new field were in French. The first book-length study of the subject was Tadeusz Kowsan’s 1970 *Littérature et spectacle dans leurs rapports esthétiques, thématiques et sémiologiques*, although Kowsan had begun publishing his speculations in this area as early as 1968. In addition to recalling the earlier work of the Prague linguists, Kowsan proposed two strategies that would occupy much of the attention of the theater semioticians of this period, the categorizing of the various sign “systems” utilized by theater (Kowsan suggested thirteen, including costume, makeup, word, and gesture) and the establishment of a minimal “signifying unit” to aid the process of analysis (a heritage from linguistic theory that after considerable futile search, theater semioticians finally abandoned). An important international review for the interdisciplinary study of semiotics, *Degrés*, was founded in Brussels in 1972 by André Helbo, who was to become one



of the leading theorists in this field. A special issue in 1975, *Sémiologie de la représentation* was the first major collection of essays on this subject.

During the 1970s semiotics developed rapidly in France and Italy, studying the sign systems utilized in a wide range of cultural activities, among them language, literature, music, cinema, architecture, and theater. In France, Kowsan and Helbo were followed by two extremely influential semioticians of theater, Anne Ubersfeld and Patrice Pavis, while in Italy major new contributions to the subject were provided by Franco Ruffini, Marco De Marinis, and, to a lesser extent, Umberto Eco. Although some of these, Ubersfeld in particular, tended to focus their analysis, as theater theorists historically have tended to do, upon the literary text, others followed Kowsan and Helbo in applying semiotic analysis to the living performance. Two highly influential articles by De Marinis bore the provocative title "The Spectacle as Text," and urged that theatrical performance be subjected to semiotic analysis just as a literary text might be, through careful study of its creation and manipulation of signs. Such analysis, along with the closely related question of the actual or potential relationship between the semiotic systems of the literary text and those of the performance, had by the end of the decade become central analytic concerns. The use of semiotic analysis for the study of particular productions was most highly developed by French theorists, especially at the Paris Centre National de Recherche Scientifique, which published during the 1960s and 1970s a number of model studies in its series *Les voies de la création théâtrale*.

Semiotic analysis of theater and performance was much later in coming to the English-speaking world. During the 1960s and 1970s students of theater in England and America who did not read French or Italian had access only to the translated works of a few generalists like Barthes, whose comments on theater were provocative but not extensive, and, much more important, the writings of a new generation of film theorists, who recognized and demonstrated the importance of this new critical methodology well before it came to the attention of their colleagues in theater. The pioneering work of Peter Wollen (*Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*, 1969) and Christian Metz (*Film Language: A Semiotics of Cinema*, 1974) provided useful and stimulating introductions to semiotic theory, even though the film, as an art of images, did not present the phenomenological challenges to traditional semiotics that eventually had to be addressed by theater theorists. Even so, theorists like Wollen and Metz could have provided a ground for the development of semiotic analysis in English, but in fact such analysis did not develop until the 1980s, when the first introductory works in English devoted specifically to drama and theater finally appeared. The first of them was Keir Elam's *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* in 1980, which provided for English-speaking theater scholars an extended introduction to the basic concepts not only of Saussure but also of the hitherto largely unknown Prague Circle writings on the theater. Elam's book was widely read and discussed, although its own suggested methodology, strongly orientated toward linguistic analysis,

was not specifically widely imitated. Elam, with his emphasis upon dramatic discourse, attracted almost no imitators. The rather cumbersome, pedantic, and linguistically oriented model of semiotic analysis that he applied to the opening scene of *Hamlet* lacked the flexibility and openness to production values provided by the work of such continental theorists as Kowsan, Helbo, and De Marinis.

The first such continental theorist to gain significant attention in the English-speaking world was Patrice Pavis, a collection of whose essays were translated in 1982 as *Languages of the Stage*.<sup>5</sup> Although Pavis had produced a number of important semiotic analyses of particular plays and productions during the previous decade, particularly of the works of Marivaux,<sup>6</sup> this new collection, as he noted himself, reflected a change in the field, away from global systemization or global analysis and toward considerations of more specific objects or phenomena. Somewhat surprisingly, few semiotic analyses of particular productions have appeared, although a detailed questionnaire to guide such analysis and two sample analyses were offered by Pavis and others in a 1987 collection of essays edited by Helbo,<sup>7</sup> subsequently translated into English. Jim Carmody's "Alceste in Hollywood," which appeared in the first edition of the present anthology in 1992, and again in this revised edition, applies semiotic analysis not to a global analysis, but to specific elements in a particular production, selected for their potential to reveal much larger and more general artistic and cultural concerns that are implied by their use. Una Chaudhuri's 1986 study of the work of Jean Genet, *No Man's Stage*,<sup>8</sup> offered another illuminating use of semiotic analysis applied to individual plays or productions, but such analyses remain, as Carmody remarked in 1992, "remarkably rare."

What has happened instead is that a wide variety of other theoretical approaches grounded in or heavily indebted to semiotic theory have appeared in Europe and America from the 1970s onward, taking the heritage of semiotics in directions quite unexpected by the first theorists to apply it to theater, drama, and performance. Like modern semiotics itself, these new directions were in many cases based upon continental and particularly French theory, which in the late twentieth century exerted a profound and continuing influence throughout the academic world and particularly in America. The developments in late-twentieth-century theory are both complex and highly intertwined, but in terms of influence upon the analysis of theater and performance, two general developments—both growing out of earlier work in semiotics—proved of particular importance. One of these developments, a wide variety of approaches gathered under the general heading of poststructuralism, often defined itself in opposition to semiotics and to its closely related field of study, structuralism, which, like semiotics, utilized analytic strategies derived from modern linguistics to consider the text as an object whose meaning can be interpreted in terms of its symbolic patterns. The other, equally diverse in its applications, did not oppose semiotics, but sought to take it in a new direction, by focusing not on the production but upon the reception of the

sign. Both of these developments had an enormous effect on the study of theater and performance in the closing years of the twentieth century.

In theatrical theory, the poststructuralist reaction to semiotics manifested itself most significantly in a challenge to the analytic rigidity of semiotic analysis, especially as applied to a living art like theater. An early expression of this concern came from a leading poststructuralist theorist, Jean-François Lyotard, inspired by a panel at an International Theatre Festival in Venice in 1972, where a group of primarily European theorists attempted to apply the new strategies of semiotic analysis to a series of Japanese performances. Lyotard subsequently denounced the “semiotic imperialism” that in his opinion turned the living art of the Japanese into a “lifeless object” for analysis.<sup>9</sup> On more directly theoretical grounds, Lyotard challenged the entire theory of signs as developed by classical linguistics, since it was based upon absence, the sign by definition standing in for a primary, but not present, reality. Like most poststructuralist theorists, Lyotard found this absent ground of meaning philosophically unacceptable, insisting that all positions were relative, shifting, and negotiable and that a theater that sought to reflect life and consciousness accurately should be built, as life and consciousness themselves were, not upon the “representative substitutions” of signs, but upon the “libidinal displacements” of flows of psychic energy.<sup>10</sup>

Lyotard’s opposition between absence and presence and between structuralist stability and poststructural flux was echoed in a variety of ways in theorists of the next decade, and was particularly important for those developing a theoretical grounding for the concept of performance, especially in an attempt to separate it from conventional theater. Thus, for example, Josette Féral, in a key essay in *Modern Drama* called “Performance and Theatricality” (1982), distinguished between these two fields of activity in terms extremely close to those of Lyotard. Theater, Féral suggested, was based upon the semiotic, built of representation, of signs of an absent grounded reality, while performance deconstructed the semiotic codes of theater, creating a dynamic of “flows of desire” operating in a living present.<sup>11</sup>

In this same issue of *Modern Drama* Michael Kirby called for a “non-semiotic performance” that would free itself from representation and signification entirely,<sup>12</sup> but few theorists supported so extreme a position. Marvin Carlson argued that any presentation of an activity as theater or performance would inevitably initiate a semiotic process within an audience, and America’s leading poststructuralist theater theorist, Herbert Blau, rejected the idea of an “unmediated” performance that could avoid semiotic codifications, since consciousness itself was invested with the dynamics of repetition and reproduction upon which the process of signification was based.<sup>13</sup>

Still other theorists, while acknowledging that the processes of consciousness inevitably introduced semiotization into reception, argued that, especially in a living art like theater, where the audience member encountered objects and bodies that had a substantial existence as bodies

and objects in addition to their semiotic use within the performance, the actual encounter must also be considered in any complete analysis of the reception process. Thus what Bert O. States characterizes as “the phenomenological attitude” in his essay of that name (which follows in this volume) offered not so much an alternative as an important supplement or even correction to traditional semiotic theory. States himself provided some of the most important applications of phenomenological theory to theater and performance, particularly in his 1985 collection of essays, *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms*.<sup>14</sup> Here, in addition to phenomenological analyses of particular theater devices and practices, States suggests a continual doubled perception on the part of the audience, concerned on the one hand with the semiotic meanings and messages of the performance, and on the other with the direct perceptual impact of real bodies and objects.

Such a blending of semiotics and phenomenology was the concern of several of the major new studies of theater and performance of the late 1980s. André Helbo in his French *Les Mots et les Gestes* (1983) and his English *The Theory of the Performing Arts* (1987) characterized theater as a “site of confrontation” between semiotic concerns with meaning and representation and poststructuralist concerns with flows of desire. Thus the tension in French performance theory of this period, between structuralist stability and poststructural flux, expression of signification and its denial, absence and presence, was brought to the center of performance itself, and even more specifically to the figure of the actor, a site of both signification and desire.<sup>15</sup> A closely related dual consciousness in theater was developed by Jean Alter in *A Sociosemiotic Theory of Theatre* (1990), which spoke of the theater as employing two complementary dynamisms, a semiotic, information-bearing *referential function* and a phenomenological *performant function* involving direct experience.<sup>16</sup>

Phenomenologically oriented performance theorists, whether interested in relating phenomenology to semiotics or not, nevertheless shared with their semiotically oriented contemporaries a growing interest in the contextualization of performance, and especially in the largely neglected area of reception. The shift that occurred in modern semiotic studies in the late 1970s and early 1980s was clearly described by Teresa de Lauretis, a pioneer in the use of semiotic theory in both feminist and film studies. De Lauretis characterized it as a shift “away from the classification of sign systems, their basic units, their levels of structural organization, and towards the exploration of the modes of production of signs and meanings, the ways in which systems and codes are used, transformed or transgressed in social practice.”<sup>17</sup>

Marco De Marinis, who has been one of the most astute theorists in assessing the state of semiotic analysis in the theater and in predicting the various stages in its development, published an important review essay in 1983 arguing that theater semiotics, having established itself internationally as a major critical approach, was now at a crossroads. It must either continue its developed interest in the structural analysis of literary or performance texts or move beyond such case-by-case analysis to develop

what De Marinis characterized as a “pragmatics of theatrical communication,” engaging the historical and sociological context of both stage realization and reception.<sup>18</sup> The importance of the shift described by de Lauretis and De Marinis can hardly be overstated, since it converted theater semiotics from a stimulating but limited method of analyzing production techniques and strategies within the art form itself to a method of exploring the relationships between the theater and its entire surrounding culture, relationships that would provide the basis for much of the most innovative and significant theoretical work of the following years.

The simple communication model employed by the first modern theater semioticians essentially assumed that the creator of a sign (a playwright, actor, director, designer), wishing to convey a particular “signified” to a reader or spectator, selected and then offered the proper verbal, visual, or aural “signifier” associated with that message. The spectator’s role was essentially passive and given little attention. The Prague School theorists had been well aware of the limitations of this simple stimulus-response model; indeed, Jan Mukařovský had specifically called attention to a certain “indeterminacy in the specific referentiality of the work of art,”<sup>19</sup> but it was probably less a memory of that previous insight than the rise of reception theory in Germany during the 1970s that led theater semioticians to recognize that the process of the sign’s reception and interpretation is as important to its understanding as the hitherto privileged process of its creation and presentation.

The key theorist in connecting reception theory to modern semiotics was Umberto Eco in his 1979 book *The Role of the Reader*. Eco is probably the best known of the modern semioticians, not so much because of his extensive and important theoretical writings, but because of his best-selling novel, *The Name of the Rose*, which ingeniously wed semiotic theory to popular historical and detective fiction. Eco’s interest in semiotic analysis is extremely broad, and his specific writings on theater semiotics are few, but nevertheless his contribution to this study has been considerable. His essay “Semiotics of Theatrical Performance,” appearing in the *Drama Review* in 1977, was for most English-speaking students of theater the first example of the new critical approach, and his attention to reception, soon taken up and moved to a central position in semiotic analysis by De Marinis and others, fundamentally altered the landscape of international semiotic theory.

The attention to reception changed not only the way semiotic analysis was practiced, but also the way semiotics came to view its own history and development. More and more attention was paid to a hitherto neglected contemporary of Saussure, the American philosopher Charles Peirce, who quite independently of Saussure had developed a massive and complex “formal doctrine of signs” based not on linguistics but upon logic, to which he gave the name *semiotics* (the name that has largely replaced Saussure’s *semiology*). Much of Peirce’s system is built upon triads, one of the most fundamental of which is *sign-object-interpretant*. The third term, involving the manner in which the sign is understood, built reception into

the basic semiotic formula, in a way that Saussure's binary *signifier-signified* did not. A similar emphasis is found in Peirce's basic definition of a sign: "something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity."<sup>20</sup> Other aspects of Peirce's system gained much currency during the 1980s, particularly his typically triadic division of types of signs into icons, indexes, and symbols, describing three different relationships between signs and objects. Icons bore some actual resemblance to their objects (such as realistic paintings), indexes "pointed to" their objects (as smoke to fire), and symbols were related to their objects only by cultural convention (the way most language works). This triad, especially the icon, was much utilized by theater semioticians, since iconicity is so widespread in performance (especially in realistic drama, where almost everything on stage is iconic).

It was the Peircian emphasis upon reception and cultural placement of the sign, however, that made him particularly interesting to the new generation of theorists emerging at this period. The very title of Jean Alter's 1990 book, *A Sociosemiotic Theory of Theatre*, suggests this new orientation, and indeed Alter suggested that theater analysis should emphasize not signification, a term he believed was now too closely associated with the old style of rather abstract semiotic analysis, but instead referentiality, which studied the specific contextualization of a sign, its meaning as a "concrete manifestation at a given time and in a given space."<sup>21</sup>

The cultural placement of the sign also called attention to the imprint of ideology upon signification, the realization that theatrical signs produced meaning according to the values, beliefs, and ways of seeing operating in their specific performance culture. It was primarily feminist theorists of theater, like Sue-Ellen Case and Jill Dolan, who called attention in the late 1980s to the importance of this insight for their analysis. As Case observed, semiotics, as a tool for describing the cultural encoding of a sign, could be used to reveal "the covert cultural beliefs embedded in communication." For this new generation, semiotics was no longer a study of the elements of theatrical communication based on an assumption of an objective and value-free selection of signs by the artist, but rather of the way in which the signs thus selected worked to reinforce the dominant ideology or beliefs of their cultural context.<sup>22</sup>

Semiotic film theory was much more productively utilized by feminist theater theorists than by others seeking to develop a semiotic approach to theater analysis. From the work in the early 1980s of E. Ann Kaplan, Kaja Silverman, and Teresa de Lauretis<sup>23</sup> came the concept of women as sign instead of a biological or natural reality, a "fictional construct, a distillate from diverse but congruent discourses dominant in Western cultures."<sup>24</sup> Since the Western theater has almost exclusively been produced by and for men, the depiction of women within this theater, in both the literary texts and the physical representation on stage, contributes directly to the patriarchal ideology of gender. By revealing the dy-

namics of this process, hitherto generally accepted as natural rather than culturally constructed, semiotics provided the first step toward the development of alternative practices.

The shift in modern semiotics from meaning as created by an author-artist to meaning as cocreated by a work and its audience was also of great importance to feminist theater theory. Again feminist film semioticians led the way in this area, considering the implications of the presentation of woman in films created with the unacknowledged but ubiquitous assumption of a male viewer. Combining the insights of semiotics, feminism, and reception theory with the contemporary French psychoanalytic theory of Lacan and others, film theorists developed the important concept of the "male gaze," a term and concept that proved extremely important to feminist theater theorists as well. According to Lacan, the creation of the concept of self (always understood to be male) is achieved at the cost of alienation from libidinal self-satisfaction, an alienation that the self perpetually seeks vainly to overcome through the manipulation of symbols, a process that forms the basis of activities like theater. The male subject has created and supports the theater as a site for the playing out of his always unfulfilled desire, his gaze there directed toward the ever elusive object of that desire, the woman, or the Other. Women spectators can participate only in this system of representation by adopting the male gaze, by viewing performances from the male perspective.

As feminist theorists sought during the 1980s to develop a concept of theater that would not be dominated by male concerns, semiotics continued to provide a useful critical framework for their explorations. Recognizing, as Case noted, that "within the patriarchal system of signs, women do not have the cultural mechanisms of meaning to construct themselves as the subject rather than the object of performance,"<sup>25</sup> a number of theorists sought to imagine an alternative, authentically female drama, which would be, as Linda Walsh Jenkins proposed, "replete with female signs."<sup>26</sup> Certain of these theorists turned again to modern French psychoanalytic theory, not however to Lacan, but to French theorists and authors like Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, and Hélène Cixous, who were challenging the male-oriented tradition of Freud and Lacan to seek a ground for a literary and artistic woman's voice. Kristeva posited a more emotional, poetic, and decentered "language of the mother" opposed to the logical, abstract, and discursive "language of the father." Although Kristeva somewhat confusingly called the mother's language "semiotic" and the father's "symbolic," the sort of distinction she was making resonated with the distinction being made at this same time between the logical, discursive, "semiotic" art of theater and the emotional, free-flowing "phenomenological" art of performance. Indeed, Josette Féral, drawing particularly upon Irigaray, supported feminist performance on precisely these grounds.<sup>27</sup> Despite the essentialist quality of this dichotomy, the feminist artists of the 1980s in both England and America found performance a particularly attractive form for the expression and exploration of

their concerns. During the 1990s the work of Peggy Phelan offered an important new approach to a feminist art in reaction to the semiotic process. Also drawing upon continental psychoanalytic theory, Phelan argued that the traditional system of signification was based upon the absence of women, "unmarked" by semiosis. For Phelan, women are "the hole in the signifier," offering an aspect of reality "which [is] unsayable, unseeable, and therefore resistant to representation."<sup>28</sup> Rather than attempt to develop an alternative female semiotics, which might only reproduce the existing system, Phelan works to theorize the more difficult and original task of exploring and celebrating the "unmarked" of absence and disappearance.

Although modern feminist theory and practice in theater and performance has been extremely varied, three general approaches are often suggested. The one I have just been describing, seeking to develop an alternative theater of "female signs" quite distinct from the traditional patriarchal semiotic, has been characterized as "radical" or "cultural" feminism, as distinct from "liberal" feminism, which seeks to develop opportunities for female expression within the existing system. The third general approach, "materialist" feminism, draws not so much upon modern psychoanalytic theory, like radical feminism, but rather upon modern cultural and political theory, particularly the various strains of neo-Marxism represented by such performance and cultural theorists as Antonio Gramsci, Louis Althusser, Raymond Williams, Walter Benjamin, and Bertolt Brecht.<sup>29</sup>

Roland Barthes's relation of semiotics to the theories of Brecht in 1963 has already been mentioned as one of the first modern statements applying semiotic theory to performance, but a quarter of a century passed before this relationship was developed theoretically, this time by feminist scholars. Brecht anticipated a semiotic approach, Barthes suggested, by his view of the theatrical sign as part of an alterable system of signification.<sup>30</sup> Brecht's system, calling attention to the machinery of signification and thus to the constructedness of the theatrical sign as well as of the culture that produced it, hoped to bring his audience to realize that both sign and culture were thus not natural and inevitable, but susceptible to change. Materialist feminists were alerted to the applicability of this insight to their own project of cultural change by a highly influential 1988 essay by Elin Diamond, "Brechtian Theory/Feminist Theory."<sup>31</sup> Similarly Janelle Reinelt, in her "Rethinking Brecht," from 1990, pointed out that feminists could work "to interrupt and deconstruct the habitual performance codes of the majority (male) culture," so as "to emphasize the possibility of change, that things might be other."<sup>32</sup> Sue-Ellen Case, in "Toward a Butch-Femme Aesthetic" (1989) argued that lesbian performance provided a particularly productive site for such subversion. Drawing upon Jean Baudrillard's idea of "seduction" as a process of semiotics rather than the natural order, Case argued that butch femme seduction is not only "always located in semiosis," but transforms all presumed realities "into semiotic play."<sup>33</sup> A decade later, Mary Brewer's study, *Race, Sex,*



and *Gender in Contemporary Women's Theatre* (1999), announced as its basic principle "that representation is a process of semiosis or meaning-making,"<sup>34</sup> and proceeded with a nuanced semiotic materialist analysis of a wide variety of performances in England and America involving the issues of its title.

This significant shift toward materialist analysis in the later 1980s was by no means restricted to feminist performance theory, but could also be found across the international spectrum of drama and performance analysis. The shift in the semiotic heritage from sign systems to the social context of signification during the 1980s, noted, as we have seen, by de Lauretis and De Marinis, resulted in a rich variety of new approaches to theater analysis. The social and cultural contextualization of dramatic texts, especially those of Shakespeare, became the major concern of the American New Historicists, headed by Stephen Greenblatt, and of the British cultural materialists, such as Alan Sinfield and Richard Dollimore, who in turn influenced British gender and racial performance studies such as Brewer's. In both America and England, the work done by feminist theorists in exploring the gender codes inscribed in representation served as a model for the gender studies of queer theorists and for theorists interested in the relationship between performance, representation, and ethnicity or social class. The role of performance and representation in the construction of national identity, in intercultural contact, and in colonialism and its aftereffects engaged theorists around the world. Significantly, two of the European scholars who had become leaders in the field of theater semiotics during the 1980s, Patrice Pavis in France and Erika Fischer-Lichte in Germany, turned their attention during the following decade to the analysis of intercultural performance. Pavis characterized his new concern as the placement of performance texts "within contexts and cultures," seeking "to appreciate the cultural production that stems from these unexpected transfers."<sup>35</sup> Guillermo Gómez-Peña, one of the leading theorists and practitioners of performance art in the late twentieth century, noted in the introduction to his 2000 study, *Dangerous Border Crossings*, that both his books and performances were particularly concerned with "crossing extremely volatile geographic and cultural borders."<sup>36</sup> A leading American work of performance theory of the 1990s, Joseph Roach's *Cities of the Dead* (1996), combines a study of cultural contact with one of cultural memory as encoded in performative practice. The convergence between performance studies and the growing international interest in cultural studies emphasized the importance of performance in establishing and questioning all sorts of cultural and social spaces, from those involved with the formation of individual identities, to those negotiating sites of ethnic, national, and intercultural contact. Fittingly, this section of the present collection concludes with a new essay by Josette Féral, who like Pavis and others has been centrally involved with semiotics and performance analysis throughout the complex theoretical evolutions of the past quarter of a century.

## NOTES

1. Sue-Ellen Case, *Feminism and Theatre* (New York: Methuen, 1988), 115.
2. Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Wade Baskin (London: Fontana, 1974), 15.
3. Roland Barthes, *Critical Essays*, trans. Richard Howard (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1972), 261–62.
4. Roland Barthes, *Elements of Semiology*, trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (London: Jonathan Cape, 1967), 9.
5. Patrice Pavis, *Languages of the Stage*, trans. Susan Melrose et al. (New York: PAJ Publications, 1982).
6. Collected in Patrice Pavis, *Mariovaux à l'épreuve de la scène* (Paris: Sorbonne, 1986).
7. André Helbo, *Théâtre: Modes d'approche* (Brussels: Editions Labor, 1987).
8. Una Chaudhuri, *No Man's Stage* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI, 1986).
9. Quoted in Ricard Salvat, *El teatro de los años 70* (Barcelona: Ediciones Península, 1974), 261.
10. Jean-François Lyotard, *Des dispositifs pulsionnels* (Paris: Union générale d'éditions, 1973), 96.
11. Josette Féral, "Performance and Theatricality," *Modern Drama* 25, no. 1 (1982): 178.
12. Michael Kirby, "Nonsemiotic Performance," *Modern Drama* 25, no. 1 (1982): 110.
13. Herbert Blau, "Universals of Performance; or, Amortizing Play," *Sub-stance* 37–38 (1983): 143.
14. Bert O. States, *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985).
15. André Helbo, *Les mots et les gestes* (Lille: Presses Universitaires, 1983), 49–50.
16. Jean Alter, *A Sociosemiotic Theory of Theatre* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1990), 32.
17. Teresa de Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* (London: Macmillan, 1984), 167.
18. Marco De Marinis, "Semiotica del teatro: Una disciplina al bivio?" *Versus* 34 (January–April 1983): 125–28.
19. Jan Mukařovský, *Kapital aus der Aesthetik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1946), 97.
20. Charles Peirce, *Collected Papers* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1931–58), Vol. 2, 247.
21. Alter, *Sociosemiotic Theory of Theatre*, 32.
22. Case, *Feminism and Theatre*, 117. See also Jill Dolan, *The Feminist Spectator as Critic* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1988).
23. E. Ann Kaplan, *Women and Film* (New York: Methuen, 1983); Kaja Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983); de Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't*.
24. De Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't*, 5.
25. Case, *Feminism and Theatre*, 120.
26. Linda Walsh Jenkins, "Locating the Language of Gender Experience," *Women and Performance Journal* 2, no. 1 (1984): 6.
27. Josette Féral, "Writing and Displacement: Women in Theatre," trans. Barbara Kerslake, *Modern Drama* 27, no. 4 (1984): 550–60.

28. Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London: Routledge, 1993), 10.

29. Most books on feminism and theater, headed by Case and Dolan, offer some variation of these three categories. They were apparently first proposed and discussed by Alison M. Jagger in her *Feminist Politics and Human Nature* (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Allanheld, 1983).

30. Barthes, *Critical Essays*, 263.

31. Elin Diamond, "Brechtian Theory/Feminist Theory: Toward a Gestic Feminist Criticism," *TDR* 32 (Spring 1988): 30–36.

32. Janelle G. Reinelt, "Rethinking Brecht: Deconstruction, Feminism, and the Politics of Form," *Brecht Yearbook* 15 (1990): 99.

33. Sue-Ellen Case, "Toward a Butch-Femme Aesthetic," in *Making a Spectacle: Feminist Essays on Contemporary Women's Theatre*, ed. Lynda Hart (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1989), 295, 297.

34. Mary Brewer, *Race, Sex, and Gender in Contemporary Women's Theatre* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 1999), 1–2.

35. Patrice Pavis, *Theatre at the Crossroads of Culture*, trans. Loren Kruger (London: Routledge, 1992), 2. See also Erika Fischer-Lichte, ed., *The Dramatic Touch of Difference: Theater, Own and Foreign* (Tübingen: D. Kolesch, 1990).

36. Guillermo Gómez-Peña, *Dangerous Border Crossings* (London: Routledge, 2000), 7.

# The Phenomenological Attitude

*Bert O. States*

All things exist as they are perceived: at least in relation to the percipient. . . . But poetry defeats the curse which binds us to be subjected to the accident of surrounding impressions. And whether it spreads its own figured curtain, or withdraws life's dark veil from before the scene of things, it equally creates for us a being within our being. It makes us the inhabitants of a world to which the familiar world is a chaos. It reproduces the common universe of which we are portions and percipients, and it purges from our inward sight the film of familiarity which obscures from us the wonder of our being. It compels us to feel that which we perceive, and to imagine that which we know. It creates anew the universe, after it has been annihilated in our minds by the recurrence of impressions blunted by reiteration.

—Percy Bysshe Shelley, *A Defense of Poetry*

This passage becomes less dated when you consider that it was written nearly a century before Victor Shklovsky's attempt to align the method of criticism and the function of art in the now famous concept of perceptual "defamiliarization."<sup>1</sup> If anything, Shelley's language is even more "phenomenological" than Shklovsky's, but what we learn from Shelley is that a phenomenological attitude toward the world (or what Husserl calls the "phenomenological standpoint") does not depend on knowing the "science" of phenomenology. It is rather an ability to see through "the film of familiarity" that blunts "the scene of things" through its reiteration. Those in whom this attitude "exists to excess," Shelley goes on, are called poets; but they might also be called critics. Indeed, they could be any "inhabitants" of the world who have a natural gift for the *epochē*, or the capacity to put into perceptual brackets "the accident of surrounding impressions" and to see what phenomenologists call "the things themselves." So right off, when we speak of criticism in the phenomenological mode, we are referring less to a relentless methodology or a deep philosophical concern for the nature of consciousness than to an attitude that manifests itself with varying degrees of purity and one that may come and go in a given exercise as critical objectives change. It would be nice if we had a less pretentious (or at least *shorter*) term for this kind of commentary, if only to avoid hints of "scientific" aspiration, but the best I have been able to manage is *neoinpressionism*, and that opens even more embarrassing risks in an age that seems bent on exposing the myth of a reliable self.

Nevertheless, phenomenological criticism is a form of impressionism—or, as Maurice Natanson calls it, "methodological solipsism."<sup>2</sup> It is some comfort to add, however, that the impressionists were very good painters of *phenomena*, in the strict sense of that word. In their own way

they were painting a perceptual critique of the real world, much as the critic of theater might try to show that the world of a play is opaque, geometrical, primordial, dense, sparse, and so on. To close the circle, criticism derived from the phenomenological attitude is highly *mimetic* in its methodology. That is, owing to the nature of its project, phenomenological criticism—like phenomenology itself—tends to rely strongly on some variation of figural description, or “proof” by metaphor. On this account it is probably the most personal form of critical commentary and hence is a useful counterbalance to the increasingly impersonal methodology in so much of today’s criticism.

I am not implying that we should all run out and buy a pair of philosopher’s brackets; but if one were looking for an alternative to the radical skepticism of deconstruction and postmodernism—its “uninhibited questioning of everything,” as Eugene Goodheart puts it<sup>3</sup>—one can find it most readily in the phenomenological attitude that uninhibitedly *accepts* everything it sees. Indeed, the aim of phenomenological criticism seems to be the reverse of the aim of deconstruction in that it seeks, as Mikel Dufrenne puts it, “the-being-at-the-end-of-oppositions in which idea and thing, subject and object, noesis and noema, are dialectically united.”<sup>4</sup> It is no contradiction of this claim to add that deconstructive philosophy is intimately connected with the phenomenological movement (especially with Heidegger and Husserl) as to basic questions of being, meaning, and consciousness. I am referring mainly to the practice of deconstruction as it descends from philosophy *into* criticism—the species we encounter regularly in our journals (sometimes without a single mention of the *D*-word) where the aim is to show the paradox of presumed identity, the retreat of meaning before the finger of definition, or to demonstrate how a text “has already dismantled itself” before the critic arrives.<sup>5</sup> Phenomenological criticism, however, posits a stopping place, as it were, *at* the starting place, not of all possible meanings but of meaning and feeling as they arise in a direct encounter with the art object. A phenomenological approach offers a critique of what cosmological physics might call “the first four seconds” of the perceptual explosion. It is beside the point to claim that the first four seconds are always tainted by a lifetime of perceptual habit within a narrow cultural frame. It is only the moment of absorption that counts; what conditions the moment and what follows it are somebody else’s business.

I am not using the expression “first four seconds” in a strict durational sense, as the physicist might speak, however literally or loosely, of the first four seconds of the “Big Bang.” I intend it as referring to the “moment”—soon or late—in which an object or an image establishes itself in our perception as something, as Shelley puts it, that “creates for us a being within our being [and] compels us to feel that which we perceive.” Such an experience is commonly delayed or prevented by all sorts of everyday significations that attend the appearance of any object or image. Moreover, it is one thing to *have* such an experience (when one has it), another to know what to do with it from an analytical standpoint. It turns out to be an immensely complex problem.

Adolf Reinach, for example, a student of Husserl, is said to have devoted an entire semester studying the ways in which one experiences a mailbox.<sup>6</sup> This makes a nice joke on the philosopher, but there is more to a mailbox than meets the eye. No matter how much you fondle it, study it, turn it this way or that, or walk around it, a mailbox will always look you straight in the face, like a cat that won't let you get behind it. Most people aren't bothered by this problem, but the fact that you can never see *all* of a mailbox raises the imponderable question of the frontality of everything in the world before the eye of consciousness. This is the foundational problem of phenomenology. For this frontal quality of all experience, as Husserl says, is what keeps the world from being *all me*:<sup>7</sup> if I could see all sides of a mailbox at once, if I could perceive its interior, its composition, its angles and curves, its materiality, its field of world relationships, its functions, its vicissitudes, its history, and its deterioration in one grand cubistic glance, in what sense can it be said to be exterior to me, of the world rather than of myself? Such "vision" could only occur at what we may safely call the "Divine Standpoint." Moreover, if inside the mailbox we should discover a letter written by God containing a definitive description of all that a phenomenologist could possibly—ideally—want to know about a mailbox, we would be no better off because language itself contains an even more virulent form of frontality. In this frontality we perceive one word or phrase at a time and the rest hides or slides into a "backside" along with the mailbox we are ignoring as we read the divine description of what a mailbox is.

In one way or another this problem takes us to the base of all our concerns with the problematics of meaning: the central terms of our critical discourse—*presence, representation, repetition, deferral, difference, aporia, supplementation, referentiality, indetermination*—can be treated as variations on the principle of frontality. For frontality is not simply the perception of the surface facing us; it carries with it what Husserl calls the "apperception" of the rest of the object that is, in "a kind of" way, "co-present" even though unseen: "what is there perceptually motivates [belief in] something else being there too."<sup>8</sup>

It is easy to see why phenomenologists are drawn to the theater metaphor so often. In what other art form is the frontality of experience more amply demonstrated? In what other art form do we *apperceive* so much rotundity in what we merely *perceive* ("the vasty fields of France," etc.)? Before the world, Sartre says, we are as spectators at a play.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, theater is the paradigmatic place for the display of the drama of presence and absence; for theater, unlike the mailbox, produces its effect precisely through a deliberate collaboration between its frontside ("on" stage) and its backside ("off") whereby anticipation is created through acts of entrance and exit (the recoil of the world beyond), and finally between the frontside illusion (character and scene) and the backside reality (the actor, the unseen stage brace that "props" up the illusion). Beyond all this, theatergoing in itself is a kind of bracketing, or *epochē*, in which we willingly, if not involuntarily, suspend our belief in the empirical world and attend

to a half-reality already “reduced” by the premeditations and manipulations of a series of prior and present artists. As a consequence, phenomenology cannot look at a theater stage in the way that it looks at the simple mailbox, which has no such illusionary pretensions (unless it is placed on a stage). What is required, then, is still another suspension that does not cancel the first or throw us altogether out of the illusion into reality, or throw reality altogether out of the illusion, but brackets what each would convey exclusively and retains as “co-present” both what we have consented to disbelieve (reality) and the belief we have temporarily “willed” in its place (the illusion). Merleau-Ponty suggests that the modern phenomenologist/painter strives to show “how the world becomes world”;<sup>10</sup> the phenomenological critic strives to show how theater becomes theater—that is, how theater throws up the pretense that it is another kind of reality than the one constituting the ground on which its pretense is based.

We see this most clearly in stage scenery. If one looks at the stage setting in the spell of the *epochē*, one sees that it is the means of creating the illusion that there is no scenery there but only a world, a reality (of sorts). Scenery comes into existence in order to deny that it exists—a duplicity at the heart of carpentry. You may ask: isn’t this really a description of naturalistic scenery? What about stylized scenery? obvious scenery? scenery in which trees and chairs are played by actors? It really makes no difference. Even in these forms, in calling attention to itself, in seeming to say, “I exist. I am nothing but scenery!” scenery is lying, or speaking with the permission of the mimesis. Even in Brecht’s tacky world where scenery deliberately remains scenery (“built to last three hours”), it is nevertheless fabricated in such a way that its fabrication constitutes the illusion. “It must be clear that the play is taking place in a theater,” the designer may have said to the carpenters. “Make the scenery look like badly designed scenery.” Whereupon the carpenters labor skillfully to bring about this slapdash failure, this nondisguise of bad art, this backside become frontside, this absence become presence, of which the newspaper critic (with luck) will write, “Y’s settings are brilliantly conceived to produce the illusion that the play is taking place in a theater.”

The *epochē* (roughly synonymous with *bracketing* and *reduction*) bears some resemblance to Michelangelo’s notion that the sculptor releases the statue from the stone in which it is imprisoned. That is, in order to appear as an essence that has its “being within our being,” as Shelley says, the phenomenon must be released from its perceptual bondage in the “natural” world—or, indeed, from its collaboration with other phenomena in the same theatrical illusion. Since the case of stage scenery is a relatively simple one, let us apply the idea to one of the most immaterial, yet fundamental, phenomena in the theater experience: our perception of *character*. Is it possible to isolate an entity called character, the behavioral essence that characters in a play are said to possess? Immediately, we are faced with a perceptual problem expressed most succinctly in Henry James’s famous definition of character and incident: “What is character

but the determination of incident? What is incident but the illustration of character?"<sup>11</sup> So there is character, seemingly linked to incident (action) as indissolubly as Escher's swimming fish are linked to the birds flying "through" them. And the problem is complicated still further by the fact that the character is being played by an actor who is not the character but who forms the entire perceptual ground from which any such essence as character can appear.

So, if we are supposedly perceiving character as a persistent essence in individual behavior, in what way can we say that it is distinct from the person of the actor? How can we know it? How do we feel its being? Is its persistence not the simple persistence of, say, Olivier playing Othello? Finally, there is the problem that any character seems to undergo changes as the incidents lead to different moods and the display of different traits. As we say, character "develops." So what is it in the character phenomenon that persists? If character changes with every scene, or within single scenes, or even constantly, where do the eye and ear get the notion that something called character is iterating itself, always being itself, in this chaos of different and differing phenomena in the stage world?

I set up these resistances in the spirit of the *epochē* itself, for they are the kinds of things that must be chiseled away, or bracketed, before we can release the "figure" of character from the overall illusion and determine that there is, indeed, an aspect of Othello that cannot be charged exclusively to Olivier's personal persistence and something that is phenomenally distinct from incident and survives all changes and so-called development.

Othello's character is not my topic here, but, if one were pursuing an essence of Othello, it would be found through Husserl's principle of co-presence. Or, to paraphrase another phenomenologist, the presence of one "side" of Othello in a given scene, and the absence of all the other "sides" of the Othello of previous scenes, "are what becomes present."<sup>12</sup> If Othello's character accumulates ("changing" as it goes), it is accumulating according to an Othello "law" determined, in the first place, by Shakespeare's sense of consistency in his creation and, in the second place, by Olivier's interpretation of that consistency. As for Olivier lending his visible "weight" to Othello's invisible character, this is obviously a strong factor: Othello's character would be very different were John Gielgud playing him. But then Olivier's actor-character would be very different if he were playing Hamlet rather than Othello. In any event there is an essence of Othello on the stage at all times that never changes or at least never violates an invisibly circumscribed field of behavioral potentiality. (Othello, for example, would never—like Hamlet—wonder how long a man might lie in the earth ere he rot; nor would Othello "scan" his vengeance so scrupulously.) Othello is always a formation of presence and absence; his character is never absent or present in the way that one of his traits (say, anger) is present or absent. Othello's character may be likened to a sphere revolving in space: it may reveal different sides or features as it turns, but it always remains the same sphere, it always continues around "the backside."



You may well ask what one can *do* with such information. Isn't it finally rather obvious? Indeed it is. Phenomenology, as Bruce Wilshire says, "is the systematic attempt to unmask the obvious."<sup>13</sup> Like Shelley's idea of poetry, phenomenology is an effort to recover what in our experience has been "annihilated . . . by reiteration." In order to gain a systematic idea of how theater affects us, we need (among other things) an awareness of character essence and the contribution of its persistence to the stream of radically changing events we call a plot. This is one of the basic tensions through which theater becomes theater. Still, it is only one kind of phenomenological problem. Another might involve an examination of character as a perceptual locus of "hidden" cultural assumptions. It would be interesting, for example, to conduct a comparative phenomenology of different kinds of character essence (Greek, Shakespearean, Restoration, "psychological," naturalistic); or, to put it another way, what were playwrights in a given period making character *of* (what is its DNA?) that may have been beneath their own awareness? Such findings might serve very well in the context of New Historical criticism, which itself involves a seeing of what absences may be co-present in artifacts we have heretofore regarded as things that are entirely *present* to the eye.

I want to turn now to the question of how one recognizes a phenomenological description. Earlier I said that the phenomenological attitude might be present in almost any critical exercise. Reader-response criticism, for example, has a heavily phenomenological bent insofar as it is concerned with the transaction between consciousness and text. I detect it less often in semiotic discourse, but this may be a judgment based on my sampling of semiotic literature. In any case Umberto Eco's description of the complementarity of semiotic and phenomenological practice offers a useful way of sorting the differences:

A rereading . . . of Husserl's discussions might induce us to state that semiotic meaning is simply the socialized codification of a perceptual experience which the phenomenological *epoché* should restore to us in its original form . . . Phenomenology undertakes to rebuild from the beginning the conditions necessary for the formation of cultural units which semiotics instead accepts as data because communication functions on the basis of them. The phenomenological *epoché* would therefore refer perception back to a stage where referents are no longer confronted as explicit messages but as extremely ambiguous texts akin to aesthetic ones.<sup>14</sup>

This is hardly a denial that semiotics may adopt the phenomenological attitude for its own purposes. Indeed, Keir Elam argues that "any semiotics worthy of the name . . . is eminently phenomenological, and the reverse may well also be true."<sup>15</sup> The degree of truth in this statement would depend on where one draws the line between semiotics and phenomenology. It is my sense that as long as semiotics holds the notion that all things (on a stage, for example) can be fully treated as *signs*—that is, as transparent

codes of socialized meaning—it cannot adopt the phenomenological attitude in any “eminent” way. Husserl is quite plain on this point: “The spatial thing which we see is . . . perceived, we are consciously aware of it as given in its *embodied form*. We are not given an image or a sign *in its place*. We must not substitute the consciousness of a sign or an image for a perception.”<sup>16</sup> Of course, Husserl is not talking here about perception as it occurs in the theater where we *are* confronted by images and signs. But in the theater something is *also itself* as well; we can always (if we choose) see an object on a stage as we see, say, a bird in a feeder, and, though the bird in the feeder may be a sign of spring, it is not the sign of a bird. More complexly, however, in the theater we see an object in its “embodied form” as having a double aspect, one of which is significative, the other (like the bird) self-given; and when we treat one of these aspects to the exclusion of the other—it doesn’t matter which—we are not taking a phenomenological attitude toward what has been intentionally set before us on the stage. At a play Dufrenne says, “I do not posit the real as real, because there is also the unreal which this real designates; I do not posit the unreal as unreal, because there is also the real which promotes and supports this unreal.”<sup>17</sup> Phenomenology occurs in the “seam” between these two faces of the object.

Still, in principle, Elam is right. There is no reason that the phenomenological and the semiotic attitudes cannot compatibly blend into each other. Let me cite a passage from Patrice Pavis’s *Languages of the Stage* that will illustrate what I take to be a fusion of semiotic—in this case, semiological—and phenomenological interests. Here is Pavis explaining why the mime’s “universe of gesture is [only] contaminated” by the spoken word:

When the body tries to say too much, and with too much wit, the body is “talkative,” overstated by an overly precise story and discourse.

The mime should therefore be left alone, and his only dialogue should be the one established between what he does and what he does not do, between normative gestures and their poetic deviation: the comparison between two universes of differing coherence and modality, between our immobility and the limits of our body, and his movements and original mode of existence creates the dialogue in the spectator.

But this dialogue is only initiated—with Amiel as with all mimes—when the body begins to unfold, tears itself from inert matter and sketches in a narrative.<sup>18</sup>

The topic here is “the discourse of the mime” and how we “read” the sequence of mime gestures. Hence we find words like *modality, gestural narrativity, framing, segmentations of gesture, codification*, and so on, which belong to “the discourse” of semiotics and semiology. But it seems to me that descriptive methods of semiology and phenomenology are almost

equally in evidence in this passage: *discourse* could easily be replaced by *presence* or *appearance*, or, in Pavis's own words, the "original mode of existence" of the mime—the essence of the mime, to invoke the classical phenomenological term. Here the body of the mime appears before me in all of the economy and purity of gesture that results from the mime's self-deprivation of an audible voice. Through Pavis's description I sense exactly why the power of the mime rests in the "dialogue between what he does and what he does not do"—in brief, between what is present and what is absent.

I suspect I knew all this already, and it is certainly "obvious" to me now. The point is that I didn't *know* I knew it, and there is all the value of such a description. What is obvious is also what is transparent and therefore unseen—like a dead metaphor or, to invoke Brecht's example, like the face of the watch on your wrist. And the peculiar effect of the phenomenological statement is that of discovering something in the backyard of your memory that has somehow bypassed awareness—"Sight," Bachelard says, "says too many things at one time"<sup>19</sup>—or has got there without being consciously processed as a "datum" of experience. It is at once forgotten and remembered. I take the passage, then, to be (whatever else it is) an example of phenomenological reduction because it puts on hold all codes of communication, all referentiality in the *content* of the mime's narrative, in order to "rebuild from the beginning," as Eco says, the primordial *form* of the mime's body. The mime has not yet become a "sign" or a "cultural unit"; he or she is simply the realization of a certain potential in human expressiveness.

Roland Barthes's project in *Mythologies* is to write a semiology of the bourgeois world by analyzing the language of its myths. Myth is a "pure ideographic system" that steals its meanings from one order of signification and plants them surreptitiously in another. The delicacy of Barthes's semiological problem in these essays—tracing a myth back to its origins in a "first language"—requires that the invisible be made visible, since the myth (plastic, steak and chips, ornamental cooking) is exactly what we cannot see because we are too busy living it. Here is where he calls upon the phenomenological eye. Barthes has always been a closet phenomenologist.<sup>20</sup> He cannot resist the lure of the "absolute," the pursuit of the essence of the culturally disguised thing, until he corners it and it turns and faces him openly. Here he is—semiologist, phenomenologist (who could possibly sort out the voices?)—tracking the essence of Greta Garbo's face in order to tell us why we have "deified" it:

It is indeed an admirable face-object. In *Queen Christina*, . . . the make-up has the snowy thickness of a mask: it is not a painted face, but one set in plaster, protected by the surface of the colour, not by its lineaments. Amid all this snow at once fragile and compact, the eyes alone, black like strange soft flesh, but not in the least expressive, are two faintly tremulous wounds. In spite of its extreme beauty, this face, not drawn but sculpted in something smooth and

friable, that is, at once perfect and ephemeral, comes to resemble the flour-white complexion of Charlie Chaplin, the dark vegetation of his eyes, his totem-like countenance.<sup>21</sup>

For me the most striking image in this passage is “the dark vegetation of his eyes.” This is its *punctum*, as Barthes would say, or the element “which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me”<sup>22</sup> (just as the *punctum* of the Pavis passage is: “the body begins to unfold, tears itself from inert matter and sketches in a narrative”). Who has ever thought of Chaplin’s eyes in this way, yet who does not instantly see “the connection”? Who does not a moment later see the connection between Chaplin and Garbo as this dark vegetation drains, like intertextual makeup, out of Chaplin’s face into hers and thence into the whole granular black white world of “early” film? But for a split second, before the image begins giving in to these significations, one sees only something absolutely new, and the response, as Baudelaire might say, is instantaneous laughter in the soul. For on one of its levels this is a kind of pure joke, an adventure in grotesque. And what is grotesque but the creation of a new phenomenon, something without a history of signification or, rather (in this case), something with two histories—*eyes* and *vegetation*—that have been fused and abbreviated in a bridge of recognition, something both arbitrary and right: arbitrary because it is an unanticipated confusion of realms, right because the old Chaplin eyes that one has always *overseen* in the ensemble of the famous face suddenly shoot out of the scene and pierce you.

To claim these felicities of expression as the property of phenomenology would be rather like claiming that a bird was yours because it flew into your feeder. If anything, phenomenology and semiology borrow them from the poet and the artist, and this is really the sense of my discussion. The larger frame of Shelley’s remark that poets possess a certain attitude “in excess” is that poets are those who are able to observe “a certain rhythm and order [in] natural objects,” or “[that] relation subsisting, first between existence and perception, and secondly between perception and expression.” The poet’s language, therefore, is “vitaly metaphorical [in that] it marks the before unapprehended relations of things and perpetuates their apprehension.” This sentiment can be found over and over in the literature of phenomenology. Consider the simple statement that the phenomenological attitude “is admittedly a difficult process to describe, so Husserl used many different metaphors”<sup>23</sup>—beginning, incidentally, with the three key metaphors (bracketing, reduction, and the *epochē*) that form the basis of phenomenological method. Or again:

what usually happens is that the [phenomenologist] will project a single imaginative variant, but one that is strategic, crucial, and usually colorful, one that brings out a certain necessity in the thing we wish to examine. It is not easy to capture the right imaginative vari-

ant, to pick out the dramatic, vivid example that shows a necessity. We need fantasy to do so. Thus we need imagination to be good at philosophical analysis.<sup>24</sup>

In view of our interests here the term *phenomenological* can be thought of as pertaining not to a subfield of philosophy or a scientific movement but, instead, to the mode of thought and expression the mind naturally adopts when questions relating to our awareness of being and appearance arise. Thus defined, the mission of any form of phenomenological critique is to describe what Cezanne called “the world’s instant,” by which we mean not simply a paintable instant but also any instant that is perceptually “apprehended” as carrying, or leading to, an intuition about what it *is* and what it is *doing* before our eyes. Thus phenomenology is forced, through the sheer poverty of scientific language in the face of subjective experience, to say (to itself and to its reader), “It is *like* this: the eyes are [like] dark vegetation,” or “The mime’s body tears itself from inert matter.” For there is no other way to trap an essence in “frontal” expression, since essence is not a kind of information or a “fact” of matter (like valence or specific gravity) but, rather, a transaction between consciousness and the thickness of existence, something that keeps on going around the back but is also here as well. In the phenomenological sense essence, one may say, is founded in a personification through which the world is invested with a human consciousness: perception and object become synonymous. Thus the impulse toward mimesis in phenomenological commentary, so noticeable in Heidegger, Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, Sartre, and Bachelard, would seem to be an attempt to forestall the retreat of the object into signification (understood as its infinite cultural referentiality), to arrest it in a radical defamiliarization that names without defining and pictures without limiting. The essence is at once caught and freed, as it is in experience itself.

## NOTES

1. See Victor Shklovsky, “Art as Technique,” in *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, trans. Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), 3–24. Robert Scholes calls attention to the similarity between the Shelley passage and Shklovsky’s concept of defamiliarization in *Structuralism in Literature: An Introduction* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 174–75. Scholes is interested in the structuralist parallel between Shelley and Shklovsky, whereas my own interest is strictly phenomenological, though I trust it is apparent that I have no desire to label either Shelley or Shklovsky as phenomenologists.

2. Maurice Natanson, “Solipsism and Sociality,” *New Literary History* 5 (1974): 243.

3. Eugene Goodheart, *The Failure of Criticism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 14.

4. Mikel Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, trans. Edward S. Casey, Albert A. Anderson, Willis Domingo, and Leon Jacobson (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1973), xlix.

5. J. Hillis Miller, "Stevens' Rock and Criticism as Cure, II," *Georgia Review* 30 (1976): 341.
6. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, trans. David E. Linge (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1977), 133.
7. Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, trans. Dorion Cairns (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960), 109.
8. Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 109–10.
9. Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Psychology of Imagination*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (New York: Washington Square Press, 1968), 82.
10. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception and Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology, the Philosophy of Art, History and Politics*, ed. James M. Edie (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 181.
11. Henry James, *The Art of Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1948), 13.
12. Robert Sokolowski, "The Theory of Phenomenological Description," in *Descriptions*, ed. Don Ihde and Hugh J. Silverman (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), 17. Sokolowski's statement reads: "If we focus on the present and the absent as such, a new dimension becomes thematic for us. It is not the case that this side is present and the other sides are absent, but rather [the present of this side and the absence of those sides] are what becomes 'present.'"
13. Bruce Wilshire, *Role Playing and Identity: The Limits of Theatre as Metaphor* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 11. Wilshire's book is a basic text in the phenomenology of theater.
14. Umberto Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979), 167.
15. Keir Elam, review of my *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms*, in *Times Literary Supplement*, March 7, 1986, 250.
16. Edmund Husserl, *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, trans. W. R. Boyce Gibson (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1952), 136.
17. Dufrenne, *Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, 10.
18. Patrice Pavis, *Languages of the Stage: Essays in the Semiology of Theatre* (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1983), 56.
19. Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 215.
20. "I am too much of a phenomenologist to like anything but appearances to my own measure" (Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard [New York: Hill and Wang, 1981], 33).
21. Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), 56.
22. Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 26.
23. David Stewart and Algis Mickunas, *Exploring Phenomenology: A Guide to the Field and its Literature* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1974), 26.
24. Sokolowski, "Theory of Phenomenological Description," 23. For an excellent overview of the role of metaphor in phenomenological description, see David Levin's "The Poetic Function of Phenomenological Discourse," in *Phenomenology in a Pluralistic Context*, ed. William L. McBride and Calvin O. Schrag (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983), 216–34. On the question of metaphor as description, see George E. Yoos, "A Phenomenological Look at Metaphor," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 32 (1971): 78–88. On the more general matter of metaphor as an aspect of philosophical language, see James M. Edie, *Speaking and Meaning: The Phenomenology of Language* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976), 151–94.

# Alceste in Hollywood: A Semiotic Reading of *The Misanthrope*

*Jim Carmody*

A code cannot be destroyed, only “played off.”

—Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author”

Alceste, the familiar protagonist of Molière’s classic comedy *Le Misanthrope*, is a quintessentially seventeenth-century Parisian creature, the product of a culture far removed in time and space from contemporary Hollywood. Yet Robert Falls’s mise-en-scène of this play asks us to accept the proposition that Alceste “belongs” in the Hollywood of 1989.<sup>1</sup> The semiotics of this transplantation, this translation, are the subjects of this essay.

There are, in this essay, at least two semiotic readings of Molière’s script in play: Robert Falls’s mise-en-scène and my own reconstruction of that mise-en-scène.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, neither of these readings should be understood as the work of a decontextualized subject. The “Robert Falls mise-en-scène” emerges as the product of a collective effort to engage with the signifying processes of Molière’s seventeenth-century theater, the signifying processes of twentieth-century, not-for-profit, American theater, and the ways in which those discursive practices combine dialectically in the variety of subjectivities that constitute any group of artists working on a common project.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, this essay emerges from my own dialectical engagement with the discursive practices already mentioned as well as those of contemporary theater aesthetics and semiotics, not to mention the institution of the American “research” university. Neither this essay nor the Falls mise-en-scène can ultimately be understood semiotically apart from the specific cultural realities in which they are embedded and which they can be seen as embodying.

Although the basic theoretical foundations for the semiotic analysis of mise-en-scène were established many decades ago, actual examples of such analysis are remarkably rare.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, there exists no general agreement among theater semioticians as to how such an analysis ought to proceed or even which kinds of semiotics are likely to produce the most fruitful results. For the purposes of this essay, I have chosen to adopt what has become a characteristic strategy of semiotics (as well as poststructuralism in general) and concentrate on what traditional theater criticism might consider marginal or relatively unessential signifiers of the Falls mise-en-scène: a piece of exercise equipment that remains partially invisible for most of the performance, the final bow taken by the actress playing Célimène, and an excerpt from the subscribers’ newsletter at the Goodman Theatre. Readings of these signifiers will, in turn, lead to considerations of the cultural sign “Molière” and the semiotics of restaging classic texts in the American theater.



Fig. 1. *The Misanthrope*, act 3, La Jolla Playhouse (1989). From left, Arsinoë and Célimène.  
Photo credit: Jim Carmody.

Throughout the following discussion, it should be understood that I am not arguing for a specific hierarchy of codes or of signs in this mise-en-scène. Falls has systematically refrained from providing a master code (apart from suggesting that the spectator think in terms of analogies, a suggestion I will discuss later); the spectator cannot find an indication of what the “correct” interpretation might be (i.e., what the director wants the spectator to think). Instead, the spectator is confronted by a number of theatrical and cultural codes that continually collide, avoiding the kind of resolution in an aesthetically and ideologically unified “work” that we have been conditioned to anticipate in a classic comedy. Falls refuses to synthesize these disparate codes; instead, he obliges us to read them against each other and through each other. In this, Falls may be following Brecht’s advice with respect to the “separation of the elements” (which many have recognized as one of the primary semiotic ideas of twentieth-century theater).

#### *From 1666 Paris to 1989 Hollywood*

An imposing piece of exercise equipment, a postmodern blending of Universal weight machine and high-tech guillotine, stands close to center stage in George Tsypin’s creation of Célimène’s Hollywood home. This scenic element, with its wealth of bicultural signifieds, offers a provisional entry into the complex semiotics of Robert Falls’s 1989 mise-en-scène of Molière’s 1666 play, *The Misanthrope*.



the guillotine blade that “takes the place of” the expected counterweight in the machine makes an unmistakable reference to the French Revolution that ended the *ancien régime*, of which the early years of Louis XIV’s reign (the 1660s) are the acknowledged cultural highlight. Molière’s *Le Misanthrope* is among the celebrated masterworks of that *grand siècle*—indeed, the play is commonly regarded as *the* paradigmatic French classical comedy. Tsypin’s visual reference to the French Revolution is reinforced when Arsinoë pulls one of the wires on the machine to send the blade racing dangerously down toward Célimène, who is reclining on the bench.

The guillotine blade can also be read in the context of the cultural codes of “Southern California” or, more specifically, the “Hollywood” community. The oversize weight machine in Célimène’s dressing room is no mere decoration. This Célimène works hard to stay in shape and enjoys displaying her well-toned body to Alceste and the others in her circle. Célimène wears a different costume each time she makes an entrance, and in many scenes she appears to move from one consciously adopted pose to another, a behavior that most of the other characters manifest to a lesser degree. These frequent changes of costume and even more frequent changes of pose emphasize the extent to which the sociosexual economies of this microcosm privilege display as the currency of their power exchanges. Célimène enters for her workout dressed in a stretch-nylon, black workout combination with pink trim, carrying a white gym towel and a bottle of Evian mineral water (a sign that invokes both Frenchness and Southern California “health consciousness”).<sup>5</sup>

The La Jolla audience usually greeted this first entrance with a laugh of recognition, anticipating the customary satirical comment on the California “fitness lifestyle.” But no such comment is made in this scene. Instead, the presence of the exercise-guillotine machine provides an ironic frame for the bitter dispute between Célimène and Arsinoë by drawing our attention to the ways in which notions of aging and physical attractiveness serve as the axis of dissension between the two “friends.” The presence of the guillotine suggests that the physical effort of staying in shape is only one negative aspect of the endless search for attractiveness and of the equally endless competition for attention that characterizes the Hollywood milieu as its codes of conduct emerge in this production.

I begin this discussion of the Falls production by focusing on the exercise-guillotine machine, even though the distinctive contour of the guillotine blade remains invisible to the audience until the machine is moved into place for Célimène’s exercise session (Molière’s *Misanthrope* 3.4). Following the intermission, which is taken at the end of act 3, the guillotine blade is turned perpendicular to the proscenium line and becomes once again invisible for the final two acts. This very invisibility, however, becomes significant during the coda that Falls stages following the final exit of Philinte and Eliante, which traditionally marks the conclusion of the play. Immediately following that exit, Célimène returns to the stage, once again dressed in workout clothing, carrying a small white towel and a portable tape deck. She lays her towel on the bench, pushes the play button

on her tape deck, lies on her back, raises her knees, reaches up for the hand rings, and begins to exercise by raising and lowering the weight/ guillotine blade. She is working hard, and her exhalations are audible over the music. Now that the exercise machine appears only in profile, the spectator can see that the blade of the guillotine is precisely aligned with Célimène's neck. As the lights fade, we watch Célimène work at what appears to be the Sisyphean task of "saving her neck" from the blade.

Falls's *mise-en-scène* of *The Misanthrope* resolves on Célimène's response to the events of the play. Indeed, the *mise-en-scène* encourages the spectator to shift focus from Alceste, the title character and the spectator's presumed center of orientation, to Célimène. Falls echoes this emphasis on Célimène in the curtain call when Kim Cattrall (Célimène) steps forward to take a final solo bow. In Molière's text, Philinte has the final line, a line that directs our attention to Alceste, who, we presume, is already en route to the desert refuge of his choice. This focus on Célimène, however, like the image of the guillotine, invites us to reread the *mise-en-scène* from a perspective that is quite different from that urged on us by Molière's own dramaturgy and the history of its reception.

More than three centuries of accumulated commentary have read *The Misanthrope* as a play about its protagonist, Alceste, the *amoureux atrabilaire* who is named in the play's title. The fact that Molière himself played the part of Alceste and the assumption (dating from the time of the first production) that Célimène was a fictionalized version of his wife, Armande, have been taken as "proof" of the author's intention—that the play should express his (Molière's) criticisms of his contemporaries' (particularly his own wife's) social behavior. Indeed, this titillating blend of the real with the fictional has undoubtedly been a factor in the play's popularity over the centuries and has added a layer to its acquired meaning (both the La Jolla Playhouse and Goodman Theatre programs reminded the spectators of the play's autobiographical nature). Of course, all classic texts accumulate significance over time as the endless cycles of interpretation create a complex web of intertexts that all contemporary readings inevitably confront. Robert Falls's reading of *The Misanthrope*, as embodied in his *mise-en-scène*, must therefore be seen not only as a reading of Molière's script but also as a reading of the traditions of understanding that have become attached to it during three and a half centuries of readings and performances.

### *Theatrical Coding and Local Semiosis*

A consideration of Célimène/Kim Cattrall's final bow offers a particularly useful example of the ways in which Robert Falls stages collisions between a variety of codes as a way of provoking the spectator to work at his or her own reading of the many signifiers deployed in this *mise-en-scène*. Indeed, what emerges as the decisive strategy of this *mise-en-scène* is Falls's insistence on not resolving tensions that arise from the juxtaposition of theatrical and cultural codes whose differences are more apparent than their similarities. Seen in this light, the *mise-en-scène* (including

the exercise-guillotine machine as well as the final bow of the actress playing Célimène, which I have taken as emblematic of the production as a whole) can best be understood as the kind of text described by Roland Barthes in his celebrated essay "The Death of the Author":

A text is not a line of words releasing a single "theological" meaning (the "message" of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from . . . many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader, not, as was hitherto said, the author.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, the final bow, like the entire text of the *mise-en-scène*, should be understood as a site of "contestation" where the individual spectator contends with the "tissue of quotations" assembled for these performances of *The Misanthrope*. Only the individual spectator can construct, from this "variety of writings," the final, subjective significance of this theatrical event.

I have pointed out that Kim Cattrall is the only performer who takes a solo bow, which I have interpreted as manifesting the director's desire to position Célimène as the focal figure in his *mise-en-scène*. But Falls's desire to reconfigure Molière's dramaturgy by decentering Alceste cannot, in itself, account for the way in which the bow itself is performed. Cattrall steps forward in the usual manner from the line of actors to take her solo bow, and the spectator may respond to this movement by reading it as the customary acknowledgment of the "star" performer's special contribution. The bow itself, however, blends a traditional deep curtsy with a flexing of both biceps in a gesture of exultant triumph. The flexing of biceps immediately calls attention to itself by invoking the range of metaphors suggested by the presence of the exercise-guillotine machine throughout the play (the actress takes her curtain call wearing the same workout costume she wears in the coda). Furthermore, this gesture of triumph seems to run counter to the implications of the final sequence in which we see Célimène struggling with the guillotine blade of her exercise machine. Upon further reflection, however, the bow calls to mind an even more complex series of questions: Should the spectator assume that this bow indicates that Célimène emerges unchastened from the multiple rejections she suffers during act 4? If so, how should the spectator understand, in retrospect, Célimène's social behavior throughout acts 1 through 4? If Célimène remains unchastened and unrepentant, should the spectator understand the triumphant bow as a challenge to the traditional reading of the play? Or should the spectator read this final sign as "the-film-actress-from-Hollywood" claiming a victory for her character when nothing in the rest of the play suggests that one was earned?

The bow invokes a number of theatrical and cultural codes simultaneously: the suggestions of traditional femininity conveyed by the "classical"



Fig. 2. *The Misanthrope*, act 2, La Jolla Playhouse (1989). From left, Célimène and Alceste. Photo credit: Jim Carmody.

decorum of the “leading lady’s” bow are contested by (but, interestingly enough, not replaced by) a flexing of the biceps, which proposes a contemporary celebration of the athleticized female body. In this final moment of the mise-en-scène, when the code of classical theater (our received notions of how *The Misanthrope* “should” be performed) is subverted for the last time, two representations of the female emerge in/from the body of the same actress. Since spectators’ personal ideologies frame their readings of all aspects of a mise-en-scène, each individual will either privilege the “classic” misogynist representation of this character that our culture has inherited from literary and theatrical history or will privilege the representation of a contemporary autonomous woman. To put it more bluntly, the spectator can choose to see Célimène from the perspective of Alceste or to see Alceste from the perspective of Célimène. (It is interesting to note how audiences usually greeted Alceste’s final invitation to Célimène to share his desert life with an explosion of derisory laughter.)

### *Mise-en-Scène and the Classic Text*

Questions such as these, however, cannot be considered in isolation, as this mise-en-scène participates in a long tradition of restaging texts that belong to the canon of acknowledged dramatic masterpieces. Like all other such mise-en-scènes, the Falls production of *The Misanthrope* generates much of its significance by responding to that tradition of critical and theatrical interpretation in certain ways. Three hundred and twenty-three years and formidable linguistic and cultural differences separate the first

production of *Le Misanthrope* from Robert Falls's adaptation of Neil Bartlett's translation.<sup>7</sup> In the period from 1666 to 1989, the play acquired and shed layer upon layer of accumulated commentary, performance traditions, and translations. Many of these layers remain both accessible and influential. Indeed, from a semiotic perspective, the play known as *The Misanthrope* is, for all practical purposes, absolutely indistinguishable from the many layers of interpretation and ranges of signification that have become attached to it over time, which is another way of saying that the play is what we familiarly term a classic. Falls's adaptation and mise-en-scène of Bartlett's "version" of *Le Misanthrope* can be read as a response to the tradition of restaging classic texts as well as to the dramaturgy of an individual text by Molière. It can also be read as an exploration of a range of problems that Marvin Carlson has discussed in the context of what he calls "local semiosis."<sup>8</sup> Using the theories of Clifford Geertz as a point of departure, Carlson asserts that the creative process "must inevitably be conditioned by the artistic tools of the artist's own culture and by the ways that culture defines and interprets artistic artifacts. . . . Such a view . . . is surely a useful corrective to the naive assumption that such a work makes . . . a specific 'aesthetic' statement, the same for all audiences, whatever their cultural background."<sup>9</sup>

In *Onstage*, the Goodman Theatre's subscriber newsletter, Falls writes about his approach to the problem of local semiosis:

The world of Alceste and Célimène—the world of the intrigue and backbiting of Louis XIV's court—is a world that's turned up again and again in countless forms in the centuries since. I'd heard of other productions that had set the play just before the French Revolution, in the 1920s, in the 1930s . . . but I knew immediately that I was going to set the play in 1989 in the Hollywood Hills.

I've always had a love-hate relationship with Hollywood. . . . There's no doubt in my mind that the world of agents, actors, screenwriters and producers provides a perfect modern analogue to Molière's world.

From that core idea came . . . the design of the set and costumes (using photos of Madonna's new house in the Hollywood Hills as inspiration), and the discovery of a brilliant new verse translation . . . which we've adapted further for our setting.<sup>10</sup> We're sure that our first show this year will bring our season maxim alive: Then *is* now, the great works of the stage reflect our time just as they reflect times past and future.<sup>11</sup>

In this "director's note" Falls shares with his subscribers some of the ideas that helped shape his semiotic reading of the play. Even though these words were not spoken from the stage, contemporary theater semiotics recognizes them as an integral part of the mise-en-scène in that they provide the spectator with information that conditions the spectator's ability to interpret the cultural and theatrical codes deployed on stage. Goodman



Fig. 3. *The Misanthrope*, act 2, La Jolla Playhouse (1989). From left, Philinte, Clitandre, Acaste, Eliante, Célimène, and Alceste. Photo credit: Jim Carmody.

subscribers came to performances having already read these words. Even those who had not read *Onstage* had almost certainly been exposed to the same ideas in newspaper articles, in reviews (many of which quoted or paraphrased the *Onstage* piece), and in the program distributed to spectators at the theater.<sup>12</sup>

Falls describes his perception of Hollywood as “a perfect modern analogue to Molière’s world” as the “core idea,” the origin of all other artistic choices in the production. Several reviewers, however, criticized the production for its failure to provide a “perfect” analogy, pointing out that Arsinoë’s seventeenth-century prudishness, for example, had no counterpart in contemporary Hollywood. But such criticisms fail to appreciate the nature of analogy, which does not pretend to eliminate all differences between the two entities that are being compared. Although he writes “then *is* now” (a rhetorical gesture that has become a commonplace since Jan Kott’s *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*), Falls is not suggesting that 1666 Paris and 1989 Hollywood are identical. Indeed, his *mise-en-scène* succeeds in performance precisely because it continually draws our attention to *both* the similarities and the differences between 1666 and 1989.

As Falls himself points out, setting the play in a period other than the seventeenth century is by now a traditional gambit. But it is difficult to establish an analogy between “then” and “now” if the dialogue refers only to the codes of the culture in which the play was first written and performed. In the case of *The Misanthrope*, the words of Molière in the “standard” translation of Richard Wilbur (a translation that privileges lit-

erariness over theatricality and the demands of local semiosis) would sound utterly foreign in the context of George Tsypin's postmodern setting. Neil Bartlett's translation, on the other hand, offers a language that sounds indigenous to the Tsypin scenography and the culture it invokes.

Bartlett's translation (brilliantly) preserves Molière's twelve-syllable rhyming alexandrines, the names of the characters, and Molière's formal mode of address (e.g., Sir, Monsieur, Madame, etc.). Bartlett makes no attempt to employ anything other than contemporary English/American, with the result that the characters speak a language that is not only instantly comprehensible but laden with contemporary cultural resonance (an advantage that the actors enjoyed in Molière's time). At the same time, the poetic texture of Bartlett's language is rich in unexpected rhythm and rhyme, pun and paradox. But Bartlett's translation does more than provide the actors with a contemporary language: it provides them with the language of contemporary Hollywood. Thus, the often wide gap in productions of classic plays between the cultural frame of reference of the classic spoken text and the cultural frame of reference of the contemporary text of the *mise-en-scène* is, with the exception of character names and French modes of address, almost inconspicuous.

Accustomed to attending foreign plays performed in translation, the spectator may automatically consider the foreign character names insignificant. As a result of the same habit of mind, the spectator may choose to ignore the fact that the characters address each other with a formality that seems strange indeed in the context of the Hollywood Hills. What the spectator cannot fail to notice is that Bartlett has chosen to retain Molière's twelve-syllable line, a verse form that is utterly unfamiliar in the English-speaking theater. The easy accessibility of the contemporary vocabulary is offset by the strangeness of the verse form and the foreignness of certain elements of speech. While Bartlett worked hard and effectively to make the analogy between 1666 Paris and 1989 Hollywood persuasive, he clearly never intended to efface the cultural and temporal divide that separates the two:

The whole point of translating this play has been to make an elaborate and provocative game out of the collision of the formality of classical French verse and the vivid recognizability of contemporary speech. . . . [*The Misanthrope*] is completely un-English. I wanted the translation to sound foreign, like a foreign work of art, even though the language is comprehensible.<sup>13</sup>

Bartlett never allows the spectator to forget that he or she is dealing with a play from another culture and another time. Indeed, at one point in act 2, Bartlett blatantly reminds the audience of the classic status of *The Misanthrope* when he has Eliante quote two lines from the play in French, the same two lines that Molière gives her to speak at that precise moment: "L'amour pour ordinaire, est peu fait à ces lois, / Et l'on voit les amants vanter toujours les choix." She goes on to translate those lines

and the rest of the speech: "Love is blind and not subject to the Laws. / Lovers are used to Love without Good Cause. / No Matter how foolish, the Loved One seems wise. . . . / *Le Misanthrope*. Act II. It's my own translation."<sup>14</sup>

While Bartlett's citation from *Le Misanthrope* draws attention to the cultural status of Molière's play, it also calls attention to the extraordinary degree to which citation permeates both the Bartlett/Falls text and the mise-en-scène. The first line of the translation/adaptation is an obvious citation: "What's up doc?" Although there are several equally recognizable citations, the unfamiliar verse form in tandem with the often bizarre juxtapositioning of the formal with the vulgar works to make the spoken text sound artificial, as if the entire play were nothing but a tissue of citations. Alceste's final speech provides a good example of this phenomenon:

I hope you'll be happy, from the depth of my heart  
And that you will be faithful 'til Death Do You Part.  
Crippled by injustice, and spat upon by shits,  
I'll book a one way ticket out of this Abyss  
I'll fly to some city that isn't run by Vice,  
Where a good man can be as honest as he likes.

Similarly, the scenography borrows visual ideas from a variety of periods and cultures, using the visual language of postmodernism to provide a hospitable setting for the intertextualities of Bartlett's and Falls's recreation of Molière's classic text.

Like the translation, the Falls mise-en-scène both advocates and undermines the analogy between Molière's culture and our own. At best, the analogy only partially obscures the foreignness of Molière's play, just as Molière's play only partially illuminates the Hollywood culture. Although Falls and Bartlett succeed in persuading us that the two cultures have much in common, they do not try to persuade us that they are identical. In fact, as I have tried to suggest, they have devoted at least as much creative energy to subverting the proposed similarity as they have to promoting it. Ultimately, the unusual richness of this mise-en-scène results precisely from the many ways in which Falls and Bartlett bring the theatrical and cultural codes of seventeenth-century France and contemporary Southern California to play off each other.

In a brief essay such as this, it is impossible to describe at sufficient length the semiotics of such important elements of mise-en-scène as scenography, costumes, lighting, music, blocking, and acting styles. Each of these topics requires many pages of description before even the most basic analysis can begin. Instead, as I indicated earlier, I have chosen to deal only with the semiotics of selected marginal details, hoping that they will convey the semiotic wealth of this quite extraordinary mise-en-scène.



## NOTES

Chapter epigraph from Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 144.

1. Robert Falls (director/adapter), Neil Bartlett (translator), George Tsypin (sets), Susan Hilferty (costumes), James F. Ingalls (lighting), Rob Milburn (sound), Walter Bilderback and Richard Pettingill (dramaturges), David Darlow (Alceste), William Brown (Philinte), Del Close (Oronte), Kim Cattrall (Célimène), Christina Haag (Eliante), David Alan Novak (Clitandre), John Douglas Carlile (Acaste), and Peggy Roeder (Arsinoë). The play was first performed at the La Jolla Playhouse in La Jolla, California, on August 20, 1989. After its initial run, the set and costumes were transported to Chicago, where the production opened on October 10, 1989 as the first production of the Goodman Theatre's 1989–90 season.

2. Patrice Pavis provides a detailed discussion of *mise-en-scène* as a form of semiotic reading in *Languages of the Stage: Essays in the Semiology of the Theatre* (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1982), 131–61.

3. Throughout the present article, I attribute to "Robert Falls" the authorship of the performance text, which is the subject of this discussion. Such an attribution is, of course, a habitual one in the discussion of production, but it is important to remember that the Robert Falls of this essay is a fictional construct that stands for the real Robert Falls and all those involved in this *mise-en-scène*.

4. The most thorough presentation in English of these theoretical foundations can be found in Keir Elam, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* (London: Methuen, 1980). Since the 1960s, the theater research group at the Centre National de Recherche Scientifique in Paris has published a number of semiotic readings of various productions in the series *Les Voies de la Création Théâtrale*. The sixth volume of the series includes a particularly impressive analysis by Tadeusz Kowzan of Roger Planchon's influential *mise-en-scènes* of *Le Tartuffe* in the 1960s and 1970s.

5. This relationship between Frenchness and Southern California "health consciousness" is developed differently in the character of Alceste, who smokes French cigarettes. Alceste is the only smoker in the play. In addition, Alceste's interest in French culture marks him as an outsider in Hollywood. Instead of the "old song" that Molière gives Alceste to sing in act 1, Bartlett has Alceste put Jacques Brel's "Ne Me Quitte Pas" on the turntable and provide a simultaneous translation.

6. Barthes, *Image-Music-Text*, 146–48.

7. Bartlett's "English" version of *The Misanthrope* was first performed at the Edinburgh Festival in 1988 by the Red Shift Theatre Company. The text of this English version can be found in *Bérénice (Racine), Le Misanthrope, The School for Wives (Molière)* (London: Absolute Classics, 1990). All quotations from the "American" version are from *The Misanthrope by Molière*, a new version by Neil Bartlett, further adapted by Robert Falls (Chicago: Goodman Playscripts, 1989). The American version was reprinted in *American Theatre* 7, nos. 4–5 (1990).

8. Marvin Carlson, *Theatre Semiotics: Signs of Life* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 110–21.

9. Carlson, *Theatre Semiotics*, 111.

10. Bartlett's "English" version located the play in London's media world.

11. *Onstage* (Goodman Theatre series) 4, no. 1 (1989): 1.

12. Interestingly enough, the La Jolla Playhouse program included no statement from Robert Falls. The playhouse program included an extract from Bartlett's

"A Letter to the Company," twelve citations from the "Maxims of La Rochefoucauld," a brief biography of Molière (which emphasized the autobiographical nature of the play as well as his difficulties with his wife), and two reproductions of seventeenth-century artworks—an engraving from the 1682 edition of the *Oeuvres de Molière* and the well-known painting of Molière breakfasting with Louis XIV. This last image appeared over the caption, "Power Breakfast: Louis XIV with Molière at Versailles."

13. Neil Bartlett, "A Letter to the Company," *Performing Arts* (San Diego) 2, no. 9 (1989): LJP-6. The La Jolla Playhouse program appears as a separately paginated insert after page 20 of *Performing Arts*.

14. Eliante's speech occurs at act 2, scene 4, ll. 711–30. Bartlett's version slightly abridges Molière's text.

# Every Transaction Conjures a New Boundary

*Josette Féral*

At a 1995 conference in Brussels entitled “Culture as Diversity,” a photographer presented a research project he had conducted over some years. Every year he had taken aerial photographs of certain neighborhoods in order to observe what changes took place. The results were clear: initially the fences and walls designed to separate properties disappeared due to a deliberate attempt to create open spaces and facilitate communication and exchange. Eventually though, the fences reappeared over the years, creating new divisions and separations—the only real difference was that these new boundaries appeared in slightly different places.

The photographer’s testimony is significant in more than one way. It expresses two tendencies of both individuals and the structures they create: contradictory and simultaneous movements of opening and enclosure. Indeed, despite the fact that today’s dominant discourses are almost unanimous in their call for an opening towards the Other—be that other a place, a country, a culture, a discipline, or an art form—there is a parallel tendency toward isolation or enclosure, as though an opening at one level is achieved only at the price of an enclosure at another.

The photographer’s story is a metaphor for the ideas I would like to explore in this essay. My investigation will cover four main areas: (a) this double movement of opening and enclosure that seems to characterize both individuals and the structures they put into place; (b) the creation of particular spaces determined by these openings and enclosures, be they physical or imaginary; (c) the relationship to time of these movements, be they simultaneous or alternations; (d) the self-referential nature of theater art as it illuminates this phenomenon, allowing us to better comprehend it.

I should like to suggest that the “trans-action,” which is the central theme of this essay,<sup>1</sup> is in fact a form of this tendency toward opening. It is also my suggestion that this opening is always accompanied by a quasi-simultaneous phenomenon of enclosure.

To begin, let me give a small linguistic overview of the central concept of our discussion. The notion of transaction seems particularly appropriate to help us grasp the nature of today’s artistic and social endeavors between cultures. It appears to be even more useful than the notions of interculturality or intertextuality, which do not place enough emphasis on the idea of “displacement.” The prefix *trans* brings forward a sense of transition that clearly evokes a *movement* between point A and point B. Moreover the word *action* carries the idea of a will to trans-act and of a resulting impact.

In order to come to grips with the interrelations involved in theatrical transactions, a phenomenological interpretation seems more appropriate

than a strict semiological approach limited to the performance itself. Semiology, however, does provide the starting point of objective tools and is the ground upon which this performance analysis rests.

Transaction is a theme that conjures notions of exchange, influence, translation, transcription, transformation, transfusion, transparency, transgression, transmission, or transit. It is a single concept expressed in many modalities. These modalities recur in different fields: in culture, where one speaks of transcultural, intercultural, and multicultural; in the arts, as in transartistic and transdisciplinary; in geography, as in transgeographic and transnational;<sup>2</sup> in politics, as in transpolitical; in economics, as in transeconomic; and also in genetics (transgenic) as well as in gender and sexuality (transsexual).

Over the past thirty years the prefix *trans* has invaded numerous discourses, carrying with it an inevitable positive charge. It is used liberally as much in the hard sciences as it is in the social and human sciences: one thinks of cultural studies, anthropology, performance studies, theater studies. Linking it to the word *actions*, as in *transactions*, implies movement, change, a dynamic and deliberate desire to move from one point to another.

Certain contemporary theorists, Edgar Morin for example, suggest that despite the fact we live in an era when such notions have become the dominant discourse, and when it is no longer possible to envision either the world we live in or the arts we practice without referring to them, the actual practices that surround us do not demonstrate this “trans-actional” opening:

Disciplines are closed in on themselves and do not communicate with each other. Phenomena are increasingly fragmentary, and we cannot conceive of their eventual unity. At the same time, territorial nationalisms assert themselves. Indeed, one observes that while political frontiers may have been altered, they still exist. They reaffirm, rather than dissolve themselves.<sup>3</sup>

While we can detect a general tendency to make national, economic, political, and cultural frontiers more porous, we also detect its opposite. Simultaneous with this opening, a reterritorialization is occurring, one that is as much political as cultural and artistic. The notion of “territory” has come under scrutiny in the last ten years, namely in the works of Homi K. Bhabha, Arjun Appadurai, Akhil Gupta, and James Ferguson. Taking up the distinction made by Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, these scholars remind us that notions of identity and of the state have long been associated with that of territory, the latter being the foundational concept of the nation. The idea of national sovereignty has thus long been legitimized through the existence of a defined “territory,” defined according to geographic borders. However, with today’s numerous migrations of people and with the porousness of national borders, the notion of territory is no longer self-evident.

A new cartography has been instated whereby subjects are more and more “deterritorialized,” that is, severed from the country or culture to which they are originally linked and “reterritorialized” according to new parameters more akin to the localities they live in, localities defined through “human sociality” rather than geographic borders.<sup>4</sup> This analysis suggests that despite a global movement toward openness—toward transactions of wider and wider embrace—we also endlessly create zones of exclusion and isolation. We create new boundaries.

In the pages that follow I investigate the political consequences of these movements of opening and enclosure as well as the artistic procedures that accompany them and what their existence implies for theater research. My discussion will draw on two theatrical performances presented at the Festival du Théâtre des Amériques: Groupov’s *Rwanda 94* and Alain Platel’s *Allemaal Indian* (the title of which means, “We Are All American Indians”).<sup>5</sup> Both performances have been presented in numerous festivals and are perhaps familiar to many.

### *Politics: Territory versus Location*

*Rwanda 94* is a performance about the genocide in Rwanda. Over a period of five years, the performers of the Groupov, a Belgian Company in Liège, met with survivors of the war and recorded their accounts. They conducted historical research and readings, and traveled to Rwanda. Their research centered on the three months (April through June 1994) during which eight hundred thousand Tutsis were massacred by Hutus, who represent 80 percent of the Rwandan population. Based on the testimonies and information they had gathered, five actors undertook the task of assembling a coherent whole. They strove to create a dignified performance suited to the subject matter. They also sought to avoid both sensationalism and the simple anecdotal documentary form.

One of the authors of the performance is Yolande Mukagasana, a Tutsi woman who witnessed the genocide. She has written two powerful biographical works: *La mort ne veut pas de moi* (1997) and *N’aie pas peur de savoir* (1999).<sup>6</sup> The six-hour-long performance begins with forty minutes of her testimony recounting her experience of the three months of killings. She describes the death of her husband who, along with thousands of other Tutsis, was taken from his home and repeatedly struck with a machete, his hand cleaved from his body before her eyes. She describes the death of her three children, ages eighteen, sixteen, and thirteen. The youngest, Nadine, was buried alive after throwing herself into a burial pit in order to escape the blows of machetes. The testimony is overwhelming. Every night, Yolande Mukagasana relives those three months, her struggle and fears and her betrayal at the hands of friends and neighbors, people she saw on a daily basis, in whose company her children had grown up, and who were the first to mark them for slaughter. Mukagasana’s narrative is told in a very “neutral” voice—at least she tries to keep it neutral and undramatic—rather than revealing her emotions, fears, feelings of



Fig. 1. Belgian Theatre Company Groupov's production of *Rwanda 94*. Photo by Lou Hérion.

guilt and pain. Although her account is broken by tears as she evokes these painful events, she recounts not so much her pain as the events that took place in Rwanda.<sup>7</sup> Exhibiting neither pathos nor the desire for vengeance, she serves as a through-line for history, narrating her flight and her terrible sense of failure as a mother.

The performance alternates between fiction and reality: testimonies, films of the genocide, the songs of the dead. The performance even includes a lecture by Jacques Delcuvellerie, the director, who explains in forty-five minutes the history of the Tutsi and Hutu ethnic groups in Rwanda, the political and economic events that led up to the genocide, and the lack of action on the part of the outside world, which seemed to prefer to remain ignorant of the events. These elements come together to create a performance that is at once a theater piece and a shocking testament to the bloody massacre of an entire ethnic group, a massacre the rest of the world witnessed without being able, or without being willing, to intervene.

### *What Is at Stake in This Performance?*

Through its historical and fictional account of the horrors, this work reveals what scholars such as Appadurai, Gupta, Ferguson, and Bhabha, following Deleuze and Guattari, have argued repeatedly with precision.<sup>8</sup> These researchers have demonstrated how the idea of self that a nation, state, or individual creates is intimately linked to the notion of territory.<sup>9</sup> These concepts are in a profound state of crisis due to the growing disassociation between the idea of state and the idea of nation, on the one hand, and the idea of nation and that of territory, on the other. Territory



Fig. 2. In the bar of the Hotel Intercontinental, *Rwanda 94*. Photo by Lou Hérion.

here is the key concept as it transcends the traditional geographic borders of the state, revealing communities founded on such variables as mutual interests, morphology, common history, economic situation, or political concerns. The synchronization of an ideal territory with an ideal state in a nationalist vision legitimizing a single ethnicity creates the conditions for the wars of extermination or of ethnicity of which the twentieth century was far from innocent. This is what the performance *Rwanda 94* demonstrates.

The term *ethnic war* is inappropriate here, where a large group claiming ethnic unity attacked a much smaller and defenseless group. Given the massive inequality of the opposed forces, genocide is the only appropriate term. Through a detailed presentation of the origin of Rwanda's two ethnic groups, the performance shows how migrations from one part of the country to another led to conflict between the legislated ethnic subregions and their actual ethnic composition. The performance also reveals that differentiation on the basis of ethnicity is, in the case of Rwanda, a holdover from a Belgian colonial policy dating from 1920. The population was required to divide itself into ethnic groups, divisions that were unimportant and unproblematic prior to the colonial period.

In a masterful lecture that is part of the play, Delcuvellerie tells the story of these ethnic divisions and wars. He states that the divisions took place along morphological and economic lines decided by the Belgians: the Tutsi was more likely to own land and property, to be tall and have fine features; the Hutu to have stronger Negroid features and to be laborers. The attempt to make a national census ran into numerous problems, according to the performance, as many Hutus and Tutsis failed to



Fig. 3. The musicians supporting *Rwanda 94*. Photo by Thilo Beu.

conform to the general categories. A simple solution was proposed: all residents with more than ten cows were declared Tutsis; those with less than ten were therefore Hutus.

While this classification system strikes us as absurd, it was actually adopted, and it contributed to the horrors that occurred in Rwanda in 1994. It is symptomatic of a moment in history when an entire population found itself obliged to define itself in terms of ethnicity. Far from endorsing the idea that an individual is a member of a vast set wherein interaction brings people closer together, this “self-definition through ethnicity” created boundaries between individuals, racial frontiers drawn with broad and arbitrary strokes.

My goal is not to describe the Rwandan situation and its complex history, but to underscore how the performance created by the Groupov allows us to witness, in the context of an artistic presentation, observations already confirmed by political realities. The performance suggests that the rulers of Rwanda at the time, as well as all the people who contributed to the massacre, had the idea that the sovereignty of the nation-state rests implicitly on the ideal of ethnic coherence. Therefore the expulsion and in this case even the murder of those considered inferior or ethnically different was justifiable. The play also reminds us that despite the fact that the territorial basis of the nation-state is rapidly eroding, states are the major players in a global scene that really needs the idea of territorially based sovereignty.<sup>10</sup> The play also stresses that when an isomorphic relationship among the people, the territory (concerned with integrity, survival, policing, and subsistence), and the legitimate sovereignty is destabilized, violence can erupt.<sup>11</sup> Arjun Appadurai explains why this happens:



What ethnic plurality does (especially when it is the product of population movements within recent memory) is to violate the sense of isomorphism between territory and national identity on which the modern nation-state relies. . . . What diasporic pluralisms particularly expose and intensify is the gap between the powers of the state to regulate borders, monitor dissent, distribute entitlements within a finite territory and the fiction of ethnic singularity on which most nations ultimately rely. In other words, the territorial integrity that justifies states and the ethnic singularity that validates nations are increasingly hard to see as seamless aspects of each other . . . . Put another way, since states, territories and ideas of national ethnic singularity are always complicated historical productions, diasporic pluralism tends to embarrass all narratives that attempt to naturalize such histories.<sup>12</sup>

Isomorphism also deals with the notion of space, a space that is again deemed isomorphic to an ethnic group. The Hutus perceived the Tutsis as a threat to their space and thus attempted to send them back to "Abyssinia," which was supposedly one of their places of origin. Arjun Appadurai continues:

In the history of culture theory, territory and territoriality have played an important role: in a general way, the idea that cultures are coherent, bounded, contiguous and persistent has always been underwritten by a sense that human sociality is naturally localized and even locality-bound. The concern of anthropologists with rules of residence and their relation to descent groups and other social formations, for example, is based on a continuing sense that territorial realities of one or other sort both bound and determine social arrangements. . . . There is still a wide spread sense that human beings are conditioned to demand spaces of allegiance that are extensions of their bodies.<sup>13</sup>

The relationship between individuals, the collective, and their space is essential in the tragic events that happened in Rwanda and in the performance of *Rwanda 94*. From the political situation as presented, the audience can gather that the arguments that justified the killings were based on conceptions of spatialized "cultures" where one space is envisioned as being naturally disconnected from the next. This disconnection seems to have always been prevalent. An alternative to that would be to consider space as naturally connected rather than naturally disconnected.

*Rwanda 94* illustrates the conclusions drawn by scholars in a variety of fields. Sociologists, anthropologists, economists, and political observers underline the fact that while a discourse of opening to other cultures prevails, often simply by virtue of large-scale migrations, there is a simultaneous and opposite tendency toward enclosure and exclusion. This tendency is, in many countries, charged with violence and expresses itself in

the massacre of perceived minorities in defense of territorial sovereignty. In other words, the play reminds us of the fact that, although acculturation is expanding in the world, new nationalisms, often tied up with ethnic separatism and state-level turbulence, are on the rise. The play shows that while boundaries may be geographic, they are more often ideological and constitute a process by which we imprison one another in a single origin, culture, religion, or ideology. Through this process of identification we can exclude another from our shared space. This would seem to be the final program of the discourse of enclosure and exclusion: to clear the space.

Now, how can a performance go against the signs of enclosures that it narrates? How can it go beyond the intelligent deconstruction of what it tells? To be more specific, how does it contribute, beyond the evocation of tragic events, to the transformation of a restricted and exclusive vision of a territory, nation, or ethnic group? How can it facilitate an openness allowing future transactions?

There are numerous levels to any answer: some are dependent on contingent, nonartistic factors; others are the direct consequence of specifically artistic choices. For instance the ethnic exclusionism that characterized the events in Rwanda in 1994 was not repeated onstage: one of the performers was Hutu, a presence that was not recognized by the narrative, yet it was a modest, but important opening.<sup>14</sup> The play had an impact beyond its artistic aspects: the actors came to constitute a Rwandan diaspora (along with their Belgian colleagues), as some of them applied for refugee status in France and Belgium.<sup>15</sup> This, too, contributed to the disintegration of a vision fusing geographic space with ethnic identity. Here identities were no longer categorically attached to a single country or ethnic group. They were dictated by their link to the present, a present tied, of course, to their specific past, but not a past determined by nostalgia and refusal. It is a present of transitional space or a frontier space, a space that Homi Bhabha has defined as being the *third space* marked by cultural and political diaspora.

At the artistic level, openness was signified within the performance itself as an affirmation of the identities and unique trajectories of the individuals who had composed it. It denied the binary logic that divides Rwandans into Tutsis and Hutus, replacing it with a more complex logic born of multiple origins where the present is not merely the consequence of the past, nor a rupture with it. It is a present paradoxically characterized by discontinuity, complexity, and a multiplicity of experience. This was carried through a narrative that presented many points of view: those of the victims, of the murderers, of the media, of the politicians, of foreign governments—stressing that there is no easy answer to this difficult situation.

So, by resisting a categorical grand narrative, the structure of the performance reveals a hybridization of genres. The play mixed forms ranging from direct accounts, confession, and autobiography to the classic lecture (a good forty-five minutes!), a violent public address—“if you refuse to listen, you are collaborating with the oppressor!”—critical analysis, microfictions, oratorio, electronic media, documentary, and the cantata. The epic



Fig. 4. Is this the third space? *Chez Jacob* in *Rwanda 94*. Photo by Lou Hérion.

style of the piece avoided blaming the public, crusading for justice, or posing acts of vengeance. It also avoided the potential pathos of its subject matter. The hybridity of its collages, montages, and patchworks was an eloquent response to the ethnic “purification” described by its narrative.

### *Deterritorialized Space*

The second performance I describe is very different in its nature and inspiration. I might even describe it as an opposite to *Rwanda 94*. Its theme, form, and characters evoke the daily environment of the Occident. No natural or human cataclysm marks this work. The enclosures described in *Rwanda 94* are self-evident. In *Allemaal Indian*, the opposite movement is highlighted—the opening of public spaces, the circulation of individuals, and the absence of strong notions of identity.

*Allemaal Indian* is the third piece in a trilogy in which director Alain Platel translates today’s world onto the stage. This performance also translates the phenomenon of acculturation, a liberating force according to some and a factor in the disappearance of identity for others. Whether or not we adopt an optimistic or pessimistic attitude to this phenomenon, it is a dominant factor in many of our lives, information globe-trotters and transnational immigrants that we are.

What is the story of *Allemaal Indian*? On stage are two houses complete with rooms, levels, doors, windows, stairs, roofs, and hallways; the doors and windows open, close, and slam. Blinds rise and fall. Banal scenes of everyday life roll by, indoors and out, juxtaposed seemingly without any connection, linked only by the continuities of common space



Fig. 5. In a small space, filled with everyday things: a “microstory.” From Alain Platel’s production of *Allemaal Indian*. Photo by Kurt Van der Elst.

and the hazards of individual desires. Through the windows of the houses, or in the space between the two houses, is seen a poorly defined public area—perhaps a sidewalk, alley, or road. The audience observes the lives and activities of two families in a working-class neighborhood. The action could be happening anywhere. The families represented are dysfunctional: mothers or fathers are absent, parents are overwhelmed, children play at threatening each other with real weapons. Each character has a “defect”: one is mentally handicapped, another blind; one is a suicidal housekeeper, one a burned-out mother; there is an immigrant seeking social acceptance, a son who rejects his mother after her return from psychiatric incarceration, a teenage girl seeking her absent father.

The performance is a series of microstories that when linked create fragmented and multiple relationships between the twelve characters. Beyond the violence and alienation inherent in these relationships, a certain clumsy tenderness appears to haunt the interactions of these lost characters.<sup>16</sup> An immigrant from Montenegro named Kosovo, expresses her delight in finding herself in Belgium by singing the national anthem. At the same time one of her neighbors scrawls, “Kosovo Go Home” in his window. In the absence of a single dominant narrative, the links between the characters are created using the space defined by the two houses. We are witnesses to a space inhabited by the small things of everyday life. Relationships are imposed by the simple fact that the characters are neighbors. The separation between the interior and exterior space is erased. The entire stage becomes a vast living area for a reconstituted community of disparate elements.

Fig. 6. The proxemics of close living in *Allemaal Indian*. Photo by Kurt Van der Elst.



The extreme openness of this area is remarkable. Everything is visible, even the insides of the houses. Intimacy is banished and every action on the stage is revealed to the gaze of the public. Individuals have relinquished their private space, yet each struggles to rid himself or herself of the others' presence, viewing them as intruders. Despite these furtive attempts at staking boundaries, we have the impression that space is no longer related to individual identities. The performance presents a tableau of a receding private arena in the face of the devouring public sphere, which offers up everything in its grasp to the eyes of the audience. The individuals who are subject to this phenomenon can no longer tell the difference between what should be shown in public and what should be concealed in intimacy. An opening to the world has been replaced by a defensive self-contraction in the face of the outside world's persistent invasion. As Homi Bhabha comments of such a process: "This results in re-drawing the domestic space as the space of the normalizing, pastoralizing, and individuating techniques of modern power and police: the personal is political; the world in the home."<sup>17</sup>

The performance space, which is neither presented as a totality nor totally presented, is never invested with symbolic meaning. Simultaneously integral and fragmented, it is transitional, a space of passage and crossing rather than a place of identification. It is a representation of those undefined zones, reterritorialized sites inhabited by individuals without stable points of reference.<sup>18</sup>



Fig. 7. Seeing and being seen have become the *modus vivendi* in *Allemaal Indian*. Photo by Kurt Van der Elst.

As a place of exploration or passage, the space represented on stage becomes the simple receptacle of daily acts. It is a zone between home and foreign ground, between inside and outside, between known and unknown, between friendly surroundings and an antagonistic neighborhood. More and more, these spaces reflect the universe in which we live.<sup>19</sup>

### *What Does This Performance Express?*

This performance expresses several things:

1. The opening of the space corresponds to the opening of the individuals who inhabit it and to their absence of strong individuality. In this structure, individuals are defined by their relationship with others. This vision of today's Western societies has been clearly articulated by Baudrillard.
2. The space is devoid of symbolic meaning. It is merely the location of activity. It is malleable and can be explored in all its multiple facets. It does not imprison; rather it opens onto other(s') territories, should one desire to explore them.
3. The perpetual crossing of this space creates networks within it that themselves instantly create sets of new trajectories. The space becomes a place of crossings, where limits endlessly transect themselves. The crossing of boundaries necessarily transforms all hegemonic material or culture, all hierarchical space. It contaminates space. Space becomes interstitial to the people. It is what connects them, not what divides them. It allows for real transactions based not on dichotomist or one-way relations, but a network of movements and exchanges.

4. The border, in this instance, does not refer to a fixed topology but rather to an interstitial zone, a “zone of displacement and deterritorialization,” as Gupta and Ferguson state, a zone that “shapes the identity of the hybridized subject.”<sup>20</sup> In such a space, it is no longer possible to invoke the orthodox idea of culture. Here one can only witness “a clustering of cultural practices that do not belong to a particular people or to a definite place.”<sup>21</sup> It is not a hybrid space but a space of hybridity. It stresses the production of locality as a dimension of social life, as a structure of feeling, and as co-presence to the other. It even tends, through the character of the immigrant, to show that certain places, which are local spaces for some, are translocal for others, showing the complexity of the new space we live in. This translocality could express different forms of human organization. If we reverse this vision—as Gupta and Ferguson have rightfully suggested—and substitute the idea that spaces are naturally interconnected, then countries, nations, or even ethnic groups could no longer use this argument in the service of violence and a fight for power. Gupta recommends that when one starts from the “premise that spaces have *always* been hierarchically interconnected, instead of naturally disconnected, then cultural and social change becomes not a matter of cultural contact and articulation but one of rethinking *through* connection.”<sup>22</sup> This interconnection of space is rendered possible by the importance given to localities (translocalities) or transcommunities rather than to large territories.
5. In this space, identity appears as the effect of homelessness, of a rootlessness that is not the direct result of historical, social, or political conditions. Here the subject is endlessly transplanted in space and time along with the multiple aspects of his environment. No longer obsessed by notions of fixed identity, the subject becomes the seat of mutant hybrid identities resulting from transactions with the environment.<sup>23</sup>

Many scholars in the field of cultural studies have underlined the benefits of such opened spaces, these borderless zones of passage defined as translocalities. However, they have also noted the individual’s tendency to reterritorialize space in reaction to this destabilizing force.

This brings us back to our point of departure, to alternation of opening and closure. The paradox in this play is that although it is a fair illustration of today’s tendency in Western cultures to indulge in open spaces, at the same time the characters try to close the doors, shut the windows, get out or get in to escape the other, and yet in the next moment they will reopen shutters, open doors, go toward the other. They are always drawing limits, a border between themselves and the others. Yet this border is always moving, vanishing, reappearing elsewhere. It remains as a constant possibility, like an elastic membrane, a porous line, which has to be there as a potentiality in order to be crossed, like those described by Gupta and



Ferguson: "Border zones are now becoming spaces of complex quasi-legal circulation of persons and goods. The border between US and Mexico, is an excellent example of one kind of translocality."<sup>24</sup> Similarly many tourist zones may be described as translocalities. The characters seem to be in perpetual flight from this zone of radical openness and flux. Though they are seemingly at ease in this openness, one can wonder if it is not after all a form of enclosure.

### *From the Artistic to the Theoretical*

This brings me to the final consideration: the role of the artistic. I should like to attempt a reconciliation of the views expressed by these two performances. Despite their decidedly opposite visions of spaces, nations, and identities, and also despite the opposite kind of transactions that they evoke—visions of exclusion and enclosure contrasted with depictions of radical openness—I should like to point out that both pieces contain, and are even driven by, the same active ingredients, of which they are the negative and positive image respectively. If we consider the meaning of these two performances and what they propose about the nature of individuals, how their narratives unfold and what aesthetics are employed to express them, we will indeed conclude that they share important characteristics.

What do these performances present? Both present the dissolution of the individual identities represented on stage. In the first case, individuals recount their personal histories, their loss of a personal identity in the face of a forced fusion with the identity of an ethnic group. Without individual traits, dominated by their ethnic status, they are completely defined and condemned by it. They are stripped of their roles of mother, wife, or daughter and become mere numbers in a mass of victims.

In *Allemaal Indian*, the characters maintain their roles as mother, son, or husband, but these roles are lifeless, made up of so many superficial actions as to be without consequence. The banality of daily life is presented in random interactions that leave the spectator with the impression of witnessing the disintegration of individual identity. How does this disintegration herald the hybridity of the new subject that is to come, as some have repeatedly asserted? The question remains unanswered.

The second characteristic linking the two performances is that in both of their universes, the private has become public. It is impossible to find refuge in the intimacy that makes the subject an individual. Life is lived in view of all, motivating *Allemaal Indian's* characters' perpetual attempts to close the blinds, doors, and windows and yet to live openly. Life also becomes inconceivable without the constant gaze of the collective.

Privacy is also negated in *Rwanda 94*, but the negation is imposed by the outside force of the genocide. In *Allemaal Indian*, it seems that the characters themselves have chosen to accept the lifestyle where the private sphere has become public, banishing intimacy. The subjects have become the subjugated objects of their fellows' gaze, a gaze that ignores distinctive signs and recognizes only what renders subjects similar to one an-



other, without differences and indifferent. In both cases, the events of daily life become spectacular—objects of spectacle—like the documentary footage used in *Rwanda 94* where smiling assassins mug for the camera in front of a pile of dead bodies, as though they were so much game brought in by so many hunters.

The third characteristic is that, surprisingly, both these universes are concerned with violence. Both performances take place in universes that are spaces of “trans-actions.” While this violence differs in force, intensity, and meaning, it would be naive to imagine that only the forced exclusion of *Rwanda 94* is charged with violence. Intolerable in the barbarity depicted in *Rwanda 94*, violence is also present in a defused way in *Allemaal Indian*. In tiny acts of cowardice and betrayal, this violence is continually present. It colors human relations, appearing suddenly disguised as play.

Certainly these performances differ in force and in violence. Where *Rwanda 94* creates a clear and categorical distinction between the oppressors and the victims, *Allemaal Indian* presents a system of interactions revealing the circularity of events and relationships between individuals. Micronarratives are linked in the chaos of the insignificant actions of daily life, whereas in *Rwanda 94*, the micronarratives link together to present a coherent whole—the narrative of ethnic cleansing. In both cases, we are confronted with chaos. In *Rwanda 94*, it is a chaos arising from the abolition of what appeared to be a political order. In *Allemaal Indian*, the chaos is structural. Life itself appears destructured, and its events have become unimportant.

Finally, in both performances one has the impression that any notion of ethics has been abandoned, but for different reasons. In one case this is due to the upending of the social order, which is itself no doubt based on a certain kind of violence. In the second case it seems impossible to institute any notions of rights and responsibilities in a space devoid of social or political homogeneity because of its openness. In this second instance we are confronted with a vision of society based on a lack of boundaries between individuals and spaces, one where the only remaining normative structuring force is the interactions between individuals.

It is tempting to say that in both these performances we enter the third space that Homi Bhabha would like to see emerging from these transitional identities.<sup>25</sup> It is a space produced by cultural and political diasporas, a frontier zone without readily identifiable frontiers. Indeed the strength of these two performances comes from their incarnation of the complementary and opposite nature of all transactions: their transcendent necessity and imminent danger.

In both cases, boundaries remain and indeed must be preserved. These borders are not merely geographical, national, or ethnic perimeters—they are boundaries that reveal the urgent necessity that what is private remain so. Where the private becomes completely public, the subject disintegrates, replaced by the spectacle of himself, as Guy Debord has ably demonstrated.<sup>26</sup>

Let us return to the theater and our role as scholars in the field of

theater studies. What have we to say to all this? What positions and discourse should we hold given the artistic practices we witness? If we content ourselves with performing the familiar inventory of artistic forms and practices, we risk establishing a useful but arbitrary formalism. Likewise if we are satisfied with revealing the correspondences between artistic creations and the world, or between those productions and the discourses they hold about the world, our approach again is of limited use. Research and scholarship are finally only interesting in the case where they discover avenues of exploration as yet unsought.

The genius of these two performances is that they allow us to take part in the creation of new territories and to observe that boundaries are constructive when they remain porous. They permit us a critical distance and perspective on our present reality. Likewise this porosity affirms the reality of the theater, which appears as a frontier zone where things may be said that escape easy and rapid political categorization. The theater is in this way comparable to those points of transit where the demands of the world are suspended: airports, hotels, train stations. The theater becomes a frontier zone, which in itself is more interesting than the spaces it links—after all, it is at the frontier where transactions are possible.

By revealing the new forces at work in the world, by making visible the elements that compose the universe that surrounds us, by highlighting contradictions and hidden factors, the theater is a revelatory force. It becomes an important cognitive tool where the messages it transmits have important conceptual consequences. Theater permits the interpretation of a world not easily interpreted by classical categories. It plays a dialectical and critical role, one that facilitates and accompanies us on our journeys through performance.

## NOTES

1. This essay was originally delivered as a keynote speech at the International Federation for Theatre Research conference "Trans-actions: Culture and Performance," Sydney, July 8–13, 2001.

2. Arjun Appadurai, "Sovereignty without Territoriality. Notes for a Postnational Geography," in *The Geography of Identity*, ed. Patricia Yeager (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 40–58.

3. Edgar Morin, *Science avec conscience* (1982; reprint, Paris: Édition du Seuil, Collection Points, 1990), 124.

4. Appadurai states: "'Deterritorialisation' generates various forms of 'reterritorialization.' Not all reterritorialization is counternationalist or nativist. Reterritorialization can involve the effort to create new localized residential communities (slums, refugee camps, hostels) that rest not on a national imaginary but only on an imaginary of local autonomy or of resource sovereignty. In such 'transit communities,' there is frequently an effort to create and defend various forms of rights . . . that allow the displaced community to continue its reproduction under unstable conditions by assuring reliable access to the material needs of reproduction. . . . Territory thus can be seen as the crucial problem in the contemporary cri-

sis of the nation-state, or, more precisely, the crisis in the relationship between nation and state. . . . Insofar as these minorities (as guest workers, refugees, or illegal aliens) enter into new polities, they require reterritorialization within a new civic order, whose ideology of ethnic coherence and citizenship rights they are bound to disturb, since all modern ideologies of rights depend, ultimately, on the *closed* (enumerated, stable, and immobile) group of appropriate recipients of state protection and patronage." "Sovereignty without Territoriality," 54–57.

5. This festival occurs every two years and usually presents works by theater and performance artists from North America, Latin America, and Europe.

6. The translation of these titles in English is *Death Does Not Want Me* and *Be Not Afraid to Know*.

7. The spectator can feel the presence of these emotions and feelings, but they are contained by Mukagasana as she tells the compelling story to which she has committed herself. It is precisely her efforts to tell her story with objectivity that makes it so powerful and so emotionally disturbing for the spectator.

8. See, for example, Arjun Appadurai, *Après le colonialisme: Les conséquences culturelles de la globalisation* (Paris: Payot, 2000), 322, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 229, and *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 329. See also Homi Bhabha, *Nation and Narration* (London: Routledge, 1990), 333, and *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 285; Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson, *Culture, Power, Place: Explorations in Critical Anthropology* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1997), 33–51. For Deleuze and Guattari's foundational ideas, see *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (London: Athlone Press, 1988), *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. R. Hurley, M. Seem, and H. Lane (New York: Viking Press, 1977), and *On the Line*, trans. John Johnston (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983). See also Deleuze, *Critique and Clinic* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, Coll. Paradoxe, 1993), *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), and *Empiricism and Subjectivity: An Essay on Hume's Theory of Human Nature*, trans. Constantin V. Boundas (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).

9. Although this territory can be conceived of as a geographic space situated within well-defined limits, it can also refer to a virtual territory occurring in the imagination. The state of Khalistan, which nationalist Sikhs project as their ideal homeland, is an example of such a territory.

10. The notion dates back to the agreement associated with the Westphalian peace settlements of 1648. It is on that occasion that the principle of territorial sovereignty becomes the foundational concept of the nation-state.

11. It was, of course, assumed by the "génocidaires" who believed that this isomorphism was about to be broken although they were representing 80 percent of the population.

12. Appadurai, "Sovereignty without Territoriality," 57. Appadurai's writings are of broader scope than those of Rustom Bharucha, who studies interculturalism through the prism of art forms. Appadurai's analysis is more political and thus more appropriate to the political and social content of performances such as *Rwanda 94* and *Allemaal Indian*.

13. Appadurai, "Sovereignty without Territoriality," 53.

14. It was, in fact, a Tutsi who had changed ethnic groups (as it happens in Rwanda) because he was poor. He therefore became Hutu. However, the public was not informed of such a fact.

15. Indeed, fearing that they might ask for refugee status, the Canadian Government had not granted some of the artists a visa. It is only the pressure exerted by the media and the theater community that brought a change and opened the borders.

16. It is interesting to note that young people seem to identify with this presentation. The fragmented images, techno music, and chaotic reality that they evoke are in synch with the sensibilities of today's youth.

17. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 11.

18. Akhil Gupta, in the same vein as Deleuze's earlier work on the same subject, notes that the "transnational public sphere has certainly rendered any strictly bounded sense of community or locality obsolete. At the same time, it has enabled the creation of forms of solidarity and identity that do not rest on an appropriation of space where contiguity and face-to-face contact are paramount. In the pulverized space of postmodernity, space has not become irrelevant: it has been reterritorialized in a way that does not conform to the experience of space that characterized the era of high modernity. . . . For, it is not only the displaced who experience a displacement. Even people remaining in familiar and ancestral places find the nature of their relation to place ineluctably changed and the illusion of a natural and essential connection between the place and the culture broken." Gupta and Ferguson, *Culture, Power, Place*, 55.

19. See Marc Augé, *Culture, idéologie et société* (Paris: Le Monde diplomatique, Hors série, 1997), *Manière de voir* (Paris: Mars, 1997), *Non-places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, trans. John Howe (London: Verso, 1995), *The Anthropological Circle: Symbol, Function, History*, trans. Martin Thom (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982). *A Sense for the Other: The Timeliness and Relevance of Anthropology*, trans. Amy Jacobs (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), and *La construction du monde* (Paris: F. Maspero, 1974), 141.

20. Gupta and Ferguson, *Culture, Power, Place*, 48.

21. Gupta and Ferguson, *Culture, Power, Place*, 49.

22. Gupta and Ferguson, *Culture, Power, Place*, 35.

23. "We have argued that deterritorialization has destabilized the fixity of 'ourselves' and 'others.' But it has not thereby created subjects who are free-floating monads. . . . Instead of stopping with the notion of deterritorialization, the pulverization of the space of high modernity, we need to theorize how space is being reterritorialized in the contemporary world." Gupta and Ferguson, *Culture, Power, Place*, 50.

24. Gupta and Ferguson, *Culture, Power, Place*, 44.

25. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 36–39.

26. Guy Debord, *La société du spectacle* (Paris: Champ Libre, 1971), 170.

## Postcolonial Studies

*Postcolonial studies* designates a body of critical theory about Western imperialism and its consequences, especially the cultural politics of relations between colonizers and the colonized, and the representations of those relations. Postcolonial theorists practice a particular kind of “critique,” a method of scrutinizing colonialist and anticolonialist discourses and assessing their implications for the human subjects who make and bear their meanings. Pointing out that “more than three-quarters of the people living in the world today have had their lives shaped by the experience of colonialism,” the authors of the early and influential *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (1989) take their title and their epigraph from Salman Rushdie: “the Empire writes back to the Centre.” They evoke the spectral binary of colonial periphery and metropolitan center, which, historically overdetermined by the vicissitudes of a long geopolitical struggle, still haunts what they call the “perceptual framework” of the postcolonial world. This includes its problematic assignment of identities along racial and ethnic lines and its complicit cultural productions (see “Critical Race Theory” in this collection).<sup>1</sup>

Drama and other kinds of performance figure prominently in both the construction of this colonial framework and the postcolonial critique that aims to dismantle it. The most authoritative precursor to postcolonial studies, Frantz Fanon, a Francophone psychoanalyst and activist in the cause of Third World liberation, titled his most frequently cited book *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), and in it he wrote: “A drama is enacted every day in colonized countries.” The drama to which Fanon refers, quoting Jacques Lacan, occurs between the Self and the Other as defined by colonialism and its discontents. Here, as in the more intimate setting of family drama, “the Other is perceived on the level of the body image, absolutely as the not-self—that is, the unidentifiable, the unassimilable.”<sup>2</sup> Fanon’s drama of black skin and white masks did not end with the independence movements of the 1960s, nor is it containable ahistorically within psychoanalysis. According to the single most important book in postcolonial studies, *Orientalism*, Edward Said’s generative study of Western knowledge of the non-West, history has divided the world into a “we-they” dichotomy on the mental maps of once and future empires, in which

“they”—say, the Palestinians—subsist as a political nullity.<sup>3</sup> The construction of “we” in this context presents as vexed a problem as the construction of “they.” For whom does an author speak when using the first-person plural? Who are *we*? (See also “Psychoanalysis” in this volume.) This problem of postcolonial positionality—the assumption of authority for the position from which one is entitled to speak—provokes Gayatri Spivak’s celebrated question about permission: “Can the subaltern speak?” (The “subaltern” refers to the silenced, colonized subject, which cannot “know or speak itself.”) It also motivates her double-edged answer: “Clearly, if you are poor, black, and female, you get it in three ways.”<sup>4</sup> Moreover, positionality instigates Homi K. Bhabha’s formulation of “mimicry” as the prevailing mode of (post)colonial relations, a sly, ambivalent repetition, a performance that produces “a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite” or, less delicately, “almost the same, but not white.”<sup>5</sup> To speak globally of the *postcolonial* moment of the present is to underestimate neither the lingering effects of the former project, including the resistant agency that subjects deploy against it, nor the clear and present danger of its return as *neocolonialism*. Postcoloniality is a long-running drama with multiple plots and many characters but as yet no denouement.<sup>6</sup>

Australians Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins define postcolonial drama, actual and metaphoric, as a “re-action” to empire, by which they mean to emphasize “how plays and playwrights construct discursive contexts for an artistic, social, and political present by enacting other versions of the pre-contact, imperial, and post-imperial past on stage.”<sup>7</sup> That historical meaning of postcolonial drama, extended to include tourist performance, obtains in each of the essays that follow in this section, beginning with Tompkins’s own “Performing History’s Unsettling.” She treats four plays, each from one of the former “settler colonies” of Great Britain (Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Canada), which some would exclude from postcolonial studies because of their dominant “whiteness” and the particular history of South African apartheid. Tompkins here makes a case for their inclusion. Despite their stylistic differences, each of Tompkins’s plays discloses a distinctive effect of the colonial experience or its residue in shaping relations of identity and difference among the inhabitants of the former colony. In Josie Ningali Lawford’s *Ningali*, it is the re-quickening of Australian Aboriginal ethnic consciousness that dramatizes the historic consequences of internal (and internalized) colonization. In Lorae Parry’s *Eugenia*, it is transvestism as a dramatic metaphor for New Zealand, a country that “fails to recognize itself, partly because its own identity has not been established independently of its colonizer.” In Reza de Wet’s *Crossing*, it is an allegory of the return of the dead to the living that “unsettles” South African history by having the dead represent, as they so often do in colonies and former colonies, displaced social relations. Finally, in Djanet Sears’s *Harlem Duet*, the “four-hundred-year history of African Americans and African Canadians” is played out in what the playwright intends as an “exorcism” of “the effects of race and sex on the lives

of people of African descent." Among those exorcised spirits must be numbered the dramatic roles—Shakespeare's Othello, for instance, and the mask of blackface minstrelsy—that have been used to define and contain the descendants of the most systematic of all imperial and colonial deprivations, the Middle Passage.

Like Djanet Sears's dramatization of the historic burden of African diasporic identities in the present, Sandra L. Richards's "What Is to Be Remembered? Tourism to Ghana's Slave Castle-Dungeons" confronts her own and others' memories of the Atlantic system, but Richards reports in the first person from the scene of the "forts" erected along the West African coast by the slave-taking European empires. Here for several centuries captives from the African interior were imprisoned until they embarked on slave ships through the infamous "Door of No Return." The most harrowing of colonial monuments, castle-dungeons are now among the most popular of tourist destinations in the postcolonial world. Supported in part by UNESCO's "World Heritage" initiative, they are pitched to attract dollar-bearing "cultural tourists." Tourism currently employs more people worldwide than any other industry, and tourist performance is a growth area in scholarship.<sup>8</sup> Generally, the colonialist encounter of privileged metropolitan traveler and picturesque "native" is reenacted wherever locals perform for tourists, but the issue here is complicated for Richards by the double consciousness of African Americans staging a sentimental journey of return to this bitter Eden. She reports that in the empty chambers of the slave forts well-to-do African Americans perform unbidden as historical reenactors, taking the supernumerary roles of their anonymous ancestors: "Tourists imagine themselves as standing in, as artifacts or surrogates, for those whose names can no longer be recalled." Richards carefully delineates the conflicting agendas of visitors from America and Europe and the local Ghanaian project of putting together attractive vacation packages, which include sunbathing, shopping for jewelry, and dining in a restaurant and bar located in the main castle-dungeon itself. Thus, Richards shows, the excruciating negotiation of colonialist history and postcolonialist experience is packed into the contradictory itinerary of a contemporary holiday pilgrimage.

Another kind of postcolonial negotiation appears in Phillip P. Zarrilli's account, which he has updated for this edition, of the Franco-Anglo-Indian reception of the multinational production of the *Kathakali King Lear*. Shakespeare, as the talismanic canonical figure held up to colonials as the acme of metropolitan culture, has proved a touchstone for postcolonial critiques, of which the Caribbean novelist George Lamming's Calibanic reading of *The Tempest* in *The Pleasures of Exile* (1960) is exemplary. The *Kathakali King Lear*, however, purported to be a truly intercultural production: it adapted Shakespeare's tragedy to the tradition of the kathakali, or "story play," a highly conventionalized form of dance-drama from Kerala, India. Zarrilli, studying the reception of the production, recounts the prior controversy surrounding Peter Brook's *Mahabharata*, a problematic attempt to "universalize," through intercultural performance, the local knowledge of

the Sanskrit epic.<sup>9</sup> But here the ancient subcontinental form takes aesthetic pride of place as the organizing structure and style into which Shakespeare's plot and characters are incorporated, culminating in a performance at the restored Globe Theatre itself. The result intrigued and discomfited critics in both the former colony and the former metropole. They wrote back to an empire, which, like Lear's kingdom, no longer has a center, but which has dissolved into fractious parts, still burdened with the ambivalent yet fertile consequences of their fateful union.<sup>10</sup>

J.R.R.

## NOTES

1. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (London: Routledge, 1989), 1.
2. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 145, 161.
3. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978), 26–27.
4. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 294–95.
5. Homi K. Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse," in *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 86, 89.
6. As Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o notes in *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (London: James Curry, 1981), "Drama is closer to the dialectics of life than poetry or fiction. . . . [It] encapsulates within itself this principle of the struggle of opposites which generates movement" (54).
7. Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins, *Post-colonial Drama: Theory, Practice, Politics* (London: Routledge, 1996), 107.
8. The foundational study is Dean MacCannell's *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (1976; New York: Schocken, 1989).
9. See Rustom Bharucha, *Theatre and the World: Performance and the Politics of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1993), 68–87. See also Bharucha, "Foreign Asia/Foreign Shakespeare: Dissenting Notes on New Asian Interculturality, Postcoloniality, and Recolonization," *Theatre Journal* 56 (2004): 1–28; and Ania Loomba, *Post-colonial Shakespeares* (London: Routledge, 1998).
10. For the deterritorializing of classical imperialism in the age of globalization, see Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000) and subsequent commentary: *Empire's New Clothes: Reading Hardt and Negri*, eds. Jodi Dean and Paul Possavant (London: Routledge, 2004).



# Performing History's Unsettlement

Joanne Tompkins

History is not the past: it is a consciousness of the past used for present purposes.

—Greg Dening

[T]he idea of mapping the historical landscape depends on the construction of perspective, a view from the present, around which the panoramas of history are made to revolve.

—Felix Driver

Driver's revolving panoramas and Dening's consciousnesses of the past must be plentiful, since there are any number of "present purposes" for which history might be helpful. In postcolonial studies, refiguring history remains one of the predominant tropes for the decolonization of texts, bodies, minds, and nations, precisely because imperial agents maintained strict control over the interpretation of history, as a key mechanism for exerting authority over a people. Postcolonial reinterpretations of history have adopted several strategies: recovering suppressed or lost histories, recognizing the authority in myths and other oral transmissions of the past, valorizing unofficial versions of history as well as official documents, and remapping imperial settlements of space and land.<sup>1</sup> An increasingly articulated (re)use of history as a means for exploring postcoloniality is a self-reflexive performance of cultural specificity, individual subjectivity, and theatricality. Among the late-twentieth-century plays that address the anxiety of historical unsettlement are Josie Ningali Lawford's *Ningali* from Australia, Lorae Parry's *Eugenia* from New Zealand, Reza de Wet's *Crossing* from South Africa, and Djanet Sears's *Harlem Duet* from Canada. While a degree of revisionism occurs in any nation that permits reevaluation of its national mythologies, in some former colonies this reevaluation is highly charged, politically and socially.

These plays were first performed in countries whose claim to postcoloniality is often questioned: the former settler colonies (Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and South Africa) are most frequently excluded from a field itself subject to substantial critical debate.<sup>2</sup> The extent of imperialism's historical and geographical reach unsurprisingly provokes debate about the parameters of the field.<sup>3</sup> Critics of former settler colonies tend to argue that they are industrialized and predominantly white, which restricts interpretations of postcolonialism to a black/white, poor/rich frame.<sup>4</sup> The United States has traditionally been discounted because of its political and economic weight: its connection to imperialism tends now to be as an imperial agent in its own right. It is, however, possible to include some aspects of American society in a postcolonial relationship outside an

American nationalist context, and *Harlem Duet* provides a model: it is written by a Canadian about the postcolonial history of descendants of slaves transported from Africa to North America.<sup>5</sup> South Africa's postcolonial status is also complicated by the overt racism of apartheid. Yet the lengthy process of dismantling apartheid, like decolonization, "helps us realize the limitations of thinking of 'colonial' and 'post-colonial' as distinct, rather than intermingled conditions which vary according to the historical and cultural specifics of the place."<sup>6</sup>

Moreover, to dismiss settler colonies from postcolonial studies is to confirm any power ostensibly invested in "whiteness," rather than attempting to dismantle its authority. Richard Dyer maintains that race (including whiteness) "is never not a factor, never not in play."<sup>7</sup> While racial identity is now well acknowledged to be a complex construction, "whiteness" is still often exempt from analysis. The complexity of whiteness is evident in the historical experience of many subjects of former settler colonies who held a "not quite/not white"<sup>8</sup> status vis-à-vis Europeans, figured as authentically "white." The effect of this "colonial cringe" is an enduring and debilitating performance anxiety on a global stage. The ambivalence of the settler colonial subject position is exacerbated by the whitewashing of history since settler colonies were established by *unsettling*—dispossessing—indigenous peoples. A third factor, the displacement of people from one nation to another as a result of imperial maneuvers, has substantially altered the demographics of settler nations that accepted large numbers of migrants following the two world wars. Such countries are no longer uniformly "white," if they ever could be considered so. The ongoing reconstitution of the population of such former settler nations suggests the necessity of a relatively frequent reevaluation of national identity, or at least an opportunity to accommodate diversity.

Yet national identity is, of course, often a closely guarded, even sacred, entity. Its unsettlement can be more disruptive than the shift in demographics itself. Such unsettlement has been evident in a backlash manifested most clearly in right-wing politics in several former settler colonies.<sup>9</sup> Subscribers to these political positions tend to share a fear of losing their place in that society by losing their land or being otherwise disenfranchised. The resultant instability has been best articulated in Australia by Ken Gelder and Jane M. Jacobs as the "uncanny," which

elaborate[s] a modern Australian condition where what is "ours" may also be "theirs," and vice versa: where difference and "reconciliation" co-exist uneasily. In an uncanny Australia, one's place is always already another's place and the issue of possession is never complete, never entirely settled.<sup>10</sup>

A sense of instability is also pronounced in other countries comprised of indigenous and settler populations, particularly in contexts where "the nation seems suddenly to have become unfamiliar to itself."<sup>11</sup> Unsettle-

ment, then, registers a fundamental unfamiliarity confronting the self, national mythologies, and perceptions of the present and the past.

In politics and popular culture, this unfamiliarity promotes nostalgia for the days of traditional values and knowing where one stood (often the speaker's childhood years). Theatrical manifestations of this national and/or individual unfamiliarity tend to opt not for a wholesale return to a closed field of representation but for a strategic reengagement with history and difference. The means by which they attempt to achieve this is the performing body, which by definition offers access to an unsettled, strategic system of representation: performance is uncanny in its own right since the actor "is" and "is not" the character s/he plays. Performance has thus been effective in staging postcolonial resistance to imperial control: among its possibilities, it takes place in a communal location, it is able to enact historical inequities quickly, it can mimic, it displays race and alterity in a manner that does not merely exploit, it facilitates the use of multiple languages, and it can manipulate the borders of geography, history, and subjectivity. As a result, history itself does not hold the power, but rather the *performance* of history is the dominant factor in the iteration of the past. Performance is a potentially dangerous genre that can encourage political engagement outside the theater building.

The plays discussed here capitalize on performance itself. They perform multiple subject positions, trying out various possibilities and strategically playing different roles. This self-reflexive performance of anxiety is not a mere metaphor for multilayering, "appearances versus reality" illusion, or the play-within-a-play model. By deliberately juxtaposing at least two different times, the texts play with both history and performance to stage some of the manifestations of the uncanny in unsettlement such as indigeneity and other race matters, migration, and gender. The plays reconfigure unstable representations of self, place, history, race, identity, and nationhood in divergent ways to reconstruct culturally specific, contemporary subject positions in a manner that continues to challenge the frames of the former settler colonies from which they emerge and the borders of the larger field, postcolonial studies. The act of taking on a different role does not always yield the desired results, but its effect generates a broader subjectivity by looking beyond a national history to a personal history, while not forgetting how the national history has shaped the individual.

### **Ningali: *Living with History***

In one way, *Ningali*, by Josie Ningali Lawford, Angela Chaplin, and Robyn Archer, is the most conventional example of historicizing the present in its recounting of how a young Aboriginal woman comes to understand the importance of her ancestral heritage, since indigenous history is integrally interconnected with the present: the one-woman play recalls the importance of the direct cultural connection between the past and the

present. Lawford explains her own history by introducing the audience to her extended family whose spirits appear to be on stage and by dancing her tribal dance: the space of the stage and the duration of performance transform to incorporate thousands of miles and thousands of years of “[m]aybe the oldest culture in the world.”<sup>12</sup> It encompasses the spatial memory contained in each dance and the cultural memory encapsulated in the Wambajarri language, reinforcing Lawford’s close connection to her people’s land, their language, and their dreaming, as well as to her living relatives.

*Ningali* is, however, more than an Aboriginal play reiterating an ancient claim to the land: amid the layers of ancient and recent Aboriginal history, the narration of Lawford’s life constructs a specific, individual subjectivity. Her journey moves from Fitzroy Crossing in northern Western Australia to Perth (for high school) to Anchorage, Alaska (on an American Field Scholarship), to Sydney (the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Dance Theatre), to performance in the national tour of the first Aboriginal musical, *Bran Nue Dae*. The specificity of Ningali’s story is staged theatrically as well as narratively: as she plots her self on the stage, it becomes clear that the stage floorcloth depicts a somewhat abstract image of Lawford herself, so that “during the course of the performance, Ningali Lawford inscribes her story on the landscape of her face.”<sup>13</sup> The performer’s body acts upon a representation of the performer’s own face as the play constructs a complex individual subjectivity in conjunction with an extensive, well-defined cultural backdrop.

The narrative that describes Lawford’s life as a performer is also an imbricated performance of different theatrical traditions, reinforcing the effect of Lawford’s image in the set. *Ningali* is part monodrama, part stand-up comedy routine, part a performance of contemporary and indigenous music and dance, and part indigenous history. The performance of the stand-up routine and the country-and-western singing are Western in style but Aboriginal in content, as the collection of performance styles marks a somewhat hybrid fluidity between the individual and the community. These performance styles form the play’s narrative structure as much as Ningali’s life itself does, representing somewhat abstractly the multiple subject positions that generate her subjectivity.

Of the performance modes, tribal dance is the most important for the performance of history’s unsettlement. Less entertainment than a direct connection to the culture’s history, Lawford’s dancing body is aesthetically beautiful on stage as well as representing an act of political engagement in which history is made current and present with each step of the dance. Formerly a means of marking the land and telling dreamtime history, tribal dance holds a more significant memory function now that Ningali’s family no longer has access to the land from which the dances, language, and culture emerged, having been forced to move by the (white) owners of the land. The power of the dance is in some respects transferred to language, a signifier of the physical culture that the Wambajarri are lucky enough not to have lost with their lands. Ningali

learns the impact of her grandfather's advice that keeping language at least keeps as much of the law and culture as possible:

He told me, Ningali, you can go anywhere you want  
 Do anything you want, be anyone you want  
 But don't forget your language  
 Because your songs, your dreaming, your stories  
 Are in your language  
 And if you lose your language  
 You are nothing.<sup>14</sup>

A visit to a group of Inuit people in Alaska reinforces the meaning of these words. Language itself becomes a performance strategy: *Ningali* is performed in English, Wambajarri, and kriol (a combination of the two). *Ningali* plays on the likelihood that audiences outside Fitzroy Crossing will understand only the English, briefly repeating many of the scenes in a different language, always heavily punctuated with telling gestures. The fluid movement from one performance style to another underscores possible ways of constructing and maintaining subjectivity. The layers of indigenous history and of personal history are clearly differentiated, yet intertwine to perform the complicated subjectivity of one indigenous Australian.

*Ningali* reinterprets the supposedly settled history of Australia: while *Ningali*'s experiences may suggest a somewhat effortless intervention into the world of contemporary performance in Australia, the play's backdrop depicts the relatively recent dispossession of the land on which she was born. A specific example of the uncanny Australia described by Gelder and Jacobs, this land belongs to *Ningali*'s family by virtue of an ancient historical connection, but others, who feel that the land belongs to them, hold the deed. The performance of history's panoramas in *Ningali* helps merge various subject positions to construct an example of a contemporary subjectivity for Aborigines in Australia that attempts to engage with the effects of dispossession.

### **Eugenia: Gendering History**

Whereas the trope of performance structures *Ningali*, the process of performance is the basis of Lorae Parry's *Eugenia*,<sup>15</sup> about a transvestite woman in New Zealand in 1916. In its focus on the boundaries of gender, *Eugenia* stages the performance of gender and gender roles as high school students in 1996 rehearse a play about Eugenia's life. Eugenia (also called Jack)<sup>16</sup> Martelli migrates from Italy to escape poverty and discrimination regarding her transvestism. In faraway New Zealand, she takes the opportunity to start again—as a man—but she soon finds that the prejudices of the Old World also travel to the New World. In addition, the promised land does not live up to its name: many migrants face disappointment with "God's own country" (a common description of New Zealand) and the disdain expressed toward them by longer-standing settlers.<sup>17</sup>

*Eugenia* enacts an unsettling in a country that, in Gelder and Jacobs' words, fails to recognize itself, partly because its own identity has not been established independently of its colonizer. Against the backdrop of an influx of migrants from non-Anglo-Celtic countries, most (male) New Zealand citizens in 1916 were loyally fighting in Europe although the British Empire was waning economically, politically, and even ceremonially, and the massive losses of New Zealand, Canadian, Australian, and Irish soldiers in the front lines of battle forced these colonies to reevaluate their relationship to the imperial center. The violent, misogynist Vincent, one of the lodgers in the house *Eugenia* inhabits, who lied about his health to escape the war, symbolizes the caliber of most of the play's remaining male characters, together with the unwelcome migrants who were perceived to be potentially disloyal. The prospect of unsettling the cultural composition of New Zealand by accommodating women, migrants, and the Maori population (although the play does not have a Maori presence) is only a distant possibility for the characters of 1916, for whom alterity is equated with danger and fear.

*Eugenia's* status as an "alien," an Italian rather than an Anglo-Celtic New Zealander, marks her as different enough, but her transgression of the conventional gender boundaries alienates her much more from the majority of the play's population. The men in particular vehemently object to her actions, which threaten their own perceptions of sexuality. The threat is so great that *Eugenia* is eventually framed for the murder of Violet and hanged, ostensibly in order to prevent further disruptions to the social order. The police report at the trial reads, "The dwelling that had been designed for the sacred ceremonies of motherhood became a ribald clubhouse for the mock rites of masculinity."<sup>18</sup> *Eugenia's* challenge to gender roles extends beyond her male dress: she carries out sexual relationships with various women (only Mrs. Bassani recognizes her biological gender) and marries Violet. She carries with her a box containing several artificial phalluses. The stage directions stipulate that the audience never sees the contents of the box, but the characters who do are horrified by what they consider to be a sacrilege. The gender difference is in some respects confined to the box, encouraging questions about just which part of the anatomy epitomizes gender.

The performance of various panoramic slides of history's unsettling is achieved by staging the process of performing gender. The contemporary narrative characters thus learn to act gender and to ask the questions that help them determine subject positions for themselves. In the first moments of the play, the actor playing *Eugenia* comes onto the stage dressed in women's clothes and takes them off to reveal men's clothes, the discarded clothing swept off the stage. The audience sees *Eugenia* work out acting "male" through both costume and mannerisms, and the actor playing her must also frequently change roles to become a female teacher in the 1996 narrative. Both "male" and "female" are thus foregrounded *as* performance. The performing body is the object of attention not in a sexually charged way (although there are physical attractions

among several of the women characters) but to propose that gender can be enacted, rather than innate.

Eighty years later, the students rehearse their controversial reconstruction of Eugenia's story. The audience sees fragments of the 1916 scenes *re*-played by the same group of actors who are now playing the young students, thus intensifying the process of performing gender. Not surprisingly, all gender, character, and time boundaries become blurred as actors in 1916 and in 1996 say the same lines simultaneously, and several of the 1996 characters become able to "see" several of the 1916 characters. Georgina, the teacher (whose role is paired with Eugenia's) "sees" Violet, Eugenia's wife, and the two of them become attracted to each other across the decades and the divide between life and death.<sup>19</sup> The students are also encouraged to try to "dance" Eugenia's story in their performance, since their discursive attempts to understand Eugenia remain inadequate.

Eugenia's 1916 narrative ends with her being hanged for murder, in addition, one surmises, to crimes against "nature," while the student production succeeds in proving that Eugenia did not kill Violet (rather, Vincent was the likely perpetrator). The 1996 narrative ends with the play being canceled by the school board, which deems the subject material inappropriate. Gender remains a substantial location of unsettlement, used in this case to conceal fears of cultural and racial alterity. The characters' performance of the possibility of transformation from role to role—and gender to gender—provides the means for a strategic reengagement with representations of difference as they have been articulated in history. By displaying the performance of gender in a manner that is controversial to the characters of 1916 and 1996, *Eugenia* reminds its audience that post-colonial studies has yet to explore gender as fully as it might.<sup>20</sup>

### **Crossing: Memorializing History**

The performative transformation that is liberating in *Eugenia* disrupts a traditionalist reading of history in *Crossing*.<sup>21</sup> Reza de Wet's play invokes Afrikaans drawing room melodrama of the 1930s, "aimed at articulating a sense of national ethnic identity,"<sup>22</sup> but its staid setting is quickly overturned as the play turns a performance of séance, hypnosis, and nostalgia for history's dead into a "lurid gothic spectacle animated by an ironic post-modern fascination with kitsch."<sup>23</sup> The play is set in South Africa's north in 1910 and 1930, and while these two times are juxtaposed, the present cannot be forgotten. Hermien and Sussie, twins in their fifties, run a guest-house near the bank of a river that floods annually. The domineering Hermien hides Sussie from the world because of the substantial hump on Sussie's back. They perform a "sacred duty,"<sup>24</sup> warning gold and diamond diggers about the river's rages. Those who ignore the warnings are usually swept to their death, and the sisters recover their bodies to give them a Christian burial. The ghost of one dead soul refuses to rest quietly, so the sisters conduct a séance to help her remember her baptism name. The séance transports them back twenty years when an itinerant showman and

his young assistant visited the house and then left abruptly, becoming victims of the river.

Hermien and Sussie's duty memorializes a chapter of Afrikaans history wherein the souls of people long dead are more important than the lives or conditions of the living. The women keep mementos of people they have never known as reminders of their deaths, not their lives. These mementos give the women an almost sexual delight, particularly Sussie, who has only ever seen Hermien, her mother, the two visitors whose spirits are called up again by the séance, and dead bodies. The memorializing of the dead bodies is a closed system that accommodates no other races or histories. The women's cycle of activity—unheeded warnings, dead bodies, memorializing the dead bodies—is broken not by racial unrest or cultural clash but by souls that can't be kept quiet, as if to signal that the veneer of Christian piety is about to be disrupted.

*Crossing* unsettles expectations of performance itself in the complicated séance: Hermien is both herself and the spirit of Ezmerelda until Ezmerelda emerges as separate actor/entity. When Maestro joins them, Hermien momentarily also "becomes" him before he gains his own embodiment and Hermien can become herself again, albeit a version of herself from twenty years earlier. When the séance begins, Hermien as the medium loses control over her own being, leaving Sussie to probe the spirit for answers. Maestro is a hypnotist, and Ezmerelda, whose revealing clothes are all too big for her, his reluctant helper. Claiming to make dreams come true, Maestro hypnotizes diggers into thinking that they have found enormous nuggets, but the popularity of his act likely owes more to the opportunity he offers men to fondle Ezmerelda. The layers of performance are further multiplied by Ezmerelda's references to all the other women who have played the role of "Ezmerelda," dressed in the same clothing and even to Maestro's gleeful account of raping her and his subsequent purchase of her from her mother. The performance of these roles intensifies the uncanny aspect of performance: it becomes difficult to determine the "edge" of the characters when they take on each other's roles.

The process by which the characters perform multiple roles unsettles both history and individual subjectivity. In the sample of his performance that Maestro executes for the sisters, he demonstrates what Ezmerelda does on stage, but the stage directions indicate that he "is not imitating Ezmerelda but seems rather to be embodying her."<sup>25</sup> The embodiment of various characters points to one of the essential elements of the play's use of performance: like hypnosis or a séance, the agency of the actor is minimal (even if a séance tires its medium). All the characters embody someone else, enacting a different person in a manner that is not as simple as meta-performance, mimicry, or imitation: they temporarily *transform* into their targets. This incestuous living in each other's bodies continues to be represented performatively: Maestro hypnotizes Ezmerelda, whose extreme compliance suggests an almost total absence of being outside him (predicated, perhaps, on the violence that meets her occasional attempts to resist



him). The characters articulate a functionality rather than an essence or identity.

De Wet's work is usually allegorical, and while allegorical characters are by definition functional, that functionality in *Crossing* results from the closed historical system that makes the present stagnant rather than invigorating it. In *Crossing*, the narrow history that the sisters worship and in which Maestro and Ezmerelda also participate, allows no room for other physical characters: it requires the few to embody others to satisfy the demands of history. The excess of history contributes to the disintegration of individual subjectivity, the play's allegory being the effects of the historical excess and the disintegration of the self. The unsettling excess of performance reveals the actions of an unchecked and circular history.

Ezmerelda's spirit is not lulled by the séance: hearing her real name does not fix her identity, and the sisters' sacred duty no longer appears to have divine backing. Ezmerelda belongs neither to God nor to a glorious Afrikaans history: she belongs to Maestro, who names her and fixes her as his property, her function defined by "Ezmerelda's" name and clothes. Perhaps the most significant achievement of Maestro's performance in *Crossing* is his transformation of Sussie from acquiescing to Hermien's almost violent control to a sensual woman who leaves the confines of the house. Maestro's spirit succeeds in seducing Sussie to join him in the swollen river, twenty years after he drowned. She escapes the brutality of Hermien's service, but in "becoming" the next Ezmerelda, she escapes one cloistered, deadening existence for another, playing Ezmerelda, while a third—literal death in the river—is the most likely outcome.

The histories that are recounted—both the history of duty that the women enact and the Maestro's performance history—overtake the characters' individual subjectivity: their functions within "history" are more important than they are in themselves. Whereas Lawford productively intertwines an individual and tribal identity in *Ningali*, the twins in *Crossing* give over their identities to the preservation of a vacuum-like national history that glorifies the dead for no particular gain while Ezmerelda's identity is given over to a sexual exploitation that symbolizes the incestuous, seedy undercurrent to the sisters' ostensibly pure world. *Crossing* deflates the history of South Africa, insisting that the development of individual subjectivity cannot be completely eclipsed by the construction of a national identity in contemporary, postapartheid South Africa. The play's enactment of performance and transformation unsettles a closed historical system of representation in order to productively develop subjectivity and identity.

### **Harlem Duet: "Trapped in History"**

If subjectivity crumbles in *Crossing*, the characters in Djanet Sears's *Harlem Duet* are plagued by too many possible representations that trap the main character, Billie, in a maze of historical roles that she did not devise and that she does not want to claim.<sup>26</sup> Whereas *Ningali* integrates the

overlapping histories that define the indigenous title character, Billie seeks to shed some of the history that she is forced to enact. *Harlem Duet* encompasses the four-hundred-year history of African Americans and African Canadians as it continues to affect people in the twenty-first century. This complex play is set in Harlem in three eras (1860, 1928, and the present), but its narrative sweep incorporates Shakespeare's *Othello* in its performance of the history of racism and recovery. The play focuses on Billie, the black woman Othello leaves for the white Desdemona who "appears" only as an offstage voice or a disembodied arm at a door.<sup>27</sup> The scenes in 1860 (with "Him" and "Her") and in 1928 ("He" and "She") stage previous manifestations of Billie, whose relationship with Othello also disintegrates over the white woman. These scenes might be figments of Billie's overwrought imagination (all three couples are performed by the same pair of actors), but they also have their own reality. The multiple representations of the couple intensify their performances of staged African bodies and the effects of racism.

*Harlem Duet* may appear to be another version of Shakespeare's play, given the names (Othello, Desdemona/Mona, and Chris Yago, which recalls *Iago* and *Cassio*), plot details (Othello, an academic at Columbia, will teach the summer courses at Cyprus that Chris Yago expected to get), several lines of Shakespeare's text, and the handkerchief. Yet Sears's play uses the *idea* of *Othello*—particularly the idea of *Othello* as a play about race—rather than relying on Shakespeare's play itself.

The 1928 Harlem Renaissance scenes find He in a small dressing room preparing for a performance. Mona has given him the opportunity to leave his black minstrel role to play Pericles, Hamlet, and Macbeth. In scene 9 of act 2, He rehearses the role of Othello, although such parts do not materialize because She cuts his throat. Othello's incomplete performance is just one example of the thwarted and forced performances of race throughout the play. A discussion of involuntary performance of the black subject takes place in 1860 when Him and Her talk about Cleotis, a fellow slave, whose penis sits in formaldehyde in the hardware store for viewing at a price. Her compares Cleotis with Saartjie Baartman, the Hottentot Venus, whose naked body was also placed on show for paying audiences while she was alive and after her death. For the 1928 Othello as minstrel and as Shakespearean hero, and the 1860 mutilated slave, the performance of self is involuntary, signifying the other's (white) representation of black subjectivity.

*Harlem Duet* performs history as well as race, Shakespeare, and African American/African Canadian cultures. Each scene's musical introduction mixes blues or jazz music with excerpts from speeches of well-known African American figures (Marcus Garvey, Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, Louis Farrakhan, Paul Robeson—himself an Othello—and Christopher Darden). The panoramic view of African American history includes a lengthy and dynamically performative history, and discussions of the practices of affirmative action and black versus white feminism, in addition to the realities of being black in North America today. Yet behind

the celebration of this history lies the history of how people of African descent have been represented. For Billie, Othello's betrayal of her for a white woman also betrays the history forged by Africans. Othello's "defense" of the history of how whites represent Africans ensnares Billie in a historical and ideological minefield that threatens to destroy her. Her landlord explains that it's "[l]ike she's on some archeological dig of the unconscious mind." Billie claims that she is "[t]rapped in history. A history trapped in me."<sup>28</sup> The history of racism and prejudice plays out in Billie's mind as profound personal and historical unsettlement, affecting her physically and psychically, resulting in a breakdown.

The introduction of Billie's father, allegorically named Canada, recalls Him and Her discussing going to Nova Scotia (Canada's home) to escape the Civil War and to find the freedom that the underground railroad would provide some slaves. Canada arrives to help her recover herself. His namesake nation, however, has hardly been a refuge for people of African descent. The history of Africans in North America—comparable on this point to indigenous North Americans—does not stop at the forty-ninth parallel. Sears's home is Canada, but the African history in Canada has too many connections to the history of the United States to be limited by the political border, and it is reasonable that postcolonial studies accommodates the analysis of issues such as racism and the representation of the descendants of the imperial enterprise of slavery, rather than rigidly stopping at national (arbitrary) boundaries.

The play is not, then, about African Americans or African Canadians as "different." Rather, it attempts to normalize racial difference: Sears's introduction discusses her desire to live in a world where her niece will "have access to a choir of African voices, chanting a multiplicity of experiences."<sup>29</sup> Sears's play attempts to accomplish this by peopling the stage with a full cast of African actors, privileging the performing African body. *Harlem Duet* is, she explains, about beginning an "exorcism" of "the effects of race and sex on the lives of people of African descent"<sup>30</sup> but, as Billie's illness indicates, there are centuries of damage to repair before she can construct a personal identity that draws on the wealth of African history, not on a history of racist representations that predetermines her role, identity, and place.

It would be convenient to read "history" as a scapegoat in *Harlem Duet*, as a refuge in *Crossing*, as a haunting presence for some characters in *Eugenia*, or as just "dreamtime" in *Ningali*. The plays' disruptions of simplistic interpretations insist that history be open to reinterpretation, reevaluation, and rehearsal when it forms part of the process by which the present is understood. The unsettlement of history can disturb the surface of apparently settled nations, individuals, and texts to reveal gaps in representation, inadequacies of national identities, cultural misunderstandings within a nation, the return of long-forgotten ambivalences, and personal dislocation.

While postcolonial former settler colonies are predisposed to the

ambivalence of unsettlement, it can also emerge in other apparently stable discourses such as globalization. The connection between the two is not as distant as one might imagine: postcolonialism could be seen as one reaction to a historical form of globalization—imperialism. Its artificially rendered, worldwide sameness could also come to unsettle globalization's figuration of history, culture, and individual subjectivity, the analysis of which might generate a greater understanding of the place of cultural specificity and personal autonomy.

Finally, it is the performance of the historical, cultural, and personal conditions of settler postcolonialism that rereads ambivalence not as hesitance but as dynamic potential. While theater continues to be a useful general metaphor for the rearticulation of history, performance also operates as a specific, self-reflexive trope of unsettlement in contemporary theater that may be termed postcolonial. The strategic performance of the inadequacies of some histories for use in the present illustrates the necessity of continuing to rethink the effects of colonialism.

## NOTES

Epigraphs are from Greg Dening, *Mister Bligh's Bad Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 170; and Felix Driver, "Geography's Empire: Histories of Geographical Knowledge," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 10 (1992): 23–40.

1. For critical texts that address history in postcolonial theatrical contexts, see Christopher Balme, *Decolonizing the Stage: Theatrical Syncretism in Post-Colonial Drama* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1999); and Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins, *Post-colonial Drama: Theory, Practice, Politics* (London: Routledge, 1996).

2. David Chioni Moore notes that the field is remarkably "autocritical" in "Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet? Toward a Global postcolonial Critique," *PMLA* 116, no. 1 (2001): 112. For examples, see any of the following: Peter Childs and Patrick Williams, *An Introduction to Post-Colonial Theory* (London: Prentice Hall/Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1997); Leela Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1998); Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (London: Routledge, 1998); Stephen Slemon, "The Scramble for Post-Colonialism," in *De-Scribing Empire: Post-colonialism and Textuality*, ed. Chris Tiffin and Alan Lawson (London: Routledge, 1994), 15–32. Each of the many introductions to the field maps the postcolonial world differently: compare, for instance, Childs and Williams, Gandhi, and Loomba to Dennis Walder, *Post-colonial Literatures in English: History, Language, Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998); and Bart Moore-Gilbert, *Postcolonial Theory: Contexts, Practices, Politics* (London: Verso, 1997).

3. For Loomba, careless use of the term severs the discourse's political underpinnings: "Postcolonialism becomes a vague condition of people anywhere and everywhere, and the specificities of locale do not matter" (*Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, 17). Moore, on the other hand, argues—contentiously—that the term can apply to nations of the former Soviet Union, maintaining that the expanse of nations that can claim to have been colonized is the field's strength ("Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet?" 112).

4. For a fuller account of the history and role of settler colonies, see Anna Johnston and Alan Lawson, "Settler Colonies," in *A Companion to Postcolonial Studies* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 360–76.

5. For one of many explanations of the potential of the United States as post-colonial, see Jenny Sharpe, "Is the United States Postcolonial? Multinationalism, Immigration, and Race," *Diaspora* 1, no. 2 (1995): 181–99.

6. Walder, *Post-colonial Literatures in English*, 156.

7. Richard Dyer, *White* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 1.

8. Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 92. See also Carrie Dawson, "Never Cry Fraud: Remembering Grey Owl, Rethinking Imposture," *Essays on Canadian Writing* 65 (1998): 120–40.

9. The rise of the Alliance Party in Canada coincided with the popularity of Pauline Hanson's One Nation Party in Australia, both sharing ultraconservative platforms. The Alliance Party remains the official opposition in Canada. One Nation won no seats in the 2001 federal election, but the ruling Liberal Party has taken a substantial step to the right, adopting many of Hanson's policies. The appeal of these movements followed the somewhat comparable notoriety of Eugene Terreblanche (whose name even means "white land") in South Africa, who attempted to segregate a portion of the country in which apartheid could continue. New Zealand's bicultural society enables the descendants of the mostly Anglo-Celtic settlers (*pakeha*) and Maori to co-exist, but it leaves little space for the increasingly immigrant population, or those who fit neither category.

10. Ken Gelder and Jane M. Jacobs, *Uncanny Australia: Sacredness and Identity in a Postcolonial Nation* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1998), 138. This version of the uncanny is particularly urgent in Australia because of the government's specific refusal to officially reconcile indigenous people and the settler population.

11. Ken Gelder and Jane M. Jacobs, "Uncanny Australia," *UTS Review* 1, no. 2 (1995): 151.

12. Josie Ningali Lawford, Angela Chaplin, and Robyn Archer, *Ningali*, unpublished (1994), 26. *Ningali* premiered at Deckchair Theatre in Fremantle, Western Australia, in 1994. The play is about the life of the woman who wrote it and who performs it. To avoid confusion, I refer to "Lawford" when I am referring to the author of the play and "Ningali" when I am referring to the character.

13. Helena Grehan, *Mapping Cultural Identity in Contemporary Australian Performance* (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2001), 76.

14. Lawford, *Ningali*, 14.

15. *Eugenia* premiered at Taki Rua Theatre, Wellington, New Zealand, on January 19, 1996. Lorae Parry, *Eugenia* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1996). Parry is well known for playing with the bounds of gender: she and Carmel McGlone are famous for performing Digger and Nudger (none-too-bright male New Zealanders) in comedy sketches.

16. While it is customary to refer to transvestites by their preferred gender role, the play and its title focus on female subjectivity and female gender roles more than their male counterparts, so I refer to the main character as "Eugenia" and "she."

17. Ironically, the experience of settler subjects who were not "white" enough is revisited upon migrants in former settler colonies.

18. Parry, *Eugenia*, 11.

19. Parry, *Eugenia*, 72.

20. An example of a text that does address these issues is Anne McClintock,

*Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Context* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

21. *Crossing* premiered in Afrikaans at the Grahamstown Festival, July 4, 1994. The English-language premiere was at the Nico Arena Theatre, Cape Town, October 22, 1994. Reza de Wet, *Crossing*, in *Drama for a New South Africa: Seven Plays*, ed. David Graver (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 166.

22. David Graver, introduction to *Crossing*, in *Drama for South Africa*, 166.

23. Graver, introduction, 166, 167.

24. De Wet, *Crossing*, 173.

25. De Wet, *Crossing*, 185, 186.

26. Djanet Sears, *Harlem Duet* (Victoria, B.C.: Scirocco, 1997), 101. The multi-award-winning *Harlem Duet* premiered at the Tarragon Theatre in Toronto in April 1997, produced by Nightwood Theatre.

27. Sears, *Harlem Duet*, 47.

28. Sears, *Harlem Duet*, 30, 101.

29. Djanet Sears, "Notes of a Coloured Girl: 32 Short Reasons Why I Write for Theatre," introduction to *Harlem Duet*, 12.

30. Sears, "Notes of Coloured Girl," 14–15. The play weaves another strand into the idea of "exorcism." Billie's name is short for Sybil, a "seer of the future" and a "sorceress" (*Harlem Duet*, 81), which Sears takes from *Othello*. The only activity that engages Billie in her depression is her alchemical work with herbal remedies and poisons, and she impregnates Othello's handkerchief with poison. As Amah says, "if this kind of stuff truly worked, Africans wouldn't be in the situation we're in now" (*Harlem Duet*, 102), leaving the audience to decide whether or not the poison is effective enough to kill the third Othello.

# What Is to Be Remembered?: Tourism to Ghana's Slave Castle-Dungeons

*Sandra L. Richards*

Travel mobilizes many calculations concerning the possible identities of the host and the tourist: will the people and place be sufficiently interesting, that is, unlike or different from me and my environment, to warrant the time and money spent journeying to this other space? Will they be sufficiently like me, so that the social organization of services and space will not require my constant decoding? Will this location be heavily commercialized, or will the locals appear more interested in communicating with me than in simply having me spend money? Who, in fact, am I? That is, how do I wish to present myself in relation to what I hope to find at my destination?

Additionally, the project of memory, upon which travel to historical sites or heritage tourism is built, raises other issues familiar to theater scholars: Like theater, memory is constructed through processes of selecting, repeating, forgetting—willfully as well as unconsciously—and re-assembling narratives. It operates through the conflation of chronological time, for the more vivid a memory, the more it produces the affect of existing in the present. Memory serves a presentist agenda, even though its subject is the past. No matter how much we strive for a full recuperation of a past event, our selection of facts, the emphases we devote, and the meanings we make are determined by our location in the present;<sup>1</sup> we remember for some purpose, most often expressed as a need to learn how the past can instruct our present and future. Like theater directors and designers, curators of a successful heritage site—that is, one that continues to attract visitors/audiences—seek to shape a necessarily multifaceted, complicated history into a comprehensible narrative that is affectively present; like theater practitioners, they seek to transform an abstract absence into a palpable presence.

To all these issues of identity and difference, role playing, required labor disguised as voluntary hospitality, and mediated authenticity, cultural travel to slave sites adds several more: How is a history of pain to be represented so that people will want to visit (and revisit) the site? Must a teleology of progress away from the original source of pain be invoked? Whose story is to be narrated? If that enslavement meant being dispossessed of one's body, let alone of any material possessions, how is absence to be memorialized?

James Clifford has asked, "How do different populations, classes, and genders travel? What kinds of knowledges, stories, and theories do they produce?"<sup>2</sup> Partially because I like to travel, and because I agree with Clifford's subsequent comment that "[a] crucial research agenda opens

up" (173), I have begun to research African American travel to slave sites in the Black Atlantic. This account, based upon trips taken between 1997 and 1999,<sup>3</sup> focuses on the memorialization of the transatlantic slave trade at Elmina and Cape Coast castles in southern Ghana. I analyze performances of identity, determined by tourist brochures, Web media, and the organization of museum spaces and displays; in some instances, I offer my own memories, because I believe they partially mirror the reactions of other black American tourists. Whereas travel media encourage African Americans to imagine ourselves as family members returning to a welcoming home, the memorial sites produce, for both hosts and "returnees," more contradictory responses that register the tension and dissimilarity, as well as unifying bonds, of "family." Funded by international agencies, multinational corporations, and the Ghanaian government, patronized by visitors from Ghana, other African nations, Europe, the United States and the Caribbean, Ghana's castle-dungeons are, in fact, "contact zones," defined by cultural studies scholar Mary Louise Pratt as

a space of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict.<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, the museum displays housed in these structures enact a series of provocative, hegemonic surrogations that argue for the need for a more difficult or noncoherent, multiperspectival memorial that honors disparate histories, yet re-members threads with which a shared future might be fashioned.

Tourism is reputedly the world's largest industry.<sup>5</sup> According to the Travel Industry Association of America, heritage travelers stay in hotels more frequently and for longer periods of time, fly rather than drive, visit more destinations, and generally spend more money than their "non culturally-oriented, traveling counterparts." Further, "[T]he profile of the minority travelers makes the picture for heritage tourism even brighter, for African Americans' favorite activities are shopping, visiting historical places, and attending cultural events or festivals, all of which rank above the participation level of other groups."<sup>6</sup> In Ghana, tourism ranks as the third-largest producer of foreign exchange.<sup>7</sup> The most frequented destination is the southern coast, known as the Central Region of Ghana, where the castle-dungeons are located. Given the centrality of slavery to the creation of an African diaspora in the Americas, some will question my use of the term "tourists" rather than "pilgrims." Though many travelers may emphasize the spiritual dimension of their journey, I retain the former term in order to signal our collective inability to escape a mediatized cultural economy, whose commodification and circulation of information, images, and desire so saturate our daily environment as to nearly pass for invisible, with the result that discourses of authenticity and agency mask our identities as consumers selecting from a number of externally determined options.<sup>8</sup>



*Casting Oneself: Tourist, Returning Daughter, Or . . . ?*

Semioticians Umberto Eco and Marco De Marinis argue that a text constructs its own reader or spectator as a necessary condition of its potential for meaning. Thus, travel brochures attempt to anticipate and structure the roles the visitor might choose to play. Anthropologist Edward Bruner argues that tourists, headed for less developed areas of the Third World, hunger for confirmation of their image of a precolonial past:

The Other in *our* geography is a sight of disgust; the Other in *their* [own] geography is a source of pleasure. In *our* place, the Other is pollution; in *their* place, the Other is romantic, beautiful, exotic. In *our* geography, the elite pay not to see the Other, keeping them distant or hidden, whereas in *their* geography, the Western elite pay for the privilege of viewing and photographing. There is racialization at home and a primitivization over there, in *exotica*.<sup>9</sup>

This assertion makes sense only if the elite is presumed white. In the United States, African Americans constitute the Other; our skin color marks us as unwanted on the terrain of elites or tolerated as an exception that proves the rule of black inferiority. In amassing the capital required to travel to Ghana, we are economically more elite than many of our other black (or white) compatriots—for example, a round-trip ticket from Chicago to Accra, Ghana cost approximately \$1,300 in the summer of 1999. We possess more financial resources than most of the locals with whom we will come in contact. Yet, as will be discussed, many of us also require, for reasons quite different from those of white elites, that continental Africans play the precolonial role.

During my visits to the castle-dungeons at Cape Coast and Elmina, I have observed three broadly defined categories of visitors: local people, most of whom are school-age youths on field trips; Europeans; and diaspora Africans, that is, black people from the historic, slave-derived diasporas of the Caribbean and the United States as well as from newer diasporas, constituted by economic and/or political instability and war.<sup>10</sup> In this essay, I use “diasporic Africans” to refer to blacks from slave-derived societies in the Americas, while the more restrictive “African Americans” refers to blacks from the United States. Of the African Americans whom I have met directly or observed through videos of their trips, some were members of a Pennsylvania community college program attending the biennial international theatre festival known as PANAFEST; others were members of an intergenerational community-based study group who hoped the trip would play a significant role in the confidence-building and values orientation that their teenagers were undergoing in a rites of passage program. And, a group from the St. Paul Community Baptist Church in Brooklyn, New York had journeyed to Ghana’s castle-dungeons as part of an innovative, multidisciplinary performance program designed to redress the trauma of slavery.<sup>11</sup> I suspect that many of us beyond the teen

years had, prior to arriving in Ghana, experienced the thrill of Alex Haley's genealogical achievement, popularized in *Roots* (the *Reader's Digest* serial, the 1976 book, the American television series, or the video). Unlike Haley, many are unable to identify the exact location of familial origin, but inspired nonetheless, we posit our roots in Africa wherever experiences resonate with, or seem familiar to what we have encountered—emotionally, intellectually, or imaginatively—in black American communities. Thus, we journey to Africa, hoping to briefly escape American racism and experience racial dignity at its source.

In fact, speaking from a variety of self-interested positions, various texts depict the would-be traveler as desirous of an Edenic origin. African American travel writer Deborah Barfield headlines her article about her trip to Senegal, Ivory Coast, and Ghana, "Trip to the Motherland Is Painful, Educational."<sup>12</sup> Implying that no particular African nation is her ancestral home, Barfield deploys the trope of return to a space of loving acceptance by the mother whose biological connection guarantees acceptance of the (lost) child. Though she notes occasional tensions between travelers and hosts, she closes her piece with guide Joseph N'diaye of Senegal saying, "I was mistaken about the door of no return [used by captives to begin their transatlantic passage]. You guys are back."<sup>13</sup> The accompanying photographs of a woman and child carrying water on their heads and of a young man, wrapped toga-like in traditional Ghanaian kente cloth, are eye-catching in marking the difference between diaspora visitors and locals.

The communications conglomerate AT&T also appeals to a longing for ancestral connection in its "I found them" print advertisement. With a man and a young girl photographed in a rural environment devoid of any national or ethnic markers, it dramatizes an unseen character phoning home to exclaim, "RIGHT HERE. RIGHT NOW. I've found our blood, our people. Not just our roots but the whole doggone tree."<sup>14</sup> Similarly, the Pan African historical theatre festival, PANAFEST, which up until 1999 was supported by the Republic of Ghana as well as the Organization of African Unity, mobilized the trope of family, adopting as its 1997 sub-theme "Uniting the African family through development."<sup>15</sup> Likewise, Topmount Tours utilized the discourse of family but stressed for potential PANAFEST visitors the appropriateness of Ghana—rather than other African nations or branches of the family—as a vacation destination. Noting that three castles have been declared World Heritage monuments, its text moves with astonishing rapidity from the pain of enslavement to the titillation of desire with "Let your dreams come true. Come and experience the country your ancestors probably came from." Invoking the names of such Pan African leaders and Ghana residents as Trinidad-born George Padmore and African American W. E. B. Du Bois, it appeals to pride in black achievement before settling on the comfortable scenario of "Come for a reunion. Share in the family ceremonies that mark events like child-naming . . ."<sup>16</sup>

Seeking to entice as many tourists as possible to spend their dollars

in Ghana rather than in nearby Senegal or Benin, the Ghana Tourist Board adopts a more multivocal approach on its Web home page. It suggests a variety of roles for the tourist below a beautiful, full-colored picture of a prepubescent girl in ceremonial dress, complete with kente cloth, gold, trade beads, and fly whisk. One can become the sophisticated owner of experiences unknown to the traveling masses: "Nestled in the heart of the Gulf of Guinea on the West Coast of Africa is a jewel. This jewel is one of the best secrets in Africa." Europeans and white Americans can be sun worshippers: "Welcome to Ghana. A land of miles and miles of sun-dappled beaches," while diasporic Africans seeking a glorious history, or all lovers of fine jewelry, will also find roles to their liking: "the home of Asante and the land of gold. Ghana offers some of the best travel experiences. Come in and explore." The attractive home page on the Web suggests that the tourist will experience a hospitable, exciting environment once in Ghana.

The reference to Asante and gold is double-voiced and illustrates a crucial point about these castle-dungeons as contact zones. The Asante built empires of significant geographic reach, organization, and wealth, a tremendous achievement for black diasporans, who study people of African descent in school only in relation to slavery or quests for civil rights. But the abundance of gold was what originally drew Europeans into trade with West Africa, until the trade in black bodies proved more profitable. In being invited to "let your dreams come true," in witnessing a durbar or parade of traditional chieftains and their supporters, where so much precious material, such as gold and kente, is on display, Africans in the diaspora are encouraged or seduced to cast ourselves amongst the victors, amongst the powerful and rich architects of empire. But on the site of Elmina and/or Cape Coast castle, where the slave dungeons seem to emit their own odor and presence, such self-fashioning is much harder to achieve; the fractured quality of "family" and "home" is much more apparent to travelers from the African diaspora.

### *Geographies of Performance*

While the tourist has a variety of roles in which she can imagine herself prior to arrival, on the castle-dungeon grounds she is both spectator and actor, alternating between distanced observation and imaginative self-identification. As spectator, she has paid for the privilege of looking at and photographing everything and everyone within her field of vision. As actor, she moves through a space that, given its sometimes constraining physical dimensions and coupled with the impact of the guide's narrations, transforms into an antagonistic environment; further, given her companions' video cameras, she may provide a spectacle for the non-vacationing folks back home. But first, let us consider the history that has shaped the terrain through which this specta(c)tor is moving.

Ghana boasts the distinction of having sixty castles, forts, and lodges built along its three-hundred-mile coastline.<sup>17</sup> The Portuguese were the

first to protect their trading interests by building São Jorge da Mina, or St. George's castle, at Elmina in 1482; thereafter, the Dutch, Swedes, Prussians, Danish, and British all competed for dominance, with many fortifications changing hands as one European power triumphed over another. With the abolition of the slave trade, these structures were often used as colonial administrative offices and prisons; after independence in 1957, some functioned as schools or military training academies; Christiansborg castle in the capital, Accra, has served as Ghana's seat of government since 1876.<sup>18</sup> Given the importance of the transatlantic slave trade to world development, UNESCO has designated the largest of these fortifications, popularly known simply as Elmina castle, and nearby Cape Coast castle, located approximately eighteen kilometers to the west, as World Heritage monuments in accordance with its World Heritage Convention:

there are some parts of heritage which are of such outstanding value to the world as a whole that their protection, conservation and transmission to future generations is a matter not just for any one nation but for the international community as a whole.<sup>19</sup>

A variety of national and international organizations, including the Ghana Museum and Monuments Board, the US Agency for International Development, the United Nations Development Programme, and Shell Oil (Ghana) Limited, have funded the conservation of these sites. Expenditures also included new drainage systems, toilet facilities, and, in the case of Elmina, a new town market that benefits locals directly by providing needed infrastructural development, and indirectly by rendering the environment attractive to foreign visitors. Interestingly, although these castle-dungeons are reputed to have "outstanding value to the world as a whole," the former colonial power of Britain, whose nationals played significant roles in the transatlantic trade, is not listed among the donors.

As spectator, I remember the exterior of Elmina castle-dungeon as startling in its offensive whiteness (see fig. 1). Nestled close to the ocean, the town's central area appears relatively small, with its narrow streets filled with cars, pedestrians, and shopkeepers whose wares spill out onto the sidewalks. Its architecture an eclectic mix of European colonial and more modern designs, the town boasts no building higher than two stories, and most structures are painted in faded yellow ochres, pastels, or white that register the harmful effects of intense sun and salt-water humidity. But given preservation efforts, this castle—which is not only the biggest building in the town of Elmina but also the largest of all the structures built on Ghana's coast—sparkles with its fresh white paint.<sup>20</sup> Utterly distinct from its surroundings, the structure is a silent but undeniable monument to the international dimension of the slave trade.

Several sections within the castle loom large in my memory's eye/I and temporality. In re-viewing those spaces, I do not necessarily see myself in those rooms, but I re-experience some of the bodily distress they engendered. In writing, I create another mediated memory that I hope to

communicate to another. Further, I attempt to adopt a suitable, yet self-contradictory “both/and” language: a language that resists the disorder that lurks at the edge of this mediated memory and that mimics—in miniature—what I imagine were the emotions of the enslaved, and threatens to render me, like them, hysterical. A defensive language that nonetheless seeks to acknowledge their trauma and my inheritance.

As a distanced spectator, I view the officers’ quarters located on the second floor. There is no furniture or other material artifact on display in any of these rooms. Thus, they seem amply spacious; several of them also face the ocean and enjoy a refreshing vista and cool cross-breezes. Connecting them to the lower level is a narrow stairway that leads to the enslaved women’s dungeons. As the architecture makes amply clear and as the guides explain, from their bedrooms officers had access to an interior balcony that looks onto a small, completely enclosed square. Enslaved women would periodically be herded into this courtyard, and those unfortunate enough to attract the officers’ fancy would then be sent up the narrow stairs. Though history books have only recently, with the impact of second-wave feminism, begun to study the gendered dimensions of slavery, the physical structure stands as a text both waiting to be read and provoking questions: Who prepared these women for their encounters with European officers? What did townspeople know, and how did they react to the palpable horrors of the slave castle? Or, in that Europeans had these structures built from plans presumably developed elsewhere, were other women systematically abused like these Africans? These are questions that I think to ask after the fact, when I am home again in the safety of my office.<sup>21</sup>

But, on site, as I descend from the officers’ balcony to the women’s pens and courtyard below, and as additional senses come under attack, it is hard to preserve an emotional distance. Dark, with mold and mildew plainly visible on the wall, some of the dungeons receive their only air source from what was once a magazine storage for armaments, meaning that overcrowded female captives would have inhaled sulphur in addition to the odors of bodily fluids and fear. Surprisingly, a stench that momentarily catches and stops the breath remains. It activates the imagination, destroying temporal distinctions and flattening historical and individual subjectivities into one force-field of pain. Tour guides generally evidence no notice of this emotional shift but continue with their script, pointing out that if a woman were found to be pregnant, she would not be shipped into slavery. Left unstated is the implication that sensing the traumas yet to come, women would have desired rape. Left unstated is any information about what happened to pregnant women. Given the project of memorialization that Elmina enacts, these silences or forgettings enact a second wounding. But in the relative safety of reflection, I must acknowledge that even if guides were to supply additional data, that would not fully assuage a sense of loss; whether I knew then that representation is bound to fail before the enormity of the historical violence, I do not remember.



Fig. 1. Front view of Elmina castle. Photo by Snoop Cards, reproduced with permission.

The passage connecting the male and female dungeons and leading to the infamous “door of no return” offers little relief from the identification that memory has effected, because we tourists are required to re-enact in some small measure an aspect of the captives’ experiences. The area is dark, severely limiting one’s ability to see what comes next; the visitor must bend down and then move single file toward the spot where the enslaved would have entered boats to take them out to the waiting ships. For many who had been marched hundreds of miles from the interior, this moment would have marked their first sight of the ocean and another stage of their descent into the unknown. Guides inform visitors that when the Europeans traded mainly in material goods, this passageway was much broader, but once commerce switched to humans, castle administrators decided to severely constrict the space so as to prevent attempts to escape.

Part of the pain of walking through the lower levels of this castle-dungeon,<sup>22</sup> of imagining the life that transpired here, relates to absence. I can smell what I imagine is the stench of suffering, but no material scrap remains inside the dungeons. Scholarship on Jewish Holocaust memorials helps clarify the analysis of my responses to Elmina and Cape Coast. Theater studies scholar Vivian Patraka has noted that in the initial fund-raising letters,

There is an overpowering sense of desire in all these descriptions, a need to create an utterly convincing spectacle that will say it all, stop time and space, prevent denial and make the suffering known. Of course, no representation can do that [. . .] How could the unspeakable genocide be spoken?<sup>23</sup>

While I agree with Patraaka's assertion that no mountain of artifacts, such as the spoons, shoes, or family photographs one encounters in the US Holocaust Memorial Museum can diminish the "enormity of the absent referent,"<sup>24</sup> I am deeply impressed by that amassing of pedestrian materials that stand in for the moment—whether fairly immediate or decades long—before the disappearance of millions of Jews. No such collection at Elmina or Cape Coast marks the captives' history as free people. While a few chains and leg irons are on display, nothing stands in for the pretraumatic moment, whose representation might rescue victims from the category of commodified abstraction and allow visitors to appreciate the particularity of their lives.

This absence of artifacts performs African diasporic identity, for dispossession of a specific history, loss of a coherent, complex universe of values and practices, constitute the very grounds of our identities in the Americas. Faced with this absence and burdened by the oppressive presence of the confining castle-dungeon walls, some black tourists give free rein to their imaginations. Memory thus becomes a creative act, akin to the method Toni Morrison deployed when she began writing *Beloved* as an answer to the lack of interiority in the slave narratives:

... on the basis of some information and a little bit of guesswork you journey to a site to see what remains were left behind and to reconstruct the world that these remains imply. What makes it fiction is the nature of the imaginative act: my reliance on the image—on the remains—in addition to recollection to yield up a kind of truth. By "image," of course, I don't mean "symbol"; I simply mean "picture" and the feelings that accompany the picture.<sup>25</sup>

Tourists fill a violent absence with the materiality of their own bodies; they imagine themselves as standing in, as artifacts, for those whose names can no longer be recalled. Analogous memories of dispossession enable them to step into the role of surrogates but pose the danger that these present-day actors will suture the aching disappearance of the forever-lost ancestor with their own subjectivity. They produce a problematic fiction that nonetheless contains the moral truth that every life deserves the honor of acknowledgment. Down in the bowels of the earth, the minister from St. Paul Community Baptist Church prays to "God, . . . [who] saw it all,"<sup>26</sup> as his group prepares to leave Elmina castle. Against the lack of narratives of their genealogy, against the vicious distortions that have constituted their representation and life chances in the modern world, against the possible amnesia of history, these tourists invoke a divine justice to validate their presence. They sing in a halting, flatted, blues style, "Remember me, remember me, Oh Lord, remember me." Sound, particularly the moans and silences between words, becomes memory and chronotope, propelling these travelers back through the racialized violence of the Jim Crow South, plantation slavery in the Americas, the watery graveyard of the Atlantic, to the dungeons of West Africa. Sound

becomes a mode of representation and comfort, holding out the hope of eventual rescue.

So far, my narrative has focused on the African American tourist, who moves from spectator to actor, as she tours Elmina castle. But what about the guides: what roles do they assume, and how does the specta(c)tor respond to them? If, as performance studies scholar Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett argues, tourism—and by extension, heritage—is an “export industry” in which the local is produced for outsiders,<sup>27</sup> then an anomaly lies at the heart of the promotion of these structures. Slavery is not integral to how most Ghanaians define themselves. To attract tourists, Ghanaians must remember a history they learned to forget.

Though the nation’s record number of castles and forts might seem like a giant history book readily available for the reading, meaning is not inherent in an object but resides in the narratives that we ascribe to it.<sup>28</sup> Until relatively recently, slavery was not a subject taught in Ghanaian schools or transmitted orally in informal settings. The men serving as guides have not only received academic, content-specific training, but like other actors, they also calibrate their performances to produce a desired audience response. They construct their narrations according to particular spaces, indigenous linguistic practices, and the composition of the touring group. That is, three categories of people occupied Elmina and Cape Coast castle-dungeons during the period that is being memorialized: European officers and soldiers, captives marched from the interior, and castle slaves. While the slave trade significantly affected local life, indigenous people were largely separate from day-to-day operations within the castle confines. Thus, for the most part they do not enter the guides’ scripts, and the production of locality, discussed in the upcoming section on exhibition semiotics, pales against the monumentality of the trade, signaled by the very buildings themselves.

Indigenous languages and custom prefer indirection in dealing with subjects of great sensitivity.<sup>29</sup> Thus, guides offer the history of each room in understated terms. Mr. Charles Adu-Arhin, with whom I have toured Elmina and whom I have seen on videotape, rarely uses the term “slave,” substituting instead “captive.” The distinction is subtle but important, for as scholar Marimba Ani has argued, “slave” connotes an ontological category of character or essence, while the term “captive” alludes to the violence required to deprive a person of his/her freedom.<sup>30</sup> Typically, these storytellers deploy euphemisms, such as “women were put in the family way,” when referring to rape. Given a linguistic penchant for the passive, they produce a discourse in which there are victims but few identified perpetrators or accomplices, even though the fact of African involvement in the slave trade is acknowledged. This history may belong to Ghanaians, but they are missing from its performance.

Though the guides may perform a self-erasure, they often engage in some casting of their own before the tour even begins. Through the exchange of backstage anecdotes and experience gained from actual tours, they have learned to cast racially and avoid placing disparate tourists into interracial groupings. Seemingly, white visitors remain spectators, who,



while moved by the tour, have the luxury of utilizing the space afforded by linguistic indirection to maintain a sense of distance between themselves and their European ancestors. But once in the dungeon areas, diasporic Africans are likely to succumb to memory's temporality, in which past and present identities merge; African Americans, in particular, are known to respond with uncontrollable tears or to direct their anger at whites, seen as the contemporary agents of a historic oppression. The visitors' shift to surrogates—spectacularly interacting with the narrator-guides and the environment—discomforts guides, challenging them, perhaps, to rethink their cultural definitions of acceptable behavior and to remember slavery from the perspective of the victims.

Visitors' responses to these tours vary. As recorded in the guestbook, many people of various nationalities and races remark that Elmina offers an impressive monument to a human atrocity that must never be repeated. In contrast to what I have described, some college students report feeling nothing; others object to the commercialism of the gift shop, where they are encouraged to wait before the tour begins; several omit any reference to the trip from their journals entirely; while some find the experience too intense to capture on paper.<sup>31</sup> On site, many African Americans choose to document their presence. Not only do they attempt to take photographs in the subterranean dungeons, I have also observed people line up their cameras so that guides can take their pictures against the panoramic background of the ramparts facing the sea. Perhaps, like me, they are relieved to be free of the dungeons and troubled by the incongruity of such physical beauty at the site of human horror. But it would appear that at such a moment, they are also simultaneously enacting conflicting roles. As vacationers, they conform to the expectation of displaying evidence of themselves having an enjoyable trip<sup>32</sup>; as "family" members, they produce an ambiguous document, a competing memory of a beautiful vista that preserves the perspective of the enslavers and omits reference to the trauma of the ancestors they have come to memorialize. Other black Americans consent to having themselves videoed, but with their dark glasses and grim expressions, refuse the role of smiling tourists who engage the camera's gaze. Some appear stunned by the heat, smells, and sights; their faces betray no emotion.

### *Backstage Contact Zones*

Having analyzed performances of memory that passage through the castle-dungeon engenders, I wish to turn to the backstage production area before coming forward again to scrutinize the ethnographic identities that the production team enacts in wall exhibitions. In the backstage contact zone, various actors, who share a history but exist in unequal power relations to each other, began meeting in the early 1990s to establish a definition of the memorial object and a protocol for remembering. Their roles and objectives were varied: on the national level, Ghanaian government officials had identified tourism as a "priority area in the overall developmental programme of the economy."<sup>33</sup> Their decision to link both castle-dungeons

to the development of a national park suggested that heritage (or for that matter, environmental) tourism is primarily a means to increase national prosperity. Having secured technical assistance from agencies such as Conservation International, the Midwest Universities Consortium for International Activities (MUCIA), the United States branch of the International Council of Monuments and Sites, and the Smithsonian Institution, the Ghanaian government coupled foreign expertise with staff from the Ghana Wildlife Department, the National Commission on Culture, the Ghana Museums and Monuments Board, the University of Ghana at Legon, and Cape Coast University.<sup>34</sup> In addition, African Americans resident in Ghana became involved in conservation disputes. Ghosting all these stakeholders was the “world as a whole” for whom, according to the UNESCO designation, these heritage sites have “outstanding value.”

One particular controversy demonstrates the complex, competing claims of memory, responsibility, and ownership that characterize these sites. In 1993, in keeping with a concern for tourist comfort and revenue, local museum officials decided to open a restaurant-bar above the male dungeon at Cape Coast (fig. 2).<sup>35</sup> They reasoned that a restaurant would encourage visitors to stay longer and possibly learn more, but as the discussion on exhibition semiotics demonstrates, various stakeholders adopted different definitions of the object of study. African Americans felt this decision was analogous to opening a restaurant in a cemetery and further, that work on the structure went beyond preservation to a renovation that would “whitewash” the structures’ history of oppression.<sup>36</sup> Local Ghanaians wanted to utilize the museum as an opportunity to display their history, of which slavery was a small, albeit significant, part, while members of the Council of Chiefs of Edina (Elmina’s traditional name) were angered at not being properly consulted in the Central Region Development Commission’s planning for (tourism) development.<sup>37</sup>

The controversy about preservation protocols and tourist comfort points to larger issues that, given historical disjunctures, different linguistic codes and socialization processes—and asymmetrical economic as well as political resources—resist easy resolution, tropes of a (re)united family notwithstanding. Ghanaians have inherited diverse historical and cultural legacies, resulting in ambivalent responses to slavery.<sup>38</sup> While all recognize the horror of the trade, some local coastal residents are the descendants of people who prospered from the transatlantic slave trade; some benefited not from slavery per se but from the Western-style education that was introduced as a result of trade and thus historically prepared them to occupy important positions in a modernizing colonial Gold Coast and in the subsequent postcolonial Ghana. Various ethnic traditions forbid discussion of slave ancestry, even though in a northern community like the historic market town of Salaga, which served as an important nineteenth-century depot for both the trans-Saharan and Atlantic slave trades, elderly people can still identify enslaved ancestors and their descendants. This ability to remember enslaved individuals, coupled with the taboo surrounding slavery, suggests that communities invest consid-



Fig. 2. The restaurant-bar, later removed, within Cape Coast castle-dungeon in 1992. Photo by Nathan Kwame Braun, reproduced by permission.

erable psychic energy in maintaining silence around a public secret. Yet, artists and other cultural workers have broken this taboo: as early as 1965, dramatist Ama Ata Aidoo tackled issues of national relationships to the slave-derived diaspora in *The Dilemma of a Ghost*, and in 1970 she dramatized the disastrous impact of slavery on local culture in *Anowa*.<sup>39</sup> More than two decades later, Kwadwo Opoku-Agyemang continued the discussion among the well educated with his *Cape Coast Castle: A Collection of Poems* (1996), and Ghana TV's 1999 airing of a fifteen-part program documentary on the nation's slave sites shattered some of the silence among the general public.<sup>40</sup>

Some diaspora Africans have shouted loudly into that silence, demanding in the mid-1990s that their conceptualization of the site as a sacred memorial, free of human manipulation, prevail.<sup>41</sup> African Americans in particular are viewed as overly sensitive, domineering, and hypocritical. Reacting perhaps to failed fund-raising efforts, Francis Duah, the regional director of Ghana's Museum and Monuments Board, has said of African Americans, "They come in here and they cry and throw themselves on the ground, but they don't want to contribute anything to what we're doing. Then they want to have a big say in what we do."<sup>42</sup> The Ghanaian expectation that African Americans would contribute funds to this preservation project strikes some African Americans as insensitive to the price of death and alienation that their ancestors have already paid and that they continue to suffer.<sup>43</sup> But this position, of course, ignores the facts that African Americans on average have considerably more financial resources than most Ghanaians and come from a diaspora to which many Ghanaians aspire.<sup>44</sup> Yet, when all of these parties—Ghanaians from the tourism and development as well as academic sectors; American technocrats from museum, conservation, and development arenas; and expatriate African

Americans critical of dominant American institutions—sit down to negotiate, African Americans are structurally in the weakest position: the sites are Ghanaian, and though they assert the status of historical insiders, African Americans are political outsiders. They have no governmental or philanthropic organizations that will argue their viewpoint; they represent no organized constituency with resources to support their opinions. In fact, their position replays their dispossessed, liminal status as citizens of a nation that historically has trampled on their rights, and as fictive kin to a nation whose borders, languages, and customs largely exclude them.

### *Exhibition Semiotics*

James Clifford has observed that when the concept of a contact zone is applied to museums, one recognizes that their collections become “ongoing historical, political, and moral *relationship[s]*—a power-charged set of exchanges, of push and pull.”<sup>45</sup> Such is the case in the Elmina and Cape Coast castle-dungeons, where, like object theatre, the wall displays reenact a drama of struggle among stakeholders to reach consensus over what the structures memorialize. The result is a series of surrogations in which one narrative has been selected, for reasons of ideology, political power, or economic clout, to stand in for others,<sup>46</sup> and some memories have been forgotten entirely in order to make possible the remembrance of other stories. On these walls and in accompanying brochures, a progress narrative stands in place of a narrative of defeat; the local history of the Central Region takes the place of histories of northern Ghanaian communities from which captives were taken; and African Americans perform as metonyms for diaspora Africans in the Americas. Further complicating this series of displacements is the seeming tendency of guides to ignore the exhibit spaces entirely, for on the three or four tours I have taken of the Elmina and Cape Coast castle-dungeons, they have consistently neglected to mention these areas. Apparently for them, the English-language, text-based exhibits are irrelevant to the tour experience.

The wall displays and published materials betray an ideological imperative embedded in tourist sites dedicated to the memory of horror. That is, tourism is a leisure activity that travelers undertake, to varying degrees, with the expectation of experiencing a pleasant release from daily realities; heritage tourism assumes a continuity between past and present, with progress understood as an “inevitable, natural process.”<sup>47</sup> Remembrance of pain, brutality, and victimization is generally unappealing and thus bad for business. Even those who cast themselves as serious-minded pilgrims, rather than fun-seeking tourists, are likely to produce concomitant narratives of resilience, justice, or transcendent purpose, thereby reassuring themselves that their ancestors’ lives and their own have some meaning other than degradation. Indeed, these are the memories that African Americans produce in travel accounts, poems, or videos. Further, the memory of oppression raises issues of the responsibility, complicity, and guilt of the original perpetrators, accomplices, and possibly of

their descendants—questions that do not offer an escape from reality, but confront visitors with ethnic or racial tensions analogous to what they may experience at home. Thus, administrators of these sites must devise a means of softening the horror by effecting a substitution in which a healthy actor or progress narrative stands in for the dehumanized body and tale of abjection.

Though disagreeing on the specific memorial agenda, Ghanaians and diasporic Africans share a particular imperative to construct a triumphalist narrative. Such stories empower us, who are marginalized within global networks and/or within a specific nation-state, to struggle toward greater agency. Thus, area residents eager to tell their history, as well as other black visitors, are likely to receive with pride such exhibits as Elmina's "People, Neighbors, Culture" that include a historical sketch of royal women at a durbar and information about Prempeh I, the late nineteenth-century Asante king who resisted British imperialism and was imprisoned at Elmina for four years.<sup>48</sup>

But placed toward the rear of the exhibit hall is an eight-sided set of panels that is likely to provoke controversy among Afrocentric visitors, both local and foreign, because here adoption of European culture seems to constitute progress. Documenting "the Impact of European Contacts," the panels group together a blank rock slate, a jar, and a *Readers' Guide Abstract* from March 1992. No explanatory placard accompanies these items, so the viewer is left to surmise that knowledge production in Ghana was dependent upon the evolution to written texts. Included in this area are pictures of Christian church services and attractive, biracial children dressed in their Sunday best (see fig. 3); omitted are any references to institutional practices that denigrated indigenous African religions or facilitated colonialism. One can also read about the influence of European tongues on local languages, but there is no indication of linguistic transfers from indigenous people to Europeans. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's observation that ethnographic displays reflect the cognitive understandings of their producers is relevant here,<sup>49</sup> for "developed entirely by Ghanaians, a showcase for their new expertise [in museum practice, acquired as a result of collaboration with Smithsonian officials],"<sup>50</sup> the exhibit performs the memory of a colonial education in which value resides in the European metropole and flows outward to backward peripheries.

The obligatory progress narrative takes a different trajectory in the Cape Coast museum brochure, "Crossroads of People, Crossroads of Trade." Developed by a content team of Ghanaian scholars and implemented by Ghanaian and Smithsonian museum professionals,<sup>51</sup> the brochure focuses on periods before and after slavery. Not only can one read of trans-Saharan trading networks that predate European arrival in West Africa, but one can also learn about the contemporary economy, family structures, indigenous religious practices, and education. Interestingly, "The Road to Freedom" section of this brochure, though it summarizes African American and Ghanaian histories, features a photograph not of anticolonial struggles in Ghana but of the American NAACP Silent

Protest March of 1917. Consistent with the wall displays discussed below, this choice of photograph performs (African) American hegemony. In fact, Ghanaians are visually represented in this booklet only by contemporary color photographs.

As in the printed brochure, a similar situation prevails in the Cape Coast exhibits: displays document not only the establishment of complex city-states around 1000 A.D., but also the continued existence of institutions like the political-military *asafo* companies that combine traditional chieftaincy-related responsibilities with contemporary civil society obligations. Thus, it would appear that the demand for a representation of local history has been satisfied, for as Christine Kreamer, an American museum specialist who worked at Cape Coast, writes:

For the African owners and custodians of these historic structures, many were and continue to be reluctant to reduce the interpretation of these sites to a singular theme. . . . [M]oving beyond the singular theme of the slave trade allows Ghanaians to tell other stories deemed important to them, including those that celebrate the vibrant cultural life of communities surrounding the forts and castles today.<sup>52</sup>

With an emphasis on color and light, representation of the history and culture of the Central Region not only partially relieves the oppressiveness of the dungeons, it also stands in for representation of the “moment before” northern Ghanaians were enslaved.

But inhabitants of the Central Region are not the only surrogates. African American achievements occupy considerable wall space, while photographs of the Ghanaian independence struggle—which resulted in Ghana becoming the first sub-Saharan African nation to achieve independence—are confined to one wall. Further, black Americans function as metonyms for other Africa-descended peoples in the Americas, even though scholars estimate that only five percent of the approximately ten million captives arriving in the Americas came to North America, and Akan speakers constituted the largest ethnic group exported to Jamaica.<sup>53</sup>

That African Americans had captured center stage was the result of considerable backstage drama, or what Clifford terms “[the] push and pull” of “power-charged exchanges.” Dr. Vera Hyatt, director of the Smithsonian team, remembers that the idea to include the African diaspora in the exhibit originated with the Ghanaian intellectual community.<sup>54</sup> By 1994, the Ghanaian and expatriate teams were facing mounting criticism in local and American newspapers about their conservation practices. Attendees at an international symposium held in the capital of Accra negotiated competing stakeholder claims with a resolution that did not pre-empt the likelihood of further conflicts, for they concluded that “the cultural heritage of all the different epochs and powers should be presented, but also that areas symbolizing the slave trade be given reverential treatment.”<sup>55</sup> Many officials feared the possibility of additional public criticism when the

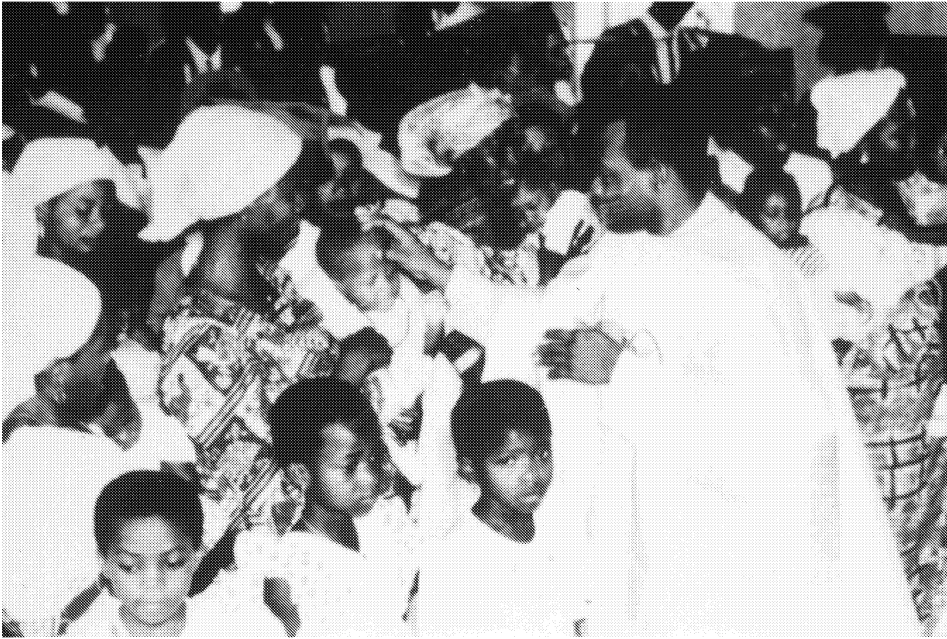


Fig. 3. Priest blessing a baby. This photo was part of the “Impact of European Contacts” exhibit at Elmina castle-dungeon in 1997. Photo by S. L. Richards.

PANAFEST theater festival would bring hundreds more diasporic Africans to the Central Region. Though members of the Smithsonian implementation team disagreed about content and direction,<sup>56</sup>

the history of the African Diaspora ended up dominating ninety percent of the space in this section, completely eclipsing Ghana’s own freedom story which was reduced, unfortunately, to just one lone panel and a single photo of Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana’s first president.<sup>57</sup>

On the museum walls, the “history of the African diaspora” is, in fact, the history of black people in the United States. Missing from the frantic implementation activities, apparently, were voices arguing for Ghanaian national interests, for nationalist histories of specific Caribbean islands and Latin America, or for a transnationalist position that would adopt the Black Atlantic as the proper frame of reference. Ironically, though the many stakeholders in this contact zone project espoused varying antagonistic positions, they united to forget certain memories. Centering African Americans, they perform American hegemony and its corollary, Ghanaian neocolonial dependency.<sup>58</sup>

Experience in theater production—or museum display—teaches that meaning is made at the level of research and design, implementation, and spectator responses. Without careful, sustained attention paid to the histories, assumptions, and power relations that bring people together as well as divide them, and a commitment to work through difficulties toward a shared objective, without time devoted to building and then enacting, through community involvement and through spatial and exhibition design (what Clifford terms the dynamic “moral relationship” that

inheres in museum collections), controversy will continue to haunt these memorial projects. And even such careful collaboration offers no sure guarantee against disputes, because individuals are also socialized to (re)act from their relational, sometimes cross-cutting, positions in structures of asymmetrical power. Yet, heritage tourists, unlike their “sand ‘n surf” counterparts, bring to the memorial site a receptivity to new information and a curiosity, often informed by considerable academic preparation. Presented, in a variety of media both at home and onsite, with a complex narrative that does not disguise its fissures, they may prove themselves ready to tackle the contact zone challenges of polyfocus and polyvocality in which they, along with multiple other competing protagonists and plots, present themselves for re-memoring.

The final surrogation to be discussed brings me back to the beginning of my paper, where I posed the question of difference as an identity the host must enact. Here, the medium is a video that noted film maker Kwaw Ansah of Film Africa produced in order to synthesize the topics Cape Coast visitors would encounter on the wall panels. Rather than erasing recent colonial history, this document places its citizenry in an ambiguous, ahistorical time zone. Constructed around the premise of an elderly woman relating the history of the community to youngsters, the movie features such scenes as young girls’ initiation into womanhood, an assembly of chiefs, and communal merrymaking after a hard day’s work. Presented as representing the past, the color footage is drawn from scenes that appear to be contemporary. Thus, in this video the Ghanaian present doubles as a precolonial past and is characterized by its difference from, rather than its similarity to, the rest of the developed and developing worlds.

Ghana, and by extension Africa as a whole, seems situated in a chronological period in which time has either stopped, or the past is identical to the present. Recall the AT&T advertisement, in which the excited caller finds his roots not in the city, in the person of someone operating a computer, running a factory, or working in a hospital. As constructed by this ad and the Barfield newspaper feature, as well as by countless other travel materials, continental Africans are visible to many diaspora Africans only to the extent that they appear to be different, located in a time frame impervious to change. True enough, many Africans do lead lives that have not changed in some respects from those of their ancestors. But that one unchanging aspect of life is allowed all too often to stand in as the sole, distinctive marker of Africanness. The exotic Other, no matter where she or he is located, attracts tourist dollars.

*“Our Tradition Is a Very Modern Tradition”<sup>59</sup>*

Most often, this distinctiveness is given the name of “tradition.” In that it is unlike the West, tradition seems to afford both Ghanaians and diasporic Africans a shared zone of purity, free from the contamination of slavery or colonialism. But I am also reminded of a 1997 incident that occurred



when PANAFEST visitors were invited to participate in a village naming ceremony. At one point, a voice could be heard over the crackling amplifier, “The ceremony is about to begin. You will see something traditional. This ceremony is as our fathers have always done it.” What we visitors could, in fact, see was the backs of camera and video people who had rushed forward into position, thereby blocking our view. Obviously, “tradition” had changed over time, assimilating, as Wole Soyinka argues, new technologies into its elastic framework of knowledge without losing its character.<sup>60</sup> The trope of tradition can be mobilized, as in the naming ceremony incident, to authorize an event in which both participants and spectators willingly suspend beliefs in authenticity or an accurate reproduction of the past.<sup>61</sup> Or, as numerous African writers have dramatized, it can be deployed to defend a hierarchical, oppressive status quo and disable a quest for a more equitable future.<sup>62</sup>

The castle-dungeons represent one stop on a tourist itinerary that often includes a visit to nearby Kakum National Forest, to the village of Bonwire, famed for its kente cloth that has become a commodity symbolic of black pride, and further north to Kumasi, the historic seat of the Asante empire. Though in the oppressive castles diasporic visitors enact conflicting identities—emotionally distraught surrogates for enslaved ancestors, smiling tourists, quarrelsome members of a reunited African family, or disruptive critics complicit with American hegemony—the appeal of Ghana (or other West African nations) as a site that marks one’s ancestral beginnings or measures the distance one’s resilient ancestors traveled, remains strong. The challenge for tourist and host alike is to discern the agenda behind tropes of tradition and family performed along the way.

The Asante people of Ghana encode some of their most important proverbs in visual symbols. One is the Sankofa bird, whose body is poised to take flight in one direction, while its head is facing the opposite direction. The Sankofa bird represents the proverb, “Go back and fetch it.”<sup>63</sup> Presumably, the bird looks at any number of resources available to him and chooses the one best suited for his trip. In journeying to these slave sites, travelers need ask: Who are we? How are “we” constituted such that we share an identity with “them,” or conversely, have adversarial interests? What morsel(s) of wisdom from the past are we to collect from these sites of memory? Toward what future(s) are we—and they—poised for flight?

## NOTES

I am grateful to the Dean’s Offices in Northwestern University’s Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences and School of Communication, as well as to the Program of African Studies, for funding to support this research. Like its author, this paper has traveled and benefited from feedback along the way; I am particularly grateful to Mae Henderson and Daniel Walkowitz, who generously read and commented on an earlier draft when we were fellows at the Stanford Humanities Center in 2001–2002.

The term *castle-dungeon* is a contested one: though these large structures have

historically been termed “castles” in European accounts, in the 1990s IMAKHUS Okofu and other diasporic Africans suggested that the word “dungeon” be added to acknowledge the victims’ perspective. The Ghana Tourist Board and The Ghana Museums and Monuments Board did not accept this suggestion, which emerged from the international symposium and controversy discussed in the “Exhibition Semiotics” section of this essay.

1. See Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge University Press, 1989); Paulla A. Ebron, “Enchanted Memories of Regional Difference in African American Culture,” *American Anthropologist* 100.1: 94–105; Iyunola Osagie, “Historical Memory and a New National Consciousness,” *Massachusetts Review* 38, no. 1 (1997): 63–83.

2. Quoted in bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 173.

3. I have visited Ghana on at least three occasions: in February 1998, I was fortunate to participate in a tour that included twelve Africa-based scholars, a seven-person technical crew, and one other African American academic and retraced slave routes from Ghana’s southern coast all the way north across its border with Burkina Faso. This tour was funded by the Ford Foundation as part of a larger, multiyear initiative, “Transcending Boundaries,” that linked the University of Ghana Legon’s African Humanities Institute with the Institute for Advanced Study and Research in the African Humanities at Northwestern University and with CODESRIA, the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa, headquartered in Dakar, Senegal. A second segment of the trip took the group westward to Abomey and Ouidah in Benin.

4. Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992), 6.

5. Dennis Kennedy, “Shakespeare and Cultural Tourism,” *Theatre Journal* 50.2 (1998): 175–88.

6. Bernetta Hayes, “Claiming Our Heritage is a Booming Industry,” *American Visions* (1997): 44.

7. Chris Abotchie, “International Tourism in Ghana: Socio-Cultural Impacts,” *Legon Journal of the Humanities* 9 (1996): 1–29; Joseph Akyeampong, “An Overview of Ghana’s Tourism Industry,” *Business Watch*, February–March 1999: 51–52.

8. Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minnesota University Press, 1996), 42; Susan Willis, “Memory and Mass Culture,” in *History and Memory in African-American Culture*, ed. Genevieve Fabre and Robert O’Meally (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 178–87.

9. Edward M. Bruner, “Tourism in the Balinese Borderzone,” in *Displacement, Diaspora, and Geographies of Identity*, ed. Smadar Lavie and Ted Swedenburg (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 160. What makes this assertion all the more puzzling is that Bruner writes with a good deal of insight about the castles of Ghana. See Edward M. Bruner, “Tourism in Ghana: The Representation of Slavery and the Return of the Black Diaspora,” *American Anthropologist* 98.2 (1996): 290–304.

10. Ghana Tourist Board data for 1999 indicate that out of 41,406 visitors to Cape Coast Castle alone, 79.18% were Ghanaians; nationalities of the foreigners were not reported. I am grateful to Devin Griffin for sharing this information with me.

11. For further information on St. Paul’s program, known as “Commemorating the Maaafa,” see its Web site, [www.spcbc.com](http://www.spcbc.com).

12. Deborah Barfield, “Trip to the Motherland Is Painful, Educational,” *Florida Today* 26 July 1998: F1.

13. *Ibid.*, F2.

14. I believe this ad has appeared in a number of black magazines. See *American Visions* 12.5 (October–November 1997), in which this two-page spread appears on the back of the front cover and on the opening page of the magazine, before even the table of contents.

15. In 1999, the subtheme was revised slightly and became “Uniting the African Family” (PANAFEST ’99 Official Souvenir Brochure).

16. *Status of the Tourism Industry in Ghana*, <http://www.africaonline.com.gh/Topmount/whyghana.html>. Accessed 2001.

17. Albert van Dantzig, *Forts and Castles of Ghana* (Accra: Sedco Publishing Limited, 1980), i.

18. van Dantzig, *Forts and Castles of Ghana*, ix; Christine Mullen Kreamer, “Contested Terrain: Cultural Negotiations and Ghana’s Cape Coast Castle Exhibition, ‘Crossroads of People, Crossroads of Trade,’” in *The Atlantic Slave Trade in African and Diaspora Memory*, ed. Ralph A. Austen (Durham: Duke University Press, forthcoming). An earlier draft is accessible through the Africana Conference Paper Index, located within Northwestern University Library’s Africana Collection.

19. Kwesi Anquandah, *Castles and Forts of Ghana* (Atalante/Paris: Ghana Museums and Monuments Board, 1999), 8.

20. Other visitors to Elmina may have different memories, for the building’s appearance changes, depending upon how recently it has been repainted in order to withstand the harmful environmental effects.

21. Information on relationships between castle occupants and townspeople is limited; see A. W. Lawrence, *Trade Castles and Forts of West Africa* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1963); Theresa A. Singleton, “The Slave Trade Remembered on the Former Gold and Slave Coasts,” *Slavery and Abolition* 20.1 (1999): 150–69.

22. Interestingly, most African American travel accounts omit any reference to the officers’ quarters and public spaces; it’s as though these above-ground areas at Elmina or Cape Coast castle made no impact on the authors’ memories. See, for example, Opal Palmer Adisa, “Accra Drums Me Home,” in *Go Girl! The Black Woman’s Book of Travel and Adventure*, ed. Elaine Lee (Portland: Eighth Mountain Press, 1997), 53–60; Renee Kemp, “An Apology in Ghana,” in Lee, *Go Girl!*, 87–88; Daniel Jerome Wideman, “Singing Sankofa,” in *Giant Steps: The New Generation of African American Writers*, ed. Kevin Young (New York: Perennial, 2000), 298–307.

23. Vivian M. Patraha, “Spectacles of Suffering: Performing Presence, Absence, and Historical Memory at U.S. Holocaust Museum,” in *Performance and Cultural Politics*, ed. Elin Diamond (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 94.

24. *Ibid.*, 99.

25. Toni Morrison, “The Site of Memory,” in *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*, ed. Russell Ferguson (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art; Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990), 332.

26. “Ghana Slave Dungeon Document—St. Paul Community Baptist Church” (Brooklyn, New York).

27. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, “Afterlives,” *Performance Research* 2.2 (1999): 1.

28. Richard Handler and Eric Gable, *The New History in an Old Museum: Creating the Past at Colonial Williamsburg* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997); Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

29. Kwesi Yankah, *Speaking for the Chief: The Okyeame and the Politics of Royal Akan Oratory* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995).

30. Marimba Ani, "Remarks" (paper presented at the 3rd Pan African Historical Theatre Festival [PANAFEST '97], Cape Coast, Ghana, 1997).

31. I was fortunate to be given access to student journal reports submitted as part of Stanford University's African and African American Studies Program's 2001 Spring Learning Expedition to Ghana; in addition, Melinda Wilson shared portions of a journal kept on her Vanderbilt University-sponsored trip to Ghana.

32. Citing the statistic that "vacationers take 70% of all photographs shot worldwide" (7), Michelle Citron also discusses the convention of the smiling subject. See Citron, *Home Movies and Other Necessary Fictions* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

33. *Status of the Tourism Industry in Ghana*.

34. Kreamer, "Contested Terrain," par. 2, 15; *Status of the Tourism Industry in Ghana*. Christine Kreamer graciously shared with me an electronic version of her pre-publication manuscript; therefore I am citing this article by paragraph.

35. Bruner, "Tourism in Ghana," 294.

36. IMAHKUS Vienna Robinson, "Is the Black Man's History Being White-washed?," *Uhuru* 9 (1994): 48-50.

37. Bruner, "Tourism in Ghana," 297.

38. Kofi Anyidoho, "Memory and Vision," in *Ancestrallogic & Caribbeanblues* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 1993); Kwadwo Opoku-Agyemang, "Colonial History and the Slave Experience as Themes in Modern African Literature," in *Nationalism vs. Internationalism: (Inter)National Dimensions of Literatures in English*, ed. Wolfgang Zach and Ken L. Goodwin (Tubingen: Stauffenburg Verlag, 1996), 219-28.

39. Ama Ata Aidoo, *Anowa* (London: Longman Drumbeat, 1970); Christina Ama Ata Aidoo, *The Dilemma of a Ghost* (New York: Collier Books, 1965).

40. Kwadwo Opoku-Agyemang, *Cape Coast Castle: A Collection of Poems* (Accra: Afram Publications [Ghana] Limited, 1996). Entitled "Slave Routes: A Trail So Long Gone," the television program documented the 1998 trip which I had joined (see n. 3). The African Humanities project was overseen by Kofi Anyidoho of the University of Ghana, Legon; Doris Adabasus Kuwornu served as the director of the television project.

41. Stephen Buckley, "Heritage Battle Rages at Slavery's Sacred Sites," *Guardian* 11 May 1995, 11. In addition, I remember informal conversations with Jamaican activist and tour leader Pauline Petinaud, aka Miss P, during PANAFEST '97, when she complained that plans to hold a popular music performance at Cape Coast castle amounted to irreverent dancing on ancestors' graves.

42. The former director of the ministry of tourism, Mohammed ben Abdallah, suggests that this seemingly intemperate comment may have been prompted by a history of failed promises. African American performers Isaac Hayes and Dionne Warwick had promised to contribute to preservation efforts, but to date, no funds have been forthcoming. Similarly, African American expatriate and long-time Ghana resident Dr. Robert Lee was forced to abandon plans to preserve Fort Abandze, presumably in part because African Americans proved unresponsive to his fundraising efforts. Mohammed ben Abdallah, interview with the author, spring 2000. See also Kreamer, "Contested Terrain," par. 40.

43. Stephen Buckley, "U.S., African Blacks Differ on Turning Slave Dungeons into Tourist Attractions," *Washington Post* 17 April 1995, A10.

44. On this latter point, see Caryl Phillips, *The Atlantic Sound* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2000).

45. James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 192.

46. Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 2–3.

47. Elli Lester Roushazamir and Peggy J. Kreshel, "Gloria and Anthony Visit a Plantation: History into Heritage at 'Laura, a Creole Plantation,'" *International Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Administration* 2, no. 3–4 (2001): 185.

48. Patience Essah, "Slavery, Heritage and Tourism in Ghana," *International Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Administration* 2, no. 3–4 (2001): 31–50. Prempeh I was imprisoned at Elmina and then exiled in 1899 to the Seychelles in order to forestall local alliances that might have threatened the British position in the European "scramble for Africa." What goes unnoted is a history of painful ironies, for Prempeh I was head of the Asante Empire, whose wealth and power were built upon the transatlantic slave trade. Defending the freedom of the Asante people, Prempeh I and his predecessor fought troops from the British West Indies who, in all likelihood, were the descendants of enslaved Africans exported across the Atlantic.

49. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture*, 2–3, 17–78.

50. Vera Lawrence Hyatt, "Ghana: The Chronicle of a Museum Development Project in the Central Region" (Washington, D.C.: Office of International Relations, the Smithsonian Institution, 1977), 28.

51. Kreamer, "Contested Terrain," par. 15.

52. *Ibid.*, par. 13.

53. Michael Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 18, 107.

54. Hyatt, "Ghana," 13.

55. Kreamer, "Contested Terrain," par. 38.

56. Christine Mullen Kreamer, email, 6 February 2002.

57. Kreamer, "Contested Terrain," par. 26.

58. Kreamer (par. 46) asserts that Ghanians working on the project tended to interpret this debate over the object of memorialization as an imposition of Western imperialist values. In this instance of surrogation, appeals to racial solidarity and the trope of family have been trumped by Americocentrism. For a critique of hegemonic African American performance, see Stuart Hall, "What Is This 'Black' in Black Popular Culture?," in *Black Popular Culture, a Project by Michelle Wallace*, ed. Gina Dent (Seattle: Bay Press, 1992), 21–33.

59. Christopher Waterman, "'Our Tradition Is a Very Modern Tradition': Popular Music and the Construction of a Pan-Yoruba Identity," *Ethnomusicology* 34.3 (1990): 367–79.

60. Wole Soyinka, *Myth, Literature and the African World* (Cambridge University Press, 1978), 54.

61. Edward Cohen, "Authenticity and Commoditization in Tourism," *Annals of Tourism Research* 15 (1988): 371–86.

62. For a representative sample of plays and critical statements, see Biodun Jeyifo, ed., *Modern African Drama, Norton Critical Editions* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2002).

63. Adolph H. Abgo, *Values of Adinkra Symbols* (Kumasi: Ebony Designs and Publications, 1999), 4; Alfred Kofi Quarcoo, *The Language of Adinkra Symbols* (Legon: Sebewie Ventures Publications, 1994), 17.

# For Whom Is the King a King? Issues of Intercultural Production, Perception, and Reception in a *Kathakali King Lear*

*Phillip B. Zarrilli*

## *The Interculture of Production*

It has become commonplace to assume that “culture” is both reflected within and simultaneously invented by the webs of signification knit into the performative moment. Performance as a mode of cultural action is not a simple reflection of some essentialized, fixed attributes of a static monolithic culture but an arena for the constant process of renegotiating experiences and meanings that constitute culture. Critical theorist Susan Bennett expands this notion of the interactive state of flux in the relationship between culture and performance, noting that

both an audience’s reaction to a text (or performance) and the text (performance) itself are bound within cultural limits. Yet, as diachronic analysis makes apparent, those limits are continually tested and invariably broken. Culture cannot be held as a fixed entity, a set of constant rules, but instead it must be seen as in a position of inevitable flux.<sup>1</sup>

It is also a commonplace of the postmodern condition that we cannot credit metanarratives like the concepts of “culture” or discrete “performance traditions” within “cultures,”<sup>2</sup> that we indicate our awareness of such incredulity by using quotation marks, and then we go ahead and use such dangerous words laden with the baggage of their metanarratives because we recognize that “there are times when we still need to be able to speak holistically of Japanese or Trobriand or Moroccan culture in the confidence that we are designating something real and differentially coherent.”<sup>3</sup>

If “culture” and “cultural performances” as fixed metanarratives have been quoted out of existence, where is “culture” and where are “its performances” to be located in a postmodern world? Ethnographic historian James Clifford asserts that

the world’s societies are too systematically interconnected to permit any easy isolation of separate or independently functioning systems. . . . Twentieth-century identities no longer presuppose continuous cultures or traditions. Everywhere individuals and groups improvise local performance from (re)collected pasts, drawing on foreign media, symbols, and languages.<sup>4</sup>

Indonesian novelist-playwright-poet Putu Wijaya describes the superhuman effort required to exist in this jumble of identities prompted by a “world dominated by the media, by consumption, and by global cultural flows”:<sup>5</sup>

To discuss an Indonesian poet does not merely mean to discuss the poetry of the man because the poet also writes prose, essays, drama, critiques, travelogues . . . articles about the economy, philosophy . . . gossip, pornographic stories . . . and so forth. Nor can we write of the joys and sorrows in the life of a teacher only from the perspective of his work at school because he also raises chickens . . . is a councilman for his neighborhood . . . as well as being . . . a law student, a Moslem scholar . . . a fan of pornographic movies, a royal servant, a gambler and a shaman.

. . . The above descriptions present a complex but also superhuman phenomenon. . . . Complex because we find that cultural roles are inexorably entwined with one another so that no characteristic stands alone. The phenomenon is labelled “super” because we sometimes have a difficult time imagining that people can have so many roles and statuses in life.<sup>6</sup>

While sharing Clifford’s point of view and appreciating Putu’s ironically poetic self-definition, I would qualify both by suggesting that, even if individual and group identities are being shaped in an interculture of juxtaposition and disjuncture, the reflexive awareness of and attention to this condition is primarily part of the discourse of an educated and/or artistic elite. Although twentieth-century identities no longer necessarily *presuppose* continuous cultures or traditions, there are nevertheless many contexts within which either “the world” or at least some more framed and circumscribed arenas of experience are imagined as continuous, and where tradition is cast in the role of maintaining and authorizing a particular form of continuity within that particular experiential arena.

Given the provocative choice by James Clifford of interpreting our postmodern condition and the breakdown of metanarratives with either a Lévi-Straussian “narrative of entropy or loss . . . [as] an inescapable, sad truth” or “a more ambiguous ‘Caribbean’ experience . . . reconceived as inventive process or creolized ‘interculture,’”<sup>7</sup> I have chosen the latter. I will examine the relationship between performance and interculture by focusing primarily on one experiment—a recent South Indian *kathakali* dance-drama version of Shakespeare’s *King Lear*.

On July 28, 1989, I attended the inaugural performance of a South Indian dance-drama (*kathakali*) version of Shakespeare’s *King Lear* (*Kathakali King Lear*) on the proscenium stage of the Victorian-styled V. J. T. Hall, Trivandrum, Kerala, India. The European premiere took place on September 2, 1989, at the Festival of Rovereto, Italy, followed by two and one-half months of performances in the Netherlands, France, and Spain. A second international touring production appeared in Singapore as part

of its Twenty-fifth Independence Day celebrations and at the Edinburgh Theatre Festival in August 1990.<sup>8</sup> Programmed as part of the “Globe to Globe” annual international festival intended to “explore the impact of Shakespeare on other cultures,” the third and most recent production of *Kathakali King Lear* was performed at Shakespeare’s (reconstructed) Globe Theatre, London from July 6–17, 1999.

Australian playwright-director David McRuvie and French actor-dancer Annette Leday originally conceived *Kathakali King Lear*, which was coproduced by their Association Keli (Paris) with the internationally known Kerala State Arts Academy (Kerala Kalamandalam, Cheruthuruthy, Kerala, India). Scripted by McRuvie in English and originally translated by Iyyamkode Sreedharan (poet and then Secretary of the Kerala Kalamandalam) into Malayalam (the regional language of Kerala, *kathakali*’s home state), *Kathakali King Lear* was choreographed and staged collaboratively by McRuvie, Leday (who also played Cordelia), and a group of highly regarded senior kathakali artists: K. Kumaran Nayar (King Lear), C. Padmanabhan Nayar (King Lear), Kalamandalam Gopi (France), K. P. Krishnankutty Poduval (percussion), T. K. Appukutty Poduval (percussion), Madambi Subramaniam Namboodiri (vocalist).

With its Western content, its highly conventionalized *kathakali* mise-en-scène and techniques, its collaborative process of conceptualization and realization, and its performances in continental Europe, Edinburgh, Singapore, and Kerala, *Kathakali King Lear* was certainly intercultural in both its production and reception. Prompted in part by my agreement with and desire to pursue Susan Bennett’s assertion that “production and reception cannot be separated, and a key area for further research is the relationship between the two for specific cultural environments, [and] for specific types of theatre,”<sup>9</sup> I will use *Kathakali King Lear* as the primary example through which to analyze the relationships among production, perception, and reception.

### **What Is Kathakali?**

*Kathakali* is one among many indigenous performing arts of Kerala, India. At the historical moment of its emergence as a distinct genre of performance during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, it was given the new name *kathakali*, denoting a hybrid formed by borrowing from a number of Kerala’s traditional arts. The name *kathakali* literally means “story play” and refers to the performance of dramas written by playwright-composers in a highly florid Sanskritized Malayalam based on India’s epics and puranas—first the Ramayana, then the Mahabharata, and later from the *Bhagavata Purana*.<sup>10</sup>

On a bare stage using only a few stools and an occasional property, three groups of performers collectively create *kathakali* performances: actor-dancers, percussionists, and vocalists. Traditionally constituting an all-male company of actor-dancers,<sup>11</sup> the performers use a highly physicalized performance style embodied through years of training to play a



variety of roles, including kings, heroines, demons, demonesses, gods, animals, and priests. Each role is easily identifiable to a Malayali audience as a particular character type with its own inhering characteristics by the codified makeups and elaborate, colorful costumes. The actor-dancers create their roles by using a repertory of dance steps, choreographed patterns of stage movement, an intricate and complex language of hand gestures (*mudras*) for literally “speaking” their character’s dialogue with their hands, and a pliable use of the face and eyes to express the internal states (*bhāva*) of the character. The percussion orchestra consists of three types of drums (*ceṅṅa*, *maddalam*, and *iṭekka*), each with its own distinctive sound and role in the ensemble, and brass cymbals, which keep the basic rhythmic cycles around which the dance-drama is structured. The two onstage vocalists keep the basic time patterns on their cymbals and sing the entire text, including both third-person narration and first-person dialogue in a vocal style where elaboration and repetition are common characteristics. Performance traditionally began at dusk, and it took all night to perform a thirty-to forty-page text.

*Kathakali*’s dense performance structure provides many opportunities for narrative and performative elaboration on the basic story /text, enhancing the realization of the aesthetic ideal of *rasa*—tasting or savoring the major moods unfolded in the drama. *Kathakali* has always appealed to a wide cross-section of Malayalis. The easily recognizable characters, colorful makeup and costumes, and those scenes played with broad dramatic action, mime, and dance combine to make *kathakali* entertaining and pleasing for the general audience, which knows the stories well but is not attuned to reading its nuances. Its more subtle and codified modes of performance appeal to connoisseurs in the audience educated to appreciate these nuances.

### *Kathakali King Lear*

From its inception, *Kathakali King Lear* was intended to be more than a superficial dressing up of Shakespeare’s *Lear* in colorful kathakali costumes as an exotic novelty for Western audiences. Rather, it was to serve as an intercultural experiment in production *and* reception, opening in Kerala for Malayali audiences and then touring continental Europe. Leday and McRuvie wanted the production to speak equally to both its original audiences. For Malayalis the production was intended to provide a kathakali experience of one of Shakespeare’s great plays and roles. Assuming that many in the European audience would know Shakespeare’s play, the production was intended as an accessible way of experiencing *kathakali* and the aesthetic delight of *rasa*. For Leday and McRuvie, *kathakali*’s “rich means of expression and its intensity of effect” seemed an appropriate performative means through which to “find a theatrical expression for the larger-than-life dimension and explosive power of the play.”<sup>12</sup>

Following theater semiotician Patrice Pavis, the lengthy process of adaptation and translation that created *Kathakali King Lear* might best be



Fig. 1. *Kathakali King Lear*. Goneril (right) bows before her father as Cordelia (left) asks herself, “What shall Cordelia speak? Love, and be silent.” Photo credit: Annette Leday and David McRuvie.

described as a series of *reelaborations* of text, gesture, and choreography into a new frame.<sup>13</sup> The process began with McRuvie’s reelaboration of the *King Lear* text to conform with kathakali’s theatrical criteria in length, action, and number of characters—a process that radically transformed the original. The typed English adaptation ran barely twenty pages for the two-hour-plus performance. The action focused exclusively on Lear and his three daughters. The Gloucester subplot was completely cut, as were Kent, Cornwall, and Albany. Only eight characters appeared, including Lear, his three daughters (Cordelia, Goneril, and Regan), the King of France (in a somewhat expanded role), the Fool, mad Tom, and a soldier. Each of the nine scenes—(1) King Lear Divides His Kingdom (fig. 1); (2) The Departure of Cordelia and France; (3) At Goneril’s Palace; (4) At Regan’s Palace; (5) The Storm (figs. 2, 3, 4); (6) The Return of Cordelia and France; (7) The Reconciliation of Lear and Cordelia; (8) The Battle (fig. 5); and (9) The Death of Lear (fig. 6)—was organized around one or two major dramatic actions. The first scene, for example, enacted the division of the kingdom and banishment of Cordelia. The second scene dramatized the wedding and departure of Cordelia and France in which Cordelia expresses her sorrow at leaving her father and pledges herself to her husband.

McRuvie rendered his English adaptation into a somewhat simplified version of the three major components of a traditional *kathakali* performance script: narrative passages (*śloka*) in third person describing the context of the action, dialogue passages (*padam*) sung by the onstage vocalists and spoken by the actors through hand gestures, and passages (*āṭṭam*) delivered in gesture language and mimetic dance by the actors but



Fig. 2. In the midst of the storm, mad Tom is discovered by Lear and the Fool. Lear: “Unaccommodated man is not more but such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou art.” Photo credit: Annette Leday and David McRuvie.

not sung by the onstage vocalists. The *śloka* and *padam* were then translated into Malayalam and set in the appropriate musical mode for the vocalists and rhythm for the percussionists.

The production ensemble also carried out a series of specific spatial, gestural, choreographic, and musical reelaborations of McRuvie’s translated text to fit *kathakali*’s theatrical conventions—a process that required reinterpretation of a number of *kathakali* conventions as well as the creation of one new role (*vēṣam*). Since the *vēṣam*, literally “dress, mask, disguise,” which is the “whole outward appearance, shape,”<sup>14</sup> determines not only the external contours but also the internal nature of each character an actor plays, the decision on each *vēṣam* was the actor’s beginning place in trying to create roles for which there was no tradition to follow.<sup>15</sup> A few roles were obvious and easy to select: the heroic King France, who marries Cordelia, defeats her evil sisters, and attempts to return Lear to his throne, had to be played as a *pacca*, the primarily green-colored, ideal, heroic, kingly type of character. Cordelia, the devoted, loving, chaste daughter, had to be played as a female *minukku*, or “radiant” type, whose makeup has a golden hue. Mad Tom was played as a *tēppu* with a smeared black-face, a special category for characters close to animals in nature.

The selection of *vēṣam* for the other major characters, including Goneril, Regan, the Fool, and Lear, generated considerable controversy in Kerala. For Lear the “knife” (*katti*) *vēṣam* was selected since its mixture of green and red symbolized his combination of kingly and turbulent attributes. In keeping with *kathakali* convention, the role of Lear was split into two parts, each to be played by a senior *kathakali* actor: the fully costumed Lear who appears at the opening of the play in court through the moment in the storm scene when he removes his crown and ornaments to

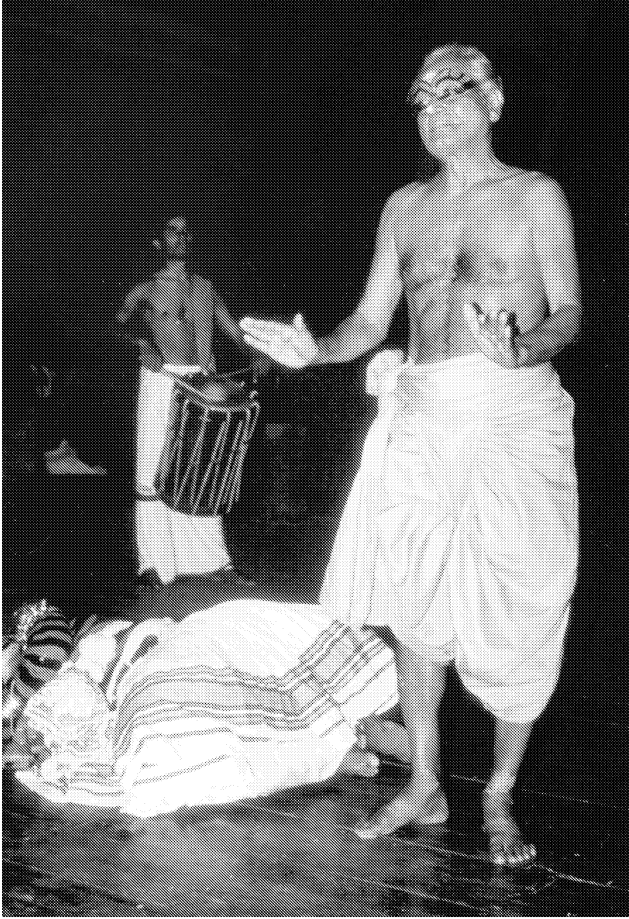


Fig. 3. Lear is revealed after he has removed his ornaments and crown to be like mad Tom at the Kalamandam dress rehearsal. A great deal of controversy was raised when Kumaran Asan appeared bareheaded and virtually without makeup. Photo credit: Kunju Vasudevan Namboodiripad.

become like mad Tom and the partially costumed mad Lear on the heath. For Goneril and Regan the *kari vēṣam*, typically used for demoness roles, was selected, and they were costumed in black and blue, respectively, symbolizing their primitive nature. Finally, for the Fool, no *kathakali vēṣam* existed; the brahman clown (*vidūṣaka*), however, who serves as the king's court fool in the tradition of staging Sanskrit dramas (*kūṭiyāṭṭam*)—from which *kathakali* historically derived much—provided a model adapted for the production.

Appropriate ways of enacting each role and scene were developed in the collaborative rehearsal process. Beginning with the basic *vēṣam* in which each role was to be played, the spatial, choreographic, gestural, and musical elements were carefully reelaborated to fit the nonindigenous narrative and the peculiarities of the story's characters. Vasudevan Namboodiripad, former superintendent of the Kerala Kalamandalam, who served as an advisor for the production, explained that Leday and McRuvie made sure that the production was more than a superficial appropriation of *kathakali* conventions and techniques:

Thought had to be given to not only the outer structure of *kathakali*, but also to the inner structure and nuance. For example, for King Lear's initial entrance with his "curtain look" (*tiranōkku*) [i.e., gradual revelation of a character behind a handheld curtain], you retain the visible structure of the look but you may change the inner struc-



Fig. 4. For the Trivandrum performances and tour, more of the original costume and makeup were kept for Kumaran Asan’s mad Lear. The trial scene in which Lear says, “Anatomize Regan; see what breeds about her heart.” Photo credit: Annette Leday and David McRuvie.

ture of the nuance of expression in the look. The ultimate purpose of the curtain look is kept, but these subtle changes are made. Otherwise, it is just a copy of the same scene from any other curtain look of any other play in the repertory. To accomplish this, you must have people like Padmanabhan Asan [playing Lear] who have the capacity to analyze the character’s inner state or condition (*bhāva*). From this analysis every phrase must be worked out in detail.<sup>16</sup>

This sensitivity to the nuance of expressive interpretation was one reason for the decision that Leday would play Cordelia. McRuvie explained his view of the centrality of the Cordelia role to me: “What makes *King Lear* great is a great king, which is rare. Second in making the king is the Fool. But the one thing that can ruin it is Cordelia.”<sup>17</sup> To McRuvie’s decidedly Western eye, potential disaster threatened if one of the young male actors specializing in female roles (*strivēṣam*) were to act the “delicate role of Cordelia” in what McRuvie correctly characterized as “their boyish quality . . . that becomes kind of campy.”<sup>18</sup>

The lengthy process of reelaboration created a completely new performance text that would provide both Malayali and European audiences with a new performance experience—a *kathakaḷi*-style production of Shakespeare.

### *Production, Perception, and Reception*

Although *Kathakaḷi King Lear* was originally reelaborated for continental European and Malayali audiences, in fact, it played for audiences in four



Fig. 5. Goneril and Regan in battle. Photo credit: Annette Leday and David McRuvie.

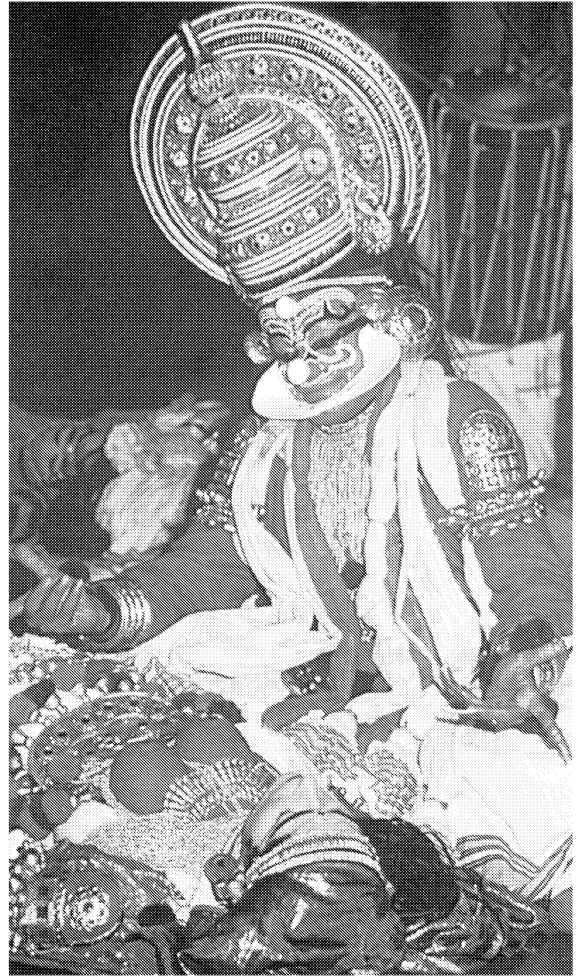
quite different cultural locations on its two tours: not only Kerala and continental Europe but also Singapore and Edinburgh and, much later, London. Both between and within each set of cultural boundaries there are “different viewing publics,”<sup>19</sup> each of which brought to the production not only their own native cultural assumptions but also an increasingly global flow of ideas, images, and information, all of which affected their expectations about what they would experience, their perceptions and categories for understanding that experience, and therefore how they received and responded to *Kathakali King Lear*. How are we to understand the reception of *Kathakali King Lear* among such diverse audiences?

Phenomenologist Maurice Natanson explains that our perceptions are shaped by a consciousness that posits horizons of probabilities, which constitute expectations.<sup>20</sup> In performance, expectations are created in four interdependent ways: (1) the daily experiences and cultural assumptions that inform the experience each spectator brings to the performance; (2) performance experiences similar to or different from the one that each is having now; (3) expectations created by publicity, word of mouth, and so on; and (4) what happens within the frame of the performance one is attending. In this fourth mode, a set of expectations is created as the performance is enacted.

The way in which *kathakali* structures an audience’s experience creates the possibility for a particular range of meaning very different from other genres of performance, whether American psychological realism or Japanese Noh. Likewise, the way in which a Shakespeare play and its characters create the possibility for a particular range of meaning is very



Fig. 6. Lear: “She’s gone forever.” Photo credit: Annette Leday and David McRuvie.



different from other types of dramas such as the *kathakali* play *Naḷa Caritam* or *Peter Pan*.

As theater semiotician Marco De Marinis, following Umberto Eco, asserts: “Production and reception are strictly linked even though they obviously do not altogether coincide . . . [A performance] text postulates its own receiver as an indispensable condition not only of its own, concrete communicative ability, but also its own potential for meaning.”<sup>21</sup> We have seen how *kathakali*, as a genre of performance, postulates both a general audience and one of connoisseurs educated to receive a range of cultural meanings implicit in the conventions used to enact its stories. Each specific *kathakali* play-in-performance articulates a specific set of meanings for both these generic audiences as well as its particular audiences. Like other adaptations of *kathakali*, such as P. K. Devan’s one-hour performances for tourists in Ernakulam, Kerala,<sup>22</sup> *Kathakali King Lear* postulated its own receiver in the process of reelaboration described above and possesses its own potential for meaning different from other *kathakali*.

When *kathakali* performances of Indian epic stories are held for Kerala audiences, it may often be said with reception theorist Anne Ubersfeld that the “signs refer to what corresponds to them in the experience of the spectator. The fictional universe set before him [*sic*] summons up the referential universe of the spectator, that of his personal as well as his cultural

experience."<sup>23</sup> In intercultural performance, however, codes and conventions easily read by those within one culture may be opaque to those outside.

Those working interculturally have evolved a number of different production strategies for dealing with this fundamental problem. Peter Brook's production of India's great epic Mahabharata demonstrates one strategy. For Brook "art means extracting the essence from every detail so that the detail can reveal itself as a meaningful part of an inseparable whole."<sup>24</sup> Brook problematically assumes that if one can erase all the cultural codes in the way of reaching a hypothetically universal "reality of zero" common to all humanity, then "geography and history cease to exist."<sup>25</sup> Brook works with an international acting company whose style attempts to reach this zero state of communication by removing any cultural marks that might require of the audience the ability to read any special cultural codes. Consequently, "to tell [the Mahabharata] we had to avoid evoking India too strongly so as to not lead us away from human identification, but also we had to nevertheless tell it as a story rooted in Indian earth."<sup>26</sup>

If Brook erases distinctive cultural codes in his attempt to be universal, Leday and McRuvie chose to challenge their European audiences by maintaining as much of *kathakali's* structure and technique as possible.<sup>27</sup> Given the facts that *Kathakali King Lear* was originally reelaborated for two quite different audiences, played in four quite different geographical and cultural contexts, and that it has conventions or content nonindigenous to one or more of its audiences, I want to ask the following questions: Who was the receiver postulated by the production? What potential meanings were implicit in the production? What meanings were read into the production? Specifically, how was the production received?

### *European Reception: From "Curiosity" to "Bewitching Ritual" to a "Moving Performance"*

For anyone seeing something from outside one's own "culture" for the first time, there is bound to be some degree of difference in assimilation and understanding of what is being seen and heard between an indigenous and nonindigenous audience. Moreover, as Anne Ubersfeld explains,

when he is faced with signs which he does not understand to which he cannot give a name (objects, gestures, discourse), which do not refer to anything in his experience, or, more simply, which pose a problem for him, the spectator's own inventiveness is stimulated: it is up to him to manufacture the relationship between the sign and its intelligibility, or its relationship to the world.<sup>28</sup>

The West has a long and continuing history of manufacturing a variety of meanings for nonindigenous customs, persons, or cultural artifacts and performances it could not (or did not wish to) understand. Historically, the



West took this experience of difference and encapsulated it in a series of discourses on the cultural Other.<sup>29</sup> In the Western-initiated colonial drama of subjugation and domination, India was cast in several key roles. Most important, as South Asian historian Ronald Inden relates, for empiricists and rationalists that role was “THE unchangeable” and/or “THE *absolutely* different” (and therefore inscrutable and dominatable), and, for romantics, the “SPIRITUAL OR IDEAL” Other.<sup>30</sup> As the period of colonial expansion reached its final climax at the turn of the nineteenth century, this drama of subjugation and domination was played out symbolically rather than literally at the “world’s” fairs<sup>31</sup> and even at Coney Island and other amusement parks where exotic Indian nautch dancers were featured in the Durbar of Delhi. Our abilities to read, understand, assimilate, and even participate in Indian performance have been shaped by these discourses of Otherness, which feed both our imagination of Otherness and the way we describe it.<sup>32</sup>

*Kathakali King Lear* generated all these responses and more. In continental Europe, the original production was received with great and near universal acclaim by French dance critics, who filled their columns with information on *kathakali* interspersed with comments ranging from F. C.’s vacuous but appreciative “a splendidly colorful show,”<sup>33</sup> to Pichot’s more adamant expression of appreciation—“a dazzling marriage” of *kathakali* and Shakespeare filled with “intensity, energy, and extravaganza.”<sup>34</sup> Not surprisingly, in Shakespeare’s home, responses focused on the production as a specific interpretation of Shakespeare’s *Lear* rather than on *kathakali* per se. The colorfully opinionated British theater press greeted the Edinburgh Festival performances with less than universal praise. Responses ranged from Michael Billington’s cynical scorn (“Empty gestures of a frustrating *Lear*”)<sup>35</sup> to Charles Spencer’s appreciative evocation of the production as both exotic and mysterious (“Hypnotic power of an Indian *Lear*”)<sup>36</sup> to Randall Stevenson’s grudging appreciation (“Beat of a different drum”), which marveled that even if “Shakespeare transformed into the traditional, colourful, highly stylised dance drama of Kerala . . . doesn’t sound entirely promising . . . [it is] one of the most enthralling performances of the Festival.”<sup>37</sup> The one near universal point of agreement among most of the British press was that *Kathakali King Lear* had, as Tom Morris put it, “little to do with Shakespeare.”<sup>38</sup>

Beyond the general praise and blame, there were those like the reviewer from the *Cannes-Matin/Nice-Matin* who found the production inscrutable and difficult to decode: “we do not have all of the keys to this code, which allows us only sporadically to decipher them.”<sup>39</sup> For the writer from *La Presse de la Manche* the only pleasure of the production was the spectacle of the costumes: “The costumes are the main attraction of the show at least for the western audience, incapable of understanding the complex language of the hand and face gestures, somewhere between mime and a sign language conversation.”<sup>40</sup> For Sergio Trombetta from *La Danse* this inscrutability made the spectacle fascinating: “The interplay of the dance, the facial expressions and the hands remain impenetrable and fascinating.”<sup>41</sup>

Grandmontagne, writing for *Le Telegramme* responded to the difficulties of reading the production by inventing *kathakali* as a timeless, Jungian, dreamlike world:

Without any training, you can appreciate this theater by allowing yourself to be invaded by the music, by the rhythms; by marvelling at the splendid, glittering, colorful costumes, the make-up that completely re-sculpts the actors' faces and makes them timeless even while accentuating the expression of each individual character. . . .

You can, without any training, be subjugated, letting the music intoxicate you.<sup>42</sup>

Pierre Gilles responded similarly, finding in the production a realization of an Artaudian reverie in which "the drama of the aging King Lear . . . [was] promoted to the ranks of the sacred, rendered to the 'primitive destination' of theater—which Artaud sought—and, therefore, to the universal."<sup>43</sup>

The most extreme problem with response is when either too many demands are made on the spectators so that they withdraw their participation or when audience members are unwilling to make any attempt to respond to the performance and therefore withdraw their participation.<sup>44</sup> It appears that the latter may have been the case for John Percival of the *London Times*, who, in a remarkably snide, nothing short of racist, tongue-in-cheek commentary entitled "Lear's heath at half blast," ungenerously wrote of the vocalists as "two fellows with skirts, bare chests and cymbals," of Tom as a "dirty little chap," of the adaptation as "crippling," and the production as a "curiosity."<sup>45</sup>

If, for some, *Kathakali King Lear* was inscrutable—or all spectacle—for others, the production communicated at more than a level of surface exoticism. I think it an oversimplification to assume with Bennett that "audiences are at best 'fascinated' with performances that do not fall into their cultural experience, performances that resist or deny the usual channels of decoding."<sup>46</sup> Randall Stevenson provides a balanced and sensible account of his fascination with *kathakali's* spectacle, his simple enjoyment of its exciting moments of obvious and colorful action, as well as the subtler way in which the performance affected him:

From the opening moment, when the screen brought on to signal scene changes drops to reveal magnificently poised and costumed performers, *Kathakali* offered spectacle and simple excitement. The two onstage percussionists add a mesmeric heartbeat to every move and turn onstage—creating a devastating prelude to the storm, for example—while the singers who chant the narrative fill in tone and colour for every scene. More subtly, what seems "simple" spectacle quickly communicates a great deal of emotion. Stylized movement, minute repeated hand gestures, progressively indicate Lear's poised withdrawal, even before Goneril's ecstatic devil dance steals a vision of insanity and the stresses which create it.

The argument I want to make regarding the kind of European reception of *Kathakali King Lear* represented by Stevenson's review depends upon a prior understanding of the Malayali reception.

### *Malayali Reception: From "Bouquets" to "Brickbats"*

Although *Kathakali King Lear* was coproduced by the premiere Kerala state government arts school, featured some of the most distinguished performers of the *kathakali* stage, played well over thirty performances on its continental tour and at Edinburgh, and, with the important exceptions noted above in the British press, was generally appreciated and praised on tour, *Indian Express* journalist Paul Jacob recalled, one year after the original production, that it opened in Kerala to "no great critical or popular acclaim."<sup>47</sup> As early as the January 1989 experimental staging of four scenes at the Kerala Kalamandalam, the production aroused considerable controversy in Kerala, a situation reflected in the *Hindu* staff writer's report that "comments from the spectators . . . came out in the form of a mixed bag of bouquets and brickbats."<sup>48</sup>

In Kerala during the final months of rehearsal before the production opened, I read and heard the artistic and aesthetic "brickbats" thrown at it while I attended rehearsals or conducted numerous interviews with those involved in the first production. Debated both within rehearsals as well as in the public and press, the controversy swirled around the following five issues, all having to do with the "sense of appropriateness" (*aucityam bodham*) in *kathakali*: (1) Were non-Indian, nonepic, nonmythic stories like *Lear* appropriate for the *kathakali* stage? (2) To what degree was the title character of *Lear* kingly? (3) Was the selection of the *katti vēṣam* appropriate for *Lear*, or should the heroic *pacca* have been selected? (4) During the storm scene, was it appropriate to have *Lear* "realistically" remove part or all of his kingly accoutrements and typifying makeup, or should his relative "nakedness" have been imagined by the audience? (5) Was it appropriate to borrow the clown's (*vidūṣaka*) makeup and costume directly from *kūṭiyāṭṭam*?

All five issues are part of a continuing "internal cultural debate"<sup>49</sup> within the *kathakali* cultural community over the limits of experimentation within the tradition.<sup>50</sup> Since the dawn of the modern institutional era of *kathakali*'s history with the founding of the Kerala Kalamandalam by the great Malayali poet Vallathol in 1930, *kathakali* has been adapted both by practitioners from within the tradition and by artists and entrepreneurs from without. Some of these adaptations, such as the *Kathakali King Lear*, are responses to an increasingly intercultural, global artistic economy, while others have been shaped by the complex contemporary sociopolitical and economic realities within Kerala itself.<sup>51</sup> As there are wide differences of opinion on these issues, my task here is to represent several parties to the debate, situate each point of view so that the terms of argument informing each are clear, and discuss how this internal debate shaped perception and reception of *Kathakali King Lear*.

Given limitations of space, I want to explore Malayali response to the production primarily through the eyes of one of the most visible and certainly the most outspoken champions of a radically conservative interpretation of the *kathakali* tradition, Appakoothan Nayar, one of the founders of the Margi Kathakali School in the capital city, Trivandrum. An engineer by training who holds a graduate degree from the University of Michigan, Appakoothan Nayar is the architect of the uniquely styled Kerala Kalamandalam theater where *kathakali* is regularly performed. His response to *Kathakali King Lear* was straightforward and blunt: "I could not stand it. . . . Even though there are thirty performances abroad, after five years, nobody here will remember it. It will die a natural death."<sup>52</sup> To understand Appakoothan Nayar's negative response, it is necessary to explain the aesthetic that informs his point of view.

Appakoothan Nayar differentiates between two levels of aesthetic realization. The first and "lower" aesthetic he calls "sensual" or "worldly" because it limits reception to the feelings of the five senses. Such reception is a simplistic and immediate sensual response; that is, "when you see [touch, taste, feel, etc.] a thing you like it, but it doesn't go to the mind." An example is the appearance of an everyday character like the mahout in *Kamsavadham*, where the spectator's simple recognition of the character could be characterized as sensual, immediate, and based on what one sees in daily life.

In contrast is what Appakoothan Nayar calls an "aesthetics of the mind," that is, an act of reception that resonates long beyond the immediate apprehension of the five senses. It is an aesthetic built on the cultivation of the aesthetic sensibilities of the connoisseur's tasting and savoring of *rasa*.<sup>53</sup> This interpretation of *kathakali*'s aesthetic as "of the mind" is derived from *kuṭiyāṭṭam* and the classical Sanskrit drama tradition. Sanskrit scholar Barbara Stoler Miller calls the aesthetic of the most celebrated Sanskrit poet, Kalidasa, an "aesthetic of memory" and identifies Sanskrit theater as a "theater of memory."<sup>54</sup> In many Sanskrit dramas such as Kalidasa's *Sākuntala* and Bhasa's *The Vision of Vasavadatta*, the act of remembering is both a literal mode of reconciling and relating love-in-separation and love-in-union and remembrance of a "deeper metaphysical kind."<sup>55</sup>

Indian epistemologists hold that whatever we perceive by means of the sense organs leaves an impression on the mind. Memory occurs when a latent impression is awakened. Indian literary theorists define memory as a recollection of a condition of happiness or misery, whether it was conceived in the mind or actually occurred. In what is considered one of the key passages of Sanskrit aesthetics, the tenth-century Kashmiri philosopher Abhinavagupta explains what Kalidasa means by "memory." It is not discursive recollection of past events, but rather an intuitive insight into the past that transcends personal experience, into the imaginative universe that beauty evokes.<sup>56</sup>

In *kathakali* this aesthetic of mind is accomplished through extended narrative and performative elaboration of the basic story and playtext. An example from the first of Unnayi Warriar's famous series of four plays, *Nala Caritam*, will illustrate the process. The first of the Nala plays dramatizes the budding love of King Nala and Damayanti from the moment they hear of each other's perfection and beauty. The play opens with a scene intended to awaken Nala's imagination to Damayanti's beauty. The sage Narada is visiting Nala when he suggestively implants the idea in Nala's mind that he should "waste not [his] birthright"; that is, it is time to consider marriage. Having implanted the idea of marriage in Nala's mind, Narada goes on to describe Damayanti in florid poetic terms:

In Kandinapur there lives a beauty,  
A gem among women,  
Damayanti by name.  
Even the *devas* have fallen in love with her.  
But mark me.  
Jewels rightfully belong to kings.  
The *devas* may claim only *yagnas* (sacrifices) offered in their honour.  
Perfect one, paragon among kings,  
Strive to win this jewel for your wife.<sup>57</sup>

The poetic conceits imbedded in this *padam* provide opportunities for the actor to embody each image through gesture language, thereby serving as the vehicle for the creation of an image of Damayanti not only in Nala's mind but also in the mind of the spectator.

There follows an interpolation (*āṭṭam*) in which Narada assures Nala that he will win Damayanti, since she already has set her heart on him alone. Immediately after Narada's departure, Nala enacts the following *śloka* in which the actor embodies Nala's state of mind at that moment: "Having heard Narada's words, and the words of other travellers, Nala's mind, already immersed in thinking about Damayanti, became pained by his longing for her."<sup>58</sup> This is a moment of consummate "interior" acting in which he embodies *cinta bhāva* (one of the thirty-two transitory states [*sañchāri bhāva*] of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*), best translated as a state of "reflecting." Nala's reflections on Damayanti cause him pain because he is unsure whether he will actually realize union with her. The actor, lingering over these moments of reflection, must take sufficient time to allow his elaboration of Nala's inner mental state to be relished by the audience. Unlike the semiotically more complex reading of an actor's delivery in hand gestures of the specific dialogue of the text, reception of this particular scene does not depend upon technical knowledge but on an audience that knows the story as well as the actors and therefore possesses a similar set of associations regarding Nala's character, state of mind, and the possible associations conjured in that state.

From Appakoothan Nayar's point of view, it is precisely moments

such as this that are the epitome of the aesthetic that informs his perspectives on *kathakali* in general and his critique of *Kathakali King Lear* in particular. For Appakoothan Nayar the two major problems with the latter are its all too brief two-hour running time and its nonepic characters. In contrast to *Kathakali King Lear*, where everything is cut short, Appakoothan Nayar is proud of the fact that the recent Margi production of Warriar's *Nala Caritam* expanded its running time to thirty total hours to allow more performative elaboration than usual. Appakoothan Nayar told me how one friend commented: "If you go on like this it will come to 365 days." To which he said:

"It will go on to one thousand days!" And this is precisely why I don't like *Kathakali King Lear*. The potential for elaboration *must* be there. In most [new] *kathakali* they simply translate the text into gestures and say, "that's *kathakali*." But that is *not* *kathakali*! You must take the text and see how much scope there is for expansion and decoration.

From Appakoothan Nayar's perspective, it is impossible to elaborate nonepic stories because the characters are "not fit for *kathakali*." Unlike epic characters, who "never existed" and therefore must be created in the imagination of the spectator, Lear, like Jesus, Karl Marx, or Franklin Roosevelt, is for Appakoothan Nayar an historical figure who at one time existed and for whom therefore one already has a set of associations.

Although one has images of epic characters, the image is not supported by any visual comparison because the characters never existed. Ravana is supposed to have ten heads and twenty hands—can he ever have existed in any stage of human evolution?<sup>59</sup> Lear's features you know because he was a human being. But in the case of Ravana, he is the concretization of a concept. . . . The concretization of the abstract is there [in ritual and theatrical arts] in order to reach the abstract.<sup>60</sup>

For Appakoothan Nayar *kathakali* is a metaphysical theater of the imagination where the spectator "creates [each character] in his mind," and for Appakoothan Nayar the spectator's ability to freely imagine, or "take in his mind," a Lear was disrupted because, he says, "I have that [previous] image [of Lear] in mind."

Lest Appakoothan Nayar's metaphysical theater of the imagination be perceived as unproblematic, I want to situate his discourse in the larger debate over the role of the past in the Indian present by reflecting on the astute observation by South Asian poet and scholar A. K. Ramanujan: "In a culture like the Indian, the past does not pass. It keeps on providing paradigms and ironies for the present, or at least that's the way it seems."<sup>61</sup> On the one hand, Appakoothan Nayar's argument against *Kathakali King Lear* is constructed from an aesthetic paradigm of the past—the *rasa* aes-

thetic—and his institution is an attempt to insure that this aesthetic remains central to *kathakali*'s creativity in the future.<sup>62</sup> It is a paradigm written for and from the privileged position of the traditional patron-connoisseur for whose pleasure *kathakali* was originally created. While his is an inventive form of intercultural discourse in its use of the Western intellectual icons of history and evolution as part of its argument against experimentation, it is a reactionary one that does not historicize his own perspective and then stakes exclusive claim to interpreting what is or is not appropriate within the tradition and what qualifies as a legitimate form of experimentation. Appakoothan Nayar's critique implies a denial of the validity of experiments attempting to reach audiences other than connoisseurs. Such experiments range from *Kathakali King Lear* to populist adaptations with little elaboration for Malayali mass audiences at annual temple festivals to the 1987 production of *Humanity's Success (Manavidyam)*, the latter of which was a dramatized critique of imperialist aggression authored by Iyyemgode Sreedharan (translator of *Kathakali King Lear*), staged primarily for leftist political audiences.<sup>63</sup>

### *Aesthetic Congruence and Kingly Dissonance*

Although *Kathakali King Lear* evoked little aesthetic delight in Appakoothan Nayar and some other *kathakali* connoisseurs, for at least some among the European and Malayali audiences the subtlety of *kathakali*'s interior acting *was* communicated. I refer especially to the penultimate and ultimate moments of pathos in the production—the seventh and ninth scenes of the production in which Lear is first reunited with Cordelia, then dies from grief over her loss.

*His crown having been placed beside him by the Fool, Lear slowly wakes. Cordelia stands back, but the fool urges her to present herself to Lear. Lear sits up.*

*Lear:* I do not know whether I am alive or dead. I do not remember these clothes.

*Cordelia:* Sir, do you know me?

*Lear:* I fear I am not in my right mind, but I think you are my child.

*Cordelia:* Yes! I am, I am your child!

*Lear:* You have cause to hate me.

*Cordelia:* No cause, no cause.

*Lear:* Forgive me, I am old and foolish.

*They embrace. The Soldier appears. He claims Cordelia and the Fool as prisoners. [After their departure] Lear picks up his kiridam [crown].*<sup>64</sup>

In the battle that ensues during the eighth scene, Regan orders her soldier to kill his prisoners, Cordelia and the Fool. The order sends France into a wild fury, played out in *kathakali*'s typical stylized battle choreography as he slays both Regan and Goneril. As the final scene opens, the vocalists create a transition from the cacophony of battle with its loud-sounding

drums to the pathos of loss and death as they sing the opening *śloka* in a slow rhythm, reporting what has happened, and telling what will happen: “The young Queen and the King’s Fool have been brutally murdered. The old King finds his beloved daughter dead. He dies from grief and so ends his terrible suffering.” Even though the Western audience cannot understand what the vocalists are singing, the pathos carried by the music alone sets the appropriate mood. The handheld curtain is lowered to reveal Cordelia’s body.

*Lear enters in full katti vēṣam. He walks slowly but stands very straight. Lear approaches Cordelia. He turns her head and recognizes her. He screams with grief. He falls down beside his daughter.*  
*Lear:* I know when someone is alive or dead. My child is as dead as earth.

In spite of reservations about certain aspects of the production, reviewers of the Edinburgh performances in particular focused much of their positive commentary on Lear’s pathos over the loss of Cordelia. Although Tom Morris, writing in the *Times Literary Supplement*, responded to most of the production with “remote fascination,” it was different with the closing scene: “at Lear’s cry over the dead Cordelia, magical and spotlit, there is a frightening and uninterrupted moment of agonized theatrical communication.” For Randall Stevenson of the *Independent*, who responded positively to the shape, contours, and variety of the entire production, the closing scene in which Lear dies of grief was also a profoundly moving moment:

Lear’s concluding rhythmic keening over Cordelia, picked up by the percussion, provides almost the first remotely human sound from performers rather than the accompanying singers.

It both wrings the heart and moves the performance forward into another dimension: towards the awesome, elemental world from which Shakespeare’s original vision was compounded.

Among Malayalis who responded at least in part favorably, V. Kaldharan acknowledged that both Kumaran Nayar and Padmanabhan Nayar were “successful in portraying the full depth of King Lear’s sorrow (*karuṇa rasa*).”<sup>65</sup>

I would suggest that the emotive resonance that Stevenson describes was a moment of aesthetic congruence when at least some among the Edinburgh audience experienced the resonance of aesthetic delight similar to, if not the same as, a Malayali connoisseur’s arousal of *rasa*. As steeped in Shakespeare as a Kerala audience in the Mahabharata and Nala story, at least some in the Edinburgh audience share a knowledge of Lear’s mental state equal to that of the actors playing the roles. The knowledgeable audience “knows” that Lear’s mental state moves from his deranged



wandering, forgetfulness, and impromptu ravings to one of the dawn of remembrance when he awakes from his sleep.

McRuvie's sparse text allows the *kathakali* performer the performative time necessary to embody through internal acting the appropriate *bhāvas*—in scene 7, *cinta bhāva*, “reflection” or “remembrance.” Lear, in a dreamlike state of forgetfulness, awakens to Cordelia and the Fool. In the process of remembering, he gradually recalls Cordelia, his loss of her, his foolishness in rejecting her, and the mental agony of their separation. Although the tone and specific dramatic context and circumstances are quite different, Lear's act of reflection, or remembrance, is similar to that of Nala. The scene is that moment of classic Western recognition in which Lear realizes his loss. It makes possible the Western audience's experience of Lear as a tragic character.

As staged at Edinburgh, the entire final scene could be characterized as Lear's grieving cry over the loss of his beloved daughter. When Lear returns in the final scene to discover the dead Cordelia, he is resplendent in his full costume and makeup. With only one line “spoken” during the entire scene, Padmanabhan Nayar was free to elaborate, through interior acting, *śoka bhāva*—that is, the pathos of his loss—and the moment-by-moment search for any signs that she might still be alive. Since he was playing Lear as a *katti*-type character considered less refined than the idealized kingly *pacca* roles, he was permitted by convention to utter sounds. In his brilliant elaboration of this long dramatic moment, Padmanabhan Asan chose to make full use of the psychophysical means of embodiment in the *kathakali* repertory, subtly uttering whimpers through the control of his breath and manifesting other signs of the grief of loss such as trembling. The sounds and signs of Lear's grief gradually draw out of him his own life force (*prāṇa-vāyu*) so that he collapses beside his daughter, dead of grief.

The narrative and mimetic simplicity of these scenes meant that it was unnecessary for the Western audience to be able to read *kathakali*'s codified gesture language to follow or appreciate the action. Given the familiar trajectory of both the Lear story and the narrative of pathos, at least some in the Edinburgh and European audiences savored *karuṇa rasa*—pathos—the closest emotional tone in Indian theater to Western tragedy.

*Kathakali King Lear*'s success at communicating pathos is not unproblematic. The positive reception of Padmanabhan Nayar's empathic cry of loss over Cordelia unquestionably assumes a modernist paradigm of the main character's emotional state as the essence of the pleasure of dramatic reception. It was also a problem for some in the Malayali audience—how could one appreciate a play in which the predominant *rasa*, or flavor of aesthetic delight, is pathos and in which the king does not act like a king? Understating the case somewhat, Malayali reviewer Vinita noted, “It is unusual to conclude a *kathakali* on a tragic note.”<sup>66</sup>

But even more problematic was Lear's behavior. *Kathakali* actor Nelliyode Vasudevan Namboodiri, who played the role of the Fool in the

original experimental staging of the storm scene and Goneril on the second tour, described his problems with understanding Lear: "When Lear's older daughters tell him they love him so much, and Cordelia says she can only give half her love, he believes all these things. It is difficult to believe that Lear, at 80 years of age, with all his life experience, would respond this way to his daughters!"<sup>67</sup> V. Kaladharan raised the same problem in his *Mathrabhumi* article, noting that even master percussionist Krishnankutty Poduval, who helped conceive the production, was puzzled by the fact that Lear would "forgo his daughter who is prepared to share her love between her father and her husband."<sup>68</sup> Given the fact that social convention dictates that a daughter will naturally give her love to her husband and that tragedy and the individual human weaknesses that prompt Lear's downfall have little resonance in Kerala culture, where human kinship was historically idealized and related to maintenance of the cosmic order, Lear's behavior toward Cordelia appeared to some Malayalis naive, even silly. As Kaladharan concluded, for those in the audience for whom Lear could *not* be perceived as a king, "the theme which is important for a Western audience becomes totally awkward for an Indian audience."<sup>69</sup>

### *Conclusion*

Although *Kathakali King Lear* was conceived ideally as an intercultural project to be performed for Kerala and European audiences, the commercial realities (over thirty performances abroad and two in Kerala), the Western Lear narrative, and McRuvie's directorial eye naturally shaped the production for a primarily Western theatergoing public. It may not have been, therefore, as well received by Malayali audiences as by Western audiences, but it brought to its Western audiences an integrity hard to find in a number of other intercultural experiments. In contrast to Peter Brook's naturalized Mahabharata, which "flattened" the Indianness of the epic's cultural markers and suppressed India's codified performance techniques,<sup>70</sup> Leday and McRuvie's project intentionally kept an active tension between a simplified Shakespeare narrative played in a fully codified theatrical and choreographic reelaboration of that narrative. *Kathakali King Lear* was an intercultural project conceived and developed with the full cooperation of leading kathakali artists. For an artist such as Padmanabhan Nayar, developing and acting the role of Lear was considered a consummate and appropriate professional acting challenge that he relished at this point in his career as a performer—a fact too often ignored by critics and theorists who have not interviewed members of the cast.

With its collaborative process of creation, the meanings and experiences that the production made available were constrained by the limitations the artists themselves strategically selected and by the preconceptions and (relatively open or closed) horizon of expectations of its varied audiences. The production was never intended as a postmodern experiment, but as a meeting between *kathakali* techniques, aesthetics, and sen-

sibilities and Shakespeare's *King Lear*. It did not, and could not, reach some hypothetically universal realm of communication.<sup>71</sup>

## NOTES

1. Susan Bennett, *Theatre Audiences: A Theory of Production and Reception* (London: Routledge, 1990), 101.

2. Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report of Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), xxiv.

3. James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 230.

4. Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*, 231, 14.

5. Arjun Appadurai and Carol A. Breckenridge, "The Situation of Public Culture," in *Modern Sites: Consumption and Contestation in a Postcolonial World* (in press), 3.

6. Putu Wijaya, "Indonesian Culture," trans. Ellen Rafferty (unpub. MS, 1986).

7. Clifford, *Predicament of Culture*, 14–15. See also Arjun Appadurai, "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy," *Public Culture* 2, no. 2 (1990): 1–24; Appadurai and Breckenridge, "Situation of Public Culture"; Appadurai and Breckenridge, "Why Public Culture?" *Public Culture* 1, no. 1 (1988): 5–9; and other articles in *Public Culture*.

8. *Kathakali King Lear* program, Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, 1999. The 1999 *Kathakali King Lear* followed the Bankside performances of a Zulu *Macbeth* and Cuban *Tempest* in 1997 and 1998. The second and third productions, no longer associated with the Kerala Kalamandalam, used a new Malayalam translation by K. Marumakan Raja, several new cast members, and some revisions in the staging. My analysis of the European performances focuses on the second European and Edinburgh performances (viewed on videotape), and the numerous reviews they generated. Although I did see the production again at Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, due to limitations of space, I do not extend my analysis to this most recent incarnation.

9. Bennett, *Theater Audiences*, 114. See also Marco De Marinis, "Dramaturgy of the Spectator," *TDR* 31, no. 2 (1987): 100–114.

10. The two great Indian epics (Ramayana and Mahabharata) and puranas (a diverse collection of wisdom and stories that "become the bibles of popular Hinduism" [William Theodore De Bary, *Sources of Indian Tradition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), 1:323]) are the sources of most traditional modes of storytelling and performance. Of the eighteen major and eighteen minor puranas, the *Bhagavata Purana* is the most popular and widely circulated. Especially dear to devotees of Visnu, this purana tells the story of the life of Lord Krishna.

11. On women *kathakali* performers, see Diane Daugherty and Marlene Pitkow, "Who Wears the Skirts in Kathakali?" *TDR* 35, no. 2 (1991): 138–56.

12. Annette Leday and David McRuvie, *Kathakali King Lear* (program) (Paris: Keli, 1989), 1.

13. Patrice Pavis, "Dancing with *Faust*: A Semiotician's Reflections on Barba's Intercultural Mise-en-scène," *TDR* 33, no. 3 (1989): 37–57.

14. Rev. H. Gundert, *A Malayalam and English Dictionary* (Mangalore: C. Stolz, 1872), 995.

15. The actor uses the *vēsam* to cover and thereby "transform" himself when he

assumes a role. For a discussion, see Pramod Kale, *The Theatrical Universe: A Study of the Natyasastra* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1974), 58–59.

16. Vasudevan Namboodiripad, interview by the author, December 9, 1989.

17. David McRuvie, interview by the author, September 29, 1989.

18. McRuvie was referring to the fact that actors who play female roles receive special training in three modes of expression used exclusively for playing many female roles: a coy, “pretended” shyness; a pouting contempt; and, similarly, a pouting anger. In all three modes of expression, there is clearly a set of quotation marks put around each emotional state that says, “This is pretended” or “I don’t really mean this.” Therefore, when a female character is enacting this special shyness toward her beloved, the subtext is, “I’m just acting shy and you can really have me.” Although there are a few strong and less submissive female roles played in which shyness, contempt, and anger are expressed more directly without the quotation marks, they are the exception rather than the rule. Consequently, McRuvie’s hesitancy about using a male *kathakali* actor for the role of Cordelia.

19. Bennett, *Theatre Audiences*, 101. See also Marvin Carlson’s important essay on the “local habitation” of performance, “Local Semiosis and Theatrical Interpretation,” in *Theatre Semiotics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990).

20. Maurice Natanson, *Phenomenology and the Social Sciences*, vol. 1 (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1973).

21. De Marinis, “Dramaturgy of the Spectator,” 102.

22. See Phillip B. Zarrilli, “Demystifying *Kathakali*,” *Sangeet Natak* 43 (1979): 48–59.

23. Anne Ubersfeld, “The Pleasure of the Spectator,” *Modern Drama* 25, no. 1 (1982): 131.

24. Jean-Claude Carrière, *The Mahabharata*, trans. Peter Brook (New York: Harper and Row, 1987), xiv.

25. Richard Schechner, “Talking with Peter Brook,” *TDR* 30, no. 1 (1986): 55.

26. Schechner, “Talking with Peter Brook,” 68. For a critique, see Rustom Bharucha’s “Peter Brook’s ‘Mahabharata’: A View from India,” in *Theatre and the World* (Columbia, Mo.: South Asia Publications, 1990), 94–120.

27. Similar to Brook, Barba seeks a form of metacultural communication, but, rather than erasing cultural distinctions, he has his group of international actors each keep her distinctively enculturated movement vocabulary while developing the *mise-en-scène*, thereby seeking to reveal “culture . . . through cultures” (Pavis, “Dancing with *Faust*,” 53).

28. Ubersfeld, “Pleasure of the Spectator,” 133.

29. For a comprehensive overview, see Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

30. Ronald Inden, “Orientalist Constructions of India,” *Modern Asian Studies* 20, no. 3 (1986): 401–46.

31. See Burton Benedict, *The Anthropology of World’s Fairs* (Berkeley: Lowie Museum of Anthropology, 1983); and Robert W. Rydell, *All the World’s a Fair* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

32. One of the earliest performance examples of our mystification of India is Ruth St. Denis’s creation of her 1905 “Radha” where she danced the role of this “spiritual other.” See Joan Erdman, “Performance as Translation: Uday Shankar in the West,” *TDR* 31, no. 1 (1987): 64–88.

33. F. C., “‘Le roi Lear’ en Kathakali!” *Progres*, November 21, 1989.

34. Nadine Pichot “Le Roi Lear en Theatre Kathakali: Intensite, force et feerie,” *Semaine Côte d’Azur*, December 8, 1989.

35. Michael Billington, "Empty Gestures of a Frustrating Lear," *Guardian*, August 17, 1990.
36. Charles Spencer, "Hypnotic Power of an Indian Lear," *Daily Telegraph*, August 17, 1990.
37. Randall Stevenson, "Beat of a Different Drum," *Independent*, August 18, 1990.
38. Tom Morris, "A *Midsummer Night's Dream*," *Times Literary Supplement*, August 24, 1990.
39. "L'histoire du 'Roi Lear' Contée en Kathakali," *Cannes-Matin (Nice-Matin)*, November 26, 1989.
40. "Le Roi Lear Version Kathakali: Un Spectacle Haut en Couleurs," *Presse de la Manche*, November 9, 1989.
41. Sergio Trombetta, "Le Roi Lear," *Danse*, October 3, 1989.
42. Cl. Grandmontagne, "Le 'Roi Lear' par le Theatre Kathakali: Deroutant Mais Superbe," *Telegramme*, October 9, 1989.
43. Pierre Gilles, "L'automne Indien du Roi Lear," *Quest France*, September 15, 1989.
44. Ubersfeld, "Pleasure of the Spectator," 133.
45. John Percival, "Lear's Heath at Half-Blast," *Times* (London), August 17, 1990.
46. Bennett, *Theatre Audiences*, 103.
47. Paul Jacob, "King Lear Coming Again," *Indian Express* (Kochi ed.), August 5, 1990.
48. "'King Lear' in Kathakali," *Hindu*, January 13, 1989.
49. D. Parkin, *The Cultural Definition of Political Response* (London: Academic Press, 1978).

50. The paradigmatic past is present for the *kathakali* actor each time he approaches any important role on stage. The "sense of appropriateness" guiding his acting is imbibed first and foremost from his teacher, from the traditional method of playing each role taught in training, from observation of senior actors (especially his own teacher) playing the role on stage, and, finally, from his own understanding of what is appropriate in each dramatic context.

The degree to which performers feel responsible for creating only what they interpret as appropriate to the context is illustrated in the great *kūṭiyāṭṭam* actor Guru Ammannur Madhava Chakyar's account of how and why he "modified slightly" his enactment of Bali's death scene in *Balivadhham* ("The Death of Bali"). After recounting his family's traditional right to perform the play, he recalls how, "of all the actors I saw in my childhood, Kitangur Rama Chakyar, who took the role of Bali, remains indelibly engraved in my memory. His Bali was unrivalled indeed" (G. Venu, *Production of a Play in Kūṭiyāṭṭam* [Irinjalakuda: Natankairali, 1989]: iv). Eventually, as he grew older and matured as an actor, "the rare fortune of acting Bali descended" on him and, in his words, he was

emboldened to [make the slight modification] by the training I received from Bhagavatar Kunjunni Tampuran of the royal family of Kodungalloor. I went to Tampuran, who had done deep research in the art of drama, to learn the art strictly according to the principles laid down by Bharata [author of the authoritative *Nāṭyaśāstra*]. I was his student for two years. He taught me also the minute details of climacteric breathing. This particular training took about forty days. The various Svasas [breaths or internal winds] . . . are controlled, one after another, appropriately to make the death-throes realistic. This is the essence of my modification. (v)

Although *Kathakali King Lear* was a new production for which no precedents had been set for particular roles, nevertheless there was very real pressure felt by some of the actors that they might be severely criticized for transgressing the boundaries of appropriateness. This was especially true of junior actor Balasubramaniam, who was playing the role of the Fool in a *vēṣam* over which controversy raged up to and past the official opening production.

51. For a discussion of specific adaptations, translations, and transformations that have shaped *kathakali* to suit a particular audience, see Phillip B. Zarrilli, *The Kathakali Complex* (Delhi: Abhinav, 1984), and most recently Phillip Zarrilli, *Kathakali Dance-Drama: Where Gods and Demons Comes to Play* (London: Routledge, 2000).

52. Appakoothan Nayar, interview by the author, October 24, 1989.

53. On *rasa*, see Rachel Van M. Baumer and James R. Brandon, *Sanskrit Drama in Performance* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1981), 209–57; and V. K. Chari, *Sanskrit Criticism* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990).

54. Barbara Stoller Miller, *Theatre of Memory: The Plays of Kalidasa* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984).

55. Miller, *Theatre of Memory*, 40.

56. Miller, *Theatre of Memory*, 40.

57. V. Subramanya Iyer, trans., *Naḷa Caritam Attakatha* (*Journal of South Asian Literature*) 10, nos. 2–4 (1975): 211–48.

58. Trans. M. P. Sankaran Namboodiri.

59. Ravanna and Raman are adversaries in one of India's two great epics, the Ramayana. Ravanna is the ten-headed demon-king of Lanka who captures Raman's wife, Sita, and whom Raman rescues with the help of the devoted monkey-god, Hanuman.

60. P. C. Namboodiri made the same point when he contrasted the historical characters who appeared in a locally initiated and produced World War II *kathakali* (Hitler [the evil red beard], Roosevelt, Chiang Kai-shek, and Stalin [the heroic beneficent "green" character type]) with epic characters: "They are real human beings you have seen either in motion pictures or in photos. But you don't know what Shiva is. People can only imagine what is his exact nature. The costumes fit only such characters. So realism in that [historical] way is not appropriate to a dance-drama like Kathakali" (quoted in Judith Lynn Hanna, *The Performer-Audience Connection* [Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983], 162).

61. A. K. Ramanujan, "Classics Lost and Found," in *Contemporary Indian Tradition: Voices on Culture, Nature, and the Challenge of Change* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989), 133. For a provocative study of the manipulation of the past in the creation of the present, see David Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

62. See my extensive discussion of the history and context of this contemporary interpretation of connoisseurship as a "theatre of the mind" in *Kathakali Dance-Drama* (33–38).

63. Suresh Awasthi follows a similar logic in his damning argument that the production "violated" *kathakali* conventions, and was not a "true intercultural experiment" since it did not merge two performance cultures ("The Intercultural Experience and the Kathakali 'King Lear,'" *New Theatre Quarterly*, 9, no. 34: 172–78). For a full account of the leftist experiment, see my analysis, "when Marx met imperialism on the *kathakali* stage," in *Kathakali Dance-Drama* (196–205).

64. David McRuvie, *Kathakali King Lear*, MS, 1989.

65. V. Kaladharan, "The Problems Raised by King Lear Kathakali" *Mathrabhumi*, August 13, 1989.

66. Vinita, "The Heart-Rending King Lear," *Deshabimani*, February 5, 1989. The only Sanskrit drama in which it could be argued that pathos plays a major role is Bhasa's play *Urubhangam*. In the *kūṭiyāṭṭam* repertory, the style of acting Bali's death is filled with pathos and may have served Padmanabhan Nayar as a model.

67. Neliyode Vasudevan Namboodiri, interview by the author, September 25, 1989.

68. Kaladharan, "Problems Raised."

69. Kaladharan, "Problems Raised."

70. Pavis, "Dancing with *Faust*."

71. Since the original version of this essay was published in 1992, a number of theorists and critics have written about the essay or the production. I refer the reader especially to the discussions of W. B. Worthen (*TDR* 39, no. 1 [Spring 1995]: 13–28) and Susan Bennett (*Performing Nostalgia: Shifting Shakespeare and the Contemporary Past* (London: Routledge, 1996), 69–74). Worthen and Bennett limited their discussions to either my essay on *Kathakali King Lear* or that of Suresh Awasthi. Apparently neither consulted the extensive literature available on experimentation within the *kathakali* tradition available in print at that time, nor was Awasthi's perspective on *kathakali* placed within a wider critical context. I would encourage the reader to read between these essays, and my own book-length analysis of these issues, which expands beyond the limitations of an essay of this length, *Kathakali Dance-Drama: Where Gods and Demons Come to Play*.





## Critical Race Theory

Today the word *race* not infrequently appears in quotation marks. This usage signals a well-founded wariness of a dangerous idea, one with so many sharp edges that it's hard to pick up. To limit its propensity to wound, critical theorists first historicize it. For millennia, the best authorities attributed differences among peoples to climate and temperament: those living nearest the equator, such as Africans, were regarded as sanguine and intelligent, builders of pyramids; those hailing from northern climes, such as Germans, were thought phlegmatic and stupid.<sup>1</sup> Beyond the place where the North Wind originated, however, according to the ancient Greeks, dwelt "the Hyperboreans," the members of the oldest and most virtuous human race, who were thought to have lived blissfully for a thousand years of perpetual spring under their cloudless sky. "Race" as a concept has clearly long justified the scare quotes by which it is here circumscribed, but history has not always rendered it so.

Over the past several centuries, many impressionistic concepts of human difference accrued to the word *race*, which developed from a breeding stock of animals into an elaborated anthropological taxonomy, dividing the species known to itself as "the human race" into a putatively settled but in fact ontologically shaky array of subgroups—tribal, regional, national, or continental. During the European Enlightenment, the problematic question of "race" prompted spurious answers from "science," which in turn offered convenient rationalizations for the world-historical projects of slaveholders, colonizers, nationalists, and segregationists. In the eighteenth century, the comparative anatomist Johann Friedrich Blumenbach proposed a fivefold scheme of racial classification—Caucasian, Mongolian, Malayan, Ethiopian, and American (Indian)—based on the pseudoprecision of skull measurements and a spectrum of white, yellow, brown, black, and red skin. Many variations on this scheme have been tried since Blumenbach, none ultimately durable, but each consequential for someone. Such taxonomies typically catalog various kinds of phenotypical (visible) differences between and among people from different parts of the world, but they have also assigned to those differences a host of dubious and sometimes fantastic meanings. By the middle of the nineteenth century, Joseph Arthur, comte de Gobineau, in *The Inequality of*

*Human Races* (1853–55), organized such a taxonomy into a hierarchy of races, at the apex of which he placed “the Nordic strain” of “the Aryan race,” a construct as mythical in its way as “the Hyperboreans” of ancient times, but incalculably more catastrophic in its effects. Such treatises as Gobineau’s typically expand their purview to refer to invisible characteristics as well, further opening the door through which haphazardly invented, cynically fabricated, or genuinely hallucinated ideas of human difference can enter. At this point, when the discredited but remarkably persistent notion that race is the primary determinant of human traits and capacities joins with a belief in the inherent superiority of one racial group over others, “race” metastasizes into racism.<sup>2</sup>

To complicate the issue, marginalized groups trying to maintain solidarity in the face of racist oppression have sometimes claimed a positive racial identity for themselves, though here the appeal is more often ultimately to a network of shared social and cultural experiences than it is to a biologically determined essence.<sup>3</sup> Affiliation through the common experience of a particular place of origin, ancestry, language, religion, set of customs, traditional food (or all of these things together) can best be described by the word *ethnicity*, derived from *ethnos*, the Greek word for a nation or a people, and akin to *ethos*, meaning custom. Such terms can also inhere in *nationality*, cognate to *native* and *nativity*, historically meaning the circumstances of a person’s birth, now more commonly the legal relationship of allegiance between an individual and a state. In practice, however, ethnic and national identities can overlap with racial ones (indeed, sometimes they are intentionally confounded), not only exposing the often confused and arbitrary nature of categories of human difference, but also potentially mobilizing their prolific and dangerous power. This includes the power of the modern nation-state to assign racial identities to its subjects by law and the power of culture to impose them extralegally by custom.

The project of critical race theory is to diminish the danger by deconstructing racial categories themselves, while critiquing the laws and customs that authorize, enact, and promulgate them.

This critique has been most stringently applied against the vestiges of essentialism, the assumption that human differences are constituted as fixed types with innate and immutable characteristics. Against essentialism, critical race theory deploys the idea of hybridity. Paul Gilroy defines it as “the instability and mutability of identities which are always unfinished, always being made.”<sup>4</sup> Like the word *race*, *hybridity* derives from the classifying terminology of botany and zoology, where it means heterogeneity, the mixture of individuals of different races, breeds, or varieties. In human terms, it means mixing not only DNA, but also backgrounds, cultures, and traditions. Even though some may still disavow or ignore its prevalence, hybridity characterizes the actual lived experience of much of the world under conditions of diaspora, migration, and exile (see the section “Postcolonial Studies” in this volume). Where hybridity is acknowledged, as it has been recently by the U.S. Census, it appears in the form of

hyphenated identities, moving far beyond such crude binary distinctions as “black” and “white” into multiply variegated crossovers and recombinations. Such dynamic transactions trouble efforts to legalize received racial taxonomies, but the success of critical race theory in undermining essentialized categories has recently emboldened neoconservatives in their efforts to undo affirmative action and other instruments of legal redress for the historic consequences of racism. If race does not (or ought not) legally exist, their reasoning goes, then it cannot provide the basis for special protection any more than it can be used to justify discrimination under the national constitution.

The problem with this reasoning is that “race” does exist. It exists in much the same way that theatrical and other performances exist—as copies without originals (see the section “Performance Studies”). It exists as an alternative, hypothetical reality, which does not make its existence any less consequential. It exists, for instance, as a legal fiction like “the reasonable man,” in whose elasticity of nonbeing the law finds a measure and a model for the behavior of everyone. It exists, in other words, as an imaginary realm populated by experientially improbable but imaginatively plausible personae, unforgettable characters from “Mammy” to “Madame Butterfly.” Like dolls with stereotypical features, such effigies or avatars can be forced to work as stand-ins or stunt doubles for vast human constituencies (see the section “Mediatized Cultures”). In the creation of subjectivity—the interior experience of being a particular subject (one who is placed under the control of a designated authority or regime of self-sameness)—such effigies work variously as objects of desire, identification and imitation or ambivalence, repulsion and disidentification. And they work very hard. They “interpellate” (or “hail”) human subjects, summoning them into illusory fullness of being by letting them act out whoever they think they are or to act out against whoever they think they are not. This coincidence of techniques—between the construction of racialized identities or subjectivities and putting on shows—provides ample occasion for critical interventions by theorists and practitioners of performance.

The first essay in this section, Jill Lane’s “Black/face Publics: The Social Bodies of *Fraternidad*,” delineates the racialized entertainments that were immensely popular in nineteenth-century Cuba. She shows how racial mimicry, especially as it appears in a performance tradition such as blackface (in which it is typically gendered as well as raced), presents a historically dense theoretical problem. She links her argument to recent work on racial impersonation, demonstrating how it both reflects and creates attitudes, practices, and beliefs in groups as small as a local audience or as large as a nation. “Race” is historically implicated in the construction of what Benedict Anderson has influentially called “imagined communities.” Such enclaves create in turn the possibility of modern subjectivities under the legal summons of nationality. As Lane has extensively demonstrated elsewhere, *teatro bufo*, in which white actors danced, sang, and acted in blackface for white audiences (impersonating effigies like the comic *negrito*

or the sexy *mulata*), rallied the cause of Cuban anticolonial nationalism under the subversive mask of blackness. But here Lane explores the counterperformance of the *velada*, a contestatory multimedia demonstration of black Cuban identity and dignity. She posits the development in nineteenth-century Cuba of “a black public sphere,” making her own use of Jürgen Habermas’s concept of the European bourgeois public sphere as a zone of civic expression. The public sphere, operating neither as formally as a state-sanctioned institution nor as informally as private life, but rather separately as an alternative forum of public opinion, produced printed discourse as well as theatrical and paratheatrical performances from the Enlightenment onward. Participants in the public sphere, however, universalized as “abstract citizens” in theory, were in practice privileged white males. Performances of the Cuban black public sphere, Lane shows, put another face on the abstract citizen. Her keyword *Fraternidad* suggests, however, that even though the face of the citizen was no longer exclusively privileged and white, it was still conspicuously male. Even the favored symbolic body of the Cuban interracial conversation, expressed in the steamy *danzón* and identified with the island “herself,” was only provisionally gendered female and black for the duration of her erotic dance to an African beat. When the cue finally came for the dancer to speak as a subject, the role was taken over by a man, one hailed as a *criollo* (Creole), or native-born Cuban of (white) European descent. His macho anticolonial stance performed not only *Cubanidad* in the face of his Iberian colonial oppressors, but also *Latinidad* in the face of his anglocentric cousins, even as the North Americans prepared an expansionist and exclusionary agenda of their own in the racial crucible of nation and empire.

The imposing claims of “the native-born” in defining the limits of imagined community highlight the vexed experience of the immigrant, especially the racialized immigrant, in the construction of nationality, on the one hand, and subjectivity, on the other. As a self-proclaimed “nation of immigrants,” the United States has historically put its idealized self-conception to severe tests, especially with regard to the taxonomically surreal but culturally formidable category of the doubly alienated “foreign-born nonwhite.” Legally excluded from citizenship (and for some time excluded altogether by special quotas, which were not fully abolished until 1965), the Asian immigrant in particular became a “figure,” which, in the words of Lisa Lowe, “has served as a ‘screen,’ a phantasmatic site, on which the nation projects a series of condensed, complicated anxieties regarding external and internal threats to the mutable coherence of the national body.”<sup>5</sup> Writing specifically about the theater, Karen Shimakawa calls this experience “national abjection.”<sup>6</sup> While seeking racial equality against the imposition of discriminatory laws, Asian-American immigrants have also struggled to maintain their ethnic identities and cultural traditions in the face of both imposed and self-generated assimilationist pressures. Performance at once incites this struggle and embodies it.

In “Virtual Chinatown and New Racial Formation: Performance of

Cantonese Opera in the Bay Area," Daphne Lei takes up the historic and contemporary revival of a venerable theatrical genre. Its early productions in nineteenth-century San Francisco were tellingly mistaken for "Ethiopian minstrelsy," while its current ones self-consciously perform traditional "Chineseness" to the rising generation of "ABCs" or "American-born Chinese." Lei documents what she calls the "paratheatrical" elements involved in the tenacious act of putting up these shows despite declining numbers of both audience members and skilled performers. She resists the tendency to use such performances to define ethnic traditions as "timeless," which would be to deny them temporal coexistence (or "coevalness" in the words of anthropologist Johannes Fabian) with other activities such as the contemporary productions of the Asian American Theatre Circle. More broadly, Lei takes up Chinatown itself as a performance, one expressed not only as an actual (though evidently elusive) physical place—once a ghetto, now a destination—but also as a "virtual" site of vicarious tourism, visited by what she calls its "tangential citizens" in their sometimes fitful dreams of what it means to be both Chinese and American.

Critical race theorists often cite W. E. B. DuBois on the bifurcating pressures of the phenomenon he named "double-consciousness," a divided subjectivity conducive to psychic conflict but also to potential clairvoyance as the result of a special kind of performance: "One ever feels this two-ness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings, two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder."<sup>7</sup> DuBois hints at the capacities required to conduct what Harry Elam calls a "reality check"—an actorlike ability to reimagine and thus defamiliarize the given circumstances of "race" in America, "experiencing the grotesque, the unfamiliar in familiar circumstances." Beginning with the highly dramatized funeral of fourteen-year-old Emmett Till, who was savagely beaten to death for a supposed transgression against the normative protocols of ocular circum-spection between the races, Elam works through several representations of racially charged violence, attending in each case to the "moment that traumatically and productively ruptures the balance between the real and representational." He features the Rodney King case and its representationally magnified aftershocks. In 1991 uniformed officers of the LAPD beat an African-American man after stopping him for a traffic violation, and a year later the officers were acquitted. As Robin Bernstein notes, neither the incident nor the outcome was "unique or even unusual."<sup>8</sup> What was unusual—a "reality check" in Elam's account—is that a bystander videotaped the beating and that his tape was broadcast. By the time of the acquittal, most Californians—and much of the world—had seen the tape repeatedly, and in the ensuing protest rioters torched buildings across twenty-five blocks of central Los Angeles. Anna Deavere Smith's *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992* along with the apocalyptic finale of Spike Lee's *Bamboozled* give Elam occasion to enlarge upon the real consequences of imaginary differences, which in some demonstrable ways have changed only nominally from those that once divided the sanguine and phlegmatic into separate and

opposed corners of the perilous earth and deferred the possibility of living together in harmony to the people who lived beyond the North Wind.

J.R.R.

## NOTES

1. See Mary Floyd-Wilson, *English Ethnicity and Race in Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Kim F. Hall, *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995); and Roxann Wheeler, *The Complexion of Race: Categories of Difference in Eighteenth-Century British Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000).

2. See Les Back and John Solomos, eds., *Theories of Race and Racism: A Reader* (London: Routledge, 2000).

3. Kimberly W. Bentson, *Performing Blackness: Enactments of African-American Modernism* (London: Routledge, 2000).

4. Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), xi. See also Gilroy's *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Color Line* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000).

5. Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1996), 18.

6. Karen Shimakawa, *National Abjection: The Asian American Body Onstage* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2002).

7. W. E. B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Vintage, 1986), 8–9.

8. Robin Bernstein, "Rodney King, Shifting Modes of Vision, and Anna Deaver Smith's *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*," *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* 14 (2000): 121–34.

## Black/face Publics: The Social Bodies of *Fraternidad*

Jill Lane

“On that memorable night . . . we threw down the gauntlet against those who, with *cynicism* and unabashed *ill-will* insist . . . that we have not so much as knocked on the doors of progress,” wrote the black Cuban exile Pedro D’Aguirre from Panama to the activist newspaper *La Fraternidad* (Fraternity) in the fall of 1888. The night in question—12 July 1888—marked the first so-called *velada* or “soirée” for the black community held in Havana, which staged an extensive evening of performance, including oratory, poetry, and a three-act drama, along with original classical music, and hours of social dance, featuring that Cuban favorite, the *danzón*. Held only two years after the official end of slavery, this night of elegant performance hosted by *La Fraternidad* revealed for D’Aguirre and others that, despite continued white resistance to supporting black education and black integration in the larger public sphere, black Cuba nonetheless excelled at white Cuba’s most valued measures of “culture” and “progress”—the performing arts. “You should be proud,” wrote D’Aguirre, “for having placed the cornerstone of that magnificent monument to our dignity.”<sup>1</sup>

This letter lends insight into the central dynamics of the Cuban black public sphere that emerged between abolition of slavery in 1886 and the beginning of the final war for independence in 1895.<sup>2</sup> First, D’Aguirre’s letter makes clear that the black public sphere exceeded the boundaries of the island; newspapers like *La Fraternidad* and its counterpart *La Igualdad* (Equality), were read in an extensive community of predominantly black Cubans that encompassed a local audience as well as a network of Cuban exiles throughout the Caribbean, Central America, and in New York, Tampa, Miami, and Madrid. A strong commitment to an international—or more accurately, a hemispheric—black community informed much reporting; features explored the state of black Americans in the United States, Haiti, Jamaica, or elsewhere in the Caribbean and Central American region, often comparing quality of life, political successes, or continued racial oppression with conditions in Cuba. At the same time, nationalist and anticolonial sentiment saturated the editorial pages of this black press: throughout the period, black patriot-intellectuals used the press to advocate for a racially integrated Cuban national future, and provided one of the most dynamic and articulate sites of anticolonial critique in Cuban letters at any time in Cuba’s colonial history.<sup>3</sup> Thus the public that

was both constituted and represented by this press evinced both a black transnational solidarity and a transracial national solidarity.

While the press was a crucial tool in the constitution of this complex black activist public, performance played an equally constitutive role. As D'Aguirre's anecdote illustrates, the fact that black Cubans had publicly performed in those genres widely associated with education and culture served as evidence—factual, bodily evidence—of black talent, equal to those of any white European. The veladas were regularly staged by black mutual aid societies across the island after 1888; each time, countless reviews and editorials affirmed their important role as manifest “proof” of black creativity, innovation, and “progress.” The reviews also circulated the impact of these performances in the broader transnational public to whom that press was addressed. Thus it is that a single evening of performance in Havana could indeed become so meaningful to a black Cuban exile in Panama City. Print became a means for circulating the special work of these elaborate social performances, while performance buttressed the claims to political, social, and juridical equality advocated in the press.

The very same theaters used to host veladas for the black community also regularly staged popular theatrical performances from the *teatro bufo* repertoire for a white criollo (Cuban-born) audience. Like the veladas, the teatro bufo combined multiple genres—dance, music, drama—in a single evening of entertainment. Favoring comic and vernacular genres, however, the teatro bufo was most valued for its representations of “African” presence in Cuba, through the dissemination of social dance and music that combined Spanish and (ostensibly) African rhythms and choreography (the *guaracha* and later the eroticized *danzón* were the famous signatures) or through its wealth of blackface stock characters, from the *negrito* to the *mulata*, played by white actors in blackface. While the veladas were lauded by the black press for their racially integrated, if overwhelmingly black, audiences, the teatro bufo performances were witnessed by racially segregated and predominantly white audiences. Yet the teatro bufo, like the veladas, was imagined by audiences as a vital site for the articulation of an emergent national sentiment: the *negrito* and the *danzón*, as we shall see below, were imagined foremost as “Cuban,” attaining the status of popular symbols of the Cuban, as the island moved toward anticolonial war. Thus both the teatro bufo and the veladas carried enormous representational burdens, producing persuasive understandings of the “Cuban” through performance, and relying on embodied representations of race to do so.

In the pages that follow, I outline the complex role of performance, in relation both to print culture and to discourses of race, in the constitution of Cuban black and blackface publics in the critical years leading up to the final war of Cuban independence. If events like the veladas sued for public acknowledgment of the rights and rewards of black participation in a larger Cuban public sphere, the teatro bufo's reliance on modes of racial impersonation more often mapped the conditions of impossibility



for such black public life and citizenship, underscoring the normative expectations of whiteness (and maleness) associated with the homosocial bonds of fraternity, equality, and liberty. The impasse between these competing embodied social imaginations hinges, I suggest, on the uses and abuses of racial impersonation in the attempt to control the terms and practices of the newly emergent public sphere in Cuba.

### *Black/face Public Spheres*

The term *public sphere* appears with frequency in black activist oratory and press in the interwar years, particularly in the writings of Juan Gualberto Gómez, Cuba's leading activist for racial equality and Cuban independence. In 1893, he wrote in *La Igualdad*: "We want equality in all that is related to public and social relationships. We respect the prejudices that our [white] neighbors might encourage in their homes, which we will never enter. But in the public sphere we want the end of differences based solely on skin color."<sup>4</sup> Invoking an important social geography of race relations, Gomez considers the "public" racism that informs institutional, legal and other cultural segregation as fundamentally separate from the "private," petty racism that motivates whites to exile blacks from their homes. As such, antiracist activism in the postslavery era focused on gaining legal access to all aspects of the "public sphere" of Cuban society at large.

Gómez's insistence on separating the public and private spheres is striking, not least because the notion of a "public" sphere was only just gaining currency for all Cubans in this period. As a result of concessions in the aftermath of the Ten Year's War that provided for relaxation on censorship of the press and of the theater, and to some extent allowed free assembly, along with new constitutional rights, including limited electoral representation in the Spanish Cortes, Cuba witnessed the development of a significant public sphere for the first time in its colonial history. Here we might use the term *public sphere* in the sense lent to it by Jürgen Habermas and his many subsequent interlocutors. While I would extend the term well beyond the liberal bourgeois sphere he suggests, the notion of a public sphere is generative for the study of anticolonial culture, as it designates a site of discursive deliberation and imagination between "citizens" or other social subjects that is by definition distinct from the "official" discourse of the state or colonial apparatus, and distinct from the private realm alongside which it emerges.<sup>5</sup> In Cuba, this public sphere (or spheres, as was the case) was the site in which Cuban subjects gradually organized themselves *as* a public and publicly as "Cubans" for the first time. Those publics emerged in constant relation to—and against—official colonial discourse on the one hand, and to those structurally excluded from that discourse as nonsubjects (or noncitizens)—including women, blacks, Asians—on the other. The latter, for their part, negotiated this same terrain in the formation of contestatory counterpublics that allowed for different coordinates of inclusion.

The very meaning of the "public" was deeply contested in relation

to race in Cuba's anticolonial context. Just as Partha Chatterjee insists that we must account for the constitutive role of colonial and anticolonial contexts in the development of postcolonial nationalism, so too can we examine how notions of the public sphere in Cuba's anticolonial context were constituted in ways that may contrast sharply with Europe.<sup>6</sup> In Cuba, the European ideal of the public sphere as a stable site of fraternal deliberation between social subjects arrived well before its reality: in a context divided by race, definitions of the public sphere were the terrain over which men struggled at both discursive and material levels. Anti-racist critiques by Gómez invoked an enlightenment discourse of universal (male) access to the public sphere, grounded in notions of fraternity and equality; at the same time, these invocations sought to reveal and eradicate the implicit racial exclusion on which the developing public sphere appeared to be based.

The public sphere in anticolonial Cuba further raises important questions about the social poetics of print in relation and in contrast to performance. Whereas Habermas advances an understanding of the public—publicity—grounded in textual, literary practice, in Cuba, I suggest, the new sense of “publicity” in the interwar years—from 1878 to 1895—was specially manifest in a wealth of embodied, performance practices. Across the country the interwar years witnessed the sudden proliferation of new spaces for public gathering and performance behaviors: cafés, dance balls, masquerades, revived carnival activities, innumerable social dances held on almost every night of the year outside of Lent, roller-skating clubs, baseball clubs for all regions, classes, and races, and the building of new theaters—which were used as often for social and political gatherings as for plays.<sup>7</sup> What made these performance-related activities notable was not only their new scope and scale, but their being repeatedly claimed and marked as “Cuban.”

I suggest we consider how the techniques of *performance*—of music, dance, theater, and of impersonation and spectatorship—organized this new Cuban publicity of the 1880s and early 1890s, rather than assume the primacy of print. Further I suggest that doing so may reveal a complex colonial tension between the cultures of print and those of performance. The implications of this suggestion are several. First, print culture has been understood as foundational to the formation of not only of Habermas's public sphere, but to the formation of the nation, as articulated by its pioneer theorist, Benedict Anderson. Where Habermas bases the development of the bourgeois public sphere on the rise of print culture, Anderson's famous account in his *Imagined Communities* bases the rise of nationalism on what he calls print capitalism.<sup>8</sup> Their related critiques share an investment in the idea of print, as well as a series of assumptions about the necessary relation between literacy, national community, and the formation of subjectivity. For both theorists, a community of readers is the stuff by which the public sphere or national community is made; both are constituted through a foundational moment of social projection in the activity of reading. Michael Warner describes this experience as “social sub-

jectivity," one in which "we adopt the attitude of the public subject," marking our identity with others; in so doing, we momentarily disavow our own particularities of class or gender or race, thus also "marking to ourselves our nonidentity with ourselves."<sup>9</sup> Through the ongoing production of this social subjectivity the nation is "imagined" (per Anderson), and the public is "incorporated" (per Habermas). For both nation and public, the culture and technology of print provide the mediating ground between the private imagination and social incorporation; print culture enables the production of the social body.

What kind of body is this virtual, imagined, and textually produced social body? Warner explores the formative contradiction of this virtual social body, arguing that the process of social incorporation demands a corresponding process of "disincorporation" from each of its subjects. The bourgeois public sphere, he writes, "claimed to have no relation to the body image at all"; in theory, citizen-subjects of any race, gender, sexuality, or class could partake of the process of becoming "public" subjects, since the public sphere was, by definition, structured through a process of disembodied self-abstraction. The technology of print thus carried the utopian promise that no actual body would be required to create the new social body, hence its appeal to liberal, enlightenment discourse—a theory not unlike or unrelated to that informing enthusiasm for new virtual technologies today.

In practice, however, the public sphere, like Anderson's nation, continued to rely on features of some bodies: "Access to the public came in the whiteness and maleness that were then denied as forms of positivity, since the white male *qua* public person was only abstract rather than white or male. . . . [E]ven while particular bodies and dispositions enabled the liberating abstraction of public discourse, those bodies also summarized the constraints of positivity."<sup>10</sup> Both nation and public sphere thus safeguard privilege for certain bodies, a privilege that is disguised and elaborated—rather than averted—by the technology of print culture. This bourgeois, liberal print culture, then, maintains a relation of bad faith with the bodies of its subjects: even as it promotes a disembodied, virtual community, its process of selective disincorporation exiles some groups—women, people of color—by forcing them to acknowledge their own positivity as the mark of their difference from the "public" norm. Consigned to bodies, rather than the public subjectivity of reading, they are denied complete entry into the public sphere.

What kind of social body, then, might a *theatrical* imagination make possible? What different economy of public representation emerges through the technology of performance? In posing this question, I make no attempt to use performance as a means to recuperate liberal-individualist notions of an ideal public sphere, nor to propose an inherent good-faith relation between self and body through performance, nor even to suggest that the representation of bodies through performance is any less mediated than it is through print or other media. Not only would such claims be suspect, nothing in the Cuban historical context I examine

would support them: Cuban blackface performance, for one, was very much a process of “disincorporating” blackness in order to “incorporate” a white racial norm. I pose the question to better understand the insistent presence of alternate forms of publicity in Cuba’s anticolonial culture, especially that of racial impersonation. In posing this question, then, I attempt to understand the crucial difference between impersonation and incorporation in the constitution of public spheres in relation to race.

Two key historical examples elaborated below, one from the beginning and the other at the end of the interwar years, will suggest that if the European liberal bourgeois public sphere imagines that it has no body, Cuba’s most certainly does, and—I contend—it is in blackface. The anticolonial public sphere “has a body” because, by simple virtue of violating the unspoken norms of positivity defined by the peninsular Spanish citizen, the white criollo subject could not quite occupy the sphere of unmarked public subjectivity. By the fact of his birth he—and it is *he*—could not fully “disincorporate” (from) himself to join the dominant public sphere, whose normative range was defined by peninsular-born subjects who enjoyed greater political freedom and social rank than those born in Cuba. The public sphere constituted through print was both materially and discursively tied to peninsular constellations of power, educated literacy, and social subjectivity. As Angel Rama’s seminal study of the Latin America, *Lettered City*, suggests, the “documentary umbilical cord” that brought Spanish letters—in all senses of the word—to the Americas provided “the linguistic models for [Latin American] *letrados*” or the elite class of American-born, literate bureaucrats, the compradors, that brokered power for the metropole. The “rigid semantic system of the city of letters,” writes Rama, which discursively interlinked legal and literary practice, “required the most univocal language possible.”<sup>11</sup> Competency in such language was required for participation in the public sphere defined by the lettered city, and formed the basis of elite criollo power; yet in this colonial context, full competency was premised on birthright, excluding even elite criollos from the highest echelons of social and political power.

Emerging through this discursive grid of literate power, we can imagine the populist criollo subject retreating into the otherwise undervalued domain of embodied subjectivity as a tactical maneuver, providing an alternate site from which to critique the dominant ideological structure and mount his own bid for power. This Cuban public sphere indulges embodied performance practices as viable alternatives to the print models proposed (but then prohibited) by Spanish colonial rule. Such will be evident in the anticolonial and often nationalist enthusiasm for the *danzón* that emerged in both black and white dance halls in the city of Matanzas in 1878, and was popularized both through the *teatro bufo* and in black social gatherings like the *veladas*, ten years later. This rhythm—which used “African” syncopation to mark its difference from peninsular norms—enabled a distinctly national and public “structure of feeling,” in Raymond Williams phrase, not easily understood or tamed by the peninsular “lettered city.” At the same time, however, white criollos performed

an identical repressive operation on blacks in Cuba, prohibiting their participation in the field of letters and literacy during slavery and impeding it thereafter, thereby consigning them, too, to the domain of the body and of performance. The black patriot intellectuals who organized the elegant veladas of the late 1880s and early 1890s, made counterclaims not only in the realm of performance, but in direct relation to “literate” culture: theirs was, to borrow an insight from Houston Baker, a “stolen literacy”—by which he means a “radically secular and critical structure of feeling gained from reading and writing.”<sup>12</sup> Oratory, recitations of poetry, and drama were the markedly literate performance media through which black publicity made its bid to enter the white city of letters.

The field of performance, then, represents not a site for unproblematic, reciprocal racial mixing and exchange—a *mestizaje* of African and Spanish rhythm—as some would have it in telling the history of Cuban music, dance, and theater, but the contrary: performance was a site of profound social contestation and negotiation. Both Paul Gilroy and Joseph Roach have persuasively illustrated the importance of performance to social formations in the Americas, particularly in the production and contestation of racialized national discourses.<sup>13</sup> Warning against essentialist notions of nation and race, both understand performance as central to the diverse cultural traditions that participated in the making of anticolonial, postcolonial, and national cultures in America; this was so in part because performance was already central to the native American or African traditions that became forcibly engaged in the story of European colonization. Even more, however, both suggest that the story of American conquest, colonization, and its aftermath itself produced historically unprecedented social circumstances that required the complex cultural processes of public memory, surrogation (in Roach’s term), and self-invention that performance makes possible. The penchant for racial impersonation in Cuba’s anticolonial period, then, should be understood in this wider context, and should signal the ways in which understandings of the “public” and of race were mutually formative.

### *Public Bodies and National Rhythm*

From its controversial arrival in 1878, the discourse surrounding the *danzón* encapsulated a contradiction between a notion of national rhythm, which kinesthetically hailed Cubans, interpellating them, into the developing national community, and what Barbara Browning has called “infectious rhythm,” a virulent form of racial and sexual contamination of the social body.<sup>14</sup> Operating in dialectical counterpoint, these competing interpretations of the *danzón* presented a contradictory Cuban social body, invested with competing gender and racial coordinates. For some, the dance offered a new structure of feeling for developing notions of Cubanness; as such, it was a specially erotic and racialized form of national embodiment. The backlash against the *danzón* enacted in the press was, in turn, a discourse about the racial contamination of

this newly public “Cuban” social body. The tension between dance and text, in turn, speaks to the tensions between performative impersonation and discursive incorporation.

The first attack on the dance was launched in the local press in November 1878 with the question, “¿progresamos?!” (is this progress?).<sup>15</sup> The critic went on to say that whereas refined women (whom he calls “most dignified mothers”) in years past might have enjoyed *watching* a dance similar to the *danzón* performed by their slaves during carnival, they certainly never *danced* such a dance, which he describes as a “voluptuous melody, slow, ardent, inciting, conceived in African brains to the heat of this tropical ground.”<sup>16</sup> To the nation’s shame, now the daughters of these most dignified women actually dance the dance themselves. Is this the direction of progress? The distinction he makes between watching and performing is crucial: viewing a pleasing performance and actually taking pleasure from performing it organize totally different registers of social conduct. While the former is tolerable and does not challenge the social differences between the refined woman and her slave, the latter contaminates the social body itself.

Those defending the dance did so by calling into question the critic’s understanding of the ontology of rhythm itself. Neither rhythm nor choreography determines the meaning of the dance, wrote a dissenting commentator the following day, but rather the dancers themselves. A similar critic addressed his female readers thus:

know that this humble essayist considers you as pure and virtuous when you dance the *danzón* as when you do not. Certain dances do not make people decent, instead decent people make decent all dances.<sup>17</sup>

According to this rehearsal of a racist trope not new to Cuba, apparently whiteness, here described as “pure” and “decent,” is more contagious than blackness: if a white woman dances an African dance, she whitens it. Ana López notes that the creation of national space in dance “simultaneously invokes and elides the differences that constitute it, thus also laying bare the traces of its production.”<sup>18</sup> Here the *danzón* is a site for the production of Cubanness (here coded as white and embodied as female), whose very constitution requires a repressed African or black source.

In 1881, several conservative newspapers launched an all-out attack on the *danzón*, which had in two short years become Cuba’s dominant entertainment form. Said one: “Havana is a scandal. . . . On every street corner in respectable neighborhoods they [dance] from night until dawn, [bothering] peaceful neighbors and lur[ing] inexperienced girls from their homes.”<sup>19</sup> The attack reprised two central objections: its “Africanizing” effects and its sexual impropriety, as an excerpt from one tirade illustrates:

[I]ntellectual regeneration and . . . progress will be impossible among us so long as there are fathers who take their daughters, the

virgins of the nation [*vírgenes de la patria*], to the madness of today's dance. And [the *danzón*] deserves no other name . . . it is nothing other than a degeneration of the African tango.<sup>20</sup>

Both charges elaborated a more fundamental premise: the rhythm operated as a palpable contagion on real and figurative social bodies.

Broadcasting images of Cuba's white virgins willingly giving in to the seductions of this powerful African rhythm, conservative critics implied that Cuban men could not control their women, much less their own political affairs. Female chastity and political independence were, apparently, firmly interconnected: "Without modesty" announced one moralist, "there is no mother possible, no good society, nor dignified people, nor dignified spirit, nor noble spirit, nor free country."<sup>21</sup> White women are the discursive currency—the object to be rescued, exchanged, or lost—between rival white male ideological positions on Cuba's fate; "she" is the public body over whose control and racial purity white men compete.

So why did liberal Cuba celebrate the dance, given that it left them vulnerable to such pointed criticism? What form of sociality did this dance help structure? The *teatro bufo*, which played a crucial role in developing and disseminating the *danzón* throughout the period, illustrates some answers. Ramón Moralez Álvarez's musical play *El proceso del Oso* (The trial of El Oso), performed in 1882, is especially revealing. In the play, we are told that the conservative attack on the *danzón* by the press has reached such a pitch that Terpsichore herself decides to convene "all resident dances" in Cuba to participate in a trial of the latest and most "voluptuous" version of the *danzón*, "El Oso," or "the bear."<sup>22</sup> The play illustrates how liberal Cuba strategically resignified the dance's racial and sexual associations so that it would finally be heard—felt, danced—not as African, not infectious, but instead as *Cuban*. The primary conceit of the play is that each dance is anthropomorphized and made to embody the social, class, and racial characteristics of the region where it developed. Hence we have the ultrarefined white female European *minué* (minuet); the foot-stomping throaty white male Spanish *zapateo*; the drum-beating blackface African Congo; and so on. Combined, their entries map a folkloric genealogy of Cuban dance, and more: a social, sexual, and racial profile of Cuban culture itself.

The character representing the *Danzón* finally enters the stage as the culmination of this parade of dances; his introduction resignifies the contemporary critiques in important ways. *Danzón* begins by announcing that "the girls ask for me with screams, and even the old women get moving to the sound of *¡entra, guabina!*" (the latter being lyrics to a popular *danzón*).<sup>23</sup> Here we find the dance still associated with extraordinary seductive powers over women, but the play no longer allows these women to stand in for the body of Cuba. Now Cuba is the *danzón* itself, presented here as a virile young man, whose powers of seduction are now harnessed in service of a virile nationalism. Anticipating Cuba's revolutionary independence in the years to come, *Danzón* insists that whereas the French

revolutionaries went to the gallows singing the “Marseillaise,” the Cubans will surely meet their destiny singing “La Mulatica Revoltona,” or “The Sashaying Mulata,” a popular *danzón*. Casting Cuba as a virile male allows the play to protect his/Cuba’s body from difficult questions of social reproduction raised in relation to Cuba’s “patriot virgins.” Cuba’s white virgins are no longer threatened by the *danzón* (to the contrary, the play implies that they are well satisfied by the dance); rather, pro-Spanish conservatives should beware the seductive political powers of the dance.

El Oso’s actual trial, which follows these lengthy danced introductions, suggests that the affective value of the dance cannot be assessed through legal, spoken, or written means—which is to say, through textually grounded discourse. Both the prosecution and defense offer haughty dissertations that do no more than parody the inadequate discourse already available in the press. The character *Danzón* offers to translate the whole tiresome defense into what he calls plain “Cuban”: Cuba needs the *danzón*, he says, because “in intertropical countries everything should be *candela*”—which, among other things, means hip, hot, cool, all the rage, and in the groove.<sup>24</sup> For his part, the latest *danzón*, El Oso, is all rhythm and entirely *candela*: he has no lines in the play, and he presents no defense other than the rhythm itself, to which everyone on stage is—we are told—compelled to move at his very appearance. The tribunal is impressed and drops all charges. This simple conclusion advances another rather remarkable theory on the power of rhythm: it suggests that national sentiment and character, here Cubanness, can be expressively carried in and by bodies organized and persuaded through rhythm.

Like El Oso, women are central to the discourse, but have no speaking parts; they are all rhythm. For those women, who just keep dancing, perhaps the *danzón* provides an instance of what José Piedra has evocatively called “hip poetics,” a form of “feminist posturing of African origin” that has historically allowed women (usually of color) to negotiate a public arena whose sexism and racism might otherwise render them invisible and speechless: dance provides them a “signifying bodily attitude.”<sup>25</sup> The *danzón*, it appears, offered liberal criollos their own signifying bodily attitude, a way of inhabiting its national identity, a structure of feeling that defined the contours of what it meant to be Cuban. For many white Cubans, the *danzón* was itself a form of erotic choreographic black-face that allowed them to live, to embody, their sense of public self—that is, their social subjectivity—in a tantalizing way that “felt” African, transgressive, non-Spanish, anticolonial, *candela*, and, as such, Cuban.

### **Fraternidad**

Almost ten years later, black patriot-intellectuals began a series of important interventions into the developing public sphere, articulating an alternative vision of the Cuban. Juan Gualberto Gómez and his colleagues—among them the patriot José Martí, then in exile in the United



States—sought to define a Cuban public imaginary that was also grounded in notions of race and homosocial relations. For Gómez, the new Cuban public would be grounded in an ethic of fraternity, which first implied fraternity between men of color (or, in the important term he popularized, “la raza de color” or “the race of color”) in the struggle against the legacy of slavery and continued racist practice. Toward this end, Gómez had founded the Directorio Central de las Sociedades de Color (Central Directory of Societies of Color) to consolidate the resources and political power of Cubans of color. At the same time, it implied fraternity between Cubans, both black and white, in the struggle for a free Cuba.<sup>26</sup> Informed by the experience of the Ten Year’s War, in which white, black, and mulatto men had fought in a relatively integrated revolutionary army, this radical view of the Cuban insisted that anticolonialism and antiracism were inextricably related and mutually reinforcing projects. Historian Ada Ferrer captures the view of these veterans: “the nation—born of the physical, moral, and spiritual embrace of black and white men—transcended race and converted white and black into Cuban.”<sup>27</sup>

For patriot-intellectuals like Gómez, the Cuban national project would not combine the races or even integrate them, but transcend race itself, forming a radically new form of social fraternity. “From the instant that differences in the public and social spheres do not exist between whites and blacks,” an editorial from the Directorio wrote, “there will not exist the organization of a race.” Toward that end, the leadership of the Directorio advocated and eventually won crucial concessions from the Spanish colonial government in late 1893 that ended official racial segregation in public life in Cuba, and granting blacks equal access—in theory if not always in practice—to all areas of theaters, cafés, and public parks; integrating public schools; ending the practice of separate official birth rolls for people of color; and granting blacks equal access to the courtesy titles *Don* and *Doña*, which had previously been reserved for whites only. Acting in the name of “la raza de color,” Gómez understood activism based on race as a key step toward the eradication of race as we know it: “the man of color will consent to live in order to give birth to a man without adjective. In this supreme hour,” the editorial stated with optimism, “the gravest Cuban problem will be satisfactorily resolved.”<sup>28</sup>

Only a few months later the Cuban teatro bufo answered that optimism with the play, written by Laureano del Monte and performed in blackface, *Con don, sin don, ayer y hoy* (With *Don* and without *Don*, yesterday and today), a deeply racist satire of Gómez and this landmark civil rights legislation. As the title suggests, the play proposes a review of recent Cuban history, analyzing the social place of blacks with and without access to the courtesy titles *Don* and *Doña*.<sup>29</sup> The first two scenes, “yesterday,” are set on a plantation in 1850, while those of “today” illustrate three contemporary scenes of black social life. Each scene, it turns out, is a scenario in which black protagonists have the opportunity to prove their social or moral standing; this scathing play, more reactionary than any in the

teatro bufo repertoire, presents a catalog of their failures, in which the black characters, almost all men, only prove their unworthiness—yesterday, today, and presumably tomorrow—to share in the social or moral standing that the term *Don* designates for whites.

If we return to that “memorable night” at the Teatro Jané in July 1888 when the first black velada was held, we find a series of performances—original poetry, political oration, serious drama—marshaled on behalf of a cause that the organizers called both “philanthropic and patriotic.” Called the “Velada Gómez-Fraternidad,” it was a benefit for Gómez, who was then in uncertain exile in Madrid, and hosted by the activist newspaper he had helped found. It explicitly enjoined a community of literate readers to partake of “cultured” performance in the name of an activist social cause: a new *fraternidad* that advanced the cause of Cuba and Cubans of color:

This is the true solidarity of interests that should exist and never be forgotten between Cuban men of color; without forgetting that our solidarity does not exclude—to the contrary, it [demands] another solidarity—that of the interests of the *patria* [the nation] which are shared by all of its sons.<sup>30</sup>

For many black Cubans, both in Havana or as readers of the paper in other countries, the very idea of a full theater of black spectators, enjoying public oratory and performing arts offered proof positive of black social progress, a performance that occasioned meaningful pride and hope in the face of ongoing racism.

As the veladas became a central and regular activity for virtually all black *sociedades* in the years following, evidence suggests that they began to act as structures for a utopian political imagination—a space for imaginative social rehearsal as important as, if entirely different from, that offered by the teatro bufo to white criollos. A velada held in 1889 was described by a commentator in *Fraternidad* as an “essentially democratic festivity,” in which one could witness “mixing in agreeable intercourse white men and black men, the noted man of letters with the humble man of industry or arts. In that balcony an aristocratic white Lady, in another a virtuous black woman worker.” He continues, in a remarkable commentary, “We viewed that grandiose picture, and could not help but exclaim: if only it were always so! if the performance of that night could transcend [these walls], to inform all acts of social and political life in this country, another would be the destiny of Cuba!”<sup>31</sup> While still mapped along vectors of class, race, and gender, this site of interracial performance—focused on the audience more than the stage—engenders a political hope that otherwise has no form of representation.

Perhaps the commentator is too pessimistic about the force of such events. But let us nonetheless pursue his wish: why *didn't* these veladas succeed in transcending the limits of the theater and reshaping the destiny of Cuba? The answer might be found, in redux, in that blackface play, *Con don, sin don, ayer y hoy*. Consider just the middle scene, entitled “El Meet-

ing," a satire of the Directorio and Gómez through the blackface *negrito* character, Don Juan Gualberto. When J. Gualberto begins his speech, "Hoy que nuestra raza de color . . ." [Now that our race of color . . .], he is met with angry grumbling from the crowd. He quickly corrects himself: "He dicho de color, sin acordarme de que ya todos somos blancos" [I said "of color," forgetting that now we are all white]. The lesson to be drawn in the joke—which is repeated through out the scene—is stark: blackness and political identification are mutually exclusive; by definition, the political sphere is a domain of whiteness. No matter what Gómez says or does in this arena, he will be heard not as a black man, but as a black man in whiteface. The fact that a white actor plays him in blackface behaving as though in whiteface only compounds the inability of any credible black political identity to emerge through this frame.

The contrast between these two scenes is striking. In one theater, we have the teatro bufo, where white actors and predominantly white audiences indulged a range of racially marked entertainments celebrated as "Cuban": performing virile danzones and mean little plays like *Con don, sin don* along with comic skits filled with blackface *negritos* or seductive brownface mulatas. Just down the street, literally, a theater attended by a socially committed black community, performing oratory, classical music, poetry, and serious drama, celebrated as evidence of black participation in a new transracial "Cuban" public.

If the white criollo public sphere that developed in the anticolonial period relied on the medium of performance, more often than print, to organize its sense of publicity, I suggest that it did so as a necessary alternative to European, colonial models of sociality based in the culture of print. But this performance also provided the means to incorporate and thus control the insistent influence of (and white desire for) African or black cultures. The fact of blackface dramatized this exclusion of black people from the public sphere, even as it underscored the intense, almost obsessive, concern on the part of white authors, actors, and audiences over the problem of race and public representation—social, political, and theatrical. The *velada* could not quite extend its social power beyond the theater because it could not command discursive or material control over the intertwined meanings of blackness and impersonation—simulated blackness as a particular structure of Cuban feeling—that were, by 1893, already central to the making and maintenance of normative white Cuban *fraternidad*.

## NOTES

1. Pedro D'Aguires, letter to the editor, *La Fraternidad*, October 20, 1888. "En la noche, en la memorable noche del 12 de Julio hemos arrojado el guante á la faz de aquellos que con tanto *cinismo* y desenmascarada *maldad* afirman . . . que todavía no hemos ni siquiera todaco a las puertas del progreso. . . . Orgullosos debeis estar por haber colocado la primera piedra angular del magnifentísimo monumento de nuestra dignificación." All translations from the Spanish are mine unless otherwise noted.

2. I translate the word *negro* as "black" throughout. Throughout the nineteenth

century, Cuba was famous for its carefully calibrated distinctions regarding race: the meanings of words such as *pardo*, *moreno*, *mulato* have no exact English equivalents (due to a related but different history of racialization in the United States). Unlike some recent historians, I have not used the term *Afrocuban* to refer to blacks born in Cuba (or *negros criollos*) since the term *Afrocubano* postdates and is an important consequence of the history of racialized national identities told here. The term *Afrocuban* remains controversial in Cuba; see, for one relevant discussion, Rogelio Martínez Furé, "A National Cultural Identity?" in *Afro-Cuban Voices: On Race and Identity in Contemporary Cuba*, ed. Pedro Pérez Sarduy and Jean Stubbs (Tampa: University Press of Florida, 2000), 154–61.

3. For further discussion of the black press, see Ada Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba: Race, Nation, and Revolution, 1868–1898* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), especially chap. 5, "Writing the Nation." See also Pedro Deschamps Chapeux, *El negro en el periodismo cubano en el siglo XIX* (Havana: Ediciones R, 1963).

4. *La Igualdad*, February 4, 1993, trans. Aline Helg in *Our Rightful Share: The Afro-Cuban Struggle for Equality, 1886–1912* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 39.

5. Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991).

6. Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

7. See Louis A. Pérez, *On Becoming Cuban: Identity, Nationality and Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

8. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 2nd ed. (London: Verso, 1991).

9. Michael Warner, "The Mass Public and the Mass Subject," in *The Phantom Public Sphere*, ed. Bruce Robbins (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 234.

10. Warner, "Mass Public," 239.

11. Angel Rama, *The Lettered City*, trans. John Charles Chasteen (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1996), 33, 59.

12. Houston Baker, *Critical Memory: Public Spheres, African American Writing, and Black Fathers and Sons in America* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001), 7.

13. Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

14. Barbara Browning, *Infectious Rhythm: Metaphors of Contagion and the Spread of African Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1998).

15. *El Diario de Matanzas*, November 7, 1878, in Osvaldo Castillo Faílde, *Miguel Faílde Pérez: Creador del danzón* (Havana: Editora del consejo nacional de cultura, 1964), 122–23. I have benefited from Castillo Faílde's exhaustive review and frequent transcriptions of articles, editorials, and reviews related to the danzón in the Cuban press of the 1880s. I cite both his text and the original publication.

16. "voluptuosa melodía, pausada, ardiente, incitante, concebida en cerebros africanos al calor de este suelo tropical."

17. *El Diario de Matanzas*, October 9, 1879, in Castillo Faílde, *Miguel Faílde Pérez*, 134–35. "Sabed que este humilde gacetillero os considera tan puras y tan virtuosas cuando bailáis el danzón como cuando no la bailáis. Determinados bailes no hacen decentes a las personas, sino las personas decentes hacen decentes todos los bailes."

18. Ana M. López, "Of Rhythms and Borders," in *Everynight Life: Culture and Dance in Latin/o America*, ed. Celeste Fraser Delgado and José Esteban Muñoz (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1997), 324.

19. *La Aurora del Yumurí*, September 3, 1882, in Castillo Faílde, *Miguel Faílde Pérez*, 158–59. "Habana es un escandalo. . . . En cada esquina de culta población se estaciona de la noche a la mañana un organillo, que con sus chillonas notas molesta a los vecinos pacíficos y saca de sus casas a las inexpertas muchachas."

20. *El Aprendiz* [de Regla], July 22, 1881, in Castillo Faílde, *Miguel Faílde Pérez*, 144–45. "La regeneración intelectual y por consecuencia el progreso será imposible entre nosotros mientras haya padres de familia que . . . lleven a sus hijas, vírgenes de la patria, al desenfreno del baile de hoy día [que] no es más que una degeneración del tango africano."

21. D. Luis Arias, *La Aurora del Yumurí*, August 28, 1881, in Castillo Faílde, *Miguel Faílde Pérez*, 152. "Sin pudor, no hay madre posible, no hay sociedad buena, ni pueblo digno, ni espíritu digno, ni espíritu noble, ni países libres."

22. Ramón Morales Álvarez, *El proceso del oso, ajlaco bufo-lírico-bailable*, in *Teatro bufo, siglo XIX*, vol. 2, ed. Rine Leal (Havana: Editorial Arte y Literatura, 1975), 9–56. The play was first published in Havana, by Imprenta La Nueva Principal, in 1882. It was performed by the Bufos de Salas at the Teatro Torrecillas, January 28, 1882.

23. Morales Alvarez, *El proceso del oso*, 126. "Las niñas me piden a gritos . . . y hasta las viejas se embullan al son del . . . ¡entra, guabina!"

24. Morales Alvarez, *El proceso del oso*, 54. "[E]n los países intertropicales todo debe ser candela."

25. José Piedra, "Hip Poetics," in Delgado and Muñoz, *Everynight Life*, 96.

26. Juan Gualberto Gómez, "Programa del Diario 'La Fraternidad,'" in *Por Cuba Libre*, ed. Emilio Roig de Leuchsenring (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1974), 243–72. Originally published August 29, 1890.

27. Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba*, 126. Ada Ferrer suggests that this "homosocial" embrace sidesteps the sexualized discourse of *mestizaje* by virtue of this all-male imagination. I am more tempted to read the investments in multiracial *fraternidad* as, precisely, a form of hom(m)osocial *mestizaje*.

28. Translated in Philip A. Howard, *Changing History: Afro-Cuban Cabildos and Societies of Color in the Nineteenth Century* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998), 198–99.

29. Laureano del Monte, *Con don, sin don, ayer y hoy, caricatura trágico-bufa, lírico bailable en un acto y 5 cuadros, y en prosa* (Havana: Imprenta El Aerolito, 1894). The music was by "M. F.," possibly Miguel Faílde. The play was first performed at the Teatro Alhambra, February 23, 1894.

30. *La Fraternidad*, July 9, 1888. "Ésta es la verdadera solidaridad de intereses que debe existir y nunca olvidarse entre los hombres de color cubanos; sin olvidar tan poco que esa solidaridad de nuestros intereses no excluye, antes al contrario, impone de manera imprescindible, otra solidaridad: la de la de los intereses de la patria que son communes á todos sus hijos."

31. *La Fraternidad*, January 22, 1889. "Contemplamos aquel cuadro grandioso por el eternal espíritu que lo animaba, y no pudimos menos que exclamar: 'Si siempre fuera así, si el espectáculo que esta noche se da, tranciendiera afuera, e informara todos los actos de la vida política y social de este país, otro fuera el destino de Cuba.'"

# Virtual Chinatown and New Racial Formation: Performance of Cantonese Opera in the Bay Area

*Daphne Lei*

## *The Most Chinese Place of All*

"Where is Chinatown?" It was a spring afternoon in San Francisco in 2001. I was walking on Grant Avenue when a man approached me with this question. Chinatown? This was Chinatown. Or did he mean something even more "Chinese" than this famous Chinatown street? I pointed in the direction of the dragon "gate" at the end of the street.<sup>1</sup> That is probably the most Chinese place of all, at least in the sense that the gate suggests the official entrance to a Chinese city. "Is it worth seeing?" He asked again. I paused and said, "Sure. . . . Since you are here already, why not take a look?" I could not think of a better response. Worth seeing? Is Chinatown worth seeing? Are Chinese worth seeing? How does one evaluate a fake "town" representing a culture and ethnicity anyway?

I looked around. Crowded narrow streets, colors, smells, goods, impatient drivers and pedestrians, people, people, people. Chinese, non-Chinese, Chinatown Chinese, non-Chinatown Chinese, Chinatown non-Chinese, non-Chinatown non-Chinese. Both the man and I seemed to believe my "Chinese" authority because of my ethnicity in this short encounter; but at the same time, I had the urge to tell him that I was just a visitor, as much as he was. He came to Chinatown for his tourist pleasure; I came to Chinatown for my academic research. We both need our Chinatowns, yet our Chinatowns were very different. As a diasporic Chinese academic, do I have more right to study Chinatown than he does? Can I claim Chinatown because of my "cultural heritage" or "ethnic pride"?

My research on Chinese immigrant theater (in the form of Cantonese opera) in nineteenth-century America brought me to San Francisco. From the first documented performance to today's occasional productions, Cantonese opera in the Bay Area has had a continuous history of over a century and a half. Today's Cantonese opera, like many traditional arts in the age of global technology, is "aging" quickly or even "dying." However, I want to argue that in *performances* of Cantonese opera, a new kind of energy is being generated to create a virtual Chinatown, and a new racial formation is also emerging. The amateur opera performance, both theatrical and paratheatrical, promulgates a racial split, between the new Chinese ethnicity and the virtual Chinatown residents, between performers and audiences, between trans-Pacific horizontal connections and vertical Chinese American memories. The virtual Chinatown is constructed by economics and politics, by technology and

academic discourse, and, most interestingly, by Cantonese opera lovers. Within the virtual reality, Chinatown functions as the audience and witness for the amateur performance; however, the new racial formation is itself a performance for a larger non-Chinese audience and a performance for the *new* Chinese themselves. The racial split—both the prerequisite and result of the amateur Cantonese opera performance—coincides with performer/spectator divide in theater. However, this split has to be incomplete in order for identification/community building process to begin. An incomplete racial split, a new racial formation and the creation of the virtual Chinatown all constitute a *Chinese* performance for the global spectators in a very localized theater venue.<sup>2</sup>

### *Early Cantonese Opera in the Bay Area: A Sketch*

A consideration of early Cantonese opera performances is necessary in order to understand the present situation. On October 18, 1852, Tong Hook Tong mounted the “first” Cantonese opera performance in the United States (in American Theatre, on Sansome Street, San Francisco).<sup>3</sup> In many ways, the development of Cantonese opera in the Bay Area resembles the history of Chinese immigration in the United States: In the early period, it is a history of survival, but in the age of multiculturalism and globalization, a once alien art has taken on new meanings. Cantonese opera, a southern regional opera sung and spoken in the Cantonese dialect, does not enjoy the same prestige as Beijing opera (the national opera) or *kunqu* (an elite drama) within China, but enjoys popularity in southern China, as well as in the Chinese diaspora. Just as the dialect Cantonese was regarded as a “lingua franca” by some overseas Chinese, this local and “lowly” opera was pushed to the forefront to represent Chinese theater in the New World in the nineteenth century.

The apparent success of Tong Hook Tong inspired many more troupes to visit California. Throughout the nineteenth century, Cantonese opera saw a slow but steady development.<sup>4</sup> The earliest companies followed their audience of Chinese laborers to San Francisco—which, from Gold Rush days, was known by Chinese as “Gold Mountain”—but non-Chinese were also drawn to the performances for their novelty. Novelty notwithstanding, the preconceived notion of “Chinese” performance was already well established before the first wave of Chinese performance. The taste for Chineseness basically included two kinds of *Chinese* performance: the display of genuine Chinese persons (a Chinese giant or Siamese twins), or drama with Chinese themes but without Chinese cast members (such as *The Orphan of China*, produced in both French and English versions starting in the eighteenth century).<sup>5</sup> *The Chinese Other, 1850–1925*, a collection of plays with Chinese subjects, attests to the vogue of “playing Chinese” in the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth century.<sup>6</sup>

The production of Cantonese opera in the nineteenth century was measured not only against established notions of “Chineseness,” but also

against “Americanness.” Contemporary American theatrical conventions became the standard for such appraisals: Chinese theater had no wings or drops, no curtains, no female players, no footlights, no set, and no props. Reviewers tended to focus on the unfamiliar sound of Chinese opera: the music was “an interminable humming, banging, scraping, and screeching of Chinese fiddles, pipes, cymbals and gongs.”<sup>7</sup> Some of the “curious looking” musical instruments were said to be inspired by “Ethiopian minstrelsy.”<sup>8</sup> The dialogue was totally unintelligible, but “throw in a few ‘ch’s and ‘ts’s into the common caterwaul of the midnight cat, and you have the highest art of the Chinese stage.”<sup>9</sup> The audience is seen as an anonymous crowd, consisting of mostly “men, all dressed in the cold blue denim of Chinatown and all wearing soft round hats.”<sup>10</sup>

References to animals and to other ethnic minorities put Chinese theater in a very strange category in the nineteenth-century cultural configuration. Chinese theater, as a token representation of Chinese culture, is further racialized, bestialized, and exoticized. The earliest wave of Chinese immigration corresponds to the Gold Rush, but anti-Chinese sentiments became strong when labor surplus became a social problem in the 1870s and 1880s. I have argued elsewhere that this quasi-ethnological writing of Chinese theater in a time of political and economic instability can be seen as a way of rebuilding the American frontier and national consciousness.<sup>11</sup> Chinatown in the nineteenth century was to be preserved and visited by tourists, to be studied by anthropologists, to be reported on by newspapers and magazines. The exoticness or savagery of Chinatown is to be experienced on tour and collected as souvenir. It was a custom for nineteenth-century tourists in California to bring home Chinese shawls as presents.<sup>12</sup> For Americans, visiting Chinatown was like visiting China; for Europeans, visiting Chinatown was a way of experiencing America’s peculiar “multicultural” quality. It was indeed a global experience before the age of globalization.

### *Contemporary Cantonese Opera in the Bay Area: Theatrical versus Paratheatrical*

The recent major influx of Cantonese opera artists started in the 1980s, after the introduction of China’s Open Door Policy. Once famous “national” (*guojia ji*) actors, these singers, now retired from professional performance, devote their time to teaching Cantonese opera.<sup>13</sup> Most of them have established their own theater organizations and teach Cantonese opera classes on weekends. I generally categorize the participants in the Cantonese opera scene into three generations: the *sifu*-master generation (in their sixties and seventies), a second generation of middle-aged, middle-class immigrants (thirties to fifties), and a third, relatively small generation of young ABCs (American-born Chinese, in their teens and twenties).

The *sifu* are responsible for introducing, teaching, and transmitting the art, but are not necessarily the major performers. In a production, they often take on the title of “artistic director,” but they actually serve as “act-



ing and singing coaches." The ABC generation is drawn into this rather "archaic" and "foreign" art because of their parents' involvement. Most of the youngsters dance as little fairies or play nonspeaking roles at the edges of their parents' spotlights. Some of them have gone through the typical rebellion phase of second-generation Chinese Americans—first rejecting their parents' cultural heritage, then falling in love with the art at the college age. A website to serve the Bay Area Cantonese opera community was launched in 2002 through the efforts of these youngsters.<sup>14</sup>

The second generation furnishes the driving force in today's Cantonese opera circle. The major players of this generation are middle-class, middle-aged women.<sup>15</sup> Although prospects might seem dim for Cantonese opera, there are regular performances at least once a year, with sizable audiences. Support comes both from the performers within the show (the actors) and from volunteers and sponsors (whom I consider the paratheatrical performers) surrounding the show. Very often, the performers are responsible for securing production costs, either by coming up with the capital themselves or by soliciting funds from others. That Cantonese opera performance today remains at an amateur level is partly a result of financial constraints. Once funds have been raised, the performers will seek help from *sifu*—to coach new songs or to "tune up" old ones, and to "supervise" the performance. "Training" in Cantonese opera in the Bay Area today is very performance-oriented; it is indeed a kind of extended rehearsal. There are no systematic actor-training programs like those in China. The most regular training probably takes place at weekend singing lessons and at karaoke parties. Performers are also responsible for their own costumes, which are often expensive.

The paratheatrical performance is at least as important as the theatrical performance—local politicians and gentry, as well as local businesspeople, inevitably get involved and "perform" for the show. On the day of the show, paratheatrical performance starts with the flower baskets with sponsors' names in the lobby and also in front of the proscenium. A standard program is about four to five hours long and usually consists of five to seven scenes. Framing these theatrical performances are numerous speeches, award-presentations, and photo opportunities with VIPs. Because no one is making a profit, it is important that every sponsor be recognized and "present" in the performance. The emcees are responsible for the paratheatrical performance—introducing eminent speakers, congratulating performers, handling awards, and controlling photo opportunities. Since multiple scene changes are a standard practice, the paratheatrical performances between scenes actually contribute to the continuity of the entire performance. In the Tri-Valley charity performance of July 8, 2001, there were speeches and award presentations before and between performances, but extra sponsors' names had to be announced during intermission. At the cast party, held at a Chinese restaurant, the paratheatrical performance continued. As food and liquor were consumed, there were more expressions of gratitude, more photos, and more speeches. The paratheatrical performance was very organized

and extremely efficient. It was a performance with a well-tested formula and almost without surprises.

*The Need for a Chinatown: Virtual versus Actual*

Productions of Cantonese opera are costly for a few reasons: The run is usually no longer than a single performance. Local technical support is very limited, so set and costumes are very often imported from Hong Kong or China. There is no designated space for rehearsal or performance, so rent is often the largest portion of the production budget. There are not even enough musicians to form a complete Cantonese opera orchestra, so when there is a big production, musicians are flown in from New York or Vancouver. And finally, because Cantonese opera is a “dying” art, there is not a large enough audience to support the box office. Whereas the genre would traditionally have benefited from numerous active professional actors and enthusiastic audiences, what is left now is a great number of amateur opera-lovers who are not willing to give up. But, how can they survive under such harsh circumstances?

Chinatown becomes a necessary component in this configuration. The virtual Chinatown is both a prerequisite and a by-product of Cantonese opera performance: a virtual Chinatown has to be created in order for the players to perform for Chinatown, but the Chinatown becomes part of the performance of a new racial formation. The desire for a virtual Chinatown signifies a need for a new Chinese ethnicity in the age of globalization.

There are three prerequisites for the creation of a virtual Chinatown: demographics (the Chinatown Chinese), virtual time, and virtual space.

*Chinatown Chinese*

Amateur performances of Cantonese opera often take on the trappings of a quasi-religious charity event—the performance is for the benefit of “Chinatown seniors.”<sup>16</sup> The theater patron is recognized as a “great charitable person” (*da shanren*), who occupies a favorable position in the cycle of Buddhist reincarnation. Instead of being rewarded in the next life, all the charitable persons are “recognized” on stage, now. Therefore, the awards presented between scenes are “appreciation awards.” What is recognized is not artistic merit, but services or financial contributions, both charitable deeds. Performers and sponsors also congratulate each other as “great charitable persons” in one-page inserts in the program.<sup>17</sup> One common congratulatory phrase is “Charity is the utmost happiness, merit is without limits” [*Weishan zuile, gongde wuliang*]. The words “charity” (*shan*) and “merit” (*gongde*) have strong religious associations. Besides purchasing tickets, this is the most direct way for everyone to chip in for the performance. In the Red Bean Opera House, donations were listed with donor names and amounts on slips of pink paper posted on the wall, imitating the style of donation records in Buddhist temples.<sup>18</sup>

Some sponsorship comes in the form of charity tickets. Usually a block of tickets will be purchased for local senior homes. At the Tri-Valley charity performance of 2001, 300 tickets were purchased for San Francisco and Oakland Chinatown senior housing projects. In the Red Bean Anniversary Performance in 2003 (July 5 and 6, 2003), 150 tickets were given to seniors. Charity tickets guarantee larger audience participation, and senior citizens are probably the audience members best prepared to understand the art of the “last generation.” Moreover, many middle-generation opera lovers have fond memories of seeing operas with grandparents in childhood. This can be seen as an act of commemorating “home.”<sup>19</sup>

The fact that “Chinatown” residents have to be bused in to see a *Chinese* performance warrants further examination. Unlike a century earlier, the Chinese performance is no longer *from* Chinatown, but *for* Chinatown. Although there is a continuous supply of new Chinese immigrants, the real strength of Cantonese opera nowadays comes from the middle-class, middle-aged generation, who usually live in the East Bay and other suburban areas. Some of them are successful professionals and some are wealthy housewives, but most of them came to this country when they were young, so Cantonese opera is for many of them the only memory of “home.” As the Great Star Theater, the last Cantonese opera theater in the United States, no longer functions as a regular performance space, and all the *sifu* and amateur performers live outside of Chinatown, the Cantonese opera circle is moving farther and farther away from Chinatown. In the new dispensation, Chinatown is refigured as the recipient of charity and a justification for the important business of paratheatrical performance. Senior Cantonese opera lovers become the virtual population of “Chinatown Chinese” who exist only during a performance.

### *Virtual Time*

The virtual Chinatown can exist only in a virtual time, but virtual time itself is a complex matter. Chinatown, traditionally seen as the epitome of China, is inevitably “old,” as the word *ancient* or *old* always precedes China in the nineteenth-century imagination. The senior audience corresponds to this misconception of Chinatown. On the other hand, an “ethnic” community in the United States often has a difficult time shedding the FOB, or “fresh off the boat,” image. Based on these two stereotypes, Chinatown is easily seen as a space occupied by newly arrived senior citizens! In the Cantonese opera circle, although the “oldness” of the audience is part of the virtual Chinatown configuration, it is more appropriate to speak of the virtual time of the opera itself. G. R. MacMinn described Chinese opera as “being very old from the beginning”; it “did not change with time.”<sup>20</sup> The staleness of Chinese civilization, represented by the “ancient” Chinese theater in the New World, is part of the Americanized rendition of German idealist notions.<sup>21</sup> Without the ability to progress, to make history, China stays forever in the past. A look at a recent performance of Cantonese opera at the Great Star Theater strangely reveals the

negotiation of time. The full-length play *The Lioness Roars* was on the bill for July 5, 2003, as part of the celebration for the seventh anniversary of the Red Bean Opera House. Despite the ticket-checker at the entrance, the border of the theater was blurred, as the doors to the auditorium remained open and audiences wandered in and out throughout the entire performance. Time ceased to matter, as the curtain was twenty minutes late and the performance lasted more than four hours. Audiences ate, chatted, moved around, but did not miss special moments to cheer or applaud. The freedom of the audience reminds us of the old Chinese theater practice, but also resembles the theatricality of the auditorium before the era of the fourth wall. Moreover, the staging is surprisingly reminiscent of nineteenth-century American practices. As noted earlier, while nineteenth-century Chinese theater was always evaluated as “non-American,” now all the negative criticism has been answered, and present-day Cantonese opera theater includes curtains, footlights, drops, set and props, and women players! The most obvious nineteenth-century theater practice is the extensive use of backdrops and footlights on a proscenium stage. Despite certain modern artifacts such as microphones and dry ice, the Great Star Theater seemed to have been frozen in a virtual time: the old Chineseness, the nineteenth-century Americanness, along with the FOBness of the Chinatown residents create a peculiar virtual time for Cantonese opera.

### *Virtual Space*

The virtual Chinatown does not correspond to the actual—the San Francisco Chinatown with the “official” dragon gate entry. As a matter of fact, the 1906 earthquake and fire all but eliminated Chinatown, and many Chinese reestablished their residences in East Bay or on the peninsula. The recent boom in the Silicon Valley also stretched areas of Chinese habitation much farther. The San Francisco Chinatown seems minuscule compared to the Chinese population of the whole Bay Area. The Red Bean Opera House is located in Oakland, and most opera lovers do not live in Chinatown. The senior audiences are bused in from various locations.

For tourists, the dragon gate of Chinatown is the representation of Chineseness reduced to token size. For Cantonese opera lovers, the Great Star Theater (636 Jackson Street, San Francisco) is probably the best symbol of today’s Cantonese opera performance. Built in 1925, with a facade that recalls a pagoda, the Great Star was used regularly as a Cantonese opera playhouse as well as a movie theater until the turn of the century. The only Cantonese opera theater in the United States now faces the possibility of being torn down by developers. Cantonese opera lovers started the “Saving the Great Star Theater” campaign in 2001. Initiatives have included soliciting letters to local government and politicians as well as staging fund-raising performances. Samuel and Elaine Wong, CPAs, opera lovers and patrons, are key players behind the campaign. Mr. Wong dreams of renovating the theater and establishing a space for training ac-

tors and housing visiting artists. Mrs. Wong also emphasizes the historical value of the contents of the Great Star. Early movie projectors still sit in the projection room on the second floor, and she argues that attention should be paid to preserve and restore such “historical objects.”<sup>22</sup> However, the decrepit building is barely functioning, and the renovation will require a large infusion of capital.<sup>23</sup>

Jackson Street was one of the “theater” streets in the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>24</sup> Cultural memories of a specific site are like writings on palimpsest—the current meaning cannot be obtained without some erasure of previous memories; however, since erasing is never complete, the current cultural memory is always multilayered. The Great Star Theater, on the other hand, is a different matter. It is approximately on the original site of Royal Chinese Theatre in 1860s, but since the earthquake eliminated Chinatown, claiming originality in the reconstructed Chinatown amounts to superficially inventing an originality, establishing a virtuality that transcends time and natural disasters.

The 1906 earthquake not only eliminated Chinatown, it also “cleaned up” the old Chinatown. The dark alleys, opium dens, secret tunnels, brothels, gambling quarters, and leper houses were all buried under the rubble. For anti-Chinese citizens, the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act was the government’s effort to control Chinese immigration, and the 1906 earthquake was perhaps a demonstration of “God’s will” to eliminate Chinatown. Originally, Chinatown was to be rebuilt as a tourist site in a different location, according to San Francisco mayor E. E. Schmitz. This enraged the Chinese community. After intervention from Chinese diplomats and financial help from China, Hong Kong, and the local Chinese communities, Chinatown was rebuilt at the original site. A kind of social reform—modernization and Westernization, was also taking place within the Chinese community at this time. There was a deliberate effort to create a new image for the new Chinatown—the ideal new Chinatown was clean and modern, free of gambling, prostitution, idol worship, and queues!<sup>25</sup> Safer and cleaner, the new Chinatown was also more *Chinese*. Many of the new buildings had Chinese-looking balconies, balustrades, and pagoda-like roofs.<sup>26</sup> The formation of the nineteenth-century Chinatown had corresponded to the Gold Rush immigration, but the reconstruction was to meet a new standard that, by its scrupulous self-regulation, would help to fend off anti-Chinese sentiments. The result was an even better tourist attraction.

The Great Star is a building that bespeaks such ambitions: it is a modern building with a pagoda-like roof and a Chinese facade for the upper level. It is now flanked by “non-Chinese-looking” shops on narrow Jackson Street. The Chinese building almost disappears behind surrounding big store signs and parked cars. To rescue the Great Star is also to rescue deliberately established Chineseness, and also to celebrate a hopeful mentality that was born with the Republic of China in the early twentieth century. To bring Chinese performance back to this theater is to restore a token that is different from the dragon gate. The dragon gate is for non-Chinese tourists, but the Great Star is for the opera lovers of virtual Chinatown. It is tourism

at a different level—it is revisiting the old artistic tradition as well as a glorious national moment.

*New Racial Formation: Horizontal Connection  
versus Vertical Memory and Deconstructing the  
Model Minority Myth*

“Celebrate cultural heritage!” “Celebrate ethnic pride!” Cantonese opera today is very often presented in the form of celebration. However, ethnic pride and cultural heritage can be celebrated only with selected racial memory. Contemporary Chinese American writers proudly include traditional art as part of their performance language (as in the display of Beijing opera in David Henry Hwang’s *M. Butterfly* and Chay Yew’s *Red*), or address the painful experiences of the early immigrants as part of collective Chinese American memory (as in Genny Lim’s *Paper Angels*), but the Cantonese opera circle has a very different approach: the celebration relies on the erasure of vertical Chinese American memory and on an emphasis on the horizontal (both domestic and trans-Pacific) connections. History has to be interrupted, time has to stop, for the celebration to take place.

Race, as a social construct, changes with time. Race does not explain a historical phenomenon, but is rather the name assigned to the phenomenon, as Barbara Jeanne Fields argues; however, racial constructs and racial prejudices still have to negotiate with history. As Fields writes,

The preferred solution is to suppose that, having arisen historically, race then ceases to be a historical phenomenon and becomes instead an external motor of history; according to the fatuous but widely repeated formula, it “takes on a life of its own.” The shopworn metaphor thus offers camouflage for a latter-day version of Lamarckism. In other words, once historically acquired, race becomes hereditary.<sup>27</sup>

In the case of Chinese racialization in the United States, the major historical factor is immigration policies. As Michael Omi and Howard Winant point out, “the racial order is equilibrated by the state—encoded in law, organized through policy-making, and enforced by a repressive apparatus.”<sup>28</sup> Chinamen, coolies, laundry workers, and house servants constituted the early Chinese stereotype, which was replaced in the 1960s by the newer stereotype of the “model minority”—the hard-working, successful, and complaisant Chinese.<sup>29</sup>

This quasi-official recategorization continues a long process of racial reconfiguration. During the nineteenth century, the newly “introduced” Chinese race was most easily understood in the context of existing racial stereotypes, and the slavlike treatment of Chinese laborers may well have reflected a nostalgia for the slavery of the pre-Civil War era.<sup>30</sup> Likewise, the “model minority” stereotype must be understood in its relation to stereotypes of other minority groups. As a typical formulation of the problem put it, while the government needed to spend hundreds of bil-

lions on “negroes and other minorities,” “the nation’s 300,000 Chinese-Americans are moving ahead on their own—with no help from anyone else.”<sup>31</sup> The new racial product was ideal because it was comparatively “cheap” and “low-maintenance.” In the new millennium, can we consider both the Chinaman and model minority dated racial stereotypes? How do contemporary Chinese Americans negotiate their minority status? If certain aspects of the old racism are still in circulation, how will Chinese Americans ever get beyond such minority racialization?

Today, a process of demarcation and fragmentation is taking place within Cantonese opera performance, and a new kind of Chinese race is being constructed. The new Chinese is successful, well established, and well connected, both domestically and internationally. The refusal of the collective early Chinese immigrant memory certainly separates the new Chinese from the early coolie class; however, this process has also erased memories of Cantonese opera in the nineteenth century. In the Bay Area Cantonese opera circle of the present day, the senior performers consider themselves pioneers. In a sense, the early Cantonese opera, which was rather successful for a time, is deliberately forgotten. All the pain and suffering of ancestors and the struggles of first-generation Cantonese opera performers, along with Chinese theater buildings in which they played, were buried in the earthquake of 1906.

In the meantime, another kind of memory is being constructed and maintained. For the senior performers, links to the homeland are still strong. As “prominent artists,” they keep alive memories of their own past glories. Though retired in a foreign country, most of the artists were once “state” performers whose profession was sponsored by the Chinese government. It seems that such state recognition is still important for these artists. The business card of Master Wong Chi-Ming, for instance, lists his various connections: the Oakland Asian Cultural Center (now defunct), a Chinese radio station (AM 1450), opera instructor, and “national first-class actor” (*guojia yiji yanyuan*). While many of the artists speak of certain painful aspects of the national past (the Cultural Revolution, for instance), national honor still plays an important part in forming their identities.

This kind of “national” recognition does not necessarily correspond to the “nation.” Memories of national recognition and glory recall what Fanon terms a “passionate search for a national culture.” The “dignity, glory, and solemnity” of the past constitutes the imagined national culture, and the “claim to a national culture in the past does not only rehabilitate that nation and serve as a justification for the hope of a future national culture.”<sup>32</sup> The glorious past is expressed also on a lower level, in the artistic family genealogy. It is a common practice for disciples to take on the last names of the masters in their stage names, and many of the artists trace their art to particular lineages of Cantonese opera. These affiliations always warrant recognition. For instance, in one of the rare English program biographies, Lam Siu Kwan is identified as “Prominent Chinese Opera Artist, honored to be First Class Performing Artist of China, member of

People's Republic of China National Drama Society. Past Vice President of Guang dong [*sic*] Drama Institute." It continues: "Miss Lam is daughter of Famous Artist Chiu-Kwan Lam. Student of Lan-Fong Chiu." Her husband, Master Pak Chiu-Hung, "started his art career at the age of 16, student of Kui-Wing Pak (prominent artist)."<sup>33</sup> The national recognition and artistic genealogy are cherished precisely because they cannot be presented in the United States in any "legalized" ways. Performing Cantonese opera becomes an efficacious process of recalling a "home" that always exists in the beautiful past and across the Pacific.

A kind of national recognition is also visible in the middle generation, but now it is both American national recognition and connections across the Pacific Rim. Today's Cantonese opera circle is also well connected with local economics and politics, and each performance serves as both an artistic and a social event. This is typical for community theater. In the case of Cantonese opera, however, this connection is essential because of the high production costs and because of the nature of an immigrant art. At the political level, local bureaucratic involvement is mandatory and welcome. For instance, a brief and casual congratulatory letter from the mayor (or someone with the same political weight) in the program forges a quasi-official connection. Interestingly, most letters share a very similar language: "I commend [the group's name] for its commitment, dedication and service to preserving the art . . ." (Willie Brown, 2000),<sup>34</sup> "I would like to compliment . . . on its commitment, dedication, service and devotion to preserving the art. . . ." (Henry Chang, 2000),<sup>35</sup> or "I would like to commend . . . for their commitment, dedication and service to preserving a beautiful part of Chinese culture" (Leland Yee, 2001).<sup>36</sup> The formulaic language of the letters from "American" officials to "Chinese" community further strengthens the borders between "American" and "Chinese American." Chinese have to be congratulated for doing something Chinese, for being Chinese. However, the informal connections with local and state government are presented as official approval or official sanctions for an alien art.

Between native home and diaspora, between racial discrimination and simulation, between politics and economics, Cantonese opera practiced by the second generation is a perfect vehicle for subtly negotiating all the possibilities. The horizontal connection—both trans-Pacific and with local economics and politics—demarcates a new territory for Chinese. The feeling of "Yes, I'm Chinese, but I'm not *that* kind of Chinese" reflects the mentality of the new Chinese racialization. *That* kind of Chinese is the coolies, laundry workers, FOBs, the restaurant and sweatshop workers. *That* kind of Chinese can only exist in the vertical memory, which is essential for constructing the virtual Chinatown.

Guillermo Gómez-Peña, speaking of the dark side of globalization, points out that "compassion and philanthropy" are not part of any major agenda in globalization. "Free" trade means that only those who have the power to determine the terms can trade, and the whole Third World has been turned into a sweatshop. "It is economic-darwinism.com. Only the



digitally fit will survive." The digitally unfit corresponds to the economically and racially misfit. As he also observes, in the United States, unsurprisingly, the majority populations in prisons are blacks and Latinos.<sup>37</sup> Typically, race is class; the darker you are, the harder it is for you to succeed in the white society. However, within the Chinese American communities, as noted earlier, the racial formation is closely related to immigration, so that the racialized class is also temporized. From the earlier coolie class to today, Chinese ethnicity is constantly being reconstructed according to legal and political measurements. Does this racial split between opera performers and Chinatown audiences, between charity donors and recipients, paint a better picture of Chinese ethnicity in the United States? Do successful Chinese Americans shed their model *minority* status because now they have designated another minority? Rather than being exploited, this new minority is to be helped, not as welfare receivers, but as "artistic" charity recipients, and their "helper" is not American taxpayers, but the new Chinese. Lisa Lowe speaks of the confinement of "Asian capital": Asian participation in the United States has been historically linked to the economic sphere, first in labor and later in both labor and capital. The economic success of Asian Americans is always lauded, but that also implies a discouragement of political involvement.<sup>38</sup> This is the syndrome of the pacified model minority—economically successful and politically content. Now the economic success of these opera lovers is expressed in "art," a form of cultural capital that can resist capitalist vulgarism but can still be given and received as charity. The prestige that the performers receive is not produced by doing art, but by doing "amateur" and "charity" art.

Opera practiced by wealthy amateurs is a long tradition in Chinese theater history. Traditionally, professional actors never enjoyed high social status, and the distinction between singing girls, actors, and prostitutes is very often blurred. Well-to-do opera-lovers, when practicing the art, feel the need to remain amateurs. *Piao xi* (literally "performing drama in an amateur status"), a special term reserved for amateur theater lovers, is also an indicator of the performer's class. In the *piao xi* context, performing as pastime can be considered "art," whereas performing professionally is vulgar. In today's Cantonese opera circle, the *piao xi* goes even further; it is combined with charitable giving and the invention of virtual Chinatown. Performing is to give, not to receive; performing is art, not profession.<sup>39</sup> With the increasing importance of Asian economy and speed of globalization, "Asian (Asian American) capital" should no longer be seen as a confinement, or an index for model minority's inability for political engagement; on the contrary, it is a bridge that connects home and diaspora, Asia and America, the new gold mine and the declining empire. Many of the Cantonese opera lovers have business ties with China or Hong Kong, and their actual capital speaks of both economic and political power. Sponsoring Cantonese opera performance is not just a gesture of preserving cultural heritage or indulging oneself in luxurious pastime, it is also a demonstration of economic and political connections with Asia. It is an opportunity to reexamine the significance of this new racial formation.

From the first Tong Hook Tong company to today's amateur performance, the history of Cantonese opera is always in the process of reconstruction, as many factors such as the 1906 earthquake, anti-Chinese sentiment, and U.S. immigration policy contribute to the erasing and rewriting of this history. Setting aside interruptions from "outside" the Chinese community, the most significant erasing and rewriting probably come from "within" or "around" the Chinese community. The deliberate forgetting of vertical memory and the emphasis on horizontal connection open a racial split and create a virtual Chinatown. It is among all these complicated measures—racial split, erasure and reconstitution of memories, charity events, and so on—that Cantonese opera finds a place for survival in the new millennium.

While old cultural and geographical borders seem to be disappearing for Chinatown residents, new boundaries are created by tangential Chinatown citizens. I see myself holding the passport of such a person. Tangential Chinatown citizens also have the putative status of "insiders," as most of them are "Chinese" to a certain degree.<sup>40</sup> This tangential Chinese nation includes politicians, businesspeople, academics, Cantonese opera lovers, and others, who do not live in but live "on" Chinatown. Chinatown is the recipient of charity and the topic of political or academic discourse, although it does not itself participate in the discourse in any direct way. Chinatown is also the symbol of home, cultural heritage, and ethnic pride, presented to "outsiders" by tangential citizens in the discourse of multiculturalism. In presenting the cultural heritage to "outsiders," the tangentialists demonstrate the ability to cross the Chinatown border because to the outsiders, they *are* Chinese—the insiders. On the other hand, the practice of traditional art and charity events elevate the status of the amateur players. In the context of Cantonese opera, the virtual Chinatown, created by websites, scholarly articles, and charity tickets and donations to senior homes, undergoes constant transformation according to its tangential citizens' reconfiguration. The tangentialists can cross the border easily precisely because they create the border themselves. The racial split is incomplete, the borders are porous, the virtual reality is actualized in every performance, disappears under the mask of "real" Chinatown afterwards and regenerated as a different persona for the next performance. The virtual Chinatown, though it seems passive, actually galvanizes the performance of Chineseness by tangential Chinatown citizens, and Cantonese opera, though it necessarily remains amateur, draws its lifeblood from this crossing between virtual center and real periphery.

## NOTES

1. The dragon gate, located at the corner of Grant Avenue and Bush Street, was given by the Republic of China in 1969. Very often, tourist guides use this gate as the "beginning" or "entrance" of Chinatown, but one rarely speaks of the

area's "ending" or "exit." For instance, a travel website, iNetours.com, features "Chinatown in San Francisco," with this opening sentence: "San Francisco's Chinatown begins at the dragon-crested gate at Grant Avenue and Bush Street." See <http://www.inetours.com/Pages/SFNbrhds/Chinatown.html>.

2. I have discussed the notion of incomplete split and multiple splits in various contexts in *Operatic China: Staging a Chinese Identity across the Pacific* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006). A more detailed account on some aspects of the contemporary amateur Cantonese opera performance can be found in Chapter Four of the book ("San Francisco Chinatown, Cantonese Opera and the New Millennium").

3. It is the first "documented" Chinese opera "dramatic" performance known to current scholarship, although earlier nondramatic performances (such as acrobatics) by Chinese troupes are also documented. The bill on that opening night included "THE EIGHT GENII offering their congratulation to the High Ruler Yuk Hwang, on his birthday," "Too Tsin made High Minister by the Six States," "Parting at the Bridge of Parkew of Kwan Wanchang and Tsow Tsow," and "THE DEFEATED REVENGE." See *Alta California*, October 16, 1852.

A number of scholars have studied the early history of Chinese theater in California and discussed the significance of this company. See, for instance, Lois Foster, Peter Chu, et al., "Chinese Theatres in America," Federal Theatre Project, 1936, unpublished [San Francisco Performing Arts Library & Museum has a Lois Foster (a different name for Lois Foster) collection, in which one can find a copy of the original manuscript and an updated version]; Donald Riddle, *Flying Dragons, Flowing Streams: Music in the Life of San Francisco's Chinese* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1983); and Annette Ke-Lee Chan, "A Performance History of Cantonese Opera in San Francisco from Gold Rush to the Earthquake," Ph.D. diss., University of California, Davis, 1993. My article "The Production and Consumption of Chinese Theatre in Nineteenth-Century California," *Theatre Research International* 28, no 3 (2003): 1–14, and Chapter 1 ("Chinese Theatre and the Eternal Frontier in Nineteenth-Century California") of *Operatic China* also cover certain aspects of this company as well as the history of Cantonese opera in the nineteenth century.

Tong Hook Tong has received a generous amount of scholarly attention; however, the history of the company remains obscure. Its name is given as Hook Took Tong, Hong Took Tong, Hook Tong Hook, Tung Hook Tong, and so on, depending on the source. *Tong Hook Tong* sounds as exotic as *Hook Took Tong*. Without proper documentation, it is impossible to verify the "real" name for the "first" Cantonese opera company.

4. Just a few examples here: In 1855, the Chinese Dramatic Company performed at the Sacramento Theatre, and Shanghai Theatre opened on Dupont Street in San Francisco; a Chinese troupe from Hong Kong performed at Maguire's Opera House in 1860; and in 1865, a group of Chinese jugglers and acrobats performed at New Idea Theatre. On January 27, 1868, a more ambitious Chinese company, Hing Chuen Yuen, better known as the Royal Chinese Theatre, built a new theater on Jackson Street in San Francisco.

5. For more examples, see James S. Moy, *Marginal Sights: Staging the Chinese in America* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1993), 7–22.

6. Dave Williams, ed., *The Chinese Other, 1850–1925* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1997).

7. *San Francisco Bulletin*, December 6, 1856.

8. *San Francisco Bulletin*, March 5, 1860.

9. Helen Hunt Jackson, *Bits of Travel at Home* (Boston: Roberts Bros., 1893), 71.

10. Gertrude Atherton, *My San Francisco: A Wayward Biography* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1946), 55

11. See Lei, "Production and Consumption," and *Operatic China*. Many theater reviews (either in newspaper or in travelogues) focus on what I call "paratheatrical" performance rather than theatrical performance. Instead of performance style or dramatic action on stage, such writings often comment on the peculiar behavior or custom of Chinese. They resemble a quasi-ethnographic report of Chinese/Chinatown culture or people.

12. J. D. Borthwick, *Three Years in California (1851-54)* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood, 1857), 79.

13. Master Pak Chiu Hung (Bai Chaohung), Lam Siu Kwan (Lin Xiaoqun, Pak's wife), Leung Jing (Liang Jing), and Wong Chi-Ming (Huang Zhiming) are the major senior figures, the master teachers, the *sifu* in the Bay Area Cantonese opera circle. Most of the names of the Cantonese opera artists are spelled in Cantonese. For purposes of clarification, I also supply the Mandarin pronunciation in pinyin.

14. "Bay Area Cantonese Opera," <http://www.pearlomagik.com/bayareacantoneseopera/Home.htm>. Stacy Fong is the webmaster.

15. My article "Can You Hear Me: The Female Voice and Cantonese Opera in the San Francisco Bay Area," *S & F Online*, <http://www.barnard.edu/sfonline/ps/lei.htm>, discusses the second-generation women's contribution to Cantonese opera.

16. For instance, the performance on July 8, 2001, raised seven thousand dollars for a local elderly organization and five thousand dollars for the Salvation Army. The performance on February 20, 1999, was a fund-raising event for American Asian Elderly Humanitarian Society, and the performances of January 26 and 28, 2001 were for saving the landmark Great Star Theater.

17. The cost is about three hundred dollars for a page. A program typically has thirty to fifty pages of such inserts.

18. These donations, usually in small amounts, are contributions to the Opera House, not to any specific performance. The small space of Red Bean Opera House, located in the heart of Oakland Chinatown, is the office for administration and meetings, classroom for weekend lessons, space for rehearsals and parties. In a sense, this is a temple of Cantonese opera. There is also a small shrine for theatre gods in the cramped office.

19. Laura Ma, a major performer and the producer for a number of productions, feels strongly about purchasing tickets for seniors, because her grandmother exposed her to Cantonese opera during her childhood in Hong Kong (interview by the author, September 3, 2003).

20. G. R. MacMinn, *The Theatre of the Golden Era in California* (Caldwell, Idaho: Caxton Printers, 1941), 507. He is consulting B. E. Lloyd's *Lights and Shades in San Francisco of 1876*.

21. China, Hegel held, is a nation that does not possess "History" because of its lack of Spirit. Since Chinese individuals obey state or family without free will, they are incapable of making linear, progressive history. Georg W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree (New York: Dover, 1956), 116-38.

22. Elaine Wong, interview by the author, July 8, 2001.

23. My recent visits confirm that, beyond cosmetic repairs, the building needs a serious modernization. Electrical connections will not support present needs, so extra power will have to be brought in for performances; the auditorium needs much better fire-proofing, and the problem of basement flooding has to be solved.

24. In 1867, Hing Chuen Yuen (Royal Chinese Theater), was opened on Jack-

son Street (north of Jackson, between Dupont [Grant Avenue] and Kearny). Liu Boji states that on Jackson Street, in 1877, there were four theaters (Nos. 621, 623½, 626, and 730); in 1878, two (Nos. 618 and 623) and in 1880, two (Nos. 623 and 626). See Liu Boji, *Meiguo huaqiao shi* (The history of American Chinese overseas) (Taipei: Xingzhengyuan qiaowu weiyuanhui, 1976), 616. Both Lois Rather and Donald Riddle also discuss Chinese theaters on Jackson Street. See Rather, 53–56; Riddle, 101.

25. For the reconstruction of San Francisco Chinatown after the 1906 earthquake and the changing mentality of Chinese Americans during that time, see the chapter “A Changing Mentality, 1906 to 1913,” in Yong Chen’s *Chinese San Francisco: 1850–1943* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 162–85.

26. Riddle, *Flying Dragons*, 136.

27. Barbara Jeanne Fields, “Slavery, Race and Ideology in the United States of America.” *New Left Review* 181 (May–June 1990): 100–101.

28. Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 84.

29. For instance, a report in *U.S. News and World Report*, December 26, 1966, demonstrates the typical depiction of Chinese Americans as a “model minority.” Chinese Americans are seen as “thrifty, law-abiding and industrious people—ambitious to make progress on their own.” See “Success Story of One Minority Group in U.S.,” in *Roots: An Asian American Reader*, ed. Amy Tachiki et al. (Los Angeles: Continental Graphics, 1971), 6–9.

30. In such rhetoric, Chinese simply inherit all the negativity of “negroes.” They share similar racial stereotypes and suffer similar discrimination. This is even expressed in iconography. Many cartoons depict Chinese with “African” features. See Dan Caldwell, “The Negroization of the Chinese Stereotype in California,” *Southern California Quarterly* 53, no. 2 (1971): 123–31.

31. “Success Story,” 6.

32. Frantz Fanon, “On National Culture,” in *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1966), 169–70.

33. Both quotations are from the program of Chinese Cantonese Opera Art Performance and Demonstration, Little Theater, Stanford University, May 4, 2001, 5–6.

34. Willie L. Brown Jr. was mayor of San Francisco. This letter appears in the program for the Red Bean Fourth Anniversary Performance, May 6 and 7, 2000, Great Star Theater, San Francisco.

35. Program for the Red Bean Fourth Anniversary Performance. Henry Chang, Jr. was vice mayor of Oakland.

36. Leland Yee was a member of Board of Supervisors of the City and County of San Francisco. See performance program for “California Chinese Orchestra,” March 18, 2001, at Yerba Buena Center, San Francisco, 2. Chang and Yee, both Chinese Americans, seem to be addressing the Cantonese opera circle from an *American* position.

37. Guillermo Gómez-Peña, “The New Global Culture” *TDR* 45, no. 1 (2001): 10.

38. Lisa Lowe, “The International within the National: American Studies and Asian American Critique,” *Critical Critique* 40 (Fall 1998): 37.

39. This also explains the separation between opera performers and musicians. In the Cantonese opera circle, musicians are the only people who demand payment for their service—the whole cast and the production staff are volunteers. The monetary reward marks their professional status, but also violates amateurs’ high ideals of pro bono performance. To perform is considered a charity event, not a way to make a profit. We also see an economic gap: unlike the middle-class

amateur actors, most musicians have to work on low-wage jobs. Traditionally, musicians were on stage, sharing the performance space with actors. In the Cantonese opera circle, the musicians' performance takes place on the margin—in the orchestra pit. The paratheatrical performers, such as sponsors when they give speeches or receive appreciation awards, appear to enjoy more stage attention than musicians.

40. Most Cantonese opera participants are ethnic Chinese who speak Cantonese. But there are also non-ethnic Chinese who participate in the larger business and political circle or view the art from an academic perspective.

## Reality ✓

*Harry J. Elam, Jr.*

There is no reality except in action.  
—Sartre

On September 4, 1955, in Chicago at the funeral of her son, Emmett Till, Mamie Mobley determined to leave the casket open, exposing his completely disfigured face to a national audience of mourners. The reality of his badly beaten, mutilated face (he was killed on August 28, 1955 for the audacity of looking at a white woman) stood in stark contrast to the picture of the smiling, handsome, light-eyed, young black boy of fourteen that hung inside the lining of the casket. This performative moment—performative in how it impacted the viewing and doings of its audience—as orchestrated by his mother intentionally induced a discomfort, a restless dissatisfaction on the part of its audience. Powerfully, Ms. Mobley’s calculated action of revealing the unspeakable body juxtaposed to the piquant, boyish, innocent face in the photograph, created for the audience what I am calling here a “reality check,” a moment that traumatically ruptures the balance between the real and representational. It is a moment that, in the dissonance, generates demands that the relationship between the real and representation be renegotiated. Reality checks brusquely rub the real up against the representational in ways that disrupt the spectators and produce new meanings. Most significantly, reality checks, in the unease that they cause audiences, can excite social action. Accordingly, the audience reacted vociferously to the funeral of Emmett Till; the NAACP soon became involved and demanded the trial of his murderers. The event, the reality check, catalyzed the anger of the spectators, which enabled them to translate long-held frustrations over racial injustices into social resistance. As such reality checks stir the psyche and impel reconsiderations of the intersections of the real and representational, they produce diverse performative responses and expose the complex possibilities of a politics of blackness.

From the very outset, I want to make explicit that I will restrict my exploration of this notion of the reality check to black expressive culture. For while its potential applicability may escape such racial constraints, my sense of the reality check foregrounds the unique interrelationship of performance and reality within African American history and culture. Discussing the work of playwright August Wilson, Alan Nadel suggests “reality is authorized for black Americans by performance.”<sup>1</sup> Further, as I discuss in more depth elsewhere, the history of African American performance is always already implicated in the history of African American social, cultural, and political struggles for freedom.<sup>2</sup> The particular collisions of the real and the figurative have proved consequential for African

Americans, and the meanings of blackness have depended on conscious negotiations with representational economies. During slavery and its aftermath blackface minstrel images of happy darkies reinforced stereotypes of black inferiority in the white imaginary against which blacks repeatedly needed to struggle. Intense ideological battles over how to represent the “New Negro” and how to define the “criteria of Negro Art” figured prominently in the work of African American scholars and artists of the 1920s. One could argue that the entire cultural energy of the Harlem Renaissance, in fact, attempted to refocus the politics of representation toward reimagining the meanings of blackness. In the 1960s, the introduction of the slogan “Black is beautiful” similarly sought to invert negative associations of blackness in fields of representation. More recently, the hip-hop adage of “keeping it real,” even as it connotes remaining true to one’s roots within the black urban community, equally reflects or embodies a politics of representation.

Within this politics of representation, realness and “authentic” blackness depend on outward displays, dress, style, and attitude. Paul Gilroy in “to be real . . .” famously argues, “Now it is the clothed rather than the unclothed body that supplies the visual signatures of the authentic black self. . . . To be inauthentic is sometimes the best way to be real.”<sup>3</sup> Realness reifies the power of the visible, the marked and recontextualized meanings: for example, wearing Tommy Hilfiger jeans or Ralph Polo shirts—seemingly apparel of the white mainstream—can constitute black street realness. Unmasking realness as representation does not undo its power but rather compels a different model for understanding the relation of the real to representation. Gold teeth might function as a performative display, a sign of authenticity or realness for black rappers, from the South particularly, that mark their relationship to their southern ‘hood. The *Wall Street Journal* cynically notes that the chief profiteer from this realness, the dentist of choice that installs these teeth, the “Rapper Dentist Daddy,” is a white Roman Catholic, Ronald Cunning of Montclair, California, who has worked on the teeth of such rappers as C-Murder and Master P.<sup>4</sup> The *Wall Street Journal*, however, misses the point. The fact that this white dentist makes money on this symbol of black rapper realness does not negate the impact or cultural capital of the representation. In fact the symbol of gold teeth becomes unmoored from its association with white dentistry by its placement and significance on, or this case in, the black body. It constitutes a real even as it refers to it. Accordingly, political or cultural efficacy is not indexed to an ur-real but to a real negotiated through representation.

Reality checks inform these processes, as they can change the negotiations, with resulting political and social consequences. Context is critical for such reality checks, as the spectators’ unease comes from experiencing the grotesque, the unfamiliar in familiar circumstances. In the case of Emmett Till, the occasion was a funeral, a time for mourning and remembering. While portraits of the deceased in happier times are common to such services, Ms. Mobley disrupted the conventional funeral obser-



vance and memorializing through public display of the dismembered body and its brutalized face, devoid of features. Consequently, the viewing audience could not avoid or ignore the dissonance between the reality of the faceless body and the image of a serene, boyish, bodiless face. The anonymity of the inhumanly distorted visage contrasted sharply with the school photo of a boy who belongs to somebody, to his mother. Such school photos speak to happier days. They present the child as a face; the photo cut off just below the shoulders, without any materiality, without any hint of sexuality. Till's schoolboy portrait in its serenity screams out, counterposed to the violence that is now written on his body. It is the body, on the other hand, the black flesh, the anonymous black flesh, that his white attackers and other white people imagine and portray as dangerous, as threatening, as sexualized, as the embodiment of a generalized deviant, black masculinity. Yet the face in the photo in its revelation of personality, identity, and not sexuality puts the lie to and checks white racist representations. The body and the portrait negotiate an unseen representation for the audience, most clearly articulated in the legal defense of his white attackers: the reports, some documented, some unsaid, about Emmett Till not being a naive fourteen-year-old boy, but a sexual predator, the stereotypical black rapist, or soon to be one. The reality check of his image—the sweet school picture—speaks for the mouthless face wordlessly countering the false representations of him being circulated by the men who killed him so brutally.<sup>5</sup>

Through this reality check, Emmett Till becomes a representation that is racially galvanizing. Not merely aestheticized or politically cynically or maudlin, it is rather an image that marshals the energies behind the movements of representation. Such moments of reality check call not for individual empathy and mourning but communal understanding and action. Reality checks, as such, reconstitute the spectators as a collective; they potentially racialize and colorize the black audience members in collective blackness. Ghosted by past histories of lynchings, beatings, and murders of black boys, the black audiences experience the reality of the injustices reaped upon Emmett Till, who now stares the spectators in the face. He checks their reality, dredging up racial narratives and stirring up unrest. Reality checks call black and white spectators, in different ways, to account, to “check” themselves and their attitudes.

Such checks and their potential social and cultural efficacy, their provocative collisions between the real and the representational, emerge only in the period Walter Benjamin refers to as “the age of mechanical reproduction.” The advent of film and other representational technologies not only introduced the ability to rapidly create, transmit, and disseminate representations but also caused, Benjamin notes, “the most profound change in their impact on the public.”<sup>6</sup> Benjamin argues that mechanical reproduction, the lithograph, the photograph, irrevocably altered the relationship between a work of art, its audience, and its authenticity. Authenticity in this case signals “the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to

the history which it has experienced.”<sup>7</sup> The rapid reproducibility of the photograph, therefore, does not allow for the authenticity of the singular image or the authority of the object. It does, however enable a new type of efficacy—not a nostalgia for the past but in its dissemination a new social force to rapidly reach so many individuals. In the case of Emmett Till, *Jet* magazine photographed his open casket at the funeral and distributed hundreds of thousands of these images across the country. Certainly, the horror of this image had a profound effect on *Jet’s* readership and even its sales. Yet, the outrage, voyeurism, empathy generated by the grotesque photograph alone do not constitute a reality check—it does not produce a collision between the real and representational. Nor can this picture, because it was so often reproduced, conform to Benjamin’s notion of “authenticity.” Still the iterability does allow for the representation to be serviceable. While it is not, in Benjamin’s terms, authentic, it does have a social utility. The juxtaposition of the other photograph, the smiling high school boy Emmett next to the open casket creates a different dynamic as it reauthorizes that photograph, recontextualizes its meaning and the authenticity of that performative moment. For Benjamin, the loss of authenticity in the age of mechanical reproduction resulted in the dissociation of art from its social utility and “its original use value.” Thus the age of mechanical reproduction introduced the notion of art for art’s sake. Yet, within the domain of the reality check, the representation becomes reinvested with social utility. That photograph of Emmett Till no longer was just a photograph. Put in dialogue with the open casket, it produced social unrest and political action as the NAACP and other voices demanded justice.

### *Rodney King as Reality* ✓

The videotaped beating of Rodney King by members of the Los Angeles Police Department on March 3, 1991, perhaps even more graphically demonstrates the potential of reality checks to generate and reinvigorate the social efficacy of representation. The King video, shot by George Holliday outside of his house, dramatized the accessibility of home video technology and changed the potentialities of television news dissemination; no longer would the production of news be solely in the hands of the media establishment. To be sure, the abuse of other black men at the hands of police officers along America’s highways and byways, the dangers of Driving While Black, certainly haunted the filmed attack on Rodney King. However, the Holliday video provided a novel form of evidence of such police actions, providing seemingly irrefutable proof of the violation of a citizen’s civil rights. The familiar venue of the evening news now became the arena for the assertion of this horrific display, the eighty-one seconds of baton blasts and kicks caught on film by Holliday. Shown repeatedly on the evening news, the raw video footage functioned as a reality check testifying to and validating the actual experiences of other black men victimized by the police. The beating as televised performance

rubbed the real and the representational in ways that generated outrage and spawned racialized and politicized actions.

Through the televised mediatization and dissemination, the beating gained a new potency and charge. Benjamin argues that the “aura” of a work of art “withers in the age of mechanical reproduction.”<sup>8</sup> According to Benjamin the aura—the sense of uniqueness, significance, or distance contained in a work of art, no matter how proximate the work may be—is lost in the mechanical age because of the easy reproduction of the image. As attested to by the social authority of the King video, the realm of reality checks offers an important amendment to Benjamin’s theory. The King video in its early presentation had something akin to “aura,” conveying a singular, compelling presence, despite the fact that it was disseminated across the country and the world. As Houston A. Baker notes, “The eighty-one second video tape captured in lurid, shaking, chiaroscuro the ‘scene of violence.’ And the tape’s circulation made the president of the United States himself declare that it sickened him.”<sup>9</sup> The video has become art, a tableau, a chiaroscuro in its light and shade, black and white. But, as the quote suggests, the president was compelled to comment on the video not because it was artistic but because it was so widely circulated. It is not its “aura” but the fact of its replication that sickens him. Yet I must caution that the repeated reiteration and overexposure of the video also had the potential to deaden its impact and the sensitivities of the audience as “teleabolitionists networks played the video for us night and day.”<sup>10</sup> In a segment of Anna Deavere Smith’s film *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992* entitled “AA Meeting,” Juror #7 Maria, a juror in the second trial, the civil rights trial of the four officers charged in the Rodney King beating, recalls her experience of watching the Holliday video during the trial.

The thing is we lost our humane [humanity] in there. Because we saw the tape over and over again, Rodney King became like a doll—like a little doll. You know even me. I lost my humane [humanity] in there. You know, at first like I told you, you know the first time I watched it, I was crying and everything. But by the end I could just, you know . . . pfft . . . watch it with a soda.<sup>11</sup>

Juror #7’s remarks reveal both the initial social authority of the video and how in its repetition the aura and, for that matter, the reality check withered away.

With its originary social and moral power, the videotaped beating of Rodney King as reality check compelled subsequent performances that acted to address or redress the represented social wrong. Smith’s film *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*, adapted from her performance piece commissioned by the Mark Taper Forum after the Los Angeles riots, as well as the two trials and the riots themselves, all constitute performative responses to this reality check. Responding to the outcries for justice, the first trial, the criminal case against the four police officers became a performance before

a national audience. As the performance scene moved to Simi Valley, because of all the publicity surrounding the case in Los Angeles, and the not-guilty verdict was returned, another racial narrative haunting the video emerged; the powerful, pejorative stereotype of black criminality and Rodney King as dangerous black predator. This derogatory imagery of black masculinity as social threat, used effectively in the George H. W. Bush re-election campaign's Willie Horton advertisements, now found utility in the defense strategies to portray King not as victim but as victimizer, a deviant felon under the influence of drugs. This racialized defense enabled the white jurors to perceive the force employed by the police officers to subdue King as necessary rather than excessive. The subsequent riots, or uprisings, became another social performance enacted in response to the outrage at the not-guilty verdict. Ghosted by the histories of racial conflagrations, including the Watts Riots in Los Angeles 1966, the riots in Los Angeles 1992 displayed again on video before a national audience the seething racial tensions, the anger and frustration of so many caught within cycles of poverty and discrimination. So like Till, King became the face, the catalyst for outrage.

While the uprisings, lootings, and burnings that followed the Simi Valley verdict graphically revealed the unrest of L.A.'s black urban poor, they also testified to the potential for reality checks to elicit problematic performative responses. Perhaps in reaction to black customers' sense of repeated mistreatment, perhaps as retaliation for the recent killing of a young black girl, Latasha Harlins, by a Korean shop owner in Los Angeles, black rioters with focused vehemence destroyed Korean American owned stores in South Central. These acts at times constituted "misplaced aggression," for as Jerry G. Watts points out, "Korean-Americans do not numerically dominate the Los Angeles police force nor do they constitute the power elite of the city."<sup>12</sup> Critics such as Watts have argued that while the riots in their destructive force engendered feelings of empowerment or even racial solidarity, their impact was ephemeral, as these moments of nihilistic revolt did not constitute a well-organized or sustainable politics of black liberation.<sup>13</sup> Yet this sociological view fails to recognize how these performative responses to this reality check reified race as political and social reality. The riots—untheorized acting out against Korean American shop owners as localized symbols of capitalistic hegemony and racism—voiced black difference and constructed separate and unequal performances of race on and through this angry and violent difference. The Korean Americans constituted an oppressed minority group that was not helped by the white police—the police did not stop the black rioters from burning down their stores—and were generally outside the systems of media representation on television and films. And yet the hierarchies of oppression still placed them in a position superior to black people. Comedian Richard Pryor joked that the first word of English that immigrants learn to say on coming to America is "Nigger."<sup>14</sup> Accordingly, due to their relative prosperity and their social proximity, much like that of Jewish merchants to black rioters in the 1960s, the Korean Americans became a

symbol of oppression and a visible object of black unrest and protest. Mrs. Young-Soon Han, a Korean American and former owner of a liquor store, in "Swallowing the Bitterness," the penultimate piece in *Twilight: Los Angeles*, sorrowfully concludes, "I wish I could live together with eh [sic] Blacks, but after the riots there were too much differences." What she fails to recognize in her powerful declaration of injustice and racial difference is how Koreans participate in and are complicit with the systems of oppression that place African Americans on the bottom of the social ladder.

The verdict also had the effect of producing unsettled and unsettling performances of whiteness as well as blackness or "Koreanness." The white Anonymous Man in *Twilight: Los Angeles*, a juror in the Simi Valley trial, reports:

We've been portrayed as white racists. One of the most disturbing things, and a lot of the jurors said that the thing that bothered them that they received in the mail more than anything else, more than the threats, was a letter from the KKK saying "We support you, and if you need our help, if you want to join our organization, we'd welcome you into our fold."<sup>15</sup>

Contradicting the notion of former police chief Daryl Gates and other whites who repeatedly claimed that the beating had nothing to do with race, the Ku Klux Klan recognized the verdict as a racial declaration. The potential to read the verdict along strict lines of racial allegiance, to affirm both white supremacy and black nationalism, testifies to the ways in which racial politics both informed and were informed by the performance of this verdict that was supposedly a performance of justice. Moreover, it demonstrates that performances that emanate from reality checks can be both reactive and reactionary, their agenda potentially inchoate but also always racialized.

As reality checks induce a series of performances, they also produce new audiences and audiences within audiences. They function in dichotomous, symbiotic inversions of witnessing and participation, impotence and action. Present in the Holliday video, ringing the body of Rodney King, is a line of police officers who do not stop the beating but watch as others baton and kick him. Equally, Holliday himself and his camera bear witness to the assault. His video camera becomes an active participatory reaction, documenting for those not present what transpired. For those viewing the video first on the evening news, the brutality of the performance event and its distance or separation from these viewers both in time and as representation caused not only a feeling of unease but momentary powerlessness, the uneasy experience of feeling the inability to strike back or stop the beating. The funeral of Emmett Till caused a similar discomfort and temporary inadequacy for the spectators.

The question is, how does this moment of insufficiency as a viewing audience translate into active participatory performances in the aftermath

of the reality check? What I want to suggest is that witnessing becomes a dynamic and participatory process. Here in this theory of witnessing, I do not reference the psychological trauma of bearing witness associated with Holocaust survivors and slave narratives,<sup>16</sup> but rather the sociological concept of an “engaged witness.” Joshua Miller writing in “The Discovery of What It Means to Be a Witness: James Baldwin’s Dialectics of Difference,” notes that an “engaged witness scorns detachment in favor of the vision of proximity and intimacy—even when such intimacy requires an ocean between the viewer and his subject.”<sup>17</sup> Intimacy with the King video meant moving beyond the ocean of passivity that usually defines television viewership to become not simply a witness of, but a *witness for*, King. The unease such witnesses feel is palpable. From the vantage point of such an engaged witness, the events have an intimate and inescapable effect. Such active witnessing then produces a variety of interpretative responses. In the case of both Emmett Till and Rodney King mass protests followed, as well as trials for the offenders.

The beating of white truck driver Reginald Denny by two black men that occurred during the Los Angeles riots provides a compelling riff on this formula of audience inaction and action. The violent attack on Denny, who was yanked from his truck at the intersection of Florence and Normandie streets, the zone noted as the flashpoint for the riots as the streets of Los Angeles exploded in chaotic looting, vandalism, and racial attack. The beating was caught live on video from an overhead KCOP television news helicopter. The television reporter high in the sky, physically distanced from the event but also separated by news coverage codes of non-involvement, voiced his dismay not only at the beating but also at the other witnesses who watched close by and did not respond. Yet four African Americans, who actually saw the beating live on television, determined to act and came to Denny’s defense. Their engaged witnessing translated into action as they cradled Denny in their arms, put him in their car, and hurried him to the hospital. Denny in a segment of *Twilight*, relates, “There was a weird common thread in our lives that’s an extraordinary event, and here is four people—the ones in the helicopter—and they just stuck with it, and then you got four people who seen it on TV and said enough’s enough and came to my rescue” (108). Dissatisfied with the unease of impotence, these people felt compelled to respond. Yet even this response was racialized, as the actions of these African American “good Samaritans” stood in contrast to the “black barbarians” who beat Denny. Moreover Denny’s white body as innocent victim was held up in contrast to deviant black body of King, who was driving his Hyundai at excessive speeds under the influence of the drug PCP. Paul Parker, the chairperson of the “Free the LA Four Plus Defense Committee,” the organization that grew up around the four young men arrested for Denny’s beating, exclaims to Anna Deavere Smith, “Oh, Reginald Denny, this innocent white man. But you didn’t hear nothin’ about all these other victims until the day of the trial came” (*Twilight*, 173). Denny’s beating, his white victimage, for conservative pundits became a way of

countering the injustice suffered by King and of submerging the greater social and political significance of the explosions in the streets of Los Angeles under the heading of black criminality. In responding to Denny, his black saviors refute the racial stereotypes, the news accounts and depictions of black rioters as depraved and out of control. For them the Denny beating on live television constituted another reality check that rubbed the real of his attack against the representation of black savage indifference to it. The discomfort in the witnessing of this image demanded action.

Anna Deavere Smith's performance piece *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*, I would argue, is indirectly built on the principle of reality checks. From the opening montage, Smith informs us that the words she uses are those of the actual figures that she portrays. Consequently, she juxtaposes the real of their speech with the stage representation of these figures in a way that exposes a productive tension, an excess between the expression of character and the real of their words.<sup>18</sup> Her performance is haunted by the actual incident of Rodney King and the spectators' knowledge of the functioning of the real figures such as Reginald Denny, Maxine Waters, and Daryl Gates. In her performance, Smith engages character through language, reiterating verbatim their speech habits, replete with "ahs" "umms," and colloquialisms. Inverting psychological approaches to acting, Smith works from the outside in; rather than beginning with inner objectives and psychological urges, she starts with language. Smith writes, "Words are not an end in themselves. They are means to evoke the character of the person who spoke them."<sup>19</sup> Certainly in repeating typological features such as speech patterns, Smith runs the risk of stereotyping her figures, of creating caricatures. Yet her approach is never mimetic, not an act of mimicry but always based on the juxtaposition of the real and representation, always negotiating the gap between the actual figure and her stage constructions. Smith relates to anthropologist Dorinne Kondo,

I don't believe that when I play someone in my work, that I "am" the character. I want the audience to experience the gap. Because I know they experience the gap, they will appreciate my reach for the other. This reach is what moves them, not a mush of me and the other, not a presumption that I can play everything and everybody, but more a desire to reach for something that is clearly not me.<sup>20</sup>

Through a series of juxtapositions, Smith's reality check riffs in *Twilight* defamiliarize the familiar. Smith reveals aspects of the grotesque that surround and inform the beating of King and the civil disturbances that ensued after the Simi Valley trial: Daryl Gates justifies his decision to go to a fund-raiser as the unrest first broke out; a white real estate agent, Elaine Young, discusses being holed up at the Beverly Hills Hotel during the riots; a Korean American medical student, Chris Oh, describes his stepfather being shot; Rodney King's aunt guardedly discloses her reaction to the verdict. With humor, irony, and pathos Smith explores and exposes these scabs, these ugly layers of the events and conflicts in ways

that do not bring closure but express the profound impact of a wound that is still open, still festering. In the film version of *Twilight*, Smith disrupts her narrative with video clips from the riots, from the trial, from the beatings of Rodney King and Reginald Denny. For example, prior to her performing of Juror #7's reaction to the King video, Smith's film shows the actual videotaped beating. Within this context the video has the potential to regain its symbolic authority, lost in continued iterations. Moreover, it and the other video representations of historic events become part of the filmic representation; the ghosts of the past become present, "checking" the words and memories of the characters and the spectators. Their interpolation and recontextualization offers spectators the opportunity not simply for remembering and reviewing but for critical dissonance and renegotiation of new meanings.

In her polyvocal performance, Smith puts into conversation diverse voices and perspectives that would not ordinarily be in dialogue. *Twilight* ends with the juxtaposition of the Mrs. Young-Soon Han questioning the possibility of ever bridging the tension between blacks and Koreans—"the fire is still there," she says—and Twilight Bey, the young black organizer of the gang truce who calls for moving beyond the present liminality, racial prejudices, and balkanization into a new social order and communication. "I can't forever dwell in the darkness. I can't forever dwell in the idea, of just identifying with people like me and understanding me and mine" (*Twilight*, 255). The disjunctive conjunction of these two figures, as well as the other opposed voices and opinions in the piece, places the job of synthesis within the domain of the audience.

Through the portrait of Twilight and the other figures, Smith's performance augurs the chance for the audience to "reach across ethnic boundaries,"<sup>21</sup> to embrace a more humanistic vision of America that enables racial difference. She imagines the work as "a call for community."<sup>22</sup> Such is the nature of her self-proclaimed "Search for American Character": Through troubling American diversity, she seeks to discover a collective American sensibility. What then, in Smith's *Twilight* performance of the potential that I discussed earlier, for reality checks to racialize audiences, to construct a particular code of blackness? *Twilight* testifies that racializing does not necessarily mean essentializing, that the spectatorial response to reality checks is not simply a one-dimensional black moment. Rather, reality checks can elicit racialized responses but also can facilitate the audience's reconsideration of identity politics and racial stratifications. Smith's construction of diverse racial and gendered perspectives on and through her own black body testifies to the problematic nature of racial categorization even as the performance affirms the historical significance of race and its contextualized meanings.

### ***Checking Bamboozled***

Not simply homogenizing but problematizing race and blackness, reality checks provoke an increased awareness of race as lived experience and as



a critical social, political and historical construct. Spectators must position themselves accordingly. *Bamboozled* (2000), Spike Lee's subversive satire, on the media's commodification and exploitation of blackness, climaxes in a violent disruptive sequence, a disturbing reality check that critiques racial posturing as it testifies to the interconnections of race, reality, and representation. A fictitious black militant rap group, the Mau Maus, kidnap Mantan (Savion Glover), the tap-dancing, blackfaced star of the *New Millennium Minstrel Show*, and murder him during a live broadcast across the Internet and worldwide television—a public execution, a heightened escalation of “reality television.” His actual killing is rubbed against the representation of his dancing before a televised audience. The grotesque is interpolated into the familiar. Like conventional programming, the Mau Maus schedule the “Dance of Death” for broadcast at 10 P.M. Eastern time. Prior to his murder, the Mau Maus compel Mantan to literally dance for his life, firing their weapons at his feet, in a final exhilarating display. The dance is wrought effect, a tense performance with powerful consequences, a requiem for the doomed Mantan and his career as a new millennium minstrel. As his skillful feet furiously bang out a furtive, futile, pleading rhythm, the Mau Maus encircle him, spraying out gunfire, as a virtual audience worldwide watches anxiously. The Mau Maus mean to punish Mantan for crimes against blackness. They believe that his black-face television performances degrade black people. So they now force him to perform in order to demean him. They seek to reduce him to representation, to hold his dance up to the viewing audience as a dangerous racial farce. They force him to dance without makeup in a performance that is as painful for him to perform as it is for an audience to witness. This reality check calls into question the tension between Mantan's art and his artifice as his minstrel shuffling has actual effects and real-life consequences. Yet the audience does not like this grotesque “dance of death,” it is a performance of blackness heavily layered, a reality check that purposefully elicits complex and contradictory racialized responses.

In their desire to censure minstrelsy through the murder of Mantan, the Mau Maus raise a question that is reiterated in *Bamboozled*: Who has the right to perform blackness and to determine how it is performed? Named for the legendary Kenyan Mau Mau that led a dramatic rebellion in 1952 against British colonialism, these contemporary Mau Maus seem totally removed from that history and any awareness of its meanings in relationship to their own self-serving enactment of black-on-black violence. The Mau Maus distort that history in their destructive act, their public execution of Mantan as purported revolution. Fantasizing the event prior to its enactment, Big Black likens the murder of Mantan to an earlier expressive act of black protest, a significant reality broadcast around the world: “This shit has to have some fucking symbolism to it, some sustenance. This shit gotta be like John Carlos and Tommy Smith at the '68 Olympics, you know what I'm sayin'! Some big shit!” Carlos and Smith on the Olympic medal stand in Mexico City, with black gloved fists held high and heads bowed as the American national anthem played, reflected on the growing black unrest

at home and put the lie to America's homogenizing propaganda as "the home of the free and land of the brave." The Mau Maus' violence, however, does not recapture Carlos and Smith's revolutionary spirit but misconstrues and warps it.

In their willingness to take another black life, in their embrace of a new black cultural nationalism, in their embodiment of a representational urban black "realness" throughout the film, the Mau Maus lack of any "real" revolutionary agenda—"What are you rebelling against?" Sloan (Jada Pinkett) asks Big Black (Mos Def), her brother and the leader of the group. These new ministers of culture, these prophets of rap, the Mau Maus have taken on afrocentric names that in their excess satirize the processes of rap naming, the history of Black Muslim naming as well as the rhetoric of afrocentricity—Big Black, Smooth Black, Mo Black, Double Black. Like so much of gangsta rap, the Mau Maus attack conventional capital and consumption even as they affirm the primacy of production and consumption. While the Mau Maus believe that Mantan must be killed, they still envy his fame as a star on television with a billboard on Times Square. They have even auditioned for the *New Millennium Minstrel Show* themselves. The Mau Maus berate Mantan as a "handkerchief head Uncle Tom nigger," but the film shows them creatively swathed in a variety of head scarves and wraps. As Michael Rogin points out, the Mau Maus "condemn minstrelsy even as they embody its stereotypes."<sup>23</sup> They exhibit a vacuous activism, oppositionality gone awry. Just as the black rioters who destroyed Korean-owned stores in Los Angeles vented a misplaced frustration that did not displace white hegemony and authority, the Mau Maus misdirect their racial fervor onto Mantan as the symbol of black degradation rather than the white producer (Michael Rappaport) or the white-owned corporate structures that control the politics of his representation. Orlando Patterson in *Rituals of Blood* theorizes that lynching in all its inhumanity, constituted an act of ritualized blood sacrifice, a rite of segregation that served to redress the crisis of postslavery transition and uncertainty for white America.<sup>24</sup> By figuratively and actually removing the threatening "black beast," these acts affirmed the baseness of blackness and valorized the privileges and sanctity of whiteness. The perverse and perverted blood sacrifice of Mantan by black hands ritualistically removes the offending Uncle Tom but does not reify a new power of blackness; rather like blacking up or Mantan's final dance, it is disturbingly painful to watch. The murder of Mantan does not change or rebel against the material system of oppression but sadly and painfully affirms the power of representation and ultimate power of the dominant hegemony. Consequently, the reality check of this grotesque dance of death puts the lie to the Mau Maus' empty black nationalist posturing. It asks the spectators to question the Mau Maus' racial and representational politics.

The poignant ironies of Mantan's current struggle for survival inform this reality check. As the Mau Maus hold Mantan prisoner, Spike Lee cuts back to a scene from the *New Millennium Minstrel Show* where a white sheriff puppet fires his shotgun at the feet of a blackface minstrel puppet

likeness of Mantan, including his dreadlocks. The smiling minstrel puppet dances gaily as upbeat music plays. The real "Dance of Death" that follows repeats and revises this conjunction of violence and entertainment, of pleasure and pain. The next moment reveals Mantan dancing furiously as the Mau Maus, adorned with blackface masks to hide their identity, shoot at his feet. The sound and sparks of gunfire, the urgent beat of his feet now are the only soundtrack. The tradition and memories of minstrelsy, the repeated commodification of black cultural expression in America, the legacy of the black body as the site for perverse, voyeuristic desire, haunts this scene and checks the spectators. As in the televised trials of O. J. Simpson, the daily hearings on Clarence Thomas and Anita Hill, the black body becomes the renewable source of public spectacle and entertainment.

As with the case of Rodney King, video technology becomes a powerful authority and signifier in this reality check, raising interest and outrage as an audience within an audience watches, impotent to act. Certainly this scene is informed by earlier usages of video representations of the racial real such as the Holliday video.<sup>25</sup> It also repeats and revises the genre of reality television. Within reality television the audience peers in as Peeping Toms as others embarrass themselves or push the edges of decency or the bounds of human life and will. Yet, within this moment from *Bamboozled*, we as film audience not only have the experience of watching this representation but also of how this violent, "real" programming impacts on another viewing audience. Spike Lee cuts from the murder dance scene to the reactions of Delacroix, the black middle-class television executive who first hired Mantan and created the *New Millennium Minstrel Show*, and to his assistant Sloan, the love interest of Mantan and sister of Mau Mau leader Big Black, as they become "engaged witnesses" to these events. By showing the audience within to us as audience without, the scene operates as a reality check within a reality check. For Delacroix and Sloan must check their own complicity in the commercial trafficking of blackness and the exploitation of Mantan that results in this public ritual of blood sacrifice. The camera jump-cuts back and forth from these spectators to the dance of death, filmically highlighting the dialectic between intimacy and distance. This sequencing reveals Delacroix and Sloan as active witnesses; each of them painfully watches and roots for Mantan to somehow dance for his life and freedom; each prepares an interpretative response. With the death of Mantan, Delacroix, now himself in blackface, symbolically destroys all the "Negro memorabilia" that he had been collecting and had been proliferating in his office, haunting him with their smiling faces. The imperative of participatory spectatorship makes Sloan a *witness for* Mantan. She is all the more conflicted because her brother, Big Black, is his chief executioner. Driven to performative action in response to this reality check, Sloan takes a gun and threatens, then accidentally kills, her former boss, Delacroix.

*Bamboozled* resolves in a series of performative responses to the climactic reality check that is the murder of Mantan. As the self-satisfied

Mau Maus exit the site of the execution, all but one are gunned down in a hail of bullets, another excessive display of brutality toward people of color by Mayor Giuliani—prior to his September 11, 2001, redemption as a national hero—and New York's finest, who, of course, arrive at the scene too late to save Mantan. This disproportionate police response—itsself a repetition and revision of the Rodney King beating, the police “accidental” murder of Amado Diallo, cut down in hail of forty-one bullets, the violation and torture of Abner Louima—serves as a perverse performance of whiteness. It evidences the power of whiteness—under the guise of justice, protecting law and order—to subdue the offending black hordes. On the morning of December 4, 1964, the Chicago police attacked the apartment of the Black Panther Party and with a hail of unprecedented and unreturned gunfire killed leader Fred Hampton and one other Panther, while wounding four others. The police action quelled the threat raised by Hampton and the militant Chicago Black Panther chapter. The police assault in *Bamboozled* remembers but also pollutes this memory, as the would-be revolutionary Mau Maus, misguided in their symbolic violence in defense of blackness, now in their death ironically might become mistaken black martyrs.

For the only Mau Mau alive, this massacre serves as a reality check that racializes him and confirms for him, as well as for the film's audience, the profound power of visuality in determining race. The one Mau Mau not killed appears to be white, despite his dress and his verbal dexterity with black urban vernacular. This white Mau Mau proclaims his blackness as the police handcuff him and hustle him unharmed from the scene. He shouts, “I'm black: one-sixteenth, one drop of black blood is all that's required. Why didn't you kill me?”<sup>26</sup> His rap name with the Mau Maus is in fact “One-sixteenth Black,” so his call out to the police at once recites his name, outing his unmarked racial history, and calls for their recognition of his identity. His invocation of the one-drop rule takes us back to an earlier time of identity politics, of racial performances and a history of passing. Yet his declaration of blackness must be seen within a different representational context and history in which the politics of visibility, the fact that he looks white, holds real meaning for the charging police. The police attack forces One-sixteenth Black to become an engaged witness to the annihilation of his fellow Mau Maus in an assault that serves as a traumatic reality check for him. He suffers the pains of impotency as others around him fall victim to the violence. The dialect of intimacy and distance plays out as, despite his desire for closeness with his slain compatriots, the police move him away. They racialize him through their actions as white, but One-sixteenth Black in this violent reality check attempts to perform blackness all the more.

One-sixteenth Black's declaration of blackness interrogates the relationship of the racial real and the representational. While the viewing audience may experience a dissonance when it first sees One-sixteenth Black with the other Mau Maus, no mention is ever made of his physical difference; he is accepted as one of them. In fact, he voices a virulent afrocen-

trism and speaks with and to them against the ways in which white hegemonic culture has distorted the meanings of blackness. One-sixteenth Black raps to the call and response of his fellow Mau Maus,

B-L-A-K. BLAK. The darkest of all colors, the opposite of white. Know what I'm sayin', like a member of an African people. But check it out, here's where the grey people try to trick us with their slickery and slick us with their trickery. Peep the connotations of that. GLOOMY. DEPRESSING. EVIL. WICKED. ANGRY. SULLEN. . . . BLAK OUT. BLAK LISTED. BLAK BALL. Black hat is bad luck. Bad guys wear black. Must've been a white guy who started all that.

His performance, his use of the derogative vernacular designation of whites as "grey people," distances him from whiteness. He fights the appearance of whiteness through gestures, language, vernacular codes, and even clothing associated with urban blackness. One-sixteenth Black has "kept it real" in his devotion to the Mau Maus, to the streets and to the Mau Maus' version of hip-hop black cultural nationalism. The real reflects ironically on the representational, as DJ Surge, a white rapper from the all-white early 1980s rap group 3rd Base portrays this character. The group 3rd Base preceded a wave of commercially successful white rappers such as Eminem in troubling the racialization of rap music, and whether others can legitimately perform music that arose from the black urban environs and whose "realness" in performance depends on one's representational proximity to that 'hood. With the globalization of rap and its spread into what George Clinton refers to as "the vanilla suburbs," how rap is a performance of blackness or who has the right to perform rap realness are and have been highly contested questions. In *Bamboozled*, One-sixteenth Black believes that his biology, his status as one-sixteenth black, enables him to perform blackness. Yet his reckoning comes in the moment of danger, when the police do not shoot him. Within this critical context, his black blood is read as performance, while his visible whiteness is read as real. For it is the governing factor that excludes him from the ultimate performance of blackness: being killed by the exemplars of white power. As he cries out to join his black brethren, he recognizes that his final test of authenticity is to die: he actually weeps because he is not martyred. One-sixteenth Black's visible representation in the eyes of the police, however, does not support his desire for, and claim of, black realness. A new awareness of race, realness, and performance arrives for him courtesy of this reality check.

Through this reality check the film suggests that in the lived world "blackness" is often simply how one looks; it's straightforwardly physical, not theoretical or "constructed"; its meanings are contextual and not negotiable at the moment the cops decide whom to shoot. In that moment, the question of "who is really black" is not a question of semantics at all. Blackness is not negotiable in all places at all times. It is a moment of crisis, a threat of actual death and punishment that rubs the real against the

representational in profound ways. Engaged witnesses come to understand that the “Fact of Blackness,” as Frantz Fanon calls it, can kill you.<sup>27</sup> Junebug (Paul Mooney), Delacroix’s father and a black comic, muses during his routine in *Bamboozled*, “Everybody wanna be black but no body wanna be black. It confuses me. They all act black, sound black. I hope they start hanging niggers again so we’ll find out who’s black.”

At times, as in *Bamboozled*, the performative responses of *witnesses for* are not positive. In part this is because the performative rejoinders elicited by reality checks are not necessarily politically organized and premeditated; but rather reality checks evoke emotive, inchoate political expressions that may in time evolve into a more coherent politics. They have the potential for positive political action. It is not accidental that reality checks do not necessarily produce an organized politics. They are in fact outside the usual political machinery precisely because of frustrations with traditional politicking and politicians. Thus, reality checks challenge conventional political means, constituting what Leontyne Price in the film of *Twilight* calls the “angry howl.” Invoking emotional, enraged, and even violent social responses and cultural performances, reality checks attest to the power of race, that the social constructions and reconstructions of blackness in the United States have real life-and-death costs and consequences. Foregrounding the interlocking, mutually constitutive relationship between the real and the representational, reality checks both gesture toward and help constitute a map of social reality that demands our cultural and racial responses.

## NOTES

My thanks to Michele B. Elam for her criticism and insight; our many conversations on reality checks have greatly informed this article.

1. Alan Nadel, “Boundaries, Logistics, and Identity,” in *May All Your Fences Have Gates*, ed. Alan Nadel (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1994), 103.

2. See Harry J. Elam, Jr., *The Past as Present in the Drama of August Wilson* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), introduction.

3. Paul Gilroy, “to be real. . .,” in *Let’s Get It On: The Politics of Black Performance*, ed. Catherine Ugwu (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts; Seattle: Bay Press, 1995), 29.

4. Lisa Bannon, “Word of Mouth Helps ‘Rapper Dentist Daddy’ Corner the Flashy Market,” *Wall Street Journal*, July 19, 2001, 1.

5. Many thanks to Michele Elam for this observation.

6. Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, trans. Harry Zohn, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken, 1968), 219.

7. Benjamin, “Work of Art,” 221.

8. Benjamin, “Work of Art,” 221.

9. Houston A. Baker, “Scene . . . Not Heard,” in *Reading Rodney King: Reading Urban Uprising*, ed. Robert Gooding-Williams (New York: Routledge, 1993), 42–43.

10. Baker, “Scene . . . Not Heard,” 43.

11. Anna Deavere Smith, *Twilight: Los Angeles*, dir. Mark Levin (PBS Pictures,

2001). Subsequent citations in the text that do not include a page number are to this filmed version.

12. Jerry G. Watts, "Reflections on the Rodney King Verdict and the Paradoxes of the Black Response," in Gooding-Williams, *Reading Rodney King*, 245.

13. Watts, "Reflections," 246.

14. Richard Pryor, *Is It Something I Said?* Track 3. Prod. David Banks (Los Angeles: Warner Brothers Records, 1975).

15. Anna Deavere Smith, *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992* (New York: Anchor, 1994),

73. Subsequent citations in the text that include a page number are to this volume.

16. For a discussion of such trauma see Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Tesimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

17. Joshua Miller, "The Discovery of What It Means to Be a Witness: James Baldwin's Dialectics of Difference," in *James Baldwin Now*, ed. Dwight McBride (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 337.

18. The 1992 Pulitzer Prize committee removed Smith's *Twilight* from consideration for the prize in playwriting because the jurors determined that since Smith did not actually write the words to the play, it did not meet the criteria for the competition.

19. Smith, introduction to *Twilight: Los Angeles*, xxiv.

20. Dorinne Kondo, "(Re)Visions of Race: Contemporary Race Theory and the Cultural Politics of Racial Crossover in Documentary Theatre," *Theatre Journal* 52 (2000): 96.

21. Smith, introduction to *Twilight: Los Angeles*, xxvi.

22. Smith, introduction to *Twilight: Los Angeles*, xxiv.

23. Michael Rogin, "Nowhere Left to Stand: The Burnt Cork Roots of Popular Culture," *Cineaste* 26, no. 2 (2001): 15.

24. Orlando Patterson, *Rituals of Blood: Consequences of Slavery in Two American Centuries* (New York: Basic Civitas, 1998), 173–79.

25. Interestingly, Spike Lee, due to financial limitations as well as aesthetic dictates, shot much of the movie in digital video rather than on film.

26. In a version of *Bamboozled* available at <http://www.imsdb.com/Scripts/Bamboozled.html>, the response of One-sixteenth Black is quite different in this scene than the version in the film.

"The Mau-Mau's [*sic*] come out of the factory high as a kite. Each has a big fat joint or a 64 oz. of DA BOMB. They're also doing a free-style rap about their execution.

#### ON CHEVY SUBURBAN

They get in when the squak of police walkie-talkie's clicks.

#### BIG BLACK

It's the man!

What follows is a horrifying display of firepower. All the Mau-Mau's [*sic*] bodies are doing the Bonnie and Clyde Sonny Corleone Dance of Death as bullets tear into them and the Suburban. Not one of them is able to get a shot off. The shooting stops. The twitching stops. All's quiet. 1/16th Black comes out with his hands up.

1/16TH BLACK

Don't shoot! Don't shoot! I've  
been held hostage. They made me  
part of them against my own free  
will. Don't shoot!

The cops quickly pounce on 1/16th Black.

1/16TH BLACK (CONT'D)

I'm WHITE. I'm WHITE! Look at me,  
I'm white!"

27. Frantz Fanon, "The Facts of Blackness," in *Black Skins, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1967).



# Theater History and Historiography

Historians often begin their accounts of the discipline of theater history with the same anecdote of irretrievable loss. The seventeen-volume compilation of sources on the ancient theater, assembled in the reign of Augustus by Juba II of Mauretania, disappeared. Only fragments of its mouthwatering table of contents—lost treatises on special effects, scene painting in perspective, and mask wearing, for instance—could be reconstructed from other sources. This parable of disinheritance articulates a wistful sense of incompleteness, which seems to haunt theater historians generally, even when documents do survive intact, because of the evanescence of performance itself. Some profess to find themselves “in the unenviable position of the art historian who plans to evaluate the lost paintings of Polygnotus and Zeuxis.”<sup>1</sup>

This self-consciousness about the perceived contradiction of writing the history of so notoriously transient a form as theater suggests a point of entrance for critical theory. As they reflect on the fragility of their subject, theater historians struggle with the problems of historiography—theories of writing about history. Not the least of these problems is the absence of the transcendental signified (call it performance) from the linguistic or pictorial residue that historians optimistically call “sources,” a word that holds out the false promise of authentic origin. The source materials with which historians of performance most frequently work might more descriptively be called, following Jacques Derrida, “marks” or even “traces.”<sup>2</sup> These are the echoes of voices, erased even before they are fully transcribed, which historians try to recover from that disorderly repository of silent artifacts, fugitive contexts, and hypothetical audiences—the past. In this sense no document can survive intact, and even the particularly Western preoccupation with trying to write everything down—ethnography, biography, historiography, choreography, and the rest—cannot put Juba back together again. Perpetually reminded of irretrievable loss, then, theater historians should be among the most receptive to the theoretical problems of interpretation and representation; and increasingly, they have become so, but not without a fight.

In the 1980s and 1990s, the critical and interpretive approaches of feminist, postcolonialist, and New Historicist scholars clashed with the

residual positivism of traditional theater history. Descended in part from the nineteenth-century “objective school” of historians led by Leopold von Ranke (1795–1886), positivist historians expressed one version or another of the ambition of the founding generation of German and American theater historians to develop “a scientific approach to theatrical facts” consistent with the methods of *Theaterwissenschaft*.<sup>3</sup> Whether scholars acknowledged the influence of positivism—to some it seemed to be just common sense, not a theory in its own right—*Theaterwissenschaft* separated the study of historical documents, the supposed repository of objective facts, from the study of the works of dramatic literature, the supposed domain of subjective imagination. In this division of labor, historians were to reconstruct the past from solid documentary evidence, while literary critics and theorists were left to interpret the mysteries of dramatic form. This dichotomy has to some extent continued to divide the field, sometimes vexing its relationships with “literary” theory and the departments that teach it, for instance, or at other times further mystifying the role that dramaturgs are expected to play as intellectual ambassadors without portfolio to the production process.

Theory has troubled the framework not only of what can count as a document, but also of what can count as a fact. It has shaken the assumption that there is a fundamental difference between literary texts and other kinds of texts. It has suggested alternatively that all forms of writing—indeed, all representations—are as distanced from the real world as literature was once thought to be. Under the aegis of performance studies, theory has emphasized the concept of the repertoire of living performances to complement the archive of research materials,<sup>4</sup> a trend that has proved particularly successful in the work of dance historians and musicologists, but which has general implications for all performance researchers. Above all, theory since the 1960s has featured a heightened consciousness about the strategies whereby the historical facts are made to signify in different social, cultural, and political contexts.

A number of metahistorians or historiographers have influenced theater and dance historians in formulating their strategies of interpretation, but the ideas of four might best characterize the diversity of interdisciplinary approaches: Hayden White, Michel Foucault, Stephen Greenblatt, and Walter Benjamin. Proposing a “poetics of history” based on conventions of narrative, White set forth a “tropology,” a limited number of rhetorical patterns that recur whenever stories, including factual histories, are told and heard.<sup>5</sup> In a series of highly influential studies of medicine, penology, and sexuality, Foucault advanced a theory of historical knowledge that organizes all writing into categories of discourse—the rules that govern what statements can or cannot be made within different institutional contexts and structures. He also foregrounded the body—as disciplined, punished, diagnosed, and sexed—as the principal site of social practice and meaning.<sup>6</sup> Reexamining the situation of early modern plays in relationship to what Shakespearean scholars previously viewed as their cultural “background,” Greenblatt wrote that “history cannot

simply be set against literary texts as either stable antithesis or stable background, and the protective isolation of those texts gives way to a sense of their interaction with other texts and hence the permeability of their boundaries."<sup>7</sup> As an alternative to the uninvited term *New Historicism* to describe work that centered on this theory-inflected concept of "intertextuality," Greenblatt proposed *cultural poetics*, adapting Hayden White's "poetics of history" to the rapidly developing interdisciplinary of cultural studies. Practitioners of cultural studies generally embraced the idea that culture is the occasion and instrument of struggle between groups of people with different amounts of power or, at least, different kinds of power. These relative powers shape, among other things, what counts as history, as Marxist theorist Walter Benjamin hauntingly suggested shortly before his death in 1940 while fleeing the Nazi occupation of France. Exploring the theoretical limit of the usefully recoverable past at a time of political catastrophe, he epigrammatically critiqued Ranke's positivism but simultaneously proposed an alternative process of laying a claim to historical truth: "To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it 'the way it really was' (Ranke). It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger." Assessing a high-stakes struggle to remember the past—with the collective memory of the likely victims as a last-ditch tactic of resistance against the "scientific" rewriting of history by the apparent victors—Benjamin concluded: "Only that historian will have the gift of fanning the spark of hope in the past who is firmly convinced that *even the dead* will not be safe from the enemy if he wins."<sup>8</sup>

Facts do matter. They matter so much that historians never stop interpreting and debating their significance. Without denying the facts, for instance, that in 1989 an excavation at a London building site uncovered the architectural footprint of the Elizabethan Rose Theatre, theory interrogates such facts to educe the tangled interests by which they have been historically produced and the different ways in which they have been experienced by stakeholders in their unstable meanings. Contested by land speculators, corporations, the "heritage industry," and the theater community itself, the Rose excavation seemed to precipitate yet another bitter episode in the struggle for the legitimating possession of cultural patrimony by gay men, for instance, in the face of contemporary homophobia. It did so on a site marked by its association with productions of plays by Christopher Marlowe, who was accused in his own time of having said, "all they that love not tobacco and boys were fools."<sup>9</sup> On such sites (and by such sites) the trace of the past is marked.

In *Theatre/Archaeology* (2001), Mike Pearson and Michael Shanks go so far as to compare the historical site of a performance to a crime scene: "We ask: What has happened? The temporality of these spaces is one of aftermath—the traces left behind. Time is fractured as present appearances are haunted by indeterminate pasts, events now gone and evident only in their alienated traces. Here the alienated trace is the precondition of meaning."<sup>10</sup> Proposing a strategy of interpretation, they speak of the

need for a “forensic archaeology,” emphasizing the argumentative and rhetorical dimension of probative work in theater history as well as the factual. To apprehend meaning from a crime scene or a site of performance, they conclude, always requires a leap of interpretation. Interpretation, in turn, requires as detailed as possible an understanding of the relationship between events and their contexts. Sometimes this relationship is a long and fiercely guarded secret. Sometimes it is hiding in plain sight. Sometimes the scene has been “salted.” There is no reason to assume the innocence of the archive: to select is to tamper. For these reasons forensic investigation into the history of performance favors what Paul Ricoeur aptly called a “hermeneutics of suspicion,” in which the narrative sleights of hand of the stories told, no less than the motives of the storytellers themselves, must be scrutinized.<sup>11</sup>

In “Theater Events and Their Political Contexts: A Problem in the Writing of Theater History,” Thomas Postlewait suspects nearly everyone. He lays out in fine detail the evidence from a richly documented but complex crime scene in Jacobean London. The event in question is a performance of Thomas Middleton’s *A Game at Chess*, an anti-Spanish topical satire got up by the King’s Men at the Globe Theatre in 1624. For Postlewait the playtext is no more or less reliable a document than any other in the poetics of history. Middleton’s drama à clef enjoyed a popular but (as it turned out, illegal) run of nine performances, an extraordinary hit for the time. Unfortunately, the law forbade stage representations of living royals or court officials, and the Spanish ambassador, whose colleague was lampooned and humiliated, complained to the king. Silenced, the company ceased playing for ten days, and Middleton evidently went into hiding. Postlewait rigorously interprets the presumed facts about the reception of the production in the context of the diplomatic, religious, and national issues current at the end of the reign of James I. He is interested in complicating what he identifies as the New Historicist reduction of the politics of early modern drama into the simple binary opposition of “containment or contestation, subservience or subversion.” That familiar story is far too simple to escape suspicion. For Postlewait, the facts suggest a much richer interplay of interests, designs, personalities, and factions. To elucidate the performance, reaching for a totality he knows will exceed his grasp, he wants “to encompass all of the political locations of the historical event and its contexts.” The Benjaminian memory that might flash up before Postlewait’s reader is that of the early modern consolidation of the nation-state apparatus, with its hypothetically totalized powers of diplomatic hegemony abroad and surveillance at home, a most presciently ambitious game of chess indeed.

Like Postlewait’s meditation on *A Game at Chess*, Rosemarie Bank’s “Representing History: Performing the Columbian Exposition” questions received narratives by revisiting a paradigmatic event and its manifold contexts. The exposition, which opened in Chicago in 1893, ostensibly commemorated the four-hundredth anniversary of the founding event in American history. It operated as a world’s fair, foregrounding the emer-

gent culture of the host country in a series of exhibitions, collections, and shows. It also occasioned the influential address of Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," which he delivered to the Chicago meeting of the American Historical Association that year. Placing the complex network of public events in the context of the history that the participants were engaged in performing (and thereby in part creating), Bank focuses on the powerful representation of Native American peoples at the exposition. These ranged from learned academic displays of ethnographic objects in the hard-to-find Anthropological Building to highly visible commercial exhibitions of live Native peoples, epitomized by the successful residency of Buffalo Bill's Wild West. A number of scholars have previously documented and deplored this whole genre of embodied performance as exploitative and racist. Conceding their views in part, Bank, following Foucault, nevertheless critiques their binary narratives of passive "show Indians" and grasping impresarios and white-supremacist audiences. She finds evidence of agency in the construction of native "authenticity" that the shows delivered and, therefore, in the history that the performers (re)wrote. She finds a certain dignity in the strategies by which the actors reclaimed their historical role in evading or resisting the tidal wave of genocidal ruin that is predominant narrative of the American frontier. Perhaps the most poignant test of Bank's recuperative thesis is her reconstruction of the ceremonial reenactment of Columbus's landing, featuring nine Sioux in full Plains Indian regalia standing in for the long-since exterminated Arawaks. Their very presence contested what too often passed and still passes for a famous historical "fact": that Columbus discovered America in 1492. What they contested was the Eurocentricity of the word *discover*, which suggests the original revelation of a previously uninhabited continent. At the moment when Turner proclaimed "the closing of the American Frontier," in the year of the "battle" at Wounded Knee, did these Native Americans also seize a memory that flashed before them, performing an act of forensic archeology in the middle of the vast crime scene of the North American continent? Bank shows why their anachronistic reenactment struck much more deeply into authenticity than mere historical accuracy could have done, as the Sioux performed the Native Americans' part in Columbus's *encounter* with America, the consequences of which are ongoing for all Americans and the entire world.

Unlike Postlewait's microhistory of a single production or Bank's account of one dimension of an enormous event, Susan Foster's "Kinesthetic Empathies and the Politics of Compassion" highlights several key points in two hundred years of dance reception theory, from the philosophe M. le Chevalier de Jaucourt's "Compassion" to the modern dance critic John Martin's "inner mimicry." Like Postlewait, however, Foster's keyword is *politics*. Like Bank, her object is embodied performance. Drawing on eighteenth-century ideas of imaginative sympathy, she substitutes vividly corporeal practices—the precarious balance of the rope dancer, for instance, or the bodies falling from the burning World Trade Center on September 11—

for the philosophical abstractions of Adam Smith. Her idea is that the kinesthetic sense (the infrequently acknowledged sixth sense of somatic position and movement) not only provides for a heightened consciousness about the position and trajectory of one's own body, but it also allows for imaginative identification with the motion, attitude, and fate of another's. This sketches out both a theory of reception and the history of an idea. Kinesthetic empathy is not transhistorical; it adapts to the contingencies of the contemporary context, including the modern technologies of communication that broadcast movement and mediate it. Yet at the same time, Foster's understanding of the distinctiveness of current practices posits a knowledge of historical movement patterns and styles, which she has established authoritatively in *Choreography and Narrative*.<sup>12</sup> Dedicated to Hayden White, her mentor, this book shows Foster's strategy, also evident in her essay here, of incorporating dance performance into the history of consciousness itself as a central but heretofore undervalued trope of historical meaning, an underexplored repertoire of embodied knowledge. Foster also shows conclusively that although writing the history of performance, even the most transient, is not theoretically impossible, it is impossible without theory.

J.R.R.

## NOTES

1. A. M. Nagler, *A Source Book in Theatrical History* (New York: Dover, 1959), ix.
2. Jacques Derrida, "Signature Event Context," in *Limited Inc*, trans. Samuel Weber (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1988). See Mark Franko and Annette Richards, "Actualizing Absence: The Pastness of Performance," in *Acting on the Past: Historical Performance Across the Disciplines*, ed. Franko and Richards (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 2000), 1–9.
3. Nagler, *Source Book*, xxi. For a sympathetic account of the pioneers of theater history, see Michael Quinn, "Theaterwissenschaft in the History of Theatre Study," *Theatre Survey* 32 (1991): 123–36. For a critique of the underlying assumptions of *Theaterwissenschaft*, see Bruce A. McConachie, "Towards a Postpositivist Theatre History," *Theatre Journal* 37 (1985): 465–86.
4. Diana Taylor, in *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2003), argues that "writing has served as a strategy for repudiating and foreclosing the very embodiedness it claims to describe" (36), too hastily dismissing the repertoire as ephemeral when, in fact, it provides the continuity of cultural memory for many people.
5. Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978).
6. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1979) and *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1980).
7. Stephen Greenblatt, "Towards a Poetics of Culture," in *The New Historicism*, ed. H. Aram Veeser (New York: Routledge, 1989), 1–14. For an application of similar principles to the history of performance, see Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986).

8. Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1969), 255.
9. Peggy Phelan, "Uncovered Rectums: Disinterring the Rose Theatre," in *Mourning Sex: Performing Public Memory* (London: Routledge, 1997), 73–94.
10. Mike Pearson and Michael Shanks, *Theatre/Archaeology* (London: Routledge, 2001), 61.
11. Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, trans. Dennis Savage (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 32–36.
12. Susan Leigh Foster, *Choreography and Narrative: Ballet's Staging of Story and Desire* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996).

# Theater Events and Their Political Contexts: A Problem in the Writing of Theater History

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The primary task for all historians, once they have finished their research and begun to write, is to describe and interpret the relations between events and their possible contexts. The abiding problem is to specify not only the defining traits of any context but also the causal features that contribute to the making of the event. With this task in mind, I want to consider how theater historians use the concept of *politics* to define and explain the relations between a theater event and its conditions.<sup>1</sup> Of course, this topic is far too complex to cover in a single essay, so I will illustrate the problem with one specific event: the 1624 production of Thomas Middleton's *A Game at Chess*, the anti-Spanish play staged in London at the Globe Theatre by the King's Men. The production took place from August 6 (Friday) to August 16 (Monday), nine continuous days, not counting the two Sundays when theaters were closed.<sup>2</sup> It was the longest-running play during the English Renaissance. This play, which T. S. Eliot called "that perfect piece of literary political art," can serve as a touchstone for an analysis of the relation between theater and politics (or event and context).<sup>3</sup> I also take it up because, as R. C. Bald noted, "more is known about *A Game at Chess* [*sic*] than about any other pre-Restoration play."<sup>4</sup>

Middleton's play is a political satire, written in the allegorical mode. The allegory is based upon the game of chess. The play pits the white players, representing England and Protestantism, against the black players, representing Spain and the Catholic Church. The White King is James I, the Black King is Philip IV of Spain. The white players also feature the White Knight, who is Charles, the Prince of Wales (who would become king in 1625), and the White Duke, who is George Villiers, the Duke of Buckingham. Buckingham was the lord admiral and the "favorite" adviser of King James I. In addition, the white pieces feature a treasonous White King's Pawn who represents the Earl of Middlesex (Lionel Cranfield).<sup>5</sup> Middlesex had served as lord treasurer and advocated a policy of accommodation with the Spanish, especially the marriage of Prince Charles to Donna Maria, the Infanta of Spain.<sup>6</sup> Another key character is the vulnerable White Queen's Pawn, who represents not only Protestant purity and innocence under the assault of Jesuit deviousness and lust but also the Protestant forces in the Palatinate region of the German states that the Hapsburg armies, both Austrian and Spanish, had recently invaded.

The major characters among the black pieces include the "Fat Bishop" who represents Marc Antonio de Dominis, archbishop of Spalatro. When de Dominis came to England in 1616 he had converted to



Protestantism and was taken up by James, who put him in charge of the Hospital of the Savoy, which he administered with severe austerity. But in 1622, seeing opportunities for himself in the papal state, he reverted to Catholicism and returned to Italy. In consequence, by 1624 he was despised by many people in England, inside and outside of the government.

The dominant black player, however, is the Black Knight, a Machiavellian figure who represents the Spanish envoy Don Diego Sarmiento de Acuña (1567–1626), who became conde de Gondomar in 1617.<sup>7</sup> Between 1613–18 and 1620–22 Gondomar was the resident Spanish ambassador in England, exerting considerable influence over James and his foreign policy.<sup>8</sup> From 1618 forward Gondomar had encouraged a marriage between Prince Charles and the Spanish Infanta. Appealing to James's desire to keep England out of the continental wars, Gondomar tried to manipulate James into a marriage agreement that would, at the very least, avoid military battle against the Spanish troops in the German states and the Netherlands. Gondomar even hoped that eventually England, with a Catholic queen and the possibility of Catholic children, might one day return to the Catholic fold. James, for his part, hoped that a marriage agreement would induce Spain to withdraw its troops from the German states where his son-in-law, Frederick of Bohemia, and his only daughter, Elizabeth, were struggling unsuccessfully to defend Protestant causes.

Most Protestants in England feared and hated Gondomar. They were also opposed to the marriage negotiation. Indeed, in February 1623 when Prince Charles and Buckingham went to Madrid in order to negotiate a marriage contract and to convince Spain to withdraw its military troops, James faced growing resistance to his foreign policy. Even key members of the Privy Council expressed their concerns over Catholic influence on James and their anger about the military assaults on the Protestant states in Germany. Thus, when Prince Charles and Buckingham returned from Madrid in October 1623 without a Spanish bride, the country exploded in public celebrations. Bonfires, church bells, and large crowds greeted Charles along his route from Portsmouth to London. The city became a festival of happy citizens, shouting "Long live the Prince of Wales." Tables of food and wine lined the streets, candles burned in windows, and over one hundred "blazing piles were counted in the short distance between St. Paul's and London Bridge."<sup>9</sup>

Charles and Buckingham immediately shifted to the anti-Spanish cause, thereby aligning themselves with the prowar campaign both inside and outside of the central government. Their new position helped to galvanize the Parliament, which James had called into session in February 1624. In May 1624, after several months of struggle between Parliament and the king (with Charles and Buckingham often acting as mediators), James agreed to support a war effort if Parliament voted him a series of subsidies to pay for both the war and his debt-ridden government. Thus, the Spanish influence on James and his foreign policy subsided. For a few months during the summer of 1624 the country was in a frenzy of anti-Spanish campaigns and prowar preparations. When the Earl of Oxford,

Henry de Vere, and the Earl of Southampton, Henry Wriothesley, led the newly formed army through London streets in July (a few weeks before the production of *A Game at Chess*), the city erupted with celebrations almost as exuberant as those that had greeted Charles nine months earlier upon his return from Spain.<sup>10</sup>

Quite explicitly, then, *A Game at Chess* represented current events of 1623 and 1624. Despite the fact that James had issued an edict that forbade stage representations of living royalty and governmental advisers, the King's Men obtained approval of the play from Henry Herbert, Master of the Revels.<sup>11</sup> James knew nothing about the plans to produce the play, which was staged when he was out of town (on his annual summer progress to country estates). Observers at the time had no doubt about the political significance of the play and production. John Woolley, writing the day after it opened, was amazed by how explicit it was in displaying the "devilish plots and devices" of Count Gondomar. Woolley commented that "assuredly had so much been done the last year, they had every man been hanged for it." Sir George Lowe, two days after the production opened, noted that the play "describes Gondomar and all the Spanish proceedings very boldly and broadly, so that it is thought that it will be called in and the parties punished."<sup>12</sup> In a dispatch to Madrid, the Spanish ambassador, offended by the satire, described the concluding scene of the production: "The Prince of Wales [as the White Knight] . . . heartily beat and kicked . . . Gondomar into Hell, which consisted of a great hole with hideous figures."<sup>13</sup>

In its nine days of performance, *A Game at Chess* attracted at least one-tenth of London's population. Many people were turned away each day, for the playhouse was packed an hour before performance.<sup>14</sup> The play probably could have run longer, but when James found out about the production—because of an official complaint by the Spanish ambassador extraordinary, Don Carlos Coloma—he ordered the closing of the playhouse. He also demanded an inquiry into the whole matter. Traveling with the king, Sir Edward Conway, secretary of state, wrote to the London-based members of the Privy Council on August 12. He expressed the king's displeasure and charged the council members to begin an investigation:

His Maiestie hath receaued information from the Spanish Ambassador of a very scandalous Comedie acted publicly by the Kings Players, Wherein they take the boldnes, and presumption in a rude, and dishonorable fashion to represent on the Stage the persons of his Maiestie, the Kinge of Spaine, the Conde de Gondomar, the Bishop of Spalato, &c. His Maiestie remembers well there was a commaundment and restraint giuen against the representinge of anie moderne Christian kings in those Stage-playes, and wonders much both at the boldnes nowe taken by that Companie, and alsoe that it hath ben permitted to bee soe acted, and that the first notice thereof should bee brought to him, by a forraine Ambassador, while soe manie Ministers of his owne are thereaboutes and cannot but haue heard of it.<sup>15</sup>

Conway also wrote to Ambassador Coloma, assuring him that “justice will be done in this matter with the proper publicity.”<sup>16</sup>

James ordered “severe punishment” of the guilty parties.<sup>17</sup> The stage production apparently surprised and angered him, but the evidence does not clarify which aspect of the event most concerned him: the subject matter of the play, the stage representation of living royalty and governmental figures, the playwright’s audacity in ignoring edicts against such representations and topics, the audacity of his own King’s Men in staging the play, the Spanish complaint and his need to address it, the embarrassment or frustration that he felt over his own theater company being the guilty parties, the possibility that he would have to face more public controversy over Spain, or the need to contend with yet another political and religious controversy over foreign relations. Any one or all of these factors might have contributed to his demand that those responsible should be punished. One thing was obvious: he was frustrated that his own governmental ministers had failed to keep him informed.

The Privy Council questioned various people, including the players of the King’s Men and Henry Herbert, who had licensed the play. The players swore that “they added or varied from the same nothing at all.”<sup>18</sup> The Globe production, they insisted, was based upon the text that the Master of the Revels had approved. As evidence, they gave the Privy Council the manuscript of the play that had been signed by Herbert. (There were actually several manuscripts circulating at the time, so what Herbert approved was likely an earlier, shorter version of the production text.) In its report to the king, the council rebuked Herbert, but then left to the king the tasks of reading the play, questioning Herbert, and administering punishment. As far as we can tell, no such examination of Herbert occurred. Whatever the case, he continued in his office without interruption. And the King’s Men, though restrained from playing for ten days, returned to business as usual by the end of August.<sup>19</sup> Middleton himself apparently went into hiding. It’s possible that he was tracked down and imprisoned temporarily, but the evidence is quite sketchy. Basically, no one received any significant punishment, despite assurances to the Spanish ambassador that justice would be done, with publicity.

So, besides the obvious political satire, what is the political context for this event? What did it mean to the various people involved? How and why did it occur, given the censorship powers (and obsessions) of the Crown? The standard explanation is that Herbert licensed the play on June 12, despite its representation of royalty, because he was sympathetic to its message. He did not identify any “dangerous matter” in the manuscript. But we do not have any evidence that he was motivated by political considerations. Indeed, we must wonder why Herbert would open himself to the possibility of the king’s anger and punishment, perhaps endangering his own position and income. He had just taken over as Master of Revels a year before, when James had knighted him. By licensing the play, did he make a political mistake or a political calculation?

Various theater scholars, believing in the possibility of a political

intrigue, have speculated that Herbert was urged on by the anti-Spanish faction in the Privy Council.<sup>20</sup> If so, perhaps he felt that he had the protection of key people at court, including his distant relative William Herbert, third Earl of Pembroke, who was one of the richest men in England and held the powerful position of lord chamberlain.<sup>21</sup> Also, though we have no direct evidence, Henry Herbert might have had the support of the Duke of Buckingham, and even the tacit sanction of Prince Charles. For example, John Woolley, in a letter to his friend William Trumbull (dated August 20, 1624), speculates that the prince and duke “were all loath to have it forbidden, and by report laughed heartily at it.”<sup>22</sup> Both the prince and Buckingham are represented in positive terms in the play. If any of these key people supported and protected the Master of the Revels, the playwright, and the King’s Men, this could explain the light punishments for all involved. So the argument goes.

Andrew Gurr, for example, argues that “the King’s Men were disloyal to James in 1624 with *A Game at Chess*, when they adopted the court party line favoured by William Herbert, Lord Chamberlain and third earl of Pembroke. . . . The anti-Spanish faction at court must have backed the play and protected Herbert as well as the company from its consequences.”<sup>23</sup> But as Gurr acknowledges, the Earl of Pembroke was increasingly opposed to the Duke of Buckingham, whose growing political power over James had begun to displease the lord chamberlain (141). So why would Pembroke support a play that celebrated Buckingham’s triumph over the Spanish? Gurr admits that the historian Thomas Cogswell makes “a very strong case against any direct court role in the play’s production” (143). And Gurr acknowledges that “on paper, of course, [which is] the only extant form of evidence, nobody was willing to admit that they had been directly involved in the plot” (144–45). Perhaps, then, it might be prudent to modify “must have backed the play” with a more tentative “may have backed the play.”

In contrast to Gurr’s speculation, Jerzy Limon makes a case for court intrigues that approached the status of a grand conspiracy. Although Limon acknowledges that the evidence is sketchy or nonexistent, he argues for “a consciously contrived campaign, initiated and sponsored by a group of politicians, whose goal it was to use all means available to win the support of both nobility and the commons.”<sup>24</sup> Specifically, Limon credits the Duke of Buckingham and Prince Charles with orchestrating the “war party,” the theaters, the playwrights, and the Protestant pamphleteers. Given this control from the top, “the players and playwrights felt secure enough to engage themselves in what seemed to be anti-royalist campaign initiated by the new court party of Prince Charles and the Duke of Buckingham.”<sup>25</sup> Thus, behind the scenes, Charles and Buckingham instigated and carefully controlled the production of *A Game at Chess*. This circumstantial argument, freed from the need of collaborating evidence, allows Limon to posit that the playwright and players were subservient to a powerful faction of like-minded people within the central government.

Yet it is also possible to argue, by contrast, that *A Game at Chess* reveals the politics of subversion rather than the politics of control. That is, the event reveals the supposed subversive aims of the playwright and players who challenged the central government. Margot Heinemann, for example, has claimed that *A Game at Chess* served as a catalyst to the “oppositional politics” of the court and Parliament.<sup>26</sup> She contends that “in its political and religious radicalism,” the play goes “well beyond what its noble patrons would normally have countenanced.”<sup>27</sup> *A Game at Chess*, like a handful of other plays in 1623–24, was “critical of the policy of the crown,” and should be seen as nothing less than “a turning-point in relations between the government and the nation” (237). It thus fueled “a much longer post-Reformation crisis of authority, in which the theatres help to form the ‘mentalities’ to which they will later appeal, not only at court and among the political elites but more widely among London citizen audiences” (238).

Moreover, the anti-Catholic plays at the theaters in the 1620s contributed to the subsequent Puritan resistance to Charles I, who would lose his head twenty-five years later. By so arguing, however, Heinemann is making one of the common fallacies in argument: *post hoc, ergo propter hoc*. Despite these conjectures, it is impossible to establish a cause-and-effect relationship between *A Game at Chess* and the beheading of Charles. The “turning-point” that she discovers is located in her assumptions, not in the evidence. Nor is it possible to demonstrate that Middleton’s satire had any influence upon political developments in the 1630s and early 1640s. But this expansive argument allows us to believe that the Renaissance theater, capable of shaping beliefs and guiding actions, was a decisive political force in the era.

Heinemann’s argument flounders because (1) she presents a reductive and inaccurate conception of “Puritan” ideology and identity; (2) depends upon an overly neat formula that reduces 1624 politics to a battle between royal authority and Puritan opposition; (3) misreads or ignores the historical evidence, which suggests that a number of contending political agendas were operating at the time; and (4) wishes to grant to theatrical activities a political influence on governmental policy and public beliefs that cannot be demonstrated conclusively.<sup>28</sup>

Not surprisingly, several scholars, including T. H. Howard-Hill, Richard Dutton, and Thomas Cogswell, reject conspiratorial and subversive conjectures.<sup>29</sup> In his study of the Office of the Revels, Dutton writes: “While we cannot rule out the possibility of a conspiracy behind *A Game at Chess*, there is no evidence for it, and it remains an unnecessary conjecture. The play itself is really no more inflammatory than many others of the period; only the circumstances of its presentation, heightened by the ‘personating of Gondomar,’ made it so conspicuous and created a *furor*.”<sup>30</sup>

T. H. Howard-Hill, who has spent a fair part of his scholarly career on the study and editing of this play, is even less committed to any argument about the conspiratorial or oppositional nature of the play and production. He argues that there are three levels of allegory in the play: moral,

religious, and political, and that the political is the least significant. "In short, *A Game at Chess* is more powerful as a moral-religious allegory related loosely to contemporary political circumstances than as an allegorisation of specific political events."<sup>31</sup> Howard-Hill's dismissal of political meanings may be too guarded, for the Spanish ambassador's response demonstrates that the contemporary references were perceived as politically insulting. Moreover, political motives and religious motives cannot be neatly separated into two distinct aspects of behavior in an era of religious wars. Still, Howard-Hill does put us on guard against court intrigues and conspiracies. And he reminds us that by the summer of 1624 the whole nation, including James, had taken an anti-Spanish, prowar position. The play was basically in accord with the new national policy.

What, then, are we to think? Here we have the most famous and important case of a political drama in Renaissance England, but we cannot agree on even the basic features of the political context for the production, its reception, and subsequent events. Indeed, we cannot even agree that it had a specific political context. The evidence is open to a wide range of interpretations. It is possible, of course, to construct the political context on the basis of a series of suppositions, but these kinds of arguments are held together with standard rhetorical tropes and weasel words ("it seems likely," "it is plausible that," "surely they intended," "perhaps," "possibly," "this would seem to suggest," "it must have been possible," "it is not coincidental that," "common sense dictates that," and so on). No historian, of course, can avoid qualifying phrases; necessarily, a historian negotiates between matters of possibility and plausibility. But when tentative propositions and conjectures transform quickly into apparent facts and proofs, historical analysis becomes suspect.

Stalemate? Should we throw up our hands in defeat? Assuming that we cannot prove court involvement and intrigue, where, then, should we locate the political aspects of this famous play and production? Should we abandon our contextual methods of constructing the event, and instead return to the play itself? Obviously, the play and its production carried topical references that spectators easily recognized, given the political situation at the times. It is quite appropriate, then and now, to identify the political references (e.g., Buckingham, Count Gondomar) and to interpret the satiric purpose of the political themes (e.g., anti-Spanish and anti-Catholic messages). But this kind of topical analysis fails to satisfy most scholars today. We insist that the concept of "politics," when applied to theatrical events, encompasses more than mere topical references and motifs. The political context extends beyond such indexing.

Unfortunately, most of the scholarship of the last few decades on "early modern" theater in London constructs the political context in terms of either containment or contestation, subservience or subversion.<sup>32</sup> The texts, actions, and events of the era achieve their significance within either the ideological practices, aims, and discourses of the controlling rulers and social elites or the transgressive tactics and oppositional strategies of the theater artists and their audiences. Whether the topic is public or court

performance, Shakespeare or Jonson, censorship or cross-dressing, the working formula for explaining the operation of politics gets reduced, far too often, to a basic binary of centralized power versus selective (even cunning but usually inconsequential) modes of subversive resistance.<sup>33</sup>

Surely, though, politics can be understood in a more complex manner than these popular ideas on the dynamics of power. For example, whatever one's interpretive idea for constructing the overall context, the following sixteen factors that contributed to the politics of 1624 in England would need to be considered:

1. *The Duke of Buckingham's campaign to hold onto power.* After his rapid rise as James's favorite, Buckingham carried out a series of political moves to consolidate and expand his power, including his new position as lord admiral. For example, in 1624, following the failure of the marriage negotiations, he shifted to the anti-Spanish faction, for reasons of political cunning as well as commitment. Likewise, his simultaneous alignments with Charles and James called for great political skill.<sup>34</sup>
2. *Prince Charles's growing sense of power.* Upon his return from Madrid, the young prince began to assert himself against James, his father; he emerged as a decisive voice in the government in late 1623 and 1624.
3. *Prince Charles's anger, even his sense of humiliation.* Charles was frustrated and embarrassed by the failed marriage negotiations in Madrid in 1623; his pride was wounded, so he needed to demonstrate to the English and Spanish that he was more than a political pawn.
4. *Prince Charles's concern for his sister.* Worried over the fate of his sister Elizabeth and her husband in the Palatinate wars, Charles used the prowar issues and factions in 1624 to address, perhaps relieve, his sense of obligation and care. Personal feelings merged with political events, if not religious commitments. His religious beliefs were less clearly articulated than his political agendas at this time.
5. *The maneuvers of prowar aristocrats.* A group of powerful prowar aristocrats, including Pembroke, Belfast, Nottingham, Oxford, and Southampton, played a major role in the changing politics of the early 1620s. James had held them at bay between 1621 and 1623, and even imprisoned Oxford and Southampton after the 1621 Parliament, but by 1624 they had been released from the Tower and had reasserted themselves in matters of national policy.
6. *The decreasing power of the pro-Spanish faction within the Privy Council.* The miscalculations and lessening power of a group of Privy Council leaders who had been supporters of the Spanish policy, including the Earl of Arundel (Thomas Howard, who was a Catholic) and the Earl of Middlesex (Lionel Cranfield, who had advanced under the patronage of Buckingham but had committed

- himself to an accord with Spain), opened the door for the prowar factions and for the shifting aims of Buckingham and Charles.
7. *The general collapse of the Howard family.* The Howards had gained great power after the death in 1612 of Robert Cecil, Earl of Salisbury and paramount statesman for James. As architects of James's governmental policy, the Howards controlled the Privy Council for several years. Henry Howard, Earl of Northampton, served as lord of privy seal; Charles Howard, Lord of Effingham and Earl of Nottingham, served as lord admiral until 1619; and Thomas Howard, first Earl of Suffolk, served as Lord chamberlain (1603–1614) and lord treasurer (1614–18). They favored an alliance with Spain and opposed parliamentary campaigns for the Protestant causes. But because of corruption, incompetence, and faulty political decisions, they failed to halt the rise of Buckingham, who had displaced them by 1624.
  8. *The patronage system of rewards and favors.* This reward system was distributed not only by James but also by the various governmental leaders, such as Buckingham. Almost anything could be brokered. Throughout the reign of James this patronage system of honors, titles, trade monopolies, offices, and pensions determined many of the political alignments and obligations, thereby setting up a political world of clients and a network of corruption.<sup>35</sup>
  9. *The new assertiveness of the House of Commons.* Under the leadership of such people as Sir Edward Coke and Thomas Wentworth, the Commons was able to unify as "an overwhelmingly Protestant assembly on an issue involving religious prejudice and national honor."<sup>36</sup> In the process, the Commons, in uneasy partnership with the House of Lords, forced the issue with James on subsidies and war.
  10. *The political leadership of the House of Lords.* The Lords was guided by key members of the Privy Council, including Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton, and William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke. They were able to control and direct political factions within the divided government, thereby slowly shifting James away from Spain and the pro-Spanish advocates.
  11. *The anti-Catholic and anti-Spanish constituencies around the country.* Throughout the reign of James, various constituencies around the country were strongly anti-Spanish and anti-Catholic. The feelings were strong; indeed, the growing support for intervention in the Palatinate, in support of the Protestant princes and against the Hapsburg Catholics, was at its highest emotional pitch in 1624.
  12. *The loss of power by the Spanish envoys.* Although Count Gondomar had been very influential in his dealings with James, the Spanish envoys in 1623 and 1624 began to lose their suggestive power over the English court. For example, in May 1624 the Spanish en-



- voys attempted to slander Buckingham so that James would doubt his motives and loyalty, but their charges against him failed to convince James. With that, the Spanish envoys lost much of their substantial influence over James and his policies.
13. *The vociferous rhetoric of the pamphleteers.* In 1623 and 1624, after years of tight control on publications, the pamphlets began to flow off the presses. Pamphleteers such as Thomas Scott, John Gee, and John Reynolds not only inflamed the “godly” congregations who supported the Palatinate venture but also supplied vital information, ideas, and rhetoric for the growing anti-Spanish sentiment in Parliament and the country. For example, Gee’s anti-Spanish *The Foot out of the Snare* sold over five thousand copies in March and April 1624. It was followed by a second edition in early May. Then by late May he published *New Shreds of the Old Snare*, which also sold quite well. At this time a “culture of slander” spread through English society in speeches, gossip, pamphlets, plays, and books, filling—even overwhelming—the courts with trials for libel, defamation, sedition, and blasphemy.<sup>37</sup> The systems of control, such as press censorship, could not silence the many voices.
  14. *The pulpits as political and religious forums.* Inside and outside of London, the pulpits, including the pulpit at court, served as communicative centers for commentary on political issues and national policy. Various sermons, some of highly inflamed rhetoric, presented critiques of James’s Spanish policy of neutrality and pushed for a Protestant confrontation with Catholic powers. A number of sermons focused on the religious war in the Palatinate. Despite royal proclamations about what should and should not be said, the pulpits were often beyond the control of licensing and direct government supervision. Even governmental reprimands of preachers for venturing into explicit political criticism failed to curtail the sermons.
  15. *The distribution of political ideas and controversies.* By 1623 political ideas and controversies were spread not only by the printing industry and book market, which continued to grow, but also by the burgeoning school system that had created an educated gentry who actively debated political issues and increasingly involved themselves in politics, both locally and in London.<sup>38</sup>
  16. *The thousands of alehouses.* In England alehouses were everywhere, in great number. One existed for every one hundred people. In these alehouses, pamphlets were read aloud and discussions poured forth on current events. The alehouses provided forums for commentary on the collapse of the Spanish marriage, the daily debates in the Commons during the spring of 1624, the news from the Palatinate, the gossip about governmental divisions and political struggles, and the new fascination with both Prince Charles and Buckingham as harbingers of England’s destiny.

Politics had many voices, many agendas, and many locations. From the Privy Council to the alehouses and pulpits, voices were raised in dialogue and dispute.

And at the center of all of this activity the king tried to rule. Pushed and pulled by the contending factions and factors, he still attempted to hold to and carry out his political agendas. So any catalog of political conditions must return to James, who, despite his age, maintained a fairly vigorous role in governance. At times the events seemed to control him. Yet he also continued to direct many aspects of the foreign policy. And though the plan for a Spanish marriage had failed (for many reasons, including the politics in Madrid and Rome), he was soon able to negotiate an alliance with the French—in part because of the new power behind the French throne, Cardinal Richelieu. This alliance would culminate in 1625 with Charles marrying Henrietta Maria, the French sister of Louis XIII. Despite the Protestant nationalism in England, James was still able to negotiate a marriage to a Catholic—a marriage that Charles accepted, whatever his misgivings. Of all things, then, England's political scene was being controlled, at least in part, by a dead man. Thirteen years after the death of Cecil, his cunning policy of playing France against Spain was still guiding the country.

### *Constructing Contexts for Theatrical Events*

As the preceding catalog suggests, *A Game at Chess* was hardly a unique political event in 1624; it was tied to these various conditions that contributed to the sociopolitical environment of the government. Moreover, the participating individuals and parties of 1624 were motivated by issues and commitments that often pulled in opposing directions. Within both the Privy Council and Parliament, for example, people were divided, anti and pro, on various aspects of the political issues, from religion, marriage, and war to trade matters, taxes and levies, and foreign alliances. And everyone was concerned about the rising power of Buckingham. So, however we construct the sociopolitical context and its many components parts, we must see that theater events occur within (or in relationship to) these situations and conditions, from the psychology of Charles to the activities in the alehouses. At the same time, I want to suggest that these sociopolitical conditions—complex and contradictory as they are—provide but one of several possible settings and registers for the politics of theatrical events. Politics, defined as kinds of actions, attitudes, events, and ideas, can be assigned to a number of locations or facets of theatrical events. I therefore want to suggest that when we attempt to construct the contexts for theatrical events, such as *A Game at Chess*, we need to acknowledge that the political dimensions of these events can be discovered in any and all of the following ten contextual locations.

### *Scripts and Texts*

Politics can be located in the idiolect of each specific manuscript and published text. In the case of *A Game at Chess* we have three published quartos

of the play. Quarto 1 was published in London (1624/25). Quarto 2 is a reprint of quarto 1, but quarto 3 (1624/25), published in Leiden (a Protestant stronghold), is a new edition, based upon a manuscript different from the one used for quarto 1. Besides the published quartos, there are six extant manuscripts, with one written in Middleton's own hand and another partially so. Three manuscripts are in the hand of Ralph Crane, the scrivener of the King's Men. He and Middleton had worked together before, so we can assume that Crane was a trusted scribe for preparing a text for production and publication. And yet, as T. H. Howard-Hill notes, Crane removed some of the sexual and scatological slander that Middleton had directed at Jesuits.<sup>39</sup> Richard Dutton also points out that Crane, though "extremely professional" in bringing order out of Middleton's manuscripts, "became an editor of the text, as much as a copyist, and was not heavily constrained by considerations of what Middleton wrote."<sup>40</sup> These idiolects in the manuscripts and the quartos suggest that Middleton and Crane viewed the political meanings and functions of the play differently. Also, the manuscripts reveal that the play was changing and developing during 1624.

The earliest of the six manuscripts, probably written between March and June 1624, is 310 lines shorter than quarto 3. Among other things, it lacks the character of the Fat Bishop, who represented Marco Antonio de Dominus, former archbishop of Spalatro. This character, likely added during rehearsal, was probably written to accommodate the acting skills of William Rowley, a popular actor. He was also the coauthor with Middleton of *The Changeling*, two years earlier. Perhaps Rowley contributed to the revision, or at least parts of it (yet another idiolect to be investigated). So we have not one but nine manifestations of the play, each of which reveals idiosyncratic political intentions and meanings.<sup>41</sup> The manuscripts and published quartos thus provide not only possible registers of Middleton's shifting political tactics and aims over several months but also signs of additional contributors who expressed their own political perspectives. Part of the challenge we face is to figure out which of these versions were approved by the Master of the Revels. In turn, we want to trace the changing political agendas and contributions that emerge with each version of the play.

### *Intentions of Individuals*

Politics can be located in the intentions, aims, decisions, and actions of the individuals or agents who produce the performance text. In the theater we are always concerned with not only the playwright but also the players, whose particular traits, choices, purposes, values, needs, dispositions, projects, and programs contribute to the meaning of the production (and each performance). Because the play was licensed by Henry Herbert, Master of the Revels, on June 12, but not performed until August 6, it is quite likely that some of the revisions in the manuscripts and the quartos (e.g., development of the Fat Bishop as a significant character), reveal contributions of the players, as Howard-Hill insists: "There is no reason to

doubt that the significant wrenching of the play from the playwright's fundamental conception was inspired by the theatrical company after Middleton had shown them his early script."<sup>42</sup>

Besides the addition of the substantial role for Rowley, the players created a series of visual codes that added specific political meanings to the production. For example, as Don Carlos Coloma noted in an ambassadorial letter back to Spain, the players took care to dress the Black King to look like the young Philip IV: "the king of blacks has easily been taken for our lord the King, because of his youth, dress, and other details."<sup>43</sup> Just as the paintings of Velázquez (e.g., the ones in the Prado and the Frick Collection) capture and express aspects of young Philip (including the infamous chin), so the actor who portrayed the king articulated his own version of Spanish pomp and power. Likewise, great effort went into representing Count Gondomar, the Black Knight. Clearly, Don Carlos Coloma was responding to the politics of impersonation and representation, not simply to the politics of the dramatic text itself.

The nature of performance, with the necessary presence of actors before the audience, can be seen as part of the history of the body.<sup>44</sup> In recent years historians have begun to pay attention to the material body and its place within specific systems of cultural meanings, including political meanings. For example, scholars of Renaissance theater have been especially interested in matters of gender representation and cross-dressing on the stage. Theater, of course, invites spectators to respond to the possible iconic, indexical, and symbolic signs of costuming, scenery and properties, lighting, and acting style, as John Holles's letter of August 11, 1624, reveals, "one of the white pawns, with an under black doublet signifying a Spanish heart, betrays his party to their advantage."<sup>45</sup> Clearly, some spectators were quite astute in their ability to read the symbolic codes of costuming for their political meanings.

In the case of *A Game at Chess*, we can discover political signs in not only the black and white costuming but also the stage properties and gestures that were used to identify Count Gondomar. The title page of quarto 1, which represents the Fat Bishop, the Black Knight (Gondomar), and the White Knight (Buckingham), provides a possible guide to some of the costuming (though we must read this iconography carefully, relating it to other evidence such as descriptions in letters). The players made substantial effort to represent major figures accurately (e.g., the cut of their beards). In addition, the players enhanced the beginning of act 5, which was staged for a special entrance of the Black Knight (Count Gondomar). The members of the King's Men had acquired or replicated both the special litter and the chair of Count Gondomar, the former Spanish ambassador, who suffered from anal fistula—abnormal abscesses in the bowels.<sup>46</sup> During his stays in London, many people had seen him in his special chair, with a hole cut into the seat.<sup>47</sup> Also, this chair is represented on the title page of Thomas Scott's *The Second Part of Vox Populi*, published and widely read in 1624. The hole in the seat is clearly visible. For Scott and his readers, Gondomar's fistula had become the emblem of the

man. The pamphleteer John Reynolds also identified Gondomar with his fistula.

So, the players, by representing Gondomar in such accurate detail, including his bodily ailment and his recognizable gestures, added special political poignancy to the satire, over and beyond what the dramatic text itself represented. Textual references, such as jokes about “buttocks” and “flies” in act 2, were thus played up. And in act 2 Middleton had the Fat Bishop describe the Black Knight as the “fistula of Europe, whose disease I undertook to cure.” At the conclusion of the play, when the players brought his litter and chair on stage for the first time, the White Knight proceeded to strip the Black Knight of his devilish hypocrisies. Then the actors playing the Black Knight and the other black pieces were herded and kicked into a large black bag that appeared on stage as a kind of Hell’s Mouth for the Spanish. In this manner, the Black Knight, “the mightiest Machivael-politician / That e’er the devil hatched” (5.3.204–5) was theatrically disemboweled—to the delight of thousands of spectators. Thus the visual codes of the production added their own political meanings to the text. Gondomar’s fistula represented not only a flaw in his character but also the supposed moral corruption of Spain, the Jesuits, and the Catholic Church.

#### *Traditions of Drama and Theater*

Politics can be located in the conventions, traditions, canons, codes, styles, norms, genres, and recurring patterns of drama and theater that any specific text or performance draws upon and uses. That is, each text, besides expressing an idiolect, is also written in an intertextual grammar and syntax. *A Game at Chess* is one of several allegorical plays of the era that supported the Protestant cause and attacked Roman Catholicism. Earlier in the century the series of “Elect Nation” plays championed British Protestantism against Catholicism, the Jesuits, and the Hapsburgs in Rome and Spain. And at the time of the struggle in the Palatinate, other plays spoke to these matters (e.g., Massinger’s *The Bondman*). In order to understand the special nature of the politics of *A Game at Chess*, we need to see how it is both similar to and different from these other plays and performances, which provided subgenres of conventions and meanings. In turn, various other plays and productions of the era provided codes and conventions that helped to construct the political context for this specific production.

#### *Nationalist and Religious Campaigns*

Politics can be located in the recurring nationalist and religious campaigns that characterized not only the generic features of plays such as *A Game at Chess* but also other kinds of entertainment, including masques and lord mayor’s shows that took up the politics of the day. For example, the popular lord mayor’s shows of both Thomas Middleton and John Webster appealed to local and national sentiments. Thus, in 1617 Middleton made fun

of the Spanish in *The Triumph of Honour and Industry*, which was performed for the lord mayor's inauguration.<sup>48</sup> And in 1624 John Webster's lord mayor's show celebrated English sea power—at just the same time that the lord admiral, Buckingham, was visiting the fleet and pushing for a show of sea power against Spain. Of course, the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588 provided justification and themes for these political acts. Likewise, Ben Jonson's masque *Neptune's Triumph at the Return of Albion*, though canceled at the last minute, celebrated the return of Prince Charles to England, after the failed negotiation for the Spanish marriage. Both Prince Charles and the Duke of Buckingham "took a keen interest in the preparations for *Neptune's Triumph* . . . , Jonson's Twelfth Night masque for 1623–24."<sup>49</sup> Despite their busy schedules after returning from Spain, they rehearsed their roles in the masque over a number of days. But just before performance, James insisted on the removal of certain anti-Spanish lines. Then the performance was abruptly canceled, officially because of James's illness, but most likely because of complaints from the Spanish ambassador. A few months later, though, Jonson successfully produced another masque, the *Masque of Owls*, which was performed for Prince Charles at Kenilworth on August 19 (three days after the last performance of *A Game at Chess*). Among other things, it presented a nasty satire of a Spanish scholar who was calculating the benefits of the Spanish match. James may have been angry about *A Game at Chess*, but the court was still quite receptive to anti-Spanish entertainment.

#### *The Theater as an Organization*

Politics can be located in the social and economic organization of theater itself—its management procedures, its business practices, and its commercial aims. Theatrical commerce included, but was not limited to, the patronage system. Of course, it is significant that the King's Men, of all companies, was the one to present Middleton's play. In 1624 thirteen men ran the company as sharers, including John Heminge and Henry Condell, the editors of the folio edition of Shakespeare's plays, published the year before. That edition, instead of being dedicated to the king, who was the company's patron, was dedicated to the earls of Pembroke (William Herbert) and Montgomery (Philip Herbert). As lord chamberlain and overseer of the Master of the Revels in 1624, Pembroke was an important figure for the players. And he was a critic of the Spanish policy. Not surprisingly, then, scholars have been tempted to locate the significance of the production of *A Game at Chess* in the politics of patronage. But this fact, which too easily leads us into conspiratorial arguments about political subversion, tends to blind us to basic business practices of the London theater companies.

The players ran a commercial enterprise. Thus, we might consider to what extent the production, which purposefully appealed to the anti-Spanish mood of 1624, was calculated to deliver a quick profit for the players. John Woolley reports in a letter of August 11 that "the Players looseth

no time, nor forbearth to make hay while the Sun shyneth, acting it every day without any intermission and it is thought they have already got near a thousand pound by it."<sup>50</sup> This substantial profit agrees with other calculations at the time that the players were taking in between one and two hundred pounds a performance. Thus, each day they were getting ten to twenty times what they were paid for a court performance—motive enough for the venture. Patronage was all well and good, but it delivered only a fraction of the income of the theater companies. So publishing Shakespeare's plays or staging a play on a hot topic paid the bills and provided the profit, thereby satisfying the politics of economic self-interest.

### *Social Organizations External to the Theater*

Politics can be located in the social, economic, and political organization of the society itself, outside of the theater—that is, in the communal, national, and international systems of governance that define and order human activities. As I have pointed out in my earlier catalog of sixteen sociopolitical factors that operated in England alone, the idea of politics should not be reduced to a singular, hegemonic version of centralized power and control. Nor should our analysis be limited to the politics of compliment and contestation. Even if we focus on the specific activities and decrees of the national government, we need to recognize that the political situation was constructed out of the motives, ideas, and activities of the various people in the court, the Parliament, town, and country. Even when some people were aligned on one aspect of the political agenda, they were often moving in different directions from one another on other aspects. Thus, the court factions, in and beyond the Privy Council, were not only divided over Spain and war in the Palatinate but also splintered into various groups on such matters as diplomacy, military assignments, new court appointments, the need for a parliamentary session, a possible French marriage match, tax levies and subsidies, matters of common law, and the licensing and censorship of the anti-Catholic pamphlets. And political matters were even more complex and contradictory beyond the royal center. As soon as we start to track political attitudes and practices in such places as the booksellers' stalls in St. Paul's and the alehouses around the country, we find various oppositional factions and ideas that cannot be reduced to the monolithic idea of the Puritan opposition. Moreover, the multifarious political landscape changed rapidly during the weeks and months of 1624 and 1625, so flux and multiple perspectives defined the situation.<sup>51</sup>

### *Political Discourses*

Politics can be located in the available political discourses and rhetorical styles of the era. For any writer the conventions and traditions of each form of expression contribute to what is written and how it is written. For example, political satire has certain recurring traits, typologies, and themes.

Thus, the seemingly specific and unique aspects of a work, such as Middleton's play or Scott's political pamphlets, may be, under closer examination, a rather general pattern of available rhetorical discourses (e.g., the patterns of Juvenal or Horace in Ben Jonson's satires). We need to be able to distinguish between the particular and general discourses in order to understand how political language achieves its levels of meaning. In the case of *A Game at Chess*, the general pattern derives, at one level, from allegorical drama, including the rich heritage of morality plays and interludes, followed closely by the city pageants (e.g., the annual lord mayor's shows). Middleton's audience was familiar with this heritage, which was predominantly allegorical, so the political ideas of the play derived their meaning and function from the conventions of the interlude, the morality play, and the city pageants as well as from the specific political events and historical conditions.

Beyond the discourses of dramatic genre, Middleton's play was influenced by political tracts and sermons. The pamphlets, as Thomas Cogswell points out, poured off the presses: "The most remarkable change in 1624 was the flood of anti-Catholic literature openly available for sale. The major genre of theological literature, which had been conspicuous by its absence from booksellers' stalls at the height of the Anglo-Spanish entente, made a dramatic reappearance in 1624 both in sheer numbers and in the virulence of the contents."<sup>52</sup> For Cogswell, the production of the play is to be understood as part of the expansive pamphlet rhetoric of 1624. Because Middleton draws directly upon the pamphleteers for speeches in his play, the rhetoric of play and pamphlets shared a political and religious agenda.

Dozens of religious and political pamphlets caught Middleton's attention, but he was most taken by Thomas Scott's *Vox Populi*, first published in 1620, with a second version in 1624. He drew upon both texts of these political pamphlets, sometimes transferring passages unchanged into his play. Scott had been the former chaplain for William Herbert, third Earl of Pembroke and lord chamberlain. He was profoundly anti-Spanish. At times he was forced to live in exile in Holland, but by 1624 Scott and England were in basic accord.<sup>53</sup> Although Middleton's play should not be confused with Scott's assaults on the government, the two writers shared certain anti-Spanish and anti-Catholic agendas. In consequence, the political ideas articulated in Scott find a sympathetic, yet reformulated, voice in Middleton's drama. Beyond the pamphlets, we should attend to the political speeches in Parliament, a number of which were also published at the time. Likewise, the political discourse in 1623 and 1624 found expression in the well-crafted sermons delivered from the pulpits, including those at St. Paul's.

More generally, the rhetorical manuals and essays of key Renaissance writers (e.g., Erasmus, Francis Bacon, and others) provided models of discourse, derived from classical rhetoric. The "commonplaces" of this discourse, rather than an individual's own political ideas, may be the or-



ganizing principle for key aspects of the texts we interpret. In other words, the communicative systems themselves, as Quentin Skinner, J. G. A. Pocock, and other scholars of political discourse have noted, establish acceptable and preferred ways of articulating meaning. Thus, what we credit to Middleton may in fact belong, in equal measure, to Cicero or Seneca.

### *Cultural Ideologies*

Politics can be located in the general mentality, ideology, or zeitgeist of a culture—its basic system of beliefs, assumptions, and practices. At this level of inquiry we are confronted with the problems and temptations of generalization, as they operate in our historical categories and our modes of analysis. In part, we need to craft sophisticated ideas of mentality or ideology. Everyone today is quite ready to dismiss the reductive idea of an “Elizabethan world picture,” but most of the models of the court as a centralized power are equally reductive. Likewise, our ideas of a pervasive theatricality that somehow defines all aspects of London culture and society are too simple.<sup>54</sup> There are, though, some promising signs that historians are attempting to develop a multidimensional model of the concept of mentality.<sup>55</sup>

In addition, we need to attend to how our period concepts, which I have considered elsewhere,<sup>56</sup> lead us to posit certain organizing ideas for an epoch. For example, what would be the appropriate period concept for this era in British history: the Renaissance or the early modern age? Both concepts are suggestive yet inadequate, the one privileging humanism and the classical revival, the other privileging the new economic, scientific, and urban developments. Neither concept does justice to the religious struggles of the era, stretching from Henry VIII’s break from Rome to the Puritan Commonwealth. As the production of *A Game at Chess* illustrates, any study of the politics for this era is also an investigation into religious issues. By 1624, the Thirty Years War (1618–48) had commenced, and was defining, even controlling, both national and international politics. We now recognize that the military struggle in the Palatinate, where Elizabeth, James’s daughter and Charles’s sister, was in political duress, represented but one small aspect of the intertwined struggles that were transforming Europe. This is a reminder that the religious battles may be a better guide to ideology and mentality than either the rebirth of humanist learning or the development of early mercantile and bureaucratic society. If *A Game at Chess*, as the longest-running play of the whole era, provides a basis for understanding the political conditions and contexts of the era, it does so because of its direct engagement with the religious struggles. We thus need to see that politics cannot be separated from religion during the reign of the early Stuarts. But our period concepts, such as “early modern era,” may lead us to slight, distort, or even ignore these religious factors that shaped the politics of 1624.

*Reception of the Work and Event*

Politics can be located in the reception rather than the production of the artwork; that is, in the audience's responses, perceptions, and modes of understanding. Those processes of recognition, acceptance, rejection, accommodation, interpretation, and evaluation are the register and final site of the meaning of theater in any culture. Who were those twenty-five to thirty thousand people in attendance during the nine days of *A Game at Chess*? The audience was probably predominately adult males. Perhaps one-third to one-half of the men in London saw the production. Of the gentry and nobility, the percentage was likely even higher for men. How can we construct political meaning apart from their reception? For example, in one of his letters John Chamberlain states that the play drew "all sorts of people old and younge, rich and poore, masters and seruants, papists, and puritans, wise men, et[c] churchmen and statesmen as sir henry wotton, Sir Albert morton, Sir Beniamin Ruddier, Sir Thomas Lake, and a world besides; the Lady Smith wold haue gon yf she could haue persauded me to go with her, but I could not sit so long, for we must haue ben there before one a'clocke at farthest to find any roome."<sup>57</sup> In turn, the Spanish ambassador, in correspondence back to Madrid, reported that "all the nobility still in London" had seen the production, and some of the Catholics "secretly."<sup>58</sup>

In recent years we have begun to analyze audience reception (e.g., horizons of expectation, reading formations, attendance patterns), but we need to expand and refine our methods of research and analysis, especially if we seek to understand the political features of the spectators. Surely, the political meaning of the production was interpreted quite differently by the range of spectators, from papist to puritan, from master to servant. We can be assured that Sir Thomas Lake, the former secretary of state who had ties to the pro-Spanish faction but yet was a moderate in his religious positions, was not offended by the play and production in the ways that the Spanish ambassador was. And he surely responded to certain political meanings that would not have occurred to his servant. But despite his ability to understand most of the references and allusions, his response is not the "correct" one. The political meanings of the event find their significance in the full and various responses of the many distinct individuals. Indeed, each spectator's response is another kind of idiolect—out of which a cumulative construction of the audience reception and its political features can be made.

So, in conclusion, political meanings can be located in any and all of these nine locations, from the idiolect of a single manuscript to the observations and understandings of a diverse group of spectators.

*The Historian's Perspective*

There is yet another location that intersects with all nine of the locations identified here: that is, the perspective of each historian. The task of de-

scribing and analyzing political meanings is shaped by not only our historical methodologies but also our historical perspectives. Necessarily, our own political understanding contributes to how we recognize, describe, and analyze the other nine contextual locations of political meanings and causes. Yet the minute we shift our attention to this last location of the political, we confront a number of key problems in historiography, from research methods to writing strategies. Of course, in our “postpositivist” age we readily admit that it is impossible to investigate the political context of past events from a neutral perspective. This “subjective” condition does not lessen, however, the need to tell the truth about the past events as best we can. Historical study is not merely a solipsistic narrative that we project upon past events. Our challenge, then, is to do justice to the complex, sometimes contradictory nature of politics in a theatrical event.

Ideally, as we apply our methodological tactics and interpretive strategies as historians, we would encompass all of the political locations of the historical event and its contexts. Of course, no historian achieves the ideal. But that’s no reason to be satisfied with a neat binary of text and context that, in turn, produces an oppositional politics based upon the power equation of authority and resistance. Even if we fail to realize a comprehensive analysis, we can begin to show, as I have attempted to do in this analysis of the production of *A Game at Chess*, that the theatrical event can be described and studied from many political perspectives. The relationship between theater and politics is a complex topic; our job is to do justice to its complexities. Achieving multiple perspectives is surely an appropriate and worthy aim of historical scholarship.<sup>59</sup>

## NOTES

1. By focusing on Middleton’s *A Game at Chess* in this current essay, I am attempting to apply the political model that I developed in “The Idea of the ‘Political’ in Our Histories of Theatre: Texts, Contexts, Periods, and Problems,” *Contemporary Theatre Review* 12, no. 3 (2001): 1–25. This earlier essay, in turn, has been revised for a chapter in my forthcoming book, *The Cambridge Introduction to Theatre Historiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

2. There is some disagreement on the starting date. T. H. Howard-Hill, who is usually the most reliable of scholars, sets the date at August 5, Thursday. R. C. Bald, G. E. Bentley, and others have set it at August 6. The letter of complaint by the Spanish ambassador, Don Carlos Coloma, to King James states, “The Actors who are called ‘the King’s,’ today and yesterday presented a comedy so scandalous, impious, barbarous, and so offensive to my royal master.” The date of his letter is Saturday, August 17 (Gregorian calendar, which is the seventh on the Julian calendar). George Lowe wrote on Saturday, August 7, that “there is a new play called the *Game at Chess* acted yesterday and today.” And John Holles, writing on Tuesday, August 10, states that the play had been “allreddy thrice acted with extraordinary applause.” That is, it had been performed on Friday, Saturday, and Monday. So the production opened on Friday, August 6. See T. H. Howard-Hill’s Revels edition of the play for his comments and the letters from Coloma and Lowe (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), 17, 193, and 199.

3. T. S. Eliot, "Thomas Middleton," in *Selected Essays*, 2nd ed. (London: Faber and Faber, 1934), 166.

4. R. C. Bald, preface to *A Game at Chesse by Thomas Middleton*, ed. R. C. Bald (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1928), ix.

5. The White King's Pawn also has some characteristics of Sir Toby Matthew, an English Catholic who was pro-Spanish.

6. Parliament impeached and convicted the Earl of Middlesex (Lionel Cranfield) in May 1624, after James had abandoned the negotiations with Spain; James agreed to commit himself to the war party, and he refused to defend his lord treasurer, who had made the political mistake of resisting not only James but also Prince Charles and Buckingham, who had been his mentor and protector. See Menna Prestwich, *Cranfield: Politics and Profit under the Early Stuarts* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966).

7. There was no question about the identification of Gondomar in the play. For example, in a letter of August 11, 1624, John Woolley refers to "the play of Gundomar." And Paul Overton, in a letter two days later, notes, "At the globe playhouse is dayly presented an odious play against Spaine, but principally Gondomar, and the Jusuits." For these letters see *A Game at Chess*, ed. Howard-Hill, app. 1, items 6 and 10, pp. 198 and 201.

8. For example, Gondomar played a significant role in convincing the king in 1618 to execute Sir Walter Raleigh, who had been imprisoned in the Tower. On Gondomar, see Charles H. Carter, "Gondomar: Ambassador to James I," *Historical Journal* 7 (1964): 189–208.

9. Samuel Rawson Gardiner, *Prince Charles and the Spanish Marriage: 1617–1623*, 2 vols. (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1869), 2:423.

10. The Earl of Oxford had been imprisoned in the Tower for twenty months in 1622 and 1623 because of his attacks on Count Gondomar and his advocacy for war in Europe; James released him on December 30, 1623, after Prince Charles and Buckingham had returned from Spain. The Earl of Southampton, once a patron of Shakespeare in the 1590s, had been placed in the Tower in 1621 for six months because of his advocacy for Protestant causes. He also led the corruption case against Francis Bacon, lord chancellor. He was to die of fever in Europe in late 1624, leading troops in the Netherlands.

11. In fact, King James had issued a series of edicts that attempted to control criticism of the government. On December 24, 1620, "A Proclamation against Excesse of Lavish and Licentious Speech of Matters of State" was published. Francis Bacon had written it for James. In June 1621 another proclamation attempting to control speech was issued. And on September 25, 1623, a proclamation was published against "sundry seditious, schismatical and scandalous" imported books. Henry Herbert had just been appointed Master of the Revels in 1623; nonetheless, despite the government campaign to censor speech and writing, he approved *A Game at Chess*.

12. Letters reprinted in appendix 1 of Howard-Hill's edition of the play, items 2 and 3, pp. 192–93. Spelling corrected to modern form.

13. Letter reprinted in appendix 1 of Howard-Hill's edition of the play, item 5, p. 194.

14. See letter from John Chamberlain to Sir Dudley Carleton, Saturday, August 21, 1624, reproduced in appendix 1 of Howard-Hill's edition of the play, item 21, p. 205.

15. Sir Edward Conway, letter of August 12, 1624, reproduced in appendix 1 of Howard-Hill's edition of the play, item 8, p. 200.

16. Conway, letter, 201. Ambassador Coloma had doubts, however, that appropriate action would be taken. On August 18, he wrote to Count Olivares in Madrid: "It remains to be seen whether the punishment that will be given to the actors and the author of the play will prove that the king's indignation against them is genuine." Quoted in T. H. Howard-Hill, *Middleton's "Vulgar Pasquin": Essays on "A Game at Chess"* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1995), 103.

17. Conway, letter in Howard-Hill's edition of *A Game at Chess*, 200.

18. From the Revels documents, as reproduced in N. W. Bawcutt, *The Control and Censorship of Caroline Drama: The Records of Sir Henry Herbert, Master of the Revels, 1623–73* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 154.

19. Indeed, despite assurances to the Spanish ambassador that the players were insolent and would be publicly punished (see appendix 1, item 9 in the Howard-Hill edition of the play), James evaded such punishment. He told Sir Edward Conway, secretary of state, that he was unwilling "to punish the innocent or utterly to ruin the Commanie." From *State Papers, Domestic; James I*, vol. 171, no. 75; SP14/171, reprinted in Howard-Hill's edition of the play, appendix 1, item 22, p. 206.

20. The foreign affairs select committee of the Privy Council had twelve members: John Williams (dean of Westminster and lord keeper of the seal), Sir Richard Weston (Chancellor of the Exchequer), Thomas Howard (Earl of Arundel and Surrey), William Herbert (Earl of Pembroke and lord chamberlain), James Hay (Earl of Carlisle), Sir Edward Conway (secretary of state), Lionel Cranfield (Earl of Middlesex and lord treasurer), Sir George Calvert (also secretary of state), Ludovic Stuart (Duke of Richmond and Lennox), James Hamilton (marquis), Arthur Chicester (Lord Belfast), and George Villiers (Duke of Buckingham and lord admiral). The pro-Spanish faction included Williams, Weston, Howard, Cranfield, and Calvert. Villiers had been pro-Spanish until he returned from Spain in October 1623, and then he became a leader, along with Herbert, of the anti-Spanish faction.

21. E. K. Chambers and Richard Dutton have argued that Henry Herbert likely received the Revels office because of the intervention of his distant cousin, the lord chamberlain. But N. W. Bawcutt disputes this proposition. He points out that there is no evidence for such patronage. "There may have been some complex political manoeuvring by which [Sir John] Astley was eased out [of the office of Master] in favour of Herbert, but other explanations are possible" (*Control and Censorship*, 34). At the same time, we might note that Herbert took over as Master on July 24, 1623; on August 7 he was knighted by James I at Wilton, the estate of the Earl of Pembroke, the lord chamberlain. This at least suggests the possibility of patronage by Pembroke, though it implies nothing about possible protection for the production of *A Game at Chess* a year later. Still, one of the estates that James visited during his 1624 progress was that of the Earl of Pembroke. James was at his estate on August 7, a day after the production opened. Pembroke was anti-Spanish, so did he know of the production, and thus invite James at just the time of the opening? If one is drawn to conspiracy theories, it is tempting to conjure with Pembroke.

22. John Woolley, letter reprinted in appendix 1 of Howard-Hill's edition of the play, item 17, p. 203; spelling modernized.

23. Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespearian Playing Companies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 140, 141.

24. Jerzy Limon, *Dangerous Matter: English Drama and Politics 1623/24* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 2.

25. Limon, *Dangerous Matter*, 10; also see 131.

26. See Margot Heinemann, *Puritanism and Theatre: Thomas Middleton and Opposition Drama under the Early Stuarts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,

1982). See also Albert Tricomi, *Anti-Court Drama in England, 1603–1642* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1989).

27. Margot Heinemann, "Drama and Opinion in the 1620s: Middleton and Massinger," in *Theatre and Government under the Early Stuarts*, ed. J. R. Mulryne and Margaret Shewring (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 246.

28. For the counterargument to Heinemann, see, for example, Thomas Cogswell, "Thomas Middleton and the Court, 1624: *A Game at Chess* in Context," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 42 (1984): 273–88. Also see works listed in the next note.

29. Richard Dutton, *Mastering the Revels: The Regulation and Censorship of English Renaissance Drama* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1991); Dutton, *Licensing, Censorship, and Authorship in Early Modern England: Buggeswords* (Houndsmill, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000); T. H. Howard-Hill, "Political Interpretations of Middleton's *A Game at Chess* (1624)," *Yearbook of English Studies* 21 (1991): 274–85; Howard-Hill, "The Origins of Middleton's *A Game at Chess*," *Research Opportunities in Renaissance Drama*, n.s. 39 (1988): 39–63; Howard-Hill, introduction to his edition of *A Game at Chess*; Howard-Hill, Middleton's "*Vulgar Pasquin*"; Thomas Cogswell, *The Blessed Revolution: English Politics and the Coming of War, 1621–1624* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Cogswell, "Middleton and the Court."

30. Dutton, *Mastering the Revels*, 245. Dutton continues his statement in this manner: "As with so many other plays that attracted official attention, it did not offend 'authority' as such but one element within the complex balancing of powers that constituted the government of England, and one that was unusually exposed and insecure. In this case, for the reasons I have outlined, that element was the king himself" (246). Ten years later he writes that "the root issue seems likely to have been that of impersonation of royalty and its representatives, rather than the offensive nature of the play in general" (*Licensing, Censorship, and Authorship*, 146).

31. Howard-Hill, introduction to *A Game at Chess*, 43.

32. I recognize, of course, that literary scholars have taken up the topic of theater and politics from various perspectives, including the matters of censorship, the antitheatrical tracts, the attempts of the London city fathers to control the theaters, the themes and references in political and historical plays, the power of the court, etc. But it is striking how often the studies draw upon one of two models that set up an opposition between central control and authority, on the one hand, and individual or communal resistance or subversion, on the other. This dichotomy is pervasive. It shows up in much of the scholarship on *A Game at Chess*, just as it defines many of the studies of other plays and playwrights.

33. In general terms, then, the political actions of individuals, groups, movements, and specific theatrical organizations are placed within two interrelated contextual paradigms: (1) governments, cultural institutions and practices, economic systems; and (2) large historical mentalities of an era or period that define the major operations of a culture, and perhaps even blanket the culture with ideological or hegemonic control over thought, discourse, and practices.

34. On Buckingham, see Roger Lockyer, *Buckingham, The Life and Political Career of George Villiers, First Duke of Buckingham, 1592–1628* (London: Longmans, 1981).

35. See, for example, Linda Levy Peck, *Court Patronage and Corruption in Early Stuart England* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990).

36. Robert E. Ruigh, *The Parliament of 1624: Politics and Foreign Policy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), 90.

37. See M. Lindsay Kaplan, *The Culture of Slander in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

38. See F. J. Levy, "How Information Spread Among the Gentry, 1550–1640," *Journal of British Studies* 21 (1982): 11–34.

39. Howard-Hill, *Middleton's "Vulgar Pasquin."*

40. Dutton, *Licensing, Censorship, and Authorship*, 156.

41. For a summary of the textual record, see the informative introduction by Howard-Hill in his edition of the play.

42. Howard-Hill, *Middleton's "Vulgar Pasquin,"* 70.

43. Letter reprinted in appendix 1 of Howard-Hill's edition of the play, item 5, p. 194.

44. For a survey, see Roy Porter, "History of the Body," in *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, ed. Peter Burke (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991), 206–32. For instance, Porter writes: "There is abundant scope for political historians and political scientists to be more sensitive to the power realities produced by the exercise of the state's authority over the bodies of its subjects" (225).

45. *The Letters of John Holles, 1587–1637*, 3 vols., ed. P. R. Seddon (Nottingham, 1983), reprinted in *A Game at Chess*, ed. Howard-Hill, 199.

46. See Gurr, *Shakespearian Playing Companies*, 142.

47. The title page of Thomas Scott's *Second Part of Vox Populi* (1624)—one of the pamphlets Middleton drew upon—represents Gondomar, and shows both his litter and his special chair, with the hole in the seat. A reproduction appears in the Howard-Hill's edition of the play, 47.

48. See R. Malcolm Smuts, "Occasional Events, Literary Texts and Historical Interpretations," in *Neo-Historicism: Studies in Renaissance Literature, History and Politics*, ed. Robin Headlam Wells, Glenn Burgess, and Rowland Wymer (Woodbridge, Suffolk: D. S. Brewer, 2000), 179–98.

49. David Riggs, *Ben Jonson: A Life* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 290.

50. Reprinted in appendix 1 of Howard-Hill's edition of the play, item 6, p. 198; spelling modernized in some cases.

51. The historical scholarship on the complexity of governmental politics of 1623 and 1624 is quite substantial. For some recent historical studies, including studies of the reign of James I, consult these books (and their bibliographies): Cogswell, *The Blessed Revolution*; Glyn Redworth, *The Prince and the Infanta: The Cultural Politics of the Spanish Match* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003); Peck, *Court Patronage*; Ruigh, *The Parliament of 1624*; Conrad Russell, *Parliaments and English Politics, 1621–1624* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979); Kevin Sharpe, ed., *Faction and Parliament: Essays on Early Stuart History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978); Kevin Sharpe and Peter Lake, eds., *Culture and Politics in Early Stuart England* (London: Macmillan, 1994); R. Malcolm Smuts, *Court Culture and the Origins of a Royalist Tradition in Early Stuart England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987); Johann P. Sommerville, *Politics and Ideology in England, 1603–1640*, 2nd ed. (London: Longman, 1999); Lockyer, *Buckingham*. Also see Roger Lockyer's *James VI & I* (London: Longman, 1998). His annotated bibliography is a good introduction to the scholarship on James.

52. Cogswell, *The Blessed Revolution*, 281.

53. Too neatly, Margot Heinemann places Scott in an oppositional camp: "Scott was a radical in politics as well as religion, continuing as a political refugee in Holland to issue pamphlets full of polemical praise for Parliament as the greatest

hindrance to Spanish plots, and the Dutch republicans as the models of democracy and prosperity" ("Political Drama," *The Cambridge Companion to English Renaissance Drama*, eds. A. R. Braunmuller and Michael Hattaway [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, 202]. Yes, but what was radical in 1621, when James was tilting toward Spain, became national rhetoric in 1624, when the country was preparing for war.

54. I attempt to address this issue in the book that Tracy C. Davis and I coedited, *Theatricality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

55. See, for example, Linda Levy Peck, ed., *The Mental World of the Jacobean Court* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); J. G. A. Pocock, ed., *The Varieties of British Political Thought, 1500–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Sharpe and Lake, *Culture and Politics*; and Anthony Fletcher and Peter Roberts, eds., *Religion, Culture and Society in Early Modern Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). In addition, there has been substantial work on popular culture, led by the writings of Peter Burke, such as *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, rev. ed. (London: Scolar Press, 1996).

56. Thomas Postlewait, "The Criteria for Periodization in Theatre History," *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 3 (1988): 299–318; "The Concept of Period Style in Cultural History," *Nordic Theatre Studies*, special international issue (1990): 52–55; "The Sacred and the Secular: Reflections on Writing Renaissance Theatre History," *Assaph* 12 (Spring 1997): 1–31.

57. Reprinted in appendix 1 of Howard-Hill's edition of the play, item 21, p. 205.

58. Reprinted in appendix 1 of Howard-Hill's edition of the play, item 5, pp. 194–98.

59. With gratitude, I acknowledge the very helpful commentary of my colleague in the Department of English, Richard Dutton, who read a draft of this essay and graciously participated in a class meeting on *A Game at Chess*. He guided my graduate students and me through some of the documentary difficulties and challenges in reconstructing this major event in British theater history.



# Representing History: Performing the Columbian Exposition

*Rosemarie K. Bank*

The United States lies like a huge page in the history of society. Line by line as we read this continental page from west to east we find the record of social evolution. It begins with the Indian and the hunter; it goes on to tell of the disintegration of savagery by the entrance of the trader, the pathfinder of civilization.

—"The Significance of the Frontier in American History"  
Frederick Jackson Turner

It is not a circus, nor indeed is it acting at all, in a theatrical sense, but an exact reproduction of daily scenes in frontier life as experienced and enacted by the very people who now form the "Wild West" Company.

—*Illustrated London News*, April 16, 1887

All was simulacrum: the buildings, the statues, and the bridges were not of enduring stone but lath and plaster.

—Claude Bragdon, *Chicago History*, 1893

Scholars have not been slow to notice the collisions and contradictions presented by and represented in the Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893. Alan Trachtenberg depicts it as the culminating spectacle of what he calls "the incorporation of America" in the nineteenth century. Richard Slotkin examines the fair as the high point in the performance history of "Buffalo Bill's Wild West" and traces the show's role in the creation of the "gunfighter nation." Richard White explores the connection between Frederick Jackson Turner and Buffalo Bill and representations of the frontier that offered images of peaceful or of violent conquest (Turner presented his "frontier thesis" at the American Historical Association convention during the fair, and William F. Cody's "Buffalo Bill's Wild West" performed next to the fairgrounds). Historians of the fair itself and of organizations contributing to it (such as the Smithsonian Institution and the Bureau of Indian Affairs) have produced a rich literature often critiquing the fair's racist and sexist organization and displays, while historians of Buffalo Bill and Wild West shows examine the man, the productions, their performers, their publicity, and their impact upon U.S., indeed international, culture in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. A substantial scholarship has also taken up Frederick Jackson Turner and the impact of his view of American history. Many recent studies about these subjects reflect a revised view of U.S. history, and specifically of "the frontier," indebted to scholarly research exposing much that is deplorable about the

policies and behavior of the U.S. government and white Americans toward Amerindians.<sup>1</sup>

What more needs to be said? What more can be said about these large and complex subjects, particularly in the foreshortened format of a chapter? Two issues seem to rise from the extensive (and increasing) scholarly literature about the Columbian Exposition, Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis, and Buffalo Bill's Wild West that can, at least, be located, if hardly excavated, here. First, there is the legacy of binary thinking about history to which the late Michel Foucault alerted us. It is the legacy of seeking to drive out commanding narratives, "to pacify them by force," in order to replace them with our own. Rather, Foucault argues, the task is to map propositions "in a particular discursive practice, the point at which they are constituted, to define the form that they assume, the relations that they have with each other, and the domain that they govern." The injustices of history and of historical writing simultaneously do the work of the appeal of commanding narratives and of their undoing. The binary view is particularly obstructive for, second, what I have elsewhere called *theater culture*, that is, the interconnection between performance and culture and culture and performance. Representation is not a single but a multiple and simultaneous relationship—performer to audience to role to culture to venue to cast to means of production to image, and so on—which defies the analysis it is so frequently given in cultural histories as an ahistorical problem or "reality."<sup>2</sup>

While "unreal" cultural phenomena carry social responsibility with them because they can produce "real" effects (that is, attitudes, thoughts, emotions, and behaviors), theater historians have been slow to formulate a way of talking about representation that considers this responsibility without recapitulating antitheatrical prejudice. This chapter will look at different representations of and at the Columbian Exposition—itsself a simulacrum—in order to consider their interactions and constitutions as performances. What is an intellectual performance (the Anthropology Department's ethnographic exhibits on the fairground, for example, or Frederick Jackson Turner's paper)? How do the effects it produces vary from site to site and audience to audience? What characteristics do these kinds of performances share with performance more conventionally construed (Buffalo Bill's Wild West, the Indian Village on the Midway) and what truth claims did each make? My focus will be "the frontier" (or "Wild West") and Amerindians, but parallels with representations of women, African Americans, and foreign nationals at the Columbian Exposition will be evident to students of these subjects. Further, since these subjects involve the theater historian in the interrogation of a large (and growing) body of historiographical scholarship concerning cultural constructs—about fairs, museums, popular entertainments, and tourism, for example, but also the cultural constructions of anthropological and historical scholarship—it is hoped the wider application of performances at the Columbian Exposition to their subjects will not wholly be erased by the omission of material and arguments that an essay of this brevity must perform omit.<sup>3</sup>

It is not difficult to characterize the Columbian Exposition as a dream scenario, the "White City" (with full racial inflection) of a power elite, simulating for a mass audience its own sense of beauty, control, hierarchy, and self-secured success. Certainly, these words and their containing synonyms are those of contemporaneous participants and accounts, and have contributed to the projection of the Columbian Exposition as a dream site in subsequent histories of it. Recent analyses of the fair and its Columbian project, taking the dream projection literally, depict the "White City" as far from utopian, indeed, as a dystopic, malevolent site that, by design or indifference, featured exhibits and interpretations that produced intensely racist, sexist, and ethnist effects. The demon scenario is the flip side of, and depends upon, the utopian site to make its case. Rather than this binary negation and its positing of failed perfection, when the Columbian Exposition and its World Congresses are repositioned as performances of a far from ordered world, they become visible as heterogeneous spaces more nearly resembling Foucault's idea of a heterotopia, a countersite "in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted."<sup>4</sup>

Despite valiant efforts to promote the orderly display of goods, art, artifacts, technology, and natural products, the Columbian Exposition was a jumble of material spilling from building to building and displaced from site to site throughout the 553-acre fairgrounds and its adjoining 80-acre Midway Plaisance. Henry Adams, reflecting upon his two visits during the summer of 1893, observed:

The Exposition itself defied philosophy. One might find fault until the last gate closed, one could still explain nothing that needed explanation. . . . since Noah's Ark, no such Babel of loose and ill-joined, such vague and ill-defined and unrelated thoughts and half-thoughts and experimental outcries as the Exposition, had ever ruffled the surface of the Lakes.<sup>5</sup>

The Department of Ethnology and Archaeology at the Exposition ("Department M") typified the confusion and disorder characterizing fair display. Frederic Ward Putnam, head of Harvard's Peabody Museum of American Archaeology and Ethnology, was appointed director of the department early in 1891. Putnam's acceptance terms committed the fair's managers to support original research. Squads of unpaid graduate students from universities around the country were put into the field to locate and dispatch materials to Chicago. Their finds were augmented with fieldwork gathered and sent by government employees (mostly military officers attached to U.S. embassies in Latin America) and supported by existing collections. Though this essay features the displays of Putnam's Department M, it was not the only noncommercial exhibitor of ethnographic material. In addition to state-sponsored and foreign displays, large collections sent by the Smithsonian Institution were separately administered and

displayed, chiefly in the U.S. Government Building. In addition, the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs, opposed both to ethnology and ethnologists (Indian commissioner Thomas Morgan thought them “the most insidious and active enemies” of Indian assimilation through education), constructed its own attempt to evade the “savage” past, a schoolhouse/residence on the fairgrounds, with both mounted displays and a rotating cadre of Indian students, studying, making handicrafts, singing songs for visitors, and the like.<sup>6</sup>

Originally slotted for 160,000 square feet in the Liberal Arts Building and a 1,000-foot strip of land along the lagoon for outdoor exhibits, Putnam’s displays found their home not there at the center of things, but at the tail end of the fairgrounds, close to the livestock exhibit and sewer works, in a building charitably described as “unpretentious and devoid of all ornamentation.” Blocked off from the lake by the Forestry Building and a loop of the Intramural Railway, the Anthropological Building gave up 30,000 of the ground floor’s 52,804 square feet of display space to the Bureau of Corrections and the Bureau of Sanitation and Hygiene, and surrendered still more space to large exhibits sent by foreign countries—362 domestic but 452 foreign collections, by one count, on the ground floor and the gallery above it. One commemorative album of the fair observed, “Only a comparative sprinkling [of visitors] invades the territory south of the Stock Pavilion. So much is to be seen in the northern part of the grounds . . . that the majority are fain to content themselves with a hasty survey of this region from the Intramural railway.” The marginalization of the ethnographic exhibits affected the impact of live displays on the fairground itself.<sup>7</sup>

The eight rooms of laboratories in the north end of the Anthropological Building, organized by Franz Boas and staffed by professors from the University of Wisconsin and the newly established University of Chicago, offered fairgoers comparative craniology, anthropometry, and “exhibits referring to the development of the white race in America.” Significant to the cultural staging of the “native” is Department M’s “introduction to America of the ‘life group,’” a form of ethnographic display utilized by Boas, at Putnam’s instruction, that featured manikins “‘dressed in the garments of the people, and arranged in groups so as to illustrate the life history of each tribe represented.’” Descendants of the wax figures in evidence in Charles Willson Peale’s museum in Philadelphia in the 1790s, “only in 1893 were groups of such costumed figures arranged in dramatic scenes from daily life and ritual” in a museum context in the United States, a context more Barnum than Boasian in shifting the display of ethnological artefacts from the descriptive to the performative. As Ira Jacknis, the historian of this process, observes, “the life group was a presentational medium allowing these cultural connections to be *seen*,” and, “not surprisingly, the life groups were enormously popular with visitors.”<sup>8</sup>

The performative aspect of displays became troubling to anthropologists, as did the entertainment aspect of museum display. In the flush of the Columbian Exposition, however, display cases, photographs, and re-

constructions indoors led seamlessly to living people in the “Ethnographical Exhibit” out-of-doors. Although Robert W. Rydell locates Department M’s “exhibits of Dakota Sioux, Navajos, Apaches, and various northwestern tribes on or near the Midway Plaisance,” which, in his view, “immediately degraded them,” there were only two outdoor displays of living Native peoples on the fairground itself (there was, indeed, a commercially operated American Indian Village on the Midway). The “Esquimaux Village,” at the fair’s Northwest Pond, was a commercial exhibit owned and operated by the J. W. Skiles Company of Spokane on a site not really “near” the Midway Plaisance, though more so than Department M’s non-commercial Ethnographical Exhibit, situated near the South Pond and the Anthropological Building, which could not be further away from the Plaisance and still be on the fairgrounds.<sup>9</sup>

Putnam had instructed Boas to arrange the fourteen-some Indian “villages” making up the outdoor Ethnographical Exhibit of his department “with historic accuracy, in strict chronological sequence,” that is, geographically north to south. Contemporary accounts identify the display as including “Esquimaux” from Labrador to the north, then a Cree family and Haida/Fort Rupert peoples from Canada, Iroquois from the north-eastern United States (there are also photos of a “Penobscott Village”), Chippewa, Sioux, Menominee, and Winnebago from the northeastern and midnorth states, Choctaws from Louisiana, Apaches and Navajos from New Mexico and Arizona, Coahuilas from California, and Papagos and Yakuis from the U.S.-Mexico border region. (Publicity claims the Indians “lived” in their reconstructed dwellings, but it is not clear if they stayed there after hours.) During the day, the ethnological Indians cooked, worked, talked with visitors (if they could), played musical instruments, sang, and danced.<sup>10</sup>

The conflation of real and faux continued to the south of the “villages,” where the Anthropological Department had erected a simulation of the ruins of Yucatan, “made of staff by means of papier-maché.” The six sections of the ruins were separated by a walkway from a commercial representation of the cliff dwellings at Battle Rock Mountain in Colorado, reproduced by the H. J. Smith Exploring Company (at one-tenth actual size) as a series of rooms stocked with relics—including human remains—along an ascending pathway: “Admission 25 cents; catalogue 10 cents.” In this heterotopic play of imaged and real, science, culture, entertainment, and history moved freely through sites at once false and true, each offering its own view of the work and culture of the “real” America and Americans.<sup>11</sup>

While there were only two outdoor exhibits on the fairgrounds involving what the Indian Bureau (intending disparagement) called “show Indians,” Smithsonian, state, and foreign exhibits also included live displays. In addition to housing a large Smithsonian exhibit called “Women’s Work in Savagery”—eighty cases of Amerindian embroidery, hide work, pottery, baskets, looms, and implements—the Women’s Building, for example, featured a Navajo weaver working her loom on a staircase landing (dubbed the “Indian Alcove”), one of surely many living accompaniments

to the Indian figures prominent in the fair's artwork and statuary. In addition to Amerindians working in "show" capacities producing artifacts, many Indians appeared at the fair's special events. During the May 1, 1893, opening festivities, William F. Cody (at his own expense) invited a hundred Sioux from Pine Ridge, Standing Rock, and Rosebud to watch the ceremonies from the balcony of the Administration Building, along with his own employees—including ghost dancers, Kicking Bear, Two Strike, Jack Red Cloud, Rocky Bear, Young Man Afraid of His Horses, and Short Bull, in full regalia. On Italian Day, twelve Sioux, in full Plains dress, played the Columbus "welcoming party" of Arawaks, to shouts of "Bravo" and "Encore!" from the audience. On Chicago Day (October 9, 1893), near the close of the fair, Chief Simon Pokagon of the Potawatomi used the occasion to speak against the treatment accorded the descendants of his father's generation, who had deeded the land to Chicago in 1833 that became the site for the Exposition.<sup>12</sup>

Though Cody's guests may not have been paid performers, the Sioux were hardly Arawaks, and Simon Pokagon (given the occasion) was both "official" and "entertainment," the distinctions that designated members of the public, delegations and dignitaries, ethnographic display personnel, exhibit demonstrators, and show Indians at the Columbian Exposition were extremely fluid. Indeed, such boundaries are hardly less porous today. The interactions and interrelationships among these roles helped turn the fair's intellectual and pedagogic intentions into a performance. Sometimes the transfer was direct. The performances the Kwakiutl gave, for example, first shown to Franz Boas, were "rituals that in some cases were no longer practiced," according to Curtis Hinsley. Chosen for their show quality, ethnographic "classics" "blocking out the changes of time," anthropological subjects are frozen in the past by the progressive scenario of the exposition. Performance, however, is live and critiques even the ideas it enacts. That critique is visible in Indians watching the hoopla commemorating the quadracentennial of Columbus's arrival in America at the fair's opening, in Indians playing (other) Indians in an enactment of that event (doing it their way, the Plains way, which had become *the* Indian performance by 1893), and in the analysis by Simon Pokagon of what these events had wrought. Some scientists at the exposition may have thought their intellectual order of things triumphant, but fairgoers as well as Indians would have been hard-pressed not to grasp the performative nature of the fair exchange. The juxtaposition of equally false official and commercial exhibits stressed to fairgoers their constructed rather than "real" nature, while the difficulty of finding order as an audience, when assaulted by acres of disorderly and simulated phenomena, creates points of detachment from the intellectual performance of the "dream city."<sup>13</sup>

Though we may never know how many Amerindians labored in show capacities at the World's Columbian Exposition or how many appeared at the fair's special festivities, we do know their presence helped create and define the event, and that they were vocal, as well as visible, in

shaping the performances fairgoers saw. Central to issues of agency in this regard is the degree of autonomy as performers that show Indians enjoyed. Culture and commerce clearly went hand in hand at the fair, a fact of life for theater and shows in the United States in the nineteenth century. The "reality" of the exposition as a show was emphasized when five families in the Esquimaux Village successfully sued to break their contract with their manager, the J. W. Skiles Company, and opened their own show outside the fairgrounds. In this, these performers functioned like other paid professionals at the time. The Indians in the Anthropology Department's Ethnographical Exhibit were similarly transported, housed, and paid, though the terms and conditions of work are currently unclear. The students at the BIA Indian School exhibit and those at the Carlisle Indian School exhibit of student industrial work in the Liberal Arts Building, on the other hand, appear to have been boarded rather than treated as paid employees. Theater historians will need to compare the contracts, conditions, and compensation of exposition Indians, show Indians on the Midway, and those at Buffalo Bill's Wild West (and compare these, in turn, to the contracts, conditions, and compensations accorded similar but non-Indian acts), in order to gauge the degree of economic freedom and performative autonomy show Indians enjoyed.<sup>14</sup>

Opposition to show Indians and antitheatrical prejudice deny that employees (performers) *are* employees and that what they are doing is a performance, forestalling compensation in the first case and input into what is performed in the second. Whether the view of Amerindians performed on the fairground was that of the preservation of the customs and artifacts of "vanishing" Indians, that of the inculcation of the skills necessary to assimilate, or that of the representations of show Indian acts and artistry, however, Trennert emphasizes that "the public drew little distinction between official and commercial Indian displays," either at the Columbian or at subsequent world's fairs. Moreover, as it became clear "old" Indian culture, not new, had the public fancy, the BIA gave up education exhibits and proposed in later years to offer nonstudent "Indians 'dressed in native costume and carrying on native handicrafts, weaving, bead and leatherwork, making jewelry and baskets, work in birch bark, etc.,' right in the school building." In time, the bureau even constructed its own "village" near the conventional school exhibit where, in one case, "Geronimo and a group of Apache prisoners from Fort Sill" signed autographs and sold bows and arrows.<sup>15</sup>

The perils of the performative for Columbian scholars like Putnam were most sharply drawn on the Midway Plaisance, which operated under the auspices of his department, but whose exhibits came under the management of Sol Bloom (in later years, Bloom observed that putting Putnam in charge of the Midway was "about as intelligent a decision as it would be today to make Albert Einstein manager of Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey's Circus"). It is not difficult to locate the White City and, particularly, the Midway Plaisance, as sites for the expression of racism. While "visitors apparently experienced little overt discrimination

in public facilities at the fair"—and all the world came to see the Columbian Exposition—access to exhibit space on the fairground was restricted (Buffalo Bill, African Americans, and Indians were among those denied it) and displays emphasized “the stages of the development of man on [at least] the American continent,” which created a hierarchy of races detrimental to nonwhites. Recent histories of world’s fairs view the Midway Plaisance as the malevolent topos par excellence. Indeed, Robert W. Rydell considers the development of midways (ambivalent in Chicago, but endorsed by fairs thereafter) “‘living proof’ for the imperial calculations” of “American elites to establish their cultural hegemony,” in part through the midway’s “anthropologically validated racial hierarchies.” For these, Rydell concludes, “the World’s Columbian Exposition became the standard with which every subsequent fair would be compared.”<sup>16</sup>

The racism in contemporaneous material about the Columbian Exposition is wholly evident, but the binary strategies of negation that reveal it evade the complexities of participation by Amerindians (and other races and nationalities) in cultural performances during the fair, and can betray a lingering antitheatrical prejudice against performing itself. Against Rydell’s charge of degradation, L. G. Moses argues, for example, that “neither the newspaper accounts nor the agency records that contain comments by and about Indians bears this [degradation] out.” Performers complicate unitary readings and performance resists binary interpretations. Thomas Roddy and Henry “Buckskin Joe” De Ford, for example, managed a troupe of sixty show Indians from various tribes on the Midway that performed a gash show in which Chief Twobites and Joe Strongback had four slashes cut between the shoulder blades and a rope laced through, to the horror of a *Chicago Tribune* reporter who wrote in protest against the act. The performers filed no complaints. Was this “abuse” or even “torture,” as the reporter saw it, or is there a show context for even this act? Michael Chemers has suggested that critics of “freak” shows operate from unproblematized moral positions that are presumed to transcend the sociohistoric forces shaping those positions. Characterizing such views as ahistorical and frequently influenced by “backplanted” prejudices, Chemers argues that these positions often ignore the political and economic factors that influence performers and “unduly privileges an elitist hegemony which has traditionally dominated historical research” concerning “high” and “low” art. Similar issues have been raised concerning burlesque shows and performances classified as pornographic, but also medicine shows, carnival and circus acts, magic shows, a variety of popular performers, and Wild West shows (and, indeed, voices against iconographic or living representation of any kind have been raised throughout history). Autonomy weighs little if a performative choice is viewed as “so bad, I don’t care if it is voluntary.”<sup>17</sup>

Performances on the Midway Plaisance, the grittiest and most commercial part of the fair, invite critiques of how audiences and managers behaved and of the shows performers offered. Much has been written about the first two (audiences and managers), but the third is not always



transparent or even known. Were Chief Twobites and Joe Strongback really gashed, for example, or was theirs indeed a simulation for which the *Tribune* reporter was the “mark”? What was the act intended to show—bravery? savagery?—and why show it? Where on the Midway was the act done? How often could it have been done? Maps of the Midway Plaisance show (but often omit) an “Indian Village” to the west of the Ferris wheel, yet in addition to the Roddy and De Ford show, accounts identify P. B. Wickham’s exhibit of “Sitting Bull’s Cabin” (rivaling the one on Buffalo Bill’s campground and another in the North Dakota State exhibit), which featured nine Sioux, including Rain-in-the-Face, who had petitioned the fair managers for (and been denied) control over or influence in Native American representations on the fairgrounds. Did the Wickham exhibit on the Midway offer a countersite in which the Sioux found the agency to perform their culture as they deemed appropriate? Were show Indians on the Midway the class of duped subjects their well-wishers and the Indian Bureau characterized them as being, or did their view of what constituted culture or performance not conform to the senses of propriety and advantage dictated by managers (fair and commercial), anthropologists, reporters, audiences, or historians?<sup>18</sup>

The White City and its Midway can be seen as a heterotopia of contesting sites—the “real,” the faux, and the simulated; the educational, the aesthetic, and the entertaining; the state-sponsored, the fair-sponsored, and the commercially produced. The World Congresses reflecting the ideologies driving the White City may also profitably be viewed as heterotopic performances rather than unitary or utopic/distopic spaces. The heavily subscribed World Congresses were held in the just completed “Permanent Memorial Art Palace” (today’s Art Institute of Chicago) and organized with near military precision into twenty Departments with 224 divisions, which ran the duration of the exposition (May 15 through October 28, 1893). The World’s Historical Congress, World’s Congress of Folk-Lore, and World’s Congress on Philology and Literary Archaeology were in the Literature Department, while remaining branches of archaeology and ethnology were assigned to various congress departments. The divisions in the work of the newly founded science of anthropology, whose International Congress was also organized by the fair, reflect what Curtis Hinsley identifies as “much confusion” at the time concerning the relationships among environment, native philosophies and religions, myths, art, practical activity, and paleontology, within larger controversies about nature versus nurture and artifacts versus contexts. Otis Mason’s address on behalf of the Smithsonian exhibit, for example, counseled anthropologists to view Indians racially, on the one hand urging the distinctive features of each culture, on the other the inevitable extinguishing of cultures that failed, as Mason would later say, to “blend into ‘the proper flow of true culture . . . the flow of world-embracing commerce.’”<sup>19</sup>

Frederick Jackson Turner’s paper to the American Historical Association, “whose ninth annual meeting was held in conjunction with the World’s Historical Congress, with a programme practically identical,”

might have passed with good, but not distinguished notice, on a hot July 12 evening ("the afternoons being devoted to the Exposition at Jackson Park"). The up-and-coming historian and his thesis concerning the Frontier in American history, however, had powerful friends, and provided the unifying narrative that eluded science. As a player in the "world" performed by the Columbian Exposition, Turner's thesis simultaneously affirms and negates constructs of "the native" and "the American" enacted there. To be sure, the evolution on display at the fair and at the World's Congresses had itself shifted significantly, as Foucault observes:

In the eighteenth century, the evolutionist idea is defined on the basis of a kinship of species forming a continuum laid down at the outset (interrupted only by natural catastrophes) or gradually built up by the passing of time. In the nineteenth century, the evolutionist theme concerns not so much the constitution of a continuous table of species, as the description of discontinuous groups and the analysis of the modes of interaction between an organism whose elements are interdependent and an environment that provides its real conditions of life. A single theme, but based on two types of discourse.<sup>20</sup>

The discontinuous groups evolving in Turner's view of the closed frontier conceptualized already conventional views. Richard White, in comparing Turner's and Buffalo Bill's Wild West, sees Turner's frontier as arguing the (chiefly) peaceful settlement of an (envisioned) empty space, a process Joaquin Miller poeticized as "A kingdom won without the guilt / Of studied battle." Into this utopia, Turner inserted the frontiersman, his scholarly embodiment of James W. Steele's "sons of the border," a type of man clothed by western life "with a new individuality" that could "make him forget the tastes and habits of early life, and transform him into one of that restless horde of cosmopolites who form the crest of the slow wave of humanity which year by year creeps toward the setting sun." More directly influential, Turner's biographer Wilbur R. Jacobs observes, were the early volumes of Theodore Roosevelt's *The Winning of the West*, positing the heroic border warrior as a "type of man [who] marked a stage in the evolutionary process of society's development," the type more significant to Turner's view of historical development than the study of individuals.<sup>21</sup>

Gifted with a copy of the paper, Roosevelt (the man who would subsequently claim that his use of the term *Rough Riders* had nothing to do with Buffalo Bill's Wild West) wrote Turner, "I think you have struck some first class ideas, and have put into definite shape a good deal of thought which has been floating around rather loosely." Indeed, Turner's writing depends upon accessible images:

The wilderness masters the colonist. It finds him a European in dress, industries, tools, modes of travel, and thought. It takes him from the railroad car and puts him in the birch canoe. It strips off the garments of civilization and arrays him in the hunting shirt and mo-

cassin. It puts him in the log cabin of the Cherokee and Iroquois and runs an Indian palisade around him. Before long he has gone to planting Indian corn and plowing with a sharp stick; he shouts the war cry and takes the scalp in orthodox Indian fashion.

"At the frontier," Turner thought, "the environment is at first too strong for the man." Perceived as a boundary line, or grid of lines that had marched from east to west, from frontier to ranches, to farms, to manufacturing, and to cities, Turner's frontier marches in file to fill in the image of an empty space. The 1890 census had declared this frontier line dissolved, and Turner's thesis offered a closed (and nostalgic) explanation of its significance and a history of its passing. Though himself a son of the (Mid)west, of the open prairies and plains, Turner's thesis is an urbanist view of the glory (and cost) of progress: the White City rising where log cabins and the homes of the Potawatomi once stood.<sup>22</sup>

Historians have not failed to note the many aspects of American history Turner's thesis omits—economic explanations, class antagonisms, imperialism, the development of American capitalism and its connections to world economies, among them—and the many sins of interpretation it commits (emptying the land, tying the development of national democracy to the pioneer, separating American history from political history elsewhere in the world, sectionalizing diversity, nativism, and the positing of a unique American spirit, name some of the transgressions cited). So initially successful was the thesis among historians, however, that, by the 1930s, "the American Historical Association was branded one great Turner-verein." Poised historiographically somewhere between racial and geographic determinism, Turner's frontier mapped a terrain simultaneously closed and opened, a history written yet just beginning to write itself, in the discontinuous discursive mode of nineteenth-century American evolutionism described by Foucault and evident at the Columbian Exposition and its congresses. Aided to influence by Herbert Baxter Adams (the secretary of the AHA and Turner's doctoral advisor at Johns Hopkins), who referred to the paper several times in his report of the proceedings, Turner's frontier is irrevocably the environment of the Indian, but it is a frontier of change. In it, the frontiersman "must accept the conditions which it furnishes or perish, and so he fits himself into the Indian clearings and follows the Indian trails. Little by little he transforms the wilderness."<sup>23</sup>

It is curious to find this frontier described as a line, "the meeting point between savagery and civilization," bounded and filled in edge to edge, when Turner's thesis simultaneously creates a frontier that is a space, "not the old Europe" bordered anew, but a space shaped and inhabited by those "who grew up under these conditions . . . the really American part of our history." Turner segments the space, envisioning it in developmental stages—"line by line we read this continental page from west to east"—from frontier to city, but his is actually a history of simultaneous spaces, even in the moment Turner wrote of these spaces as past.

Those present spaces were very much on view at the Columbian Exposition in Buffalo Bill's Wild West, to which Cody had specially invited the historians on the afternoon of Turner's presentation, an invitation that the procrastinating young scholar had to decline.<sup>24</sup>

What, then, is the intellectual "performance" of Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis? In bringing Turner's frontier and Buffalo Bill's Wild West into the same display space, Richard White's essay for the Newberry Library's 1994–95 exhibit rightly underscores the absent Amerindian players who suffer equally in peaceful and in violent stories of the American frontier. Both scenarios argue, however (as does the Columbian Exposition site), the presence rather than the absence of those key players. To be sure, Frederick Jackson Turner had neither artifacts, art technology, nor Indians to assist him. Like any dramatist, Turner had only the word to offer, but it was not the detached word of the novelist (still less the objective, scientized language of the ideal historian of the 1890s), rather the representative, imaged language of the playwright in which "actors" perform history. So effective was Turner's staging that it came to enjoy the same representative afterlife of performance material. Other Columbian scholars used even more elements of performance. Washington Matthews, for example, illustrated his lecture "Sacred Objects of the Navajo" during the Folk-lore Congress with both specimens (baskets, painted sticks) and phonograph records of Navajo music. Confronting the limitations of verbal description by offering to play Indian, as Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimblett observes, Matthews and other congress speakers who offered enactments sought to make "the apparently trivial interesting by performing ethnography." Captain H. L. Scott, of the Seventh U.S. Cavalry, went further still toward the performative by using show Indians from Buffalo Bill's Wild West to illustrate his lecture for the Folk-lore Congress, "The Sign Language of the Plains Indians" (the folklorists were invited to be Cody's guests the same afternoon as the historians, July 12, 1893).<sup>25</sup>

Buffalo Bill's Wild West represented still another "history," one that served as both site and countersite for the histories offered by the Columbian Exposition and its congresses. The show brought these sites together in one performative display, one simultaneous showing of the simulation that had, by 1893, become the history of the "native" and the "American." Cody's "campground, arena, and grandstand" next to the fairground offered foot-weary fairgoers a chance to sit down and to enjoy the entertainment they sought at the exhibition (and perhaps at its congresses). A specific construction of history and the authentic came with a seat at Buffalo Bill's Wild West. "It is not a 'show' in any sense of the word, but it is a series of original, genuine, and instructive OBJECT LESSONS," a broadside promised patrons, "in which the participants repeat the heroic parts they have played in actual life." William F. Cody and his show Indians had lived the frontier they invoked, and their acts in the Wild West program for Chicago reflected that. International contingents of cavalry and show riders had been added to the Wild West during the European tour that preceded the exposition, and Cody's general manager, Nate Salisbury, opened the

Wild West for business in April 1893, before the fair itself commenced, to assure high quality for the exposition's international audience.<sup>26</sup>

From the grand review introducing "Buffalo Bill's Wild West and Congress of Rough Riders of the World," through its seventeen acts, to the farewell salute by the entire company, the show underscored the presence, rather than absence, of Indians and the frontier. Present as evidence were people and things to materially attest to the reality of Indians and frontiers: performers who had been frontier scouts, wagons that had carried emigrants across the prairies, an "authentic" Deadwood Mail Coach, Indians who were not only truly Indians, but Indians who had (like William F. Cody) lived the history of bison hunts, skilled riding, battles with U.S. Cavalry, and ghost dancing (if not of attacking wagon trains or stage coaches), and bison who nearly were (as the program declared) "the last of the known Native Herd." That these persuasive presences told audiences a tale they wanted to hear made the Columbian Exposition the show's most successful season (186 days of continuous performance in one location, from April 26 to October 31, 1893, before six million people, clearing an estimated million dollars).<sup>27</sup>

At the time of the Columbian Exposition in Chicago, Buffalo Bill's Wild West had just completed two triumphal tours abroad before the crowned heads and millions of other Europeans. The show trumpeted this achievement as a "wondrous voyage." Like Columbus, the PR none too subtly implied, the Wild West (as America) had completed a journey that paralleled the trajectory of W. F. Cody's (and American) life, "from prairie to palace." Now one with the great nations of the world, the Wild West wrote a history in which the Indian wars were a thing of the past and "the Former Foe—Present Friend, the American" (as a poster captioned an Indian portrait) was one among the many who now took the name *American* as their own. The warrior life celebrated in the Wild West had vanished, but the Indians themselves remained. In Buffalo Bill's Wild West, the "dead" rose up from the dust of the arena, rode on as well as off, were there for the opening act at the start and for the salute that ended the show. Historian L. G. Moses has recently observed, "Indians survived [the] 'Winning of the West,' both in reality and then as portrayed in the shows." Furthermore, he argues, "Show Indians had won the battle of images," for, although Buffalo Bill's Wild West portrayed Indians "heroically and sympathetically as a vanishing American" way of life, it did not portray them—as did the Indian Bureau, the ethnologists, or Turner's frontier thesis—as savages without history or culture.<sup>28</sup>

Of the visions of history, ethnology, and performance escaping the "New World" of the Columbian Exposition and Buffalo Bill's Wild West in 1893, the closed and the open, the positive and the negative, the publication of more show-tolerant histories in recent years offers ground for recovering subjects erased by racism. In Vine Deloria's view, for example, "Unlike the government programs, the Wild West treated Indians as mature adults capable of making intelligent decisions and of contributing to an important enterprise." Nate Salsbury, for example, the Wild West's

general manager, refused to control how show Indians spent their salaries or, beyond exercising “a constant vigilance that they do not fall into the hands of tradesmen who are sharpers,” to assume a patronizing posture toward an Indian performer who, in Salsbury’s words, both “knows the value of a dollar quite as well as a white man,” and who “is quite capable of choosing his occupation and profiting by it.”<sup>29</sup>

Show-tolerant history does not deny the presence of the racism that histories like Rydell’s, Slotkin’s, and White’s have been at pains to reveal, but it does suggest both that the performative is ubiquitous and that it resists too narrow a reading. Examining issues of authenticity, for example, a pursuit at the heart of much of performance analysis, widens the analytical field for viewing the Columbian Exposition, its congresses, and Buffalo Bill’s Wild West. Vine Deloria suggests how and why show Indians were able to put themselves into the “authentic” world of Buffalo Bill’s Wild West:

Instead of degrading the Indians and classifying them as primitive savages, Cody elevated them to a status of equality with conti[n]gents from other nations. In so doing, he recognized and emphasized their ability as horsemen and warriors and stressed their patriotism in defending their home lands. This type of recognition meant a great deal to the Indians who were keenly aware that American public opinion often refused to admit the justice of their claims and motivations. Inclusions of Indians in the Congress of Rough Riders provided a platform for displaying natural ability that transcended racial and political antagonisms and, when, contrasted with other contemporary attitudes toward Indians, represented one that was amazingly sophisticated and liberal.

In this world, attack acts are a demonstration of skills valued by performers as well as by audiences. As Deloria concludes, “the Wild West served to give them confidence in themselves by emphasizing the nobility of their most cherished exploits and memories.” This Wild West was a shared history and memory, a jointly occupied arena in which competing claims for authenticity could be presented and evaluated.<sup>30</sup>

Viewing the new world of the Columbian Exposition as a heterotopia permits historians to see “simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted” countersites. Some of those contests are evident in the experiences of show Indians at the fair, in their contracts and living conditions no less than in what they performed and how audiences received them. Today, more than a century after the Columbian Exposition, “Buffalo Bill’s Wild West” is a featured part of Euro-Disney, by 1997 the most popular of its performing attractions, drawing over three million people to a two-a-day, ninety-minute performance (with barbeque), for which the 1,058-capacity house is consistently sold out. According to R. L. Wilson, nearly all the enactors are from the United States, and several of the Native American performers claim descent from show Indians who worked

with William F. Cody. That there is pride among Amerindian performers in being performers and a willingness to be part of the Wild West tradition should not be surprising. "Spirit Capture," an exhibition mounted and catalog published by the National Museum of the American Indian, records a long history of show Indians and Indian shows, including performers with Buffalo Bill, the Seneca Edward Cornplanter's Indian and Minstrel Show (active in 1899), a performance of Hiawatha given by the Iroquois of the Cattaraugus Reservation in New York in 1906 (it toured the United States and Europe), the participation of Porcupine (a Cheyenne) in the forty-fifth anniversary re-creation of the Battle of Little Big Horn in 1921, and Navajo dancers entertaining a tourist train in 1963. Most Americans have seen native performers, "show Indians" and amateurs, in some capacity, recently as part of the Indian-centered opening ceremonies of the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City.<sup>31</sup>

Is it the case that audiences don't know the difference between the actual and the assumed, the real and the simulated, or is performance the canny creation of a self-conscious perception of the simultaneous presence of actual and assumed, real and simulated, and of the cultural assumption of the other as self? If, in addition, elements of stagings of this kind can be located in anthropology, history, folklore, and disciplines not conventionally considered performance or performative, theater historians can increasingly locate elements of those disciplines in their own. This essay has that wider world of the Columbian Exposition in view and a heterotopic historiographical strategy for what it perceives as a heterotopic historical site. What can be said about the theater culture of a Columbian Exposition that takes in Turner's frontier thesis, Buffalo Bill's Wild West, and the fair involves their very insistence upon their authenticity: the common belief that the exposition showed what the "real" America (the United States) had accomplished in a hundred years, Turner's thesis the "true" history of that America, and Buffalo Bill's Wild West an "exact" reproduction of the frontier life lived by those who enacted it. The form these discourses assumed, the domain they sought to govern, the internal relationships among their constituent parts, and their relationships with other discourses help theater historians consider authenticity within representation, where Rydell's, Slotkin's, and White's histories assume it does not reside.<sup>32</sup>

It seems likely that fairgoers in 1893 moved among the real and the simulated, the actual and the assumed, and were able to "get" contradictions offered by the site. Moreover, it is significant that, at the putative end of America's Columbian period, the end of its frontier, and at the supposed vanishing point for Amerindians, there is a contest concerning what and who constitutes the "native" and the "American." Histories tell us this contest reflects power's insecurity—company owners over workers, nativists over immigrants, men over women, racist whites over non-whites, and so on—and all these contests are evident in the wider performances of the Columbian Exposition in 1893. My ongoing work with

stagings of “the native,” however, suggests as well the emergence of a “new world” at the time of the fair, constructing the Indian as the American and insisting upon the authenticity of its version of that story. At the same time, the “native” is enacted in ways that underscored the real-life distance between and within competing representations in, for example, the three performance spaces considered here.<sup>33</sup>

## NOTES

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1. Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982). Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Atheneum, 1992), and see his “Buffalo Bill’s ‘Wild West’ and the Mythologization of the American Empire,” in *Cultures of United States Imperialism*, ed. Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1993), 164–81. Richard White, “Frederick Jackson Turner and Buffalo Bill,” in *The Frontier in American Culture: An Exhibition at the Newberry Library, August 26, 1994–January 7, 1995*, ed. James R. Grossman (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), 7–65.

Studies of the Columbian Exposition are numerous. Among very many, see Robert W. Rydell, *All the World’s a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876–1916* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), but see also the early chapters of his *World of Fairs: The Century of Progress Expositions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993) and Rydell, John E. Findling, and Kimberly D. Pelle, *Fair America* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2000); Neil Harris, Wim de Wit, James Gilbert, and Robert W. Rydell, *Grand Illusions: Chicago’s World’s Fair of 1893* (Chicago: Chicago Historical Society, 1993); Robert Muccigrosso, *Celebrating the New World: Chicago’s Columbian Exposition of 1893* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1993); R. Reid Badger, *The Great American Fair: The World’s Columbian Exposition and American Culture* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1979); Norman Bolotin and Christine Laing, *The Chicago World’s Fair of 1893: The World’s Columbian Exposition* (Washington, D.C.: Preservation Press, 1992); Jeanne Madeline Weiman, *The Fair Women* (Chicago: Academy Chicago, 1981); Edo McCullough, *World’s Fair Midways* (New York: Exposition Press, 1966); and chapter 6 of Neil Harris, *Cultural Excursions: Marketing Appetites and Cultural Tastes in Modern America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990). For the Smithsonian and Bureau of Indian Affairs, see Curtis M. Hinsley, *The Smithsonian and the American Indian: Making a Moral Anthropology in America* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1981); and Robert A. Trennert, Jr., “A Grand Failure: The Centennial Indian Exhibition of 1876,” *Prologue* 6, no. 2 (1974): 118–29, and “Selling Indian Education at World’s Fairs and Expositions, 1893–1904,” *American Indian Quarterly* 11, no. 3 (1987): 203–20.

For Buffalo Bill and his Wild West, see (among very many) L. G. Moses, “Indians on the Midway: Wild West Shows and the Indian Bureau at World’s Fairs, 1893–1904,” *South Dakota History* 21 (Fall 1991): 205–29 and his *Wild West Shows*



and the Images of American Indians, 1883–1933 (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996); Joy S. Kasson, *Buffalo Bill's Wild West: Celebrity, Memory, and Popular History* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000); Don Russell, *The Lives and Legends of Buffalo Bill* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1960) and his *The Wild West* (Fort Worth, Tex.: Amon Carter Museum of Western Art, 1970); Paul Reddin, *Wild West Shows* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999); Sarah J. Blackstone, *Buckskins, Bullets, and Business: A History of Buffalo Bill's Wild West* (Westwood, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1986); R. L. Wilson with Greg Martin, *Buffalo Bill's Wild West: An American Legend* (New York: Random House, 1998); Jack Rennert, *100 Posters of Buffalo Bill's Wild West* (London: Hart-Davis, MacGibbon, 1976); Henry Blackman Sell and Victor Weybright, *Buffalo Bill and the Wild West* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955); and William F. Cody's *Life and Adventures of Buffalo Bill* (Chicago: Stanton and Van Vliet, 1917).

For Frederick Jackson Turner, see Ray A. Billington, *The Genesis of the Frontier Thesis: A Study in Historical Creativity* (San Marino, Calif.: Huntington Library, 1971) and *Frederick Jackson Turner: Historian, Scholar, Teacher* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973); Wilber R. Jacobs, *The Historical World of Frederick Jackson Turner* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968); and George R. Taylor, ed., *The Turner Thesis: Concerning the Role of the Frontier in American History* (Boston: D. C. Heath, 1949). There are also reference works about Turner, among them William E. Marion, *Frederick Jackson Turner: A Reference Guide* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1985); and John Wunder, ed., *Historians of the American Frontier: A Bio-Bibliographical Sourcebook* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1988). Turner's papers are at the Huntington Library (where Billington was senior research associate).

Among very, very many studies of white-Indian interactions, see those by James Axtel, Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr., Fergus M. Bordewich, Peter Nabokov, Roy Harvey Pearce, Frances Paul Prucha, Michael P. Rogin, and, of course, the work of Vine Deloria, Jr., George Vizenor, James Welch, and (particularly for our context) Philip J. Deloria's *Playing Indian* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

2. Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon, 1972), 155–56. For theater culture, see Rosemarie K. Bank, *Theatre Culture in America, 1825–1860* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

3. In addition to Deloria's *Playing Indian*, see Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998) for an exploration of ethnographic objects and agencies of display. These boundaries are also explored by performance and theater historians. See, for example, Christopher R. Balme, "Cultural Anthropology and Theatre Historiography: Notes on a Methodological Rapprochement," *Theatre Survey* 35, no. 1 (1994): 33–52 and his "Staging the Pacific: Framing Authenticity in Performances for Tourists at the Polynesian Cultural Center," *Theatre Journal* 50, no. 1 (1998): 53–70; Dennis Kennedy, "Shakespeare and Cultural Tourism," *Theatre Journal* 50, no. 2 (1998): 175–88; and Bank, *Theatre Culture*.

4. Rydell's *All the World's a Fair* is exemplary among recent scholarly studies characterizing the Columbian Exposition (and other fairs) as a demon scenario, but see also Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation*; Muccigrosso, *Celebrating the New World*; and Hinsley, *Smithsonian*. Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (1986): 24.

5. For acreage, see *The Best Things to be Seen at the World's Fair*, John J. Flinn, comp. (Chicago: Columbian Guide Co., 1893), 12. Henry Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams*, ed. Ernest Samuels (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974), 339–40.

Adams's assessment of this disorder was grim. "For a hundred years, between 1793 and 1893," he reflected, "the American people had hesitated, vacillated, swayed forward and back, between two forces, one simply industrial, the other capitalistic, centralizing, and mechanical." The fair, Adams concluded, made clear America had "slipped across the chasm" (see Hinsley, *Smithsonian*, 231).

6. Putnam was in charge of the exhibits on the Midway as well as those of Department M. The racist aspects of this relationship have often been noted by scholars (see particularly Rydell, *All the World's a Fair*, chap. 2). For the Bureau of Indian Affairs, see Trennert, "Selling Indian Education," 210–11. Located near Putnam's Anthropological Building and its outdoor Ethnographical Village, the BIA's Indian School was described by the secretary of the Board of Indian Commissioners as "a little, mean-looking building in the midst of those grand and imposing structures" (see Moses, "Indians on the Midway," 214 n. 11; and Muccigrosso, *Celebrating the New World*, 151). Encircled by the southeast loop of the fair's Intramural Elevated Electric Railway, the school operated May 15 through October 1893.

7. Rossiter Johnson, *A History of the World's Columbian Exposition Held in Chicago in 1893*, vol. 2 (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1898), 316. According to Rand McNally's *Handbook of the World's Columbian Exposition* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1893), 90, the Anthropological Building measured 415 feet long and 225 feet wide. For the assessment of the area's appeal, see *The Columbian Gallery: A Portfolio of Photographs from the World's Fair* (Chicago: Werner Co., 1894), unpaginated. The quoted matter is from a caption to "Down in the Windmill Section," as the area was called.

8. Johnson, *History*, 329–31, and 356 for the "white race" quote. The academics in the laboratories included Joseph Jastrow from the University of Wisconsin, who ran the Psychology Section, and H. H. Donaldson of the University of Chicago, who ran the Neurology Section. Ira Jacknis, "Franz Boas and Exhibits: On the Limitations of the Museum Method of Anthropology," in *Objects and Others: Essays on Museums and Material Culture*, ed. George W. Stocking, Jr. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 81 and 76. The "life group" is related to the "habitat group" for animals, said to have been introduced by the Biologiska Muséet in Stockholm when it opened in 1893 (see A. E. Parr, "The Habitat Group," *Curator* 2 [1959]: 119). Jacknis notes (99) that Boas's model maker at the American Museum of Natural History in New York, Casper Mayer, took plaster casts of faces and body parts from the life: "These casts came from diverse sources: some were collected along with the artefacts in the field. . . , some from the visiting circus or Carlisle Indian School, and some from occasional visits of natives to New York." Such figures, Jacknis observes, deserved a performance setting; thus the museum introduced "the staged, theatrically lit diorama, popularized after 1910" (102). Hinsley, *Smithsonian*, 112, cites an unpublished paper by Jacknis adding that "without the proper control of scholarly texts subject to 'professional' standards, an exhibit could in fact feed the taste for racist exoticism that it was meant to curb." For Rydell's discussion of the Anthropological Building's laboratories, see *All the World's a Fair*, 57.

For Peale's use of wax figures to contrast the "races of mankind" in 1797, see Charles Coleman Sellers, *Mr. Peale's Museum: Charles Willson Peale and the First Popular Museum of Natural Science and Art* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1980), 92; and my "Archiving Culture: Performance and American Museums in the Earlier Nineteenth Century," in *Performing America: Cultural Nationalism in American Theater*, ed. Jeffrey D. Mason and J. Ellen Gainor (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 37–51.

9. For Rydell's certainty that the Native Americans who participated in all

these exhibits were “degraded” and “the victims of a torrent of abuse and ridicule,” see *All the World's a Fair*, 63. Concern that peoples from the Arctic have time to acclimatize to Chicago, and their show's need for a water feature, brought the performers to their privileged location in the autumn, near the “official opening” of the exposition (October 12, 1892), well before the “Grand Opening” (May 1, 1893) that admitted the public to the fairgrounds. Rydell identifies the performers in the Esquimaux Village as Inuit.

10. Flinn, *Best Things*, 63. *The Columbian Gallery*, n.p. *Handbook*, 89–91. Johnson, *History*, 331–32. The ethnographical exhibits were located between the Anthropological and Dairy buildings and the elevated tracks on the east, South Pond on the west (where the Viking Ship from Norway and Indian canoes and kayaks were moored), and, on the north, the Indian School (situated near the mock-ups of the *Niña*, *Pinta*, and *Santa Maria*). Guidebooks also feature a photograph of a “Mayan Woman and Child” and identify an exhibit of a group of Arawaks from British Guiana. Presumably they were not Putnam's “wards” (as one source calls the inhabitants of these “villages”). There was also a “pioneer” log cabin on the grounds.

11. The molds for the ruins of Yucatan were “taken from the original ruins by Edward H. Thompson, the United States consul to Yucatan, under Professor Putnam's instructions.” They included a simulation of a figure of Kukulcan, “the great feathered god” (*Handbook*, 86–90).

12. Weimann, *The Fair Women*, 402–4; and see Rydell, *All the World's a Fair*. Amy Leslie depicted Cody's guests and performers as the “vanishing Indians,” whom she saw picturesquely retreating in the face of Columbian culture (“Amy Leslie at the Fair,” *Chicago News*, May 1, 1893); and see Moses, “Indians on the Midway,” 214–15. See also Muccigrosso, *Celebrating the New World*, 151; Moses, *Wild West Shows*, 134–35; and Kasson, *Buffalo Bill's Wild West*, 192–93. For other protests, see the text and notes 11 and 15. Twenty-three of the thirty ghost dancers imprisoned at Fort Sheridan were paroled to Cody and toured Europe with him prior to the fair. At least some were still with him in Chicago in 1893.

13. Curtis M. Hinsley, “The World as Marketplace: Commodification of the Exotic at the World's Columbian Exposition,” in *Exhibiting Cultures*, ed. Ivan Karp and Steven Levine (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 350. John C. Ewers, *Indian Life on the Upper Missouri* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1968), chap. 15, “The Emergence of the Plains Indian as the Symbol of the North American Indian,” 187–203. A cartoon depicting “a major event! Indian woman throws out dishwater,” burlesqued both the performative and quotidian character of ethnographic displays.

14. Hinsley reports the fourteen Kwakiutl from Fort Rupert in British Columbia “slept on the floor of the Stock Pavillion” (“The World as Marketplace,” 349). What this means and whether the Kwakiutl used it before or while their own and the livestock exhibits were installed—sleeping with the livestock seems unlikely for a variety of reasons—is currently unclear to me. Putnam had control of a dairy barn next to the Anthropological Building, which he used as an annex until he lost the barn to a cheese exhibit. For the Carlisle exhibit, see Trennert, “Selling Indian Education,” 209–11. Emma Sickles wrote to the *New York Times*, after her discharge from Putnam's staff, that Amerindian exhibits at the fair showed Indians as savages in need of government education, while “every means was used to keep self-civilized Indians out of the Fair” (Rydell, *All the World's a Fair*, 63). I take Sickles to mean the Indians were civilized, but in ways other than those dictated by the BIA and Department M.

15. Trennert, “Selling Indian Education,” 213–18.

16. Sol Bloom, *The Autobiography of Sol Bloom* (New York: G. P. Putnam and Sons, 1948), 119; and see Badger, *The Great American Fair*, 81; Rydell, *All the World's a Fair*, 61–62; and Hinsley, "The World As Marketplace," 348. See Rydell, *All the World's A Fair*, 53, 57, 236, and 71, for the quotes. Rydell charts the migration of some Columbian personnel or their views to the Pan-American Exposition at Buffalo in 1901 (see *All the World's a Fair*, 130 and 137).

17. Moses, "Indians on the Midway," 217. For the Midway show, see Harris et al., *Grand Illusions*, 160–61. Michael Chemers, "On the Boards in Brobdignag: Performing Tom Thumb," *New England Theatre Journal* 12 (2001): 81–82, and 86 and 81 for the quotes, respectively. For an Indian defense of working as show Indians for Buffalo Bill's Wild West, see Moses, *Wild West Shows*, 101–2.

18. Omission of the Indian Village from maps suggests a late opening, after guides to the fair were printed. For an indication of some of the Indian acts there, see Moses, *Wild West Shows*, 139. He observes that "none [of the Midway Indians] apparently possessed a contract, which violated Bureau [of Indian Affairs] procedures." For Rain-in-the-Face and petitions by Indians to have exhibits at the fair, see Harris et al., *Grand Illusions*, 160. In addition to Indian defenses of their show Indian work, see also Ewers, *Indian Life*, 201–3.

19. Rossiter Johnson, *A History of the World's Columbian Exposition Held in Chicago*, vol. 4 (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1898), 501 and 412. Hinsley, *Smithsonian*, 110. Jacknis, "Franz Boas and Exhibits," 108. The "confusion of views" among the fair's anthropologists deserves detailed study that cannot be given here. For Otis Mason, Smithsonian curator of ethnology, see Rydell, *All the World's a Fair*, 58–59, and Hinsley, 110–12.

The congresses published their proceedings. Particularly germane to this essay are C. Staniland Wake, ed., *Memoirs of the International Congress of Anthropology* (Chicago: Schulte, 1894); Helen Wheeler Bassett and Frederick Starr, eds., *The International Folk-Lore Congress of the World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago, July 1893*, vol. 1: *Archives of the International Folk-Lore Association* (Chicago: Charles H. Sergel, Co., 1898); and Herbert Baxter Adams, ed., *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1893* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1894).

20. Johnson, *History*, 4:169. Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, 36.

21. White, "Frederick Jackson Turner." White argues Turner reflects the peaceful conquest side and Buffalo Bill's Wild West the violent conquest side of the same frontier, stories that contradict each other. The verse is from "Westward Ho" (see Joaquin Miller, *The Complete Poetical Works of Joaquin Miller* [San Francisco: Whitaker and Ray, 1897] 187–88). White cites it on p. 18, and see p. 26 for his quoting from Steele's popular 1873 history. Jacobs, *Historical World*, 4.

22. For Roosevelt's less than paean to Turner's originality, see Jacobs, *Historical World*, 4, and White, "Frederick Jackson Turner," 10. Thomas Jefferson made observations in 1824 similar to Turner's:

Let a philosophic observer commence a journey from the savages of the Rocky Mountains, eastwardly toward our seacoast. These [the Indians] he would observe in the earliest stage of association living under no law but that of nature, subsisting and covering themselves with the flesh and skins of wild beasts. He would next find these on our frontiers in the pastoral state, raising domestic animals to supply the defects of hunting. Then succeed to our own semibarbarous citizens, the pioneers of the advancing civilization, and so in his progress he would meet the gradual shades of an improving man until he would reach his, as yet, most improved state in our seaport towns. This, in fact,

is equivalent to a survey, in time, of the progress of man from the infancy of creation, to the present day.

See Avery Craven, "Frederick Jackson Turner," in Taylor, *The Turner Thesis*, 102–3. For the Turner quotes, see Turner, *The Significance of the Frontier in American History*, facsimile of the 1894 *Annual Report of the American Historical Association* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1966), 201 and 207.

23. For opposition to the thesis, see Taylor, *The Turner Thesis*; Jacobs, *Historical World*; Billington, *Frederick Jackson Turner*, and *Genesis*, 172–76 (for the Turner-verein, 3–4). Turner, *Significance of the Frontier*, 201.

24. Turner, *Significance of the Frontier*, 200, 207. For Buffalo Bill's invitation, see Billington, *Genesis*, 166. Turner did tour the fair, evidently after his presentation (171).

25. Bassett and Starr, *International Folk-Lore Congress*, 227–47 for Matthews, 206–20 for Scott, and 14 for Cody's invitation. See also Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture*, 33–34 for the folklore congress, 34 for the quoted matter. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett observes (288 n. 37), "Anthropologists frequently 'played Indian' as a way of demonstrating what was difficult to describe verbally."

26. Rennert, *100 Posters*, back cover for the broadside. Slotkin (*Gunfighter Nation*, 67) states the salutatory notice "was added to the program of the 1886 Wild West and . . . appeared in every program thereafter." (There is a clear similarity of language between it and the April 16, 1887, excerpt from the *Illustrated London News* fronting this essay.) Of the joining of the Wild West and the Congress of Rough Riders of the World, Slotkin asserts, "Beside each American or European unit rode representatives of horsemen of the non-white tribesmen recently conquered by the imperial powers" ("Buffalo Bill's Wild West," 173).

27. The acts are listed in *Buffalo Bill's Wild West and Congress of Rough Riders of the World, Historical Sketches and Programme* (Chicago: Blakely Printing Co., 1893), in the collection of the Newberry Library, Chicago. Wilson (*Buffalo Bill's Wild West*, 159) gives the opening date as (April 26, 1893, but his closing date of October 31, adds up to 189 days, not 186. Annie Fern Swartwout's *Missie: An Historical Biography of Annie Oakley* (Blanchester, Ohio: Brown, 1947), 204, says the show was open a month before the fair itself. The most quoted attendance figure for the fair is 27,539,041.

28. The "wondrous voyage" and "from prairie to palace" themes appeared in posters for Buffalo Bill's Wild West. See Rennert, *100 Posters*, 27 and 110. For the Indian as definition of the American, see Rennert, 52. Moses, *Wild West Shows*, 194 and 149.

29. Vine Deloria, Jr., "The Indians," in *Buffalo Bill and the Wild West*, an exhibition of the Brooklyn Museum of Art, Carnegie Institute, and Buffalo Bill Historical Center (New York: Brooklyn Museum of Art, 1991), 53–55. Moses, (*Wild West Shows*, 116) locates Salsbury's letter among records at the Pine Ridge Reservation and compares Salsbury's figures to those stated in Wild West contracts in the Federal Archives and Record Center (see 305 n. 24). See also Luther Standing Bear, *My People the Sioux* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1928), 260–61, who traveled with Buffalo Bill's Wild West and reports Cody's defense of equal, indeed preferential, treatment of the show Indians in his company.

30. Deloria, "The Indians," 53–54.

31. See Wilson, *Buffalo Bill's Wild West*, 254–55, for photos from Euro-Disney and 256 for details about the show. Cowboy hats are issued to all who will wear them. Reproduction Wild West posters are available in the gift shop, and a western

bar (with dance hall girls) awaits thirsty patrons nearby. Tim Johnson, ed., *Spirit Capture: Photographs from the National Museum of the American Indian* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1998), 32, 140, 150, and 152. The people and buildings of the fair also had a history. Frederick Ward Putnam and Franz Boas went to work for the Field Columbian Museum, housed in the Fine Arts Building after the fair closed, opening as the Field Museum on June 2, 1894. A new building was completed after World War I, which is today the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago. The Fine Arts Building cum original Field Museum was renovated (under the sponsorship of Julius Rosenwald of Sears, Roebuck) and is today's Museum of Science and Industry in Chicago.

32. I emphasize that Rydell, Slotkin, and White are not wrong about the racism in the three sites and that a show-tolerant perspective of them could not erase race because race defines these scenes.

33. Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America*, notes, apropos power's insecurity, the Dawes Severalty Act of 1887 concerning immigrants, the corporate image offered by the "white city," and the Pullman strike of 1894. Joy Kasson's final take on Buffalo Bill resonates in the context of the Columbian "world": "an apt hero for the modern era, an age when images have become indistinguishable from what they purport to represent and the content of national identity seems identical to its performance" (*Buffalo Bill's Wild West*, 273).

# Kinesthetic Empathies and the Politics of Compassion

*Susan Leigh Foster*

Hills roll and mountains rise, though they are perfectly stationary;  
the rolling and the rising are activities in us when we look at them.

—John Martin, *Introduction to the Dance*

The body is stooped, almost crumpled. It shuffles across a stage, or perhaps a screen, or even a street. How might another body witnessing this body imagine what it is feeling? How might the viewing body grasp the shuffling body's sensations of tension, fatigue, or achiness? How might the viewing body fathom the motivation, desire, or emotion contained within (or is it attached to?) this slumping figure? On what basis might the viewing body claim to apprehend what the shuffling body is experiencing?

European and American concert dance traditions have long presumed that the viewing body can and does sense something about what the shuffling body is feeling. They rely on a potential for some kind of empathetic connection between bodies that would enable a transfer of meaning from performing body to observing body. Influential dance critic John Martin, quoted in the epigraph, argues beginning in the 1930s that this empathetic connection is founded in a universal capacity of humans to register the dramatic tension of motion. Promoting a modernist aesthetic agenda that envisions all human experience as sharing common underlying values and concerns, Martin conceptualizes the dancing body as capable of unmediated contact with viewers. Every body, he imagines, is endowed with the same access to movement's meaning because of its ability to register the tensility and dynamism of all other bodies.

Postcolonial and gender studies have persuasively contested and dismantled Martin's claim, providing invaluable techniques for historicizing and particularizing experience. Yet they continue to grapple with the nature and constitution of what is shared or communal within experience. In order to re-conceptualize both the individual and the social, they must continue to ask: Is there something we could call women's experience?<sup>1</sup> Or can the subaltern speak?<sup>2</sup> These debates recur in theories of dance spectatorship: how and what do viewers feel watching another body twist, sink to the ground, or burst into the air? How and what can scholars claim about what viewers might have felt watching another body performing in some past moment and/or distant place? These epistemological dilemmas lie at the center of dance studies, and they have equal relevance for theater and performance studies and the humanities more generally. Is there any framework within which to affirm a located and partial understanding of another body's situation? Is there the potential

for an empathetic sharing of experience during the moment of witnessing another body?

Responding to these questions, this essay sketches out the contours of a genealogy of what I will call kinesthetic empathy. Following Foucault, it delineates three tropological constructions of the empathetic moment, emphasizing the historical specificity and conceptual cohesiveness of each. Although the term "empathy" originated in the late nineteenth century German research on perception and aesthetics, this essay reaches back to examine its eighteenth century French and English antecedent "sympathy."<sup>3</sup> Historians of the eighteenth century concepts of sympathy and sensibility can justifiably argue for the distinctiveness of sympathy, yet their interpretations of its meaning have largely ignored the physical experience of feeling what another body is feeling.<sup>4</sup> My aim is to insert physicality into the dynamics of exchange during any moment when a person claims to know something about another's experience. At the same time, I will be using corporeality to leverage a perspective from which to examine how empathetic connections have changed historically. I will argue that the conditions under which viewers connect to what they see on stage have altered profoundly over the past three centuries. The ability to differentiate between sympathy and empathy can thus be found in the corporeal experience and consequent transformation of identity that each entails. I want to affirm the potential for bodies, in all their historical and cultural specificity, to commune with one another, yet I want to foreground what is at stake in terms of power relations when they begin to interpret one another.

How, for example, could we theorize empathy in conjunction with the World Trade Center and Pentagon bombings?<sup>5</sup> What were observers offered that would help them to understand how, specifically, these bodies negotiated the violent disruption caused by these hostile acts? Shown on television were repeated screenings of the footage of the planes bursting into flames as they hit the towers. Networks reran the same three- to ten-second clips over and over again. In an effort to give an overview of the disaster, cameras focused on shots from a distance rather than document the local interactions at street level.

As the world grappled with this cataclysm's immensity, what was the experience of bodies attempting to escape from the Trade Center towers? Single- and double-file lines descending in near darkness; someone breaking into a vending machine and dispersing soft drinks; one- to five-minute waits before being able to descend another few steps; a few inches deep in water; a few jokes; a few reassurances from those who lived through the 1993 bombing; a lot of patience; a lot of efforts to assist those who could not travel quickly; the anxiety of choosing which stairway or elevator; the incredible burn in calf muscles from standing, holding, descending.<sup>6</sup>

These details, like those now arriving daily concerning the plights of people in Afghanistan, Iraq, Darfur, or skid row, to name but a few, call on our bodies to commiserate. But how might we imagine their bodies' tra-



vail without presuming knowledge of the other? Is there any way for us to understand their physical experience without invoking a universalizing moral stance? Is there any way to speak to, but not for, these bodies?

### *Empathy's Stages*

The emphasis on the pictorial at the expense of the corporeal in the media coverage of the World Trade Center bombings resonates with a much earlier construction of visuality, one elaborated primarily in the eighteenth century. In his entry "Dance" for Diderot's *Encyclopedia*, M. le Chevalier de Jaucourt examines the spectacularity of the tightrope dancer, and the pleasure that this form of entertainment affords. Jaucourt proposes that the performance offers viewers an unusual sense of identification with the performing body because of its treacherous and suspenseful relationship to gravity, the potential hazards that may befall it. This spectacle, one that "agitates the soul," that worries, frightens, and provokes fear and alarm, instills in the viewer a heightened sense of attentiveness.<sup>7</sup> Observing the dancers' precarious positioning, Jaucourt argues, the viewer experiences the stirring up of emotion that instinctually arises when we see those like ourselves in peril. This surge of emotion, arising mechanistically within the viewer's own body, prompts pleasure, the product of the connection between one's own body and that of the other. For additional clarification of this sensation, Jaucourt refers his readers to the *Encyclopedia's* entry on compassion.

The discussion of compassion expands on Jaucourt's analysis by focusing on the feelings that extend toward those less fortunate. As in the spectacle of the tightrope dancer, pleasure derives from the rush of feeling toward another, even when the circumstances of that individual are disagreeable or repugnant. Those who have experienced affliction are more susceptible to feeling compassion toward another, and this is why people, desirous to place themselves in a situation where they might feel compassion, attend public ceremonies of punishment: the onlooker's participation in this scenario of retribution invites a rush of feeling that affirms as it enhances one's humanity and one's potential for acting humanely toward those of lesser circumstance.

Adam Smith, economist and theorist of sympathy, clarifies this interpretation of public punishment by reminding observers that they can never know directly another's pain or joy.<sup>8</sup> In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* Smith insists that observers project themselves into the role of the person they are observing, and, through an act of imagination, take on that person's feelings. The actual physical experience of pain, Smith argues, is not accessible to the observer to any significant degree. Rather, the circumstances in which the pain is endured form the basis for imagining the other's plight. The observer exercises the imagination by carefully assessing the scene in which the person is enmeshed, and the scene must be read for its narrative by evaluating the clues signaling the status of its actors and the "general idea of some good or bad fortune that has befallen

the person" (6). Sympathetic feelings develop as the narrative, a series of tableaux vivantes, unfolds before the viewer's eyes.

The viewer's feelings about the scene consist in a relation of scale or amount, one to another. Propriety and impropriety, decency and ungracefulness, gratitude and resentment, all form a reticulated chart of emotions, each related to the next based on degrees of intensity. The social standing of the performing bodies provides a template that aids the viewer in interpreting where and how each feeling is located within the scene (292). For example, Smith assesses Louis XIV's comportment this way:

The sound of his voice, noble and affecting, gained those hearts which his presence intimidated. He had a step and a deportment which could suit only him and his rank, and which would have been ridiculous in any other person. (76)

The nobility of the king's voice and step confirms his status, even as his role as king guides viewers' evaluation of his performance.

Thus as tightrope dancer and king walk forward along their distinctive paths, they set in motion a scene that summons participants and observers into their designated places. Coquettish yet determined, vulnerable and accomplished, the dancer delights viewers by courting and then rebuffing the moment when she might fail to control weight and gravity. Imperious and surveillant, purposefully ponderous, the king commands his courtiers into obeisance, inspiring their awe and also their insecurity. Dancer and king both play the scene, play in the scene, as part of its inherent logic, setting in motion an inevitable empathetic connection to their presence.

### *Engulfed by Empathy*

When John Martin invokes an empathetic connection between dancer and audience in order to provide a rationale for the new modern dance, he alleges that a very different process unites viewing with performing bodies.<sup>9</sup> Viewers comprehend the dance, he asserts, through their capacity for "inner mimicry," a kinesthetic miming of the tensile progressions of the musculature specified in the choreography (47–52). Martin grounds inner mimicry in a fundamental physical reactivity to all events: we pucker when we witness someone tasting a lemon, and when they yawn or cry, feel similar impulses. Not only events but also objects elicit this kinesthetic responsiveness. In walking through a building, Martin continues, we sense its verticality and mass, the openness or closedness of its spaces. As children we even imbue objects with the same capacity to feel that we have.

Whereas Smith doubts that sympathizing entails a physical experience, Martin adamantly asserts that viewers can and do engage with an entire range of bodily sensation. He even extends his claims to include responses to inanimate as well as animate actions:

Since we respond muscularly to the strains in architectural masses and the attitudes of rocks, it is plain to be seen that we will respond even more vigorously to the action of a body exactly like our own. We shall cease to be mere spectators and become participants in the movement that is presented to us, and though to all outward appearances we shall be sitting quietly in our chairs, we shall nevertheless be dancing synthetically with all our musculature. Naturally these motor responses are registered by our movement-sense receptors, and awaken appropriate emotional associations akin to those which have animated the dancer in the first place. It is the dancer's whole function to lead us into imitating his actions with our faculty for inner mimicry in order that we may experience his feelings. (53)<sup>10</sup>

Viewers' bodies, even in their seated stillness, nonetheless feel what the dancing body is feeling—the tensions or expansiveness, the floating or driving momentums that compose the dancer's motion. Then, because such muscular sensations are inextricably linked to emotions, the viewer also feels the choreographer's desires and intentions.

Like Jaucourt, Martin presumes a spontaneous and mechanical connection between the viewer's perception of and feelings about the dancing body. Yet for Jaucourt, that connection is determined by the logic of the scene—the self-evident cause-and-effect relationships among the body's instability, the narrowness of the rope, and the extent of the fall for the tightrope dancer, or, in Smith's example, the ceremonial orchestration of the king's procession. Martin, in contrast, asserts an intrinsic intertwining of muscular action and emotion that prompts us to feel the flatness of the rock as calming and the vertiginous heights of the building as causing our spirits to soar.

Smith argues that knowledge about the physical world is based on the experience of evaluating objects in proportion to their surroundings. This understanding of the physical world builds up over time so as to become as habitual as a reflex:

In my present situation, an immense landscape of lawns and woods, and distant mountains, seems to do no more than cover the little window which I write by, and to be out of all proportion less than the chamber in which I am sitting. I can form a just comparison between those great objects and the little objects around me, in no other way than by transporting myself, at least in fancy, to a different station, from whence I can survey both at nearly equal distances, and thereby form some judgement of their real proportions. Habit and experience have taught me to do this so easily and so readily, that I am scarce sensible that I do it. (191)

Like social standing, the observer compares objects according to whether they are closer or farther away, greater or smaller in stature. Unlike Martin, who enters into and inhabits objects, taking on their internal structure

and dynamics, Smith appraises the relative attributes of all objects so as to make a just comparison among them. He projects himself to their various vantage points, but then stands apart, cultivating his judicious ability to interpret each object's standing within the scene. Martin, in contrast, merges with each object, becoming one with it.

In the same way that Martin's viewer delves into movement's emotional meaning, so too, the dancer, executing that movement, experiences a version of what the movement is representing because of the intrinsic connection between movement and emotion. Choreographer, dancer, and viewer all undergo the same progression of feelings. Jaucourt, in contrast, does not claim that the dancer must necessarily feel the emotions the viewer feels. The shivers of alarm that the tightrope dancer inspires result from the sudden recalibration of weight and balance necessary to avert the fall, and Jaucourt focuses on just such moments, arguing that they command the viewer's most concentrated and discerning attention. But is the dancer feeling fear? Not necessarily. Jaucourt would probably accede to the argument that as a professional the dancer long ago substituted for the fearful response to danger a set of techniques for controlling alarm. Rather than feeling afraid, Jaucourt's dancer experiences heightened awareness of visual, tactile, and proprioceptive information and uses this information to rectify the body's situation. Martin's dancer, however, must replicate the emotion intended by the choreographer and embedded within the movement. Only when the dancer is engulfed by feeling can the message be fully felt by the viewer.

Both Jaucourt and Martin make their claims for empathetic physicality in order to rationalize a capacity for human understanding across racial, class, and cultural barriers. Jaucourt's argument fits well within the developing discourse of Enlightenment *sensibilité*, contributing to the foundation it establishes for a universal capacity to empathize with the other. As elaborated in Diderot's writings on the theater or in Noverre's theories of dance, the human ability to sense the joyfulness or sorrowfulness of another's situation connects all humans. Nowhere is this capacity more clearly demonstrated than in the human ability to decipher bodily gesture and movement. Thus Diderot gleefully uncovers his ears at the end of the play and proclaims that he has understood everything, and Noverre argues that dancers' faces function as pathways to their souls.<sup>11</sup>

Smith utilizes his conception of the empathetic potential among all humans to argue for the liberation of slaves, praising the inherent courageousness of "the savage" and disdaining the slave traders whose "brutality and baseness, so justly expose them to the contempt of the vanquished" (300). Yet he does not share Diderot's and Jaucourt's willingness to ignore class-based differences. Empathetic connections rely on, even as they bridge, the distinctive behavior of rich and poor. It is by "changing position," by viewing others not from one's own place or from theirs, but "from the place and with the eyes of a third person," that a feeling for others develops (Smith 192). This third position mediates differences in class, thereby establishing an impartial, omniscient perspective that is poten-

tially available to all, even though, as Smith acknowledges, those of better means will more easily project themselves into impartiality.<sup>12</sup>

Whereas Smith uses the notion of an impartial position to ground his argument for a universal application of empathetic responses, Martin relies on inner mimicry to secure the proposition that dance functions as a universal language. Underlying the many different patterns of choreography, a common emotional core of experiences unites all human kind and communicates itself easily through dance. Such a proposal justifies Martha Graham's impersonation of Native Americans in dances such as her *American Document* (1938), just as it rationalizes Helen Tamiris's embodiment of the plight of the Negro in her solo *Negro Spirituals* (1929) and her group work *How Long Brethren* (1937).<sup>13</sup> And Martin's claims justify an even broader form of artistic omniscience in which the dancer represents the deepest and most essential qualities of humanity itself.

Eighteenth-century theories of sympathy conceptualize bodily movement as yet another, albeit the most fundamental, in a hierarchy of communicative systems. Because of its rudimentary yet powerful eloquence, movement can "speak to all nations of the globe" (Noverre 16). Martin, in contrast, imagines movement as the transparent vehicle of an inmost, and hence, pan-human emotional realm. In the same way that muscular action intrinsically links to emotion, so, for Martin, the individual psyche replicates the tensile patterns of the universal human condition. Where Smith and Jaucourt see the body necessarily engaging with a system of rules and conventions in order to convey any meaning, Martin presumes that the body spontaneously maps the contours of the psyche, the veracity of its pronouncements a direct product of its connection to interiority. Unlike Jaucourt's dancer who engages the body in the tasklike project of representing hazard, Martin's dancer uses the body to convey life's deepest truths.

Both Jaucourt's and Martin's theories of danced physicality deny difference, yet as this brief comparison makes evident, they utilize remarkably different techniques in the construction of their transcendental epistemologies. Jaucourt builds empathy out of a reading of the scene in which the imperiled individual plays a role. As in Diderot's bourgeois dramas, so effectively ironized in the Conte de Valmont's famous staging of himself as benefactor in *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, the object of identification garners sympathy from the dire conditions represented in the surrounding tableau.<sup>14</sup> The viewer interprets this scene, pulled into the predicament, either physical or social, by the human capacity to assess the storyline.

Martin, more focused on individual than social circumstances, dismisses the scene, or more precisely, relocates scene-like properties within the individual dancer's psychic interior. Differentials of status, circumstance, or need are staged within the body. The "dialogues" created in these internal scenes yield the distinctive movement impulses and qualities of which the dance is composed. The result, a psychological rather than social portrait, impels viewers into the inner landscape of the danced character.

Once there, the viewer feels his or her own version of the emotions summoned up by both choreographer and dancer.

Empathic connection to the eighteenth century tight rope dancer is mobilized through a sameness that is constructed from, even as it transcends, social hierarchies of difference, whereas empathy towards the early twentieth century modern dancer derives from a sameness based on the notion of pan-human psychological experience. For Jaucourt the universality of the tight-rope dancer's performance stems from the universal applicability of categories such as safety and danger, fortune and misfortune, advantage and disadvantage. Any social encounter, regardless of its distinctive details, can be measured and evaluated in terms of standard hierarchies of worth, merit, and security. For Martin the precision of social context blurs, its details vanish, and what endures are the universal psychological variables that all human interaction produces.

### *Flickering Empathies*

Can this historicization tell us anything about our contemporary experience of empathy? How is embodiment being constructed in this moment marked globally by massive migration and intensive electronic mediatization, a moment that Arjun Appadurai has called "modernity at large?"<sup>15</sup> What kind of empathy is promoted when the TV camera zooms in for a close-up shot of the weeping victim, held for approximately ten seconds, followed by the cut-away, usually to a commercial? Or when the Foley generated sound track for the fight scene delivers a drastically enhanced auditory rendering of the battering of flesh? Or when dentists, shop clerks, and lovers all don surgical nylon to mediate contact between bodies?

Techno-theorist N. Katherine Hayles characterizes the informatics of these material conditions as indicative of a paradigm shift from information exchange based on presence-absence to that organized around pattern/randomness.<sup>16</sup> Contrasting the one-to-one relationship between keystroke and letter that typewriter technology provided with the densely encoded layerings of functions that one touch of the computer keyboard provokes, Hayles argues that contemporary bodies are spliced into circuits whose codes reiterate and then suddenly mutate. Not only have we become cyborgs, imbricated within a vast array of prosthetic enhancements to physicality, but we operate by accessing and implementing codes based on the pattern/randomness principle that structure technological and also social life. Traveling along these circuits, identity coalesces around the changing point of view (what Hayles, following cyberpunk author William Gibson, calls the "pov") that the subject exercises as the body moves.

Exemplary of this new construction of identity, the cell-phone user moves through the day one ear frequently attached to a small device that enables conversation with anyone who has access to a telephone. The exquisite proximity to the grain of the voice that telephones offer—as if inside the mouth alongside the vocal chords—is coupled with complete

physical mobility. The cell phone registers the slightest obstacle to breathing, yet the rasping or sucking or snorting juxtaposes with ambient noises of traffic, loudspeakers, or muzak so as to further foreground the immediacy of the caller's voice. A seemingly ideal solution for people on-the-go, the cell phone allows them to revel at whim in the intimacy of the other's voice, to push the envelope of urgency in deal-making, or to feel connected and reachable at all times.

The novelty of this cyborgian configuration is evident in the glee with which callers so frequently describe their physical location to someone who is not present.<sup>17</sup> They announce, "I'm getting on the plane now," or "I'm headed toward the restaurant," or even, "I'm over here on the corner; can't you see me?" Walking down the street, the only thing fixed about the body is the arm pressing the phone to the ear. It becomes the stable reference while everything else in the environment circulates. Those not yet fluent in cell-phone protocol stand still to make or receive a call. They feel, especially, the vertiginous rush as the train takes off, while the voice on the other end of the phone talks on. Before, the body's motion alone produced the changes in volume or vision that it experienced. Now the apparatus modulates those differences so that they no longer correlate directly with physical changes.

Like Gibson's pov, the cell-phone user constructs identity from the multiple codes and cues, electronic and material, that stream past. Both caller and codes are in motion. Information, always partial and specific, is synthesized moment by moment from scattered sources. Much of the information is composed of images, reflecting actual events, that can be replayed endlessly, making it possible to re-view and examine events from different angles. In-formed bodies are pressed to learn not only how to access codes, but also to decipher how the format in which the codes are presented affects their meaning. For example, the television viewer must assess the victim's distress as framed within the close up/commercial syntax, or fathom the body's damage as conveyed through Foley electronics. And viewers must process codes and their formats while themselves in motion, discriminating between the contexts in which their own movements are responsible for producing difference and those where they are not.

Cell-phone technology also collapses prior divisions between public and private space. Earlier systems of communication required the person in public space who was trying to contact another person to reach them at a stable location either at home or at work, but not in a public space and not on the move. Public space could contact private space but not vice versa. Now, public space exists as a net of contacts and potential contacts in which the actual whereabouts of the body, constantly changing, moves through varieties of public and private space, always contactable. And private space frequently leaks into the public as callers speak unpredictably and as if into a void in public about business or pleasure.<sup>18</sup>

During the September 11th crisis, it was these voices, reporting it live, that proffered a new dimension of corporeal situatedness. Located in between the televised panoramic shots of downtown New York and the

published autobiographical details of those inside which emerged only many days after the attacks, these, in many cases last, conversations, between occupants of the buildings or the airplanes and their loved ones, connected humans as never before. Despite the briefness of the dialogue and the stereotypic exchanges of love, these technologically mediated vivifications of bodily presence fleshed out a new embodiment, resistant to technology's pressures towards dematerialization.

As September 11 made clear, cyborgian bodies do not connect with one another, feel for one another, by staging and then deciphering pictures of themselves as eighteenth century bodies did. Nor do they sense the tensile relation between core and surface that renders motivation, repression, and emotion corporeal as Martin suggests is possible. Instead, they catch fugitive, flickering glimpses of one another's corporeal status as it transits, blurred into the prosthetic devices that intensify even as they obscure physicality.

In this world where intimacy, proximity, and even subjectivity are constantly reconfigured, Smith's impartial vantage point for assessing need and dispensing compassion does not exist. Nor is there an opportunity to become engulfed by the dynamic tension of an otherness through "inner mimicry." As public and private collapse onto the site of the individual body, its ability to elicit or impart compassion from others is being relocated into a new set of framing devices—a new technology of compassion. No longer stimulated by the self-evident logic of the scene or by the interiorized dynamics of the human condition, compassion is now entwined with the apparatuses, increasingly digitalized, that hurtle images of bodies from one side of the world to the other. To sort through how bodies can, might, or should feel towards one another in this cyborg culture will require a new and flexible kinesthetic ethics.

Dancing bodies have already grasped this technology of compassion and have begun to choreograph dialogic interactions with it. They have begun to articulate how both dancing and viewing bodies negotiate their new cyborg status. Take, for example, Bill T. Jones' mixture of live and televised bodies in *Still/Here*. These bodies, wrapped in light and movement, blur the difference between virtual and real even as they proclaim their enduring presences and celebrate the labor of continuing to be. Or, consider Rimini Protokoll's critical commentary on theater and cell-phone culture, *Call Cutta*, in which audience members in Berlin are given cell phones through which they are contacted by phone bank workers in Calcutta who walk them through the city as theater all the while endeavoring to establish a more intimate and enduring relationship with the viewer as customer. Or, remember the all-woman rap group *TLC* who entered the male-dominated rap music scene in the early 1990s, devising choreographic strategies that commented on their identity as women of color performing for a multi-ethnic viewership in live stage and MTV productions.<sup>19</sup>

Even *TLC*'s forerunners, the late 1970s break dancers, signalled this new paradigm of empathic connection by showing a body composed of, and versatile at accessing codes. Like the eighteenth century tightrope



dancer, break dancers taunted and triumphed over the destiny of gravity. And like her, they appropriated moves from elsewhere so as to choreograph a commentary on social inequalities. Her *passés* and *cabrioles*, abducted from an aristocratic Baroque dance vocabulary, signalled her mastery over the codes that preserved class difference. Similarly, break dancers' splicing together of vocabularies ranging from those of martial arts to Capoeira to signature moves of pop stars demonstrated their familiarity with the world stage even as their own performances took place on street corners decimated by innercity poverty. The tighrope dancer's audience, however, followed the clearly unfolding narrative of her transit across the rope, whereas break dance viewers moved quickly from one citation to the next, connecting with a fragment here, an audacious balance there. This versatility with the codes signals dancers' skill at deciphering and responding to the random/pattern organization of the social. Viewers are drawn into their circle of dancing as they are able to sort out and savor the valiant mixing of types of information.

Thirty years after its initial appearances in decimated innercity neighborhoods, hip-hop circulates globally, born on airwaves, tape, and digital media, as a sign of resistance and empowerment. Homogenized, sanitized, morphed into generic versions of idiosyncratic and regional innovations, it nonetheless prevails as the ciphery practice that enables performers and viewers to access the codes necessary to their survival. I, for one, look forward to seeing the transformation wrought by its popularity in dance studios across this country where young girls who once studied ballet and tap now cut their dancing teeth on poppin and lockin.

In this circulation of corporeal imagery, the digitized versions of bodies themselves do not represent the dire future of physicality and live dancing bodies its hope. Rather, dancing, itself enmeshed within cyborgian matrices, reveals how physicality is constructed and how its connection to the social might feel. Martin was not misguided to assert that viewers feel something by watching bodies moving. Yet, as this essay has undertaken to demonstrate, the structuring of that empathetic moment changes over time. At this moment in history, more than ever, bodies must assess how they are connecting one with another as well as what they are feeling from that connection. Historicizing empathy constructs, not a vantage point, but a trajectory from which to interrogate this how and what of corporeality.

## NOTES

1. Gender studies has exposed the heteronormative assumptions involved in the gendered roles played out in the empathetic moment: the viewer, masculinized and ennobled by his apprehension of the predicament in which the feminine object of his gaze finds herself, expands to occupy her position as well as his own. In his claims to sympathy, the masculine observer places under erasure the specificity of the feminine figure and the differentials of power that organize their

respective positions. See Joan Scott, "Experience," in *Feminists Theorize the Political*, ed. Judith Butler and Joan Scott (London: Routledge, 1992), 22–40.

2. Postcolonial readings of these differentials of power demonstrate their connection to economic and cultural forms of imperialism. They elucidate the ways in which compassion towards the "primitive" and "underdeveloped" other justifies occupation and governance of the other by the colonizing power. See Gayatri Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossman (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271–313.

3. For an excellent overview of the history of the term *empathy*, see David Krasner's essay "Empathy and Theater," in "Staging Philosophy: New Approaches to Theater and Drama," ed. David Krasner and David Z. Saltz (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 255–77.

4. A notable exception is Joseph Roach's *The Player's Passion: Studies in the Science of Acting* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1985).

5. This essay was originally written four months after the bombings and was envisioned, in part, as a contribution to the discourses on corporeality and politics that they generated.

6. I offer these few details gleaned from a composite account of three workers' distinctive choices and their distinct consequences published in the *Los Angeles Times* five days after the events. See Scott Gold et al., "You're on the 87th Floor and Something is Terribly Wrong," *Los Angeles Times*, September 16, 2001, D1+.

7. Jaucourt describes the dancer's encounter with gravity this way: "Quand ce sauteur, ce voltigeur fait un faut entre deux épées prêtes à le percer si, dans la chaleur du mouvement, son corps s'écartoit d'un point de la ligne qu'il doit d'écrire, il devient un objet digne de toute notre curiosité." M. le Chevalier de Jaucourt, "Dance," *Encyclopédie; ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts, et des métiers, par une société de gens de lettres*, ed. Denis Diderot (Paris: Briason [etc.], 1751–65), 630.

8. Adam Smith explains, "The objects with which men in the different professions and states of life are conversant being very different, and habituating them to very different passions, naturally form in them very different characters and manners. We expect in each rank and profession a degree of those manners which, experience has taught us, belonged to it," *A Theory of Moral Sentiments* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2000), 292. Subsequent references are given in the text.

9. For further perspectives on Martin's role as an apologist for modern dance, see Mark Franko's essay "History/Theory—Criticism/Practice," *Corporealities*, ed. Susan Leigh Foster (London, New York: Routledge, 1996), 25–42.

10. John Martin prefaces this example by explaining: "The perception of any object has both these aspects inseparably; on the one hand we are concerned with what it is and on the other with what it is doing . . . we are aware of its state of action only in terms of our own experience of it; we look out from it, in a sense, instead of looking merely at it." *Introduction to the Dance* (New York: Dance Horizons, 1968), 51–52.

11. Denis Diderot, "Lettre sur les sourds et muets." [1751], *Oeuvres Complètes de Diderot*, ed. J. Assézat (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1875); Jean Georges Noverre, Letters on Dancing and Ballets, trans. Cyril W. Beaumont, Reprint (New York: Dance Horizons, 1966).

12. According to Laura Hinton, it similarly secured a new division of labor in terms of gender. She notes that Adam Smith gendered sympathy as a male spectatorial and ethical practice. For Smith, sympathy, unlike humanity, requires no-

bility and generosity, and as he notes "Humanity is the virtue of a woman, generosity of a man." *The Perverse Gaze of Sympathy: Sodomasochistic Sentiments from Clarissa to Rescue* 911 (Albany: State University of New York, 1999), 27.

13. Focusing on the production of danced spirituals by both white and black choreographers, dance historian Susan Manning argues that the universal subjectivity of the white dancing body prevails until the 1940's. After World War II modern dance choreographers integrate their companies, allowing both white and black bodies to represent the concerns of the dance. At the same time, a number of African-American choreographers come to prominence, yet they are burdened in their fame by the presumption that they will undertake choreographic projects that specifically address African-American themes and values. Pearl Primus' *Strange Fruit*, Alvin Ailey's *Revelations*, and Donald McKayle's *Rainbow Round My Shoulder*, canonical works in the African-American dance tradition, all portray life in the South and provide vivid images African-American community. See Susan Manning, "Danced Spirituals: The Performing of Race, Gender, and Sexuality in American Modern Dance 1930–1960," *Of the Presence of the Body*, ed. Andre Lepcecki (Middleton: Wesleyan University Press, 2004), 82–96.

14. For a fuller analysis of this and other literary scenes where empathy is staged, see David Marshall's summary of the debates over the artificiality of theatrical representation and the influence of these debates on eighteenth century theories of empathy in *The Figure of Theater: Shaftesbury, Defoe, Adam Smith and George Eliot* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

15. See Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

16. N. Katherine Hayles, "Virtual Bodies and Flickering Signifiers," *October* 66 (1993): 69–91.

17. My use of the term cyborg is indebted to Donna Haraway's explication of the term in "Manifesto for Cyborgs," however, I am not imbuing it with the feminist resistive potential assigned to it by Haraway.

18. This merging of public and private spaces mimics the collapse of inner and outer space described by Haraway in her analysis of the history of immunology in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991). Haraway argues that metaphors governing the conceptualization of the immune system as "a final frontier," or the last bastion of holism providing integrity to the individual reiterate the ways that science and science fiction summon up outer space. And she historicizes this equation of inner and outer as occurring within the late twentieth century developments in cell biology and astronomy. See also "A Manifesto for Cyborgs," *Socialist Review* 15, no. 2 (March–April, 1995): 65–107.

19. For a much fuller account of the history of break dancing and women's participation in it, see Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press; University Press of New England, 1994).



## After Marx

Pronouncements on the death of socialism, Marxism, communism, and all associated systems of thought and social organization marked the period of the early 1990s. The historic changes that swept Eastern Europe supposedly meant the death of Marxism as a political option and also as a scholarly practice. Triumphalists proclaimed the victory of capitalism as a world system surpassing all others, winning the Cold War, and marching toward a New World Order.<sup>1</sup> At that time, it seemed important to insist that Marx still had some things on offer, even if we had historically overshoot the period of his largest influence. Strangely enough, looking back on the past decade, Marx seems more than ever to be a philosopher for our current times. Although he often appears as eclipsed (even college students have little knowledge of or interest in him, and many assume he was a historical mistake of some kind), his approach to capital offers still-useful tools for understanding global capital expansion.<sup>2</sup> The rapid growth of virtual communications technologies also requires an analysis of the relationship between contemporary modes of production and the chief institutions that sustain them (media, education, and government).<sup>3</sup> As Marx's and Freud's notions of commodity fetishism combine into analytics for a thoroughly saturated postmodern subjectivity, even the idea of "totalization" needs reexamination before being presumed to be discarded on the theoretical junkyard of outdated and exhausted concepts.<sup>4</sup>

Teaching about Marx, however, is truly a different challenge than it has been in the past. Reviewing my teaching over a thirty-five-year period, there is now a pressing need to fill in more historical background, to present "common" concepts like class struggle carefully, even to doctoral students, because their assumption in starting out is often that the concept of class is completely obsolete. In a recent doctoral seminar, a skeptical Romanian student, who lived through the revolution in Romania in 1989–90, put it to me bluntly: "What is it that we should salvage from Marxism, rather than just throwing him away and starting over? I really want to know." The stimulating and difficult challenge of this question was knowing where and how to start. To address someone who knows Marxism in a very complex way as a series of texts and doctrines that were both studied and then applied in a concrete regime challenges one to deal with

theory and practice at once, and to begin right away with some discernment of fine points. To address other students who have never read any Marxian primary text, and who know only secondhand bits and pieces of his work almost as folklore, requires beginning with some of the historic debates about what Marx “really” said and meant, and with the ways thinkers coming after Marx have elaborated or revised the basic writings.<sup>5</sup> Obviously, these are two rather different, although related approaches. But my five doctoral students made up a small social group, and my task was to design not one-on-one tutorials, but a way for us to study—as a group—Marxism and its usefulness for performance.<sup>6</sup>

The pedagogical strategy that would adequately meet these challenges is still evolving in my classroom, but I can present a list of concepts that, reworked or revised, still constitute a central set of Marxist concepts worthy of preservation: These include an understanding of all human activity as embedded in forms of production; an analysis of economic forces, capital, commodities and money, exchange and use valuation; an emphasis on social relations as mutually structuring and yet contradictory and uneven networks of economic, political, cultural, and informational systems, and a reliance on sophisticated forms of ideology critique to enable us to discern our own historical formation and that of its relation to the past and future. While notions of the ultimate progress of history toward a final stage of achievement of justice and equality may now seem impossible, a continuing faith in the possibility of social change and the power of reason to revise and improve previous modes of knowing is still a central feature of any contemporary critical Marxism.

Marx believed that the fundamental fact of human life was its productivity and that human beings were defined by their capacity to produce. This primacy of production results in various forms of social organization in various periods. Capitalism arose when goods and services no longer had a use value, that is, an intrinsic value for the producer, but instead acquired an exchange value through circulation in a market. Labor was thus separated from any instrumental benefit of toil, and surplus value became the new objective of economic activity. Workers produced for a wage, not a needed object, and owners could alter the relationship between the wage and the established quantity of goods produced. The notion of Marxist alienation is precisely this gap between the maker of something and its direct use or benefit. Because of the understandable antagonism between the owners and the makers (workers), Marx saw an inevitable class struggle in which the interests of these groups were always at odds.

For traditional Marxism, economics provides the explanatory principle *par excellence*. Sometimes called economism, this view holds that political and cultural events can be explained by economics—in other words, that a causal relationship exists between the economic mode of production in a given time and its political, social, and cultural institutions and practices. Of course, the complex and contradictory forces at work in any moment of reality do not neatly conflate into a clear or uni-

fied set of economic circumstances; nevertheless, “in the last instance,” reality is shaped by economic pressures.

Marx called this economic motor the base, and considered all other aspects of society (law, domestic relations, politics, religion, culture) the superstructure. To pursue the spatial aspects of these metaphors, society’s institutions are supported by a foundation, which is constituted by the real relations of production at a particular stage of economic development. Of course, as Raymond Williams has pointed out, these metaphors imply a static, unchanging set of relations, which is misleading because this “foundation” is neither uniform nor static.<sup>7</sup>

While in capitalism a central part of the hegemonic formation is comprised of the relations of production, the conditions necessary to continually validate capital and its accumulation imply a set of political and cultural practices that are always potential sites of struggle, not reducible to a last economic instance. For Chantal Mouffe, for example, a poststructuralist thinker whose work over the last twenty years has been central to a revisioning of Marxism for a postmodern age, “all social relations can become the locus of antagonism insofar as they are constructed as relations of subordination.” The democratic discourse that is our historic legacy in the West conflicts with all existing practices of subordination, at least theoretically. “People struggle for equality not because of some ontological postulate but because they have been constructed as subjects in a democratic tradition that puts those values at the center of social life.”<sup>8</sup> The economic basis of production shares with political and cultural production the work of constructing the whole of sociality.

Gayatri Spivak, Stuart Hall, Rey Chow, and other postcolonial and cultural studies critics (with a keen eye on race and ethnicity) have been developing theories of transnational economics and culture that, indebted to Marx, nevertheless revise his explanatory principles. Rey Chow discusses Spivak’s insistence on “value” as more than labor’s index or representation, explaining how Spivak’s insistence on use value as differential and material (in contrast to exchange value, which is always predicated on abstraction) resists economic or cultural reductionism: “Reading Marx after reading Derrida, Spivak is thus able to force a heterogeneous and improper ‘economic text’ to emerge [from Marx]. . . . Not letting go of the economic means not accepting the privileging of one term over the other in the binary opposition between economic and cultural, and thus not accepting the happy stability of either economism and culturalism (the latter being merely an inverted version of economism).”<sup>9</sup> Taking Marx’s notions of value and commodities into world markets, these critics point out how economics and culture are intertwined in new technological flash-points. As Spivak explains in an interview, “I’m not going to spell out the whole argument for you because this is Marx’s basic argument—if it is attended to, then there is a possibility of suggesting to the worker that the worker produces capital, that the *worker* produces capital because the worker, the container of labor power, is the source of value. By the same token it is possible to suggest to the so-called

'Third World' that it *produces* the wealth and the possibility of the cultural self-representation of the 'First World.'"<sup>10</sup>

These revisions of Marxist ideas about production have necessarily gone hand in hand with new formulations of class relations. Identity theories of gender, sexuality, race and ethnicity, as well as other identity markers have thoroughly challenged the notion of economic class as a structuring principle of struggle between those that own the means of production and the workers. Critics have pointed out that multiple affiliations and internalized commodification produce cross-class identifications. As Spivak points out, developing further her notion of value as differential, "the question of Value in its 'materialist' articulation must be asked as the cappuccino-drinking worker and the word-processing critic actively forget the actual price-in-exploitation of the machine producing coffee and words."<sup>11</sup> In other words, coffee and computers are fetishized, cut off from their networks of productive relations, and seem to stand alone as desired objects—even for individuals who might seem "to know better": workers who may afford cappuccino but only as token symbolic capital in an otherwise disadvantaged situation, and cultural critics for whom their means of production (computers) are often linked to foreign sweat shops in Third World countries where women make microchips for pennies.

Critics of color such as Stuart Hall have rethought questions of class to provide greater complexity and transcendence of the binary class/race. In interpreting Gramsci<sup>12</sup> as adopting a "non-reductive approach to questions of class," Hall lays the groundwork for his own point of view: "We would get much further along the road to understanding how the regime of capital can function *through* differentiation and difference, rather than through similarity and identity, if we took more seriously this question of the cultural, social, national, ethnic and gendered composition of historically different and specific forms of labour."<sup>13</sup> Here Hall moves to a complex notion of identity formation without giving up the role of economic class in determining specific subject positions. Both/and becomes, in the best of these theorists, a strategy for valuing Marx while reading him for a present postmodern age.

Similarly, the way that actual individuals think about and experience their realities is often a contradictory and multi-faceted process. Marx accounted for these self-perceptions through the concept of ideology. It has been perhaps the most important Marxist idea for cultural critics, and it has been substantively revised during its long history. Traditional Marxism has had a reflection theory of ideology that is akin to a reflection theory of representation, wherein the economic base produces certain distortions or myths about the nature of reality held by subjects as false consciousness. The Frankfurt school of critical theory accomplished pioneering work in this area, beginning in the 1930s. Walter Benjamin, Marx Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, and Herbert Marcuse recognized the necessity of theorizing mass culture and cultural production in general as constitutive of social consciousness, mediating and not just reflecting the economic formation.<sup>14</sup>



In the 1980s, Louis Althusser rejected earlier formulations of ideology as uncritical empiricism and sought to develop a “scientific” understanding of ideology as a constitutive practice that produces and reproduces life, freeing it from relegation to the status of superstructure. This became one of the most powerful theories of ideology, combining certain aspects of Lacanian psychoanalysis with a pessimistic view of the subject, completely confined within an ideological mirror. For Althusser, the function of ideology is to position subjects within a specific organization of reality, making available certain fixed relations that pass for the whole of sociality: “In ideology men do indeed express, not the relation between themselves and their conditions of existence, but the way they live the relation between them and their conditions of existence. This presupposes both a real relation and an *‘imaginary’* lived relation.”<sup>15</sup> Thus, ideology is persuasive as well as coercive; that is, it “hails” subjects into an acceptable position, rather like the operations of psychoanalysis’s unconscious. Althusser names this process “interpellation.” Following Lacan, Althusser saw subjects positioned in language and discourse in a once-and-forever interpellation. While in the 1990s Althusser’s theories passed into the history of Marxism after serious criticism of the unhistorical and fixed nature of his theory, the concept of interpellation remains powerful and suggestive to many thinkers.

Both Slavoj Žižek and Judith Butler have worked within Althusser’s basic paradigm to produce their own, more nuanced versions of subject formation and ideological coercion. Butler, for instance, argues that recognizing the strength of the law to determine and constrain identity can also mean exploring how to refuse the invitation to interpellation, to fail to respond to the “hail,” or to respond in ways that are counter to the expected behaviors. “Under what conditions,” she writes, “does a law monopolize the terms of existence in so thorough a way? Or is this a theological fantasy of the law? Is there a possibility of being elsewhere or otherwise, without denying our complicity in the law that we oppose? Such possibility would require a different kind of turn, one that, enabled by the law, turns away from the law, resisting its lure of identity, an agency that outruns and counters the conditions of its emergence.”<sup>16</sup> In this way Butler retains the powerful analysis of interpellation as disciplining and forming subjects according to the law, but also posits a resistant strategy capable of modifying the finality or completeness of any particular interpellation. Her theory of ideology is embedded in Althusser and through him, Marx, but makes its own contemporary turn away from the laws of either inevitability (Althusser) or false consciousness (Marx).

While Butler has argued stubbornly for a way to resist the strength of the law, Žižek, falling under a stronger psychoanalytic influence from Lacan, is paradoxically pessimistic while committed to political analysis and struggle. On the one hand he believes in ideological critique and its knowledges, while on the other negating any possibility for the subject to combat or modify the structures that entrap and repress. The Real, for Žižek, is the kernel of repression, the elusive gap that resists recognition

(the sublime object of ideology, to cite his most famous book title). Not only can we not get at it, we are ourselves on empty ground: It is “possible to assume a place that enables us to maintain a distance from ideology, but this place from which one can denounce ideology must remain empty, it cannot be occupied by any positively determined reality.”<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless it is Žižek, perhaps more than any other philosopher, who is constantly in dialogue with Butler and other important post-Marxist thinkers such as Alain Badiou, Jacques Rancière, and Ernesto Laclau. His 1999 *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* is one of the most complete attempts to rethink the Left in a postpolitical age in print, and his frequent analysis of film and sometimes theater as well as cultural performances make important links to our field. As he writes in his introduction to *The Ticklish Subject*, “While this book is philosophical in its basic tenor, it is first and foremost an engaged political intervention, addressing the burning question of how we are to reformulate a leftist, anti-capitalist political project in our era of global capitalism and its ideological supplement, liberal-democratic multiculturalism.”<sup>18</sup>

The essays that follow answer the question, “What should we salvage from Marxism?” in ways that direct our attention to the difference Marx makes to our scholarly and artistic approaches to performance. David Savran recognizes the continuing utility of class analysis in a supposedly classless age, and celebrates a certain form of Enlightenment thinking—believing that rational thought and scientific inquiry produce new knowledges, even if such knowledge is always in need of being reexamined and surpassed. He also insists on embracing some causal explanations—the language in Marx of “determination”—although he illustrates how a complex and mobile understanding of determination provides explanatory power without becoming “vulgar,” as in the old familiar term, “vulgar Marxism,” by which scholars dismissed what they took to be Marx’s too simplistic reduction of the motor of history to economic determinism. Savran reads Marx through Brecht to keep the affiliations with theater very close, and through Pierre Bourdieu to keep an active sociology of culture at center stage. Savran illuminates *Rent* as his prime example of a contemporary and popular performance that can only be understood when it is historicized, subjected to an analysis of its mode of production, its relation to other “overdetermined” forces such as the replacement of class politics by identity politics, the collapse of elite and popular into each other, and the high-stakes investment of capital that makes the term *nonprofit theater* obsolete today.

Bruce McConachie demonstrates the difference it makes to theater history and historiography to use a Marxist framework when doing historical research. He writes about “production” in both its theatrical and economic sense, employing Raymond Williams’s method of locating and explicating keywords to highlight the power of the term, and to insist that “the shift in usage from *manager* to *producer* and the emergence of *production* to denote the producer’s actions consequently marked a significant

stage in the transformation of dramatic entertainment under capitalism." Like Savran, McConachie calls for an active sociology of culture as key to the analysis of performance; Raymond Williams and Pierre Bourdieu were/are primarily Marxist or neo-Marxist sociologists. Both Savran and McConachie also provide extensive discussions of the basic Marxist terms *base* and *superstructure* and their relations, showing how they have been redefined and revised by thinkers coming after Marx to create a theory of ideology that does not rely on a simple determination of culture and its institutions by the economic base, but rather posits a reciprocal and constantly changing cocreation of the entire range of human activity and its representations.

John Rouse completes this section with an essay that has become a classic for teaching Brecht. Rouse captures both a detailed description of how the actor (and the director) functions in a Brechtian theater, and also offers an explanatory analysis of how practice and theory inform each other and relate dialectically in what Marx called *praxis* (the mutual and inextricable process of reflection and action at once). Here, Rouse extends Savran's discussions of the role of social determinants and the need for historicization through concrete discussions of the actor's craft: "Historical determinants—the economic, political, and social factors that influence the social conditions of any historical period—must not simply be made recognizable. They must be made recognizable as constitutive elements in the individual occurrences between human beings." Brecht himself, like Marx, has been labeled obsolete in recent years and yet has not passed out of theatrical training or tradition. He continues to be a reference point, even if only for argument, for many contemporary artists and scholars, whether they are practitioners such as Ann Bogart or theorists and critics such as Katrin Sieg.<sup>19</sup> Since the first edition of *Critical Theory and Performance*, Fredric Jameson, the foremost American Marxist thinker, has published a major opus on Brecht (cited in Savran), and classroom syllabi for theater and performance studies continue to have need of *Brecht on Theatre* for many purposes.<sup>20</sup> Outside the United States, where Brecht productions have never flourished, Brecht's plays continue to be mounted and produced, often revised into almost unrecognizable forms, but then, Brecht would have loved that, as he believed the process of constant revision was how history moved dialectically beyond itself into something called a future.

Fredric Jameson, in fact, made one of the most important pronouncements about Marxism at the time of its supposed demise—that the task of imagining utopia is "the most urgent task that confronts Marxism today."<sup>21</sup> As Jill Dolan and others in our field have argued, the utopian imagination is peculiarly well suited to performance, whose *modus operandi* is always after all the subjunctive, "What if?"<sup>22</sup> The final thing to be salvaged from Marx is hope and a desire to envision a utopian horizon of possibility for equality and justice and plenty, even if, as Derrida tells us, it is always unreachable and undecidable.<sup>23</sup>

How long  
 Do works endure? As long  
 As they are not completed.  
 Since as long as they demand effort  
 They do not decay.<sup>24</sup>

J.G.R.

## NOTES

1. See, for example, a key text from that time: Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Maxwell Macmillan International, 1992).

2. Gayatri Spivak in particular has insisted on Marx's writings on value and on money as critical for an analysis of global culture. See, for example, "Scattered Speculations on the Question of Value," in *The Spivak Reader*, ed. Donna Landry and Gerald Maclean (New York: Routledge, 1996), 104–40, and "Practical Politics of the Open End," in *The Post-colonial Critic*, ed. Sarah Harasym (New York: Routledge, 1990), 95–112.

3. Jacques Derrida remarks on the usefulness of the *Communist Manifesto*, "I know of few texts in the philosophical tradition, perhaps none, whose lesson seemed more urgent *today*. . . . No text in the tradition seems as lucid concerning the way in which the political is becoming worldwide, concerning the irreducibility of the technical and the media in the current of the most thinking thought. . . . And few texts have shed so much light on law, international law, and nationalism." *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994), 13.

4. Slavoj Žižek is a good example of someone who has worked beyond Marx and Freud to produce theories heavily indebted to both while staking out his claim to a materialist Lacanian analysis. See *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (New York: Verso, 1989), *Enjoy Your Symptom! Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out*, rev. ed. (New York: Routledge, 2000), and *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (New York: Verso, 1999).

5. A basic source of the "humanist" Marx is Eric Fromm's *Marx's Concept of Man* (New York: Frederic Ungar, 1961). It is still an excellent pedagogical tool for explaining key ideas from the mode of production to theories of the commodity, use and exchange value, and many other basic features of Marx's writings.

6. The class was specifically Post-Marxist British Theory and Theatre, and we read Raymond Williams, Stuart Hall, Angela McRobbie, Paul Gilroy, and Richard Dyer alongside contemporary playwrights such as Mark Ravenhill and Sarah Kane.

7. Raymond Williams, "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory," in *Problems in Materialism and Culture* (London: Verso, 1980), 31–49.

8. Chantal Mouffe, "Hegemony and the New Political Subjects: Toward a Concept of Democracy," in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 91. This collection of key theoreticians' revisions of Marxist theory was very influential during the 1990s and remains important today as a record of scholarship just at the time of the collapse of socialism.

9. Rey Chow, *Ethics after Idealism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 35.

10. Spivak, "Practical Politics," 96.
11. Spivak, "Scattered Speculations," 124.
12. Antonio Gramsci (d. 1947), Althusser, and Williams have been key theorists in the history of Marxist revision and development. Gramsci is best known for his concept of "hegemony," one of the most productive theories for contemporary thinkers such as Hall and Mouffe. His major works are in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971).
13. Stuart Hall, "Gramsci's Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity," in *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, ed. David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen (New York: Routledge, 1996), 436.
14. For an overview of their contribution, see Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923–1950* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1973).
15. Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Pantheon, 1969), 233.
16. Judith Butler, "'Conscience Doth Make Subjects of Us All': Althusser's Subjection," in *The Psychic Life of Power* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 130.
17. Slavoj Žižek, "The Spectre of Ideology," in *The Žižek Reader*, ed. Elizabeth Wright and Edmond Wright (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 70.
18. Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, 4.
19. See Ann Bogart, *A Director Prepares: Seven Essays on Art and Theatre* (New York: Routledge, 2001); and Katrin Sieg, *Performing Race, Nation, and Sexuality in West Germany* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002).
20. This compilation of Brecht's theoretical writings continues to be the major introduction to Brecht's thinking in English. Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of An Aesthetic*, ed. and trans. John Willett (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978).
21. Fredric Jameson, "Cognitive Mapping," in Nelson and Grossberg, *Marxism*, 89–90.
22. "My concern here is with how utopia can be imagined or experienced affectively, through feelings, in small, incremental moments that performance can provide." Jill Dolan, "Performance, Utopia, and the 'Utopian Performative,'" *Theatre Journal* 53 (October 2001): 460.
23. "There is an *avenir* for justice and there is no justice except to the degree that some event is possible which, as event, exceeds calculations, rules, programs, anticipations and so forth." Jacques Derrida, "Force of Law: The 'Mystical Foundation of Authority,'" in *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*, ed. Drucilla Cornell et al. (New York: Routledge, 1992), 27.
24. Bertolt Brecht, "About the Way to Construct Enduring Works," in *Poems, 1913–1956*, ed. John Willett and Ralph Manheim (New York: Methuen, 1976), 193.

# Shadows of Brecht

*David Savran*

Remember that we have met together in a dark period, when men's behaviour to one another is particularly horrible and the deadly activities of certain groups of people are shrouded in almost impenetrable darkness, so that much thought and much organization is needed if behaviour of a social kind is to be dragged into the light.

—Bertolt Brecht, *The Messingkauf Dialogues*

If Marxism were a coherent philosophy, an uncomplicated set of social practices, or a straightforward political program, it would be easy to write an essay that analyzes how it has been, and might still be, applied to the study of theater, performance, or any other mode of cultural production. But as Marx himself recognized, “Every useful thing”—and what good is Marxism if it be not a useful thing?—“is a whole composed of many properties; it can therefore be useful in various ways.”<sup>1</sup> Founded as a mode of dialectical analysis and revolutionary praxis that aims to abolish class domination and make good on an overdue messianic promise, Marxism is multiform and contradictory, a totalizing perspective on that which defies totalization, a science that flouts the laws of scientific knowledge, a philosophy that questions the very bases of philosophy—in short, a set of tools with a multitude of possible applications. It is little wonder then that some of the work of the most provocative and influential Western Marxists—including Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Louis Althusser, C. L. R. James, Stuart Hall, Raymond Williams, and Fredric Jameson—could be styled deconstructionist, or that Jacques Derrida himself has been drawn in *Specters of Marx* to mourn, resuscitate, and claim (more problematically, I believe) that deconstruction radicalizes and supersedes “the tradition of a certain Marxism, in a certain spirit of Marxism.”<sup>2</sup> Or that the most celebrated Marxist to work in the theater, Bertolt Brecht, should remain, fifty years after his death (and some fifteen years after the demise of his last home, the Democratic Republic of Germany), a continuing source of inspiration and controversy, veneration and disquiet.

Despite the debates that have swirled around Brecht's aesthetics, political allegiances, collaborative methods, and relations with women, few would deny that he casts a very long shadow over twentieth- and twenty-first-century theater. His shadow, however—the particular convergence of authority, controversy, provocation, ideology critique, and aesthetic and political activism that his name evokes—is limned by the boundary between the light of reason and a certain darkness, both the “dark period” in which he, and we, live and his own sense of irony and desire to vex. Like modernity itself, his project remains frustratingly incomplete. Brecht may be absent from the scene, but, like the ghost of King Hamlet, he has

not quite finished playing his part. He has inveighed against tyranny, exited, and left in his wake dark traces of suspicion, longing, guilt, and hope. Like Derrida's reiterative specter, he is the "ghost" who "never dies" but "remains always to come and to come back."<sup>3</sup> Brecht's immortality is in part the result of his success—as playwright, theorist, and director—at recasting dialogues about the politics of art and consolidating and popularizing a theater that is as a rule stamped "Marxist." Drawing on the work of Marx, Lenin, Piscator, the Russian formalists, Chinese actors, and Walter Benjamin (to name only the most obvious), he dealt both theatrical realism and agitprop a one-two punch from which they have never fully recovered, developed a formula for a historical materialist dramaturgy, and codified a self-consciously performative and politically engaged mode of acting and *mise-en-scène*. But for Brecht, Marx was not simply one influence among many. Only after he had begun reading *Capital* in 1926 did he discover that, in his own words, it was "this man Marx" who "was the only spectator for my plays I'd ever come across."<sup>4</sup> While in exile in California during World War II, he so strongly supported both Soviet Communism and Stalin's war against the Nazis that, in the "eyes of most European and American leftists who knew him in the forties, Brecht was a Stalinist."<sup>5</sup>

It is little wonder, then, that Brecht has been hailed (and sometimes decried) for "aim[ing]," in the words of Lee Baxandall, "to be the Marx of the post-capitalist, post-subjectivist theatre."<sup>6</sup> Because his plays and theoretical writings alike maintain such a vigorous dialogue with Marxist theories and practices, his many admirers—from Peter Brook and Giorgio Strehler to Augusto Boal and Luis Valdez—have used him as both an emblem of and guide to revolutionary theater praxis. But Brecht himself was not only being coy when he declared to the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) (in what James Lyon calls a uniquely "polite exercise in cunning and duplicity"): "I was not a member or am not a member of any Communist Party."<sup>7</sup> For he was, like Marx himself, one of the great comic ironists who delighted in the perpetual undecidability and manipulability of signification itself. ("The surgeon who has heavy responsibilities," Brecht wrote, "needs the little scalpel to lie lightly and easily in his hand.")<sup>8</sup> Fredric Jameson rightly emphasizes that despite his allegiances, "Brecht never exactly had a system to teach, not even 'Marxism' in the form of a system."<sup>9</sup>

Brecht's unparalleled influence has ensured that it is impossible even to think about the impact of Marxism on theater and performance—as well as on scholarship in both fields—without considering the work of this most cunning of theorists. (I suspect that many readers of this essay did not begin, as I did not, to think seriously about Marxism until reading Brecht's plays and his theoretical essays.) Yet as Jameson suggests, Brecht proves an unreliable point of reference not because he failed to engage a host of issues that pass as Marxist but because his theories and practices, spanning some thirty-odd years, remain ambiguous, contradictory, wayward, and enigmatic. There is no other theater theorist (with the possible

exception of Artaud) who proselytizes more emphatically, tirelessly, and programmatically for what is finally an impossibly revolutionary theater. This is surely one reason why Brecht's work, much like that of his friend Walter Benjamin, lends itself to being constantly rediscovered and reinterpreted in light of changing critical (and theatrical) vernaculars, from post-modernism and feminism to deconstruction and identity politics.

The mutability and elusiveness of Brecht's shadow means of course that his theatrical shorthand can be, and has been, co-opted for nonpolitical purposes by a great many theater and performance artists (including Joseph Beuys, Allan Kaprow, Richard Foreman, and Laurie Anderson) whose works rarely or never engage Marxist theory. It also guarantees that any analysis of the relationship of Marxism to theater and performance that uses Brecht prescriptively does so at its peril. For if nothing else, Brecht has taught us the singular importance of adopting "a critical attitude" toward not only theater, culture, and politics, but all those things we take for granted.<sup>10</sup> The very cornerstone of his aesthetic, *Verfremdung* (meaning estrangement or alienation), was designed to reveal the historicity and constructedness of every imaginable orthodoxy, including (presumably) Marxism itself. If Jameson is correct in maintaining that Brecht's beliefs were founded upon "an attitude hostile to system in general"—including Marxism—then using Brecht's work as a foundation for a purportedly Marxist mode of analysis would be a malapropism of epic proportions.<sup>11</sup>

Yet the early years of the twenty-first century may be an opportune moment to take another look at the shadow that Brecht casts, in the second decade after the fall of the Soviet Union, as the American empire attempts to remap the world in line with its economic interests by waging a war against terrorism abroad and dissent at home, as globalization proceeds apace under the aegis of multinational corporations more rich and powerful than most nation-states, as the redistribution of wealth in the United States continues relentlessly upward, as the mass media continue to undergo an unprecedented concentration, as the Third World is increasingly exploited and immiserated in the name of free trade, and as effective opposition to these developments seems virtually foreclosed. Communism has been consigned to the ashcan of history while actually existing capitalism, Aijaz Ahmad observes, is giddy in triumph but "is itself mired in stagnation and riven by its own contradictions, becoming in the process more threatened and threatening than ever before."<sup>12</sup> This is "one of those moments," Samir Amin notes, "when the gluttons hold their orgy," when brutal regimes of accumulation routinely neutralize and depoliticize Marxist references, when, for example, the most famous call to arms ever penned—"Workers of the world, unite!"—inscribed on the sidewalk outside the Memphis Central Library, is reduced to a cipher, a musty quotation that is no longer "ideological" "in the context of the history of mankind."<sup>13</sup> Among dozens of quotations inscribed on the sidewalk outside the new Memphis Public Library, Marx's call to arms provoked a firestorm of protest, outraging two county commissioners, a city councilman, and hundreds of indignant citizens.



The urgency of reviving and renewing a Marxist hermeneutic has been heightened—ironically—by its very success, by the relentless cannibalization of Marxist discourse since the 1970s by what is now called “theory.” Open almost any theater or performance studies journal at random and you will discover numerous buzzwords derived in part from the rich tradition of Marxist critique: ideology, hegemony, class, social formation, historical conditions, matter, materialism, colonialism, exploitation, power, and so on. At the same time, however, if the contributors to these journals were asked if they or their work were Marxist, the vast majority would plead the Fifth. For many progressive intellectuals, Marxist modes of analysis have been displaced by a proliferation of *posts*: -modernism, -structuralism, -feminism, -humanism, and -Marxism itself. As Stuart Hall notes, “many young intellectuals have passed *through* the revival [of Marxist theory] and, after a heady and rapid apprenticeship, gone right out the other side again.”<sup>14</sup> Although as Brecht’s own testimony before HUAC reminds us, the reluctance to be labeled a Marxist has a long history that, in the United States at least, is a reasonable (if regrettable) response to a long history of anticommunist conspiracy and agitation. The success of McCarthyism and later, the backlash that followed the 1960s, made American intellectuals especially susceptible to the seductions of formalism and poststructuralism and to the radical textual politics that by the late 1980s had largely supplanted the intellectual activisms associated with both the Old and the New Lefts.

Once poststructuralism became the lingua franca of academic discourse, most “post-” theoretical work adopted Foucauldian epistemologies that have effectively replaced Marxist frames of analysis. I do not have the space to launch a lengthy critique of Foucault (who will have to stand in here as the mascot of “post-” theory), but let me note three of what I consider his most aggressively anti-Marxist formulations. First, his theory of power/knowledge (derived more from Hobbes and Nietzsche than Marx) functions to equate all forms of administration, to obviate oppositional insurgencies, to atomize the body politic, to dismiss the category “class,” and to substitute a subtle (and almost imperceptible) form of micropolitics for class politics. Second, his theory of history, founded as it is on the idea of nearly arbitrary and inexplicable epistemological ruptures, precludes (and effectively ridicules) any and all structures of determination. Third, his deep-seated critique of modernity virtually equates liberal capitalism with Marxism as two nearly indistinguishable forms of domination, surveillance, and control that justify themselves through an arrogant and deceptive appeal to progress, enlightenment, and scientific reason.<sup>15</sup>

I realize of course that my very enunciation of those things that Foucault abandons and derides betrays my own beliefs about what might constitute—and what would be worth preserving in—a Marxist frame of analysis. That is why I am anxious, if not exactly to take refuge in Brecht’s shadow, then at least to use his name as the pretext for setting forth a set of principles or methods, despite the fact that I well know the danger that

any set of theoretical prescriptions (if only inadvertently) may congeal into a dictatorial and unreliable formula. In this moment of capitalism's presumptive triumph, however, I think it worth taking that risk. For despite the claims of "post-" theorists, "the fundamental modalities of capitalism," Neil Lazarus and his coauthors note, "have not been disturbed" since Marx's own time. Globalized capitalism has been and remains "a world system of combined and uneven development based on the private ownership of the means of production, the exploitation of labor power, and the priority of profit over need."<sup>16</sup> In the second decade after the fall of the Berlin Wall, Brecht's plays continue to be performed and his theories studied, but for most theater practitioners and scholars he remains as ghostlike a presence as Marx. Given this situation, I think it as important now to try to mourn and resuscitate Brecht as to mourn and resuscitate "a certain spirit of Marxism," knowing (in Derrida's words) that "in this interminable task, the ghost remains that which gives one the most to think about—and to do. Let us insist and spell things out: to do and to make come about, as well as to let come (about)."<sup>17</sup>

Given the legacy of so-called vulgar Marxism—a reductive and ultimately ahistorical analysis of society and culture that, for any self-respecting Marxist, always describes what *someone else* is doing—the first challenge in taking up "this interminable task" requires confronting the complex, mutual constitution of those concepts and principles that historically have been associated with Marxist modes of analysis. One cannot, for example, consider the question of ideology without addressing the very considerable problems associated with the terms *base/superstructure* and *determinism*. In his now classic (and yet to be superseded) volume *Marxism and Literature* (1977), Raymond Williams confronts this challenge by complicating "the key concepts of Marxist cultural theory" and analyzing the history and interdependence of each.<sup>18</sup> Since I have neither the space nor erudition to emulate Williams, I will elide a number of crucial issues—the irreducibility of class, class struggle, and dialectical analysis; the necessity of taking up a global perspective on even the most apparently local of phenomena; the importance of examining what counts as materiality in historical materialism; and the obligation to analyze the economic and social position and function of intellectuals as producers of knowledge and guardians of the academy's gates.<sup>19</sup> I want instead to focus on one principle, one "interminable task" that happens to comprise the foundation of Brecht's method: historicization. For Brecht this entails debunking the aura of "timelessness" and universality that afflicts both "bourgeois theater" and bourgeois culture more generally. It requires that events be made strange, rendered "remarkable" and "unique" so they will illuminate "the entire structure of a society at a particular (transient) time"—and provoke social change.<sup>20</sup> It requires, in short, the cultivation of a sense of "astonishment" on the part of spectator and critic alike.<sup>21</sup> For the goal of Brecht's historicist dramaturgy is always "to expose the world's mechanism on a grand scale and to copy it in such a way that it would be more easily serviced."<sup>22</sup> By practicing a mimeticism that keeps

“impermanence always before our eyes, . . . our own period can be seen to be impermanent too.”<sup>23</sup> This principle is the same that Jameson uses as a slogan to introduce *The Political Unconscious*—“Always historicize!”—and which he there describes as “the one absolute and we may even say ‘transhistorical’ imperative of all dialectical thought.”<sup>24</sup> For historicization through dialectical analysis is the only way to expose the structural contradictions that inform both a work of art and “the entire structure of a society.” It demands that one not only remember but also analyze the very mechanics of forgetting. Or as Bourdieu puts it: to historicize means to “reconstruct the history of the historical labour of de-historicization.”<sup>25</sup> (This task seems an especially urgent one these days, when politicians, pundits, and journalists seem to drink of the river Lethe every morning.) If historicization represents both a refusal to forget and a form of contextualization, it must be an “interminable task.” For a dialectical movement that ceases moving in order to produce a static and timeless totality is antithetical to Marxist thought because “[t]otality is not,” Jameson warns, “available for representation, any more than it is accessible in the form of some ultimate truth.”<sup>26</sup> The unfeasibility of a totalizing theory, however, must not forestall dialectical thinking but rather impel it forward all the more urgently.

As an example of historicization on the fly, let me consider the significance of a theater piece that appropriates Brechtian techniques in a slapdash way but which Brecht himself would likely view with puzzlement insofar as it seems to epitomize the most seductive and narcotizing characteristics of bourgeois theater. I am referring to the musical *Rent* by Jonathan Larson, not by accident the most popular American play of the final decade of the twentieth century. How can one even begin to understand its significance unless one details that constellation of elements that comprises its historical context:

- the gentrification of New York’s East Village
- the prolonged economic boom of the 1990s that particularly benefited the Broadway theatergoing classes
- the transubstantiation of high into low, *La Bohème* into rock opera, as the occasion for slumming by members of these affluent classes
- the resurgence of a bourgeois individualism so aggressive that it permits even abjection to be fashioned as volitional
- the disappearance of bohemianism (aka the counterculture) and the rewriting of its social critique as cynical parody
- the mainstreaming of hip-hop; the triumph of multiculturalism as a spectacle of difference
- the romance of miscegenated cultural forms
- the romance of miscegenation
- the tragic mulatta updated as Latino drag queen in the wake of *Paris is Burning*
- the commodification of queer and queer wannabe culture

the Disneyfication of Times Square (courtesy of Rudy Giuliani), in  
 which the Nederlander Theatre, gussied up to look dilapidated,  
 becomes a theme park of abjection  
 the intensifying pressure on nonprofit theaters to support them-  
 selves by developing commercial fare for Broadway  
 the increasing obsolescence of the categories highbrow, middle-  
 brow, and lowbrow  
 the trickle-up effect of MTV-style editing, graphics, and rhythms  
 into almost every form of American culture  
 the clever and timely construction of the *Rent* brand-name (and  
 logo) as meaning broker and lifestyle philosophy at precisely the  
 moment when all America is being branded by the likes of Star-  
 bucks, Nike, and the Gap  
 the increasingly volatile relation in musical theater, especially  
 after Sondheim, between social critique and old-fashioned  
 amusement  
 the sentimental mythologization of Larson's death on the eve of his  
 immortality

And so on.

One problem with the simple enumeration of elements is that it  
 tends—as all lists do—to equate each of them, flattening out the differ-  
 ences and confounding systematic analysis. If they all bear equal weight,  
 how can one possibly come up with a coherent narrative about *Rent* or  
 its position in U.S. culture? Yet reformatting these contextual elements in  
 a hierarchical sequence is just as problematic. If one chooses to privilege  
 economic relations at the expense of social attitudes, ideologies, and the  
 intentions of the artists involved in the making of the piece, one could  
 be accused of reproducing a crude binary opposition between base and  
 superstructure that has long beleaguered Marxist theory. (How can one  
 isolate economic relations anyway when virtually all the elements I listed  
 above have economic components or implications?) If one takes the op-  
 posite tack, one risks being labeled an idealist, formalist, or aestheticist.  
 Raymond Williams's solution seems to me the most useful and precise.  
 He points out (drawing on Engels's own assertions) that the elements  
 traditionally associated with base and superstructure “are in practice in-  
 dissoluble: not in the sense that they cannot be distinguished for pur-  
 poses of analysis, but in the decisive sense that these are not separate  
 ‘areas’ or ‘elements’ but the whole, specific activities and products of real  
 men.”<sup>27</sup> Williams insists, like so many other Western Marxists, that  
 “[c]ultural work and activity are not now, in any sense, a superstruc-  
 ture.” “On the contrary,” he adds, “they are among the basic processes”  
 of “a formed social and economic structure.”<sup>28</sup> This mutual imbrication  
 of the economic and the cultural became particularly significant and in-  
 disputable with the explosion of mass culture during the twentieth cen-  
 tury. It therefore has become all the more urgent that a Marxist critique  
 seek to discover and map the interactions between and among all these

elements and the contradictions they produce and reproduce. “[A]bove all,” Brecht emphasizes, “knowledge manifests itself . . . in knowing better, i.e. in [knowing] contradiction.”<sup>29</sup>

Yet even Williams’s formulation does not quite solve the problem of base and superstructure insofar as it is indissolubly linked to that of determination. For if one completely jettisons the difference between the economic and the ideological, for example, it would be difficult to lay claim to a mode of analysis that could be called Marxist. As Williams bluntly declares (well aware how vexing this issue is), “A Marxism without some concept of determination is in effect worthless.” As an antidote to a crude economism, however, Williams takes up the now widely deployed concept (borrowed from Freud and Althusser) of overdetermination, meaning “determination by multiple factors.” For Williams, “‘overdetermination’ . . . is an especially useful way of understanding ‘contradictions’ and the ordinary version of ‘the dialectic,’ which can so easily be abstracted as features of a theoretically isolated (determining) situation or movement, which is then expected to develop according to certain (determinist) laws.”<sup>30</sup> Overdetermination, in other words, complicates what would otherwise be a reductive causal relationship and problematizes the dynamics of eventuation. It is a way not only of exposing contradictions but also of suggesting the multiples factors that produce them. At the same time, overdetermination can itself devolve into a self-neutralizing paradigm unless one attempts, if not exactly to privilege economic relations (understanding how complex and multiform they are), then at least to engage with the idea that they are decisive and irreducible. In theorizing (over)determination, Stuart Hall rewrites Althusser’s celebrated phrase—determination by the economic “in the last instance”—so it reads, “in the *first* instance.” He argues that to discover in the end only economic relations, as Althusser does, is to try to coax “the lost dream or illusion of theoretical *certainty*” into reality. But to begin with them means to establish “the open horizon of marxist theorizing—determinacy without guaranteed closures.” “Marxism is surely correct,” Hall adds, “to insist that no social practice or set of relations floats free of the determinate effects of the concrete relations in which they are located.”<sup>31</sup> But determination is always multiple, contested, partial, provisional.<sup>32</sup>

A somewhat less problematic component of historicization entails the analysis of how any performance or piece of theater functions and is positioned in the field of cultural production as a whole. This analysis involves an examination not only of relations of production, distribution, and consumption but also of how culture is imagined and hierarchized at any given moment. Brecht referred to this complex of interlocking systems as the “apparatus,” “the public entertainment machine” that in most cases imposes its “views as it were incognito.” He upbraids bourgeois artists because they mistakenly imagine “they have got hold of the apparatus which in fact has got hold of them” and, as a result, profoundly underestimate the extent to which their own work is fashioned and in effect held hostage by the very apparatus they believe they are managing,

manipulating, and even subverting. Because "art" under modern capitalism is always "merchandise," Brecht's apparatus keeps spitting it out like a gargantuan sausage machine.<sup>33</sup>

A detailed analysis of the apparatus must be in fact a branch of the sociology of culture of which there is a long, rich, Marxist tradition that includes the work of Gramsci, Benjamin, Bourdieu, Williams, and Hall and the Birmingham school. Williams defines it as the study of "different types of institution and formation in cultural production and distribution, and . . . the linking of these within whole social material processes."<sup>34</sup> Williams himself contributed signally to the development of this field in books like *Culture and Society* and *The Long Revolution*. Addressing itself to the complexity of this enterprise, his theorization of the sociology of theater and performance is worth quoting in full:

[A] sociology of drama, already concerned with institutions (theatres and their predecessors and successors), with formations (groups of dramatists, dramatic and theatrical movements), with formed relationships (audiences, including the formation of audiences within theatres and their wider social formation), would go on to include forms, not only in the sense of their relations to world-views or structures of feeling but also in the more active sense of their whole performance (social methods of speaking, moving, representing, and so on).<sup>35</sup>

This daunting project could be considered a kind of radicalized theater history that, for example, would be able to move with ease from an accounting of ticket prices to the formal imperatives governing dramatic forms, from the geographical distribution of theaters to the class composition of audiences and production companies, and from theater's position in the cultural hierarchy to the philosophical and ideological content of specific plays.

Perhaps the closest thing to a system that might carry out Williams's project is the historical sociology of Pierre Bourdieu, whose mode of radical historicization and contextualization provides an invaluable guide to dissecting "the relationship between systems of thought, social institutions and different forms of material and symbolic power."<sup>36</sup> Having long and deeply engaged with Marxist social theory (as well as with structuralist anthropology and linguistics), Bourdieu has developed a brand of sociological analysis that attempts both to displace and transcend the binary oppositions base/superstructure, individual/society, subjective/objective, idealism/materialism by deconstructing the (to his mind, false) opposition between a highly individualistic subjectivism and an objectivism that "bracket[s] individual experience and subjectivity and focus[es] instead on the objective conditions which structure practice independent of human consciousness."<sup>37</sup> Like Williams, Bourdieu "rejects the idea that social existence can be segmented and hierarchically organized into distinct spheres, such as the social, the cultural,

the economic." In place of this hierarchy, Bourdieu "conceptualizes the social world as a series of relatively autonomous but structurally homologous fields of production, circulation, and consumption of various forms of cultural as well as material resources."<sup>38</sup>

For Bourdieu, the concept of field is perhaps the key to his historical sociology of culture. He defines a field as a social structure, an arena "of production, circulation, and appropriation . . . of goods, services, knowledge, or status" that is configured by the range of "competitive positions held by [social] actors."<sup>39</sup> A field (whether economic, political, judicial, educational, religious, theatrical, etc.) is a hierarchically organized, institutional framework, "a universe . . . of belief," "a structured space with its own laws of functioning," a kind of marketplace (whose boundaries are never sharply drawn), which may in turn be composed of several sub-fields.<sup>40</sup> "To think in terms of field," Bourdieu emphasizes, "is to *think relationally*."<sup>41</sup> As he notes, meaning is always and only produced in relation to the structures of particular fields and the struggles between and among agents that in turn will always transform the fields' structures. For "[t]he meaning of a work (artistic, literary, philosophical, etc.) changes automatically with each change in the field within which it is situated."<sup>42</sup> A piece of theater, then, cannot be a passive reflection (or mere effect) of economic and social relations because it is always actively involved in the propagation and transformation of these same relations. Its structure, content, and rhetoric are the result not of the solitary contemplation or collaboration of artists but of an agonistic social process that is predicated less on aesthetics and truth-value than on the competition for legitimation and social power. For the object of all struggles within a field is capital—or forms of power—of which Bourdieu specifies four different kinds that are always unequally distributed: economic (money and property), cultural (artistic, cultural, and educational knowledges and competences), social (acquaintances and social networks), and symbolic (prestige, celebrity, honor, etc.).

Bourdieu's theory of fields and capital permits a detailed economic analysis of art, society, and culture that deals with issues of class interests and values in a complex way, that definitively debunks the idea of art for art's sake, that relentlessly foregrounds and elucidates contradictions, and that recognizes—and yet does not, like Adorno, condemn—art's status as a commodity in industrial and postindustrial societies. He uses the concept of field to displace the notion of apparatus, which he describes as "the Trojan horse of 'pessimistic functionalism'" in part because it does not acknowledge social struggle (even Brecht's use of the term suggests the futility of opposition). The field, on the other hand, is constituted and constantly being transformed by skirmishes between and among the different forces of orthodoxy and heterodoxy. Because it is radically historical and dialectical, it is always open to the possibility of radical change. For as Bourdieu insists, "There is history only as long as people revolt, resist, act."<sup>43</sup>

To return to my example and spin an explicatory narrative: *Rent* represents a site of struggle between economic and symbolic capital, on the

one hand, and cultural capital, on the other, at a moment when there is almost no consensus in the United States as to what qualifies as cultural competency or value. Its triumph at the box office and its string of awards cannot disguise the fact that it tends to be regarded by critics and theatergoers alike as either stockpiling or squandering massive amounts of cultural capital (that is, it is either brilliant or inept). Indeed, the ever-dwindling disparity in contemporary urban culture between getting and spending—which is in part precisely what the play is about—is the mark of a society in which the binary opposition between high and low is increasingly obsolete (not unlike theater itself), but in which the opposition still retains a residual purchase. *Rent*'s strategy of racial, sexual, and cultural mixing manages to combine an appeal both to the would-be hip and relatively affluent (but few) supporters of what used to be called elite culture as well as to the less affluent (but far more numerous) partisans of mass culture. The musical's cross-class—but still doggedly bourgeois—appeal may represent the triumph of nonprofit theater, but its massive acquisition of multiple forms of capital testifies to the very obsolescence of the category “non-profit” at the moment when American theater has become increasingly standardized and mass-produced and the so-called nonprofits depend inordinately on the development of popular fare (that deliberately muddies the distinction between elite and popular forms, between the orthodox and the heterodox) in order to balance their books.

*Rent* is also unmistakably the product (and producer) of a society in which class politics have been completely supplanted by identity politics based on race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. And while there is no question but that they have had a tremendously salutary impact on certain egalitarian struggles in the United States over the past forty years, the category “class” remains massively undertheorized or ignored in most identitarian initiatives. It is hardly surprising then that the subculture that *Rent* fashions is one for which poverty and abjection are the sign of cultural capital (as they were for both the nineteenth-century bohemians and the first avant-garde) but also a matter of personal choice. Most of Puccini's genuinely destitute dramatis personae are transformed into the naughty, downwardly mobile, incompletely oedipalized adult children of upwardly mobile suburbanites. This last feature clearly marks the play as a product of a resurgence of bourgeois individualism since the mid-1970s that tends to regard social status as volitional. Yet this triumphalist individualism is unable to disguise the fact that *Rent*'s gain is predicated upon loss. It must, as a result, also be seen as the symptom of a deeply melancholic society that has pounded the last nail into the coffin of what was once an oppositional culture. For just as the musical cannot bear to let Mimi really die, so does it attempt (if I may be forgiven for borrowing a page from Freud) a melancholic sustenance of the ghost of a leftist counterculture that it refuses to mourn because it cannot recognize that the patient has expired. It is a play whose appeal is predicated at once on death and the denial of death: the death of characters within the play, of the Rodgers-and-Hammerstein formula musical, and of the author (in this



case, quite literally), as well as on the disappearance (and gentrification) of both the old East Village and the old Times Square whose raffish charms it manages to preserve and mummify, much like the statues filling its near neighbor, the contemporaneously installed Madame Tussaud's Wax Museum on Forty-second Street.

The kind of faux existentialism that comprises *Rent's* message ("No day but today") and what the popular press would call its lifestyle philosophy ("There is no future / There is no past / I live this moment / As my last") is clearly a product of a society that has largely turned its back on Enlightenment projects and epistemologies.<sup>44</sup> To that extent, and despite its Brechtian trappings, the musical is as un-Brechtian as could be. It is also clearly emblematic of an apocalyptic, "post-" society that is extremely wary of rationalism and rationality, science, and ideas of social progress. For just as a Marxist critique must hold on to some version of determinism, so must it retain its foundation in the Enlightenment project. This critical enterprise requires a refutation of the belief in the synonymy of rationality with instrumental reason—the logic of domination and the will to power—that characterizes so much "post-" theory. The simple equation of rationalism with imperialism, fascism, sexism, racism, and the like is, to paraphrase Habermas, an astounding oversimplification of modernity.<sup>45</sup> As Lazarus and his coauthors point out, it is also "a category mistake. It is to convert the legitimate critique of the one-dimensionality of instrumental reason, through displacement and hypostatization, into a radically ahistorical arraignment of Enlightenment."<sup>46</sup> Although the attack on instrumental reason is often justified in the name of Horkheimer and Adorno (and their *Dialectic of Enlightenment*), even they recognize the progressive dimensions of scientific rationality. After all, they maintain, "[S]ocial freedom is inseparable from enlightened thought."<sup>47</sup>

Despite the oversimplifications of "post-" theorists, scientific rationality—as Habermas, Bourdieu, and Lazarus and his coauthors well understand—is by no means simply a handy camouflage for the will to power. Rather, theoretical-scientific knowledge has provided the foundation for the construction of capitalist modernity and might yet again for a different and less exploitative economic system. As Lazarus and his coauthors argue, "capitalism produced an interest in accurate knowledge about the world that outstripped even its short-term strategic goals of converting knowledge into power and money." This knowledge, in its most progressive form, "breaks with everyday, common-sense, pre-reflexive, and doxic perceptions of the world." It thereby functions (in the spirit of *Verfremdung*) as a way of making strange that which is taken for granted, insofar as it is able "to integrate isolated or 'local' phenomena into a broader explanatory scheme" that "can contradict appearance." As a dialectical and experimental form of knowledge, it seeks "to construct a way of accounting for processes in the world that can be *tested, corrected, and, crucially, disproved.*" Finally, it "entails a self-reflexive stance toward the methods of scientific experimentation, interests of scientific knowledge, and material forces determining the conditions of scientific practice."<sup>48</sup> Or as Brecht puts

it in his *Life of Galileo*, his own analysis of scientific rationality (and critique and historicization of the debilitating disconnection between science and morality), "The pursuit of science . . . deals in knowledge procured through doubt. Creating knowledge for all about all, it aims to turn all of us into doubters."<sup>49</sup> By recognizing that theoretical-scientific knowledge must always be positioned on the terrain of skepticism, Brecht seems to anticipate what Habermas would later describe as "the irreversibility of learning processes, which . . . can only be repressed or corrected by better insights." On this basis, Habermas argues for the incompletely realized potential of scientific knowledge: "enlightenment can only make good its deficits by radicalized enlightenment."<sup>50</sup> Given the ever-expanding international division of labor, however, this enlightenment must be as radically inclusive and global in its scope as in its method. For it is only "a popular internationalism," according to Samir Amin, "that can engender a genuinely universalist value system, completing the unfinished projects of the Enlightenment and the socialist movement."<sup>51</sup> It is perhaps no accident then that Brecht's *Galileo* hides his masterwork, the *Discorsi*, in a globe. For if his (or any!) scientific work is to fulfill its promise, it must combat the brutal polarization that passes these days for globalization and "put forward a universalist view of [the] future."<sup>52</sup>

For the theorists cited above, enlightenment, rationality, and scientific knowledge are vexing concepts, but ones that a Marxist analysis cannot do without. For they describe not a straight and narrow path to utopia but rather a rigorous dialectic of trial and error, confidence and doubt that aims to drag "deadly activities . . . into the light."<sup>53</sup> Or as Bourdieu describes it, "Enlightenment is on the side of those who turn their spotlight on our blinkers."<sup>54</sup> This is precisely the process that Brecht dramatizes and interrogates in *Galileo*, ventriloquizing through the title character that "science's sole aim must be to lighten the burden of human existence." This deeply humanist—and literally global—project requires the abjuration of "knowledge for knowledge's sake" insofar as the latter is likely to produce not advancement but "a progress away from mankind."<sup>55</sup> The figure who speaks these words is one of Brecht's typically fallible heroes who is utterly incapable of practicing what he preaches. He is thereby produced (like Shen Te or Mother Courage) as a character who, because he is inadvertently turned against himself, ends up sabotaging his most cherished dreams. It is then hardly coincidental that the penultimate scene of the play discovers him (Icarus-like) nearly blinded from having stared too long at the sun. With his failing eyesight he takes his place as one in a series of tragic, or in his case, pseudo-tragic, figures (like Oedipus or Gloucester) who are blinded for their inability to see the truth. Struggling to catch sight of the geese that a peasant has brought him as a gift and thinking his daughter has stepped into the lamp-light, he is unable to tell the difference between the light and the darkness.

*Virginia.* And what's wrong with your eyes this time? You should have been able to see them [two plucked geese] from where you are.

*Galileo.* You're in the shadow.  
*Virginia.* I'm not in the shadow.<sup>56</sup>

In the one play by Brecht that is most explicitly about science and enlightenment and that is rife with metaphors of darkness and light, the title character is fashioned a creature of the shadows, one whose figure both generates and blocks the light of scientific rationality. In that sense, he is much like his creator during our own "dark period." Like Galileo, Brecht appears to us less the specter that Derrida believes Marx has become than the shadow, the one whose dark silhouette falls across the stage—but only because he turned the lights on in the first place. Taking up Brecht's project—and the spirit of Marxism—requires attending to the light every bit as much as to the darkness, to reason and the utopian promises of history every bit as much as to error and doubt.

## NOTES

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3. Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 99.
4. Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, ed. and trans. John Willett (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964), 24.
5. James K. Lyon, *Bertolt Brecht in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 297.
6. Lee Baxandall, "Bertolt Brecht," in *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought*, ed. Tom Bottomore (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 56.
7. Lyon, *Bertolt Brecht in America*, 329–30.
8. Bertolt Brecht, *The Messingkauf Dialogues*, trans. John Willett (London: Methuen, 1965), 94.
9. Fredric Jameson, *Brecht and Method* (London: Verso, 1998), 2.
10. Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, 78.
11. Jameson, *Brecht and Method*, 24.
12. Aijaz Ahmad, "Reconciling Derrida: 'Specters of Marx' and Deconstructive Politics," in *Ghostly Demarcations: A Symposium on Jacques Derrida's Specters of Marx*, ed. Michael Sprinker (London: Verso, 1999), 96.
13. Samir Amin, *Spectres of Capitalism: A Critique of Current Intellectual Fashions* (New York: Monthly Review, 1998), 8; Carissa Hussong, quoted in "A Fuss Over Marx in Memphis," *New York Times*, December 29, 2001, A13; see also Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 31.
14. Stuart Hall, "The Problem of Ideology: Marxism without Guarantees," in *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, ed. David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen (London: Routledge, 1996), 25.
15. For useful critiques of Foucault, see Alex Callinicos, *Social Theory: A Historical Introduction* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 274–82; Jorge Larraín, *Ideology and Cultural Identity: Modernity and the Third World Presence* (Cambridge: Polity, 1994), 91–97; Christopher Norris, *Deconstruction and the "Unfinished*

*Project of Modernity*" (New York: Routledge, 2000), 119–35; and Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (London: Verso, 1992).

16. Neil Lazarus, Steven Evans, Anthony Arnone, and Anne Menke, "The Necessity of Universalism," *differences* 7, no. 1 (1995): 80.

17. Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 98.

18. Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 5.

19. For a authoritative analysis of the last issue, see Jill Dolan, *Geographies of Learning: Theory and Practice, Activism and Performance* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 2001).

20. Brecht, "Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting," in *Brecht on Theatre*, 96–98.

21. Brecht, *The Messingkauf Dialogues*, 48.

22. Brecht, *The Messingkauf Dialogues*, 67.

23. Brecht, "A Short Organum for the Theatre," in *Brecht on Theatre*, 190.

24. Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 9.

25. Pierre Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, trans. Richard Nice (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 82.

26. Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, 55.

27. Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 80.

28. Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 111.

29. Brecht, *The Messingkauf Dialogues*, 89.

30. Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 83, 88.

31. Hall, "The Problem of Ideology," 45; see also Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)," in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 135.

32. The concept of overdetermination that I am proposing here is much like that which Samir Amin (in a critique of Althusserian Marxism) describes as underdetermination. He disparages overdetermination because he reads it as an oversimplification, a process in which economic, political, ideological, and cultural "determinants" function in concert, "all work[ing] in the same direction." His theorization of underdetermination, in contrast, is closer to Williams's (and to my) understanding of the highly conflictual nature of overdetermination: "each of the determining factors is governed by its own logic, whether its status be that of last-analysis determinance (economics) or dominance (political in tributary systems, economic in capitalism, or, as I maintain, cultural in the communist future). These specific logics are autonomous and complementarity among them does not necessarily ensue, even spontaneously. They frequently clash with each other, and it is *a priori* impossible to foresee which of them will predominate." Amin, *Spectres of Capitalism*, 50.

33. Brecht, "The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre," in *Brecht on Theatre*, 34–35.

34. Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 138.

35. Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 139.

36. Randal Johnson, "Editor's Introduction," Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, ed. Randal Johnson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 1.

37. Johnson, "Editor's Introduction," 3–4.

38. David Swartz, *Culture and Power: The Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 40.

39. Swartz, *Culture and Power*, 117.

40. Pierre Bourdieu, "The Production of Belief: Contribution to an Economy of Symbolic Goods," in *Field of Cultural Production*, 82; Johnson, "Editor's Introduction," 6.
41. Pierre Bourdieu and Loic J. D. Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 96.
42. Pierre Bourdieu, "The Field of Cultural Production, or: The Economic World Reversed," in *Field of Cultural Production*, 30–31.
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44. Jonathan Larson, *Rent* libretto, Dreamworks compact discs DSMD2-50003, 1:15. Because there are no page numbers, I identify the source of lyrics by citing act and song number.
45. Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, trans. Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987), 112.
46. Lazarus et al., "The Necessity of Universalism," 112.
47. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (New York: Continuum, 1987), xiii.
48. Lazarus et al., "The Necessity of Universalism," 122, 120.
49. Bertolt Brecht, *Life of Galileo*, trans. John Willett (New York: Arcade, 1994), 107–8.
50. Habermas, *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, 84.
51. Samir Amin, quoted in Lazarus et al., "The Necessity of Universalism," 125.
52. Amin, *Spectres of Capitalism*, 66.
53. Brecht, *The Messingkauf Dialogues*, 42.
54. Quoted in Katha Pollitt, "Pierre Bourdieu, 1930–2002," *The Nation*, February 18, 2002, 10.
55. Brecht, *Life of Galileo*, 108.
56. Brecht, *Life of Galileo*, 100.

# Historicizing the Relations of Theatrical Production

*Bruce McConachie*

The producer does what the title says. He or she leads out, leads forth, leads through. The producer is the total organizing human being who generates the impulse from the organization.

—Zelda Fichandler

I never call myself a producer. . . . I'm part of this place. That's all. I'm part of this place, part of the work we do, part of all the people.

—Ellen Stewart

The emergence of the word *production* to mean the process of putting together a stage performance and the event resulting from this process is fairly recent. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, this usage dates from 1894, when the *Westminster Gazette* noted that “the production of the Greek play” was “the great event of the past week.” Before 1894 English writers termed a theatrical event a *show*, a *presentation*, or a *performance*. These words acquired the general sense of their present theatrical definitions soon after the development of public playhouses in England in the late sixteenth century. From that time until the 1890s, however, English had no single word that encompassed the many processes leading up to stage presentation. During these three hundred years theater artists might “found” companies, “build” costumes and scenery, “cast” plays and “stage” them, but these preperformance activities were not understood as making a total production. Similarly, English writers had no apparent need to introduce the verb *produce* and the noun *producer* in theatrical parlance until the 1890s.<sup>1</sup>

The etymological predecessor of theatrical *production* developed in the discourse of political economy. *Production* in the sense of the manufacture of goods for market exchange began in 1776 in Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*. Several economists elaborated and expanded the term's economic denotations during the nineteenth century. John R. McCulloch spoke of “the production of utility, and consequently of exchangeable value, by appropriating and modifying matter already in existence” in 1825. Henry Fawcett defined *capital* as “wealth which has been appropriated to assist future production.” Henry George further expanded the meaning of the term in his statement that “production is always the mother of wages.” And the *Manchester Examiner* reported in 1885 that, because the market was glutted, “production has of late been largely going into stock.” Although *production* retained earlier, noneconomic meanings, its primary usage by the 1890s referred to the productive processes and results of industrial capitalism.<sup>2</sup> Hence, when the *Westminster Gazette* first

termed a theatrical event a production, its readers probably understood that the occasion involved the investment of capital and the hiring of labor to create and sell a product on the entertainment market in the expectation of generating a profit.

Why do *producer* and *production* emerge in theatrical discourse at the end of the nineteenth century? In what ways did *production* link artistic and economic activity in the 1890s? And why did it take three hundred years for English writers to denote the process of putting together a show with a single word? The likely answers to these questions have significant implications for the ways in which theater historians construct explanations of past productions. Most immediately, etymological understanding can help the historian to avoid the problem of "presentism," unthinkingly reading current practices back into the past. Further, probing the history of the word can reveal the difficulties historians face in constructing contexts and causalities to explain the relations of theatrical production in the past. It can also suggest a possible strategy for overcoming these difficulties.

Such an investigation is important because theater historians in general have been much more attentive to the means rather than the relations of theatrical production. Scholars know a lot more about the probable stagings of Shakespeare's plays, for instance, than about the company hierarchy within the King's Men and the system of patronage that supported and legitimated the company's existence. While some of this ignorance is due to the paucity of the historical record, the general tendency to focus on means rather than relations has to do with the predilection of many historians of artistic practice to separate the aesthetic from the practical.<sup>3</sup>

Lack of attention to the social and economic relations of production has been especially deleterious to understanding the sweeping changes that occurred in the Western theater during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In particular, constructions of American theater history could benefit from a fresh look at the productive relations of stock companies before 1870, the similarities between acting stars and nineteenth-century capitalists, and the relations among producers, playwrights, and directors at the turn of the century. Reexamining these institutional social relations on the basis of a neo-Marxist understanding of cultural production constitutes the chief example of this essay. Its primary direction, however, is to historicize theatrical *production*, toward which exploring the etymology of the word is a necessary first step.

As to why theatrical production and its related terms borrowed economic meanings in the 1890s, one explanation might be that the demand for certain kinds of shows and the means of producing them were changing. Artistic and audience desire for aesthetically unified performances and the complexities of staging realistic plays required greater coordination of all the theatrical elements, especially acting, scenery, and lighting, and this led to the emergence of dictatorial, innovative producer-directors. This explanation constructs a causal relation linking changes in demand and productive means to a fundamental alteration in the social relations of theatrical production: aesthetic desires and new technologies

cause producers to centralize theater making under their own control. This is the conventional explanation linking the development of stage realism and institutional changes in the theater at the end of the nineteenth century, and it seems to account for the emergence of *production* in theatrical discourse and its ties to economic meanings.<sup>4</sup>

But is this an adequate explanation? To begin with, it's driven mainly by ideas: playwrights, theorists, directors, and others with new concepts and commitments create a theater that fits their aesthetic ideals. Also, this historical construction sidesteps the issue of power relations among the makers of theater, thus calling into question its causal probability. To account for these disparities of power, one alternative explanation might be that capitalists, seeing new opportunities for profit, constituted themselves as producers and rationalized their empowerment on the grounds that they could best offer the public what it wanted. Theater historians have used this explanation, too, to link the rise of realism with the development of theatrical monopolies.<sup>5</sup>

This alternative construction may gain in credibility, but it simply runs causality in the other direction: the relations of theater production now determine audience demand and the deployment of new technologies. Further, it raises the problem of completeness similar to the "idea-driven" explanation offered above. Why, in other words, should materialistic motives be more central to historical actors than ideational ones? This question begs a larger one: what structural historical forces beyond individual control may have shaped turn-of-the-century Western culture and society—and consequently its theater? This issue, in turn, takes the historian beyond a consideration of causal relations among discrete historical phenomena that are narrowly theatrical and into the broad context of social and economic history. But, once there, how is the theater historian to proceed?

A likely answer to the third question raised above—why it takes the English language so long to come up with one word to denote all the processes of "production"—suggests one promising direction for the historian at sea in contextuality. The usual etymological explanation for all such questions is that writers of English needed several words; one word wouldn't do. Until the 1890s theater making was considered to be a group activity involving several crafts: playwriting, acting, scene painting, and so on. To be sure, managing was thought necessary to coordinate these crafts for performance, but a manager was not a "producer"; though usually controlling the affairs of a stock company, the manager remained more of a master craftsman than a capitalist, as nineteenth-century writers understood these words.<sup>6</sup> The shift in usage from *manager* to *producer* and the emergence of *production* to denote the producer's actions consequently marked a significant stage in the transformation of dramatic entertainment under capitalism. A parallel transformation in practice and discourse had already occurred in most other crafts. The making of textiles didn't become production, for instance, until capitalists gained control and ownership of the separate crafts of spinning, weaving, cutting,



etc. As in the theater, group creation gave way to individual production, the “individual” being either a capitalist or a corporation, the legal extension and enhancement of individual power under capitalism.

This discussion of the possible reasons why language denoting most of the activities of theater making devolved from several words to one master term suggests that theater historians must begin with a general sense of the totality and dynamics of historical cultures to fashion complete explanations of theatrical production. Hermeneutically examining possible interpretations within a notion of totality can generate a more persuasive and complete explanation of the emergence of *production* in the 1890s than constructing causal chains linking such discrete, isolable phenomena as audience demand, business greed, artistic innovation, and new technology. The foregoing discussion also suggests that focusing on the general relations of production within this historical totality can lead the theater scholar to an understanding of productive relations within specific theatrical formations.

The implications of this etymological exploration are consonant with Raymond Williams’s approach to historical investigation and explanation. Working out of the traditions of Marxism, Williams fashioned guidelines for exploring the dynamic relations of production within a social-cultural totality, which are especially useful for theater historians. He began by questioning the conventional interpretation of the base-superstructure metaphor, the usual starting point in Marxism for relating the means and relations of production to the culture of any historical period. In the preface to his *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Marx stated:

In the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political, and intellectual life process in general.<sup>7</sup>

Early Marxists understood from this and similar statements that the productive base determines the cultural superstructure; some even thought that the social relations of material production, such as those found in heavy industry, must control the form and content of cultural practices in any historical era.

Like many neo-Marxists, Williams criticized this reading of the base-superstructure metaphor for its rigidity and reification:

I would say that each term of the proposition has to be revalued in a particular direction. We have to revalue “determination” towards

the setting of limits and the exertion of pressure, and away from a predicted, prefigured and controlled content. We have to revalue "superstructure" towards a related range of cultural practices, and away from a reflected, reproduced or specifically dependent content. And, crucially, we have to revalue "the base" away from the notion of a fixed economic or technological abstraction, and towards the specific activities of men in real social and economic relationships, containing fundamental contradictions and variations and therefore always in a state of dynamic process.<sup>8</sup>

For Williams "the base" must be seen as the social and economic activities of a totality that also includes specific cultural practices, not as foundational relations that somehow reproduce themselves in a separate cultural sphere.

Williams's synthesis of base and superstructure within a social-cultural totality plays upon ambiguities in Marx's writings concerning the nature of production. In his introduction to the *Grundrisse* Marx, focusing on how society reproduces itself, concluded: "Not that production, distribution, exchange and consumption are identical, but that they all form the members of a totality, distinctions within a unity." Marx made a similar point in the next section of his introduction on distribution: while "a definite production thus determines a definite consumption, distribution and exchange as well as definite relations between these differing moments. . . , production is itself determined by other moments." As Marxist critic Ben Fine concludes, "There is no simple relation between production and the rest of the economy, mode of production, or social formation. Indeed, even what constitutes an object of production is ambiguous [in the writings of Marx]." Fine adds that "it would be a mistake to see Marx's or Marxism's understanding of production as being exclusively preoccupied with material production. At a general level it is concerned with the reproduction of the social formation as well as of the economy."<sup>9</sup>

Williams would agree. To understand the social relations of production broadly conceived, he turns to Gramsci's notion of hegemony. "For hegemony supposes the existence of something which is truly total, which is not merely secondary or superstructural," states Williams, "but is lived at such a depth, which saturates the society to such an extent . . . that it corresponds to the reality of social experience very much more clearly than any notions derived from the formula of base and superstructure." For Williams hegemony centers on a "system of practices, meanings, and values" that legitimates the interests of historically dominant social groups.<sup>10</sup> The social relations resulting from the complex and dynamic interplay among groups within hegemonic systems are the prime movers of history for Williams, producing both material goods and non-material meanings and values.

Williams's shift from a base-superstructure model to a concept of hegemonic totality emphasizing productive relations allows him to de-

velop procedures for the historical analysis of culture that are both encompassing and revealing. He defines culture as “a signifying system through which . . . a social order is communicated, reproduced, experienced, and explored.”<sup>11</sup> Culture, then, includes material and nonmaterial phenomena, both of which are central to the process of affirming and reproducing (as well as challenging) hegemonic social relations. These historical formations produce cultural products much as they produce automobiles and race relations, but, insists Williams, art, literature, and theatrical performances are not consummable goods like some of the other products of hegemony. Williams enjoins critics and historians to shift their definition of a “work of art” from an object to a practice. Rather than attempting to isolate the art object and, in Kantian fashion, separate out its inherent components, the historian should investigate the nature and conditions of its historical practice. For the theater historian this means close attention to the social relations and means of producing the material realities of historical theaters (scripts, acting companies, playhouses, scenery, etc.) as well as to the nonmaterial response of situated audiences in historical periods.

In *The Sociology of Culture* Williams outlines methods and concepts for analyzing cultural production. His insights in chapter 2, “Institutions,” are particularly useful for theater historians. Assuming that his theoretical constructs are no more than a “set of working hypotheses,” Williams considers the variety of productive relations that have existed historically in cultural institutions, including the theater.<sup>12</sup> Some early societies, notes Williams, provided directly for what he terms “instituted artists”; the Celtic bards, for instance, were officially recognized as a part of the ruling structure of Celtic society. Williams distinguishes between “instituted artists” and artists supported by patronage, noting, however, that some overlap between the types has occurred. The craftsmen of Dionysus in ancient Greece exemplify such an overlap, since both the polis and wealthy patrons supported their theatrical productions. Regarding patronage production itself, Williams lists several types.<sup>13</sup> For the historian concerned with distinguishing between the social relations that sustained and constrained much of Molière’s theater (retainer and commission patronage) and Shakespeare’s public productions (protection and support patronage), this typology is vital. It also speaks to the structural tensions inherent in state funding of the arts (the public as patron).

Williams devotes most of this chapter to artistic production for the market, the last distinctive kind of social relationship to develop historically in the production of culture. Within this form Williams distinguishes among several types of market production: (1) artisanal; (2) postartisanal, which includes a further distinction between the producer selling his work to (a) a distributive intermediary or (b) a productive intermediary; (3) market professional; and (4) corporate professional.<sup>14</sup>

This last set of distinctions for artistic production within institutions provides a particularly helpful set of coordinates for mapping the changes in productive relations that occurred in the American theater

during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Using Williams's ideas to examine what is conventionally called "stock company production," for instance, it is apparent that this term is too general to encompass the variety of social relations involved in making and presenting theater during most of the century. Insofar as company managers were independent makers of theater who offered their troupe's work for direct sale on the local market, these managers and their craftspeople were "artisans." While the success of managers and their companies depended primarily on the market, it was also linked to a lingering form of "sponsorship patronage," most evident in the yearly benefits taken by each actor. Stock company managers also engaged in "postartisanal" theatrical production, specifically as "distributive intermediaries," when they jobbed in stars or contracted with entire companies to perform on their stages. Warren and Wood, managers of the Chestnut Street Theatre Company, for instance, gave half of their seasons over to stars, ballet, and opera companies in the early 1820s, and they prided themselves on their conservative management.<sup>15</sup> In short, stock company production involved three significantly different kinds of social relations: sponsorship patronage, artisanal market, and postartisanal market production.

Had the contributors to *American Theatre Companies, 1749–1887* distinguished among these relations of production, they would have written a very different book. As it is, most of these scholars focus on the artisanal productions of the companies themselves and largely ignore their managers' attempts to cultivate the patronage of the elite or bring national stars to their local theaters. The preface to *American Theatre Companies* even muddies a clear focus on artisanal market production by announcing that "theatre is a communal art, arising out of the coordinated efforts of the members of a group." Such statements mystify relations of superordination and subordination within theater companies and between companies and the market.<sup>16</sup>

Like stock company production, the "star system" must be broken down into its component parts to see the different productive relations operating within it. Unless these distinctions are made, theater historians run the risk of assuming that most stars were not entrepreneurs. One American theater historian, for instance, waits until his narrative reaches the 1890s to label a section of his book "Enter the Businessman."<sup>17</sup> On the contrary, when stars such as Edwin Forrest and Charlotte Cushman temporarily worked with a local stock company to present their repertoire, the star and the manager of the company functioned, through contractual agreement, as distributive intermediaries of the star's talent. Like their counterparts among energetic artisans in the mid-nineteenth century, the major American stars elevated themselves from craftspeople to capitalist by taking control of their own careers and charging what the market would bear for their services. This change in productive relations led to altered social relations within the theater. Actor Otis Skinner recalled that "caste distinctions were observed" whenever a star rehearsed with a stock company.<sup>18</sup>

The star system benefited other capitalists besides the stars themselves. A few company managers, such as Thomas Hamblin at the Bowery Theatre in New York, created minor stars who remained contractually committed to them and earned their distributive intermediaries handsome profits through their appearances with other companies. Other businessmen made money in the star system by controlling the distribution circuit through which the stars traveled. E. A. Marshall, for instance, established a touring circuit in the early 1850s that began at his enormous Broadway Theatre in New York (seating capacity 4,500), included his own theaters in Boston, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Washington, and extended to allied theaters in Cincinnati, Louisville, St. Louis, and New Orleans. The emergence of "combination" companies after the Civil War streamlined the distributive system of relations but did not alter its fundamentals. Stars, now "in combination" with a full company of actors, continued to work with other capitalists to profit from the distribution of their theatrical products.<sup>19</sup>

The monopolistic power exerted by the Theatrical Syndicate and later by the Shuberts did, however, change the fundamentals of show business from distributive to productive intermediary relations. Williams notes that the main distinction between the two types of postartisanal relations is that, in the second, the maker of the artwork (or performance, in this case) no longer profits directly from the sale of his or her product. Rather, the productive intermediary "invests in the purchase of a work for the purpose of profit; it is now his relations with the market which are direct." The initial maker is typically reduced to "offering his labour to produce works of a certain known type."<sup>20</sup> The Shuberts acted as productive intermediaries, for instance, not only when they produced a show themselves but also when they leased one of their many playhouses to a non-Shubert producer, since contracts typically specified that theater owners would share in the profits of Broadway hits. In both cases the Shuberts hired actors, musicians, and scenic artists for their known abilities to create successful shows and marketed the product of the labor of those creative others.

Early-twentieth-century producers like the Shuberts did not directly hire playwrights, however. Playwrights had become *market professionals*, Williams's term to denote "a participant in the direct market process of the sale of his work." The International Copyright Agreement of 1886, by recognizing the products of writing as transferrable private property, effectively constituted, notes Williams, "a specific kind of social relationship which can be defined as a form of professional independence within integrated and dominant market relations."<sup>21</sup> Although this copyright agreement gave playwrights more leverage with producers, it bound their work more closely to the market. Plays simply became the land upon which producers could build shows by hiring labor and investing capital. This sense of the economic utility of scripts survives in the lingo of Broadway and Hollywood today: producers buy "options" on "properties" they are considering for future "development." The playscript, like real estate, is necessary to the process of capitalist production in the entertainment industry.<sup>22</sup>

Unlike playwrights, play directors did not become market professionals. Williams's discussion of the relations of artistic production in market capitalism implicitly contradicts the conventional historical wisdom regarding the "rise of the director." According to Helen Krich Chinoy in *Directors on Directing*, the late-nineteenth-century director "filled so pressing a need that he quickly pre-empted the hegemony that had rested for centuries with playwrights and actors. . . . The appearance of the director ushered in a new theatrical epoch. His experiments, his failures, and his triumphs set and sustained the stage."<sup>23</sup> In truth, directors had and continue to exercise less independence than playwrights and far less power than producers in the modern theater. Most early directors in the United States, like Augustin Daly and David Belasco, should rather be called producers, since their artistic control depended fundamentally on their economic hegemony over the relations of production within their companies. Indeed, directors who were not primarily producers did not emerge in the American theater until 1900. A 1906 article in the magazine *The Theatre* paragraphed the leading directors of the decade. Among the more than thirty listed were William Seymour ("heads the Charles Frohman stage department . . . a firm disciplinarian, yet suave, kindly in manner"), Ned Wayburn (works for Klaw and Erlanger, "his specialty is the management of chorus girls"), and George W. Marion (directs musicals for producer Henry W. Savage, "handles his forces with a firm hand"). Hired by the Syndicate, the Shuberts, and other producers to stage their shows and keep order in their casts, these functionaries were more like factory foremen turning out formulaic products than artistic innovators.<sup>24</sup>

In Williams's terminology play directors were (and substantially remain) "corporate professionals," salaried employees akin to newspaper writers in publishing since neither can copyright their work. Significantly, one of the directors noted in the 1906 article accused another of stealing a piece of stage business that he had invented. Lacking copyright protection, he could only advocate the formation of an association among directors to adjudicate such matters.<sup>25</sup> Unlike most other theater artists "effectively or wholly employed within the new corporate structures," however, play directors did retain a small measure of individual economic power. Whereas unions now bargain with producers over the wages of scenic artists, musicians, costumers, and actors, directors negotiate individually on the basis of a minimum contract set by the Society of Stage Directors and Choreographers, which is not a union.<sup>26</sup>

Historicizing the relations of theatrical production opens up the possibility of a more complete historical sociology of the theater, a subdiscipline still in its infancy in theater studies. Were such a sociology to follow in the pathbreaking tradition of Raymond Williams, it would require extensive empirical and theoretical investigations into the sociohistorical conditions necessary for the emergence of various kinds of theater, the relations between historical forms of theatrical expression and the dominant ideology of a historical period, and the functions of theater in reproducing, modifying, or contradicting hegemonic relations of production.

Such studies could transform the discourse of theater history as it is presently taught and written in the United States.

When I wrote this article in 1991, I drew from recent research for my historiographical examples. For this revised edition, some of my examples may be updated. In particular, I would turn to Tracey C. Davis's *The Economics of the British Stage, 1800–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) as a positive example of a work that takes seriously the complexities of economic history recognized by Raymond Williams.

## NOTES

Chapter epigraphs from Zelda Fichandler, "The Arena Stage"; and Ellen Stewart, "La Mama Experimental Theatre Club," in *Producers on Producing*, ed. Stephen Langley (New York: Drama Books, 1976), 78, 138.

1. *Oxford English Dictionary* (O.E.D.), 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), 12:564–68. The verb *produce* was used as early as 1836 to mean "introduce," in the sense of a manager producing an actor or play to the public. This meaning of the word, however, did not carry with it the actions associated with preperformance preparation.

2. O.E.D., 12:566.

3. See Joseph R. Roach, "Theatre History and the Ideology of the Aesthetic," *Theatre Journal* 41, no. 2 (1989): 155–68. Roach discusses "the widely shared historiographical assumption of theatre scholars, derived from German idealist philosophy and eighteenth-century theories of art, that the aesthetic exists as an autonomous category, transcending the sublunary sphere of power relations and ideologies" (155).

4. See, for example, the first four chapters of Oscar G. Brockett and Robert Findlay's *Century of Innovation: A History of European and American Drama since 1870* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1973), 1–119. Brockett and Findlay discuss the emergence of the director but have little to say about other changes in the productive relations of the theater.

5. See Garff B. Wilson, *Three Hundred Years of American Drama and Theatre* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1982), 149–62. Wilson relies on Jack Poggi, *Theater in America: The Impact of Economic Forces, 1870–1967* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1968).

6. According to the O.E.D., a *master craftsman* is "a workman who is qualified by training and experience to teach apprentices and to carry on his trade on his own account" (9:443). A *capitalist*, on the other hand, is "one who has accumulated capital; one who has capital available for employment in financial or industrial enterprises" (2:863). Typically, theatrical managers had little accumulated capital and did not own their means of production. The actor-managers of the late nineteenth century, such as Henry Irving and William Gillette, however, were transitional figures, as I explain below.

7. Karl Marx, preface, *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (New York: International, 1970), 1.

8. Raymond Williams, "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory," in *Problems in Materialism and Culture* (London: NLB, 1980), 34.

9. *Grundrisse*, quoted by Ben Fine in "Production," in *A Dictionary of Marxist*

*Thought*, ed. Tom Bottomore (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 396, 397; see also "Base and Superstructure," "Forces and Relations of Production," and "Reproduction" in the *Dictionary*.

10. Williams, *Problems in Materialism and Culture*, 37, 38. For more on hegemony and its uses in scholarship, see my article "Using the Concept of Cultural Hegemony to Write Theatre History," in *Interpreting the Theatrical Past*, ed. Thomas Postlewait and Bruce A. McConachie (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1989), 37–58. Williams's notion of a hegemonic totality goes beyond the sense of the concept of hegemony as deployed by Gramsci, who retained a base-superstructure explanation for the production of culture.

11. Raymond Williams, *Towards a Sociology of Culture* (New York: Schocken Books, 1982), 13.

12. Williams, *Towards a Sociology*, 35.

13. Williams, *Towards a Sociology*, 36–44.

14. Williams, *Towards a Sociology*, 44–56.

15. Regarding Warren and Wood, see my article "William B. Wood and the 'Pathos of Paternalism,'" *Theatre Survey* 28, no. 1 (1987): 1–14. For an overview of changes in productive relations in the American theater during the nineteenth century, see my article "Pacifying American Theatrical Audiences, 1820–1900," in *For Fun and Profit: The Transformation of Leisure in the United States*, ed. Richard Butsch (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), 47–70.

16. *American Theatre Companies*, ed. Weldon B. Durham (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1986), vii.

17. Wilson, *Three Hundred Years*, 160.

18. Otis Skinner, *Footlights and Spotlights: Recollections of My Life on the Stage* (1923; reprint, Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1972), 58.

19. See the 1881 obituary on Marshall in the *New York Clipper*, included in Joseph Ireland's *Extra-Illustrated Records of the New York Stage*, Harvard Theatre Collection, vol. 2, pt. 13, 35. On combination companies, see Poggi, *Theater in America*, 3–8.

20. Williams, *Towards a Sociology*, 45.

21. Williams, *Towards a Sociology*, 47, 48.

22. Stephen Langley, *Theatre Management in America: Principle and Practice*, rev. ed. (New York: Drama Book Publishers, 1980), 96–101.

23. Helen Krich Chinoy, "The Emergence of the Director," in *Directors on Directing: A Source Book of the Modern Theatre*, ed. Toby Cole and Helen Krich Chinoy, rev. ed. (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1963), 3.

24. Edward Fales Coward, "The Men Who Direct the Destinies of the Stage," *The Theatre: Illustrated Magazine of Dramatic and Musical Art*, July 1906, 188, 189.

25. Frank Smithson accused Ben Teal of stealing an S formation involving members of a chorus line. See the "Ben Teal File," Robinson Locke Collection, New York Public Library, Lincoln Center.

26. Williams, *Towards a Sociology*, 51; on current theatrical unions and societies, see Langley, *Theatre Management*, 109–23.



# Brecht and the Contradictory Actor

*John Rouse*

Much scholarly material has been written on the subject of Brecht and the actor. The vast majority of this material, however, has focused on Brecht's various theoretical statements about acting, absolutizing them into an inviolate theory of so-called Epic performance and getting caught up in vaguely generalized comparisons between Brecht's "system" of acting and Stanislavski's.<sup>1</sup> I would not want to deny the partial validity of these discussions or impugn the assistance they have given several generations of theater people in understanding and making use of Brecht's accomplishments. Such discussions tend, however, to undervalue the fact that Brecht was not primarily a theoretician who sometimes directed in order to exemplify his principles, but rather a director who continually modified or reconstituted his theories on the basis of what he learned from his practice; as Brecht told a group of students in 1954, "One mustn't think of it as if there were someone with a specific conception of theater that he wants to impose at all costs."<sup>2</sup> The *Short Organon* (1948), for example, is not Brecht's ultimate statement about either theater in general or acting in particular. Rather, it is a position paper summarizing Brecht's thinking about his theater work up to around 1947. During the remaining nine years of his life, Brecht constantly modified this thinking on the basis of his directorial and dramaturgical work at his Berliner Ensemble—as the many and varied amendments, clarifications, and counterstatements to the *Organon* collected in volume 23 of the *Berliner and Frankfurter Ausgabe* make perfectly clear.

I am not attempting to insinuate that we should replace an absolutized characterization labeled "Brecht the theoretician" with an equally absolutized characterization that could be labeled "Brecht the director." Rather, I am suggesting that we cannot adequately understand Brecht's thinking about the theater in general, and certainly not his thinking about acting, until we complement consideration of his theoretical perspectives with consideration of his practical work. This is hardly a task that can be accomplished in a single essay. Consequently, I should like here to sketch an overview of Brecht's work with his actors, or, more precisely, an overview of what Brecht expected the actor to contribute to the total complex of a theatrical production and how he worked with the actor to fulfill this requirement. I should point out that this discussion will itself be fairly theoretical; only a pure description of Brecht's day-to-day work with his actors could hope to be anything else.<sup>3</sup> I shall hope at least, however, to indicate the value of reconsidering the theoretical concepts Brecht develops in the *Organon* and the *Messingkauf Dialogues* in the light of his theater practice.

My discussion will concentrate on only one phase of Brecht's practical work. Since Brecht was able to work concretely for an extended period

of time with a carefully selected ensemble only during his postwar years at the Berliner Ensemble, this period can rightly be given priority for our discussion. Besides, it was the results of this work, as exemplified in the Ensemble's guest performances in Paris and London, that influenced practical theater men like Giorgio Strehler, Roger Planchon, William Gaskill, and Peter Brook—and through them the entire European theater of the mid-twentieth century.<sup>4</sup>

Even more significantly for our purposes, an overview of Brecht's work with his actors at the Berliner Ensemble underlines with particular clarity both the shift of emphasis that results when we consider Brecht's theory in light of his practice and some of the consequences of that shift. Brecht's theoretical writings abound with references to acting methods, both particular and general. As we shall see, however, Brecht was far less concerned with acting method than he was with the interpretive basis of the actor's work. In fact, as Brecht once told Peter Palitzsch during a discussion on Stanislavski, his theatrical activity was not centered around the actor

as a point of departure. Stanislavski directs primarily as an actor, I direct primarily as a playwright. . . . He begins with the actor. . . . [You] can also hear me say that everything depends on the actor, but I nevertheless begin completely with the play, its requirements and demands.<sup>5</sup>

This begins as a statement defining the relationship between director and actor and ends up as a statement defining the relationship between director and text. The abrupt transition is instructive: Brecht reveals himself as a director who gives the text (or rather, as we shall see, his interpretation of the text) absolute priority. The actor's work, and the director's work with the actor, may be critically important, but they are important only insofar as they serve to realize the director's interpretational ends.<sup>6</sup> If we are to understand what is unique about Brecht's work with the actor, therefore, we must first examine his directorial goals in terms of his work on the text. Only then can we adequately discuss the actor's particular contribution to the fulfillment of these goals and the particular kind of rehearsal process through which the actor develops this contribution.

The Brechtian theater's most fundamental principle is its commitment to social change. The dramaturgical principle most basic to fulfilling this commitment is, in turn, that the theater must attempt to present society and human nature as changeable. Theater does not, however, depict either society or human nature directly, but rather through interpretive examples. As Brecht defines it, theater "consists of the production of living illustrations of historical or imagined occurrences between people."<sup>7</sup> This definition serves as the foundation both for Brecht's general theater theory and for his directorial work on individual dramatic texts. Using Brecht's general perspective, the core of any text may be examined as a total composition, a structuring together in time of all the individual occurrences

that take place between the play's characters.<sup>8</sup> The original author's interpretation of his historical experience becomes visible in the character of the occurrences he chooses to illustrate and in the way in which he structures these occurrences together. Directorial interpretation, in turn, proceeds through the reworking of the occurrences illustrated and the restructuring of their relationship to each other. Brecht uses a special term to describe both the original composition of incidents and its interpretational recomposition, calling both "*fables*." He also emphasizes the predominant role of the interpretational fable in production work: "Everything depends on the fable; it is the heart of the theatrical production."<sup>9</sup>

The first question such an interpretive approach must answer is whether one stresses the occurrences between characters or the characters themselves. Brecht is quite specific in his demand that production must shift focus away from the characters themselves to what happens between them. As he puts it, "From what happens between them, people get everything that can be discussed, criticized, changed."<sup>10</sup>

This shift already carries with it a shift from the individual to the group and from the psychological to the sociological. In themselves, however, these shifts are not sufficient. Brecht sets two further requirements that clarify the ideological framework within which interpretation must take place. First, both the fable's occurrences and the relationship between them must be examined dialectically. As Brecht notes, the dialectical approach treats

social conditions as processes and pursues these in their contradictions. Everything exists to this perspective only inasmuch as it transforms itself. . . . This is also true for the feelings, opinions, and behavior of men, through which the contemporary mode of their social life together expresses itself.<sup>11</sup>

Brecht's theater, then, concentrates on "the contradictions in people and their relationships." At the same time, however, a dialectical theater must also reveal the "determinants under which [these contradictions] develop;"<sup>12</sup> further, it must reveal these determinants critically. Both these requirements are essentially part of the same concern—the depiction of the contradictory process through which men structure and restructure their lives and the critical examination of the ways in which these structures are used by men to repress other men. Historical determinants—the economic, political, and social factors that influence the social conditions of any historical period—must not simply be made recognizable. They must be made recognizable as constitutive elements in the individual occurrences between human beings:

One clearly must not think of *historical determinants* as dark powers (backgrounds); rather, they are made and maintained by men (and will be changed by them): they are constituted by what is being done right now.<sup>13</sup>

Brecht is speaking here not about reality, but about the theatrical illustration of reality. The theater is for him precisely the place best suited to examine the social conditions in any historical period as constitutive elements in human relationships. This examination is what the director undertakes together with the actors as they structure out the fable's examples of the moment-by-moment occurrences between people.

The first step in applying this general interpretational framework to a specific text involves the prerehearsal work of the director and his dramaturgical colleagues. The text is treated as a historical document. The background of the text and its author are painstakingly researched in order to identify both the historical character of the social life being illustrated and the determinants that influence it. The text is then subjected to a dialectical analysis that reads its structures back into the historical experiences they mediate. Finally, the text's fable is recomposed in brief sentences that describe the fundamental action of each individual occurrence. Or rather, the sentences describe each occurrence as the production will elaborate it; Brecht's theater is true to its interpretation of the text, not necessarily to the text itself, which may be left relatively untouched or drastically restructured.

The precision with which this dramaturgical approach focuses on each separate interaction between the play's characters is well illustrated by Brecht's directorial breakdown of the first scene of his own *Mother Courage*:

Recruiters roam the country looking for cannon fodder.  
 Courage presents her family, acquired in various theaters of war, to a sergeant.  
 The market woman defends her sons with a knife against the recruiters.  
 She discovers that her sons are succumbing to the recruiters, and prophesies an early soldier's death for the sergeant.  
 In order to scare them away from the war, she also lets her children draw the black mark.  
 As a result of a small bit of bargaining, she ends up losing her brave son anyway.  
 The sergeant prophesies something for Courage: he who would live off the war must also give it something.<sup>14</sup>

As in the Stanislavski approach, this scene is broken down into its "beats"; indeed, the American-Stanislavskian term is an excellent equivalent to Brecht's "individual occurrence" (*Einzelgeschehnis*). From a Stanislavskian perspective, however, Brecht's breakdown remains a director's description of the fable rather than an actor's. The basic actions and relationships between all the characters in each beat have been sketched in, but the description does not center on any individual character's objectives, nor has a through-line of motivation been developed to link the various beats together. The concentration of effort at the level of the beat al-

lows an assimilation of Stanislavski's acting methods to Brechtian interpretational ends.

Brecht's actors were not encouraged to structure the separate beats smoothly together. On the contrary, Brecht considered the transitions between beats as significant as the beats themselves, and he demanded that these transitions occur dialectically. Each beat can be examined as a self-contained entity in which a particular interaction takes place or a particular situation arises. As Manfred Wekwerth points out, the personal and social forces that determine these relationships can change in respect to each other, bringing about an alteration in the situation; this change is marked by the evolving of one beat into another. On the other hand, each determining factor can suddenly pass over into its opposite, bringing about a completely new situation, marked by a sudden leap from one beat to the next.<sup>15</sup> There need be no more unity either of character or of action between the beats than there is between the self-contained scenes around which Brecht's dramaturgy is structured on a larger scale. Indeed, Brecht made extensive use of all the possibilities inherent in a disunity of action in order to present the "development of characters, conditions, and events as discontinuous (in leaps)."<sup>16</sup>

The director's paramount task in rehearsals is to structure the dialectical transitions between beats and the historically determined interactions between characters in the beats themselves. The descriptive reconstitution of the fable is already a first step in the development of a theatrical interpretation, but the fable still needs, of course, to be elaborated using all the means of the theater. Most importantly, the fable depends on the actors, since they physically enact the events out of which the fable is composed. Consequently, their activities need themselves to be structured to achieve what appear, at first glance anyway, to be fundamentally directorial results. We shall, therefore, move from our consideration of Brecht's prerehearsal work to a consideration of the actor's contribution to his finished theatrical interpretation, putting aside for a moment the rather surprising process through which the actor perfected this contribution.

As Brecht states, the most important procedure by which the fable is presented to the audience is "the blocking, that is, the placing of the characters, the determination of their position regarding each other [there is a pun here in the German: "Stellung" refers both to physical and attitudinal position], changes in this position, entrances and exits. The blocking must tell the story intelligently."<sup>17</sup> The pun in the midst of what seems otherwise a fairly straightforward description of blocking should alert us that Brecht is talking here about something quite different from traffic directing. In English *arrangement* perhaps comes closer to what Brecht is aiming for—an absolutely transparent physical elucidation of the fable. As Peter Palitzsch puts it, "The blocking and the *Gestus* of the actors tell the fable in such a way that one could discover what is happening even if one couldn't hear anything. Transformations in the dialectic are marked on stage through transformations in the blocking."<sup>18</sup>

The importance of this kind of physical elaboration of the fable is reflected in the term "*Gestus*," a word Brecht made up based on the German for "gesture" (*Geste*) and which he somewhat confusingly defined in several different ways. Each of the fable's individual occurrences has what Brecht calls a "*Grundgestus*."<sup>19</sup> On one level, this *Grundgestus* is simply the production staff's interpretation of each textual beat. Underlying this *Grundgestus*, however, is the "gesellschaftliche," or "social" *Gestus*: "the mimetic and gestural expression of the social relationships in which the people of a particular epoch stand to each other."<sup>20</sup> The notion of *Gestus* is thus, as Giorgio Strehler has pointed out, at bottom not an aesthetic but a sociological one—sociological in that it allows historical determinants to be concretely manifested in the physical elaboration of the motivated actions that move the characters from beat to beat.<sup>21</sup>

This notion of the physical manifestation of historical determinants goes beyond the use of blocking to include the actor's smallest physical gesture. As Hans Curjel noted while observing Brecht rehearsing his 1948 *Antigone*, "The directorial method was based on investigation and varied experimentation that could extend to the smallest gestures—eyes, fingers. . . . Brecht worked like a sculptor on and with the actor."<sup>22</sup> Curjel was also impressed by the ability of this approach to clarify and enliven the transitions between beats: "Certain pregnant behavioral motifs were extended over long passages of text and situation, to then be transformed into new gestures, basic behavior, or movement structures as if on hinges."<sup>23</sup>

The second beat in the first scene of Brecht's 1950 adaptation of Lenz's *Der Hofmeister* (*The Private Tutor*) provides an excellent example of this kind of detailed physical interpretive work. Having just told the audience in the prologue that he intends to sell himself as a private tutor, Läufer approaches and bows to the Major (his prospective employer) and to his brother the Privy Councilor, who are discussing the terrible state of the economy. The two ignore Läufer, even when he repeats his bow three more times. In the middle of the fourth bow, he curses them under his breath. He then exits.

The beat is a brief one, but as staged it provided its audiences with some essential interpretive information about the relationship between the play's characters. In the first place, the "bow" that the actor Hans Gaugler developed for his character was a highly stylized, highly exaggerated, very funny bit of actor technique. It was also far more elaborate than the "natural" bows of the period (Lenz's play takes place around 1774), and it went lower to the ground or to the feet of the Major, as the case may be. First established in this beat, it was used as a "quotable" gestural leitmotiv for Läufer throughout the production.<sup>24</sup>

As performed by Gaugler, Läufer's bow also became a fine example of Brecht's concept of *Verfremdung*. Despite all the critical blood that has been spilled over it, the term's basic definition is quite simple: "A defamiliarized illustration is one that, while allowing the object to be recognized, at the same time makes it appear unfamiliar."<sup>25</sup> Brecht's definition will, I hope, clarify why I have rejected either "alienation" or "distancing" in

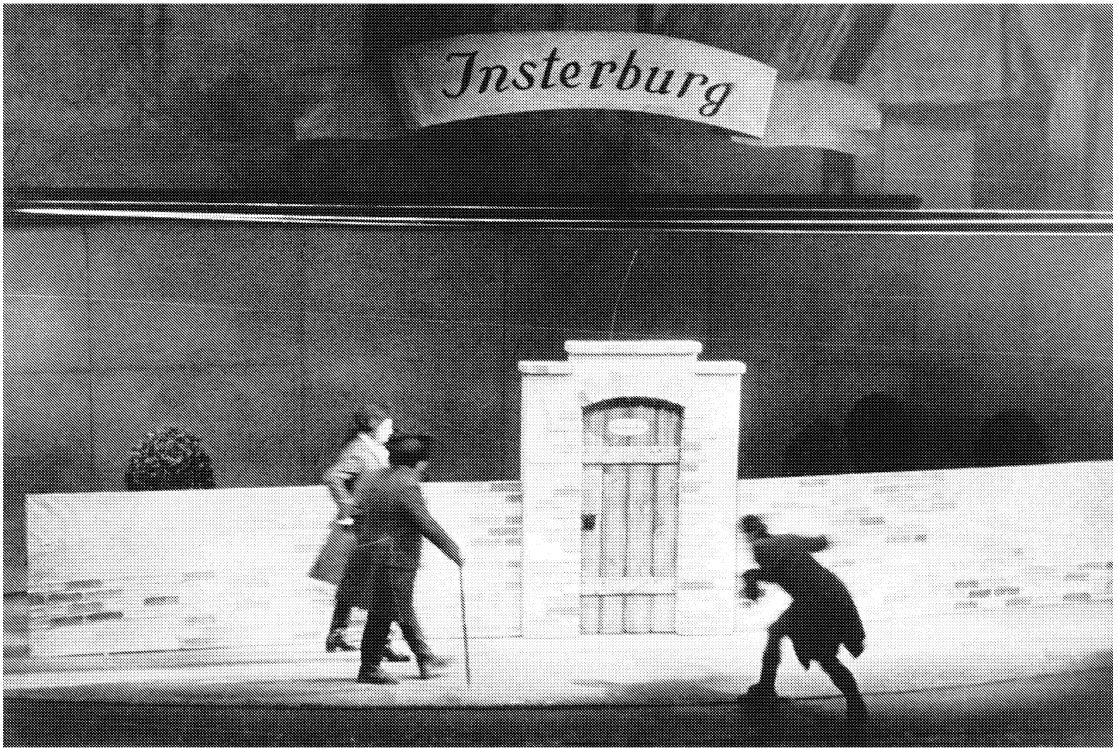


Fig. 1. Läufer's bow. (Modellbuch des Berliner Ensembles, Bertolt-Brecht-Archiv.)

favor of “defamiliarization” as a translation of the term; Brecht’s ultimate point is that a spectator will not think about anything happening on stage if clichéd conventions or a mistaken naturalism make what is happening appear familiar to him. Everyone knows, for example, that people bowed to each other in the eighteenth century, so why should a bow be the stimulus for a critical social examination of an interpretation of occurrences between people? As Gaugler executed it, Läufer’s bow became a *Gestus* that defamiliarized itself, forestalling any possibility of its being accepted as simply a customary greeting rather than the conscious action of a man who wants something from another man with more economic power.

This meaning is not, of course, explicit in the bow itself. Rather, it is a significance the audience could be led to recognize within the context both of Läufer’s expressed intentions in the prologue (written by Brecht, not Lenz), and of the discussion on economic matters which the bow interrupts (by directorial design). The audience could, however, work through to this recognition only if instructed to examine the bow as an object of analysis.

Partly for this reason, the bow was emphasized twice over in performance. First, it was repeated four times, each bow more aggressively fawning than the last. The Major’s and Privy Councilor’s repeated ignoring of Läufer’s greeting thus became clearly the result of a conscious choice. Second, the bow was defamiliarized by the text itself.<sup>26</sup> As Läufer executes his last, most fawning bow, he curses his two “betters” under his breath: “Der Teufel hol Euch, Flegel” [Go to the devil, louts].<sup>27</sup> Läufer’s language here (especially the choice of “Flegel”) recalls the manner in which people like the Major talked to their servants, and not vice versa.



Fig. 2. The *Gestus* of the servile bow repeated in a later scene between the Tutor and his employer. (Modellbuch des Berliner Ensembles, Bertolt-Brecht-Archiv.)

Läuffer's bow, its conscious rejection by the Major and Privy Councilor, and Läuffer's response to this rejection all provide the audience not simply with information about Läuffer but about the character of the play's social relationships. Even as he grovels before them, Läuffer holds his interlocutors in contempt; and they return the favor. The dialogue in the beat following Läuffer's exit underlines this: the Major discusses his intention to hire this "lickspittle," as the Privy Councilor calls him,<sup>28</sup> because he comes cheap. Established in the bow and the reaction to it, the scene's underlying social *Gestus* is developed after Läuffer's exit.

Läuffer's bow illustrates the degree to which the dramaturgical and directorial interpretation of the script depends not only on the actor's gestural work on his characterization but on his gestural work in interaction with his fellow actors. Gaugler's exaggeration of his character's "natural" behavior is also as good a practical example as we are likely to get of Brecht's concept of the actor standing beside his role in performance, at once demonstrating and commenting on his character's behavior.

Our example from the *Hofmeister* is particularly clear in part because the beat's *Grundgestus* is focused in a single character *Gestus*, in part because this *Gestus* is so highly exaggerated. Such exaggerations are, however, better suited to comic texts than to straight dramatic ones. Indeed, Brecht once mentioned to Giorgio Strehler that his defamiliarizing acting style was much easier to achieve in comedies, since the comic form tends itself to defamiliarize its characters and events.<sup>29</sup> This is one reason why the Ensemble tended to use a much less gesturally overelaborated style in its productions of serious texts, including such Brecht texts as *Mother Courage*.



This difference was, however, primarily one of degree. Brecht and his actors used stylization and exaggeration of gesture, intonation, or tempo in some of their most serious productions, although with a different emotional emphasis and a different balance between playing the role and demonstrating it. One of the best-known “emotional” moments in Brecht’s theater work, for example, is Helene Weigel’s silent scream in the 1951 *Courage* (a Berliner Ensemble revival of a production originally staged in 1949). As she hears the salvo that signals the execution of her son Swiss Cheese, Weigel’s *Courage* is seated on a low stool with her hands in her lap. She clenches her rough skirt, leaning forward with a straight, tense back as if shot in the stomach. At the same time, she thrusts her head straight back against her shoulders; her mouth tears open until it seems that her jaw will break, but no sound comes forth. For a moment, her whole physicality has the impossible, angular contortion of one of Picasso’s screaming horses in *Guernica*. Then she snaps her mouth shut, brings her torso and head back into alignment, and collapses the tension in her torso, slumping in on herself.

The moment is justifiably famous, both as an example of Weigel’s unmatched skill as an actress and as an example of the type of carefully elaborated physicality the Ensemble’s actors were expected to develop in fulfilling their responsibility to the production’s interpretation. It is also an unabashedly emotional moment—an emotionality, however, carefully controlled and used both by Weigel and by the production developing around her. In the first place, the very physicality of the moment moves it beyond the level of naturalistic grief with which an audience can empathize. We are shocked, stunned, shaken by *Courage*’s grief, but we are not allowed to share it on the plane of petty emotional titillation. The technically accomplished extremity of Weigel’s acting, in short, defamiliarizes *Courage*’s grief through the very demonstration of that grief.

Moreover, both Brecht’s play and his production allow *Courage* this intensely human moment in order to illustrate for the audience the basic social contradiction out of which the character is built. *Courage* is both businesswoman and mother. Or rather, she tries to be both; the social realities of the total war from which she tries to profit as businesswoman prevent her from fulfilling her responsibilities as mother. She has been confronted with a nearly impossible economic choice—either lose her son or pay a sum that will cost her the wagon, her only means of supporting herself and her daughter. But she has tried to avoid making this choice in attempting to deal her way out. Just prior to the execution, *Courage* has sent the prostitute Yvette offstage to bribe the soldiers holding Swiss Cheese. She is unwilling, however, to pay the ruinous sum demanded, and sends Yvette back again and again to bargain. Just before the salvo, she turns to the army chaplain whom she is hiding from his so-called religious enemies and comments haltingly that perhaps she has haggled too long. Sounds of gunfire teach both her and the audience that her delay is indeed costly. *Courage* bears responsibility for her own extreme moment of grief—a lesson underlined in performance by the simple



Fig. 3. Mother Courage's "silent scream" in directorial context. (Modellbuch des Berliner Ensembles, Bertolt-Brecht-Archiv.)

expedient of having the chaplain, who is seated on a stool next to Courage, get up and walk away from her in the middle of her scream. Brecht allows Courage her grief, but he also uses it to provide his audience with the necessary data for a dialectical analysis of his play's social relationships.

Weigel's scream, although unusual in its degree of technical accomplishment, illustrates the way in which Brecht combined the actor's gestural elaboration of role with the careful elaboration of emotive and textual contexts. The characters' reactions to the scream provide Brecht's audiences insight into the social contradictions affecting even the most seemingly personal, emotional behavior. As with Läufer's bow, this gestural elaboration could extend to the development of a basic physical *Gestus*, centered on one or a series of quoted gestures, even for a straight dramatic character. *Courage* provides several examples of such a *Gestus*, modified to suit the development of a dramatic character. One of the better known is Weigel's treatment of money. Every time she received payment in the course of her play's performance, Weigel's Courage would "mistrustfully" bite the coin to make sure it was real.<sup>30</sup> Now, this kind of gesture is certainly something many creative directors or actors might invent while working on the play—assuming they understand the play's dialectics properly.

Still, Brecht's productions developed their fables so clearly, not because of any special magic, but because Brecht and his actors went to the trouble to understand and outline in performance vocabulary the story they were telling. Without the aid of Brecht's *Modellbuch* (a photographic and descriptive record of a Berliner Ensemble production intended to guide interpretation elsewhere), for example, it is doubtful that a director working within the conventions of the German theater of 1949 would

have thought through to the telling variation of Courage's treatment of money Brecht and Weigel used at the very end of the play. Courage's daughter Kattrin has been shot trying to alert the city of Halle to an impending enemy attack. Courage is now alone. She must drag her wagon herself back into the war, back into the train of the army that feeds her. She cannot afford to wait to bury Kattrin herself, so she pays a peasant family to bury her daughter for her. She fishes a handful of coins from the leather purse at her waist, starts to hand them to the peasants, looks at the coins, hesitates, slowly puts one coin back in her purse, then gives the rest over in payment. Even as she displays her character's total personal collapse, Weigel demonstrates once again the basic contradiction between businesswoman and mother that has led to that collapse.<sup>31</sup>

This last example, like the others we have examined, illustrates the degree to which Brecht expected his actors to serve directorial interpretation and, at the same time, the degree to which this interpretation depended on the actor's contributions. On the other hand, the examples do not reveal the dominance of any single all-powerful acting technique, let alone the dominance of a global acting methodology, over either the actor's work or the director's demands. On the contrary, the examples reveal the application of virtually the full range of customary actor technique, from vocal and physical flexibility to precise emotional control. This fact, in turn, has a significant corollary: "There is *no* technique that *cannot* be used in Brecht's theater, so long as it serves to expose the contradictions in processes in such a way that they can be pleurably recognized by the spectator and lead to his own transformation."<sup>32</sup> In fact, Brecht not only encouraged the use of a wide variety of performance techniques, he structured his rehearsal process in a way that allowed these techniques to be subsumed in the service of his interpretational ends. Since the nature of this process has a great deal to do with the strengths of performances like Hans Gaugler's or Helene Weigel's, we will profit by turning back to it here.

Our examples from the *Hofmeister* and *Mother Courage* have underlined the degree to which the detailed *Fabelbau*—the building up of the fable—is the principal goal not simply of prerehearsal analysis but of rehearsal itself. The kind of detailed analysis of beats we saw in Brecht's *Courage* breakdown provides an anchor-point in rehearsals; when problems arise, one can check to see whether the fable is being told in the most effective way, or whether the right fable is being told. At the same time, the concrete discoveries made by the actors, director, and dramaturgs during rehearsals are used to fine-tune the analysis of the fable as its concrete theatrical elaboration is developed. The precise choreographic effect of Läufer's repeated bows, for example, is not something a directorial team can plan beforehand.

Or, at least, this effect is not something Brecht and his coworkers planned beforehand. Although Brecht went into rehearsals with a detailed description of the text and concrete plans for initial blocking to provide a structure for the exploration of character relationships, he did not

begin rehearsals with a specific scheme of the final physical production. He knew what his goals were, but not the concrete measures necessary to achieve them. Consequently, he could maintain that “we develop pretty much from nothing, exploring the most varied possibilities. We speak the text, move around within the situations. Slowly we try to find out what is interesting. That is then kept, other things are let fall. We then develop the characterizations, and also the blocking.”<sup>33</sup>

This kind of leisurely approach to the building up of the concrete production is clearly an essential safeguard against the impatient tendency to impose directorial decisions on the actor from outside—to treat the actor like a puppet. Consequently, Brecht took this approach seriously. Carl Weber remembers the first time he watched the Ensemble at work: Brecht, his assistants, and the actors stood around, smoked, talked, laughed. Every so often an actor would go up on stage and try one of thirty ways of falling off a table. Weber thought everyone was taking a break, until the horseplay went on long enough to make him realize he was watching the rehearsal,<sup>34</sup> a rehearsal one suspects, devoted to the serious business of discovering the one way of falling off a table that will illuminate concretely its historical determinants.

Brecht’s actors were encouraged to make their own discoveries—subject only to Brecht’s dramaturgic principle that the fable retain dominance over its characters. Brecht suggested that this process of discovery and elaboration takes place in three broad and overlapping phases. The first of these extends through reading rehearsals and the early blocking rehearsals. It involves making a first acquaintance with the character by continually asking why he does what he does: “You look assiduously for contradictions, for deviations from type, for the ugly in the beautiful and the beautiful in the ugly.”<sup>35</sup> This is also the phase during which the actors most intensely fulfill a specifically dramaturgical responsibility, studying the fable and familiarizing themselves with the results of the production staff’s background work: “The study of the role is at the same time a study of the fable; more precisely, it should at first be a study of the fable. . . . For this, the actor must mobilize his knowledge of the world and of people, and he must ask his questions as a dialectician.”<sup>36</sup> An actress playing Mother Courage, for example, would be expected to note that in one beat she attempts to protect her children by rigging the business of drawing for the black spot, while in the very next beat she ignores her children completely in order to swing a deal over a belt buckle, thereby letting Eilif get stolen out from under her nose. She would not, however, be asked to bridge this contradiction by developing a complex character conception; rather, this contradiction is the element to be explored in rehearsal. Clearly, this first phase is crucial. If the actor is not able to think along the same lines as the directorial staff, she will not be able later to teach her directors what they need to learn.

The second phase continues the work already done, but in an anti-theatrical direction—one in which more than a few theoretical purists have assumed Brecht was not interested. As Brecht describes it, “The second

phase is that of identification with the character [*Einfühlung*], the search for the character's truth in a subjective sense. You let it do what it wants to do; to hell with criticism as long as society provides what you need."<sup>37</sup> The actor must explore his character in all the detail demanded by the most naturalistic director, but the criterion for selection among his discoveries remains the character's social behavior. Brecht never denied that there were character elements outside the realm of social determination, but he frequently pointed out that such aspects "hardly belong to the constitutive elements of the illustration of reality."<sup>38</sup> Indeed, as Werner Hecht puts it, "We don't want 'characters' in the literal sense of the word on our stage, that is, people with engraved, unchangeable peculiarities that at best unfold themselves monadically. What interests us about people is their way of behaving, the historically conditioned reactions."<sup>39</sup> With this orientation, it is hardly surprising that "Brecht in fact almost never spoke about the character of the stage figure during rehearsals, but rather about his way of behaving; he said virtually nothing about what a man is, but rather what he does. And when he did say anything about character, he related it not to the psychological but the sociological."<sup>40</sup>

In fact, Brecht rarely spoke about individual characters in isolation. Rather, he exhorted his actors to create their characters dialectically with each other, to react rather than act: "The smallest social unit is not the individual, but two people. We create each other in life, too."<sup>41</sup> Hence, Brecht could describe his second phase as one in which the actor lets the character react to the other characters, to the milieu, to the fable. As Brecht rather unepically puts it, "This collecting process proceeds slowly until it then nevertheless takes a leap—until you leap into the final character, unite yourself with it."<sup>42</sup>

Only when the work of this "naturalistic" or "Stanislawskian" phase has been completed can the third, antithetical, more properly "Brechtian" phase begin.<sup>43</sup> During this phase the actor, having come to identify with his character, to know it from the inside, examines it once again "from outside, from the point of view of society," and attempts to recapture the "mistrust and astonishment of the first phase."<sup>44</sup> It is primarily during this phase that the actors and director, using the insights won from a critical re-examination of the social behavior of the characters they have come to know intimately, structure the final composition of gestures and positions that will elaborate the fable concretely in performance. The actor's goal during this phase is not, however, to reject everything he has learned during the second phase lest the audience be contaminated by unepic playing. Rather, as Brecht points out clearly in one of his 1954 appendixes to the *Organon*, the actor's ultimate goal in performance is to achieve a dialectical unity between the gestural presentation of the character in his social relationships and a realistic emotional foundation won through identification:

Ignorant heads interpret the contradiction between playing (demonstration) and experiencing (identification) as if only the one or the other appeared in the actor's work (or as if according to the *Short*

*Organon* one only plays, according to the old technique one only experiences). In reality it is, of course, a matter of two competing processes that unite in the work of the actor. . . . Out of the struggle and the tension between the two antipodes . . . the actor draws his real impact.<sup>45</sup>

Brecht, of course, did develop and discuss a number of his own techniques intended to enforce the dialectic between “playing” and “experiencing.” Most of these techniques were, strictly speaking, rehearsal exercises, such as having the actor speak the character’s lines in the third person or speak the stage directions along with her lines. Many of these exercises were, in fact, used at the Berliner Ensemble, particularly during the early productions, most notably the *Hofmeister*. They were, however, included when useful during the second and third stages of the actor’s work and without theoretical discussion about their epic purpose. Brecht knew that the practical workshop is not the place for theoretical discourse.<sup>46</sup>

Indeed, Herbert Blau is quite correct when he maintains that Brecht’s approach to acting is “more a matter of the environment created around the actor than a methodology of acting itself.”<sup>47</sup> The concentration of communal effort on the interpretation of dramatic texts may be seen as one element of this environment; the use of a leisurely approach to building up a production is another; the time committed to this approach a third.<sup>48</sup> Underlying all of these, however, is the creation of true ensemble working methods. Only when directors, designers, dramaturgs, and actors work continuously together using a shared dramaturgical approach and developing group methods to explore a number of productions treating texts from different historical periods and different genres can they create the common vocabulary necessary to allow the ensemble members to use their particular training, experience, and techniques toward the creation of a production that bears the stamp not just of individuals but of a recognizable whole. That is something we should keep in mind when we try to characterize the distinctive quality of Brecht’s work with the actor, and certainly if we try to make practical use of it.

## NOTES

1. For an example of this absolutizing tendency, see Timothy J. Wiles’s discussion of Brecht in *The Theater Event: Modern Theories of Performance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980). The tendency toward generalized comparisons with Stanislavski mars one of the most recent contributions to the discussion on Brecht and the actor, Margaret Eddershaw’s otherwise frequently interesting examination, “Acting Methods: Brecht and Stanislavski,” in *Brecht in Perspective*, ed. Graham Bartram and Anthony Waine (New York: Longman, 1982), 128–44.

2. Brecht, in a discussion with students and professors at the Universität Greifswald, 1954, “Über die Arbeit am Berliner Ensemble,” in *Brecht im Gespräch, Diskussionen, Dialogue, Interviews*, ed. Werner Hecht, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1975), 123. All translations in this essay are the author’s.

3. Today, fifty years after Brecht's death, such invaluable discussion based on rehearsal observation is virtually impossible to come by. However, a monograph by John Fuegi, *Bertolt Brecht: Chaos, According to Plan* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), provides detailed accounts of Brecht's work with his actors. Fuegi had access to Brecht's coworkers, to tape recordings and notes of rehearsals, and to his own vast knowledge and experience of Brecht's theater.

4. On the other hand, concentration on Brecht's work with actors at the Berlin Ensemble precludes consideration of such aspects of his work as the interrelationship of theory and practice during the late 1920s when Brecht was evolving his theory of the *Lehrstücke*, the learning plays.

5. Brecht, *Gesammelte Werke in 20 Bänden*, ed. Werner Hecht (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1967), 16:865. Hereafter, the *Gesammelte Werke* will be cited as GW.

6. Given the fairly widespread misconception represented by Eddershaw's statement that Brecht founded the Berliner Ensemble "primarily to facilitate the perfect staging of Brecht's own plays" ("Acting Methods," 137), it should be stressed that Brecht and his actors developed their interpretational techniques for the full range of the world's dramatic literature, from Sophocles' *Antigone* to Synge's *Playboy of the Western World*. Of the Ensemble's fifteen most important productions during Brecht's lifetime, only four were of plays by Brecht.

7. *BFA* 23: 66.

8. See *BFA* 23: 92.

9. *BFA* 23: 92.

10. *BFA* 23: 92.

11. *BFA* 23: 82.

12. *BFA* 23: 287.

13. *BFA* 21: 79–80.

14. *BFA* 25: 181 has altered the format of this list, which is printed in paragraph form, the individual sentences being separated by bullet points.

15. Manfred Wekwerth, *Schriften: Arbeit mit Brecht* (Berlin [East]: Henschel, 1975), 119. Roland Barthes provides an excellent discussion of the dialectical development of beats in the first scene of *Mother Courage*, using photographic illustrations, in his "Seven Photo Models of *Mother Courage*," trans. Hella Freud Bernays, *Drama Review* T37 (Fall 1967): 44–55.

16. *BFA* 23: 311.

17. *BFA* 23: 177.

18. Peter Palitzsch, in an interview with Artur Joseph for his *Theater unter vier Augen: Gespräche mit Prominenten* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer und Witsch, 1969), 178.

19. *BFA* 23: 92.

20. *BFA* 22.2: 646.

21. Giorgio Strehler, *Für ein menschlicheres Theater*, trans. and ed. Sinah Kessler (Berlin [East]: Henschel, 1977), 87–88.

22. Hans Curjel, "Brecht's *Antigone*-Inszenierung in Chur 1948," rpt. in *Die Antigone des Sophokles: Materialien zur "Antigone,"* ed. Werner Hecht (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1967), 137–38.

23. Curjel, "Brecht's *Antigone*-Inszenierung in Chur 1948," 138.

24. For further discussion on Brecht's use of "quoted" gestures throughout a production, see Walter Benjamin, *Versuche über Brecht*, 2nd ed. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1967), 26–27.

25. *BFA* 23: 81.

26. Käthe Rüllicke-Weiler points this out in *Die Dramaturgie Brechts: Theater als Mittel der Veränderung*, 2nd ed. (Berlin [East]: Henschel, 1968), 206.

27. *BFA* 8: 322.
28. *BFA* 8: 322.
29. Brecht, as reported by Hans Joachim Bunge, "Über eine Neuinszenierung der Dreigroschenoper: Ein Gespräch zwischen Brecht und Giorgio Strehler am 15.10.1955 über die bevorstehende Mailänder Inszenierung," in *Bertolt Brechts Dreigroschenbuch: Texte, Materialien, Dokumente*, ed. Siegfried Unseld (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1960), 134.
30. Ruth Berlau, Bertolt Brecht, et al., *Theaterarbeit: 6 Aufführungen des Berliner Ensembles* (Dresden: VVV Dresdner Verlag, 1952), 264.
31. See Brecht's description, *BFA* 25: 238–39.
32. Manfred Wekwerth, "Brecht-Theater in der Gegenwart" (Stockholmer Seminar 1978), in *Aktualisierung Brechts*, ed. Wolfgang Fritz Haug, Klaus Pierwoß, und Karen Ruoff (Berlin: Argument-Verlag, 1980), 108.
33. Brecht, "Über die Arbeit am Berliner Ensemble," 125.
34. Carl Weber, "Brecht as Director," *Drama Review* T37 (Fall 1967): 102–3.
35. *BFA* 23: 227.
36. *BFA* 23: 292.
37. *BFA* 23: 228.
38. *BFA* 22.1: 393.
39. Werner Hecht, *Sieben Studien über Brecht* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1972), 151.
40. Käthe Rüllicke-Weiler, in *Sinn und Form*, 2nd special Brecht issue, 1956, as quoted by Albrecht Schöne, "Bertolt Brecht: Theatertheorie und dramatische Dichtung," in *Zu Bertolt Brecht: Parabel und episches Theater*, ed. Theo Buck (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1979), 39.
41. *BFA* 23: 88.
42. *BFA* 23: 228.
43. This labeling of Brecht's second and third phases is Peter Palitzsch's, as quoted by Hans Daiber, *Deutsches Theater seit 1945* (Stuttgart: Reklam, 1976), 218.
44. *BFA* 23: 228.
45. *BFA* 23: 291.
46. See Herbert Blau, "The Popular, the Absurd, and the *Entente Cordiale*," *Tulane Drama Review* 5, no. 3 (1961): 121.
47. Blau, "The Popular, the Absurd," 121.
48. Brecht's productions are, of course, famous for rehearsal periods lasting six months or longer. As Peter Palitzsch has pointed out in a personal interview (March 3, 1979), however, Brecht's early productions at the Berliner Ensemble were often worked up relatively quickly; the *Hofmeister* had only about nine weeks of rehearsal, for example. Brecht began to indulge in long rehearsal periods during his last years, when he was both very ill and intent on developing his young directors and actors. The issue is not whether a Brechtian approach needs six months of rehearsals, but that it needs as long as necessary to proceed effectively through Brecht's three phases.



## Gender and Sexualities

The entire arena that is the concern of this section has been subject to dynamic revisions. Starting out under the rubric of “feminism,” early scholarly investigations of gender and sexualities quickly became “feminism(s).” This change to the plural referred both to the differences in ideology and practice among feminists, and to the different kinds of research activity engaged in by these pioneering scholars. The plural acknowledged the diversity of race, class, age, sexual preference, location, and many other attributes marking the positions of women engaged in feminist activity, both scholarly and artistic.<sup>1</sup> In time, acknowledgment of the diversity of human identities required a proliferation of categories: male, female, and transgenders; heterosexual, gay, lesbian, bi-, and transsexualities. Sometimes, but not always, these have been collected under the sign *queer*. Other times it has seemed important to hold onto the more specific signifiers. For example, the field of masculinity studies contains perspectives that might or might not be considered queer, depending on how queer is defined and on how the scholars in question choose to affiliate. “GLBT” studies has become an acronym, allowing a shorthand while explicitly naming the sexuality options. For this section we have decided on “Gender and Sexualities” as the umbrella term, as it makes room for the rapid changes in these areas of study and provides a more specific and inclusive look at the variety of work being produced by performance scholars.

The turning century witnessed the waning of large-scale political movements in support of identity politics. This is not to deny the ongoing commitments to social action and political struggle on the parts of many feminist, GLBT, and queer activists; it does acknowledge, however, that the size and power of those movements has diminished in comparison to their peak in the 1970s and early 1980s (feminism) and the middle and late 1980s and early 1990s (GLBT and queer constituencies). The diminution of this political activism has been especially problematic for scholarly movements that were originally predicated on activism. As Sue-Ellen Case has written, “Within feminism, the relationship to the activist movement significantly altered the object and structure of scholarly discourse. Although this relationship no longer pertains in the same way as it did in

the 1970s, there is still an intermingling of these projects."<sup>2</sup> Working through the terms of identity, then, and also appearing whenever the follow-through into actual practice of theoretical insights is at issue, scholarship dealing with gender and sexuality almost always renegotiates its social contract.

The emergence of queer theory, in fact, can be seen as an attempt to respond to the unsatisfactory exclusions of terms such as *feminist* or *gay and lesbian*; it also emerged as a political project to try to build a new, more broadly affiliated group in the face of the AIDS epidemic. Ultimately, it was a critique of identity categories from within a commitment to struggle on behalf of identities: "Queer is not a conspiracy to discredit lesbian and gay; it does not seek to devalue the indisputable gains made in their name. Its principal achievement is to draw attention to the assumptions that intentionally or otherwise inhere in the mobilization of any identity category, including itself."<sup>3</sup> However, in the negative locution of this citation, the inevitable tensions accompanying the inclusions/exclusions of naming groups is clear. These debates have marked theater and performance scholarship during the last decade, although most scholars have little trouble recognizing affinities between scholars operating under different nomenclatures. Jill Dolan's book *Geographies of Learning* both explicates the stakes in these namings and also performs an exemplary negotiation of the terms in her own eclectic usages.<sup>4</sup> It also specifies the challenge for actualizing theory in practice. About the first gay and lesbian theater conference in 1995, Dolan writes, "Despite the promise, perhaps, of the coalitional concept of queer, we remained, I think, two hundred or more gay men and lesbians and others, some of whom perceive themselves as thinking, some as doing, some as consuming. For queer theater to really flourish, perhaps we need a community that thoughtfully, passionately, and responsibly goes about engaging in all three."<sup>5</sup>

Among the intellectual currents swirling around these identity questions during the last decade, one of the most important contributions for theater scholars came from philosopher Judith Butler. With the publication in 1988 of her essay "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution" in *Theatre Journal*, her ideas have been a flashpoint for feminists and queer theorists who work in performance and theater studies.<sup>6</sup> Arguing that gender is not stable nor based on any ontological principles, Butler argued that gender, and more radically, sex itself is "an identity tenuously constituted in time—an identity instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts*."<sup>7</sup> Gender, then, is performative—it comes into being as repetition of "the mundane manner in which these [sex-related] constructs are produced, reproduced, and maintained within the field of bodies."<sup>8</sup> Using the theatrical metaphor of "acts," she pointed out that in performance, an act is a shared experience and collective action:

The act that one does, the act that one performs, is, in a sense, an act that has been going on before one arrived on the scene. Hence, gender is an act which has been rehearsed much as a script survives the

particular actors who make use of it, but which requires individual actors in order to be actualized and reproduced as reality once again.<sup>9</sup>

Although Butler was uncomfortable with this close association with actual performances and attempted to move away from it in later writings, this passage was, I believe, the germ of the proliferating use of her theories in work that looked at gender in performance and related representations.

Two books by Butler, *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies That Matter*, followed in 1990 and 1993. The first explored the possibilities for resistance in the theory of gender as a stylized repetition of acts, and tended to stress the freedom to explode by hyperbolic repetition (as in drag), or to deviate from prescribed gender behaviors as a way of rebelling against fixed gender categories. This freedom, however, was modified substantially in *Bodies That Matter* because scholars had seized on the liberatory promise of her earlier theories, and Butler realized that she needed to stress the constraints, the entrapments of the sedimentation of repeated acts. "Gender is not to be chosen and . . . 'performativity' is not radical choice and it's not voluntarism,"<sup>10</sup> she said in correction. Nonetheless, the notion of gender as a performed style, established through repetition before a community, and not based on any essential or biological traits, provided performance scholars with a strong explanation for how styles of femininity and masculinity become established through cultural and theatrical performances, and how they might be challenged by modifying or exploding those styles in representation.

A great deal of feminist and queer performance scholarship grew out of these suggestive ideas. Some of it fell into the trap of seeing the citation of a gender norm as being in itself subversive. The usual problem with deconstructive acts—that the binary terms are kept intact within the new representation—remained underconsidered in some of this work. However, in her recent writing, Judith Butler has moved beyond her early ideas on gender, and this work continues to be productive for performance theory—pertinent not only to this section of the volume. She has developed both psychoanalytic theories of the subject and Marxist theories of ideology in pursuit of a poststructuralist account of subject formation that does not capitulate to an apolitical adjustment to normative society. In her reading of Bourdieu in combination with Althusser (see Savran in "After Marx"), she outlines an understanding of the way the body acts in representation through regularized or ritualized practices to produce an incorporated memory: "Here the apparent materiality of the body is recast as a kind of practical activity, undeliberate and yet to some degree improvisational."<sup>11</sup> These notions go a long way toward explaining the combination of freedom and constraint operating through bodies in representation and allow room for the appearance of novelty, even as they caution against grand expectations. Butler has not been the only theorist of gender and sexuality important to theater and performance studies (consider, for example, Eve Sedgwick, Douglas Crimp,

Donna Harraway, or Chandra Talpade Mohanty), but she has been one of the most influential in this past decade.

Feminist critics and theorists in theater and performance studies continue to produce a large body of work sensitive to issues of coherence and affiliation, yet insistent on keeping the project of feminism at the forefront of scholarly thinking. Building on psychoanalytic and materialist theories of the body, Rebecca Schneider's *The Explicit Body in Performance* makes claims for the historically situated female body and its meanings in representation without succumbing to essentialism.<sup>12</sup> Alicia Arrizón, writing from her identity positions as a Latina lesbian, has contributed *Latina Performance: Traversing the Stage*, and Stacy Wolf published *A Problem Like Maria: Gender and Sexuality in the American Musical*.<sup>13</sup> Una Chadhuri, in a book not ostensibly about gender and sex, *Staging Place: The Geography of Modern Drama*, nevertheless brings an acute critical consciousness of gender issues into every page of her analysis.<sup>14</sup> Charlotte Canning continued one of the original strands of feminist scholarship, the desire to record for history the often ephemeral and hard to document work of women theater makers, in *Feminist Theatres in the USA*.<sup>15</sup> During the last ten years, established scholars have also continued to publish, for instance Sue-Ellen Case's *The Domain-Matrix*, Elin Diamond's *Unmaking Mimesis*, Peggy Phelan's *Mourning Sex*, and Gay Gibson Cima's *Performing Women: Female Characters, Male Playwrights, and the Modern Stage*.<sup>16</sup> All three of the essays in the "Psychoanalysis" section could easily fit here as well: Ann Pellegrini's essay, especially, illustrates an analytic method that borrows from Judith Butler and tackles some of the arguments within feminism concerning its contemporary relevance.

Another fruitful area of new work concerns the gender and sexualities of the masculine. Australian R. W. Connell writes as a social scientist, clearing a path for systematic study of men and their diversity without the defensiveness evident in some work from the "men's movement," whether the myth-inspired ideas of Robert Bly or the overtly reactionary politics of the Promise Keepers.<sup>17</sup> While feminists have sometimes looked skeptically at this work, they have at other times embraced it and engaged in it. Eve Sedgwick's work on men would be one obvious example,<sup>18</sup> and in another recent book entitled *Masculinity Studies and Feminist Theory: New Directions*, Judith Kegan Gardiner argues that "nuanced feminist analyses of masculinities are necessary to adequately theorize gender studies."<sup>19</sup> In theater and performance studies, a number of important books have been published in this area. Robert Vorlicky's *Act Like a Man* (1995) was perhaps the first full-length study to take American men and their representations in our national drama as its subject.<sup>20</sup> By that time, David Savran's *Communists, Cowboys, and Queers* (1992) had developed a complex understanding of the straight Arthur Miller and the gay Tennessee Williams that included their different appropriations of masculinity in a heterosexist culture, and the Cold War ideological tropes of masculinity and nation within which they were both positioned. Savran has published several other masculinity projects, including *Taking It Like a*

*Man* (1998).<sup>21</sup> In addition, a significant literature has grown up concerning gay men and the AIDS epidemic, most notably David Román's *Acts of Intervention: Performance, Gay Culture, and AIDS*<sup>22</sup> (1998). Performance artist Tim Miller has also written extensively about his work in the context of questions of masculinity.<sup>23</sup>

For this edition, we have invited several contributors to reconsider and revise their essays from the first edition. Ellen Donkin has enhanced her account, an example of feminist historiography, of Sarah Siddons's ability to assert her autonomy and subjectivity in the moment of eighteenth-century reception (see her postscript). Jill Dolan discusses how her own essay on lesbian representations of sexuality looks to her now, ten years later. Kate Davy's essay stands up well as originally published, a testament to the multifaceted writing on gender and sexuality that was already growing in our field at the time of the first edition. David Román represents the focus on masculinity with his contribution and concurrently continues his work on representation in the context of AIDS.

In looking back on over twenty-five years of theater and performance scholarship on gender and sexuality (Helen Krich Chinoy and Linda Walsh Jenkin's pioneering *Women in the American Theatre* was published in 1981 and serves as a marker for the upsurge of second-wave feminism in our field), I want to stress continuity and productivity.<sup>24</sup> Once theater and performance scholars started working with theories of gender and sexuality in the context of committed social action, they radically transformed our field. As I wrote in 1992, "Traces of the feminist project can be found in every section of this book, even when the essays were written by men."<sup>25</sup> In new and somewhat different ways, that's still true.

—J.G.R.

## NOTES

1. Cf. the first edition of this volume *Critical Theory and Performance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), 226.

2. Sue-Ellen Case, "Feminism and Performance: A Post-Disciplinary Couple," *Theatre Research International* 26 (July 2001): 145–46.

3. Annamarie Jagose, *Queer Theory: An Introduction* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 126, quoted in Donna M. Nudd, Kristina Schriver, and Terry Galloway, "Is This Theater Queer? The Mickee Faust Club and the Performance of Community," in *Performing Democracy: International Perspectives on Urban Community-Based Performance*, ed. Susan C. Haedicke and Tobin Nellhaus (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), 105. In the article from which this definition was cited, the authors discuss the ramifications of thinking through identity categories and the use of the term *queer*.

4. Jill Dolan, *Geographies of Learning: Theory and Practice, Activism and Performance* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 2001).

5. Dolan, *Geographies of Learning*, 105.

6. Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4 (1988): 519–31.

7. Butler, "Performative Acts," 519.
8. Butler, "Performative Acts," 595.
9. Butler, "Performative Acts," 526.
10. "The Body You Want; Liz Kotz interviews Judith Butler," *Artforum* 31 (1992): 84.
11. Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 154. See also her *The Psychic Life of Power* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).
12. Rebecca Schneider, *The Explicit Body in Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1997).
13. Alicia Arrizón, *Latina Performance: Traversing the Stage* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1999), and Stacy Wolf, *A Problem Like Maria: Gender and Sexuality in the American Musical* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002).
14. Una Chaudhuri, *Staging Place: The Geography of Modern Drama* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995).
15. Charlotte Canning, *Feminist Theatres in the USA* (New York: Routledge, 1996).
16. Sue-Ellen Case, *The Domain-Matrix: Performing Lesbian at the End of Print Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996); Elin Diamond, *Unmaking Mimesis* (New York: Routledge, 1997); Peggy Phelan, *Mourning Sex* (New York: Routledge, 1997); Gay Gibson Cima, *Performing Women: Female Characters, Male Playwrights, and the Modern Stage* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993).
17. R. W. Connell, *Masculinities* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995).
18. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosexual Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).
19. Judith Kegan Gardiner, ed., *Masculinity Studies and Feminist Theory: New Directions* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 1.
20. Robert Vorlicky, *Act Like a Man: Challenging Masculinities in American Drama* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995).
21. David Savran, *Communists, Cowboys, and Queers: The Politics of Masculinity in the work of Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), and *Taking it Like a Man: White Masculinity, Masochism, and Contemporary American Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).
22. David Román, *Acts of Interovention: Performance, Gay Culture, and AIDS* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998).
23. Tim Miller, *Body Blows: Six Performances* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002).
24. Helen Krich Chinoy and Linda Walsh Jenkin, *Women in American Theatre: Careers, Images, Movements: An Illustrated Anthology and Sourcebook* (New York: Random House, 1981).
25. *Critical Theory and Performance*, 229.

# Mrs. Siddons Looks Back in Anger: Feminist Historiography for Eighteenth-Century British Theater

*Ellen Donkin*

Theater history is full of accounts of women performers in conflicts of various kinds. Some occur in relation to audiences, others with playwrights or managers, and some among the women performers themselves. The history of women's performance has been shaped by these disparate incidents. Gathered up and taken as a whole, they tell a larger story. One such story is this: that in all areas of theater, but particularly in performance, women have made repeated efforts to establish a point of view that is distinct from that of men. In performance these efforts usually took the form of subverting dramatic texts that failed to reflect the reality of women's lives. Some of these attempts to subvert were conscious; many were not. In theoretical terms we can formulate as follows: that the history of women's performance is the history of a struggle for a subject, rather than an object, position in representation. In Britain women performers have attempted to undermine this positioning ever since they were legally allowed onstage. Among the most interesting of these attempts was a night in October 1784 on which the actress Sarah Siddons (1755–1831) came into sharp conflict with her audience and subsequently forced them to look at women onstage in a completely different way.

This positioning of women as object on stage has a distinct moment of inception in British history. When Charles II returned from France in 1660 and decreed that actresses might appear on the legitimate stage, it marked the beginning of a shift in British consciousness. The appearance of women on stage constituted not only an aesthetic development for the theater but also a change in society at large. By occupying the stage women now routinely occupied public space, not just on the stage but also in the public imagination. This change touched off some deep anxieties and initiated a series of tacit negotiations about the conditions under which women would be allowed to occupy public space. The theater became a venue for negotiating gender roles.<sup>1</sup>

The initial contract was straightforward. Women in the British theater might occupy space on stage, but only as an object of desire or ridicule. There was no place on the stage for a woman's own assessment of the world she lived in. She might have opinions of that world offstage, and she might even voice them in private life, but not in a public theatrical event. It wasn't just that the plays provided her with limiting stereotypes of female behavior but that her very body on the stage implicated her in a certain relationship with the viewing audience. The notion of the actress as prostitute was an expression of this relationship. It had little to do with

her private conduct offstage and everything to do with the projected desires of the viewing audience.

The career of Nell Gwyn points up some of the larger problems faced by actresses throughout theater history. Nell Gwyn was in fact a prostitute, but contemporary commentators seized upon her work as an actress and her activities as a prostitute as somehow intrinsically related, as this bit of verse spells out:

Next in the Playhouse she took her degree  
As men commence at University.  
No doctors, till they've masters been before;  
So she no player was till first a whore.<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, by 1668 Nell Gwyn had become a mistress to Charles II.<sup>3</sup> Charles was an enthusiastic theatergoer, and his presence in the theater, amid the common knowledge that he was sleeping with Nell, reinforced the audience's disposition to view any woman onstage carnally. The theater itself was shaped in such a way that for most of the audience it was possible to watch Charles watching Nell. In fact, it was difficult to do anything else.<sup>4</sup>

Theoreticians have called this kind of carnal looking "the gaze" and have asserted that the gaze in our culture is male.<sup>5</sup> In other words, the way events and characters unfold in representation tends to reward the eye of the heterosexual male subject. The woman in representation functions as object to this subject gaze; she is the one looked at rather than the one who does the looking. The Restoration gaze, with Charles and the audience as a collectively male-identified subject and Nell Gwyn as female object, constituted a paradigmatic contract, a "technology of gender," that reinforced an old set of power relations even as it *appeared* to give women a new place in representation.<sup>6</sup>

It was not until much later, in 1899, that the notion of a *female* subject had been sufficiently formulated for one actress to speak about it. The turn-of-the-century American actress Mary Shaw wrote that "the woman's point of view was usually not respected by manager, producer or actor." This failing resulted in the appearance on stage of heroines who "talk and act not as real women would, but as men think that women ought to talk and act."<sup>7</sup> Shaw's analysis suggests that a strong subject position for women is one that is necessarily grounded in women's experience rather than on men's fantasies about that experience. She concluded that there was an urgent need for a different kind of drama, one that included believable women characters in believable circumstances.

But in eighteenth-century Britain there was no such drama, and the obstacles for actresses in mainstream theater seeking a strong subject position were considerable. Even as mainstream theater offered employment and a certain provisional membership in the power structure, it placed women in roles that reified their position as object, not just in the world of the play but also, by extension, in the world at large. Theorists have made



a useful distinction between “women” and “Woman.” By performing these roles the actress publicly reinforced a notion of Woman. That notion of Woman had a positioning effect on real women, on the way they lived their lives, on what men expected from them, and on what they expected from themselves.<sup>8</sup> As she performed Woman, these cultural expectations of women *circled back* to the actress in performance through the demands of a very vocal audience. This circling back created a potential closure in the system that made change difficult to accomplish or even to conceive.

Two factors, however, made possible the disruption of this relatively closed system. The first has to do with the nature of performance. One of the most important lessons of semiotics for the theater has been the idea that performance and text constitute two distinct sets of signs that are more or less equally weighted in the way an audience assigns them importance. The text of a play in performance is not privileged as “truer” than the actions of actors on stage or any other component of production.<sup>9</sup> This idea has important bearing on the female subject in performance history. It suggests that, in spite of texts that reinforced an existing ideology about Woman, actual performances by women could maintain a certain degree of autonomy from that text and create a very different set of messages for the audience.

So, although the popular drama of the eighteenth century is full of roles in which heroines (to quote Mary Shaw again) talk and act only “as men think women ought to talk and act,” gifted actresses found ways to perform powerfully inside these texts all the time. They had to. The irony of their position was that, although audiences demanded from the text the comfort and familiarity of the norms of Womanhood, *what in fact they responded to in performance was something that potentially ruptured that comfort and familiarity*. That something was female subjectivity, which registered the contradictions, the anger, the desire, the humor, the powerlessness, and the perspective of the female subject in history. For the audience this kind of performance was a form of voyeurism. Under no circumstances were they interested in seeing this unpredictable and powerful presence work itself free of the constraints of the narrative. But they were captivated nonetheless by the potential for danger, the ripple of excitement, the spectacle of agony, as the actress gave them a glimpse of the power inside.<sup>10</sup>

As a general rule, the playtexts themselves cooperated. Most popular plays provided at least one scene in which the actress could explode into a vitality and power that were absent from the rest of her role. These were the scenes in which she made her “hits,” or “points,” as they were called. Necessarily, any such scene was carefully contained and rationalized by the plot. But to judge from various memoirs and reviews, in spite of this containment, these scenes resonated in memory long after the details of the plot were forgotten. These scenes functioned as pry bars; they penetrated the ideological closure of representation and created a space in which women, not Woman, could be heard onstage, if only momentarily. They did not solve the problem of a fully developed female subject onstage, but they kept something alive.

The second factor that challenged this closed system was audience reception. In the eighteenth century reception played a complex role in this destabilization process. Keir Elam writes: "In sponsoring the performance, the audience issues, as it were, a collective 'directive' to the performers, instructing them to provide in return a bona fide product (or production) of a certain kind—hence the outrage of certain spectators whose expectations are openly flouted, as was the case with various 1960s experiments. The audience's relative passivity as 'receiver' is in fact an active choice which imposes certain obligations on the elected 'senders.'"<sup>11</sup> Elam's observations are useful because they remind us of the way in which audience expectation shapes performance, especially around the way women are represented onstage. What needs revising for our purposes, however, is his characterization of the audience as passive, even as he argues against that passivity. Indeed, eighteenth-century audiences can in no sense be thought of as passive. They had the power to determine the survival of both plays and performers. They were far more powerful than the press. Based on audience response, a theater manager would decide from night to night whether to run the show or rotate it out of the repertory. These audiences were unconstrained in registering their approval or disapproval of any aspect of performance. I call them "shouting" audiences.<sup>12</sup> One contemporary analogy is the parliamentary institution in which the prime minister makes herself or himself available once a week for questions and answers in the House of Commons. Depending on the volatility of the issue, a barely contained multiplicity of shouting voices are heard, both singly and in chorus, alternating with the (rehearsed) statements of the prime minister.

This legitimated parley between audience and performers meant that the "reception loop" of performer to audience back to performer again was an extremely tight one. If innovation was introduced successfully onstage, it could be ratified by audience response instantaneously. The press participated in this process, but only after the fact. When a breathing, murmuring, commenting, laughing audience responded positively to something new in a performer's work, it cemented that change on the spot, and the performer was given permission to continue and build on it. This was not the leisurely process of reader-response; it had more in common with deals being made in the pit of a commodities exchange. So, although it can be argued that production and performance as a whole tended to reinforce dominant ideology, that process was by no means monolithic. In a single evening the "horizon of expectations" for an audience could change; what had been unacceptable in the Wednesday evening performance by one actress could be found plausible and moving on Thursday in the performance of another actress, opening up new possibilities for playwrights and actresses alike.<sup>13</sup> The playhouse, as we have noted, functioned as a liminal space in which gender roles were negotiated and renegotiated. In this process the audience was a wild card. Innovation did not happen often, but when it happened, it happened fast.

These two factors, the autonomous nature of performance and the

power of audience reception, were to play important parts in the story that follows. During this evening in the career of Sarah Siddons "the balance of forces maintaining a particular hegemony" became unstable, and the audience accepted the terms of a new "contract" for women on the stage.<sup>14</sup> This contract marked an important change for women in performance; it opened the way for a more complete female presence on the English stage.

October 5, 1784, was Mrs. Siddons's opening night at Drury Lane for the 1784–85 season. She had just returned from a summer season of work in Dublin, during which she had been accused (unjustly, as it turned out) by two fellow actors, West Digges and William Brereton, of first refusing to perform in their benefits and then of charging an exorbitant sum for appearing. On this particular evening, as Mrs. Siddons came onstage for the first scene of the play, she was greeted by an audience so hostile that it was impossible to perform. The auditorium was filled with derisive calls of "Off! Off!"

It was no happenstance that hostilities broke out on this particular evening. Mrs. Siddons was moving into the zenith of her career; no woman performer in memory had so captivated the British public. The spring before she had been painted by Joshua Reynolds as the Tragic Muse. She was joining a hall of fame that included celebrities like David Garrick. This outbreak was an overt challenge to her membership in that power structure.

The background to this incident is supplied by at least three different accounts, one of them by Wally Oulton, a contemporary chronicler of the theater; the second by James Boaden, Mrs. Siddons's first major biographer; and the third by Mrs. Siddons herself. It is not certain that Oulton's is an eyewitness account, but Boaden was present on the evening in question, and Mrs. Siddons was the unwilling principal in the event. I will quote Oulton's account first, in full:

On Mrs. Siddons's first appearance this season, in the part of Mrs. Beverley in *The Gamester*, she met with strong opposition, on account of some malicious reports concerning her conduct, during her last visit to Dublin; where, as insinuated, she refused to perform for the benefits of Messrs. Digges and Brereton, who were then dangerously ill. Mrs. Siddons did agree to perform for the first gentleman without any gratuity, and for Mr. Brereton on very moderate terms; but when the benefits were commencing she was *in reality* taken ill, being confined to her bed for a fortnight. On Mrs. Siddons's appearance this season, her applauders had the majority; she repeatedly courtseyed to the audience, and seemed as if she wished to exculpate herself from the charges brought against her in the Public Papers: the tumult however encreasing Mr. Kemble came on, bowed respectfully to the audience, and took his sister by the hand, and as the noise continued, both retired. In about six minutes after, Mrs. Siddons came on again, and addressed the audience, declaring that

everything should be explain'ed to the satisfaction of the public, and that she had been most unjustly traduced. The theatre still continuing in an uproar, she retired again; and Mr. King came forward; he said Mrs. Siddons's reception had discomposed her so much, she prayed the Indulgence of the House for a short time, and the Performance should go on: upwards of forty minutes elapsed before the curtain rose for the play, when Mrs. Siddons's friends having obtained silence, she went through her character with astonishing firmness, and she was announced for the part of Lady Randolph on a succeeding night. The malice of Mrs. Siddons's enemies became soon apparent, and all terminated to her credit.<sup>15</sup>

There are three things about Oulton's account that are worth reflection. The first is that the disruptions that night were apparently much more compelling than the actual production itself. In any event, they take up far more space than his comments on the performance of the actual text. The second is that the furor over her alleged failure to perform in the benefits described was disproportionate to the size of the infraction and should probably make us suspicious. In point of fact, Mrs. Siddons *had* performed a benefit for Digges, at considerable personal expense and trouble, and her failure to perform for Brereton was the result of legitimate illness and conflicting contractual obligations. In any case, Digges was a member of the Daly company in Dublin, where Mrs. Siddons had been working during the summer, and was hardly known to London audiences. Brereton was much better known, but only because he had costarred with Mrs. Siddons as Jaffier to her Belvidera in Otway's *Venice Preserv'd*. His claim to fame depended upon her choice of costar. It is interesting to note that by the fall of 1784 Mrs. Siddons was increasingly turning to her brother, John Philip Kemble, to play roles of this kind, and Brereton (correctly) felt himself in danger of being replaced.<sup>16</sup> Brereton's resentment was vented publicly through a series of newspaper columns and found a ready response in the audience at large. The furor, then, which allegedly was *about* Digges and Brereton, is more likely to have been produced *by* them.

The third arresting aspect of Oulton's report is the term *astonishing firmness*. What exactly does Oulton mean? Is he expressing admiration for the actress's composure under pressure? Is it astonishing firmness in the context of a stereotypically compliant character for whom firmness is a peculiar but interesting acting choice? Is it some combination of his awareness of her composure under pressure *inside the context* of the character? Why is this firmness "astonishing"?

We learn more from Boaden, whose account includes a detailed description of the event and of the letters to the newspaper leading up to it (2:105-18). He reports that Brereton, who was to play Lewson in *The Gamester* that evening, was *backstage* the entire time of this uproar in the theater and that his failure to appear onstage to quell the angry crowds by vindicating Mrs. Siddons was highly incriminating. "How keenly

envy follows great success," comments Boaden dryly (2:81). Boaden reiterates Oulton's description of Kemble leading Mrs. Siddons offstage, in a kind of "masquerade of womanliness," a deliberate attempt to create a scenario of rescue and maidenly distress.<sup>17</sup> Boaden then reconstructs Mrs. Siddons's address to the audience when she subsequently came out alone, after the six-minute interlude described by Oulton above.<sup>18</sup> He writes:

After some interval, calls for her became less mixed with opposition and she came again onstage, but *alone* and thus addressed the audience: "Ladies and Gentlemen: The kind and flattering partiality which I have uniformly experienced in this place would make the present interruption distressing to me indeed, were I in the slightest degree conscious of having deserved your censure. I feel no such consciousness. The stories which have been circulated against me are calumnies. When they shall be proved to be true, my aspersers will be justified: but till then, my respect for the public leads me to be confident that I shall be protected from unmerited insult." (2:115)

Boaden comments:

It was not very usual to hear a *lady* on such occasions; the delicacy of the sex, while it becomes accustomed to repeat the sentiments of others, shrinks from the seeming boldness of publicly uttering their own. But there was a *male dignity* [my emphasis] in the understanding of Mrs. Siddons that raised her above the helpless timidity of other women; and it was certainly without surprise, and evidently with profound admiration, that they heard this NOBLE BEING assert her innocence and demand protection . . . if I were to mark the moment, which I should think she most frequently revolved, as affording her the greatest *satisfaction*, the fortitude of this night and its enthusiastic reception by all who heard and saw it, seem most worthily to claim so happy a distinction. (2:116)

Boaden's conjecture that these events were pivotal in Mrs. Siddons's career is borne out in her own memoirs (although with one complicated twist, as we shall see).<sup>19</sup> In this tiny volume of thirty-three pages, written in the last year of her life, the events leading up to and including October 5, 1784, occupy fully seven pages at the end. The remaining several decades of her career are compressed into a handful of paragraphs on the final page. Contemporary commentary reinforces Boaden's conjecture; one publication reported the event as a "very awful trial—a trial which, in great measure, determined her future fame—perhaps her residence in this metropolis."<sup>20</sup>

Boaden's account has two important claims on our attention. The first is that his report of the events clearly suggests that Mrs. Siddons, by dint of personal conviction and courage, routed the opposition single-handedly.

The second is his use of “male dignity” to describe her self-presentation during this climactic moment. The term *male* applied to Mrs. Siddons suggests that some aspect of gender construction had gotten muddy in this moment of confrontation.

We turn finally to Mrs. Siddons’s own account of the events of October 5. We hardly recognize it as the same set of events. First of all, she makes no mention of Brereton and instead places the blame squarely on the Irish manager Daly, her employer during the summer of 1784, and accuses him of having engineered the entire confrontation long distance. Daly was a womanizer and a notorious nuisance,<sup>21</sup> but in this instance Mrs. Siddons is also closing family ranks. Brereton, who died in 1787 in a madhouse at Hoxton, left a widow named Priscilla who subsequently married Mrs. Siddons’s brother and costar, John Philip Kemble. This same Priscilla was an actress in *The Gamester* company the night of the disturbance, a fact that is not recorded either by Boaden or Oulton, playing Charlotte to Mrs. Siddons’s Mrs. Beverley in the opening scene of the play. “Mrs. B. [Brereton] was mean enough to sneak off the stage and leave her [Mrs. Siddons] to stand the insults of a malicious party tho’ she knew the whole disturbance was on her account and that her husband had at least been obliged to contradict the reports that concern’d him.”<sup>22</sup> Out of respect for her brother’s memory Mrs. Siddons avoids casting aspersions on either of the Breretons, and the intriguing reference to the disturbance being on Mrs. Brereton’s account is not illuminated, although there were rumors circulating at the time that Brereton was in love with Mrs. Siddons.<sup>23</sup> The uproar in the theater perhaps suited both the Breretons, Mrs. Brereton for reasons of personal jealousy and Mr. Brereton for reasons of professional jealousy.

Second and most important, Mrs. Siddons’s narrative of the events makes *no mention whatever* of her speech to the audience, the speech that Boaden is at such pains to reconstruct. Instead, she states that after her brother rescued her from the stage she went offstage and fainted. According to her, it was only the combined efforts of Mr. Siddons, John Philip Kemble, and Mr. Sheridan (Richard Brinsley), together with the prospect of her children living in want, that enabled her to go back onstage and face her audience. All this in six minutes, if we are to believe Oulton’s account. “I fainted . . . I was besought by husband, my brother, and Mr. Sheridan to present myself again before that audience by whom I had been so cruelly and unjustly degraded, and where, but in consideration of my children, I never would have appeared again” (31).

Then, suddenly, the crisis is over, and she is in the midst of the first act. She makes no mention whatever of her speech of self-defense to the audience. It is as if it never took place. “But what was my astonishment to find [myself], on the rising of the curtain, recieved [*sic*] with a *silence* so profound that I was absolutely awe-struck and *never yet have been able to account for this surprising contrast*, for I really think the falling of a pin might have been heard upon the stage” (31; my emphasis). But both

Boaden and Oulton report that she did address the audience directly, and Boaden, if not always unbiased, can certainly be trusted as a reliable reporter of events as he saw them.

What then are we to make of the fact that these reports do not tally? How is it that, at the very moment in which Boaden observes with obvious admiration a "male dignity" in Mrs. Siddons, her own memory fails her completely? How are we to reconcile Oulton's observation of "astounding firmness" with a woman who has just fainted and can only be persuaded onto the stage again by the manly intervention of husband and brother? Sheridan's sister Betsy, who visited with Mrs. Siddons a few days afterward, noted that "she seems hurt to the soul, but her feelings seem to be more of the indignant kind than any other."<sup>24</sup> One wonders where the indignation is to be found in her own account.

Some of the answers to these discrepancies are suggested by a more careful look at the text of the play.<sup>25</sup> *The Gamester*, by Edward Moore, is a moral fable about the evils of gambling and has as its central character a Mr. Beverley, who, in spite of a devoted wife (Mrs. Siddons's role) and an infant son, gambles away their considerable livelihood and reduces them to desperate poverty. Mrs. Beverley, however, can only exclaim her continuing devotion and need for him. Her lines read like a litany of disclaimers to the subject position. She says to her sister-in-law: "I live but to oblige him," and to her desperate and obsessed husband, "I have no wants when you are present, nor wishes in your absence but to be blessed with your return." This devotion reaches a ludicrous climax when she hands over to Beverley her remaining handful of jewels, even though this remnant of family fortune is all that protects her and her son from utter destitution. Elizabeth Inchbald's trenchant remarks on the play in her 1808 anthology suggest that, from a woman's point of view, the play stretched credibility. She describes Mrs. Beverley as "egregiously impassioned by conjugal love."<sup>26</sup>

It is tempting to equate a strong subject position with strong emotional display in performance, but a careful distinction must be made. The role of Mrs. Beverley, although it had no claim to a strong female subject position, had several opportunities for an actress to display strong emotions. In one key scene Mrs. Beverley is approached by the sordid Stukely, who hopes to seduce her in a moment of weakness and desperation. The rejection of Stukely was a potential "hit" for the actress playing Mrs. Beverley. In a blaze of righteous fury she says to Stukely: "Would that these eyes had Heaven's own lightening [*sic*], that, with a look, thus I might blast thee! Am I then fallen so low? Has poverty so humbled me, that I should listen to a hellish offer, and sell my soul for bread? Oh, villain! villain!"<sup>27</sup> It was one of those moments in which the performance of the text gave the actress an opportunity to *hint* at a powerful subjectivity within the confines of a recuperative plot, affording the audience excitement without serious risk to ideological expectations. Mrs. Beverley's "egregious" loyalty to Mr. Beverley flew in the face of logic and even of survival

itself. But it was precisely designed to reinforce the intrinsic rightness of laws that prevented women from having any legal or financial identity apart from their husbands. In plays like *The Gamester* these laws were seen to reflect a preexisting condition of nature. As the play demonstrated, Woman herself would not have wanted things any other way.

But on the night of October 5 something happened that dislodged expectations in a more substantive way. If we can believe Oulton and Boaden, Mrs. Siddons, an actress whose reputation had been built upon never breaking character, stepped outside of both character and dramatic narrative, turned in righteous anger, and *looked back* at her audience. In that moment she registered what she thought of them. She forced her audience to deal with her, not as object but as speaking subject. She expressed personal indignation and disdain, without the benefit of a recuperative plot. In other words, she reversed the direction of the gaze. The audience now had the experience of being the object of a female gaze in the theater, and it created a shift in power relations.

That power shift was, as Boaden and Oulton confirm, collectively ratified by audience reception. In the intervening forty minutes Mrs. Siddons's terms for appearing onstage without harassment were unconditionally accepted. When she reappeared, the impact of that power shift continued to resonate inside the performance of Mrs. Beverley, to such an extent that Oulton records an "astonishing firmness." It was impossible that night for the audience to view Mrs. Siddons as Mrs. Beverley without the memory of the earlier outburst. This must have been particularly true during the scene in which she spurned Mr. Stukely. The confrontation forty minutes before had created a springboard into a performance of Mrs. Beverley that oscillated at high frequency between actress as subject and character as object.

Mrs. Siddons had destabilized the Restoration contract. She had opportunistically grasped a hostile audience by the throat and renegotiated the terms under which she would appear. It was by no means a conscious effort to establish herself as "female subject" (even if the category had existed); it was simply a gritty determination to survive. But its consequences were important: it opened up a space in representation that had not been there before, and the audience at that historical moment registered its willingness to accept the change.<sup>28</sup>

One may argue that this assertion of the female subject was a wobbly imposition on a play that made no real room for the female subject within. Nevertheless, it was an important start. It had the effect of putting Mrs. Siddons's performance as Mrs. Beverley in quotation marks; the acting was seen to be a production of the actress and not coextensive with the actress.<sup>29</sup> This distinction made possible a different complexity of female presence both on the stage and in the audience. The price of being able to fantasize about or identify with Mrs. Beverley was the concomitant awareness of Mrs. Siddons herself as a subject. In some sense, the audience had been put on notice. Even as they watched her, they were aware that she was also watching them. They no longer occupied a safe space in the house



from which to survey the body of the actress, as they had in 1660. The actress was now in a position to look back.

The distinction between the female subject *inside* representation and the female subject *outside* representation is an important one.<sup>30</sup> The moment in which Mrs. Siddons established herself as a female subject was without question outside of the text of this play. She spoke in her own words and delivered her indignation not to a culturally approved target (Mr. Stukely) but to the immediate source of the trouble, the audience. Her voices as outraged actress and outraged character need to be carefully distinguished. She could not yet claim a full subject position *inside* of dramatic narrative, but clearly something had taken place. Perhaps one way to distinguish between a female subject inside and a female subject outside representation might be to make a distinction between subject *voice* and subject *position*. When we speak of Mrs. Siddons playing Mrs. Beverley, for example, she is a subject voice. In spite of the ideologically sanitized role she plays, certain moments of the play allow for displays of power and rage that gesture in the direction of female subjectivity. When, however, we speak of Mrs. Siddons confronting her audience directly with her indignation about their outrageous behavior, we describe a subject position, because her presence has not been neutralized by an ideologically sanitizing plot and character. In a different kind of play, and in a different century, Mrs. Siddons theoretically could have occupied a subject position inside of a playtext. But it was eighteenth-century London, and the play was *The Gamester*. In order to fully occupy a subject position Mrs. Siddons had to step outside of the play. In a broad sense her indignant address to the audience was structurally necessitated by the failure of representation itself to find adequate space for her subjectivity within the play. In speaking to the audience directly, however, she empowered the existing subject voice within the play and opened up certain possibilities for the future in playwriting and in women's performance.

When Boaden speaks of Mrs. Siddons's having a "male dignity," it may be his way of describing the taking of a subject position. He understands the subject position, in this case speaking for oneself, as a male activity: "the delicacy of the [female] sex shrinks . . . from the seeming boldness of publicly uttering their own [sentiments]" (2:116). In his efforts to describe what he sees her doing that night he falls back on the only terminology he has at hand. In doing so he exposes the inadequacy of the analysis. Mrs. Siddons becomes the locus in which assumptions about femaleness and maleness lose meaning. Maleness, in this instance, reveals itself as a constructed social position and not as a biological statement of fact.

The remaining mystery is Mrs. Siddons's own failure to record this moment of confrontation in her memoirs. One wonders if the omission was a conscious or an unconscious one. Certainly it would appear that she had little to lose by telling the truth as she remembered it; her career was long since over, and she was in the last year of her life. I suspect her recorded amazement at confronting a suddenly quiet audience is not simply a coy invention. *It is as if someone else had quieted the audience.*<sup>31</sup>

This experience of claiming a strong subject position constituted such an aberration that it was difficult to incorporate into consciousness. How was she to think of herself at once as the embodiment of Womanhood and as having a “male dignity”? Her unprecedented position of power in the theater was contingent upon her persuasiveness as Woman, both in public and in private life. In the grid of her consciousness, which had been so powerfully shaped and informed by the roles she played, there was no precedent for aberrant “male” behavior.<sup>32</sup> Without a place to lodge, the memory of this incident split off and drifted away.

We see in this drifting away the consequences of a lifetime of work in mainstream theater. Mrs. Siddons was someone who could operate defensively and powerfully in her own behalf but could not consciously remember having done so.<sup>33</sup> She was, in effect, a split subject.<sup>34</sup> It is a chronic temptation in feminist revisions of theater history to imagine that oppression created a group of women who were not allowed to speak about what they knew. In fact it appears that the situation was more complicated: that they didn’t know what they knew.<sup>35</sup> Mrs. Siddons’s participation in this moment of change had guaranteed neither her recognition of that change nor her ability to build on it. She was, like her audiences, caught up in the fluxes of history, a history in which she participated without control or consciousness.

Nonetheless, there had been change. Mrs. Siddons continued to work, and audiences continued to be more or less disruptive, but never again did she face just another noisy crowd. The neutralized claims of that 1784 opening night audience would ever after be present in the audiences that followed. It was a modest legacy but an important one.

Fredric Jameson has written that a careful analysis of incidents in mainstream culture like this one will uncover traces of other cultural voices, opposing voices that have been marginalized and muffled. This multiplicity of clear and muffled voices is in some instances the only record left to us of an underlying social struggle, one that history books are usually at pains to simplify or eliminate.<sup>36</sup> In this case both the hegemonic and the oppositional voices belonged to Mrs. Siddons. The contradictory voices of Mrs. Beverley, of the memoirs, and of the indignant speech to the audience were all generated by the same person. In this sense Mrs. Siddons’s career is paradigmatic. Any woman whose survival and financial independence rest upon her ability to represent herself as *Other*, in ways that are deeply at odds with her experience, is likely to show these curious signs of conflict and struggle.

Without gender as a category of inquiry, the significance of these multiple voices is lost, and the political implications of anecdotes like this one become, to use Jameson’s term, unconscious. The feminist theater historian must identify material like this as a form of politically unconscious theater history and begin the work of extricating the female performer from the ideological apparatus in which she worked. The story lies in the gaps and contradictions between the voices—not in what they tell us but in what they avoid or do not remember.

*Postscript for the New Edition*

Many years ago my father, who was assistant stage manager for a Broadway show called *Too Many Girls*, had the miserable task of firing a young woman in the chorus line who was pregnant and just starting to show. It is reasonable to conclude that the pregnant body onstage in the 1930s was not seen to be an economic asset. It is another way of saying, I suppose, that pregnancy did not participate in the erotic imagination of heterosexual males in the audience. Nevertheless, we run a risk by allowing such assumptions to slip into the mainstream of our thinking about actresses in earlier centuries.

There is a wrinkle to the Siddons narrative, one that I confess completely eluded me in the original edition of this essay, but that in the intervening years has seemed to me full of possibilities. A central fact of this incident, at least from Mrs. Siddons's point of view, was that she was over four months pregnant. Her son George was born on February 27, 1785, the sixth of seven children. A host of questions arise. Was her courage under fire in part a function of her condition, a response grounded not just by indignation on her own behalf, but an inchoate instinct to defend her young? Was she showing? Was the use of classical draperies as costume a way to disguise her condition for as long as possible, or did it in fact draw attention to her blooming profile, setting in motion certain undercurrents of response. Are we to imagine eroticism and gallantry in the male members of her audience, together with identification and empathy in the female members of the same audience?

Boaden, who is among her most ardent and meticulous observers, makes absolutely no mention of her condition, oblique or otherwise, so it is perfectly possible that it simply did not register with most members of the audience. But even if her condition was well disguised in October 1784, it would have been hard to ignore when she performed a historic *Lady Macbeth*, beginning on February 2, 1785, through February 26, the day before she delivered. She then appeared again on March 5 as *Lady Macbeth*, and again on March 8, this time as *Desdemona* in *Othello*. Did the shift in her condition influence the choice of roles? Was a pregnant *Lady Macbeth* a more logical choice than a pregnant *Desdemona*?

I am struck by how difficult it is, short of working deductively from birth records, to discover which among the actresses of the period was performing onstage gravid, and who was not. There seems to be very little that alludes to pregnancy, coded or uncoded, in the backstage printed gossip. A feminist historian may feel compelled to think things through one more time. When culture swept us up into a collective heterosexual male gaze relative to the actress onstage, what in fact was being gazed upon? Was pregnancy part of what Charles II and his audience saw onstage? Had it incorporated itself into the erotic imagination before the fact of women onstage or after? Did it find coded language in audience gossip, or in reviews?

Judith Schneid Lewis, in her book about pregnancy and childbirth

among English aristocrats, comments that “at no time during the century 1760–1860 does there seem to have been any social taboo against appearing visibly pregnant in public, contrary to popular myth.”<sup>37</sup> In fact, it is the period after pregnancy (commonly called confinement) that actually had somewhat stricter rules about aristocratic women staying indoors for at least a month after delivery. In this sense, Mrs. Siddons’s public pregnancy is arguably less controversial than her decision to return to the boards one week after delivery. Or, another interpretation might simply be that her pattern of behavior through pregnancy is normative for aristocratic women, but after delivery is normative for working-class women. But the fact of public pregnancy being socially acceptable begs the larger question of whether or not pregnancy itself functioned in the public imagination as a source of erotic pleasure.

The notion of the pregnant body onstage in theater history suggests a gold mine of cultural investigation, but like most gold mines, it appears to be located underground. The work begins with a biography that includes the birth dates of children and a simple act of subtraction. It is reasonable to suppose that actresses worked as long as they could for economic reasons, but what indeed was the point at which the erotic became grotesque, and the lady had to be let go? Or, as in the case of Mrs. Siddons, who arguably had a great deal more influence over the conditions of her employment than a chorus girl in any century, was pregnancy itself part of the erotic equation?

## NOTES

1. See Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1982), 11, in which Turner suggests theater as a means to scrutinize sociocultural systems.

2. Roy MacGregor-Hastie, *Nell Gwyn* (London: Robert Hale, 1987), 35. This bit of verse was written by Rochester.

3. MacGregor-Hastie, *Nell Gwyn*, 82.

4. Feminist film theorists have called this process of watching as if through someone else’s eyes “suture.” See Kaja Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 194–236.

5. Laura Mulvey’s essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” in *Screen* 16 (1975): 6–18, has been extremely influential. See also Silverman’s discussion of this article in *The Subject of Semiotics*, 222–25; and E. Ann Kaplan, in *Women and Film: Both Sides of the Camera* (New York: Methuen, 1983), 14. This theoretical work has had far-reaching implications for our discipline. The gaze of the theater historian, which has held a position of lofty ungendered neutrality for decades, may now be seen to be male.

6. See Teresa de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), ix.

7. Alice M. Robinson, Vera Mowry Roberts, and Milly S. Barranger, eds., *Notable Women in the American Theatre* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989), 786–87.

8. Sue-Ellen Case, *Feminism and Theatre* (New York: Methuen, 1988), 7. For a wonderful case in point, see also James Boaden, *Memoirs of Mrs. Siddons* (London:

Henry Colburn, 1827), 1:301, who describes fashionable women of the day imitating the actress Sarah Siddons in "deportment . . . utterance . . . and dress." Hereafter page numbers for Boaden will be cited in the text.

9. See Susan Bassnett-McGuire, "An Introduction to Theatre Semiotics," *Theatre Quarterly* 10 (1980): 47–53.

10. My thanks to Michael Wilson for pointing out to me that Mrs. Siddons was always at her best in scenes in which she spurned an immoral lover.

11. Keir Elam, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* (New York: Methuen, 1980), 96.

12. I have borrowed the term from African-American culture, in which "shouting" or "calling" are approved ways for audiences to respond at certain public events.

13. For a discussion of the term *horizon of expectations*, see Robert Holub, *Reception Theory* (New York: Methuen, 1984), 42–44.

14. Janelle Reinelt, "Speculations on Spectatorship: Dominant Hegemony and the Historical Moment," *Proceedings of the International Federation for Theatre Research* (Stockholm: Nordic Theatre Studies, 1990), 128–31. Reinelt here is developing ideas from Antonio Gramsci's "Analysis of Situations: Relations of Force," in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1977).

15. Wally Chamberlain Oulton, *The History of the Theatres of London (1771–95; reprint, London: Martin and Bain, 1796)*, 1:134; hereafter page numbers will be cited in the text.

16. Brereton's career only lasted another year, to November 1785, after which he disappeared from the Drury Lane roster permanently. Reports were that he declined rapidly into mental illness and died at Hoxton Asylum in 1787. After November 1785, Kemble did in fact take over many of Brereton's former roles. See Charles Beecher Hogan, ed., *The London Stage, 1660–1800*, pt. 5, vol. 2, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1968), for night-by-night records of performances at Drury Lane.

17. See Sue-Ellen Case, "Toward a Butch-Femme Aesthetic," in *Making a Spectacle*, ed. Lynda Hart (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1989). She cites Joan Riviere's discussion of "the masquerade of womanliness" as a way to understand how heterosexual women in positions of power will perform a certain coquettishness or helplessness in order to "avert anxiety and the retribution feared from men" (291).

18. Roger Manvell states that this was a prepared speech; unfortunately, he does not cite his source. See *Sarah Siddons: Portrait of an Actress* (London: William Heinemann, 1970), 113.

19. *The Reminiscences of Sarah Kemble Siddons, 1773–1785*, ed. William Van Lennep (Cambridge: Widener Library, 1942). These memoirs also cite the appearance in the pit of a man who speaks out in Mrs. Siddons's behalf, "impelled by benevolence and a manly feeling for the oppressed," and helping to create an aura of heroic rescue from persecution in her account (30). Hereafter page numbers will be cited in the text.

20. *Town and Country Magazine*, October 1784, 510.

21. He had made a pest of himself to many others, including Mrs. Siddons's good friend, the actress and playwright Elizabeth Inchbald, during the 1782–83 Dublin season.

22. *Betsy Sheridan's Journal: Letters from Sheridan's Sister 1784–1786 and 1788–1790*, ed. William Le Fanu (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1960),

32. Betsy Sheridan was unable to attend opening night because her father was ill, so this information comes to us secondhand, probably through her brother.

23. See Mrs. Clement Parsons, *The Incomparable Siddons* (1909; reprint, New York: Benjamin Blom, 1969), 101. Parsons mentions an infatuation but does not give her source.

24. *Betsy Sheridan's Journal*, 32.

25. The play is printed in *The British Theatre*, ed. Elizabeth Inchbald, vol. 14 (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees and Orme, 1808), together with an introduction to the play by Mrs. Inchbald.

26. Inchbald, *The British Theatre*, 37, 30, 4.

27. Inchbald, *The British Theatre*, 46.

28. Janelle Reinelt, "Feminist Theory and Performance," *Modern Drama* 31 (1989): 55. "Novelty on a historical scale, finally, emerges when a specific historic moment, a confluence of events and forces converge which makes radical change possible. Subjects are able to grasp the new social formation as it coalesces and to position themselves in relationship to it."

29. Elin Diamond, "Brechtian Theory, Feminist Theory," *Drama Review* 32 (1988): 90. "Looking at the character, the spectator is constantly intercepted by the actor/subject, and the latter, heeding no fourth wall, is *theoretically free to look back* . . . no one side signifies authority, knowledge, or the law" (my emphasis).

30. See de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender*, 10: "Women are both inside and outside gender, at once within and without representation."

31. See Thomas Postlewait's "Autobiography and Theatre History," in *Interpreting the Theatrical Past*, ed. Thomas Postlewait and Bruce McConachie (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1989), 268: "These actresses . . . go out of their way, with few exceptions, to offer a life story that credits to others key aspects of their strength, their purpose, their identity." It is also true that contemporary biographers tend to cooperate in that process. Manvell's account of Mrs. Siddons frequently assigns agency to the men in her life; see his *Sarah Siddons*, 115.

32. See Silverman, *Subject of Semiotics*, which for our purposes suggests that unconscious and cultural determinants play a strong role in omissions of this kind: "The concept of subjectivity, as we shall see, marks a radical departure from this philosophical tradition [of individualism] by giving a more central place to the *unconscious and to cultural overdetermination* than it does to consciousness" (126; my emphasis).

33. See Carolyn Heilbrun, *Writing a Woman's Life* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1988). It is interesting to consider Heilbrun's argument from the perspective of this essay. She and Postlewait both argue that women writing their autobiographies omit their own agency in their lives, crediting others with having inspired or educated or guided them (see note 31 above). One of the implications of this study is that these omissions may be unconscious because representation in the culture offered a woman no models for assigning agency to herself.

34. Sue-Ellen Case, "From Split Subject to Split Britches," in *Feminine Focus: The New Women Playwrights*, ed. Enoch Brater (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 127-34, gives a helpful analysis of the way the split subject manifests itself in dramatic literature.

35. See Christopher Bollas, *The Shadow of the Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 73, in which Bollas describes these unconscious contents as "the unthought known" and suggests that, under certain kinds of pressure, they will "split off" from the subject. He cites a clinical example of a patient whose rage at and need for his parents split off so that he could present to them the af-

fability that he knew they would reward. These feelings reemerged much later in analysis.

36. See Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 85–86.

37. See Judith Schneid Lewis, *In the Family Way* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1986), 124. Lewis provides substantial and detailed documentation based on the biographies of fifty aristocratic women. Another valuable source for this period is Jacques Gélis's *History of Childbirth* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1991).

# Practicing Cultural Disruptions: Gay and Lesbian Representation and Sexuality

*Jill Dolan*

## *Preface for the New Edition*

“Practicing Cultural Disruptions” was written over ten years ago, when the politics of the United States and of gay and lesbian culture were markedly different. As I review the essay, I find myself wondering not only at the historical sea change we’ve since experienced (or suffered), but also at my own personal change of political values and theoretical concerns. If my basic argument in this essay was that representing explicit gay and lesbian sexual practice offers the most transgressive example of activism through performance, at this remove I can no longer say with certainty that I agree with myself. I used *transgressive* a lot in my scholarship in the early 1990s; I have noticed that now, in the early twenty-first century, the word *progressive* fits more easily into my worldview. I’m not sure if this is my age speaking (that is, the difference between myself at thirty-five years old and myself at forty-five), and I certainly won’t generalize that everyone becomes less concerned with transgression once they get older. My work always announces my most radical ideas; my own history dictated that my scholarship became, at certain points of my life, the site of rebellions I had never staged elsewhere. My scholarship is a place to imagine, to work out the “what if” scenarios that are the stuff of theater and performance, as well as of politics and ideas.

I find that my own commitments have moved elsewhere from those expressed in this essay, away from goading transgressors on to extremes of queer outlaw behavior, and closer, I’m afraid, toward what I condemn in my argument as “assimilative” strategies. Of course, what “assimilative” or “transgressive” means can only be read in context, like any piece of representation, whose meaning is never secure, but always changing, shifting, held up for debate and dissent. I am no longer sure that successful transgression is possible, in a world that works so hard to condemn and contain it. The military state—which includes the United States, after September 11, 2001—tolerates performative political rebellions like antiglobalization demonstrations as little as the public sphere accepts publicly funded unconventional cultural representations. Samuel Delaney, in his book *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*, describes how the Giuliani administration in New York City destroyed the gay male sexual culture that thrived in the porn theaters and sex shops along Forty-second Street, replacing them with whitewashed Disney stores, safe mainstream theaters and cinema multiplexes, and national chain stores peddling corporate brands.<sup>1</sup>



Through Delaney's personal and historical work, and the political and theoretical work of writers like Michael Warner, groups like Sex Panic, and other academic/activist scholars and organizations, the battle to support thriving, visible representations of sexual diversity and antiassimilationist sexual practice has moved literally into the streets. Sexual outlaws—particularly queer men—don't always stage open political protests, but perform public acts of disregard for dominant morality by having sex in parks and streets and bars and baths, once again.<sup>2</sup> The arguments of these now "queer" (as opposed to "gay" or "lesbian") theorist/activists in some ways take up the case for explicit sexual visibility that I make in "Practicing Cultural Disruptions."

In 1990, contemplating how to transgress dominant values, I countered "mainstream" morals with what I thought I knew as "gay and lesbian community standards" to build my argument for the efficacy of flaunting live representations of outlawed sexual practice. Now, I wouldn't presume to think this amorphous queer community holds a common standard of sexual behavior. How sex should be practiced and expressed has been debated since the first homophile organizations formed in the 1950s, deciding to build a discourse of sameness that they hoped would absorb gay men and lesbians into dominant cultural life.<sup>3</sup> Stonewall allowed the "deviants"—the drag queens, bar queens, bar dykes—to rewrite gay and lesbian political mission statements, boasting of their difference from the heterosexual norm. Even now, more than thirty years after Stonewall, the "national queer community" is a mythical site of discursive struggle. Competing nonprofits like the Human Rights Campaign or the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force presume to represent its widest interests; media and political commentators (mostly conservative) circulate false, if convenient, notions of a universalized queer "agenda."<sup>4</sup> But queer community is much more varied and more often local than national, determined by the vagaries of geography, of race and class, of degrees of access to a queer public sphere and its attendant, various cultural expressions. Reading back, I now find it rather bold and naive that I assumed gay and lesbian standards for representations of sexual practice would inevitably be more permissive and transgressive.

Pornography, which I valorize in this essay, remains an excessive site for explicit sexual display, a representation over which United States culture vociferously, even viciously, fights. This battle has more recently focused on the Internet, as Congress debates how best to protect children from representations of unbridled adult sexuality, and how to stop child pornography from proliferating unchecked. In some ways, these conservative legislators argue from the same basic premise I embrace here: that viewing pornography causes action. While I insist such action would productively upset the appellation of dominant cultural proscriptions about sexuality, conservative commentators see porn as a prescription for perversion and deviance that will erode the true moral fabric of American life. Maybe we are arguing the same effect, from different political directions. I have never thought of myself as someone who believes representation

directly incites action; that, for example, because some adolescents who watch stunt people take stupid risks on reality shows go out and repeat them, encouraged by their idealization on television, these shows should be banned. But I do argue in this essay that staging explicit representations of marginalized sexual practices in performance could incite direct cultural change. I still trust the social efficacy of performance; I still consider performance a place to show what too often is not seen or imagined or imaged elsewhere. But I now believe that social change happens by accretion, in slow, attenuated ways that are difficult to measure without the long view of history. Likewise, I am less convinced that the shock value of explicit, live pornography provides the most widely useful model for changing dominant ethics, or that embodying upsetting new practices always offers the fastest way to instantiate a new, more flexible public morality.

At the same time, queer performance will always shock those who have never seen or contemplated alternative sexual practices or alternative emotional and affective lives. Queer performance remains vulnerable to those same definitions of dominant "community standards" that have only been more restrictively defined since the 1980s and 1990s. The damage done by the National Endowment for the Arts debacle changed the terms of this work, making artists a bit more watchful of where they perform, for whom, and how. Holly Hughes, for example, was touring *Preaching to the Perverted*, a retrospective memoir about her experiences as a national pariah, in 2000 and 2001, ten years after her horrid betrayal by the federal government. At the same time, Tim Miller, although still unveiling his queer body as a sign of both his self-aestheticism and his politics, was touring *Glory Hole*, a personal/political performance about U.S. immigration policies that forbid international queer couples from staying together after the visitor's visa runs out. In 2002, Miller decided to leave Los Angeles for London, to be able to continue his long-term relationship with his Australian partner.<sup>5</sup>

Peggy Shaw and Lois Weaver, whom I chide in this essay for what I then considered their assimilationist politics in *Anniversary Waltz*, have in fact redefined and complicated their domestic situation with a transatlantic commute and have opened their performance partnership to both solo work and collaborations with other queer performers. Their piece, *It's a Small House But We Live in it Always*, is a melancholy, ambivalent examination of relational power dynamics and the long-term costs, as well as benefits, of sustaining a sexual and affective partnership. *Anniversary Waltz* might have been more radical than I gave it credit for in 1990, because at least it camped up the conventions of marriage instead of valorizing them, as the gay and lesbian political movement toward marriage rights would do by the mid-1990s (advocacy work that continues in the new century).

Whether or not they would marry, given the civic right, more and more white lesbian couples seem to want to be soccer moms, changing the face of lesbian communities with their attention to childcare, schooling, and other family matters. Who would have thought, ten years ago, that motherhood would be a more important political issue for lesbians than

the right to visible, diverse, explicit sexual practices (even “sexpert” Susie Bright is now a mother).<sup>6</sup> These categories—of “mother” and “sex radical”—are not necessarily contradictory, although they might be in the cultural imagination. I am curious (perhaps even wary) of what all of this child rearing will mean for lesbian politics. I did think that Rosie O’Donnell’s public coming out in 2001 as America’s exemplary lesbian adoptive mother was an activist strategy, since adoption rights for gay and lesbian couples, or for queer men and women leaving straight marriages who want to secure visitation rights or custody of their children, remain contested in American politics, leaving queer parents frighteningly vulnerable.

Although I now have my doubts about my basic position in “Practicing Cultural Disruptions,” I still agree with parts of my argument. bell hooks’s notion of identity as a performative “doing,” rather than an ontological “being,” remains persuasive to me, and useful in thinking about queer performance practices. Although I write here that “most representations of lesbian and gay sexuality remain mired in realist images of lifestyle and identity that fail to exceed the heterosexual frame,” it is remarkable that queers have managed to move into a public representational frame at all. The exploits of Ellen DeGeneres and Anne Heche, and Melissa Etheridge and Julie Cypher, while just as tabloid tawdry as the exploits of Bill and Hillary, at least found a place in U.S. public culture, in ways that make familiar and (for better or worse) perhaps less deviant the complications of queer lives. So Anne and Julie returned to men; their choices, irritating as they might be for those who want to keep the queer ranks tight, make their lives examples of those performative “doings” of identity. The film *Kissing Jessica Stein* (2001), although finally only liberal in its exploration of a straight woman’s experiment with lesbian sexual practice, still means something, as it garners good reviews and delighted word of mouth from straight and queer viewers. In its own way, it too explores lesbian identity as a “doing” rather than a “being.” The girl finally returns to the guy, but her lesbian relationship isn’t erased by her heterosexual choice. None of these representations, regardless of how one reads them politically, were available in the early 1990s, when it seemed to me that the only way for queers to claim public space was by transgressing it with bold explicitness, rather than being absorbed by it progressively (in the temporal and political senses of that word).

In queer and feminist cultures—rather than the celebrity culture in which television and music and movie stars and fictional characters play out their comings out and breaking ups—butch-femme representations and practices have also changed in the last decade, in ways that make “Practicing Cultural Disruptions” read differently. The rift between lesbian “cultural feminists”—those who criticized butch-femme as imitating male-identified heterosexual models and who generally railed against pornography of all kinds—and those proporn, “prosex,” queer-identified feminists and lesbians, has ceased to be the main attraction of feminist or queer media or discourse. The divisions among feminists (which I once contributed to reifying in my application to performance of the “liberal,

cultural, materialist" taxonomy) seem less useful to employ now, since the complications of culture and politics make those three categories parsed, small, and finally only descriptive rather than proscriptive.<sup>7</sup> When lesbian cultural feminism was the dominant ideology in Madison, Wisconsin, in 1989, the acts at the Variety Show *were* transgressive, and dykes who practiced S-M or other unconventional sex and publicly performed butch-femme or other nontraditional gender identities were resolutely marginalized. Performing in the Variety Show, these dyke outcasts took over a public space that was hegemonic in its own cultural feminist or essentialist way. I can only speculate, since again, queer communities are ideologically and politically and culturally diverse all over this country and this world, but I have a feeling that now, those acts would be received as reiterations of more commonly understood and accepted possibilities for sexual expression and practice.

Butch-femme also resonates differently now that the transgender movement has become more visible and vocal. The spectrum of gender and sexual practices has expanded exponentially, as transgender rights activists articulate still more ways of practicing the doings of identity.<sup>8</sup> Butch-femme categories bleed together as well as farther apart, newly inflected by more and more possibilities for cultural and subcultural expression. Peggy Shaw's performances *Menopausal Gentleman* and *To My Chagrin* both complicate her status as a butch icon of queer performance by describing her female hormonal changes and her relationship with her biracial grandson.<sup>9</sup> The first embodies all the contradictions of her physical and performative identities, as well as the grief and losses of aging, while the second inhabits a space in which the queer family is as diverse as the beating of each person's heart (most eloquently described when Shaw opens her man's shirt and a videotape of her grandson playing is projected over her bare breasts).

Corporate culture and transnational capitalism, too, have bound butch-femme style and queer representations to dominant fashion, as more and mainstream images appropriate what were once subcultural signs legible only to those who knew how to read them. Now, it seems every *Sunday New York Times Magazine* runs a not so ambiguous queer ad (usually with women). Perhaps this co-optation bodes evil, signaling the inability of subcultures to remain transgressive or dissenting for long, as Dick Hebdige predicted in the early 1980s.<sup>10</sup> Perhaps these images are only prurient. Or perhaps this apparent visibility, as Judith Butler and Peggy Phelan might argue, makes queers more vulnerable to repressive state apparatuses.<sup>11</sup> I can only think that this current state of representational affairs cuts both ways, that while we regret the siphoning off of their transgressive potential, reading these signs as somehow progressive, rather than only assimilative, might not be such a bad thing.

If I argued in this essay for explicit visibility, perhaps the fact that queerness seeped into national advertising provided an unexpected site in which to imagine gay and lesbian desire, however white and upper class its representations in those forums. HBO programmed African

American lesbian filmmaker Cheryl Dunye's prison film about incarcerated women, *Stranger Inside*, in 2001, with its often cross-race, explicitly sexual scenes between women; the network's series, *Six Feet Under*, too, often represented explicit (and cross-race, if middle-class) queer sex. I don't mean to take a liberal turn here by suggesting in a very old-fashioned critical way that the proliferation of queer images on television and in film and performance is only good. But "Practicing Cultural Disruptions" argues for the kind of explicit visibility that's become surprisingly more available to a wider, more varied public audience, despite the condemnation it receives from conservative commentators.

Performance, though, perhaps because of the constraints of liveness, lags a bit behind in proliferating more explicit queer practices.<sup>12</sup> My argument in this essay about the formal constraints of realism, with its insistence on romance and eroticism over more gritty queer sex, still rings true for me. In theatrical representation or performance, too many queer plays, especially those by or about lesbians, remain tied to realist formulas in which their heroines fall into romantic love that somehow precludes representations of sexual practice. Diana Son's *Stop Kiss*, for instance, although formally interesting with its flashback and forward structure, still punishes its straight women leads for daring to kiss in public as they finally consummate their flirtation and what had been their platonic intimacy.<sup>13</sup> (At least in *Kissing Jessica Stein*, the women get hurt only emotionally, not physically, for their lesbian tryst.) The play ends by suggesting that Sara and Callie's relationship will now be one of loving caretaking and caregiving, as they fight to stay together over the claims of the physically damaged woman's family and her erstwhile boyfriend. Sara's socially inflicted disability, in *Stop Kiss*, implies that once again, sexual practice is exiled from lesbian experience in representation (although of course disability rights activists or scholars would find much to critique in such a nonsexualized portrayal of a disabled woman).

Only Paula Vogel, who won a well-deserved Pulitzer Prize for *How I Learned to Drive*, risks formal and sexual experimentation, in plays like *And Baby Makes Seven* and *Hot 'n' Throbbing*.<sup>14</sup> That critics—feminist and otherwise—seem flummoxed by Vogel's plays is a healthy indication of their potential to critique sexual and gender norms. In performance, perhaps the closeness of performers to spectators, and that too real sweat of the actors' bodies, requires formal experimentation and a leap out of the realist frame to represent explicit sexual practices, into forms that make spectators aesthetically, as well as politically, uncomfortable in productive ways. On the other hand, as Janelle Reinelt points out, perhaps the charge of the natural, "fleshly body" has been reduced by its wider availability in other mediatized visual forms, such as television, film, and the internet, which make sexual practices appear "naturalized," rather than shocking, when they are represented on live bodies.<sup>15</sup>

Finally, in trying to reframe "Practicing Cultural Disruptions" for a twenty-first-century readership, I have to say that the essay still prods me to sharply define the terms on which I would like to see queer performance

make its political and aesthetic claims on public life. If I have become too domesticated by my own life trajectory to completely believe in my earlier arguments about transgression, “Practicing Cultural Disruptions” still challenges me to think about how lesbian and queer performance can tell “us” (and I mean that in the most exclusive and inclusive human ways, simultaneously) something different about how our material, emotional, and sexual lives might be led. I still believe we need a “theory of reception based very materially . . . on an invitation to participate in the seduction of alternative locations of desire”; I just no longer believe that such a goal is only accessible through the explicit excess of pornographic performance.<sup>16</sup>

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Consider these scenarios, circa 1989:

1. At an art gallery and performance space in downtown Milwaukee, a long table at the entryway is set with colorful mints and peanuts and pink napkins decorated with black-lined hearts and flowers that announce, “Happy Anniversary Peggy and Lois.” The festive tone announces a real anniversary framed as a performance called *Anniversary Waltz*, which celebrates the ten-year relationship of Peggy Shaw and Lois Weaver, cofounders with Deborah Margolin of the lesbian and feminist performance troupe Split Britches. *Anniversary Waltz* combines bits of classic Split Britches performances with a smattering of new material, held together with vaudevillian patter about relationships. The piece purports to offer a look at lesbian longevity; instead, although it shifts through the lesbian-specific iconography of butch-femme relationships, it constructs an innocuous glimpse into a more generic notion of coupleness.
2. Theatre X, also in Milwaukee, mounts a production of Robert Chesley’s *Jerker, or the Helping Hand*, a play whose structuring device is pornographic phone sex between two gay men, one of whom eventually dies of AIDS. The text describes scenes of non-conventional sexual fantasy that inspire both men to masturbate. But the performers never enact the sexual fantasies or the masturbation indicated by the text. Their bodies remain clothed and untouched, as their encounters move from completely anonymous, graphically sexual calls, to a relational intimacy based on knowledge of each other’s voices and yearnings.
3. The fourth annual Lesbian Variety Show in Madison, Wisconsin, is disrupted by two acts that employ butch-femme and sado-masochistic iconography. In the context of a mostly lesbian cultural feminist celebration of femaleness, actions that represent taboo sexual practice intrude on the Variety Show’s worship of gender difference.<sup>17</sup> The transgressive performances are decried in the local feminist press as representations of violence against women, and guidelines are drawn up to guard against the inclusion of such images in next year’s show.

In the cultural and political climate of the 1990s, what do gay and lesbian representations like these mean? Do their meanings read as assimilative or transgressive, now that dominant regimes of power and knowledge are once again branding homosexual representations as pornographic and obscene? Guidelines to artists seeking to receive or keep their funding, recently released by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), rely on the Supreme Court's 1973 definition of obscenity in the *Miller v. California* decision. Obscenity is defined as work that (1) the "average person, applying contemporary community standards, would find appeals to the prurient interest"; (2) that "depicts or describes sexual conduct in a patently offensive way," particularly—according to the NEA—homoerotic and sadomasochistic activities; and (3) "lacks serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value."<sup>18</sup>

This definition relies on the commonsense knowledge of a generic viewer to determine obscenity. Historically, this viewer most resembles the white, heterosexual, male senator from North Carolina, Jesse Helms, whose outcry over the Robert Mapplethorpe and Andres Serrano exhibits prompted that the new language of censorship be attached to all of the NEA's funding awards.<sup>19</sup> The determination of behavior considered "patently offensive" is based on the standards of his dominant cultural community. If gay or lesbian community standards were applied to test obscenity, and if the assumed spectator of artistic work were a lesbian or gay man, commonsense connotations of prurience would certainly shift.<sup>20</sup>

But as the feminist antiporn movement exemplifies, the radicalism of such a shift cannot always be assumed. Some commentators even point to "the complicity of the anti-pornography movement in the larger moral panic" that, in part, has prompted the renewed vigilance over obscenity.<sup>21</sup> As Daphne Read notes presciently, "It seems reasonable to fear that new legislation [developed by Catharine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin] aimed at censoring or regulating pornography might be used more broadly to repress gays and lesbians, artists, and others . . . in spite of a feminist presence in the political process."<sup>22</sup>

Foucault suggests that throughout history, what appears to be the repression of sexuality actually proliferates different ways in which it enters discourse, some of which resist hegemonic power.<sup>23</sup> Perhaps the regressive outlawing of gay and lesbian images as prurient and obscene will prompt the reradicalization of their meaning effects in the 1990s. Perhaps representations of gay and lesbian sexuality will regain their potential to disrupt hegemonic meanings by invoking the excess of sexual practice, after a brief period of neutralizing assimilation into the dominant discourse on sexuality as alternative lifestyles and identities.

The furious discussion promoted by the congressional compromise measure to Helms's proposed amendment to the NEA appropriations bill is focused on representations of bodies, desire, and spectatorial pleasure that transgress the boundaries of white heterosexual propriety. For instance, Mapplethorpe's pleasurable citing/sighting of black male bodies in classically sculpted poses, often with penises erect, implies sexual practices

anathema to the virulently racist and homophobic likes of Senator Helms. By offering homosexual and cross-racial visual pleasure in flesh, they visually flaunt a rejection of compulsory white heterosexual practice.<sup>24</sup> Exhibited in galleries and museums, the photographs take public representational space to image eroticized organs that simply by virtue of being seen, contest dominant cultural regimes of knowledge and power about sexuality and race.

The possibility for transgression in such representations lies in the hint of sexual practice and seduction they envision, not in the gay lifestyle to which they refer, which superficially has come to resemble the quotidian routines of heterosexual relationships. Teresa de Lauretis, writing on lesbian representation, cautions that it is exceedingly difficult to alter the "standard of vision, the frame of reference of visibility, of *what can be seen*," since "the conventions of seeing, and the relations of desire and meaning in spectatorship, [remain] partially anchored or contained by a frame of visibility that is still heterosexual."<sup>25</sup> As a result, most representations of lesbian and gay sexuality remain mired in realist images of lifestyle and identity that fail to exceed the heterosexual frame.

The representation of sex politics as lifestyle, prompted partly by the "personal is political" slogan of the early white feminist movement, and more recently by transnational capitalism, has limited efficacy in a culture in which lifestyles are so easily assimilated, commodified, and neutralized by dominant ideology. Black feminist theorist bell hooks suggests that the emphasis on identity and lifestyle in white feminism, for example, has contributed to the movement's elitism and defused its ability to move social discourse. "To emphasize . . . engagement with feminist struggle as political commitment," hooks says, "we could avoid using the phrase 'I am a feminist' (a linguistic structure designed to refer to some personal aspect of identity and self-definition) and could state 'I advocate feminism.'"<sup>26</sup>

Saying, "I am a lesbian" has been validated in cultural feminist discourse as speech that breaks the silence of lesbian existence under heterosexual hegemony. But in the 1970s and 1980s, lesbianism's too rigid attachment to an identity politics of gender by terms such as "woman-identification" recloseted active sexual practice.<sup>27</sup> Cultural feminism reified same-sex female relationships as a new and better version of the heterosexual family, a claim that has limited potential for changing the dominant discourse on how sexuality organizes culture and experience.<sup>28</sup> *Anniversary Waltz*, for example, is ultimately an assimilationist lesbian text because of its emphasis on romance and familial relations rather than sexual ones.<sup>29</sup>

A somewhat idealized lesbian family anchors the text's narrative of the vicissitudes of Weaver and Shaw's relationship—their partnership is inscribed as a marriage, from the pink table napkins on display in the lobby to textual references to the now twenty-year-old daughter the couple raised. Although Weaver and Shaw mock the conventions of heterosexual marriage by "lesbianizing" the familiar, deprecatory popular cultural pat-



ter about such relationships, their own partnership, though played as camp, remains the somewhat romanticized center of the text.

When they began performing together in the early 1980s Weaver's and Shaw's personal and performative butch-femme role-playing lent the couple a certain notoriety.<sup>30</sup> The antisex rhetoric of cultural feminism made their butch-femme display of sexual possibilities and practice—informed by what appeared to be an appropriation of heterosexual and male/female gender roles—a transgressive representation in feminist and mainstream contexts.<sup>31</sup> Early productions at the WOW Cafe, where Split Britches primarily performed, were often decried in feminist media as politically regressive because they employed butch-femme iconography and role-playing.

But in *Anniversary Waltz*, Weaver and Shaw play with butch-femme iconography and roles only by trading the costumes of gender evenly between them. As the piece progresses through bits of the couple's performative and personal history, they peel off layers of costuming to reveal the signs of the opposite role underneath. Their manipulation of butch-femme solely as clothing moves it away from the transgressions of its historical signification. Rather than referring to sexual practice, like the Mapplethorpe photographs, the images that comprise *Anniversary Waltz* focus resolutely on lesbian lifestyles. Under the rubric of a long-term relationship the transgressive difference of alternative forms of lesbian sexuality once represented by the complexity of butch-femme drops out. Its costumes become empty sets of gendered clothing without referents to sexual practice or more than the most polite, nostalgic evidence of desire.

Extending hooks's analogy to "I practice lesbian sex" (in all its varieties) rather than "I am a lesbian" would initiate a discourse that might displace the emphasis on lifestyles and relationships, and break open the sanctimonious strictures of politically correct lesbian identifications. A renewed focus on marginalized sex acts, instead of romantic, familial relationships, might reassert the transgressive quality of lesbians who enter the public sphere as representations. De Lauretis's cautionary analysis ends by apparently suggesting that only butch-femme lesbians can enter, together, the heterosexual frame of vision.<sup>32</sup> Making sexual practice blatantly visible on gendered bodies that wear this deconstruction of compulsory heterosexuality might still be a productively alienating act.<sup>33</sup>

Such a move might indicate a return to historical definitions of "deviant" sexuality as acts, rather than people. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, for instance, writes that in histories of sexual taxonomy, "the proscription of particular *acts* called 'sodomy' (acts that might be performed by anybody), [were] displaced after the late nineteenth century by the definition of particular kinds of *persons*, specifically 'homosexuals.'"<sup>34</sup> Emphasizing the individual person over sexual acts or practice available for performance by *any body* inscribes homosexuality and lesbianism as biologically essentialized problems of lifestyle, rather than as social practices that comprise sex acts accomplished with agency differently through history.<sup>35</sup>

The choice of sex acts is what marks gay and lesbian bodies as

different agents within history. Judith Butler proposes, "As an intentionally organized materiality, the body is always an embodying of possibilities both conditioned and circumscribed by historical convention. . . . the body is a historical situation . . . a manner of doing, dramatizing, and *reproducing* a historical situation."<sup>36</sup> In the 1950s, for example, lesbian bodies coded with butch-femme iconography represented a transgressive accomplishment—the naming and practice of lesbian desire in a violently heterosexist climate. Lesbians who represented themselves as butch-femme in the 1970s bore traces of its courageous history, as they refused to retreat to the closet built by feminism. Even lesbian bodies of the 1980s and 1990s, when visible in representation, retain traces of the history of butch-femme resistance to dominant ideology that can still be accessed as transgressive. The disruption it symbolized can be realized by actively representing the desire and sexual practice to which butch-femme once referred. As Joan Nestle remarks, "For gay people, history is a place where the body carries its own story."<sup>37</sup>

The Mapplethorpe debacle indicates that speaking homo or lesbian sex, as opposed to identity, in public forums is still transgressive enough to activate the machinery of state power. Even if, as Foucault cautions, such transgressions do not exceed the discourse on sexuality but only set the poles of one extreme, the sex practice to which they refer contests the hegemonic principles of sexual difference that heterosexuality reifies. Representations of sexual practice that deviate from heterosexual acts threaten pornographic excess at sites accustomed to inscribing sex only as erotic, romantic love according to a heterosexual model.

In her book on hard-core film pornography, Linda Williams offers a useful working definition of pornography as "the visual (and sometimes aural) representation of living, moving bodies engaged in explicit, usually unfaked, sexual acts with a primary intent of arousing viewers."<sup>38</sup> Making visible gay male or lesbian bodies in motion, engaged in sex acts, is perhaps one radical way to disrupt dominant cultural discourse on sexuality and gender. The "primary intent of arousing viewers" might inaugurate a theory of reception based very materially—instead of psychoanalytically—on an invitation to participate in the seduction of alternative locations of desire.

It could be argued, then, that representing any sex act publicly is transgressive. Williams, in fact, argues that explicitness will demystify what Foucault calls the transcendent secret of sex. I agree, and intend to suggest that imaging gay and lesbian sex in the public sphere, rather than imagining it in the private, moves toward Foucault's notion of a different economy of bodies and pleasure.<sup>39</sup>

Some performance forms and contexts, however, seem more capable than others of accomplishing the "making seen" of such sexual practice. Homosexuality's assertion of the same can hardly be accommodated in bourgeois realism, for example, which asserts moral and sexual bipolarity—right/wrong, good/bad, and male/female—and maintains heterosexual difference as its organizing principle.<sup>40</sup> In his article on dramatiz-

ing gay male history, John Clum organizes his textual explications by designating certain plays as either “outside/heterosexual” or “inside/homosexual” perspectives on gay subject matter.<sup>41</sup> But the “inside” gay male texts in Clum’s analysis that use realism to inscribe their heroic lovers into discourse exemplify the dominant culture’s inability to see or to image the marginalized sexual practice that at least partly girds a definition of homosexual identity. Clum’s discomfort with defining homosexual identity solely as sexual practice, signaled by his article’s title (“A Culture that Isn’t Just Sexual”), leads him to argue in favor of the representation of gay lifestyles rather than gay sex.

Nestle suggests the reverse, insisting that for gay men and lesbians, “Being a sexual people is our gift to the world.”<sup>42</sup> But traditional theatrical forms tend to work structurally to keep the sexual gifts of gay and lesbian subjects invisible. Even in the texts Clum examines as favorably exploring gay male identity, realism approves the male lovers’ sexuality as moral and right because it is romantic, not physical, and usually rewards their celibacy with death. There’s a move in these “inside” texts toward the “outside” perspective, which legislates that sexuality be heterosexuality or not be imaged at all.

For example, in the incipient realism, for example, of Martin Sherman’s *Bent* (1979) and Robert Chesley’s *Jerker*, both of which Clum discusses in his article, sex is exiled to a nonphysical plane.<sup>43</sup> *Bent* opens on the day after, the postcarnal denouement of Max’s one-night stand with a leather-clad gestapo flunky. Their evening of anonymous sex, replete with intimations of sadomasochistic (S-M) play, is implicitly punished when *Schutzstaffel* (SS) troops storm Max’s apartment. The wilder side of gay male sex is tinged with amorality by its quick equation with Nazi terror.

The physicality of sex at least referred to in the first scene is then elided situationally by the play’s content. Once Max is interred in a camp, he and Horst, the gay man he meets there, are constrained to verbal sex, the possibility of physical union eternally deferred by the watchful eyes of the guards. The men’s surreptitious exchanges serve as a trope for the way realism operates on marginalized sexuality. Under the eyes of the dominant culture, gay male sex must be expressed furtively, described but not performed, and must culminate in orgasms of affirming emotional love rather than physical transport—that is, erotics rather than pornography.

Williams suggests that the distinction between erotics and pornography—often posed by both dominant culture executors like the Meese Commission, as well as by antiporn feminists, who too frequently travel similar ideological terrain—is loaded with moralizing that stifles a more productive inquiry into the representation of sex:

The very notion of erotica as “good,” clean, non-explicit representations of sexual pleasure in opposition to dirty, explicit pornographic ones is false. . . . The one emphasizes desire, the other satisfaction. Depending on who is looking, both can appear dirty, perverse, or

too explicit. . . . We need to see pornography in all its naked explicitness if we are to speak frankly about sexual power and pleasure and if we are to demystify sex.<sup>44</sup>

Privileging erotica over pornography is particularly troubling in gay and lesbian representations, since the nonexplicitness of erotica continues to mask the difference of gay and lesbian sex. Likewise, realism helps formally to repress references to active sex, cloaking bodies and pleasure under a domestic guise of romantic propriety. Pornography exceeds realism by lifting the cloak to reveal the action; its explicitness offers material investigations into the discourses of power, as well as pleasure.

Chesley's *Jerker*, since it is less realist than *Bent* at the outset and marks itself as explicitly pornographic, at first holds out potential to represent transgressive sexual practice in a radical way. *Jerker, or the Helping Hand*, is subtitled *A Pornographic Elegy with Redeeming Social Value and a Hymn to the Queer Men of San Francisco in Twenty Telephone Calls, Many of Them Dirty*. First performed in 1986, the text is marked by the constrained sexuality of a community plagued by AIDS. The play confines its graphic descriptions of sexual practice to literally disembodied phone sex between two gay men, never performing their fantasies to set in motion the pornography of desiring, visible, moving homosexual bodies. Although they never meet, Bert and J.R. fall in love over the phone shortly before Bert dies of AIDS. The move toward an ill-fated romance disqualifies *Jerker* as pornography, because as Williams says, paraphrasing Susan Sontag, porn is never primarily about the formation of a couple.<sup>45</sup>

*Jerker's* subversive potential lies in the ten or so phone calls before its descent into empathy for the loving and the dead. The phone calls begin as completely anonymous and aggressively sexual, almost clinical descriptions of sometimes sadomasochistic sex play. But the calls progress to an intimacy that makes the sex scenes they describe emotional, erotic, and relational, rather than pornographic. The fantasies culminate in J.R.'s fairy tale about three men who simply sleep together and don't have sex at all.

Theatre X's 1989 production of *Jerker* chose several Brechtian techniques to resist the text's pull toward theatrical and ideological convention. A male narrator was placed at a table behind the bifurcated set, from which he read aloud the stage directions. The directions throughout the published text indicate that the men literally "jerk off," although their erections, given realism's politesse, are carefully hidden under their bedclothes or their underwear. The two actors playing J.R. and Bert for Theatre X were fully clothed through the entire play, and, although they verbally announced their orgasms, they never touched their bodies. Often the performers' actions resisted the instructions read from the text.

Such a Brechtian intervention worked on the representation of gay male sexual practice in several ways. First, it quite literally refused to embody it by maintaining the distance of intellectual description. The fantasies related by J.R. and Bert were relegated even farther from physical inscription in representation because they remained narrative, and even

their orgasmic effects went unimagined. The inversion of the Brechtian *gestus* to nonshowing, nonaction, perhaps exemplified gay male social relations in the age of AIDS—sex relegated to telephone technology and history, imagination and nostalgia, and exiled, still, from representation.

Second, while gay male sex was verbalized in the Theatre X production, by choosing not to visualize it, the production suppressed the transgressions of pornography in favor of erotics and failed to actualize pornography's disruptive potential. Enacting the culminating masturbatory orgasms of *Jerker's* sex fantasies might have been a more radical transgression of the ethical bourgeois performance space, less aesthetic than the critical distance imposed by even the Brechtian frame. The noninteraction of the performers would have adequately maintained the commentary on the isolation of sex bound by AIDS.

Because of its ideological and formal movement away from pornography into erotic realism, *Jerker* fails as a truly radical explication of gay male representations of sexual practice. But few lesbian texts come to mind that at least match *Jerker's* frank descriptions of sex. The characters in Jane Chambers's and Sarah Dreher's realist plays, for instance, fall in and out of romantic love, but they rarely engage in anything more sexual than a hug or a kiss.<sup>46</sup>

Lesbian sexual practice remains repressed in these plays by the exigencies of propriety—both of the dominant culture and of the lesbian cultural feminist discourse on sexuality. The distinction in lesbian cultural feminism between erotics and pornography is marked by the iconographic representation of power on female bodies. Hegemonic antiporn feminism so successfully infiltrated lesbian discourse in the 1980s that even erotica has been flattened out and carefully monitored for any evidence of politically incorrect sex practice. As Foucault might observe, however, such regimes of power seem inevitably to breed resistance. The 1980s also saw the “implantation of perversions” within lesbian communities.<sup>47</sup> The new visibility of sadomasochistic practices and representational styles seemed to replace butch-femme as the location of cultural feminist anxiety over imagining or imaging sexual practice between women.

But while “avant-garde” lesbians begin to textualize practices that cultural feminism still decries as pornographic, representing S-M as sexual style is still read as a violent invasion of lesbian cultural feminist erotic images. The fourth annual Lesbian Variety Show in Madison, Wisconsin, exemplified the friction between these opposing discourses. The Variety Show is a product of the city's lesbian cultural feminist community, whose demography is best generalized as young, middle-class, and white. In 1989 the show's preferred representations of the eroticized feminine body were disrupted by the intrusion of representations of gender, power, and sex that its context could only inscribe as pornographic.<sup>48</sup>

The first half of the Variety Show presented poets and musicians who crooned lesbian love verse in repetitive rhythms and equally repetitive chords. The cultural feminist-inspired ethos of “woman spirit” hung in the air like a musky mist, and spectators generally applauded the acts

of empowering verbalization and sometimes interpretive movement that celebrated the erotics of femininity.<sup>49</sup>

Two back-to-back acts in the second half of the show broke the aura. In the first, two women performed a lip-synch and dance routine to the rock song "Push It," by Salt 'n' Peppa. As the song began, one woman entered wearing a black leather vest, jeans, boots, and handcuffs at her waist, lip-synching and snapping her fingers to the beat. The lip-synching liberated this act from the naturalized cultural feminist representational economy in which the Variety Show had been trading, into a gay male performance tradition in which dressing up in gender roles and impersonating singers has a long subcultural history.<sup>50</sup> Suddenly, the Variety Show's feminine aesthetic was disrupted by a large gay woman in butch clothing, furiously moving her lips to a rock song in a context that idealized soulful folk as its most appropriate cultural expression.

Rather than Weaver and Shaw's trading of gendered clothing, this act used its leather and lace to tease out the seduction of butch-femme as sexual roles. When the first woman's partner entered the stage, the butch-femme dynamic and all of its class connotations were secured. The second woman wore high-heeled black shoes, fishnet stockings, and only pasties on her breasts. She danced into the space to seduce the first woman, and the two acted out the song in a way that referred to sexual practice as it had not been before during the long evening. The sheer display of their bodies, layered with butch-femme and vaguely S-M iconography, inscribed the act within bar dyke culture, outside the hegemonic meanings of middle-class white feminism.

The next act outdid the transgressions of the first. In a much more stylized performance that quoted the conventions of bodybuilding contests as well as gay lip-synch spectacles, two women power lifters performed an interpretation of Barbara Streisand's song "Prisoner." The pun was intended, since the act's content included relatively explicit references to S-M.

As in the first act, bodies were present here in full force, clearly sexualized and also insistently gendered, an admission of difference that the staunchly feminine show could not contain. At the song's open, one woman stood facing the spectators with her arms crossed over her bare chest, wearing black jeans, black boots, a black watchcap, and mirrored sunglasses. As the Streisand song began, she flexed her well-defined muscles in a display that flattered her V-shaped body. Uncrossing her arms revealed her breasts as small flaps of skin; the practiced, constructed power of her body seemed to have tampered even with her biology. Femininity was startlingly absent.

Her partner, wearing a white tank T-shirt, cut-off jean shorts, and the ubiquitous black boots, knelt at her feet in apparent supplication. The two began a dance of sorts in which they posed and manipulated the power dynamic their bodies described. When the woman in shorts produced a studded collar, which she offered to the woman in the mirrored sunglasses, indicating she would like to wear it, the audience booted loudly,

and the performers broke their severe demeanor and laughed. Once the collar was fastened around the kneeling woman's neck, the one in mirrored sunglasses pulled her into sexualized positions of dominance and submission.

At the song's end, however, the power dynamic abruptly shifted as the kneeling woman rose to her feet and picked up in her arms the woman with mirrored sunglasses, who waved coyly to the audience and was carried off. The abrupt shift seemed to intend parody and also, for those willing to read it, offered a political meaning about the fluidity of power positions in sex and perhaps in gendered relationships and representation as well.

This act proved a radical disruption of a safely eroticized female space, by transgressors who performed sexual seduction through a complex assumption and deconstruction of gender roles inflected with power. For some lesbian spectators, myself included, the scene was clever and seductive, a reference to the "variety" of lesbian sexual practice. The performers' obvious self-consciousness seemed to intend the kind of playful discussion about lesbian sexual potential launched by proponents like Susie Bright. But the scene has been described in the Madison radical feminist press as a pornographic act of violence against women. Newspapers for months after the event carried emotional outpourings that testified to the suffering this act caused. Relying on what Williams calls "naive realism," spectators claimed the images of so-called violence actually caused violence to be inflicted.<sup>51</sup>

As Williams suggests, after Walter Kendrick, pornography is really only defined by its censorship.<sup>52</sup> While Jesse Helms legislates against publicly funded displays of gay male sexuality in representation, the lesbian cultural feminist community perpetrates its own censorship by legislating the correct representations of lesbian sex. Imaging the explicit relationship between power, gender, and sex offends cultural feminist propriety.

Writing about sadomasochistic heterosexual pornography, Williams comments that in art "real sex, like real death, is unaesthetic and therefore out of place."<sup>53</sup> Because gay male or lesbian sex is completely out of place—unimaged, unimagined, invisible—in traditional aesthetic contexts, the most transgressive act at this historical moment would be representing it to excess, in dominant and marginalized reception communities. The explicitness of pornography seems the most constructive choice for practicing cultural disruptions.<sup>54</sup>

## NOTES

1. Samuel Delaney, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* (New York: New York University Press, 1999).

2. See, for example, Michael Warner, *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life* (New York: Free Press, 1999); Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, "Sex in Public," in Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2002), 187–208. For alternative arguments about public sex practices,

see Gabriel Rotello, *Sexual Ecology: AIDS and the Destiny of Gay Men* (New York: Dutton, 1997); and Michelangelo Signorile, *Life Outside: The Signorile Report on Gay Men: Sex, Drugs, Muscles, and the Passages of Life* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997).

3. For one version of this history, see John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988). See also Lillian Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).

4. For a wonderfully funny explication of the fabricated moral panic about "queer agendas," see Holly Hughes, *Preaching to the Perverted*, unpublished manuscript, discussed in Jill Dolan, "Performance, Utopia, and the 'Utopian Performative,'" *Theatre Journal* 53, no. 3 (2001): 455–79. See also Richard Meyer, "'Have you Heard the One About the Lesbian Who Goes to the Supreme Court?': Holly Hughes and the Case Against Censorship," *Theatre Journal* 52, no. 4 (2000): 543–52.

5. See Tim Miller, *Glory Hole*, in *Body Blows* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002). For a discussion of Miller's life choices and his activism around same-sex immigration rights, see Donna Perlmutter, "About to Say Goodbye, Obstreperous as Ever," *New York Times*, November 17, 2002, sec. 2, p. 31.

6. See Susie Bright's *The Sexual State of the Union* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998) and her website <http://www.susiebright.com>. See also Susie Bright, *Susie Bright's Sexual Reality: A Virtual Sex World Reader* (Pittsburgh: Cleis Press, 1992), and *Susie Sexpert's Lesbian Sex World* (Pittsburgh: Cleis Press, 1990). Bright was one of the first lesbian-feminist activists who publicly claimed the right to sexual variety and experimentation.

7. See Jill Dolan, *The Feminist Spectator as Critic* (1988; reprint, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991).

8. See, for example, Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1998); Leslie Feinberg, *Transgender Warriors* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996); Kate Bornstein, *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women, and the Rest of Us* (New York: Routledge, 1994); and Leslie Feinberg, *Stone Butch Blues* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Firebrand Books, 1993).

9. See Peggy Shaw, *Menopausal Gentleman*, unpaginated, unpublished manuscript, 1997, and *To My Chagrin*, unpublished manuscript, 2001. I'm grateful to Shaw for giving me a copy of these texts. See also Dolan, "Performance, Utopia," for a reading of *Menopausal Gentleman*.

10. See Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (New York: Methuen, 1979).

11. Judith Butler, "Imitation and Gender Insubordination," in *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, ed. Diana Fuss (New York: Routledge, 1991); and Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

12. The exception here might be the proliferation of plays that require gay men to get naked, such as Robert Schrock, *Naked Boys Singing* (see [www.naked-boysinging.com](http://www.naked-boysinging.com)); David Dillon, *Party*, unpublished manuscript, 1992; Terrence McNally, *Love! Valor! Compassion!* (New York: Plume, 1995); Terrence McNally and David Yasbik, *The Full Monty* (New York: Applause, 2002); Simon Morley and David "Friendly" Friend, *Puppetry of the Penis: The Ancient Art of Genital Origami*, [www.puppetryofthepenis.com](http://www.puppetryofthepenis.com); and Mark Ravenhill, *Shopping and Fucking* (London: Methuen, 2002). While these performances aestheticize mostly white male naked men, they remain voyeuristic and titillating, rather than shocking representations of actual sexual practice. *Shopping and Fucking* offers a more graphic representation of queer sex as a weapon of humiliation. Live theater is also willing to indulge straight male (and female) nudity for its voyeuristic value—see, for in-



stance, Stanley Tucci and Edie Falco in the 2002 Broadway revival of McNally's *Frankie and Johnny at the Clare de Lune* and Kathleen Turner and Lorraine Bracco in the 2002 Broadway theatricalization of *The Graduate*.

13. Diana Son, *Stop Kiss*, in *American Theatre* 16, no. 6 (1999): 26–44.

14. Paula Vogel, *How I Learned to Drive*, in *The Mammary Plays* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1998) and *Hot 'n' Throbbing* (New York: Dramatists Play Service, 2000).

15. Janelle G. Reinelt, e-mail to the author, November 25, 2002.

16. See David Savran, "Choices Made and Unmade," *Theater* 31, no. 2 (2001): 89–95, who argues for a "sociology of the theatre" that takes into account the kind of reception practices and modes of production to which I bring attention here.

17. By "cultural feminism," I mean to indicate a strain of feminist ideology and politics sometimes called "radical" or "essentialist," which reifies gender differences and privileges female values as inherently superior to male ones. Although some commentators feel the designation "cultural" is inappropriate, because it allows this brand of feminism apparently to corner the market on culture, Alice Echols's distinction between this more recent strain of feminism and the radical feminism that preceded it in the late 1960s and early 1970s is most persuasive. See Echols, *Daring to be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967–1975* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989).

18. See William H. Honan, "Endowment Tightens Obscenity Rule," *New York Times*, July 11, 1990, B3.

19. For an excellent discussion of the political issues raised by the Mapplethorpe and Serrano exhibits and a chronology of the events surrounding the NEA censorship debates, see Peggy Phelan, "Serrano, Mapplethorpe, the NEA, and You: 'Money Talks,' October 1989," *TDR* 34, no. 1 (1990): 4–15. *American Theatre* continues to detail the controversy over government funding for the arts. For interdisciplinary essays on arts funding controversies in the United States, see also Grant H. Kester, ed., *Art, Activism, and Oppositionality: Essays from "Afterimage"* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1998).

20. For a cogent, poststructuralist feminist explication of the ideological implications of commonsense knowledge, see Chris Weedon, *Feminist Practice and Post-structuralist Theory* (London: Blackwell, 1987), 75–80.

21. Daphne Read, "(De)Constructing Pornography: Feminisms in Conflict," in *Passion and Power: Sexuality in History*, ed. Kathy Peiss and Christina Simmons, with Robert A. Padgug (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), 282.

22. Read, "(De)Constructing Pornography," 281.

23. See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1980).

24. See, for example, Robert Mapplethorpe, *Black Book* (New York: St. Martin's, 1980). See also Kobena Mercer's "Reading Racial Fetishisms: The Photographs of Robert Mapplethorpe," in *Welcome to the Jungle* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 171–220; and Phelan, *Unmarked*.

25. Teresa de Lauretis, "Sexual Indifference and Lesbian Representation," in *Performing Feminisms: Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre*, ed. Sue-Ellen Case (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 33, 35.

26. bell hooks, *From Margin to Center* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), 29.

27. This history of lesbian suppression under both radical and cultural feminism is now well documented. See, for example, Sue-Ellen Case, "Toward a Butch-Femme Aesthetic," in *Making a Spectacle: Feminist Essays on Contemporary Women's Theatre*, ed. Lynda Hart (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1989), 282–99,

as well as her rethinking of her ideas in "Toward a Butch-Feminist Retro-Future," in *Cross-Purposes: Lesbians, Feminists, and the Limits of Alliance*, ed. Dana Heller (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 205–20; and Echols, *Daring to be Bad*. See Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," in *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*, ed. Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell, and Sharon Thompson (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983), 177–205, for the quintessential text on "woman-identified women."

28. See Jan Clausen, "My Interesting Condition," *Out/Look* 2, no. 3 (1990): 11–21, for a painfully honest discussion of the political and emotional strictures of life in a "new" lesbian family.

29. I attended the performance discussed below on June 29, 1990, at the Walker Point Art Center in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

30. See Sue-Ellen Case, "From Split Subject to Split Britches," in *Feminine Focus: The New Women Playwrights*, ed. Enoch Brater (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 126–46; "Toward a Butch-Femme Aesthetic"; and Dolan, *Feminist Spectator as Critic*, esp. chap. 4, "The Dynamics of Desire," 59–81, for explications of Weaver's and Shaw's personal and performative roles. See also Sue-Ellen Case, ed., *Split Britches: Lesbian Practice, Feminist Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1996), which collects the troupe's plays, as devised and performed by Lois Weaver, Peggy Shaw, and Deb Margolin.

31. For theoretical work on butch-femme role-playing as politically and culturally transgressive, see, for example, Case, "Toward a Butch-Femme Aesthetic"; Madeline Davis and Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy, "Oral History and the Study of Sexuality in the Lesbian Community: Buffalo, NY, 1940–1960," in *Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past*, ed. Martin Baume Duberman, Martha Vicinus, and George Chauncey (New York: New American Library, 1989), 426–40; Davis and Kennedy, "The Reproduction of Butch-Fem Roles: A Social Constructionist Approach," in Peiss and Simmons, *Passion and Power*, 241–56; Kennedy and Davis, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Joan Nestle, *A Restricted Country* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Firebrand Books, 1987); Nestle, *The Persistent Desire: A Femme-Butch Reader* (Boston: Alyson, 1992); Sally Munt, ed., *Butch/Femme: Inside Lesbian Gender* (London: Cassell, 1998); Esther Newton, *Margaret Mead Made Me Gay: Personal Essays, Public Ideas* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2000); Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*; Amber Hollibaugh and Cherrie Moraga, "What We're Rollin Around in Bed With: Sexual Silences in Feminism," in Snitow, Stansell, and Thompson, *Powers of Desire*, 394–405; Amber Hollibaugh, *My Dangerous Desires: A Queer Girl Dreaming Her Way Home* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2000); Lynda Hart, *Fatal Women: Lesbian Sexuality and the Mark of Aggression* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); and Hart, *Between the Body and the Flesh: Performing Sodomasochism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

32. de Lauretis, "Sexual Indifference," 39.

33. See Elaine Marks, "Lesbian Intertextuality," in *Homosexualities and French Literature*, ed. George Stambolian and Elaine Marks (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979), in which, referring to Monique Wittig's *Le corps lesbien*, she suggests that images "sufficiently blatant . . . withstand reabsorption into male literary culture" (375). The analogy might hold here.

34. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Across Gender, Across Sexuality: Willa Cather and Others," in *Displacing Homophobia: Gay Male Perspectives in Literature and Culture*, ed. Ronald R. Butters, John M. Clum, and Michael Moon (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1989), 59. See also Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet*

(Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990) and *Tendencies* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1993).

35. See Davis and Kennedy, "Reproduction of Butch-Fem Roles," for further discussion of essentializing versus more historical, social constructionist definitions of lesbian and homosexual identity.

36. Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," in Case, *Performing Feminisms*, 272. See also her *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990); *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993); and *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

37. Nestle, *A Restricted Country*, 9.

38. Linda Williams, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the "Frenzy of the Visible"* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989), 30. For another feminist reading of pornography, see Laura Kipnis, *Bound and Gagged: Pornography and the Politics of Fantasy in America* (New York: Grove Press, 1996).

39. See Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 156–59.

40. For an explication of lesbian subjectivities marginalized by realism's ethical and heterosexual codes, see Jill Dolan, "'Lesbian' Subjectivity in Realism: Dragging at the Margins of Structure and Ideology," in *Presence and Desire: Essays on Gender, Sexuality, Performance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), 159–77.

41. John Clum, "'A Culture that Isn't Just Sexual': Dramatizing Gay Male History," *Theatre Journal* 41 (1989): 169–89.

42. Nestle, *A Restricted Country*, 10.

43. Martin Sherman, *Bent*; Robert Chesley, *Jerker, or the Helping Hand*, both in *Out Front: Contemporary Gay and Lesbian Plays*, ed. Don Shewey (New York: Grove Press, 1988), 79–147, 449–91.

44. Williams, *Hard Core*, 227. Unfortunately, Williams's own text ends by describing newer porn films, created either by women or for heterosexual couples, which, although they explore options among a range of sexual practices, retain the monogamous ideal of the heterosexual couple as their textual and spectatorial standard; see, in particular, 229–79.

45. Williams, *Hard Core*, 151.

46. See, for example, Jane Chambers, *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove* (New York: JH Press, 1982); and Sarah Dreher's *8 × 10 Glossy* and *Ruby Christmas*, in *Places, Please! The First Anthology of Lesbian Plays*, ed. Kate McDermott (Iowa City, Iowa: Aunt Lute, 1985), 41–92 and 137–92. Holly Hughes's raucous play *The Well of Horniness* (in Shewey, *Out Front*, 221–52) is reminiscent of *Jerker* in its use of language to break the taboo of homosexual discourse, but its transgressions remain verbal and cloaked in subcultural references. *The Well's* radio play genesis also works to repress the pornographic effects of bodies in motion to the margins of the text, although now that the text has been circulated more widely, it has been staged and performed in much more physically explicit ways. See also Rosemary Keefe Curb, ed., *Amazon All Stars: Thirteen Lesbian Plays with Essays and Interviews* (New York: Applause, 1996), a formally and thematically diverse collection.

47. See Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 36–49. He writes, "The implantation of perversions is an instrument-effect: it is through the isolation, intensification, and consolidation of peripheral sexualities that relations of power to sex and pleasure branched out and multiplied, measured the body, and penetrated modes of conduct" (48). Cultural feminism's isolation of lesbian "deviant" sexualities saw porn magazines like *On Our Backs* and *Bad Attitude* wrest their own piece of public

discourse to transgress the law of politically correct sex developed by cultural feminist ideology. Pat Califia, S-M advocate and founder of the S-M support group Samois, published *Sapphisty*, a sex manual and disquisition on lesbian sexual variation that was in its third edition by 1988 (Tallahassee, Fla.: Naiad Press, 1988). Califia is now transitioning as a female to male (FTM) transsexual. Susie Bright, editor of *On Our Backs* and author of its Susie Sexpert columns, has published flamboyantly frank compilations of her essays, all of which describe and celebrate a loosening of lesbian sexual mores (see, for example, *Susie Sexpert's Lesbian Sex World*, *Susie Bright's Sexual Reality*, and *The Sexual State of the Union*).

48. I attended the performance discussed on November 18, 1989, at the Barrymore Theatre in Madison, Wisconsin.

49. I don't mean to be facetious here, but I do mean to evoke the self-righteousness of these performances and the sanctimonious response they evoked.

50. The disjuncture between gay male and lesbian subcultures prompted by cultural feminism has been well documented, in an effort to forge new alliances between the two groups as sexually stigmatized communities. Borrowing from gay male subculture, therefore, is a transgressive act in a cultural feminist setting. See, for a historical example of feminism's betrayal of gay men, Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality." For historical work on lesbian and gay male alliances, see Nestle, *A Restricted Country*; and Gayle Rubin, "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality," in *Pleasure and Danger*, ed. Carol Vance (Boston: Routledge, 1984), 267–318. In the twenty-first century, of course, the term *queer* has come to represent political and cultural alliances and coalitions among lesbians and gay men, as well as bisexuals and transgender/transsexual people of all races, ethnicities, classes, and abilities.

51. See, for example, *Feminist Voices* (Madison), December 15–February 8, 1990, 4, 6, and February 9–March 8, 1990, 11–13; *Wisconsin Light* (Milwaukee) January 11–24, 1990, 5, 11. On "naive realism," see Williams, *Hard Core*, esp. 184–228.

52. Williams, *Hard Core*, 12. See also Walter Kendrick, *The Secret Museum: Pornography in Modern Culture* (1987; reprint, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996).

53. Williams, *Hard Core*, 38.

54. I would like to thank Stacy Wolf for her insightful comments in discussions around the issues in this article and for her thoughtful responses to early drafts and to the new preface. I'd also like to thank my research assistant and colleague, Paul Bonin-Rodriguez, for his help documenting the new preface and updating references in the original notes.

# Fe/male Impersonation: The Discourse of Camp

*Kate Davy*

In the course of what is still a relatively brief history of feminist criticism in theater, much has been written about work that originated in a woman-run performance space in New York called the WOW Cafe.<sup>1</sup> As a collective endeavor, WOW (Women's One World) has no single artistic vision guiding its productions; at base it is a producing organization that allows members of its collective to showcase work. The result is a wide range of offerings each season representing enormously disparate production types and performance styles. WOW is as much a community as it is a theater, and because any member of the collective can produce and perform—including women with no previous training or experience in theater—shows at WOW vary as much in quality as they do in approach. WOW might be considered a kind of preeminent community theater, which is not to suggest that its importance lies primarily in its sociology. Some of the most significant feminist theater of the last decade was created by women who started out at WOW, and most of those women continue to work there.

Despite vastly different artistic abilities and sensibilities, however, a common and compelling feature of WOW performances can be identified, one that distinguishes WOW work from that of other theaters. WOW productions represent lesbian sexualities on the stage and presume lesbians as the audience. Lisa Kron, a professionally trained actress and longtime WOW director and performer, admits, "Sometimes our theatre is really rough. But the audience we play for needs us. Lesbians never see themselves represented. And seeing yourself represented is what makes you feel you have a place in the world."<sup>2</sup>

The world as constituted by lesbians and inhabited by lesbians is the premise from which most WOW productions proceed, a premise whose consequences radically shift the nature of the performative address. These are not "coming out" plays addressed to straight audiences in a bid for understanding and acceptance. Nor are they plays about lesbian relationships within separatist communities. Instead, parody is the staple of WOW productions, parodies that take on a wide range of forms from reworkings of classical texts to spoofs on genres such as the detective film, the romance novel, and the television talk show, soap opera, or sitcom. Some WOW artists employ avant-garde strategies to make essentially nonnarrative work, pieces structured more like a poem than a plot. Performance pieces that construct lesbian spectatorial communities tend to drop from the performative address the heterosexuality that underpins hegemonic representations, what Monique Wittig might describe as the cultural products of "the straight mind."<sup>3</sup> For spectators whose sole experience with dominant

culture is one of either being erased entirely or foregrounded as tragically “Other” against a (hetero)sexuality inscribed as fiercely normative, the experience of being addressed as if inhabiting a discursive space, an elsewhere eked out in the gaps of hegemonic representations, is both profound and exhilarating.

Traditionally, regardless of genre, what has marked WOW productions is that they are peopled entirely with lesbian characters. In *Heart of the Scorpion*, for instance, Alice Forrester’s 1984 parody of the romance novel—a form that can scarcely be imagined outside of heterosexual dating and mating—all the couples were lesbian couples. There was only one man in the play, and “he” was represented by a life-size, homemade-looking stuffed dummy with a somewhat piglike face. He had no lines. Using a television talk show format for her nightclub act entitled *Carmelita Tropicana Chats*, Carmelita addressed her “studio audience” and, by extension, her entire television viewing audience as if all were lesbians.<sup>4</sup> The cast of Lisa Kron’s 1988 production *Paradykes Lost*, which loosely followed a conventional murder mystery formula, included a detective, an ingenue and her grande dame aunt, a couple (one of whom had a history, in the form of a liaison, with the detective), a butler, and an assortment of eccentric singles. Kron used butch-femme as a cultural paradigm for lesbian sexuality to build a play in which all the characters had women’s names, all were played by women, and all were explicitly identified as lesbian in the dialogue. None of these productions constructs a world “out there” of heterosexual culture that the world of the play and its characters are up against. As a result, the operations of heterosexuality as an institution are made visible by the unrelenting and rather jolting presumption that heterosexuals do not exist.

Configuring plays peopled almost exclusively with lesbian characters represents one strategy for making work that insists on a lesbian worldview. Of course, it is not the only way to create a theater for lesbians, a theater that responds to lesbian subjectivities. But until recently it has been a central and crucial strategy for WOW, one that has distinguished it from its gay male counterpart, that is, camp, or “theater of the ridiculous,” in which men impersonate women in narratives peopled for the most part by heterosexual characters. In 1988 a group of WOW artists began to experiment with representing heterosexual couples during their improvisational rehearsal process. Although the idea was abandoned before the piece opened, the notion of cross-dressing was in the air and hotly debated among WOW practitioners.

Within the year the idea was played out in a production of Sheridan’s *School for Scandal*, directed by Alice Forrester and Heidi Griffiths. All the roles were played by women; male characters were played in drag. In his review of the production for the *Village Voice* Robert Massa bemoaned the fact that the production inadequately commented on the play’s sexism, “as if the point of women’s theater were simply to cast, not to recast.”<sup>5</sup> He said that, as a spectator, “you soon forget all the roles are played by women.” And in the final line of the review he maintained that

Fig. 1. Claire Moed as Sir Oliver Surface and Babs Davy as Sir Peter Teazle in *School for Scandal*. Photo credit: Dona Ann McAdams.



“even the ones playing female characters appear to be in drag.” In other words, it was possible to read this *School for Scandal* as cast entirely with men. How can agency for women be realized representationally in a theatrical configuration that once again, like all hegemonic discourses, privileges the male voice and erases women as speaking subjects?

Massa’s gloss on *School for Scandal* is, of course, particular and, as such, a matter of reception. Like all spectators, Massa brings to every encounter with any performance his own relationships with discourses and practices in society, relationships that influence in significant ways how meaning is produced and how a performance is read. It is through institutions and their attendant discourses and practices that readers learn how to read cultural artifacts. Spectators who believe that lesbian women are gender-reversed inverts, for example, might read WOW’s *School for Scandal* as exemplary lesbian theater in which the female characters are played by mannish lesbians in drag. But I think not. Women are effaced in *School for Scandal* because there is no institutionalized paradigm for reading male impersonation. Female impersonation, on the other hand, has a long, rich history, from classical theater and film to television (Jack Benny, Milton Berle, Jamie Farr, Red Skelton, Flip Wilson, Jonathan Winters), in which men are not subsumed. On the contrary, female impersonation, while it

certainly says something about women, is primarily about men, addressed to men, and for men.<sup>6</sup> Male impersonation has no such familiar institution-ized history in which women impersonating men say something about women.<sup>7</sup> Both female and male impersonation foreground the male voice, and, either way, women are erased. Moreover, it is in the discourse of camp humor that female impersonation is firmly embedded.

Camp has been a central descriptor of theater of the ridiculous since its beginnings in the work of John Vaccaro, Ronald Tavel, and Charles Ludlam in the mid-1960s. The same has not been true for lesbian theater. While reviewers might deem a particular piece “campy,” camp has not been a central identifying feature of WOW work, nor has it been a standard part of the collective’s rhetoric. WOW performances have been compared to theater of the ridiculous as having a certain affinity in their farcical style and the use of irony and double entendre, two core characteristics of camp. Like theater of the ridiculous, WOW artists borrow scenarios from classical and popular performance forms as sources for their work. But until 1988 WOW performers did not adopt the heterosexual imperative that drives these narratives. They did not impersonate women and men in heterosexual couplings. Impersonation is the arena in which camp falls short as a definitive characteristic of most WOW work. The butch of butch-femme gender play is engaged in lesbian representation, not male impersonation. I contend that, as the notion of camp has circulated among WOW practitioners in recent years, it has garnered a certain currency that has noticeably influenced the work.

As 1990 began, *Anniversary Waltz*, a production by WOW’s co-founders, Lois Weaver and Peggy Shaw, used a wedding conceit as the frame of reference for a piece about their ten-year relationship as theater artists and lovers. Weaver donned a traditional white wedding dress and veil and clutched a bridal bouquet for the opening scene of the piece during which they talked about being “married” without really foregrounding the fact that, as lesbians, this is not one of their civil rights. As 1990 came to a close, the Five Lesbian Brothers (Maureen Angelos, Babs Davy, Dominique Dibbell, Peg Healey, and Lisa Kron) staged *Voyage to Lesbos (II)*, a narrative that focused on the wedding day of an on-again, off-again lesbian. While her future husband remained in the wings, his “dick” and its pleasures were pivotal.<sup>8</sup>

The reasons why WOW work is changing are many, and not all have to do with the issues surrounding impersonation. From an economic perspective the desire to move out of the fourth-floor walk-up loft space that currently houses WOW and seats only fifty spectators is understandable. Some WOW artists are weary of scratching out an existence in what they think is becoming a ghetto for lesbian theater. Shaw once commented with pointed irony that “when lesbians make it to off-Broadway, it’s the boys who are doing it.”<sup>9</sup> She was referring to drag performer Charles Busch’s long-running off-Broadway show *Lesbian Vampires of Sodom*. In emulating “the boys’” success at moving into mainstream venues, there is perhaps the inclination to think that one must adopt the boys’ performa-



tive strategies. *Lesbian Vampires of Sodom* is generally heralded as the epitome of camp.

In her groundbreaking book *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America*, Esther Newton defines *camp* as a system of humor and states that “the drag queen is its natural exponent.”<sup>10</sup> Explicating this assertion is, in essence, the project of her book, a work that includes, as a footnote, the following:

There are also women who perform as men: male impersonators (“drag butches”). They are a recognized part of the profession, but there are very few of them. . . . The relative scarcity of male impersonation presents important theoretical problems. (5 n. 13)

My argument focuses on the fact of this “scarcity of male impersonation” and posits that it has something to do with the inability of camp to serve lesbian women engaged in theatrical endeavors in the same ways it serves gay men. In Newton’s definition camp “depends on the perception or creation of *incongruous juxtapositions*” (106). She explains that, while any very incongruous contrast can be campy, “masculine-feminine juxtapositions are, of course, the most characteristic kind of camp” (107). It could be said that WOW’s project has been to sidestep the fierce binarism that drives masculine-feminine heterogendering, a binarism that, by its very nature, subsumes and erases women. My project is twofold: (1) to investigate the subversive potential of cross-dressing for gay male theater as it is embedded in the discourse of camp; and (2) to delineate the dangers of this same discourse for articulating a feminist subject position vis-à-vis the dynamics of butch-femme gender play in lesbian theater.

When asked to explain the significance of the title of her book Newton writes, “‘Mother Camp’ as an honorific implies something about the relationship of the female impersonator to his gay audience. A female impersonator will sometimes refer to himself as ‘mother,’ as in ‘Your mother’s gonna explain all these dirty words to you’” (xx). She then describes the drag queen as “a *magical dream figure*: the fusion of mother and son” (xx; my emphasis). Here Newton makes a gesture toward reception, that is, the hold and effect the drag queen has on his audience. The preponderance of female impersonation—across representational forms and addressed to very different spectatorial communities—suggests that in the intersection of representation and response there is something both magical and compelling about a cross-dressed male.

Of the cross-dressed female’s relationship to her counterpart in popular nineteenth-century theater, Peter Ackroyd writes:

The male impersonator, the actress in trousers, seems . . . to lack depth and resonance . . . [and] is never anything more than what she pretends to be; a feminine, noble mind in a boy’s body. It is a peculiarly sentimental, and therefore harmless reversal. The female impersonator, on the other hand, has more dramatic presence—the

idea of a male mind and body underneath a female costume evokes memories and fears to which laughter is perhaps the best reaction.<sup>11</sup>

In 1928 Jean Cocteau wrote an essay on “a magical dream figure,” an American acrobat named Vander Clyde who performed an enormously effective and popular drag act in Parisian music halls under the name “Barbette.” Ostensibly writing about the virtues of skill and concentration using Barbette as a model of professionalism, Cocteau produced instead a brief treatise on reception vis-à-vis female impersonation. What Cocteau finds so compelling about Barbette’s turn is his ability to seduce the eye of the beholder into believing he is a woman when the empirical evidence suggests otherwise. He describes how Barbette’s gown, with its tulle shoulder straps, does not conceal the absence of breasts and how his acrobatic act demands he use his body and muscles in such a way that “he doesn’t look very feminine.”<sup>12</sup>

Cocteau invites the reader to join him in the audience and explains, “When Barbette comes on, he throws dust in our eyes. He throws it all at once, so violently that he can then concentrate only on his work as an acrobat. From then on his male movements will serve him instead of giving him away” (223). This metaphor of dust blinding the audience to the “truth” about Barbette invokes not only what Barbette himself does to enact the gender role of the “Other” but the mystifications of the entire theatrical apparatus that support the illusion as well. It is also clear from Cocteau’s description of his own spectatorial response that the duplicitous nature of this “illusion of woman,” this absent presence, is the source of his fascination. He writes: “Barbette moves in silence. In spite of the orchestra which accompanies his act, his graceful poses and perilous exploits, his turn seems to be far away, taking place in the streets of dream, in a place where sounds cannot be heard, it seems to be summoned by the telescope or by sleep” (224).

Here Cocteau describes his spectatorial intervention in terms of fantasy, a fantasy evoked by the distance between himself and Barbette, who is faraway, unreachable, dreamlike, unavailable to consciousness. Fantasy is also evoked by the condition of absence constitutive of the experience of watching film. Indeed, Cocteau relates the effect of Barbette’s turn to film: “The cinema has supplanted realistic sculpture. Its marble figures, its large pallid heads, its shapes and shadows with splendid lighting replace what the eye previously demanded from statues. Barbette derives from these moving statues. Even when one knows him, he cannot lose his mystery” (224).

Cocteau is not so much blinded by the dust Barbette throws in his eyes as transfixed by it, suspended by the duplicity of the image Barbette constructs. Cocteau contends that Barbette retains his status as enigma even for spectators who have already witnessed his turn and know he will pull off his wig at the finish of his act to reveal his masculine self. Cocteau would attribute Barbette’s mystery to his ability to send mixed, incongruous signals of masculine and feminine in the guise of a single

gender, seducing even those spectators who know better into once again believing he is a woman.

But I think it also has to do with the ways in which the image of woman circulates in the representational economies of dominant culture, especially since Cocteau identifies the experience of watching film as the source from which Barbette's sense of mystery is derived. The absence of live objects and bodies constitutive of film resonates profoundly with the absence of woman as speaking subject in the construction of woman as presence, as body. The appropriation of this construction by male performers marks a kind of cultural neologism in the form of an image that resists definition and at the same time generates an excess of meanings. The strict polarization of man/woman in heterogendering precludes the possibility of reading men in drag "holistically." Female impersonation provides, in short, a seemingly endless source of fascination because, unlike male impersonation, the man who appropriates his "opposite" is not simultaneously effaced by it.

The intensely felt sense of mystery Cocteau describes is an apt description of the effect Charles Ludlam creates when he plays women's roles in his Ridiculous Theatrical Company productions—an effect he places in the service of very different ends. In his extraordinary 1973 production of *Camille* Ludlam played Alexandre Dumas *filis'* Marguerite, the Lady of the Camillias, as well as Greta Garbo's version of the character from the 1937 film to Bill Vehr's Armand Duval in full period costume.<sup>13</sup> Unlike the narrative construction of Barbette's act—his supposed simulation of a woman and subsequent transformation into a man—Ludlam's hairy chest was clearly visible above the cut of his gown, signaling his status as male from his first entrance. Hence, in the process of enacting the passionate and doomed love affair between Marguerite and Armand that dominates the *Camille* narrative, Ludlam and Vehr made manifest the desire of two men for each other. At the same time, like Barbette, Ludlam conjured a credible representation of a woman despite clearly visible evidence to the contrary. In his review for *Women's Wear Daily* Martin Gottfried wrote that "Ludlam becomes quite believable as Camille." Writing for the *New York Times*, Clive Barnes called Ludlam "a completely convincing Camille."<sup>14</sup>

In playing Marguerite, Ludlam negotiated a position somewhere between a Brechtian presentation of the character and an illusionistic portrayal, a position between the parameters Barthes articulates when he writes that "the Oriental transvestite [actor] does not copy Woman but signifies her; not bogged down in the model, but detached from its signified; Femininity is presented to read, not to see: translation, not transgression."<sup>15</sup> Although Ludlam mostly played the role for comic effect, he also played it earnestly in moments where he milked the pathos of a scene, hushing the audience, to seduce them into "seeing" a woman as a kind of "setup" for moments when he dropped the character altogether to deliver a line or two as his actor/playwright/gay-male self.

In the final act, for instance, Marguerite on her deathbed—her penniless, consumptive state played earnestly by Ludlam—calls to her faithful



Fig. 2. Charles Ludlam as Marguerite Gautier and Bill Vehr as Armand Duval in *Camille*. Photo credit: John Stern.

maid, "I'm cold. Nanine, throw another faggot on the fire!" Nanine replies, "There are no more faggots in the house." Dropping the character, Ludlam sits bolt upright, surveys the audience skeptically, and says plaintively, "No faggots in the house?" Then he throws his dust, returns the character to her deathbed, and says, "Open the window, Nanine. See if there are any in the street."<sup>16</sup>

In a piece entitled "Reading Past the Heterosexual Imperative" I argued that male drag emphasizes the illusionistic qualities of impersonation in that the actor attempts to simulate that which he is not, the Other. Instead of foregrounding dominant culture's fiercely polarized gender roles, men's camp assumes them and plays them out. I concluded that male camp tends to reinscribe, rather than undermine, the dominant culture paradigms it appropriates for its farce and means to parody.<sup>17</sup> In this characterization of gay male theater I was thinking specifically of Ludlam's Ridiculous Theatrical Company on the west side of Greenwich Village, using it as a means for clarifying what lesbian performance at WOW in the East Village is not. Since then, the torturous experience of the Milwaukee Repertory Theater's heterosexist production of Ludlam's play *Irma Vep* has jolted me into a reconsideration of what Ludlam's theater is not.

*The Mystery of Irma Vep*, subtitled *A Penny Dreadful*, is a pastiche of popular, sensationalistic Victorian plots to which Ludlam adds recognizable touches from *Dracula*, the Sherlock Holmes's tale *Hound of the Baskervilles*, and Hollywood films. The action takes place at Mandacrest, a

Fig. 3. Richard Halverson as Lady Enid and Jim Cunningham as her maid in *The Mystery of Irma Vep*. Milwaukee Repertory Theatre. Photo credit: Mark Avery.



mansion on the English moors, where a new wife has come to replace the enigmatic and recently deceased woman whose portrait dominates the living room—clearly, a reference to Hitchcock's *Rebecca*. The play's four male characters and four female characters are all played by the same two male actors in a tour de force of disguise, impersonation, and breathtakingly rapid costume changes.

The palpable desire of two men for each other, which permeated *Camille* and drove the original production of *Irma Vep* in which Ludlam played Lady Enid to Everett Quinton's Lord Edgar, was utterly absent from the Milwaukee Repertory Theater's production.<sup>18</sup> Instead, the actors maintained their status as traditionally masculine men foregrounding their ability as actors in a kind of competitive duel of caricature constructions. They never touched at all suggestively, and the stage kiss called for in the script was not executed. The intelligent, lovelorn Lady Enid came across as a dithering frump. The touch of disdain these manly men projected at having to play women's parts (a touch required in order to maintain enough distance from gay male performance) cast a misogynous pall over the entire event. In the production's final gesture, one meant to confirm and punctuate the heterosexuality that inscribed this homophobic rendering of Ludlam's work, the actors took their bows then turned squarely to each other and shook hands.

Ironically, but accurately, two of the four reviews of the production use the word *straight* to describe the acting style. The critic for Milwaukee's major morning newspaper wrote, "They play their absolutely ridiculous (that is, in the famed Ridiculous Theatrical Company sense of the word) roles absolutely straight."<sup>19</sup>

The homoerotic potential of the script—after all, the roles could have been cast with a woman and a man—was manifest through the performative strategies of camp in the performance text of the original production. Wayne R. Dynes writes in the *Encyclopedia of Homosexuality* that "camp is not grounded in speech or writing as much as it is in gesture, performance, and public display. When it is verbal it is expressed less through direct statement than through implication, innuendo, and intonation."<sup>20</sup> Gay audiences for Ludlam's production of *Vep* laughed delightedly at double entendres, such as the line "How do you take it?" delivered pointedly by the maid (Everett Quinton) as "she" served tea to Lady Enid (Ludlam). Taken aback, Lady Enid replies, "I beg your pardon?" The maid, tongue in cheek, explains, "Your tea, miss." When Lady Enid insists that she takes it plain, the maid says both caustically and knowingly, "That's queer." To which Lady Enid replies, in a moment of camaraderie and with a conspiratorial tone, "Queer?" (770). Even in the absence of such innuendo it is possible for particular readers to understand the text as homoerotic. Following the publication of Ludlam's collected works, for instance, Neil Bartlett—who had never seen an original Ridiculous Theatrical Company production—wrote in his review of the collected plays that *Irma Vep* is "an alarmingly true metaphor of the love between two men."<sup>21</sup>

Ludlam does not represent homosexuality by writing plays about gay couples. Ludlam's male actors flaunt their sexuality, their desire for each other, in texts he constructs out of pieces of classical and popular narratives. They play the heterosexual couples that people these scenarios, flaunting and thereby presenting the gay male under, alongside, and outside of the straight male and female characters valorized in these canonized texts. Ludlam opens a window in representation, takes the faggots he sees in the street and puts them on the stage, making their desire for each other visible.

More important, perhaps, homosexual practice is implicit in this presentation of homoerotic desire. Earl Jackson, Jr., argues that male homosexuality both promises and threatens to disestablish "the transcendence of the phallus from the penis, disinvesting male genitalia (and hence biological identity) of their former privilege to universal principles of order and signification."<sup>22</sup> In a cogent explication of the ways in which male homosexuality opposes, by not participating in, the Oedipal triangle, Jackson states, "Male homosexual desire for the penis does not require the penis to be hypostatized into a universal principle, embracing female subjectivity and sexuality as well" (471). Ludlam's making visible of homoerotic desire signals homosexual practice, the subversive site of all that phallographic culture attempts to suppress, contain, and eradicate.

That a dominant culture venue such as a regional theater could so

effortlessly erase, render invisible in its (re)production, any representation of the marginalized group that generated the original cultural product, raises a plethora of thorny issues related to appropriation, context, and address. But it also raises questions about the nature of Ludlam's texts as destabilizing forces, questions about his theater's potential to subvert and disrupt dominant culture's system of representation.

In an interview I conducted with Ludlam during a subsequent run of *Camille* in 1974 he argued emphatically two seemingly contradictory positions for the production. He maintained that his rendering of *Camille* is not an expression of homosexuality and, at the same time, that it represents a form of coming out. In the space of these contradictions lies the operating principle of camp. In his comedies Ludlam adheres to a set of aesthetic universals, one of which he identifies as the theatrical convention of men impersonating women both historically and across cultures.

Ludlam casts his portrayals of women in the great tradition of transvestism in the classical theaters of the Greeks, Elizabethans, and Japanese. Of his form of impersonation he says, "This is nothing new. It has nothing to do with homosexuality. I use it as a theatrical device. It distances the performer from the role. It takes more art to play a role that is very unlike yourself. You must use everything; you must use your imagination to the utmost to create the impression."<sup>23</sup> And the impression he creates undeniably works for "mixed audiences." "It is not a gay audience," he explains. "Although a lot of gay people do see it, an enormous number of straight people also come—couples clutching each other and weeping at the death scene, hugging each other all the closer." He thinks this is true because *Camille* "transcends gay. It's a love story. It's the story of Adam and Eve. It's the romantic ideal questioned and rethought."

Ludlam locates the "homosexual overtones" of his *Camille* in the narrative's dynamics of forbidden love. But his rethinking of the romantic ideal is manifest in his (re)casting; if *Camille* is the story of Adam and Eve, Ludlam's version has two Adams. Of his casting choices he says, "I think it's presenting a positive image. I think it's coming out on a certain level. But I don't think it's gay. It's a matter of being able to see the story freshly, without prejudice. It's a matter of giving the audience a new vision instead of reinforcing fixed habits of thought." In other words the play is not gay inasmuch as its address is not exclusively homosexual, but within the dynamics of the production the machinations of homosexuality surface, "come out," and are rendered visible in the pockets, gaps, and fissures of an ultimately less-than-monolithic heterosexual configuration. This is Ludlam's way of dismantling prejudice, of gesturing toward a new vision, of negotiating a partially closeted, partially out-of-the closet artistic and political stance, a stance played out in the contradiction of camp.

Dynes writes, "Undeniably, camp is subversive, but not too much so, for it depends for its survival on the patronage of high society, the entertainment world, advertising, and the media" (189). This may help to explain why lesbian theater work produced on the other side of the Village has not moved, as Ludlam's work has, into mainstream venues. The

Milwaukee Rep is unlikely to present plays with titles like *The Lady Dick*, *The Well of Horniness*, or *Paradykes Lost*.

In her essay "Toward a Butch-Femme Aesthetic" Sue-Ellen Case delineates a strategy within lesbian discourse and performance practice aimed precisely at challenging dominant culture and the violence of its attendant discourses.<sup>24</sup> Camp is a central player in an argument that picks up where Teresa de Lauretis ends in her essay entitled "The Technology of Gender."<sup>25</sup> In this essay de Lauretis makes an important critical move in distinguishing and moving away from the ideologically bound female subject position to a more promising and, therefore, more encouraging feminist subject. She locates the subject of feminism in the micropolitical practices and cultural productions of feminism and characterizes it as existing both inside and outside of gender as ideological representation in that this subject moves between two contradictory spaces. De Lauretis explains:

It is a movement between the (represented) discursive space of the positions made available by hegemonic discourses and the space-off, the elsewhere, of those discourses: those other spaces both discursive and social that exist, since feminist practices have (re)constructed them, in the margins (or "between the lines," or "against the grain") of hegemonic discourses and in the interstices of institutions, in counter-practices and new forms of community. (26)

De Lauretis locates the feminist subject in this "elsewhere," engendered there in the tension created by the condition of inhabiting the two kinds of spaces at once, conscious of the pull in contrary directions.

The female subject, on the other hand, is trapped in hegemonic discourses as "woman," the always already spoken-for construction that replaces women as speaking subjects in representation. This construction is anathema to women as historical beings and social subjects because it signifies a (feminine) essence intrinsic to all women, thereby reducing them to "nature," "mother," and, ultimately, the object of (male) desire. "Woman" replaces women and marks their absence. In this configuration the lesbian is doubly missing in that even her absence is not inscribed. This is both her oppression and her promise as a destabilizing force.

De Lauretis not only distinguishes between the female subject and the subject of feminism, she also identifies the female subject position as inescapably trapped in the phallographic contract of heterosexuality. Borrowing Irigaray's notion of "hom(m)osexuality" as the term of sexual (in)difference, that is, the term that signifies a single practice and representation of the sexual—male—de Lauretis identifies hom(m)osexuality as in fact the term of heterosexuality.<sup>26</sup> Thus, when she states that, in order to begin the process of change, "we must walk out of the male-centered frame of reference in which gender and sexuality are (re)produced by the discourse of male sexuality" ("Technology," 17), she means that, at the level of discourse, we must walk out of the hom(m)osexual frame and its phallographic contract, the heterosexual contract.



In a brilliant theoretical maneuver Case recuperates the lesbian butch suppressed historically by the feminist movement, reassimilates recent feminist theoretical strategies, and maps the butch-femme subject position—one that provides, in her words, “a ground that could resolve the project of constructing the feminist subject position” (289). In other words, a position outside the heterosexual contract.

In her project Case employs camp as a strategy in combination with the discourse of the butch-femme couple “to provide the liberation of the feminist subject” (286). My only quarrel with her project, a project that has been enormously influential in constructing an alternative to the female subject, is her use of camp. Because she invokes camp as a “discourse,” instead of merely using its salient elements, the baggage of camp discourse is imbricated in her argument. The result is that the subject position she constructs does not walk out of the hom(m)osexual frame of reference as effectively as it could, for camp as a discourse is both ironically and paradoxically the discourse of hom(m)osexuality, that is, male sexuality.

In Case’s scheme camp is a neutral non-ideologically bound discourse in that it is produced by both gay men and lesbians out of the condition of being closeted. Furthermore, it is available as a strategy for other marginalized groups in much the same way that “coming out” is available for assimilation as a euphemism for heterosexuals coming out of whatever it is they come out of, except, of course, the closet of homosexuality. In using *camp* generically, Case falls into the same trap de Lauretis identifies when the word *homosexual* is used to refer to both gay men and lesbians “sliding inexorably, it seems, into its uncanny hommo-sexual double” (“Sexual Indifference,” 163). The tools that camp provides—artifice, wit, irony, exaggeration—are available to butch-femme gender play separate from the ways in which they are inscribed by camp as a historically marked phenomenon.

Equally significant to camp as a discourse, as a system of signs, is the cross-dressed male, who is not merely an element or an instance but a central figure. Cocteau’s *Barbette* and Ludlam’s *Marguerite* are figures that incorporate and subsume the sexuality of the Other, of woman. Like the construction “woman,” the cross-dressed male specularizes the phallus, providing a screen on which anxieties of castration and loss of the privileged phallus are projected and compensated for through the dynamics of fantasy. The cross-dressed male plays the absence of women from phallic discourse; woman as signifier is profoundly empty.

In theorizing the subversive potential of gay male discourses and practices, Jackson notes:

Throughout history, for various reasons, male homoerotic practices have been supportive of, rather than subversive to, hegemonic conceptions of masculinity. Even in the postmodern, late capitalist societies of the twentieth century, male homoerotic discourses are often reinscribed within the very patriarchy they would seem to countermand. (459)

As a discourse with a historical specificity, camp undermines the attempt to construct a subject position that hopes to resonate with what Audre Lorde describes as a "house of difference." Lorde's house filled with difference(s) suggests for de Lauretis "a more complex image of the psychosocio-sexual subject . . . which does not deny gender or sex but transcends them" ("Sexual Indifference," 164). This is the challenge Case takes on and meets in theorizing her "dynamic duo," as she refers to the butch-femme couple, out of and within recent feminist theories of the psychoanalytic notion of "womanliness as masquerade." Case's dynamic duo "play on the phallic economy rather than to it" (291), foregrounding its fictions as fiction by negotiating its "realities" between two lesbian women.

I have argued that the iconography of butch-femme culture present in performances at WOW is not about cross-dressing ("Reading Past," 156). Wearing the gender of the "other" sex is not the point. Nor is it about drag in the sense of simulation. No attempt is made to hide the lesbian beneath a mask of male or female gender identity; to fool the audience, even momentarily, is not the objective. As a dimension of erotic identity, butch-femme is about sexuality and its myriad nuances. It is also about gender in that it appropriates gender in its social articulation and representational construction. In butch-femme iconography, attributes that in dominant culture are associated with strict gender roles are not sex-class specific. Worn by lesbians, these attributes have meanings for lesbians in a same-sex, lesbian culture that do not necessarily symbolize conformity to rules of gender behavior and the oppositional dynamics of polarized gender roles.

The articulation of desire in the dynamics of butch-femme gender play in lesbian performance positions this performance outside heterosexuality both as a social institution and as a representational model, by realigning what Jill Dolan describes as the "dynamics of desire" between performance and its spectators. Dolan writes, "When the locus of desire changes, the demonstration of sexuality and gender roles also changes."<sup>27</sup> Butch-femme as a signifying practice in lesbian theater differs from male drag performance in that it dismantles the construction "woman" and challenges male sexuality as the universal norm. It challenges the heterosexual contract that de Lauretis identifies as "the very site in which the social relations of gender and thus gender ideology are re-produced in everyday life" ("Technology," 17).

Case's butch-femme subject position is successfully articulated outside the hom(m)osexual frame of reference, where it could have broader play if it were not encumbered by camp. Positioned inside a lesbian discourse that is every bit as artificial as camp in its gender play of phallographic fictions, the butch-femme subject position, like its original referent in the butch-femme couple, is more lethal to hegemonic discourses than Charles Ludlam's Marguerite and Charles Busch's "lesbians of Sodom."

Butch-femme gender roles played in the streets and on the stage signify, through lesbian desire, Irigaray's "goods that refuse to go to market" and Wittig's lesbian subject who is not man/not woman.<sup>28</sup> As such, butch-

femme artifice is so much more a part of lesbian discourse than camp discourse that it not only resists assimilation, because it is too dangerous, but it allows for the play of other differences as well.

Dynes emphasizes that “camp is always presented with an invisible wink” (190). But, instead of realizing the promise and threat of its subversive potential for imagining and inscribing an “elsewhere” for alternative social and sexual realities, the wink of camp (re)assures its audience of the ultimate harmlessness of its play, its palatability for bourgeois sensibilities. When the butch-femme subject winks, phallocratic culture is not reassured.

Camp is neither good nor bad; it is just more or less effectively deployed. In the context of gay male theater and its venues camp is indeed a means of signaling through the flames, while in lesbian performance it tends to fuel and fan the fire. How gay and lesbian theater as cultural production might effect social change outside of gay and lesbian contexts demands an examination of how its subversive meanings can be articulated and sustained in a hegemonic culture “bent” on benign assimilation or discursive and political eradication.<sup>29</sup> This seems to me the most crucial project for the future if change is the goal. Change is not possible, as de Lauretis so graphically puts it, “without altering the existing social relations and the heterosexual structures to which our society, and most others, are securely screwed” (“Technology,” 21).

## NOTES

1. See, among others, my article “Constructing the Spectator: Reception, Context, and Address in Lesbian Performance,” *Performing Arts Journal* 10 (1986): 43–52; Jill Dolan, *The Feminist Spectator as Critic* (1988; reprint, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991); and Alisa Solomon, “The WOW Cafe,” *Drama Review* 29, no. 1 (1985): 92–101.

2. Lisa Kron, as quoted by Dorothy Chansky, in “WOW Cafe: A Stage of Their Own,” *Theatre Week*, September 24–30, 1990, 39–41.

3. Monique Wittig, “The Straight Mind,” *Feminist Issues* 1 (1980): 103–11.

4. See my piece “Heart of the Scorpion at the WOW Cafe”; and Jill Dolan, “Carmelita Tropicana Chats at the Club Chandelier”; both in *Drama Review* 29, no. 1 (1985): 52–56 and 26–32.

5. Robert Massa, “Comedy of Womanners,” *Village Voice* January 10, 1989, 97.

6. In the chapter entitled “Lesbian Feminism and the Gay Rights Movement: Another View of Male Supremacy, Another Separatism,” in her book *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory* (Trumansburg, N.Y.: Crossing Press, 1983), 128–51, Marilyn Frye links effeminacy, as a style, with what she calls the “gay institution of the impersonation of women” and writes: “What gay male affectation of femininity seems to me to be is a kind of serious sport in which men may exercise their power and control over the feminine. . . . Some gay men achieve, indeed, prodigious mastery of the feminine. . . . But the mastery of the feminine is not feminine. It is masculine” (137). In the text she asserts that female impersonation is a “mockery of women”; in a footnote, however, she amends her position with “the realization that gay effeminacy has so little to do with women that it is not even primarily the mockery of women I had thought it was” (151 n. 3).

7. This is not to suggest that male impersonation was uncommon in certain periods. See Laurence Senelick, "The Evolution of the Male Impersonator on the Nineteenth-Century Popular Stage," *Essays in Theatre* 1 (1982): 29–44. See also Sue-Ellen Case's discussion of the salon of Natalie Barney as a form of "personal theatre" in which women performed for all-women audiences (*Feminism and Theatre* [New York: Methuen, 1988], 50–53).

Homer Dickens's book *What a Drag: Men as Women and Women as Men in the Movies* features a surprisingly large number of women in drag. But with the exception of Marlene Dietrich, Greta Garbo in *Queen Christina*, and Julie Andrews in *Victor/Victoria*, few are memorable. This is the point: there is a familiarity about many of the men in drag that denotes, I think, a certain convention inscribed in the popular imagination. Given the relatively forgettable nature of much male impersonation, it is ironic when, in her book *Hollywood Androgyny* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), Rebecca Bell-Metereau points out that "in distinct contrast to the relative rarity and negative connotations of female impersonation before 1960, females dressed in male clothing appear frequently in American film" (66).

8. While I juxtapose these two productions to indicate a certain shift in perspective, the differences between them are paramount. *Anniversary Waltz* employs a number of heterosexual tropes but is not subsumed by them; it maintains its lesbian stance. Shaw and Weaver work through some extraordinary nonheterogendered positionalities within a butch-femme representational economy. *Voyage to Lesbos*, on the other hand, is obsessively concerned with heterosexuality in a failed attempt to critique it. Without much of a leap, it could be read as a play about lesbian "penis envy."

9. Peggy Shaw and Lois Weaver, interview by the author, New York City, spring 1985.

10. Esther Newton, *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), xx; hereafter page numbers will be cited in the text.

11. Peter Ackroyd, *Dressing Up: Transvestism and Drag: The History of an Obsession* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), 102.

12. *Cocteau's World: An Anthology of Writings by Jean Cocteau*, ed. Margaret Crosland (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1972), 224; hereafter page numbers will be cited in the text.

13. I saw the original production in the spring of 1973 at the 13th Street Theatre in New York City as well as every subsequent revival of it. Readers familiar with the experimental theater scene in those days will appreciate the following anecdote: When I interviewed Ludlam in the fall of 1974, I mentioned to him that the Living Theatre's Julian Beck and Judith Malina were in the audience the first time I saw *Camille* and that I was struck by their stoicism in the face of such high comedy. Ludlam responded, "Oh, but they came back stage afterwards and said that they *loved* it; they just thought it was irrelevant, that it had nothing to do with reality."

For a reading of Ludlam's *Camille* that is quite different from mine, see Stefan Brecht, *Queer Theatre* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1978), 88–93.

14. Martin Gottfried, "The Theatre: *Camille*," *Women's Wear Daily*, May 15, 1974; Clive Barnes, "Stage: An Oddly Touching 'Camille,'" *New York Times*, May 14, 1974. These reviews are from the first revival of *Camille* in the spring of 1974. The original production opened in the spring of 1973. Both reviews were obtained from the files of the Ridiculous Theatrical Company, New York.

15. Roland Barthes, *Empire of Signs* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), 53. I am grateful to Laurence Senelick for bringing this citation to my attention.

16. *The Complete Plays of Charles Ludlam*, ed. Steven Samuels and Everett Quinton (New York: Harper and Row, 1989), 246. All subsequent references to Ludlam's plays are taken from this collection and are cited in the text.

17. See my essay entitled "Reading Past the Heterosexual Imperative: *Dress Suits to Hire*," *Drama Review* 33, no. 1 (1989): 153–70; hereafter page numbers will be cited in the text.

18. I attended the Milwaukee Repertory Theater's production in the Stiemke Theater in September 1989 as well as Ludlam's original production in his theater at One Sheridan Square in New York in November 1984.

19. Jay Joslyn, "Rep's Spoof 'Irma Vep' Smashingly Successful," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, September 18, 1989. A review also appeared on the same day in the evening paper, the *Milwaukee Journal*, by Damien Jaques, in which he conflated *camp* with *drag*, then used "camp," "campiness," and "high camp" to describe what he saw.

20. Wayne R. Dynes, "Camp," in *Encyclopedia of Homosexuality*, ed. Wayne R. Dynes (New York: Garland, 1990), 189; hereafter page numbers will be cited in the text.

21. Neil Bartlett, "Just Ridiculous," *American Theatre*, April 1990, 50–51.

22. Earl Jackson, Jr., "Kabuki Narratives of Male Homoerotic Desire in Saikaku and Mishima," *Theatre Journal* 41 (1989): 470; hereafter page numbers will be cited in the text.

23. Charles Ludlam, interview by the author, New York City, October 13, 1974. Before beginning the interview, I asked Ludlam to say something to be sure the recorder was picking up his voice. Hence, the first words on the tape are "This is Charles Ludlam speaking for posterity." He died of AIDS on May 28, 1987. All subsequent quotations are from this interview.

24. Sue-Ellen Case, "Toward a Butch-Femme Aesthetic," in *Making a Spectacle: Feminist Essays on Contemporary Women's Theatre*, ed. Lynda Hart (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1989), 282–99; hereafter page numbers will be cited in the text.

25. Teresa de Lauretis, "The Technology of Gender," in *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 1–30; hereafter page numbers will be cited in the text.

26. Teresa de Lauretis, "Sexual Indifference and Lesbian Representation," *Theatre Journal* 40 (1988): 156; hereafter page numbers will be cited in the text.

27. Jill Dolan, "The Dynamics of Desire: Sexuality and Gender in Pornography and Performance," *Theatre Journal* 39 (1987): 173.

28. Luce Irigaray, "When the Goods Get Together," in *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*, ed. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (New York: Schocken, 1981), 110; Monique Wittig, "One is Not Born a Woman," *Feminist Issues* 1, no. 2 (1981): 47–54.

29. Susan Sontag's enormously influential "Notes on 'Camp,'" in her collected essays *Against Interpretation* (New York: Dell, 1966), 275–92, strikes me as exemplary of benign assimilation. She nearly edits homosexuals out of camp and deems it a fundamentally apolitical phenomenon.

# Not-About-AIDS

*David Román*

Soon after the 1996 International AIDS Conference in Vancouver, where the success of protease inhibitors was officially announced, there was a great deal of talk in the United States about the end of AIDS, and much of it implied that the need to talk about AIDS had ended as well. Reports both in the popular media and in lesbian and gay publications suggested that we had reached the end of the AIDS epidemic. While acknowledging that most people across the world lacked access to the new drugs, these accounts put forward the idea that the AIDS crisis was now over. In the absence of a cure or vaccine, this “end of AIDS” discourse is striking. In his controversial article, “When AIDS Ends,” published in the *New York Times Magazine* on November 10, 1996, Andrew Sullivan writes: “A difference between the end of AIDS and the end of many other plagues: for the first time in history, a large proportion of the survivors will not simply be those who escaped infection, or were immune to the virus, but those who contracted the illness, contemplated their own deaths, and still survived.”<sup>1</sup> Cover articles in other major publications of the period further demonstrate this shift in AIDS discourse and share in its assumptions, from *Newsweek’s* “The End of AIDS?” issue, on December 2, 1996, to *Time Magazine’s* selection of Dr. David Ho, a pioneer of this new AIDS treatment research, as “Man of the Year,” which indicates that an understanding of AIDS as a manageable condition rather than a terminal one had taken shape. In late 1996, AIDS returned to the forefront of U.S. culture only to announce its departure. Not surprisingly, the “end of AIDS” discourse soon led to a general lack of media interest in AIDS, and to calls from gay figures for “post-AIDS” identities and cultures.

These developments surfacing in the late 1990s have left me wondering what it means to continue prioritizing AIDS in discussions of contemporary gay culture and politics. How might we return our critical attention to AIDS in light of the shifts in the political, cultural, and sexual climates of the late 1990s and early twenty-first century? In this essay I explore two central questions: how might the “end of AIDS” itself be understood as an AIDS discourse that tells us much about our current relationship to AIDS, and how are artists living with HIV/AIDS responding to recent calls for “post-AIDS” identities and cultures?

In *Dry Bones Breathe*, perhaps the most telling book of 1998, Eric Rofes, a longtime progressive gay activist, argues that contemporary gay culture needs to disentangle itself from the dated AIDS-as-crisis model that characterized the gay community’s response in the first decade of the epidemic.<sup>2</sup> Rofes, unlike most commentators, is careful to explain that he is speaking specifically about gay male culture in America and that “post-AIDS” does not necessarily mean the end of AIDS. “This admittedly con-

troversial term," Rofes writes, "claims that the communal experience of AIDS-as-crisis has ended," but it "does not imply that the epidemic of AIDS is over" (75). Despite drawing such distinctions and making an overall effort to remain sensitive to those living with HIV/AIDS, Rofes suggests that "it may be time for gay men to abandon the acronym 'AIDS' altogether" (72).

While many commentators have questioned the concept of post-AIDS, most of their critiques are cast as expressions of concern about a new wave of infection among the very subjects who imagine themselves living in a "post-AIDS" world: urban gay men. Michelangelo Signorile's September 1998 *Out* article, "641,086 & Counting," is typical. Signorile argues that "we are headed toward an unqualified disaster."<sup>3</sup> This disaster, "in which a new generation of gay men become as immersed in the horrors of AIDS, disease, and death as previous generations," is taking shape because of the message and belief that AIDS is over. Signorile's title, "641,086 & Counting," invokes Larry Kramer's 1983 *New York Native* essay, "1,112 and Counting," which helped inaugurate the AIDS activist movement. Kramer's title simultaneously registered the number of AIDS cases at the time of its publication and predicted more cases in the future. The article, as Kramer put it, was meant to "scare the shit out of you."<sup>4</sup> In "641,086 & Counting," Signorile sounds the alarm for a new generation of gay men. "Will it take massive death and suffering for us to wake up once again?" he asks near the end of his critique of post-AIDS rhetoric.<sup>5</sup> His effort to motivate gay men is modeled on Kramer's foundational rhetoric of early 1980s AIDS activism in the hope that, this time around, such rhetoric will counter apathy and denial.<sup>6</sup>

Surprisingly, Signorile neglects to account for the global shifts in AIDS demographics since 1983. Few critics of end-of-AIDS rhetoric, in fact, seriously question the assumptions that condition the post-AIDS discourse either globally or in the context of the United States. This discourse, as Phillip Brian Harper argues in response to Sullivan's essay, invests in a specific category of "racial-national normativity"—or, as Harper more bluntly puts it, in "U.S. whites," who are its implicit subjects.<sup>7</sup> He recasts Sullivan's speculation that, for many in the United States, HIV infection "no longer signifies death" but "merely . . . illness" to mean that, for Sullivan, the deaths of "those not included in his racial-national normativity"—that is to say nonwhites and those living outside the United States—"effectively do not constitute AIDS-related deaths at all."<sup>8</sup>

While I completely agree with Harper on this issue, I am less interested in similarly disassociating myself from Sullivan; Harper's opening sentence, "For quite a while now, I have strongly suspected that Andrew Sullivan and I inhabit entirely different worlds," rings false for me, given that my world often does literally overlap with Sullivan's regardless of my disagreement with many of his assertions.<sup>9</sup> I have often seen Sullivan in the bars, vacation resorts, commercial spaces, and sexual publics that I visit throughout the United States. My point here is that we, as gay men, sometimes share social and sexual worlds with those with whom we may

politically disagree. Rather, I am more interested in thinking through what was meant by the end-of-AIDS discourse that began circulating in queer culture in the late 1990s. This discourse, as we have seen, takes many forms. Claims for the end of AIDS and a post-AIDS discourse might be best understood not as markers of a definitive and identifiable moment of closure but as the next development in the discursive history of AIDS. For Sullivan, it means putting forward his experience optimistically and naively as the normative experience of AIDS, without much concern with the effects of his rhetoric on others; it is a normalizing process that demonstrates a lack of self-consciousness, what we might call a "discourse undetectable." For Rofes, who asks us to consider abandoning the term *AIDS*, it means "finding a new language that captures our experience."<sup>10</sup> For Signorile, who is concerned with HIV prevention, it means returning to the language of early 1980s AIDS activism. For Harper, who advocates a more "conscious and responsible discursive engagement," it means interrogating the social normativity that these end-of-AIDS pronouncements enforce.<sup>11</sup> Given these different meanings and competing claims, the language about the end of AIDS might be considered yet another moment in what Paula Treichler terms "an epidemic of signification," the ongoing evolution of cultural meanings and values attached to AIDS that help shape how it is understood.<sup>12</sup> Both the end-of-AIDS and the post-AIDS discourses participate in a larger social phenomenon that encourages us to believe that the immediate concerns facing contemporary American culture, including queer culture, are not-about-AIDS.

We see the tension arising from the end-of-AIDS claims played out in the United States especially around the topics of race, money, and the law. In 1998, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, blacks accounted for 57 percent of all new HIV cases in the country even though they constituted only 12 percent of the population. In Los Angeles, where I live, Latinos accounted for nearly 50 percent of new cases in 1998. Nationally, half of all new infections occurred in people under twenty-five. These statistics are no doubt what led Mario Cooper, former chair of the national AIDS lobby group, AIDS Action Council, and founder of Leading for Life, an organization that advocates for African American AIDS awareness, to assert that "AIDS isn't over. For many in America, it's just beginning."<sup>13</sup> In 1998, Leading for Life helped spur the Congressional Black Caucus to lobby the Clinton administration to declare AIDS in the black community a "public health emergency" so that the Department of Health and Human Services could allocate funds to counter AIDS where it is most prevalent. Federal funding for treatments, prevention strategies, and support services in black and Latino communities subsequently rose by \$156 million. The AIDS-as-crisis model now adopted by the national black leadership often posits queer communities against minority communities to make its point even though its origins are to be found in the gay community's efforts to organize around AIDS. This tactic departs from earlier understandings of AIDS in communities of color, which put forward the idea that AIDS was only one of a series of interrelated catastrophes that affected



U.S. racial minorities and therefore that it should not be prioritized over other pressing issues.

If by 1998 the AIDS-as-crisis model was beginning to be viewed as dated and ineffective in the gay community, the new "AIDS emergency" or AIDS-as-crisis discourse among black and Latino leadership was proving successful in channeling political energy to fight AIDS in communities of color. In a peculiar reversal, the lesbian and gay leadership began to follow the discarded logic of the earlier AIDS discourse used by the black and Latino leadership by promoting the restructuring of AIDS service organizations (ASOs) to accommodate other non-AIDS-related health issues facing the community and by prioritizing other political issues over HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment. While white gays arguing for the end of AIDS regularly neglect to account for increasing infection rates among racial minorities, leaders in communities of color regularly discount queer people in the AIDS emergency discourse that calls attention to AIDS in their communities. Queers of color do not fare well in these scenarios. In fact, homosexuality and race are generally imagined as oppositional.

This opposition between race and sexuality places groups in competition for funding and other resource allocations. As Cathy J. Cohen explains in *The Boundaries of Blackness*,

Often this struggle for money has been framed as a battle between resource-rich and overly indulged white gay communities and poor and largely ignored black and Latino communities. Of course, a case can be made that white gay men have received and controlled the lion's share of available AIDS funding; this simple dichotomy, however, does little to advance the interests of any group working for more AIDS funding.<sup>14</sup>

Consider, for example, how Patsy Fleming, former White House director of national AIDS policy, in an attempt to point out the economic discrepancies between queer communities and communities of color around the issue of AIDS, inadvertently reinforces this binary when she recounts her visit to two ASOs in the same city. As reported by the *Los Angeles Times*, "One [ASO] predominantly served white homosexual men and the other served low-income blacks and Latinos, and both were conducting fundraisers at the same time. While the first group expected to raise \$1 million, the second dreamed of bringing in \$100,000."<sup>15</sup> Fleming's attempt to call attention to the need for more and better resources in communities of color comes across as an either-or. That is, the plight of low-income blacks and Latinos affected by HIV is played against the seeming financial security of white homosexual men, even though, clearly, not all white homosexual men or ASOs that provide services to them enjoy this security.

The end-of-AIDS claims have contributed significantly to the decline in monetary donations, both individual and corporate, to ASOs. Despite the booming economy at the end of the twentieth century, which

saw private donations to nonprofits increase by 7 percent annually during 1997 and 1998, ASOs reported disturbing decreases in AIDS funding. The main reasons for the drop in AIDS philanthropy in this period were AIDS burnout, the growth in non-AIDS-related organizations catering to lesbian and gay communities, and the sense that AIDS was over.<sup>16</sup>

The “end of AIDS,” however, does not explain the legal backlash against people with HIV. Legislation has shifted the emphasis from protecting the civil liberties of people with HIV to protecting the public from people with HIV. Calls for mandatory testing, especially among prisoners and pregnant women; for name reporting and partner notification; and for the criminalization of HIV transmission are increasing. Despite the Supreme Court’s 1998 ruling that people with HIV are protected by the Americans with Disabilities Act, the legislative trend shows that “we’ve moved from a period where civil rights and civil liberties for a person with HIV prevailed to a compulsory and punitive approach.”<sup>17</sup> Prisoners, immigrants, pregnant women, and the poor are the most vulnerable to prosecution. The legislative trend is directly linked to cultural anxieties stemming from the fact that new advanced drug therapies help people with HIV live longer than previously expected. As Sean Strub, publisher of *POZ*, puts it: “Combination therapy, in our enemies’ eyes, enables us ‘AIDS carriers,’ not only to ‘live longer’ but, more important, to ‘infect more.’”<sup>18</sup> If this is so, how are we to understand what is meant by the end-of-AIDS pronouncements? The social, cultural, and medical problems that structured this moment in AIDS history have been rendered invisible by this discourse. This invisibility is supported by the lesbian and gay media, which positioned marriage and the military as the two main political sites of the late 1990s at the expense of AIDS.<sup>19</sup>

Mainstream lesbian and gay political organizations and media shifted their priorities as AIDS moved more and more into the developing world and into previously underrepresented groups throughout the United States including communities of color, poor women, and the incarcerated. This rise of marriage and the military as key issues for mainstream lesbian and gay culture underscores the symbolic centrality of marital coupling and military service to the health and defense of the nation. This move to make marriage and the military central to a new gay politics can be seen as an attempt to normalize gay and lesbian culture by associating it with the most traditionally recognized forms of national duty and social and civic responsibility. The discourse about the end of AIDS both helps to make this possible and helps displace AIDS onto the lesser-developed world. But if mainstream American lesbian and gay politics and media reassign AIDS to the shadow of gay marriage and the military, where might we find a discourse about AIDS that both marks the significant changes that surfaced in the wake of the 1996 International AIDS Conference in Vancouver and also acknowledges the political necessity of foregrounding AIDS?

Historically, performance has proved a powerful means of intervening in the public understanding and experience of AIDS and of counter-

ing neglect of it by the larger culture. Performance is a cultural practice that does more than illustrate the social and historical context in which it is embedded.<sup>20</sup> At its best, it shapes and transforms the way we understand and experience our lives. In *Acts of Intervention: Performance, Gay Culture, and AIDS*, I argue that AIDS performance is both a political intervention and an embodied theorization. Performance has provided a different perspective on the events reported in the dominant media, including those of gay culture. In the remainder of the essay, I consider the work of two performers with HIV, Bill T. Jones and Neil Greenberg, in light of the shifts in AIDS discourse I have been describing. What does it mean to live with HIV after the AIDS crisis has supposedly ended? How might we consider the relationship between AIDS and the performing arts if contemporary culture is “not-about-AIDS”? What follows is a discussion of two dancer-choreographers whose work helps us think through the contradictions and challenges of “the end of AIDS.” Examining the work of these artists allows us to track and affirm some of the cultural work around HIV that performance is able to represent, work that traditional print culture and media have been much less successful in accomplishing. But why privilege performance?

I focus on these choreographers and on dance studies for a number of reasons. First, the work of these artists stands out as among the most compelling I have seen in the past decade. It has enabled me to think through many of the challenges AIDS continues to provoke even when the work itself might not be about AIDS at all. Second, dance provides a unique entrance into theorizations of the body, temporality, and sociality, and yet it remains marginal to debates and discussions in cultural studies, queer theory, and lesbian and gay scholarship. This essay responds to recent calls in my own primary fields, theater/performance studies and American studies, to incorporate dance and dance research into the mix.<sup>21</sup> Third, dance—like the rest of the arts—often enacts a kind of counterpublicity to dominant discourses, including not only those advanced by the mainstream media but also contemporary discourses about lesbian and gay life, which increasingly resist and disavow the radical politics on which the gay and lesbian movement was founded. Unfortunately, the performing arts remain marginal to most discussions of contemporary queer life, whatever one’s politics. This essay sets out to counter that marginalization by placing the performing arts at the heart of the national culture to see what these performances might tell us about contemporary life. Finally, dance can communicate a discourse of resistance, an embodied language of cultural memory, especially for groups that have suffered oppression throughout their histories.<sup>22</sup>

In New York City, in 1994, Neil Greenberg and Bill T. Jones each premiered an ensemble dance that has become something of a signature work. The titles of these dances, Greenberg’s *Not-About-AIDS-Dance* and Jones’s *Still/Here* are telling reminders of how AIDS was understood at that moment.<sup>23</sup> *Still/Here* was based on “survival workshops” Jones conducted throughout the United States with people facing life-threatening

illness, including AIDS. Jones describes the participants as “of all ages, classes, races, sexual preferences, and states of health.”<sup>24</sup> In its promotional materials, the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company describes *Still/Here* as follows:

At the heart of *Still/Here* are the “Survival Workshops: Talking and Moving About Life and Death.” The first was conducted in November 1992, in Austin, Texas as an experiment to see what, if anything, could be collected from the experiences of people living with life-threatening illness that would inform a dance/theatre work. After it was completed, we realized that the participants living on the front lines of the struggle to understand our mortality are in possession of information—is their knowledge a gift or is it a burden? The participants’ generosity of spirit and willingness to express their experience both with words and gestures was both exhilarating and terrible. They are the essence of *Still/Here*: their gestures inform the choreography, their words the lyrics, their images the stage. They will always be *Still/Here*. This work is dedicated to them.<sup>25</sup>

Jones, whose lover and collaborator, Arnie Zane, died of AIDS in 1988, often refers to AIDS in his work and in the public discourse that accompanies it (fig. 1).<sup>26</sup> *Red Room* (1987) is a dance that Jones composed during Zane’s final two years with AIDS and performed at Zane’s 1988 memorial service at New York City’s Joyce Theater. *Forsythia* (1989) sets out, in part, to memorialize Zane and includes Jones and Arthur Aviles dancing to a tape-recorded voice-over of Zane describing his dreams. *D-Man in the Waters* (1989) is dedicated to Damien Acquavella, a dancer with AIDS who was a member of the company. As Acquavella’s health deteriorated, Jones improvised ways to honor Acquavella’s desire to continue to dance despite his diagnosis. In *Last Night on Earth*, Jones’s autobiography, Jones explains how AIDS and dance converged in *D-Man*: “I promised Damien there would be a place for him in the dance. As he could no longer walk by the time of the debut, in 1989, I carried him on stage, offering my legs as he executed the arm movements of what would have been the solo. When Damien could no longer perform, I chose not to replace him in the piece. Oddly asymmetrical groupings now mark his absence. Damien passed in June of 1990.”<sup>27</sup> *Uncle Tom’s Cabin/The Promised Land* (1990) included a number of AIDS references, beginning with the title, which Zane suggested from his hospital bed. The three-hour multimedia performance even incorporated a religious figure from the local sponsoring community, whom Jones would ask a series of questions ending with the provocation “Is AIDS punishment from God?”<sup>28</sup> This unscripted conversation was meant to, in Jones’s words, “conjure this ephemeral, unquantifiable, potentially deadly thing called Faith.”<sup>29</sup> But it also helped set the context for how AIDS was understood by certain communities. While none of these works is exclusively about AIDS, each is informed by the sociohistorical contexts, including the deeply personal experiences of Jones and



Fig. 1. Bill T. Jones in prologue to *We Set Out Early . . . Visibility Was Poor*. Photo © Johan Elbers.

his company members, of the late 1980s. Jones's artistic work during this period was at the forefront of these issues even as it meditated on broader cross-cultural and transhistorical themes.

Although Jones had tested HIV-positive in 1985, his HIV status did not become part of the public discourse on his work until 1990, when he was interviewed for a cover story in the *Advocate*. "Somewhere in this comfortable conversation," Jones later recalled of the interview,

I must have mentioned that I was positive—most casually, I'm sure, because I don't think we discussed it or its ramifications during the interview. The fact appeared, however, in the first column of this prominent profile. I was concerned. . . . From then on, every review that would once have said "Bill T. Jones, tall and black, Arnie Zane, short and white" read "Bill T. Jones, tall, black, HIV positive." I had to deal with it.<sup>30</sup>

Thus the disclosure of Jones's HIV status is something that he could not fully control or determine. Having mentioned his status to a reporter in an aside, Jones has found it presented as a major feature of his life and work by nearly everyone who has written on him since.<sup>31</sup> And yet despite this unintended outing of his serostatus, Jones bravely took on the burden of representation that came with this disclosure and with his increasing celebrity. For many people at the time, he was the most visible person



Fig. 2. Members of the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Company performing in *Still/Here*. Left to right: Gabri Christa, Odile Reine-Adelaide, Maya Saffrin. Photo © Beatriz Schiller.

with HIV in the performing arts. As he admits in *Last Night on Earth*, “I had to deal with it.”

In *Still/Here*, Jones combines spoken text, selected from survival workshop dialogue and arranged by Kenneth Frazelle and Vernon Reid, who also composed the music; images, including photos and videos of the survival workshop participants, created by Gretchen Bender; and movement, sometimes based on the gestural language of the participants, that he choreographed for his dancers. *Still/Here* is danced by the members of the company and not the participants from the survival workshops (fig. 2). The choreographic language, as Jones explains, “frequently relies upon a lone performer who is watched, touched, tracked, or supported by the group” (fig. 3).<sup>32</sup> At one point, at the beginning of his process, Jones had considered disbanding his company and working with a company of HIV-positive dancers. He decided against this idea for two main reasons. First, the company was a way to honor the memory of Zane; second, Jones had assembled over the years an extraordinary group of dancers.

During its New York premiere at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, Arlene Croce, the prominent dance critic for the *New Yorker*, refused to review *Still/Here* but nonetheless dismissed it as “victim art” in the very pages where a review would have run. Croce claimed that Jones “thinks that victimhood in and of itself is sufficient to the creation of an art spectacle” and



Fig. 3. Members of the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Company performing in *Still/Here*. Left to right: Maya Saffrin, Odile Reine-Adelaide, Gabri Christa, Daniel Russell, Rosalynde LeBlanc, Lawrence Goldhuber, Gordon F. White (in rear), Torrin Cummings (in rear), Arthur Aviles. Photo © Johan Elbers.

that Jones and his audiences are “co-religionists in the cult of the Self.”<sup>33</sup> She presumed that since Jones was HIV-positive, any meditation he might have on the time-honored theme of mortality must be narrowly understood to be autobiographical, what she deridingly terms “the cult of the Self.” Croce’s polemical and dismissive misrepresentation of *Still/Here* framed the national discussions of the work to such an extent that virtually every review of the dance mentioned it. *Still/Here*, which I saw performed in 1994 at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, had little relation to the victimhood charge that Croce had imagined. Instead of representing victimhood, the piece was a beautiful and moving meditation on mortality and the various means by which people from diverse human backgrounds come to terms with it. As someone who was immersed in the AIDS community, had experienced the deaths of friends, and was witness to the challenges of those living with HIV, including one of the participants in the survival workshops whose image, voice, and reflections were incorporated into *Still/Here*, I found the work filled with hope and danced with creative resilience. *Still/Here*, as Marcia Siegel has noted, “evokes a sort of 1970s positivism, an almost poignant faith that supportive friends and self-awareness can help even those who are imperiled to live bravely.”<sup>34</sup>

Whereas *Still/Here* received such unprecedented media attention for a contemporary dance event that it catapulted Jones into the national limelight, few people outside of the dance world are familiar with Neil Greenberg’s work. Greenberg danced with Merce Cunningham before founding his own five-member company, Dance by Neil Greenberg, in 1987.<sup>35</sup> Not-



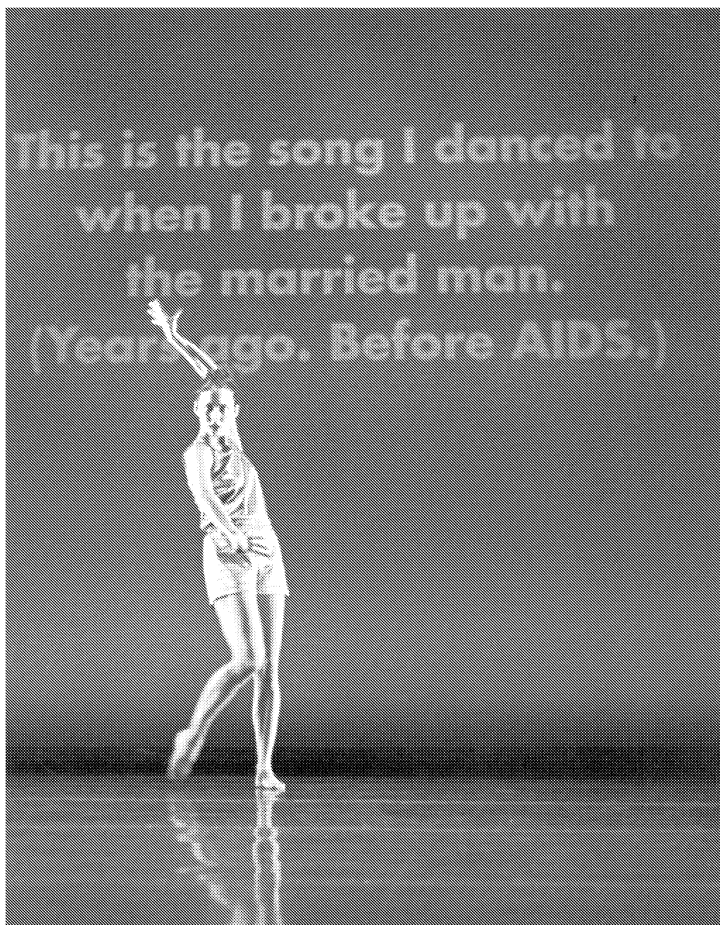


Fig. 4. Neil Greenberg performing in *Not-About-AIDS-Dance*. Photo © Alice Garik.

*About-AIDS-Dance* (fig. 4) premiered in New York City almost six months before *Still/Here*. It was performed at the Kitchen, one of New York City's leading dance venues, from May 5 to May 8, 1994, and again, as an encore performance, from December 13 to December 17, 1994. The *New York Times* named it "one of the year's 10 best" dance events, and it received a 1995 Bessie Award for outstanding dance and performance. *Not-About-AIDS-Dance* inaugurated a trilogy of pieces, including *The Disco Project* (1995) and *Part Three* (1998), that tracks Greenberg's experience of HIV in the context of the life changes he and his fellow company members underwent during a four-year period. This personal information is provided by texts projected onto the back wall of the performance space. The texts always express Greenberg's point of view, regardless of who is dancing (fig. 5). At no point do the dancers themselves speak. *Not-About-AIDS-Dance* refers to what David Gere calls the "silent signification" that characterizes most dances in the 1980s and early 1990s: the reluctance of choreographers to identify their work with AIDS despite the sense that the work may be about AIDS in some way.<sup>36</sup> Greenberg's ironic title is meant to call attention to this phenomenon and to distance his own work from it. The title is meant to intervene in this silence by invoking the very rhetoric that enables it. *Not-About-AIDS-Dance* extends beyond this silent signification in the dance world to comment on the cultural silence and suppression of AIDS.



Fig. 5. "This is the song I danced to when I broke up with the married man. (Years ago. Before AIDS.)" Justine Lynch performing in *The Disco Project*. Photo © Tom Brazil.



his brother, Jon, who died of AIDS-related complications. Through projected texts we are told, "This is the first material I made after my brother died." Justine Lynch, one of the dancers, performs the material. The rest of the company, which is dressed in white tank tops and shorts, quickly joins her, and the movements are repeated in solos and quartets. The projections introduce the company members and offer reference points for them and for the dance. "Jo is dancing that same material again" and "Ellen was a big pothead in high school" are among the first things we are told. The information is generally personal and conversational. Short, idiosyncratic fragments pulled from popular music break the silence that forms the primary score for the dance. In another section, Greenberg incorporates "found movements," the physical gestures he observed while his brother was in a coma: rolled-back eyes, fingers pointing to the head, stillness (fig. 6). He performs this section alone and without musical accompaniment. The projections state the following:

This is what my brother Jon looked like in his coma.  
He was in a coma 2 days before he died of AIDS.  
I'm HIV+.  
But this part of the dance isn't meant to be about me.

Later Greenberg will tell us that he is asymptomatic. But now, even though he is memorializing his brother, he is also positioning his audience

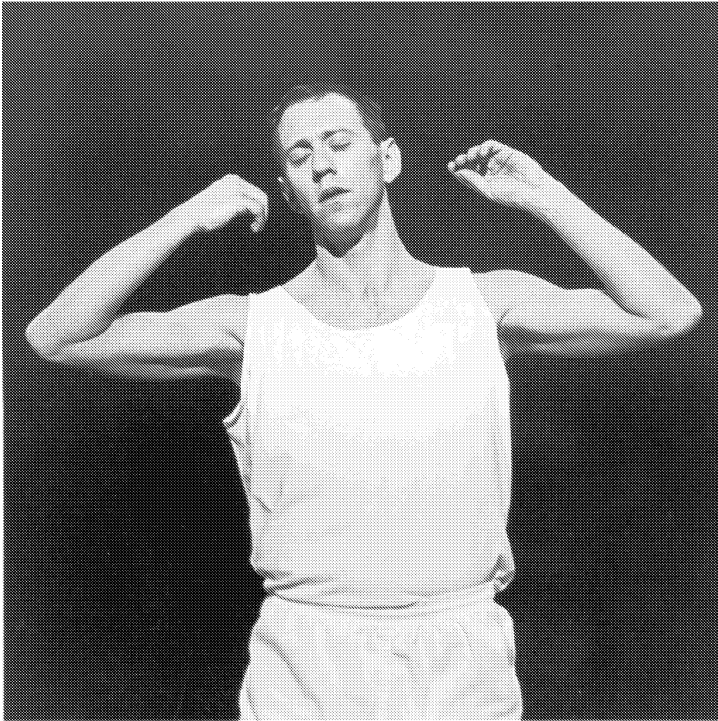


Fig. 6. "This is what my brother Jon looked like in his coma." Neil Greenberg performing in *Not-About-AIDS-Dance*. Photo © Tom Brazil.

to consider his own HIV status in relation to his brother's death. Throughout *Not-About-AIDS-Dance*, text projections will mention others who died while Greenberg was creating the piece. These deaths structure and condition the dance. The list of them seems unending:

I went away in August.  
When I came back I learned Ed Hartmann and Jon Falabella had died.  
On Labor Day Richard Wolcott died.  
When I came back from Richard's funeral I learned David Hagen had died.  
Within a week Donald Greenhill died.  
It was quieter then for awhile.

In this section, as Leigh Witchel aptly observes, "the projections progress faster than anywhere else in the dance, and then, like the announcement, there is a diminuendo and it does seem quieter for a while."<sup>37</sup> But only for a while. *Not-About-AIDS-Dance* ends with text projections that inform us of more deaths, each marking a moment in the dance's composition and thus a moment in history: "At this point in the making of the dance my friend Ron Vawter died." A quartet forms and then disbands from the stage to stand at opposite ends of the performance space. The four dancers join Greenberg, who is watching from the wings. The movement is repeated. Another slide announces yet another death: "At this point in the making of the dance my friend Michael Mitchell died." The quartet repeats the choreography. Before we hear of more deaths, the dance abruptly ends. *Not-About-AIDS-Dance* therefore not only memorializes the dead but also calls attention to the relentless dying that occurred dur-

ing the dance's making, between July 1993, when Jon Greenberg died, and May 1994, when the dance premiered.

Both *Still/Here* and *Not-About-AIDS-Dance* were created and performed in the midst of what we can only describe as the "AIDS crisis," a period of deep skepticism about the possibility of survival, a period marked by the continued acceleration of HIV infections and AIDS-related deaths. Greenberg and Jones created work that reflected on mortality and was understood at the time to be—on some level and to varying degrees—"about AIDS." In *Not-About-AIDS-Dance*, Greenberg, for example, shares his own experiences with HIV, but in *Still/Here* Jones does not. While we need to consider these works in this particular cultural and historical context, it is equally important to recognize that both works set AIDS within a larger meditation on loss, illness, survival, and everyday life. *Still/Here*, for example, is also "about" other life-threatening illnesses. *Not-About-AIDS-Dance* is also "about" the various other issues, serious and banal, facing the members of the company. (For one dancer, Christopher, the dance is not about anything discernible. "Christopher wants his dancing to speak for itself," we are told.) It also memorializes non-AIDS-related deaths that the company has experienced. These dances are at once about AIDS and not about AIDS, insofar as they are never reducible to, or exclusively concerned with, the AIDS crisis.

This paradox of being both about and not about AIDS becomes all the more evident when we consider the work these choreographers created in the end-of-AIDS or post-AIDS discursive moment. During the 1997–98 season, Jones premiered *We Set Out Early . . . Visibility Was Poor*, and Neil Greenberg premiered *Part Three*.<sup>38</sup> Unlike Jones's earlier work, *We Set Out Early* contains no text, image, or narrative to organize its meaning. The seventy-minute dance is performed in three sections; the music is by Stravinsky, Cage, and the contemporary Latvian composer Peteris Vasks. Much has been said of the work's abstractness; given Jones's emphatic addressing of social issues previously, his reluctance to provide a "message" here strikes many critics as noteworthy. Indeed, the work is said to be not only abstract but "non-linear, with little narrative structure"; it "luxuriates in the freedom of pure movement"; Jones, it seems, "is tired of talking."<sup>39</sup>

Jones himself admits that the piece "started with the music, not from an idea I wanted to express." "I've been talked about so much," he explains. "It's difficult for many journalists to talk about the work because they're so busy talking about me. I made a work I really did not want to have to talk about; I truly wanted it to be a theatrical, visual experience."<sup>40</sup> Jones does not imply that AIDS is over simply because he does not speak about it in *We Set Out Early*. Nor are his comments a disavowal of AIDS. *We Set Out Early*, unlike earlier work that secured Jones's celebrity, does not address social or cultural concerns. In fact, one might even argue that his celebrity—which both arises from and exceeds his race, sexuality, and serostatus—now enables him to create work that is not about these issues. In the context of AIDS, Jones's much publicized HIV-identity serves as a precondition for a post-AIDS piece of work.

While *We Set Out Early* may not address a particular social subject, Jones has plenty to say about this piece. He recognizes that dance communicates cultural meaning and that therefore *We Set Out Early* still makes a social statement. "The social messages are there, yes, but they are not overt," Jones explains. The piece "is about how we live and if there is subversion in it, it's by the example of the company, which is a cast of nations, touching each other, celebrating our bodies and humanity through movement."<sup>41</sup> For Jones, the message is to be found in the image of the performing bodies of the dancers.

Given Jones's own views of *We Set Out Early*, I find his discussions of the artistic process for it especially interesting. Jones explains that he learned from the participants in the survival workshops preparatory to *Still/Here* that the key to survival is to identify what matters most to you and then give yourself over to it. For Jones, what mattered was dance. "I looked around and, lo and behold, I was so glad to find out that I really loved dancing, as a primary art form. OK, I would give myself to that. Don't talk about things, because we can dance, we can see who you are, your race, your sexuality, what you're afraid of."<sup>42</sup> Since *Still/Here* Jones has become interested in finding a personal dance vocabulary; he works with Janet Wong, his rehearsal director, to codify his movements so that they can be learned by the company. *We Set Out Early*, for example, was created first through the music: "The music became the map and I followed the map with my body and the company followed my body."<sup>43</sup> The creative process began in the studio with Jones dancing to the Stravinsky score. Jones videotaped himself and then studied his movement with Wong. Together they decided which sections worked. Wong then learned the sections herself and taught the movements back to Jones and to the ten-member company. In Jones's words: "I start out alone, approaching the music purely as rhythm and texture. I work with Janet, then the company comes into it, and I respond to their personalities and shapes. . . . I choose and edit, but I also listen and see what people naturally give back."<sup>44</sup>

Throughout this process Jones's body is positioned as the exemplary body, whose movements are studied, rehearsed, and then performed by the other dancers. His body is the filter through which the dance is made. Because Jones's body, like all bodies, is marked by race, gender, age, sexuality, and serostatus, and other vectors of identity, all of which he has explicitly addressed in much of his earlier work, his body helps make the meaning of the dance too. In the end, however, this is not to say that *We Set Out Early* is about Bill T. Jones. Rather Jones's material body, along with the artistic body of his work, helps organize our responses to the dance. Whether Jones is engaged in an explicit production of meaning (as in *Still/Here*, which is interspersed with video, voice-over, and Jones's public statements about the survival workshops), or in a kind of resistance to meaning (as in *We Set Out Early*, in which there is no narrative or text to provide the dance with an anticipated social message; Jones's own statements about the piece concern artistic process almost exclusively), the meanings of *Still/Here* and *We Set Out Early* are shaped in part by his

artistic career. In other words, the history of his work's production and reception informs how we think about his choreography in the present. *We Set Out Early* cannot but signify in relation to *Still/Here* and its reception. Yet this history should not completely determine our understanding of Jones's work. In short, it is not productive to reduce his dance to the issue of identity even if it is at the heart of many of his earlier works.

Jones himself does not dance in *We Set Out Early*. (He did not dance in *Still/Here* either.) However, when I saw it performed in Los Angeles in 1998, he performed a short solo as a prologue to the evening's program. Dancing to the third movement of Beethoven's String Quartet no. 16, Jones demonstrated with exuberant physicality and grace what is possible for artists with HIV. The dance was not about AIDS, but if it had anything to tell us about AIDS, it was, to paraphrase Jones's own words, by the example of the dancer celebrating his body and humanity through movement. Jones, we might say, is still here.

If Jones is often read in the context of AIDS regardless of what his work might actually say about it, Neil Greenberg, whose career has generated less national media attention, remains less marked by his serostatus. But instead of obscuring his serostatus, Greenberg continues to find it politically necessary and artistically useful to mark explicitly his relationship to AIDS. He also asks us to consider each installment of his trilogy in relation to the previous ones and to work that predates the trilogy. His dancers perform sections of his earlier works in the newer pieces and inform us in text projections that he is doing it. Thus the work builds meaning through self-referential systems that reflect on the physical process of Greenberg's HIV status and the artistic process of his choreography. The last dance of his trilogy is itself composed of three parts. In fact, Greenberg calls the dance *Part Three* and gives each section a subtitle: *Part Three (My Fair Lady)*, *Part Three (Judy Garland)*, and *Part Three (Luck)*. *Part Three (My Fair Lady)* incorporates music by Lerner and Loewe from the film soundtrack as well as traces of music from Jimmy Somerville and the Communards, and from Judy Garland (fig. 7). *Part Three (Judy Garland)* includes musical selections from Garland's career, including "Somewhere Over the Rainbow." *Part Three (Luck)* is danced without musical accompaniment and is the only section of *Part Three* with projected texts.

In *Part Three (Luck)*, the text projections bring the lives of the company since *The Disco Project* up to date. We learn, for example, that "Ellen is moving to L.A." and "Justine now has a boyfriend." Greenberg's own updates are presented during his three solos. In "Neil's Solo 1 of 3," we learn that he is on protease inhibitors: "I started taking the pills last February"; "by March, my 'viral load' tested undetectable." From this moment on, dance issues and health issues intersect.<sup>45</sup> Consider, for example, the full text projections in "Neil's Solo 3 of 3":

I was sick in October.

Unexplained high fevers that sent me into the hospital—  
Right when we were to start work on this dance.

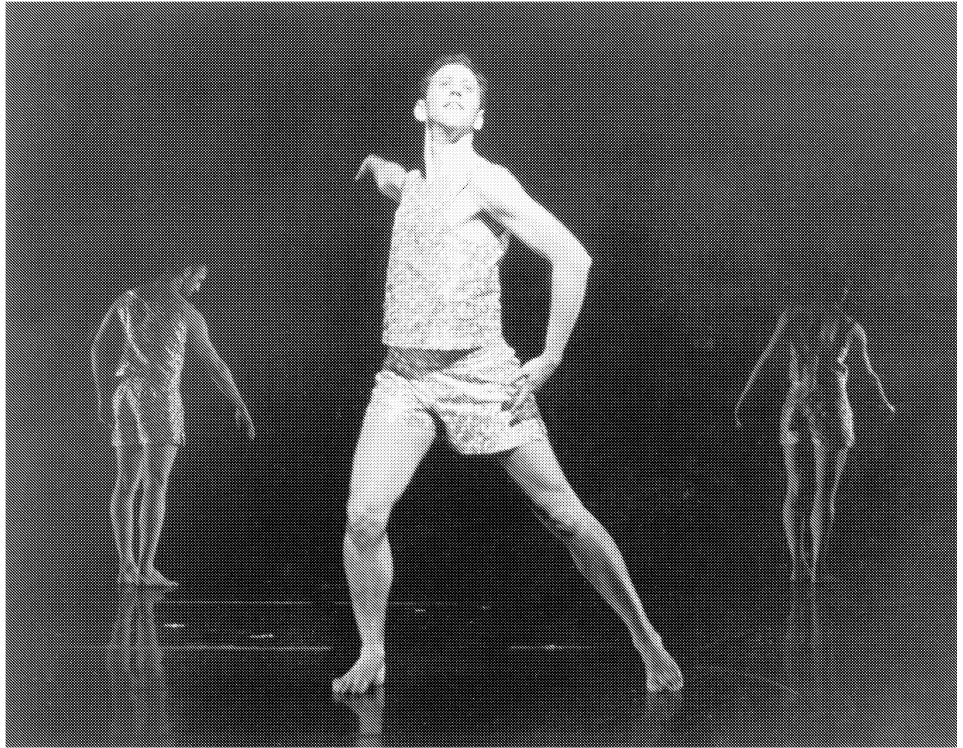


Fig. 7. Dance by Neil Greenberg's *Part Three (My Fair Lady)*. Left to right: Christopher Batenhorst, Neil Greenberg, Paige Martin. Photo © Tom Brazil.

I had a complete recovery but it was scary.  
I think it was just the flu.  
Whatever.  
We lost some rehearsal time.

As we see in *Not-About-AIDS-Dance*, when the dance is about AIDS, it is also about dance and its production. In Greenberg's trilogy, AIDS is not just a theme; it is a constraint placed on the dance itself. It informs and conditions the process of the dance from its creation, its rehearsal, and its performance.<sup>46</sup>

Greenberg's insistence that we not lose sight of his HIV status, or of the way in which it continues to inform his choreography, is a comment on the cultural tendency to relegate AIDS to the margins of cultural inquiry and expression. Like the trilogy as a whole, *Part Three (Luck)* makes public what is assumed to be private. It brings into the public sphere a discourse for AIDS that is not about closure or finality or "the end of AIDS" but is about process, including the changing of our understanding of AIDS. Unlike the first two dances in the trilogy, *Part Three (Luck)* does not address others with HIV. Although deeply personal, it is not meant to be a universalizing claim for these new treatments. Greenberg offers the following insight:

I had to make a new piece, because I had to update the audience. In *Not-About-AIDS-Dance*, I enacted my brother's death by showing what he looked like in a coma. By doing so, I implicitly asked the au-

dience to imagine my dying of AIDS. Now I'm on the new drugs, my viral load is undetectable. I've told my parents and the company, and I feel I have to tell the audience. If I asked the audience to get involved with me, I have a responsibility not just to leave them dangling.<sup>47</sup>

*Part Three (Luck)* also references Greenberg's sense of loss in the face of the company's dispersal. (Two of the original dancers, whose lives are also documented in the trilogy, have moved on to other projects.) Greenberg considers it unlikely that the complete trilogy will be performed again. "The year I made *Not-About-AIDS-Dance*, I wanted to make that moment stand still," he explains in the context of the trilogy's final performance in the spring of 1998; "[In *Part Three (Luck)*] I had to deal with the emotional trauma of not being able to hold onto the moment anymore."<sup>48</sup> The trilogy memorializes Greenberg's brother, Jon; his lover, Frank; and many of his friends who died during the period in which the dances were made. It also marks the dramatic shifts that the new drug therapies have effected for many people in the United States. At the same time, it counters the "not-about-AIDS" discourse that characterizes contemporary gay culture. Greenberg's work is especially important in helping us think about how to address both the experience of AIDS and its erasure from the cultural landscape of gay and lesbian politics. In fact, *Not-About-AIDS-Dance*, and the trilogy it launches, forces that erasure into visibility within the space of performance. Greenberg refuses to normalize AIDS or to imagine it as "over"; he seeks instead a new creative vocabulary with which to address the continuing challenges of living with HIV.<sup>49</sup>

The final section of the last dance in the complete trilogy is subtitled *Luck* because, as Greenberg states, "I have been lucky. For some reason the virus in my body didn't kill me before these new drugs came along, so that's luck. Or is it? To me, dancing is about delving into such questions."<sup>50</sup> Greenberg's comment on dance call attention to the role that the performing arts can continue to play in helping us think through the challenges of AIDS. Delving into the complex and challenging questions we face, as Greenberg reminds us, is not the exclusive domain of writers, activists, cultural analysts, or scholars. And the forces that perpetuate this divide between writers and performers and that set up a binary between theorists and artists need to be aggressively challenged. The arts play a critical role in the culture and, in the case of AIDS, sometimes provide the means to move through the impasse of stalled rhetoric and political confusion. As we have seen, Greenberg and Jones show us ways to move forward, both in our recognition of the important historical shifts and medical breakthroughs concerning HIV/AIDS, and in our need to continue to focus our energies on AIDS. These works were among the first successful attempts to think through an idea of change without lapsing into an end-of-AIDS discourse premised on either disregard or disavowal. These choreographers offer ways of moving through the world without succumbing to the post-AIDS sentiments surfacing in the late 1990s and shaping queer culture in the early twenty-first century.

## NOTES

My thanks to the editors, Janelle G. Reinelt and Joseph R. Roach, for sustained engagement with my work and career. Thanks also to Carolyn Dinshaw, David Halperin, Viet Nguyen, and Richard Meyer for reading and commenting on earlier drafts of this chapter. My thanks to Neil Greenberg and Bill T. Jones for their work and for the critical conversations we had about it.

1. Andrew Sullivan, "When AIDS Ends," *New York Times Magazine*, November 10, 1996, 1. The title of Sullivan's essay shifts from the magazine's cover title, "When AIDS Ends," to an internal publication title, "When Plagues End: Notes on the Twilight of an Epidemic." Further confusion results from the magazine's cover graphic, which highlights Sullivan's text and the phrase "the end of AIDS." Chip Kidd, who designed the cover, explains that "the prose was so strong that it became key." (Janet Froelich, "Cover Boy: Interview with Chip Kidd," *New York Times Magazine*, November 10, 1996, 51.) My reference to Sullivan's essay follows the magazine's cover title and byline "'When AIDS Ends' By Andrew Sullivan." For a full discussion of this image and Sullivan's essay, see Phillip Brian Harper, "Gay Male Identities, Personal Privacy, and Relations of Public Exchange: Notes on Directions for Queer Critique," *Social Text* 52–53 (1997): 5–29. Eric Rofes also discusses Sullivan's essay and the discrepancies in its title in *Dry Bones Breathe: Post-AIDS Identities and Cultures* (Binghamton, N.Y.: Harrington Park Press, 1998). Rofes points out that yet another phrase—"After AIDS"—is used in the layout of the printed pages of the essay. Rofes also includes a discussion of *Newsweek's* "The End of AIDS?" cover image and article and responses to these essays from gay and lesbian writers whom I do not discuss in this essay.

2. See Rofes, *Dry Bones Breathe*. This book is marked by a vision of gay culture that is much more expansive than that of most contemporary gay male commentators. He considers the experiences of many of those who are often left out of the profile of what passes for gay male community: queer youth and queer elders, gays who live outside of urban centers, and gay men of color.

3. Michelangelo Signorile, "641,086 & Counting," *Out*, September 1998, 72.

4. Larry Kramer, "1,112 and Counting," *New York Native*, March 14–27, 1983. See also Kramer's own account of this essay in *Reports from the Holocaust: The Making of an AIDS Activist* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989).

5. Signorile, "641,086 & Counting," 188.

6. While fear might force people to pay attention to AIDS in the short run, it hasn't been very successful as the basis for an HIV prevention campaign (see Walt Odets, *In the Shadow of the Epidemic* [Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1995]). Nevertheless, Signorile argues for the return of fear in a prevention campaign directed at gay men in "Don't Fear the Fear," *Advocate* 13 (1999): 51–55.

7. Harper, "Gay Male Identities," 8. But see also Cathy Cohen's important book *The Boundaries of Blackness: AIDS and the Breakdown of Black Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), in which she argues that with the arrival of protease inhibitors a new racist discourse has emerged in the popular media around the question of access: "In the case of reports on protease inhibitors, a troubling discourse has already developed. It seems that protease inhibitor therapies require great discipline, since a patient's medication must be taken, in some cases, every eight hours on an empty stomach. Further, without strict adherence to the defined regime with regard to the medication, it is possible that a virus resistant to these drugs might develop and spread. Thus the question of which patients or people with AIDS have 'enough discipline' to receive these new therapies is now a central



part of a new generation of AIDS reporting. Journalists are openly discussing and writing about who should be allowed such treatment" (184).

8. Harper, "Gay Male Identities," 8.

9. In *Love Undetectable*, Sullivan revisits his earlier essay, admitting that the hostile public response from many gay men "took my breath away." In an effort to clarify his claims, Sullivan writes: "But this end, of course, was laden with paradox. As the plague relented in one world, it was busy redoubling its might in another, in countries far away, and against people who had nothing with which to counter it." (See Sullivan, *Love Undetectable: Notes on Friendship, Sex, and Survival* [New York: Knopf, 1998], 33.)

10. Rofes, *Dry Bones Breathe*, 72.

11. Harper, "Gay Male Identities," 27.

12. Paula A. Treichler, *How to Have Theory in an Epidemic: Cultural Chronicles of AIDS* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1999).

13. Mario Cooper, "Two Nations Under Plague," *POZ*, January 1999, 20.

14. Cohen, *The Boundaries of Blackness*, 113.

15. Elizabeth Shogren, "Clinton to Boost Minority AIDS Funding," *Los Angeles Times*, October 28, 1998, A9.

16. See Liz Galst, "Check in the Mail?" *POZ*, December 1998, 42. Galst provides accounts from various ASOs on the decline in AIDS philanthropy.

17. Lawrence O. Gostin, director of Georgetown University/Johns Hopkins University Program on Law and Public Health and a member of the advisory committee of the CDC, as quoted in Lynda Richardson, "Wave of Laws Aimed at People with HIV," *New York Times*, September 25, 1998, A1.

18. Sean Strub, "S.O.S.," *POZ*, December 1998, 13.

19. The cultural repercussions of this shift in the lesbian and gay movement as it relates to gay marriage are detailed by Michael Warner, for whom the most urgent concerns include attacks on queer sexual culture and the isolation of queer counterpublics from "national organizations, magazines, and publics." Warner ends his essay with the claim that "any argument for gay marriage requires an intensified concern for what is thrown into its shadow" ("Normal and Normaller: Beyond Gay Marriage," *GLQ* 5 [1999]: 159). AIDS, I argue, is one of the issues thrown into this shadow.

20. David Román, *Acts of Intervention: Performance, Gay Culture, and AIDS* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998).

21. See, for example, Jane Desmond, "Embodying Difference: Issues in Dance and Cultural Studies," in *Meaning in Motion: New Cultural Studies of Dance*, ed. Jane Desmond (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1997), as well as the important essays in that volume by Susan Leigh Foster, Norman Bryson, and Randy Martin, each of whom argues the critical interdisciplinarity possibilities of dance studies. See also *Everynight Life: Culture and Dance in Latin/o America*, ed. Celeste Fraser Delgado and José Muñoz (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1997); and Susan Leigh Foster, ed., *Choreographing History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995).

22. Alberto Sandoval and I write on this process in "Caught in the Web: Latinidad, AIDS, and Allegory in *Kiss of the Spider Woman, the Musical*," in *American Literature* 67, no. 3 (1995): 553–85.

23. My discussion of these works is based in part on performances I saw of *Still/Here* in 1994 at the Brooklyn Academy of Music and of *Not-About-AIDS-Dance* in 1994 at the Kitchen in New York City. I also saw *Dance* by Neil Greenberg's *The Disco Project* at Highways Performance Space in Santa Monica in 1995 and his

complete trilogy, comprising these two works and *Part Three*, at Playhouse 91 in New York City in 1998. I saw Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company perform *We Set Out Early . . . Visibility Was Poor* at Royce Hall in Los Angeles in 1998. I am indebted to the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company for photographs and press packets and to *Dance* by Neil Greenberg for photographs, videos, and press packets.

24. Bill T. Jones with Peggy Gillespie, *Last Night on Earth* (New York: Pantheon, 1995), 252.

25. From the promotional material supplied by the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company.

26. Identity issues, as Gay Morris points out, have been evident throughout Jones's career. "What He Called Himself: Issues of Identity in Early Dances by Bill T. Jones," in *Dancing Desires*, ed. Jane Desmond (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000).

27. Jones, *Last Night on Earth*, 194.

28. *Uncle Tom's Cabin/The Promised Land* was performed in over thirty-five cities, and Jones was never quite sure how these questions would be answered in advance.

29. Jones, *Last Night on Earth*, 220.

30. Jones, *Last Night on Earth*, 250. The actual *Advocate* quote reads as follows: "Even now, I would like to have straight men in my company, but I worry if I could trust them. There's a stigma associated with our company because someone in it died of AIDS and because I'm HIV-positive. I want to get on with my life and deal with my artistic collaborators, but I still expect someone to scorn me. I find that most people are curious to know what AIDS is like, but they are scared too." Douglas Sadownick, "The Dancer Speaks Out," *Advocate*, February 27, 1990, 38.

31. Some critics have gone so far as to suggest that Jones's artistic success is due to his HIV status and race. In a *New Yorker* profile, Henry Louis Gates Jr. quotes a critic who states that "the reason he's getting so many awards so soon is that people aren't gambling on his surviving: they're giving it to him now." Gates reports, "It is clearly a commonplace, albeit usually an unspoken one, that the fact that Jones is both HIV-positive and black has more than a little to do with his having received so many laurels so early in his career." "The Body Politic," *New Yorker*, November 28, 1994, 124. By now the irony of these claims is self-evident. In 1994, however, they conveyed the sense of urgency surrounding HIV/AIDS, even if the claim about Jones's success makes little sense. If HIV-positive black gay artists are the new darlings of the elite media, how is it that no other artists are named in Gates's essay or in the larger cultural discourse of the period? Leaving aside the implications of tokenism, such comments displace attention from the artistic work and set up Jones—and other artists with HIV—as undeserving of whatever critical acclaim they may receive.

32. Jones, *Last Night on Earth*, 259.

33. Arlene Croce, "A Critic at Bay: Discussing the Undiscussable," *New Yorker*, December 26, 1994, 54–60. For responses to Croce's condemning rhetoric, see Richard Goldstein, "The Croce Criterion," *Village Voice*, January 3, 1995, 8; Deborah Jowitt, "Critic as Victim," *Village Voice*, January 10, 1995, 67; Frank Rich, "Dance of Death," *New York Times*, January 8, 1995, A19; and, last but not least, letters from Tony Kushner, bell hooks, and others published in *New Yorker* itself, January 30, 1995, 10–13. For a context for which to place *Still/Here*, see my collaboration with Tim Miller, "Preaching to the Converted," *Theatre Journal* 47, no. 2 (1995): 169–88. The bibliography on Bill T. Jones is impressive. For the dance context, see

Marcia B. Siegel, "Virtual Criticism and the Dance of Death," in *The Ends of Performance*, ed. Peggy Phelan and Jill Lane (New York: New York University Press, 1997); Jennifer Brody, "Opening Sequences," in Desmond, *Dancing Desires*; and Morris, "What He Called Himself." For studies that place Jones's work in African American cultural contexts, see Maurice Wallace, "The Autochoreography of an Ex-Snow Queen: Dance, Desire, and the Black Masculine in Melvin Dixon's *Vanishing Rooms*," in *Novel-Gazing: Queer Readings in Fiction*, ed. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1997); and Sharon Holland *Raising the Dead: Readings of Death and (Black) Subjectivity* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2000).

34. Siegel, "Virtual Criticism," 249.

35. For an excellent introduction to Neil Greenberg's career see Rick Whitaker and Don Daniels, "A Conversation with Neil Greenberg," *Ballet Review*, Spring 1997, 1–12.

36. David Gere, "How to Make Dance During an Epidemic," Ph.D. diss., University of California, Riverside, 1998.

37. Leigh Witchel, "Neil Greenberg's Trilogy: A Survival's Tale," *Ballet Review*, Fall 1998.

38. Both choreographers remain prolific. Shortly after the premier of *Part Three*, Greenberg choreographed for Mikhail Baryshnikov's *White Oak Dance Project* and premiered *This Is What Happened*, a dance-noir trio, set to Hitchcock film music by Bernard Herrmann at New York's PS 122 in the spring of 1999. Soon after *We Set Out Early*, Jones collaborated with Jessye Norman in *How! Do! We! Do!* as part of the New Visions series produced by New York's Lincoln Center in the summer of 1999, and he premiered *Out Some Place*, a full company dance, at the American Dance Festival in Durham, North Carolina. Both Jones and Greenberg danced at these events. Both artists continue to premier new work throughout the United States and abroad.

39. Karen Campbell, "Dance: Choreographer Jones Sheds New Light On 'Visibility,'" *Boston Herald*, May 31, 1998, 39; Lewis Segal, "Clarity of Vision in *Visibility* was Poor," *Los Angeles Times*, May 11, 1998, F3; Elizabeth Zimmer, "The Word From Bill T. Jones: He's Moving Beyond Words," *New York Times*, October 4, 1998, sec. 2, p. 12.

40. Zimmer, "Word From Jones," 12.

41. Rohan Preston, "Bill T.'s Exultant Adventure," *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, September 25, 1998, E1.

42. Jennifer Fisher, "Q & A: Bill T. Jones; Moved To Seek A Connection," *Los Angeles Times*, May 6, 1998, F1.

43. Preston, "Bill T.'s Exultant Adventure," E1.

44. Fisher, "Q & A," F1.

45. AIDS is not the only topic that Greenberg addresses in his solos. The second solo, for example, announces, "Last summer I fell in love."

46. Greenberg has explained to me that he was running a fever during the final performances of the trilogy in 1998.

47. Ann Daly, "A Chronicle Faces Death and Celebrates Life," *New York Times*, March 29, 1998, sec. 2, p. 52.

48. Daly, "A Chronicle Faces Death," 52

49. Others in the performing arts are also exploring this new creative vocabulary. While this essay is specifically concerned with only two artists, Jones and Greenberg, I do not mean to present them as the norm in terms of their health issues or artistic concerns or even their public responses to AIDS. Nor do I intend to

position them against each other, as if the response of one were to be valued over that of the other. Instead, I am interested in the work that artists with HIV are creating. I have written on other recent work by artists in "On the Unfashionability of AIDS-Arts Today," *Artery: The AIDS-Arts Forum*, an electronic journal available at [http://www.artistswithaids.org/artery/symposium/symposium\\_roman.html](http://www.artistswithaids.org/artery/symposium/symposium_roman.html).

I also discuss another dancer-choreographer, Paul Timothy Diaz, whose work *Dia de los vivos* (1996) both conjures and revises traditional Day of the Dead rituals, in my essay "Latino Performance and Identity," *Aztlán* 22 (1997): 151–68. For a full-scale study of AIDS and performance, see my book *Acts of Intervention*; for a full-scale study of AIDS and dance see Gere, "How to Make Dance." Finally, for new literature on women and AIDS see the excellent anthology *Gendered Epidemic: Representations of Women in the Age of AIDS*, ed. Nancy L. Roth and Katie Hogan (New York: Routledge, 1998).

50. Mike Steele, "Prolific Dancer Greenberg Comes With New Work," *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, March 1, 1998, F1.

# Psychoanalysis

Psychoanalytic theory and criticism have always been held suspect by a substantial number of scholars and artists. The reasons for this resistance are widespread, reaching back to an earlier era in the 1950s when Freudian “readings” seemed reductive or even absurd (penis envy always did have a hard time sounding credible), or to the 1970s humanistic therapy trends of “primal therapy,” Esalen Institute encounter weekends, and perhaps the most well-known of them all, Eric Berne’s Transactional Analysis. Some of us, myself included, benefited in a number of ways from this culture, but today it can bring smiles of embarrassment to those old enough to remember those “put your mother in the chair” gestalt exercises.

There were, of course, powerful thinkers and practitioners who were being taken very seriously as they recast their field: R.D. Laing, Wilhelm Reich, and most influentially, Jacques Lacan. Their intellectual projects were not laughable, although some thought them extreme. Feminists challenged the misogyny that seemed so long embedded in the history of psychoanalysis, and gay folks seldom found any psychoanalytic theory that could fit or was helpful. Still, in 1973 Juliet Mitchell’s *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* urged women to see that “psychoanalysis is not a recommendation for a patriarchal society, but an analysis of one. If we are interested in understanding and challenging the oppression of women,” she wrote, “we cannot afford to neglect it.”<sup>1</sup>

For theater scholars, it would seem that some form of psychoanalytic thinking is difficult to avoid. Acting theories often borrow or rework notions of emotional memory, unconscious repressions, psychic identifications and substitutions, and many other traditional psychoanalytic categories. Yet here too, as Anthony Kubiak has pointed out, the use of psychoanalysis as an analytic tool “will always raise eyebrows,” either because it is presumed ahistorical or because of discomfort with the key concept of the unconscious.<sup>2</sup> Yet performance brings the individual and the social together in its staging of symbolic repetitions. As both Kubiak and Herbert Blau point out, “what is ‘really’ happening is never the substance of what I am ‘really’ seeing. It is in this sense that we say theater always occurs elsewhere.”<sup>3</sup> Thus the scene seen is usually a gesture toward a scene unseen, but implied, prescient but not present. For Blau, “There is a certain kind of

thinking that I associate with the thought of the theatre. . . . the kind of thought that is deliberately, even relentlessly, subjunctive and provisional. . . . trying out an idea, taking it back again . . . putting it up for grabs in the exhaustive play of perception that, at some limit approaching meaning, always seems to escape, thus keeping meaning alive."<sup>4</sup>

Through the 1990s, a growing body of work has countered the fear of ahistoricity and reworked Freud and Lacan for poststructuralist and postmodernist purposes—and also sometimes for political purposes. Feminists, queers, and people of color have developed hybrid theories of subject formation, subjection, abjection, and resistance. Theater historians have sometimes followed Kubiak's path toward historical psychoanalytic readings: "I believe historical knowledge can be had, but following R. G. Collingwood and Hayden White, I also believe any reading of history involves rereading the fantasy that structures the historical narrative."<sup>5</sup>

Psychoanalysis, then, grew in its usefulness as it seemed to provide tools to probe the elusive, receding notions of Reality and the Subject that turned especially suspect in the theatrical world of simulacra and mediated spectacles. Perhaps because performance, directly involves corporeal individuals breathing, thinking, speaking, moving in front of other similar organisms, intimate questions of human behavior have always been central to performance. This "intimate geography" of the self concerns interior private experience, conscious and unconscious desires, expressions, significations. The attempt to get outside of the ongoing process of this interior living in order to see and understand how it happens constitutes a metatheatrics of everyday life: trying to see the invisible, to make present what seems to be eternal absence, to affirm what may be undecidable. In life (perhaps in therapy) as in art (perhaps on stage), there is a desire for interpretation, for discernment. Freud, limited by his gender and his late early twentieth-century assumptions about science, nevertheless began to probe the nature of human consciousness and this intimate geography.<sup>6</sup>

Freud viewed human life as a materially grounded struggle to ensure survival. The pleasure principle, in dialectical relationship with the reality principle, compels individuals to forgo personal gratification in order to obtain other goals, ultimately connected with survival. If one denies or delays gratification too often or too systematically, neurosis ensues. Sometimes, however, a creative tension comes from this displacement of psychic energy—a creative tension that may produce works of art, knowledge, civilization itself.

From many perspectives, human beings are divided within themselves. Freud divided the subject into unconscious and preconscious in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) and into id, ego, and superego in his later work (e.g., *New Introductory Lectures* [1933]). For the earlier Freud the unconscious was the seat of primary processes seeking gratification in the most direct way possible, while the secondary processes of the preconscious mediated and delayed gratification, responding to cultural determinants by insisting on circuitous ways of achieving pleasure. Since the

two reacted to one another, the unconscious as well as the preconscious (and of course the conscious) was materially grounded in culture. In his later work Freud tended to stress the overlap between conscious and preconscious and to describe the id as pure drive for pleasure, uncontrolled by cultural prohibition. The ego is the seat of adjustment to the reality principle, and the superego is a kind of bank of repressions and taboos that also functions as an image of the ideal other, usually based on the father. The preconscious and the ego (and in earlier Freud the unconscious) are engaged in producing symbolic activities such as sublimation, displacement, and dreamwork, all aimed at synthetic pleasures when direct pleasures are forbidden.

According to Freud we have certain basic needs that are mediated by our dependence on a “family” who meets these needs in infancy; enter the oedipal crisis. Since children are learning language at about the same time that they discover sexual difference, sexuality and language become intertwined. The child must learn how to negotiate the desire for the mother (source of direct pleasure, e.g., the breast) over and against the authority of the father. Simultaneously, he or she must learn the symbolic order, the determinate network of social roles that are legitimated by society and authorized by the father. Repression of desire is thus the price for successful socialization.

While this semiotization of the psyche was only implicit in Freud, Jacques Lacan significantly modified the intimate geography under discussion through his insistence that the unconscious is structured like a language.<sup>7</sup> Bringing a semiotic and an anthropological analysis to traditional Freudian categories, he saw that sublimation, transference, and dreamwork were all aspects of signification. In addition, Lacan also brings to bear the marks of the existential thinkers in France who wrote so prolifically about human alienation. Freud, while explaining that human beings did not have access to all parts of their “selves,” was still not given to ruminating on the dark night of the alienated soul who wished to recover and become congruent with the *en soi* but who was condemned to the positioning knowledge only of the *pour soi*. I am referring to Jean-Paul Sartre’s distinction between the in-itself, that essence of self which is inert, unknowable, only definitive at death, and the for-itself, which is basically consciousness, a transparent contentless self that seeks to “know” the in-itself in order to be whole. This notion from *Being and Nothingness* seems to brood over certain aspects of the psychoanalytic project as configured as lack by Lacan, intensifying the connotations of loneliness and loss.<sup>8</sup>

Psychoanalysis provides a dramatic scenario for the subject, and both Freud and Lacan figure it as a journey that leads to differentiation: first of self from other, then of male from female; finally the self joins sociality, becoming again connected to a social body while at the same time retaining a fundamental difference from it.

In a way, all psychoanalytic narratives are romantic; they are based on nostalgia for a prior state of bliss—connectedness, wholeness, undifferentiation—which birth inevitably interrupts. The path of human life is

toward ever more acute detachment from this primordial experience of unity. The infant first feels connected to the mother's body and to all objects in its environment, then gradually comes to recognize the difference between itself and Other, while also having its body colonized into territories or zones of various (cultural) functions; pleasure zones, to be sure, but here, not there, and thus already within a regulating economy, which will also teach "so much," not more, and now, not then. Achieving consciousness is itself possible only when accompanied by a loss of fundamental self-knowledge. One enters language and conceptual categories only by forfeiting direct contact with internal needs and drives. Self-knowledge is bartered for social knowledge, and social knowledge is always coercive.

For Lacan, transcending Freud, the oedipal crisis is not just a crisis of the body; it is refigured as a social crisis of language acquisition. The fear of castration is not just the fear of losing or lacking the male appendage; it is the fear of not having the power to participate in the male-determined logic of signification. The phallus, symbol of this ruling order rather than of the physical penis, is the sign of the paternal realm of agential activity, which conforms to the law of the Name of the Father, to use Luce Irigaray's terminology.<sup>9</sup> Thus, the biological and familial relations of the child to its world become intimately tied to the sociality of which he or she is an inevitable effect. The conflation of physical and familial with social and juridical produces the intimate geography of the self, a geography of inner splintering and outer alienation.

For female subjects this narrative is obviously especially distressing. Since the Symbolic Order into which human beings are inducted is a phallogocratic one, women cannot really enter discourse. Irigaray, one of Lacan's students and an important feminist critic, writes that "the feminine occurs only within models and laws devised by male subjects. Which implies that there are not really two sexes, but only one. A single practice and representation of the sexual . . . this model, a *phallic* one, shares the values promulgated by patriarchal society and culture, values inscribed in the philosophical corpus: property, production, order, form, unity, visibility . . . and erection."<sup>10</sup> For male subjects there is some sorrow in the separation of internal knowledge from social knowledge at the stage of language acquisition/oedipalization, but for female subjects there seems to be only exclusion from the symbolic order: castration comes home with new meaning—what is lacked is the means to signify. We will come back to this dilemma after examining a particularly suggestive aspect of Lacan's psychoanalytic account of the subject.

The "mirror stage" might be seen as one of the Lacanian enhancements of Freud which is especially useful for performance theory. Here the individual child first "sees" his image outside of himself and identifies this "picture" of a unified self as itself (always "his" with Lacan). It is, however, utterly Other, an ideal self, a culturally constituted self (since by now perception too has been conditioned). The child will henceforward desire to recapture and to be congruent with this image of self, will also



mourn for the lost self, which is forever absent. While this “loss” is not the primordial loss (which is the moment of sexual differentiation in the womb, when the child is unable to “be” both female and male), it is a central experience of self-alienation and also of desire for the Other, even at the same time that this Other is a version of the self.

This notion of the mirror stage has been especially useful for theater studies because of the analogy between it and the mimetic mirror of the stage, which reflects representations of the self and its world. The social construction of the representations leaves no doubt that the reflection in the stage mirror is also Other, not identical to any viewing selves, and not “accurate” about any so-called human nature but, rather, a socio-cultural construct of ideal images. Besides demystifying the nature of such representation, however, Lacan provides an explanation of why spectators are in thrall to these representations, why their desiring apparatus is in motion each time a stage mirror simulates this experience. Many of the basic theoretical questions of dramatic theory touch on this psychological process: the role and purpose of aesthetic experience, the Aristotelian notion of catharsis (what happens to spectators when they view), the Platonic/Aristotelian debates about the danger/good of mimesis, the question of presence in acting theory (or, more historically, the association between the character of the actor and the character of the play), the modern discourse on the role of empathy, and the benefits of alienation in receiving representation. All these topics can be seen as intimately linked to the paradigm of the mirror stage, and, while psychoanalysis provides other pertinent areas of investigation for performance theory, this section concentrates its major focus on the issue of identification and its role in subjectification.

There is much more productive work in this area than what we have been able to present here.<sup>11</sup> Especially important is José Muñoz’s theorization of “disidentification” as a refusal of negative representations by “rehabilitating” these images as a site of resistance and revaluation, while not discounting their liability or history. Developing his notions in the tradition of Freud but in dialogue with other theorists such as Eve Sedgwick, Michel Pécheux and Judith Butler, he strikes a decidedly materialist note (see *After Marx* on Althusser and interpellation), proposing that queers of color, particularly, can use disidentification as a strategy to work on and against dominant ideology: “Instead of buckling under the pressures of dominant ideology (identification, assimilation) or attempting to break free of its inescapable sphere (counteridentification, utopianism), this ‘working on and against’ is a strategy that tries to transform a cultural logic from within, always laboring to enact permanent structural change while at the same time valuing the importance of local or everyday struggles of resistance.”<sup>12</sup> Whether with Elin Diamond one theorizes paths of identification that through destabilizing an “I” can produce a “we” or even a productive contradictory dissonance, or with Muñoz, concentrates on transforming the terms of the identification through “working on and against” the meanings of the first term, theater and performance scholars have politicized mimesis and its effects.

The essays collected here share three features crucial to a productive use of psychoanalytic theory for performance hermeneutics. They connect the internal psychic processes of subject formation and modification to social, material reality, and insist on reading classic texts by Freud, Lacan, Irigaray, and Kristeva in support of this fundamental presupposition about the material and historical foundations of psychic life. Second, they each offer accounts of identification as sources of healing and expansion for women—rather than as sources of violence, obliteration, or ventriloquy (being taken over, penetrated and occupied). Third, they insist on the connections between the body and the mind in psychic life as in physical life, providing a role for the body to “lead” in therapeutic conversations as well as to follow, and to partner with other bodies, even dangerous bodies, in moving through trauma.

In the course of these essays, most of the essential psychoanalytic terms of Freudian/Lacanian analysis are redeployed for ends specific to performance: pleasure principal, trauma theory, hysteria, melancholia, identification, transference, and the oedipal scenario. Since all three authors write from a feminist perspective, the redeployment is also specific to feminist performance theory. In addition, all three make use of narratives—create narratives—in order to present their cases. For Elin Diamond, the spectator who laughs after seeing *Hedda Gabler* and says “we are all Hedda,” might be producing a much more rebellious and useful set of identifications than women spectators who weep at the spectacle. For Ann Pellegrini, looking to see what ambiguities and alternative versions of history the fractured narrative of *How I Learned to Drive* enables, there are retrievable bits of memory and trauma that are valuable aspects of subject formation. For Peggy Phelan, a fictional narrator who is a wounded ballet dancer enables a “talking cure” to reveal itself as a partnered dance between language and movement that structures the psyche in time. Contrary to the pessimism often associated with traditional psychoanalysis (with its emphases on regression, determinism, and Thanatos), these three essays search for and find transformation, healing, movement, and self-reproduction in their creative uses of psychoanalytic theory for performance analysis.

We grouped these essays to emphasize and consolidate the immensely productive uses feminist performance scholarship has made of these psychoanalytic materials—in spite of the misogynist history and tendencies of much of its tradition. The size and shape of this contribution was only vaguely palpable ten years ago. It is well-established today. It is a more difficult question whether or not this methodology will continue to follow this line of development in the future.

One theoretical strand that offers an alternative to Freudian and Lacanian based psychoanalysis is Deleuze and Guattari’s schizoanalysis. In *Anti-Oedipus* (1977) and *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987), they criticized the psychoanalytic concepts of desire in Freud and Lacan, insisting on the inseparability of social production from desiring-production.<sup>13</sup> Their claim, “There is only desire and the social, and nothing else,” leads to an analysis

of forms of capitalist organization and its “desiring machines,” and a theory of revolution which relies on micropractices, flows and intensities to subvert the causal determinations at work in a given social field.<sup>14</sup> Their desire is productive; they reject the notion of lack, and deny that desire is best described as an attempt to regain a lost object. Instead, they write, “Lack refers to a positivity of desire and not desire to a positivity of lack.”<sup>15</sup>

Theater and performance theorists have used these ideas in their broad outlines, but only a few scholars have so far connected schizoanalysis to our field. Timothy Murry included Deleuze’s “One Less Manifesto” in his important collection of French writings on theatricality, *Mimesis, Masochism, and Mime*.<sup>16</sup> Bryan Reynolds’s recent book, *Performing Transversally*, owes a considerable amount to Deleuze’s ideas although Reynolds reworks them for his own original theories of transversality. Borrowing the concept of “any-space-whatever” from Deleuze’s writing on cinema, Reynolds is interested in the interaction among elements of experience that are hallucinatory or nonchronological, that when mixed simultaneously with other elements that are chronological and causal, create a state of questioning, of possibility, or transversality. Putting people into this situation enables them to move beyond the boundaries of their own subjective territory: “Similar to empathizing, people can engage in transversal movements by performing the unfamiliar social identity of another, by acting “as if” they were someone else. . . . The time-image [Deleuze’s name for a virtual presentation of time] insofar as it creates the conditions for an any-space-whatever, engages with alternative subjectivities and encourages transversal movements.”<sup>17</sup> The salient point for this section on Psychoanalysis is that the goal of theorizing a way for subjects to combat the domination of their desire through regimes of forced identification is common to all the projects we have been describing. Our scholars desire theater and performance to facilitate this psychic struggle.

—J.G.R.

## NOTES

1. Juliet Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1975), xiii.

2. Anthony Kubiak, *Agitated States: Performance in the American Theatre of Cruelty* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 8. In his study, Kubiak argues that Lacan is deeply invested in notions of theatricality, pertinent to scholars of performance and theater.

3. Kubiak, *Agitated States*, 14.

4. Herbert Blau, *The Dubious Spectacle: Extremities of Theater, 1975–2000* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 319.

5. Kubiak, *Agitated States*, 10.

6. For a useful secondary source see Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, eds. *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: W.W. Norton, 1973).

7. Lacan’s major work can be found in a collection of his lectures, *Ecrits: A*

*Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W.W. Norton, 1977); an excellent introduction is Elizabeth Grosz's *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction* (New York and London: Routledge 1990).

8. Cf. Sartre on consciousness: "Consciousness is a being such that in its being, its being is in question in so far as this being implies a being other than itself." Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Citadel Press, 1966), lxii.

9. Luce Irigaray along with Julia Kristeva, Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément together constitute the major French feminists who have responded to Freud and Lacan, and who are associated with *l'écriture féminine*. A now classic secondary source is Alice A. Jardine's *Gynesis* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985).

10. Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), 86.

11. For a recent collection that provides a good sense of the scope of psychoanalytic scholarship in the field, see *Psychoanalysis and Performance*, eds. Patrick Campbell and Adrian Kear (New York and London: Routledge, 2001).

12. José Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 11–12.

13. Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane (New York: Viking Press, 1977); and *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1987). For an excellent book that connects and explains their theories relation to other political thinkers, see Paul Patton, *Deleuze and the Political* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000).

14. Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 28–29.

15. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 91.

16. Timothy Murray, *Mimesis, Masochism, and Mime* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997).

17. Bryan Reynolds, *Performing Transversally: Reimagining Shakespeare and the Critical Future* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 120. For a recent essay using *A Thousand Plateaus* to develop an alternative reading strategy, see Peter Dickerson, "Travels with Tony Kushner and David Beckham, 2002–2004," *Theatre Journal* 57, no. 3 (2005): 429–50.

# The Violence of “We”: Politicizing Identification

*Elin Diamond*

## *Preface for the New Edition*

This article, written in 1991, laid the groundwork for chapter 5 of *Unmaking Mimesis: Essays on Feminism and Theater* (Routledge, 1997), where I explore the political meanings made available by Adrienne Kennedy’s theater of multiple and shifting identifications. Since then, other theorists have elaborated a notion of “disidentification”—see, for example, José Esteban Muñoz’s *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (University of Minnesota Press, 1999), which demonstrates how minority and queer artists recycle and transform oppressive discourses for their own cultural purposes. Given the importance of disidentification as a strategy of resistance, to understand how and why identification shapes social and sexual identity, and how it also destabilizes identity, seems all the more urgent. Identification may be “hard-wired” in the human psyche—unlike disidentification, it can never be a strategy—but its theorization is complex and various. In the slide from “I” to “we,” it may be difficult to distinguish between narcissism and political practice or to discern how violence moves from the discursive to the actual.

In *La Jeune Née (The Newly Born Woman)*, Hélène Cixous takes a brief moment to describe the dangerous pleasures of identification. She strategically takes up the hysteric’s position, presenting her own history as a random series of passionate identifications: She is Penthesileia, Achilles, an eagle, a vulture, as well as all of Freud’s hysterics and their narrative counterparts: “I have been all the characters Dora played, the ones who killed her, the ones who got shivers when she ran through them, and in the end I got away, having been Freud one day, Mrs. Freud another, also Mr. K. . . , Mrs. K . . . and the wound Dora inflicted on them.”<sup>1</sup> Cixous’s gender crossings are of course intentional: she is performing the originary bisexuality Freud attributed to all hysterics. In a later section, speaking, as it were, in her own voice, Cixous recapitulates the delights of the process: “One never reads except by identification. But what kind? When I say identification, I do not say loss of self. I become, I inhabit. I enter. Inhabiting someone at that moment I can feel myself traversed by that person’s initiatives and actions.”<sup>2</sup> With her usual metaphoric accuracy, Cixous is describing the mimetic pleasure of identification—becoming or inhabiting the other on stage or in spectatorial fantasy: I stand in for her, act in his place. Such acts are distinctly imperialistic and narcissistic: I

lose nothing—there is no loss of self—rather I appropriate you, amplifying my “I” into an authoritative “we.”

The link between identification and the authoritative “we” has figured into reception theory since Plato and Aristotle, although students of drama and performance are more familiar with the unrigorous “we” of the traditional critic who projects her or his subjective impressions and analyses on all members of a theater audience, as in “we feel Hamlet’s remorse” or “we understand Hedda’s frustration.” One of the effects of such rhetoric (in which the emotions and thoughts of others are assumed to follow our model) is a fictitious but powerful sense of community that buttresses but also conceals the narcissistic claims of the critic. Interweaving discussions of Plato and Aristotle with psychoanalytic theory, I will suggest that the dominance of dramatic realism (mid-nineteenth century to the present) has promoted this preemptory “we,” and that phenomenological criticism, while it offers invaluable insights into theatrical consciousness, propounds the problem by eliminating historical contradiction. I will end by suggesting that psychoanalysis, read through a feminist materialist lens, might suggest a different kind of reception. Though identification seems to promote the annihilation of difference—and thus violence to the other—it may also suggest the problematizing of models that support such violence. Rather than upholding a strong unitary subject that constrains others to become copies of ourselves, identification might be understood as a psychic activity that destabilizes the subject. Rather than upholding a social status quo, identification might be seen as producing historical contradiction. Because it bridges the psychic and the social, identification has political effects. This leads me to suggest that perhaps we (feminists and others involved in a cultural critique) might begin to politicize our identifications.

Let’s return briefly to Cixous’s statement:

One never reads except by identification. But what kind? When I say identification, I do not say loss of self. I become, I inhabit. I enter. Inhabiting someone at that moment I can feel myself traversed by that person’s initiatives and actions.

A deconstructive, post-Freudian writer, Cixous characteristically both affirms and unravels her pleasure. On the one hand she presents the terroristic thrill of standing in for the other; on the other hand is the terror of “feel[ing] traversed” by her. Throughout Freud’s many discussions of identification, this doubleness reigns. Identification never loses the aspect of introjection—the primitive incorporation of the rivalrous other as with the ur-father of the Mosaic tribe. Yet even in his more schematic formulations in, for example, *The Ego and the Id* (to which we will return), the little boy who wants “to be his father and take his place everywhere”—especially in the mother’s bed—is eventually haunted by imagined bodily violence: castration. Cixous herself, even as she praises the delights of identification, imagines a violation of the self. In a parenthetical aside fol-

lowing the citation above, she writes: "Actually that feeling of being traversed by the other disturbed me. When I was younger I was afraid because I realized I was capable of mimicry." Being the other, feeling the other traversing her, abolishes distance and difference, that which is necessary to establishing the boundaries of the self. To identify is apparently not only to incorporate but to be incorporated. To be radically destabilized.

Plato's loathing of the theater begins here: not only is the drama a third-order copy of ideal forms, but the mimetic performer and the spectator who vicariously participate in such imitations produce the instability of unitary identity that constitutes the membership of the ideal republic. What is refreshing about reading the sections of *The Republic* that deal with recitation and performance is that Plato never underestimated desire, both its inaccessibility to consciousness and its relationship to power. Giving himself up to the performance, identifying with the pain of the tragic hero, the male spectator risks loss of control when he leaves the theater. "Womanish" or clownish activity at performances might lead to a breakdown in gender roles or disciplined behavior in society. "Few," says Socrates, "are capable of reflecting that to enter into another's feelings must have an effect on our own: the emotions of pity our sympathy has strengthened will not be easy to restrain when we are suffering ourselves."<sup>3</sup>

Plato would understand the definition of identification offered by Laplanche and Pontalis because it confirms his worst fears:

The psychological process whereby a subject assimilates an aspect, property, or attribute of the other and is transformed, wholly or partially, after the model the other provides. It is by means of a series of identifications that the personality is constituted and specified.<sup>4</sup>

Identification, then, is psychological, that is, partially unconscious and not immediately accessible to rational scrutiny; this alone makes it something to be feared. More troubling, the subject takes on, takes *in* features of the other and is "transformed" wholly or partially in conformity to that model. This implies that the subject has no prior identity; rather identity is formed in the crucible of identifications; the subject is "specified," distinguished from all other subjects not by his immortal soul but by his identifications, and these identifications stem not from disciplined reason but from desire, what Plato calls a "weakness in our nature" or a "trick of illusion."

Aristotle tamed such fears, making imitation the central and enabling heuristic of the developing human. As he writes in chapter 4 of *The Poetics*, we learn by imitation. At the theater of the great tragedians, who offer us exemplary characters and emplotments of their suffering, we spectators become uplifted through the purgative actions of catharsis. We identify with the ideal and universal referents the performers embody. I use "we" advisedly. Ironically Plato's wish for spectatorial discipline in spite of mimesis becomes possible in Aristotle *because of* mimesis. Pity and fear may appear to be private emotions, but they are registered collectively, as

the final effect of spectatorial identification with the heroes of tragedy—those, as Aristotle is at pains to tell us, who are good but flawed, whose actions are probable if horrific, in other words who invite an edifying identification from the audience. These constructive models of human behavior are good for communal health, offering heroic Olympian images (as Nietzsche said of this Apollonian art) in which Greek male spectators would find reflected back to them the superiority of their culture. (Of course, women and slaves would not appear in these heroic mirrors; as Aristotle notes in chapter 15 of the *Poetics*, their cultural referents—actual women and slaves—were too inferior for stage life.) For Aristotle, then, identification combines catharsis with social discipline: built on the universally upheld virtues of consistency and causality, catharsis adjusts its spectators to accept the truth and rightness of the hero's destiny and the play's action. In such acceptance, the spectator reaffirms his place—his role—in the polis.

It is the universalizing model of truth, the reinscription of a social status quo, the enforcing of cultural discipline that has brought classical mimesis under critical scrutiny in this century. For self-reflexive modernists and contemporary culture critics, mimesis was and is not merely a morphological issue, proposing likenesses between made objects and their real or natural counterparts, between characters and real performers. Classical mimesis is profoundly epistemological, a way of knowing and judging the truth. It sets up normative rules of inclusion and exclusion by which a text, be it the text of a play or the text of someone's behavior, may be judged. Not surprisingly, mimetic discourse, when it emanates from spectators and critics, tends to enlist such comforting abstractions as nature, truth, reality, humanity, human nature, and common sense in its "analyses." Such abstractions tend to mystify the critic's identificatory investments in her objects of study—that is, the appropriation of authors and texts to her perspective so that they become extensions of her own desires and ideologies. (Isn't this precisely what black feminists have correctly found wanting in the texts of some white feminists? Because she was identifying with her own whiteness—and by extension identifying whiteness with female sexuality—Judy Chicago didn't see that of all the plates in her *Dinner Party* creation, the Sojourner Truth plate lacked a vagina. Because she was identifying with eurocentric models of literary authority, Ellen Moers didn't see that she had excluded women of color [except Lorraine Hansberry] in her *Literary Women*, a foundational text of Anglo-American feminism. What is revealing in both cases is that as feminists, Chicago and Moers thought they were producing new sites of "we"—a "we" that empowered women, but that in fact excluded many women.)<sup>5</sup>

Dramatic realism produces precisely the conditions that allow for the creation of a smugly self-identifying spectator-critic, and the creation in the late nineteenth century of aggressively bourgeois "we." Not only does realism tirelessly play out the Oedipal family drama, it follows the curve of Plato's condemnation of mimesis but inverts the valuation. The lifelike stage sign reinforces the epistemology: an objective world for the referent



is not simply implied, it is reaffirmed in the activity of reception. Which is to say, realism is more than an interpretation of reality passing as reality; it produces "reality" by positioning its spectators to recognize and verify its truths. Naturalizing the relation between character and actor, setting and world, realism's project is always ideological, drawing spectators into identifications with its coherent fictions. It is through such identifications that realism surreptitiously reinforces (even if it argues with) the social arrangements of the society it claims to mirror. My favorite example—a deceptively simple example—comes from an account of the reception of *Hedda Gabler* in London in 1891. In her memoir *Ibsen and the Actress*, Elizabeth Robins, who premiered the role of Hedda and other Ibsen heroines, quotes one of her female spectators:

How should men understand Hedda on the stage when they didn't understand her in the person of their wives, their daughters, their woman friends? One lady of our acquaintance, married and not noticeably unhappy, said laughing, Hedda is all of us.<sup>6</sup>

Here identification creates "we" with a vengeance. Not only does the spectator see and reproduce a real relation between sign and referent, she achieves through her identification a satisfying group identity; through Hedda the spectator becomes "all of us." By her capture in this illusory mirror, she eliminates difference between herself and others and, at least on the surface, any sense of historical contingency.

A phenomenological account of reception would applaud the woman spectator's rapt involvement with Hedda as the essence of theatrical consciousness. Post-Husserlian phenomenology concerns itself with acts of perception that comprise both the particularity of a subject's perspective and the essence of the object perceived. The dramatic image—in this case, Robins's bringing to presence the fiction that is Hedda—allows the spectator to bracket empirical considerations and to see Hedda whole, as an "all" that expresses the truth of "us." That theater should be particularly receptive to phenomenological description is not surprising. Like Kant, Husserl understood a phenomenon as that which "appears to consciousness." But for consciousness there is no "unknowable world behind the appearances"; what matters is what appears "in person"<sup>7</sup>—the performance, one might say—not the play. Husserl's famous reduction—wherein a transcendent subject suspends belief in a causally related, empirically organized world in order to focus on the specific ontology of the object—is analogous to the bracketed otherness of the theater space, where, as Bert O. States puts it, "there is no ontological difference between the object and the image."<sup>8</sup> Rather, "theater ingests the world of objects and signs only to bring images to life. In the image, a defamiliarized and desymbolized object is 'uplifted to the view' where we see it as being phenomenally heavy with itself."<sup>9</sup> States's emphasis on perspective ("where we see it") and the being-ness of the object-turned-image rehearses Husserl's famous dictum—philosophy must

return “to the things themselves,” beginning with a description of things as they appear to a particular consciousness.

To phenomenological consciousness Merleau-Ponty adds another element of particular importance to theater reception, that is, the lived presence of the body: “the word ‘here’ applied to my body does not refer to a determinate position in relation to other positions or to external coordinates, but the laying down of the first co-ordinates.”<sup>10</sup> Rather than being an object *of*, the body anchors us *to*, consciousness, and it is that particular embodied relation that brings to light the essence of the play’s action and characters. The body-turned-image has, as Gaston Bachelard puts it, “an entity and a dynamism of its own . . . a direct ontology”;<sup>11</sup> or, as States puts it, “philosophy in the theater must unfold itself, literally, as the thinking of a body.”<sup>12</sup>

But suppose we turn down the intensity of the phenomenological spotlight and wonder what body is in view, what body is viewing? Can bodies either perform or perceive outside of the material markings of gender, race, or ethnicity? And can the mode of seeing that is called phenomenological be devoid of desire? Interestingly, when phenomenological methods are used to discuss theatrical identification, both the desire and the material specificity of perceiving subjects tend to drop out. Bruce Wilshire, for example, understands identification as a strong heuristic whereby spectators and actors explore the mimetic structure of all human relations: “Through the actors’ deliberate identifications with and standings in we discover our largely undeliberate identifications-with and standings-in.”<sup>13</sup> He continues, in a nice turn of phrase, “the actor models modeling, enacts enactment,” which “reveals” to the audience “our involvements.”<sup>14</sup> For Wilshire, then, the spectator’s identification with Hedda reveals her continuing identification with others, which the theater and its actors enact for her. She learns from Hedda that “my fellow human beings are a picture of *myself*.”<sup>15</sup> Wilshire would not view this response as narcissistic or appropriative but as a means of achieving a transcendent wholeness. In this respect, the phenomenological account of reception reinscribes the effects of dramatic realism, leaving in place the coherent subject/spectator while asserting “universal and enduring” conditions that undergird the humanity of the object (character). Moreover, the phenomenologist’s perceptions denude both subject and object of historical specificity: “Great variability in their [the objects’] manifestation and intensity from culture to culture and age to age does not undermine but just the reverse, it undergirds their generality.”<sup>16</sup> Similarly, Austin Quigley seeks a generalized universal enlightenment for his spectators, eliding any notion of gendered representation or reception, of power hierarchies within the apparatus of representation or within the historical context. He assumes instead that the spectators’ “shared culture” and “shared humanity” will help them move from “temporary disorientation” to “subsequent reorientation,”<sup>17</sup> another way perhaps of linking identification with models of cultural discipline. Of the contemporary theater phenomenologists, only States refers (though only once) to identi-

fication in the more problematic relation to subjective desire: "the actor is someone like us who consents to serve as the channel through which the poet's art can be brought out of the realm of imitation and briefly detained, *for our narcissistic pleasure*, in the realm of being" (my italics).<sup>18</sup>

Would a psychoanalytic account permit the material specificity we hunger for? We might separate Lacanian and Freudian views of identification by proposing two distinct readings of the Hedda Gabler example. For Lacanians, the married woman's capture by the image of Hedda would be explained by the narcissistic lures of the mirror stage that carry over from early infancy, through childhood, and into adulthood. Lacking controlled motor development, the infant sees its image in the mirror as a coherent whole, thus misrecognizes itself as a complete autonomous other. Introjecting this mirror image as an ideal ego or identificatory model, the child spends the rest of its life desiring versions of it—at, for example, Hollywood movies.<sup>19</sup> In Lacan, identification, always in the register of the imaginary, is narcissistic—the perceived other is always a version of me. Difference, contradiction are all occluded in the subject's initial and continuing capture in the mimetic mirror.

In Freud identification is also narcissistic, but complicated by the very thing that Lacanian identification leaves out—namely historical contradiction. Let me briefly review a number of relevant texts. In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, identification for Freud was merely a feature of hysterical mimicry, enabling his patients, he said, "not only to express their own symptoms, but those of a large number of other people."<sup>20</sup> The hysteric—and this is surely Cixous's pose in *The Newly Born Woman*—will enter, become, inhabit because she wants to "play all the parts." In "On Narcissism" (1914), mimicry is replaced by the idea of substitution. This troubling and in many ways confused essay has drawn fire for its outrageous acts of naming: homosexuals are demonized because their love-objects are not true others but only versions of themselves; women are denigrated because like children and cats they are incapable of forming attachments to others. What is crucial to this discussion is that here Freud associates identification with a decathexis of the object, a turning inward instead of outward toward the other.

In *Mourning and Melancholia* (1917) this turning inward is replaced by the notion that identification substitutes for losing the other. The ego introjects a lost object that is then set up inside the ego and becomes a model of identification, and thereby changes the ego. By the time he writes *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921), Freud will say that the ego is transformed by such identifications. In fact in this essay he decides that identification occurs not only to compensate for loss, as in *Mourning and Melancholia*, but occurs continually, throughout psychic life. We are continually taking in objects we desire, continually identifying with or imitating these objects, and *continually being transformed by them*. In other words, identification in Freud always works both ways: it is an assimilative or appropriative act making the other the same as me, or me the same as the other, but at the same time causes the I/ego to be transformed by the other.

This suggests that the borders of identity, the wholeness and consistency of identity, are transgressed by every act of identification.

*The Ego and the Id* is the famous 1923 text in which Freud remaps the topography of the psyche—the unruly id, the “reason[able] and common sens[ical]” ego, and the proscriptive and disciplinary superego are all given their local habitations. Yet in this essay Freud affirms that identification is a constitutive part of psychic life: The process, he says, occurs in all phases of development, and “makes it possible to suppose that the character of the ego is a precipitate of abandoned object choices and that it contains the history of those object choices.”<sup>21</sup>

In other words, it would be impossible to conceptualize a subject in the process of identification who would not be engaged, however unconsciously, with the history of her identifications, which is at least partly the history of her psychic life with others. Moreover, the ego, which Freud uses interchangeably with the self, is here conceived as an effect of continued transformation. He even writes an amusing dialogue between the ever accommodating ego and the insatiable libido.

When the ego assumes the features of the other it is trying to make good the id’s loss by saying “Look you can love me too, I am so like the object.”<sup>22</sup>

And in this imitation of the other the ego transforms and transforms again. Identification, says Freud, builds the character of the ego. Like all Freud’s theatrical metaphors, this one emphasizes construction over essence. The ego, this representative of reason and common sense, is a theatrical fiction. Permeable and transformable, it is a precipitate of the subject’s psychic history with others. The humanist notion of identity as a model that the self enacts over time, that is unique, unified, coherent, and consistent, is belied precisely by the temporality, the specific historicity of the identification process.

Might we *situate* Elizabeth Robins’s spectator, however provisionally, in an identification process? We would not attempt to reconstruct her imaginary, but would remember the highly gendered cultural context in which her identifications took place. In male Victorian accounts of spectatorship at Ibsen’s plays, women were accused of behaving like hysterics—not only entering into the passion and morbidity of fictional characters but also imitating them, passionately weeping into their handkerchiefs. Interestingly, in her own testimony of identification, the woman spectator is laughing.

For the governesses, schoolteachers, and married women who sat in these matinee audiences, aware of, if not contributing to the contemporary scandal of women’s suffrage, perhaps the destruction and suicide of Hedda Gabler validated their antipatriarchal tendencies. The Married Woman’s Property Act of 1882 (nine years before the play’s London debut) gave women the right to their own property after marriage, but these and earlier reforms hardly introduced social and sexual equality between gen-

ders. (Is this why she was laughing?) Thinking of Ibsen's 1891 spectators as historical subjects, as bourgeois consumers yet not full citizens, complicates the coherence of a spectatorial "we." Is it possible to think of a spectator's self-affirming "all of us" as an empowering social fantasy? Might we think of her identifications as having a distinctly political edge? With her laughing reference to "all of us" the spectator is perhaps suggesting a new social arrangement, one that transforms *her* more than it defines or circumscribes Hedda. Viewed this way, she does not reinforce a social status quo, but arguably describes a new if temporary social space—a space occupied by women in matinee performances of Ibsen's plays. It seems ridiculous from our vantage point to see realism in the service of revolution, yet cultural subjects entering into and inhabiting powerful roles may be capable of self-transformation—may even be capable of transforming the social space of theater spectatorship into the theatricalized space of social contestation.

Only by attending to the projections, the narcissistic, self-transforming fantasies of historical subjects can we begin to imagine a politics of identification—a politics that dismantles the phenomenological universals of transcendent subjects and objects; that places identity in an unstable and contingent relation to identification; and that works close to the nerves dividing and connecting the psychic and the social.

## NOTES

1. Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, *The Newly Born Woman*, trans. Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1975), 99.
2. Cixous and Clément, *The Newly Born Woman*, 148.
3. Plato, *The Republic*, trans. Francis Cornford (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), 338 (X-605b).
4. J. Laplanche and J-B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Norton, 1973), 205.
5. See Alice Walker, "One Child of One's Own: A Meaningful Digression Within the Work(s)—An Excerpt," in *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave*, ed. Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith (New York: Feminist Press, 1982), 37–44.
6. Elizabeth Robins, *Ibsen and the Actress* (London, 1928), 18.
7. John F. Bannan, *The Philosophy of Merleau-Ponty* (New York: Harcourt, 1967), 8.
8. Bert O. States, *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms: On the Phenomenology of Theater* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 35.
9. States, *Great Reckonings*, 37.
10. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), 100.
11. Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958), xii.
12. States, *Great Reckonings*, 133.
13. Bruce Wilshire, *Role-Playing and Identity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 14.

14. Wilshire, *Role-Playing and Identity*, 16.
15. Wilshire, *Role-Playing and Identity*, 26.
16. Wilshire, *Role-Playing and Identity*, 69.
17. Austin Quigley, *The Modern Stage and Other Worlds* (New York: Methuen, 1985), 63.
18. States, *Great Reckonings*, 128; emphasis added.
19. Cf. Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16, no. 3 (1975): 6–18.
20. Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Avon, 1900), 183.
21. Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, in *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*, vol. 29 (London: Hogarth Press, 1971), 29.
22. Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, 30.

# Staging Sexual Injury: *How I Learned to Drive*

Ann Pellegrini

Memory believes before knowing remembers. Believes longer than  
recollects, longer than knowing even wonders.

—William Faulkner, *Light in August*

So by taking flight into the ego love escapes extinction.

—Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia"

## *Disclosure and Deferral*

Paula Vogel's *How I Learned to Drive* (1997) opens with the lure of a secret: "Sometimes to tell a secret, you first have to teach a lesson."<sup>1</sup> In substituting a lesson for a secret, the narrator, Li'l Bit, in some sense reverses her own story; she also shows herself to be as sly a teacher as her Uncle Peck, who promised to teach Li'l Bit how to drive. However, as we will discover, in place of this lesson, or maybe alongside it, Li'l Bit is given a secret whose unfolding drives the narrative forward and back again.

Li'l Bit's lesson plan—*Sometimes to tell a secret, you first have to teach a lesson*—may not flatter the teachers among us. After all, her formulation effectively proposes pedagogy as a kind of knowledge deferred. Lured by a secret, the audience (and would-be pupil) finds itself in a curious kind of classroom with a charming, if somewhat unreliable, teacher. Call it the pedagogy of bait and switch or, if this sounds better, pedagogy's swerve.

Over the course of the roughly ninety-minute play, this narrative swerve undoes straightforward connections between event and representation, experience and understanding, past and present, injury and impression. The audience's access to what happened to Li'l Bit, to her "secret," comes through her narration of it. We never see the reality, but only its representation. In other words, we are watching a play. But it is not as if Li'l Bit has immediate access to her own experience either. Indeed, there are numerous moments in the play when Li'l Bit seems to withhold crucial information from us. Does this make her an unreliable narrator? Perhaps. But it also suggests the unreliability of memory itself. That is, what if the secret Li'l Bit will not or cannot tell is unknown to her?

To be sure, what is past can never be returned, nor returned to, in its original form. When memory retrieves, it does so with a difference; it remembers. However, the cut between memory and event is attenuated to the point of fracture in the case of trauma. Trauma has a particularly vexed relation to time and knowledge. As Cathy Caruth suggests in *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, a book that has helped to

reinvigorate trauma theory, in psychoanalytic terms trauma is a wound that is experienced too soon to be known or narrated.<sup>2</sup>

In describing trauma as an injury ahead of its time (ahead of *it's* time?), Caruth is building on Freud's discussion of trauma in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. In this study, composed in the aftermath of World War I, Freud puzzles over the striking fact that traumatic illness is far more likely to arise in cases where there was no apparent physical injury.<sup>3</sup> A wound to the body, he seems to suggest, provides a brake against trauma by absorbing the blow *and* by offering undeniable evidence of what has happened. But, evidence to whom and of what? What happens when the severity or even the reality of physical injury is contested by others, as can happen in cases of sexual violence? In courts of law, though not only there, a victim's claims of sexual assault or abuse often hinge on whether or not her (or his) injuries are visible to others, whether because the bruises are still fresh or they photographed well. It may even be that, for some victims of sexual violence, trauma results not from the initial violating event, but from the refusal or inability of others to recognize the wound or blow to the body. In yet other cases, the trauma of sexual violence may have very little or nothing to do with the violation of sexualized bodily zones, but may rather lie elsewhere, in a somewhere or something else that cannot be named or recognized. I will come back to this suggestion later in my discussion of melancholia's holding power. For now, I simply want to flag the uneasy place of the body in Freud's account of trauma.

In a passage he himself calls "far-fetched speculation,"<sup>4</sup> Freud paints a striking picture of a "living vesicle" that both reaches out into the world and is affected, touched, by it.<sup>5</sup> He tells us that "this little fragment of living substance" would be overwhelmed and even killed but for the presence of a "protective shield."<sup>6</sup> He goes on to describe this protective shield as being built up, like so many layers of dead skin, out of the residue of formerly organic materials. Although Freud does not say this exactly, it seems to me that what he is describing is the precarious suspension, or in-betweenness, of the embodied subject. For the bodily envelope offers multiple points of contact and crossing (skin, eyes, mouth, nose, ears, genitals, anus) even as it also marks the space of difference between one self and another, between inner and outer worlds. Ordinarily, this protective shield is strong enough to manage and reduce the energies that bombard embodied consciousness. However, some external stimuli are so strong that they break through the protective shield. Trauma thus involves a violent breaking through or rupture in consciousness.

In her gloss on Freud, Caruth points out that the traumatic kernel of trauma is not the precipitating event itself nor even the force with which stimuli storm and overwhelm consciousness; trauma rather emerges at the juncture of destructive event and its survival.<sup>7</sup> Something awful has happened, but what exactly, and to whom? Where am "I"—where is the "I"—in relation to the concussive event? In trauma, what is outside has come inside, been internalized, without being hypercatheted or bound.<sup>8</sup>



The subject of trauma thus suffers from an inability to narrate and in some profound sense even know her own experience as her experience.

In other words, there is a profound disconnect between what is experienced and what is apprehended or assimilated. This gap in knowledge is the crisis or, in Caruth's terms, the "enigma of survival."<sup>9</sup> This epistemic gap also opens up the question of referentiality, frustrating simple models of experience and reference, event and representation. At first glance, this might seem to end the possibility of history. However, Caruth proposes that, in fact, "it is here, in the . . . bewildering encounter with trauma—both in its occurrence and in the attempt to understand it—that we can begin to recognize the possibility of a history that is no longer straightforwardly referential."<sup>10</sup> Coming to terms with trauma and the disturbance it poses to correspondence theories of truth "permit[s]," in her words, "*history* to arise where *immediate understanding* may not."<sup>11</sup>

Where the story of trauma is concerned, then, narrative gets out ahead of both audience and narrator. And yet, telling trauma's story becomes the working condition of coming to know it. This is the "behindsight" of traumatic knowledge,<sup>12</sup> its deferred action, or *Nachträglichkeit*, in the language of psychoanalysis. The French translation of *Nachträglichkeit* is still more evocative: *après-coup*, or, literally, "afterblow." Of course, part of the problem with trauma is precisely its resistance to the literal, to the thing itself, and it may be this resistance to the literal that also makes the literary and, yes, the theatrical such resonant sites through which to think trauma anew.

But, for now, back to behindsight: The very backwardness of this relation between representation and traumatic event upends conventional ways of thinking about truth and the evidence of experience. For we are confronted not simply with deferred action, but with deferred *revision*. How do you tell a story whose founding events you have not, on some very basic level, yet experienced? Where telling precedes knowing, what is the status of the truth that is told? What's more, can the important feminist project of bringing sexual violence (feminism's privileged injury) into the light of day survive this severing of representation from "the real"? In the context of trauma, the metaphor of survival is a loaded one. Thus, to pose the question as I just have—as a matter of the *survival of feminist politics*—is to link the future of feminism, its revitalization, to a different way of thinking about and encountering feminism's own past.

### *Disordered Time, Feminist Revisions*

Certainly, *How I Learned to Drive* stages Li'l Bit's encounter with her own past, but it does so out of time, in at least two ways. If we conceive of trauma as a break in the mind's experience of time, then the piecemeal quality of Li'l Bit's narration reiterates trauma as its symptom. And yet, this very piecemeal quality also gets at the restlessness of memory and psychic life. In a sense, all memory, and not just traumatic memory, performs a kind of "deferred action" on the self. Li'l Bit's narrative, then,

brings us to see not simply the belatedness of trauma, but the revision that just is memory. We travel with Li'l Bit backward and forward in time, viewing snapshots, out of sequence, out of time, as Li'l Bit's story comes together, and falls apart, in pieces.

An antichronology: launched in an indeterminate present, the play jumps back to 1969, shifts forward ever so slightly to 1970, when Li'l Bit is kicked out of college: "Some say I got caught with a man in my room. Some say as a kid on scholarship I fooled around with a rich man's daughter. I'm not talking. But the real truth is I had a constant companion in my dorm room—who was less than discrete. Canadian V.O. A fifth a day" (21). The narrative falls further back, into 1968 and a drunken dinner celebrating Li'l Bit's driver's license, leaps ahead to 1979, before reversing course to 1967, 1966, 1965; and then it's Christmas 1964 (when Li'l Bit assigns herself the task of rescuing Uncle Peck from himself); from there, a stutter step to 1969 and Li'l Bit's eighteenth birthday, a fall backward to 1962, and, then, finally, move forward again—or is it back?—to an indeterminate present.

Throughout, *How I Learned to Drive* wonderfully captures the work of memory as it recomposes a life but not necessarily in the self-same order. The play of memory that is Li'l Bit's self-narration refuses the tidy linearity—and pious teleology—of even a reverse chronology. The play thus depathologizes the life lived in pieces. This is one of the play's richest feats: by telling Li'l Bit's life in pieces, but out of order (a li'l bit at a time?), *How I Learned to Drive* perpetually defers the future, but in the cause of reopening its possibilities. Let me try that again, put it another way: Out of this disordered time, we catch sight of another way to live it. *How I Learned to Drive* refuses a conception of identity as an always already, a story that could only have one ending and one beginning; indeed, a story whose ending is foretold in—scripted by—the beginning.

This notion of the determining impact of an event in the past is a holy grail of much of the therapeutic and popular discourse on trauma, especially sexual trauma. But even if we allow that traumatic events have psychological effects (and this seems a crucial allowance), this does not mean that the effects are fully determined—as if a life lived in the wake of trauma could only unfold one way: *very badly*. To be sure, *How I Learned to Drive* does not shrink from showing Li'l Bit's woundedness, but, no less significantly, it neither assigns her wounding to any one event nor makes injury the whole of her story, the hole in her self. Instead, the play helps us to see something of the contingency of identity, the accidents of identification, desire, and loss that trace the body's edges. This other way of seeing affords a glimpse, however fleeting and fractured, of new ways of telling and living a life. This play, this life, could be told differently, we learn, with different endings, surprising detours, and suspended beginnings.<sup>13</sup>

This is not the only one of Vogel's plays that circles back on itself to disorganize principles of cause and effect, before and after.<sup>14</sup> But this formal device works especially well in a play whose concerns include incest and its afterlife. And yet, *How I Learned to Drive* is hardly reducible to a

story about the trauma of incest; in fact, the play rebukes precisely this kind of reduction.

This rebuke, along with the pressure the play puts on positivist accounts of history and truth, runs headfirst into some cherished and hard-fought feminist claims about sexual injury, especially the particular injury identified as childhood sexual abuse. In a cultural and political context in which girl's and women's accounts of sexual violence are still greeted with skepticism, the suggestion that women do not have unmediated access to what really happened is bound to produce alarm. But, as theater studies scholar David Savran has pointed out, for Vogel, "feminism means being politically incorrect. It means avoiding the easy answer—that isn't really an answer at all—in favor of posing the question in the right way. It means refusing to construct an exemplary feminist hero."<sup>15</sup> Vogel's brand of incorrect feminism takes dead but loving aim at received ideas, and she does not spare even her "own," that is, feminist, gay, and lesbian communities.

Feminists—both clinicians and nonspecialists—fought to expand the category of trauma and "post-traumatic stress disorder" (PTSD) from its focus on "masculine" injuries like shellshock or war trauma to include such "feminine" injuries as incest and rape. This victory has not come without cost, however. On the one hand, as Ann Cvetkovich also notes, the broadening of PTSD to include rape, domestic violence, and other kinds of sexual violence may give victims access to medical care, including mental health care, otherwise denied to them.<sup>16</sup> The diagnostic category PTSD, after all, is not just the specialized language of therapists and clinicians; since its inclusion in the 1980 edition of *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual*, PTSD has also been used by insurance companies to determine what is and is not covered (for those lucky enough to have health care coverage in the first place). PTSD also performs a legitimating function that resounds beyond the office walls of therapists and HMOs. For a culture in love with science, diagnosis makes it real. By contrast, the one who suffers in silence from something without name does not suffer at all. (This is Betty Friedan's "feminine mystique" three decades on, and counting.) And the one who *loudly* suffers from nothing at all? She is a hysteric.<sup>17</sup>

On the other hand, the medicalization of sexual violence risks depoliticizing it. A therapeutic focus on the victim and on the dynamics of her individual family effectively brackets the social; larger intersubjective—and sociopolitical—components of trauma are thereby lost to analysis. This inward turn is, unfortunately, in keeping with larger trends in a commodified feminism, a "therapeutically absorbed feminism," in Pamela Haag's stinging words.<sup>18</sup>

Somewhat paradoxically, the diagnostic category PTSD simultaneously individualizes and normalizes, or homogenizes. Janice Haaken, herself a feminist therapist, yet one of the most outspoken critics of dominant feminist clinical and political discourse around trauma, worries that the umbrella category PTSD elides crucial differences among traumatic events and responses to them. As she points out, when one diagnostic category

covers the Holocaust, child abuse, war trauma, political terrorism, and religious cults, more may be obscured than revealed. Additionally, and specifically where incest is concerned, she argues that the PTSD label leaves out of view the ambivalence that characterizes the relations of many “victims” to their “perpetrators.” There is a complexity and variability to victim/perpetrator relations that PTSD cannot lay hold of or recognize.<sup>19</sup> This inability, Haaken suggests, contributes to the Manichaeian pitch of trauma narratives, and especially narratives of sexual trauma, which depict all-or-nothing stories of good versus evil.<sup>20</sup>

Moreover, it is not just the ambivalent relations between “victim” and “perpetrator” that get written out; the complexity of the victim’s relations to the other adults in her immediate circle also disappears. Just think here for a moment of the mother-daughter conflict in *How I Learned to Drive*. This is not the classic incest story in which the mother refuses to see what is happening to her daughter, or sees but remains helpless to “save” her. In fact, Li'l Bit’s mother sees what’s coming before “it” happens and gives a warning, albeit one that takes the form of blaming the daughter in advance for anything that might go wrong. The mother-daughter conflict, though, is not between seeing and not seeing incest, but between seeing and not seeing Li'l Bit. The mother cannot see in her daughter what Uncle Peck sees, recognizes, supports—a seeing that he also comes to exploit, of course.

Once framed as a stark contest between good and evil, helpless victim and all-powerful perpetrator, what *conscious* space remains for either ambivalence or moral ambiguity? (Psychic space is another matter, of course; the unconscious is nothing if not roomy.) In fairness, this casting out of ambiguity and insistence on the inherently traumatizing effects of adult-child sexual contact does make sense culturally: as feminist responses to backlash against feminism in general and as feminist attempts to focus attention on sexual abuse in particular. In the face of renewed and often virulent cultural battles over gender roles and the meaning of sexuality in women’s lives, the hardening of the therapeutic and feminist line on childhood sexual abuse has its logics. Where sexuality is at once consigned to silence and compelled to speech and where women’s sexuality is the especially fraught site of this double burden, one of the few ways for women to speak legitimately about sex is to speak from the position of victim. Speaking *as* victim inoculates women or, more accurately, *some* women (since race and class crucially mediate which women get counted as victims) against the charge of unruly desire. The irony of this new feminist command to speak our injury is that it too may perform a silencing—all in the name of liberation.

I want to be very clear what I am *not* arguing here. I am not denying the sobering reality of violence against women; I am not rehearsing by-now familiar accusations that feminists—and women in general—just need to get over it, where “it” refers to sexual violence in particular; I am not casting my voice with Camille Paglia, Katie Roiphe, Christina Hoff Sommers, and other self-appointed feminist champions who want to res-

cue women from so-called victim feminism. Although one would scarcely know this from reading mainstream media accounts of feminism, the diversity of feminist thinking about sexual violence and about the stakes of designating something as a specifically sexual violence defies reduction to catchphrases like “victim feminism.”

Nonetheless, there is yet reason to scrutinize dominant feminist approaches to the question of sexual violence. Much feminist effort has been devoted to exposing and analyzing the ubiquity verging on normalization of violence against women, and rightly so. Rape, domestic battery, incest are far too common experiences. However, to say that these are too-common experiences in the lives of many women and girls does not mean that they are experienced the same, in common. Nor does it make violence or the threat of violence the structuring condition of women’s sexual subjectivity. What’s more, this focus on sexual danger leaves little or no room to ask about women’s pleasure and what might enable it. There is a far more complex story to be told here, a story about the way second-wave feminist thinking about violence, sexuality, and the body has been narrated and, in that narration, narrowed.

Certainly, the essays gathered together in Carole S. Vance’s still timely 1984 anthology, *Pleasure and Danger*,<sup>21</sup> reveal that second-wave feminists were hardly of one mind on the matter of women’s sexuality. The volume collected papers and talks given at the 1982 “Scholar and the Feminist” conference at Barnard College. Contributors acknowledged and analyzed the myriad social *and* psychic forces bearing down on women, but they also refused to conceptualize women’s sexuality as a uniform or singular experience. Instead, contributors moved to complicate and even disrupt the category of “woman” by introducing such “other” critical differences as race and class. This productive feminist disruption also carried over to the category “sexuality,” for it too is inflected—and complicated—by race and class. Just as crucially, contributors to the volume did not reduce sexuality or sex to a matter of sexual object-choice or sexual orientation. Rather, essays by Joan Nestle, Amber Hollibaugh, and Gayle Rubin among others dared to address sexual identifications and practices that did not fit into neat boxes—feminist, lesbian, or otherwise—about what women’s bodies and women’s pleasures were for.

The feminist possibilities on view in *Pleasure and Danger* were not universally applauded by other feminists; far from it. The volume and the 1982 Barnard conference were assailed by some antipornography feminists as worse than no feminism at all; indeed, Vance and the other contributors were accused, in sometimes vitriolic terms, of actively promoting violence against women.<sup>22</sup> The controversy around *Pleasure and Danger* is just one example of a feminism embattled over sex and violence. However, that feminists disagreed—and still disagree—profoundly over these matters need not spell the end of feminism. If anything, we might rather see contestation and difference as the very ground of a feminist politics.<sup>23</sup>

As Pamela Haag makes clear in her 1996 genealogy of second-wave feminist debates over violence, victimization, and sexed embodiment, the

unified subject of feminism is not and never was. In a brave and necessary essay, Haag returns to the feminist archives to reveal that for many 1970s feminist activists and theorists (and these categories are not mutually exclusive), violence was not understood as some external force that shattered a previously unified subject and a previously intact body. Rather, thinking, writing, and acting with and against the often violent backdrop of 1960s and early 1970s American politics, they came to see that the body-subject was itself created in and through multiple forms of violence: from the structural violences of racism and sexism to the psychic demand (one backed up by social force) that subjects, if they are to be subjects, must legibly represent their "sex" and their "race" to other subjects. As Haag points out, the feminist recognition that subjects became subjects not despite violence, but in some sense through it, was not a romanticization of violence as "good" for women. Rather, it opened up the possibility of agency in the wake of violence. Perhaps agency is even thinkable as a traumatic waking out of violence, a suggestion that links the question of agency to Caruth's "enigma of survival."

The possibility that violences of various sorts are among the constitutive conditions of embodied subjectivity energizes much recent feminist and queer discussions about injury, agency, and embodiment. Importantly, this suggestion is *not* tantamount to claiming that women are defined by our violability. The latter assertion leaves little room for agency; within its terms, every woman is a victim waiting to happen. Moreover, given the heterosexual parameters of this rape script, every man is a rapist waiting to attack.

With literary scholar Sharon Marcus,<sup>24</sup> we need to ask, what if this very presumption—that women are defined by our violability—produces as its effect the truth it purports simply to tell: passive, victimized women? To ask this also means asking some hard questions about the privileged injury that is rape. Within one influential strand of feminism, rape is the very paradigm of injury; it is an injury to woman in her sex and, to the extent that woman's sex defines her, rape is thus an injury to her in her very core. (Feminists did not invent this privileging of the sexual, of course; but the feminist strain represented by Catharine MacKinnon, Andrea Dworkin, and the antipornography movement more broadly has reiterated the privileging of the sexual.) Rape and other sexual injuries, according to this line of thought, are inherently traumatic and peculiarly devastating. However, by foreclosing what rape or incest might mean in the life experience of any particular woman (or man, for that matter), we define out of the category "woman" or "raped" any woman for whom rape or incest is *not* the worst thing that could have happened to her. The complexity of women's responses to rape and other forms of violence cannot be comprehended by the demand to narrate violation and only violation, whether that narration be conducted in accord with a legal vocabulary of assault or a medicalizing vocabulary of injury.

Must a rape narrative conform to naturalized cultural scripts of injury and innocence in order to be legitimated as a real injury? What pre-

existing patterns of meaning-making and intelligibility shape what can be told, what can be heard? What would it take for us—for feminists—to be able to tell different stories, messy in all their complexity and ambiguity? Here is where Paglia and the others are actually in sync with the very feminism they rebuke: As Mary Gaitskill perceptively argues, both those who accuse feminists of being crybabies and those who would prescribe the exact order, down to the word order, of a consensual sexual encounter paper over the complexities of sex and injury.<sup>25</sup>

Gaitskill makes this observation in the midst of telling the story of her own *nontraumatizing* experience of rape. For Gaitskill, being raped by a stranger was *less* traumatic than her various experiences of emotional cruelty. In the case of this rape, she says, she did not need to ask how or whether she had contributed to it; it was not about her, even if it was done to her. The rape was bad, but “not especially traumatic.”<sup>26</sup> Gaitskill’s self-reporting does not fit into the cultural narratives of rape and sexual injury that are currently available, and yet, this is all the more reason to take her account seriously. As with the swerve orchestrated by Vogel’s *How I Learned to Drive*, Gaitskill teaches by deviating from the expected path.

### *On the Value of Getting It Wrong*

To get a sense of the intervention *How I Learned to Drive* makes into trauma theory and, especially, into mainstream feminist accounts of sexual injury, we need to ask what the secret is that *Li'l Bit* cannot or will not tell. Ultimately, the secret *Li'l Bit* has to share is not the secret of sexual abuse at the hands of Uncle Peck. Anyway, this is not much of a secret at all, for it is the rare audience member who comes to the play not knowing in advance that incest is one of its basic plot points. Moreover, for any audience member still in the dark, Vogel makes short work of bringing incest into the open—all the better to defamiliarize it as “the” secret that must be told. This defamiliarization does not quell the play’s ability to disturb, however; it incites it.

Let’s return, briefly, to the opening scene of the play and *Li'l Bit*’s mischievous turn from confessing to teaching. As *Li'l Bit* walks us through our first lesson, she gently segues from an unspecified present to an “early, warm summer evening.” “It’s 1969,” *Li'l Bit* informs us, locating us in the chronology of her past, “And I am very old, very cynical of the world, and I know it all. In short, I am seventeen years old, parking off a dark lane with a married man on an early summer night” (7–8). It’s a driving lesson, although not her first one, we will later find out, and the sexual banter between the couple is alive with come-ons and refusals:

*Peck:* [] I’ve got the mind of a boy scout.

*Li'l Bit:* A horny boy scout.

*Peck:* Boy scouts are always horny. What do you think the first Merit Badge is for?

*Li'l Bit:* There. You’re going to be nasty again.

*Peck*: Oh, no. I'm good. Very good.

*Li'l Bit*: It's getting late.

*Peck*: Don't change the subject. I was talking about how good I am.

(*Beat*) Are you gonna let me show you how good I am?

*Li'l Bit*: Don't go over the line now. (9–10)

The man asks the girl to let him caress and kiss her breasts, his reward for not taking a drink all week. She relents, but to his desire or hers—or both? Her measured response—“Li'l Bit closes her eyes, carefully keeps her voice calm,” advise the stage directions (12)—walks the line between desire and resignation. Nonetheless, there's a light, teasing quality to the scene, which defies the revelation to come: “Uncle Peck,” she breaks his reverie, “we've got to go. I've got graduation rehearsal at school tomorrow morning. And you should get home to Aunt Mary” (12).

I suggested earlier that there are moments in the play when Li'l Bit seems to hold something back from the audience. But it's important to distinguish, as best we can, between those scenes in which Li'l Bit knows more than she says and those in which she discloses more than she knows. The scene rehearsed above belongs to the former category, in which the narrator exerts control over what we know and when we know it. Li'l Bit suspends identifying the married man as her uncle until late in the first scene. This is a wonderful setup to the rest of the play, because, through it, *we* get wonderfully set up. One conventional depiction—older (married) man and younger woman—turns into another, less depicted perhaps, but no less “ordinary” scenario (denials notwithstanding).

Thus, it seems to me that Li'l Bit's “secret”—if that is the right word for it—lies elsewhere than incest. As her narrative is pieced together, we get a sense of the ambivalence that characterizes her relation to Uncle Peck. Maybe this is the secret she has to tell and teach: not the brute fact of her violation and betrayal, but an ambivalent admixture of love and hate, desire and identification, pleasure and danger. Indeed, this is one of the features of *How I Learned to Drive* that makes it such a refreshing break from form: Li'l Bit is an active, unruly subject of desire; she is not simply prostrate before the other's desire for her. Moreover, Li'l Bit's desire for Uncle Peck is not purified of danger any more than her love for him is untouched by fear and even hate.

There are numerous scenes that make clear Li'l Bit's desire for Uncle Peck as well as her identification with him. Buckle your seat-belts and fast forward to 1979: Li'l Bit is twenty-seven; she's on a “long bus trip to Upstate New York” during which she picks up a high school senior (40). Afterward, she tells us, “I lay on my back in the dark and I thought about you, Uncle Peck” (41). This direct address to Uncle Peck, calling him into presence, becomes indistinguishable from her imaginative identification with him: “Oh. Oh—this is the allure. Being older. Being the first. Being the translator, the teacher, the epicure, the already jaded. This is how the giver gets taken” (41). She addresses this reverie of praise and wonder to Uncle Peck even as she assumes his position, a redoubling of desire at and



as the site of identification. This is a glimpse, then, not of the reiteration of predation (“Who did it to you, Uncle Peck? How old were you? Were you eleven?” [86]—questions without answer), but of desire’s melancholy turn inward into identification.

My invocation of melancholy here is deliberate. In his famous discussion in “Mourning and Melancholia,” Freud traces an analogy between mourning (which he considers a normal psychological response to loss) and melancholia (which he describes as a pathological response).<sup>27</sup> He is seeking to show what mourning and melancholia have in common and, especially, where they differ. Along the way Freud resorts to a range of metaphors to describe the process of melancholia: figures of flight, falling, shadows, wounds. “Mourning and Melancholia,” written in 1915 and first published in 1917, is part of Freud’s evolving theory of identification, the topography of the ego, and the formation of conscience. His puzzlement at the quality of ego’s attachment to loss and the force with which lost objects continue to affect the ego also anticipates his investigation of trauma and the death drive in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*.

Both mourning and melancholia are a relationship to loss, and in both cases the ego suffers profound loss of interest in the outside world, inhibition of all activity, loss of capacity to love, and painful dejection. However, the melancholic suffers a blow to the inner world that seems to exceed the loss itself. “In mourning,” Freud tells us, “it is the world which has become poor and empty; in melancholia it is the ego itself.”<sup>28</sup> This diminution of self is marked by lacerating reproaches to self-regard,<sup>29</sup> a self-abasement not present in mourning; the mourner might lash out at a world suddenly bereft of his (or her) lost object, but does not, Freud says, turn the fire on himself. If mourning is characterized by dejection, melancholia is marked by *abjection*.

There is one more crucial difference between mourning and melancholia, a difference that bears on Li'l Bit's secret and its retreat from understanding. In melancholia, the subject may know well *whom* he or she has lost, but not *what* is lost. Melancholia, then, involves an object loss that is withdrawn from consciousness and *absorbed into the ego*. Lost, yet unrecognized as loss, the lost object cannot be mourned as gone. And yet, this nonrecognition of loss does not spare the subject of melancholia; the unknown loss produces internal work similar to that undergone in mourning. However, it is a kind of psychic work that defies understanding; neither the subject of melancholia nor those who surround her know what it is that absorbs her. This defiance even of self-understanding results in part from a change in the ego; in the place of an object that cannot be mourned, there comes an identification with the lost object or, perhaps even, with loss itself. All unknowing, Freud observes, “the shadow of the object fell upon the ego.”<sup>30</sup> But the psychic pull of melancholia also derives from the ambivalence of the ties that bound, and still bind, the subject to its lost and unmourned object.

Now there is much in Freud’s discussion of melancholia that we might wish to contest. For example, his opening distinction between

mourning and melancholia depends on another, between “normal” psychological responses and “pathological” ones—ultimately, a distinction that does not quite hold. Indeed, it cannot even hold for Freud; when he returns to the topic of identification and the constitution of the ego in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921) and *The Ego and the Id* (1923), “normal” processes of identification come more and more to resemble the melancholic model of object-identification he has initially diagnosed as pathological in “Mourning and Melancholia.”<sup>31</sup>

A related problem has to do with depoliticization. To pathologize melancholia is also to treat it as an individual problem and remove it from the social.<sup>32</sup> Curiously, this hermeneutic bracketing of the social, a bracketing I have earlier criticized in the clinical and pop cultural discussion of trauma, follows melancholia’s path from the outside in. That is, within the terms of Freud’s analysis, melancholia is an inward turn that cuts the subject off from the world around her. This is also what ego psychology’s individualizing diagnosis of melancholia effects: a flight from the world.

We might ask, both with Freud and against him—which is to say, with Freud but also with Paula Vogel—what refusals and blind spots in the social require the withdrawal into and burial within the self of Li’l Bit’s ambivalent relation to Uncle Peck. By “refusals” and “blind spots,” I do not refer to a cultural refusal to see or acknowledge the “reality” of incest and adult-child sexual contact. (This latter, when it does get spoken about, can only be spoken as “abuse,” a term that squeezes out all moral ambiguity and also evacuates the category of childhood.)<sup>33</sup> Rather, I mean the assertion that these experiences necessarily wound the one who undergoes them and, not only that, that this is all these experiences amount to: loss and more loss. The simultaneous refusal to recognize incest and adult-child sexual contact and insistence, when they do break the horizon of the visible, that such experiences injure and traumatize without spare may be part of what propels such experiences inward and away from consciousness in the first place (a firstness that is displaced in favor of the immediacy of trauma). In view of this, far from pathologizing this inward turn, we might rather marvel at the melancholic’s rebellious refusal—“revolting” is Freud’s term (but he does not mean it approvingly, whereas I do)—to get over it and give up so despised an object or object-relation.

### *Dare to Witness*

Let’s turn again to *How I Learned to Drive* and its ambivalent course of desire and identification. It’s fall term 1969, Li’l Bit’s freshman year in college. Uncle Peck counts down to her eighteenth birthday in December, then pays a birthday call. The scene of their encounter makes clear her desire for him—and her confusion:

*Peck:* Li’l Bit. Listen. Listen. Open your eyes and look at me. Come on. Just open your eyes, honey. (*Li’l Bit, eyes squeezed shut, refuses*) All right then, I just want you to listen. Li’l Bit—I’m going to ask

you just this once. Of your own free will. Just lie down on the bed with me—our clothes on—just lie down with me, a man and a woman . . . and let's . . . hold one another. Nothing else. Before you say anything else. I want the chance to . . . hold you. Because sometimes the body knows things that the mind isn't listening to . . . and after I've held you, then I want you to tell me what you feel.

*Li'l Bit:* You'll just . . . hold me?

*Peck:* Yes. And then you can tell me what you're feeling. (80–81)

And so, they lie together, the man holding the woman. As Li'l Bit and her uncle lie together, on an unadorned bed, discrepancies between body and word, between what we desire and what we can allow ourselves to have (or become?), play out before us. The Greek Chorus steps onto the stage, intoning a "Recipe for a Southern Boy." Without leaving Uncle Peck's side, Li'l Bit joins in the litany, praising, in turn, his "warm brown eyes," "warm hands," the "slouch of the fishing skiff in his walk," "sweat of cypress and sand," and at last "his mouth" (81–83). Speaking her desire, she comes quite nearly to enact it, leaning into his body, breath to breath, as if to kiss his mouth. Then, abruptly voice breaks from body: "I've got to get back" (83). Asked by her uncle if she really feels nothing, Li'l Bit lies, "No. Nothing" (84). After sending him away, after saying no to his desire *and* hers, Li'l Bit will never see him again. It will take him "seven years to drink himself to death" (85).

The afterwards of this refusal and this death is another memory, but one that takes Li'l Bit and the audience further back than the beginning. It is 1962, Li'l Bit's first driving lesson, the first time Uncle Peck crossed the line. In this, the penultimate scene of the play, Li'l Bit, the woman whose memories have been the driving force of the play thus far, exchanges the role of narrator for that of spectator and witness. Her life, her lines (lifelines?) now spoken by the Teenage Greek Chorus, Li'l Bit watches and listens as her own story unfolds before her, as if it were happening to someone else, as if it were a scene in someone else's life. A play even. The stage directions for this scene yoke the work of memory and the work of theater:

The Teenage Greek Chorus member stands apart on stage. She will speak all of Li'l Bit's lines. Li'l Bit sits beside Peck in the front seat. She looks at him closely, remembering. (88)

Li'l Bit takes her seat in the theater of memory. Only now, at this late juncture in the play, a play whose temporal indices are as revisable as memory itself, do we witness what precipitated Li'l Bit's flight from her body and into her head. She is eleven; she will be thirty-five "before you know it" (91). She lives both times at once.

Throughout this scene, as the Teenage Greek Chorus takes Li'l Bit's part, she watches herself remembering, objectifies her memory as her self.

The Teenage Chorus stands to the side of the “action” and speaks Li'l Bit's confusion and fear as Uncle Peck places the eleven-year-old girl on his lap, behind the wheel of his car, and then reaches up under her shirt. Simultaneously, we witness another encounter in time. As Li'l Bit listens to her own story, words now spoken by another, she climbs back into the car of memory. We hear one story even as we watch another unfold before us in the shared space-time that is live performance. At the same time that the Teenage Greek Chorus gives voice to Li'l Bit's fear (“Uncle Peck—what are you doing” and, then, “Uncle Peck—please don't do this” [90]), she leans back into her uncle and reaches up to stroke his face, giving us to wonder if it is the eleven-year-old girl touching him or the adult woman, in memory willing connection with the lost man who taught her love and loss at once.

The accumulated weight of Li'l Bit's memories teaches us at what cost she learned to drive and learned to love; she retreats into the fire in her head, leaves her body behind, feels shame at and in her body. “That day was the last day I lived in my body” (90). These are the first words she speaks when she resumes her place as teller of her own story. But the last words of the Teenage Greek Chorus—Li'l Bit's eleven-year-old self—echo at her back, “This isn't happening” (90).

This doubling—of time, of Li'l Bit—is readable as the splitting off that characterizes trauma. But I want to resist this reading. Instead, I am struck by the doubling, or standing in, that is witness and that is also the intersubjective occasion of the self. The scene I have just described is one of two moments in *How I Learned to Drive* that explicitly represent what it means to remember trauma and bear witness, a remembering and a witnessing that blur the lines between self and other, inside and out, past and present (34–35).

Let's briefly consider the other scene in which *How I Learned to Drive* seems to reflect self-critically on bearing witness. On a drive home from a drunken 1968 celebration with Uncle Peck, Li'l Bit falls asleep, and as she sleeps Uncle Peck walks downstage towards the audience and begins another lesson, a fishing lesson, for the never-seen Cousin Bobby. But the scene of pedagogy turns—as had happened before with Li'l Bit—somewhere else. In some productions of *How I Learned to Drive*, the actress playing Li'l Bit is stationed off to the side while this scene unfolds, as if she has awakened from sleep—or has fallen into a dream?—and is watching Uncle Peck “seduce” Cousin Bobby. The uncertain status of the scene—is it a dream; a memory (but if so, whose); a speculation on Li'l Bit's part that Uncle Peck must have done something like this to someone else, so why not to Cousin Bobby?—is only enhanced by the fact that we never see Cousin Bobby. The actor playing Uncle Peck speaks his lines to an empty space and mimes interactions with a body that is not there. In some sense, then, we are being asked whether it is possible to witness what we have not seen. This is a question with deep ethical import, for it raises questions of our responsibility to and before others whom we may never know.<sup>34</sup>

Vogel also recognizes that there is another deep and deeply ethical challenge she has presented her audience: how to witness what you cannot bear to see. In her opening notes on casting, for the Teenage Greek Chorus Vogel “strongly recommend[s] casting a young woman who is ‘of legal age,’ that is, twenty-one to twenty-five years old who can look as close to eleven as possible.” “If the actor is too young,” Vogel worries, “the audience may feel uncomfortable” (4). Now, this is a striking worry for a play that is all about discomfiting audience members’ presumptions. But, of course, there is discomfort and there is discomfort. What distinguishes one kind of discomfort from another? What, in other words, makes discomfort bearable, even if it scarcely feels that way at the time?

Vogel’s proposed solution pivots on the peculiar status of the live body of performance. On the one hand, Vogel cautions directors to cast an actress who can plausibly play—“look”—eleven; on the other hand, she wants to make sure the audience knows full well that the Teenage Greek Chorus, the actress who will speak as the eleven-year-old Li'l Bit, is really (in life and off stage) and most definitely not eleven.

The casting choice (which is also an acting direction) certainly seems in keeping with the Brechtian leanings of *How I Learned to Drive*: its suggested use of screens for the slide projection of traffic signs; musical interludes to signal mood shifts and mark time; a narrative that circles back on itself, revising as it goes; and defiance of simplistic notions of “good” characters versus “bad.” Making visible to the audience the chronological discrepancy between the Teenage Greek Chorus and the actress playing her could thus be understood as a kind of “alienation effect,” intended to open up a critical distance between actress and role *as well as* between character and audience. This interpretation is fine as far as it goes, but does not adequately get at the charge of the live body of performance.

One of the distinctive features of theatrical representation is its involvement of bodies in shared time and space. On stage, actors and actresses do not just speak characters’ lines but embody them, bringing flesh to word, gesture to figure. Just as crucially, there are, on the “other” side, the witnessing bodies of the audience. In the peculiar alchemy of live performance, these lines of division—between onstage and off, actor and role, actor and audience—can blur or otherwise be confounded. This crossing over is both the risk and the thrill of theatrical representation.

The risks can only be ratcheted up in a play whose story line revolves around (even as it is not reducible to) such a morally freighted topic as incest. Ultimately, the audience of *How I Learned to Drive* is called to witness not the moral clarity of injury, but the messy ambiguities and ambivalences of lived embodiment, and these complexities are played out in and across real bodies in shared space and time. Perhaps, if the audience is to bear witness to what is before them, they must not see what they already think they know. Perhaps, just perhaps, to see too close to the “real” would alienate in the wrong way, potentially pushing the audience back from the uncomfortable lessons the play has to teach. In many respects the dare of *How I Learned to Drive*—the dare not just to see, but to

witness, not just to experience, but to comprehend—is the dare of theater itself.

The association between theater and witnessing is a long-standing one; the English word *theater* comes from the ancient Greek verb *theaomai*, “to view, gaze at, behold.” “Behold” is perhaps the best translation of this deponent verb, for it preserves the self-reflexivity otherwise lost to translation. As a deponent verb, *theaomai* has no active form, but is used in the middle voice to communicate the active sense of viewing (as opposed to being viewed). The middle voice, though, reverberates with the promise (and risk?) of a double movement: out into the world and back onto the self. Theater, when it works, is the activity of witness—an activity that takes place, as it were, on both sides of the stage. The challenge to spectators is not just to sit and watch a play, as if the play were some passive object to be quickly consumed and passed; rather, spectators, if they are also to be witnesses, are in some fundamental sense taken in and transformed by what they watch. (And here’s another reason I like to translate *theaomai* as “behold.” I like its grasping-ness, the way in which one kind of sensory perception, sight, is explained in terms of another, touch.) This is more than empathic identification. Witnessing as beholding requires an openness to the surprise of the other—and of the self.

In the excruciating final scene of *How I Learned to Drive*, Li'l Bit tells us, “The nearest sensation I feel—of flight in the body—I guess I feel when I’m driving” (91). That she should feel most alive while driving seems counterintuitive. For wasn’t the car the scene of her trauma, the place where Uncle Peck had unfettered access to her? However, if, as I have suggested above, Li'l Bit’s trauma and her secret are bound up in all that she has loved and lost in Uncle Peck, a love and a loss whose high toll do not cancel out their value for Li'l Bit, then it may only be while driving that she gets to have him again—by being him. For the length of the drive, she is not pressed to get over him or get over herself. If the price tag for getting over the loss is letting go of an object and an object-relation that the world tells you was not worth having in the first place, then this melancholy refusal to get over it already is not destructive of the self, but may even be constitutive of its ongoing life.

In the topsy-turvy world of *How I Learned to Drive*, Li'l Bit’s rituals of remembrance and revision, as she moves us and herself back and forth in time, enact a truth-telling that, in Ann Cvetkovich’s words, “def[ies] simple notions of disclosure.”<sup>35</sup> Importantly, the play proposes that this defiance of conventional expectations of how memory works and of knowing our own stories and communicating them to others does *not* mean that understanding and healing injury is impossible, but is the very condition of forging a different relation to injury and to identity. But we cannot do so, the play suggests, unless we stop seeking for hard-and-fast truths and instead allow for the ambivalence of an arrival that is at once too soon and too late.

None of us can meet the past again face to face; we are always too early or too late. But this suspension of time, even as we move through it,

might be the condition for another kind of meeting. The final image of the play presents melancholia shorn of pathology (judgment from others) and shame (judgment of self). Li'l Bit steps out of the past and into the car:

Ahh . . . *(Beat)* I adjust my seat. Fasten my seat belt. Then I check the right side mirror—check the left side. *(She does)* Finally, I adjust the rearview mirror. *(As Li'l Bit adjusts the rearview mirror, a faint light strikes the spirit of Uncle Peck, who is sitting in the back seat of the car. She sees him in the mirror. She smiles at him, and he nods at her. They are happy to be going for a long drive together. Li'l Bit slips the car into first gear; to the audience)* And then—I floor it. (92)

Where the *live* recedes, there is memory's psychic life of witness, and perhaps theater's too—if we open ourselves to its lessons.

## NOTES

I want to thank Sharon Holland and Janelle Reinelt for their incisive and detailed written comments on this essay. I also benefited from the opportunity to present earlier versions of this essay to audiences at the University of California, Irvine; the University of Illinois, Chicago; and Columbia University. Finally, I want to single out the following friends and colleagues for their critical encouragements along the way: Jennifer Brody, Mark Canuel, Ann Cvetkovich, Jill Dolan, Lisa Duggan, David Eng, Janet R. Jakobsen, Tom Lee, Molly McGarry, and Rebecca Schneider.

1. Paula Vogel, *How I Learned to Drive*, in *The Mammary Plays* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1998), 7. Subsequent references are given in the text.
2. Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).
3. Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 18, ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1955), 12.
4. Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 24.
5. Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 27.
6. Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 27.
7. Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 58.
8. Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 31; Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 131–32 n. 5.
9. Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 58.
10. Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 11.
11. Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 11.
12. The term “behindsight” is borrowed from Lee Edelman, “Seeing Things: Representation, the Scene of Surveillance, and the Spectacle of Gay Male Sex,” in *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, ed. Diana Fuss (New York: Routledge, 1991), 101.
13. In this regard, *How I Learned to Drive* not only intervenes in trauma theory, but also checks the developmental flow of most psychological theory, which posits neat stages through which individuals pass en route to normal adulthood. Even Freud, for all his hedging, ultimately succumbs to a developmental bias.

(Witness the arc of *The Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*.) Vogel's playful vocabulary of "drives" and "driving" productively and punningly engages Freud's notion of the drive, which figures so crucially in his developmental model of human sexuality. But, this engagement with Freud's drive theory is also a rebuttal, since *How I Learned to Drive* ultimately refuses to map sexual development or maturation more generally along the lines of a linear progress narrative. *How I Learned to Drive* might thus serve as a generative case study for a nondevelopmental psychological theory. I pursue this possibility at greater length in *Against Childhood* (Beacon Press, forthcoming). See also Elspeth Probyn's lovely essay on the place of childhood in gay and lesbian narratives, "Suspended Beginnings: Of Childhood and Nostalgia," *GLQ* 2, no. 4 (1995): 439–65.

14. David Savran neatly summarizes Vogel's anti-Aristotelian style in "Loose Screws," his introduction to *The Baltimore Waltz and Other Plays* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1996), ix–xv, especially xiii.

15. Savran, "Loose Screws," xii.

16. Ann Cvetkovich, "Sexual Trauma/Queer Memory: Incest, Lesbianism, and Therapeutic Culture," *GLQ* 2, no. 4 (1995): 366.

17. Janice Haaken, "The Recovery of Memory, Fantasy, and Desire: Feminist Approaches to Sexual Abuse and Psychic Trauma," *Signs* 21, no. 4 (1996): 1069–94, especially 1078.

18. Pamela Haag, "'Putting Your Body on the Line': The Question of Violence, Victims, and the Legacy of Second-Wave Feminism," *differences* 8, no. 2 (1996): 24.

19. Haaken, "Recovery of Memory," 1079. See also Cvetkovich, "Sexual Trauma/Queer Memory."

20. Haaken, "Recovery of Memory," 1083.

21. Carole S. Vance, ed., *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexual Imagery* (1984; New York: Pandora Press, 1992).

22. In feminist histories of "second-wave feminism," the 1982 Barnard conference has often been set down as the opening battle in the feminist "sex wars." There are strong historical reasons to resist doing so, however. This way of telling the story overlooks the fact that women's sexuality was already a matter of heated debate among nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century U.S. feminists. In addition, it also leaves out broader cultural currents and debates over sexual identity and practices that influenced the direction(s) of feminist sexual politics. See Lisa Duggan and Nan D. Hunter, *Sex Wars: Sexual Dissent and Political Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

23. For a helpful discussion of the value of feminist political differences, see Janet R. Jakobsen, *Working Alliances and the Politics of Difference* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998).

24. Sharon Marcus, "Fighting Bodies, Fighting Words: A Theory and Politics of Rape Prevention," in *Feminists Theorize the Political*, ed. Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott (New York: Routledge, 1992), 385–403.

25. Mary Gaitskill, "On Not Being a Victim," *Harpers*, March 1994, 35–44.

26. Gaitskill, "On Not Being a Victim," 42.

27. Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 14, ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1957), 243–58.

28. Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," 246.

29. Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," 244.

30. Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," 249.

31. For a rich discussion of melancholia as at the heart of subject-formation,



see Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).

32. For a valuable treatment of melancholia that redraws it through the social and political register of Asian American identity and difference, see David Eng and Shinhee Han, "A Dialogue on Racial Melancholia," *Psychoanalytic Dialogues* 10, no. 4 (2000): 667–700. See also Douglas Crimp's important "Mourning and Militancy," *October* 51 (Winter 1989): 3–18.

33. For a provocative feminist discussion of moral panic around the specter of childhood sexuality, see Judith Levine, *Harmful to Minors: The Perils of Protecting Children from Sex* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

34. For helpful discussions of the ethical dilemma of bearing witness to the trauma of the other, see Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*; and Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

35. I am here borrowing from Ann Cvetkovich's important discussion of the ambivalence of telling and healing trauma in Dorothy Allison's novel, *Bastard Out of Carolina*. See her "Sexual Trauma/Queer Memory," 360–61.

# Immobile Legs, Stalled Words: Psychoanalysis and Moving Deaths

Peggy Phelan

## I

*I have had a long and, if I may say so myself, distinguished career as a member of the corps de ballet in the New York City Ballet, or NYCB as we call it. We were entrusted with preserving the works of George Balanchine, without a doubt the master choreographer of this century. Even as a young girl I longed to dance—before I had ever seen a ballet. I cannot explain this deep urge in me. It just is. Or perhaps was. But I get ahead of myself, like James Joyce's daughter Lily. "Lily was so busy she was literally run off her feet." Joyce's daughter was a dancer, and surely he learned from her how peculiarly the feet flee the body after a long dance. Anyway, I have devoted my life to dance, and it is my greatest happiness to feel I have been able to interpret accurately and passionately some of the movements Balanchine imagined.*

*Most of my colleagues at NYCB viewed their work in the corps as a kind of advanced apprenticeship, a necessary stepping-stone toward their real goal, which was to become a principal dancer. I myself, however, was content to remain a member of the corps. I have certain physical limitations (I am not as tall as the ideal ballerina needs to be), but more importantly, I was not dedicated enough to put my body through the disciplined work, especially in relation to the precise technique of dancing on pointe, that cannot be sidestepped by any aspiring principal. I was happy to make a relatively anonymous contribution to Balanchine's expansive vision. My ex-husband liked this in me and often remarked that I was one of the few remaining women who understood the value of subsuming individual ambition for a larger collective purpose. To my distress I soon found it much easier to give myself fully to the work of Balanchine than to my marriage; I believed in the vision of Mr. B. wholeheartedly but discovered I could not sustain the faith needed for marriage.*

*But I digress. I do not want to burden you with the details of my personal life. Rather, I would like to tell a different story altogether, one that I hope will play some small part in opening a long-deferred conversation between dancers and cultural theorists, more particularly, those interested in psychoanalysis and questions of the feminine body. For reasons that I hope will be apparent a bit further on, I find it necessary to frame my entry point into the conversation by making some mention of the events that led to my interest in the relationship between dance and psychoanalysis.*

*Once I realized that my marriage was ending and that I would not be on the same career path as most of the corps, I found that I had a small amount of time and psychic freedom to pursue certain questions that had surfaced from time to time in my life but had always been put aside to dedicate myself to dance.*

*I found, for example, that I had a certain appetite for finance and a rather surprising interest in science, especially kinesiology. Moreover, I became interested in risk-gain ratios and found myself calculating what the percentages of injuring knees, hips, and ankles would be in relation to the number of hours the troupe rehearsed, divided by the number of hours we performed. I made charts to include travel time via airplanes, and compared these with charts of travel time and crime statistics on the New York subway. I realized that all my years counting at the bar and doing various exercises had given me a deeply intimate kinship with numbers. I had come to order my habits of thinking in relation to numbers and found that I had a strange facility for understanding the ways in which they could be combined and divided. It seemed to me that numbers had an inner logic, a sort of affinity for certain other numbers, that I found comforting. Numbers seemed to be a kind of music that extended from dance into a richly layered world whose movements I wanted to graph, to plot, to layout—as if on an enormous clock that everyone in the whole world could see. This rather late and large ambition threw me at first.*

*My ex-husband was (actually is) something of a computer wizard, and some of the calmest times we had together were spent choreographing numbers across a computer screen. After we divorced, I became almost obsessive about creating a fantastical virtual ballet on the computer. My efforts in this regard were made all the more pleasurable by the possibility of imagining movement as pure form. It was only later that I realized my passion for computers was a way of grieving. Having felt the deep pain of realizing that my marriage was a misstep, I was in danger of losing my way everywhere. I had devoted most of my life to placing one foot in front of the other, and suddenly I was profoundly unsure about where to step. As my feet tapped away under my chair and my fingers typed on the keys, I began to feel that the lack of direction in my feet might be cured by the mapping my fingers were making on the keyboard. I was transferring the hesitation in my feet to the plotting of my calmer hands. A strange form of grieving, perhaps, but for me a helpful one.*

*After a while I came to realize that my computer plan could not be realized. I simply did not know enough about the deep structure of statistics and computation to do what I most wanted to do—develop a computerized version of Balanchine's elegant ballets. I dreamed that if I could learn these skills, I might bring the beauty of Balanchine to an audience who had never heard of him or seen his work.*

*I went to the NYCB directors and explained my vision. They were supportive but in a vague, immaterial way. I wanted them to fund my study at the Courant Institute of Mathematics at New York University, where my ex-husband's best friend was a professor. He had assured me that the institute would admit me as a special student. Unfortunately, the tuition there was considerably more than I could afford, and since I would not be enrolled in a degree program, I was not eligible for financial aid. The ballet directors were not forthcoming with the fees, however, and I could not bring myself to push the matter beyond my broad hint. The NYCB had to devote itself to preserving Balanchine's real ballets first and foremost, and while I thought my project in virtual ballet was certainly compatible with that mission, I also knew it would take several years and promised only uncertain results.*

*Despite my intellectual acceptance of the directors' decision, I grew depressed and somewhat despondent during rehearsals. I had been a member of the corps for twelve years and it was increasingly difficult for me to maintain my enthusiasm for practice. I spent about six months in this inattentive condition. Then one evening during a sparsely attended performance of Mozartiana at Lincoln Center (it was sparsely attended because there was a snowstorm and I was thinking about how I might plot the risk-injury ratio of audiences from Manhattan versus New Jersey) when I extended my right leg in the air above my waist, as I had done thousands upon thousands of times, I heard my hip crack.*

*After the bone was set and I was in the hospital recovering, I thought about the ironies of my injury. I had been plotting the probabilities of injuries for about three years. I wondered if I had somehow known in advance that I would break my hip. Was my statistical frenzy an elaborate form of self-explanation, self-justification? I also considered the irony of my injury occurring during a performance of Mozartiana. While Balanchine choreographed it, he spoke often of the death of Mozart and the kind of smooth order his music represented (perfect integers). Tchaikovsky's Suite No. 4 sets Mozart's piano pieces for an orchestra, and Balanchine used Tchaikovsky's score to illustrate how music could be seen and dance could be heard. As the music builds on the principal drive of the piano, so too did the corps elaborate the central drama of the four principals. Balanchine privately referred to the role of his principal dancer in one sequence as a dance for "the angel of death." Publicly, the sequence is called "Prayer." Balanchine's choreography in Mozartiana struck me, in its simplicity, as his most spiritually searching work; it was my personal favorite. But if you asked me what it was "about," I could not say. It was more of a feeling than anything else for me—a feeling of searching, of longing.*

*As I lay in the hospital bed, I tried to hear my own longing. While my injury was extraordinarily painful and I dreaded being immobile, I had to admit that somewhere part of my spirit—felt liberated. I was out of the corps for at least eight months, possibly a year. I had reasonable amounts of insurance, and on the third day of my convalescence the ballet directors came and rather sheepishly told me they had paid the fees for Courant. I was to be the first injured ballerina to enroll in the prestigious institute.*

*But as is so often the case in human affairs, when I arrived at Courant I was immediately overwhelmed. I had been essentially self-taught. I could not decipher any of the language in which these professors spoke. They were on a planet so remote that what I needed to join them there was beyond whatever resources I had or even wanted to summon. Professional mathematicians seemed so different from professional dancers that I began to think my plan utterly mad, impossible.*

*This became clear after the fifth lecture of Introduction to Statistics. Enrollment was so large the course was held in the psychology building, which had large lecture theaters. The course was designed for social scientists. The professors at Courant told me quite frankly that it was the easiest of all their offerings and that it would ground me in the basic language of computation necessary for instruction in "higher" mathematical forms. By the end of the fifth lecture, however, I was totally lost. I could not find an entry point despite my most heroic efforts to concentrate. I sat in the lecture hall dejectedly, waiting for the pain in my*

hip to subside. Absentmindedly, I began doodling with some numbers on my notepad and did not notice for some time that a new group of students had filled the room and a new class begun, something having to do with psychology. By the time I began to listen I could feel the force of Providence resetting my bones. This, after all, was what I had been moving toward, but as in the best choreography, I never would have guessed where I would wind up from where I had started.

The lecture was being given by a young, apparently serious but not especially talented, lecturer. She seemed at times quite over her head. I liked that. Suddenly I did not feel as if I were the only one at sea. I actually could follow most of what she said. I rushed to the bookstore and began reading voraciously. This class was going to answer all the questions I did not even know "were mine."

What follows is a long version of my interpretation of the lecturer's remarks. She is not a dancer, but most of what she said was so applicable to dance that I have, with her permission, entwined our thoughts. I asked her if I could use her name since so much of the work is hers, but she insisted that all teachers want this kind of collaboration to happen. She prefers to remain an unmarked presence in my text.

## II

In the inaugural text of classical psychoanalysis, Josef Breuer and Sigmund Freud's *Studies on Hysteria* of 1895, remarkable attention is given to bodies, and to body parts, that will not or cannot move. The first of the five case histories collected in *Studies*, Breuer's account of his treatment of Anna O., and the last, Freud's account of his treatment of Elisabeth von R., contain especially fascinating and often overlooked notions of the relationship between the body and truth, the body and time, and the body and language. Here, we would like to recast the usual critical approach to *Studies on Hysteria* that accents the invention of the *talking* cure, and review another hope for a psychical cure that these early case histories also express. This cure had as its foundation a deep faith in the "truth" of bodily performances.

The psychoanalytic session, at least as it was conceived in these early case histories, involved the acting out, the performative elaboration, of the symptom. While the case histories chart several different notions of performance—ventriloquism, imitation, "possession"—we will concentrate here on the ideas of dance and movement that inform *Studies*. Following the lead of Freud and Breuer, we will be concerned with paralytic feet and eloquent thighs, and with the transfers enacted in psychic and physical movements and "obstructions."

Dragging feet, feet with sharp cramps, feet that swell and limp, feet that are suddenly too heavy to move, feet that support legs frozen in contractions, give *Studies on Hysteria* a strange rhythm and rocky gait. It is on the basis of these aching feet that psychoanalysis proposes a new reproductive system for the female body (all five of the case histories are of women). In Breuer's analysis of Bertha Pappenheim, whom he names Anna O., "when the first of her chronic symptoms disappeared," the contracture of her right leg, the psychoanalytic method was born:

These findings—that in the case of this patient the hysterical phenomena disappeared as soon as the event which had given rise to them was reproduced in her hypnosis—made it possible to arrive at a therapeutic technical procedure which left nothing to be desired in its logical consistency and systematic application.<sup>1</sup>

Returning suppleness and motion to Anna O.'s right leg enables both Anna O. and psychoanalysis itself to "take a great step forward" (35). In the disappearance of the contraction in the right leg, the technique "which left nothing to be desired" was born.<sup>2</sup>

The birth of psychoanalysis requires the re-production and representation of the "event" that triggered the contraction of Anna O.'s right leg. In that reenactment psychic and physical movement are restored. The psychoanalytic reproduction of the symptomatic body requires two people. In these early histories, the patient and the doctor connect both physically and psychically. Freud eventually theorized the psychical contact in the transference and countertransference. In *Studies*, however, the physical contact between the doctor and the patient is instrumental to the cure. "But she would never begin to talk until she had satisfied herself of my identity by carefully feeling my hands."<sup>3</sup> Peter Swales has documented that when Freud told Sandor Ferenczi about his early years as an analyst he admitted that when he analyzed Frau Cäcilie M., whose history is documented in *Studies*, "he had even lain on the floor, sometimes for hours at a time accompanying [her] through hysterical crises."<sup>4</sup> For both doctors, although for different reasons, the physical cure presented too many risks. Psychoanalysis moved away from embracing the body and refined the talking cure. A technique that depended too heavily upon touch was a huge risk for an epistemological revolution whose visionary leader was determined to be, above all scientific. *Studies*, almost unwittingly, was two different approaches to the cure—and the psychoanalytic movement followed the one that left the body untouched.

Like blind men first learning Braille, the fingers of Freud and Breuer press and prod the somatic utterances of their patients' hysterical bodies.<sup>5</sup> The doctors apply mental and physical pressure to the indecipherable bodily signifier, the symptom, until it "joins in the conversation." Different body parts of the patient join the doctor in an ongoing conversation whose subject is no longer strictly speaking "her" body but is rather "their body," the body being made and manipulated in their discursive and physical interaction. In his history of Elisabeth von R., Freud describes this technique that "left nothing to be desired":

[H]er painful legs<sup>6</sup> began to "join in the conversation" during our analyses. . . . If . . . by a question or by pressure upon her head I called up a memory, a sensation of pain would make its first appearance, and this was usually so sharp that the patient would give a start and put her hand to the spot. The pain that was thus aroused would persist so long as she was under the influence of the memory;

it would reach its climax when she was in the act of telling me the essential and decisive part of what she had to communicate, and with the last word it would disappear. I came in time to use such pains as a compass to guide me; if she stopped talking but admitted that she still had a pain, I knew she had not told me everything, and insisted on her continuing her story till the pain had been talked away. Not until then did I arouse a fresh memory.<sup>7</sup>

The “arousal” of a fresh memory reproduces a fresh body, one newly made in the somatic and verbal performance Freud and Elisabeth enact. Putting his hand on her head causes pressure to build; her hand flies to a different body part that is then verbally massaged. Freud transforms Elisabeth’s leg’s contribution to the conversation into a truth-meter, a somatic lie-detector.<sup>8</sup> Although Freud doubts his patient’s verbal starts and stops, her narrative’s beginnings and endings, for him her thigh does not lie.<sup>9</sup>

In *Studies*, Freud and Breuer tried to find the history of the symptom. Their search for history has led many scholars to use a kind of shorthand in describing the relation between history and hysteria: hysteria is a disease that is the consequence of a jumbled narrative, an incoherent autobiography, a failure of historical accounts.<sup>10</sup> But it would be more accurate to say that hysteria is the disease through which psychoanalysis imagines a history of the symptom and the patient discovers that her body’s history must be spoken. The imposition of narrative order, an imposition rehearsed when the doctor composes his account, imposes psychic order on the body.<sup>11</sup> What is profoundly startling to realize, however, is that the body does not contain such an order independent of this narrative imposition. Psychoanalysis suggests that the body’s “truth” does not organize itself narratologically or chronologically. The body does not experience the world in the way that consciousness does: the aim of psychoanalysis is to find a way to suture the body into time’s order (time’s truth is its order). The equally logical task of suturing consciousness to bodily “truth” remains outside the official domains of mainstream science, and thrives in New Age philosophy and alternative medicine.

Dance can be said to be the elaboration of possible temporalities for the body that are interpreted in movement; and psychoanalysis can be said to be the elaboration of possible narratives for the body that are interpreted (or displaced) in the body’s symptom. Dance frames the body performing movement in time and space. While it is true that bodies usually manage to move in time and space, dancing consciously performs the body’s discovery of its temporal and spatial dimensions. For many dancers, of course, dancing is timing. Lacking a good sense of timing, some people abandon dancing.

*I feel an overwhelming need to interrupt the partnering that I am doing here. The following few paragraphs constitute my solo writing. Perhaps I have secretly longed to be a principal dancer and have been renouncing that desire all this time. So much of my past is lost to me now. Anyway:*

*When I began to dance Balanchine's ballets as a teenager I entered his system of time. I became one of a number of bodies he wanted to move, and my body became for him a type of number. While Balanchine generated his numbers from the music, I generated mine from the measure of my limbs' movements. Looking back, I can now see that Balanchine's choreography cured a certain fear of being lost that I sometimes had before I fully became a dancer. On those rare occasions when I did not practice or rehearse for a day or two, I would remember that vague feeling of drift that I had experienced prior to my training. It was as if I could not find a place to land, a way to be in the world. Dancing gave me that place, that way of counting. With a broken hip I was in danger of losing a certain mental equilibrium. As I read the psychoanalytic case histories over and over I would listen to Mozart as a way to keep my body in the time to which it had grown accustomed.*

*Soon I began to see aspects of my own past in these histories that inspired me to revise my relation to my training. This absorption with my past startled me, for dancers are disciplined to think in the present tense exclusively—to be fully in the moment. Remembrance is replaced by "reconstruction," a present performance of dances that have been rescored in notation practices that are only now becoming common ways to preserve dance.*

*Freud's favorite word for psychoanalysis was reconstruction. I began to see a deep similarity between the process of reassembling the movements that constitute dance and the psychic remembering and working through of psychoanalysis. While ballet is dedicated to "beauty," psychoanalysis is dedicated to "health." But both practices are very close.*

*Physical movement and psychic transference allow for a revision of the body's relation to its own past. Psychic transference is the work accomplished in the actual analysis itself and then repeated in the analyst's act of composing and publishing the case history. Breuer's record of Anna O.'s cure reenacts the process by which his discursive interpretation "surmounts" the questions raised by her body. However, in the translation of the somatic symptom into the discursive cure, another movement occurs. In addition to moving simply and elegantly from the logic of the symptom to the logic of discourse, the body makes another move. It dances. Something central to the vitality of the body cannot be contained by even the most exhaustive psychoanalytic cure.*

*For my lecturer this "something" is the irreducible symptom of femininity itself. Jacqueline Rose argues that "hysteria is assimilated to a body as site of the feminine, outside discourse, silent finally, or at best, 'dancing.'"<sup>12</sup> But Rose and my lecturer seem to assume that talking is better than dancing, that language is more expressive than somatic utterances. I myself cannot accept this assumption. Moreover, the argument about hysteria and femininity neglects the question of what Breuer and Balanchine wanted to cure in their own bodies. Breuer's copious note-taking and Balanchine's breathtaking choreography answered some need in them that had little to do with the women upon whose bodies they sought to pose their deepest questions.*



*Like dancers and choreographers, Freud and Breuer admitted that the body can express things that consciousness and its discursive formations cannot. Within psychoanalysis, these bodily expressions are called symptoms. Symptoms are somatic expressions that signal the work of repression; they are the bodily placeholders for material that consciousness cannot fully absorb. Symptoms are condensed indexes of a not yet consciously narrativized event. Therefore, symptoms can only occur in the present tense; once the event finds a past tense, the symptom (temporarily) disappears.<sup>13</sup> Within the terms of psychoanalysis, bodies are symptomatic; some symptoms are dangerous, but most are not. Although we tend to think of a symptom as a pathology, we will use the word here in the genuine psychoanalytic sense, to refer to bodily expressions not yet interpreted.*

*From a dancer's point of view the symptom is one way of understanding a movement phrase. Movement phrases are somatic expressions that are condensed versions of particular techniques. They consolidate a specific physical gesture in the dance even while pointing to the broader movement vocabulary from which the phrase is derived. Likewise, the symptom registers a particular "something" that the body can only perform symptomatically (a cough, a paralyzed arm), while also pointing to something that eludes conscious narration. In dance, the exclusions of movement choices, which are fundamental to establishing the technique from which the phrase emerges, function in a way similar to the repressions of the unconscious. They are as vital to the legibility of the movement phrase itself as symptoms are to the legibility of a particular subjectivity. A failed movement phrase, in my case, a broken hip, might be an expression of some dis-join that my body must dis-play precisely because I cannot name it. (Some injuries of course are the result of bad choreography: if everyone in the troupe keeps breaking bones, perhaps it is the choreography that needs to be reset.)*

*Psychoanalysis is the performance in which the doctor and the patient interpret a symptom that gives the body temporal coherence. Part of the burden of establishing temporal order for the body, for both dancing and psychoanalysis, often falls to narrative since one of the things that narrative generates is temporal order. But even without narrative, dance organizes its movement across temporal schema often carried by music. And in this sense, dance, like psychoanalysis, helps join the body to time. But just as the proliferation of dance styles throughout history and across cultures implicitly suggests the enormous range of temporal possibilities within movement performances, so too do the interpretations of the symptom emerge from historically and culturally specific meanings and values. Psychoanalytic symptoms and their interpretations are subject to historical, political, and cultural pressures. We can see that certain diseases, for example hysteria at the turn of the century and depression now, achieve a cultural currency that instigates a change in the technique of the cure. Thus the technique of the talking cure surmounts the technique of hypnosis, and the techniques of pharmacology, especially Prozac, have surmounted the talking cure.*

*But again, I get ahead of myself. In the interests of clarity I here move*

*offstage until the end of our collaborative analysis of the first case histories of psychoanalysis. The corps will come back, as bodies always do.*

### III

The first symptoms Anna O. and Elisabeth von R. developed were sympathetically reproduced somatizations of their fathers' pain. These symptoms were the result of a kind of stilling kinesthetic empathy: each woman became partially paralyzed. The somatic symptoms were motivated by the daughter's desire to show love for her father by lending him her own body. If she could transfer the pain in her father's body into her own, she believed, she could help her father live. When the somatic symptom (paralysis) failed to keep the father alive, new, more dangerous hysterical symptoms emerged.

Anna O.'s paralysis was a mimetic response to her father's stillness. As he lay in bed struggling to breathe and as she anticipated his final loss of breath in the stillness of death, she herself became spectacularly still.<sup>14</sup> Through paralysis Anna O. attempted to sacrifice her own youthful active body to the stillness encroaching upon her father's. If the stillness could have another body on which to alight, if the stage could be larger, perhaps the stillness would not have to engulf her father's body so completely that he would expire.

Anna O.'s cough, her breath's stutter step, began the night she heard the dance music playing. "She began coughing for the first time when once, as she was sitting at her father's bedside, she heard the sound of dance music coming from a neighbouring house, felt a sudden wish to be there, and was overcome with self-reproaches. Thereafter, throughout the whole length of her illness she reacted to any markedly rhythmical music with a *tussis nervosa* [nervous cough]."<sup>15</sup> So let us set the stage: she hears the music playing while she sits near her father's bed. He is dying. She is watching. She is watching and not dying. Outside, dance music is playing. Her foot starts tapping involuntarily. She stills it. Sharp intake of breath, a slight, hastily silenced cough. All she wants to do, all she wants to do, is dance. The rhythm of the music is infecting her body. Her blood picks up a little speed; she's remembering the two-step. And her romance with her father is that she cannot live without him. She is her father's daughter. His girl. The apple of his eye. She is going to nurse him back to life. She will tell him nursery rhymes, fairy tales. ("He joked with her in English, Na, how are you, Miss Bertha?"<sup>16</sup> Na, how are you, Papa? Papa don't die. Papa Pappenheim . . .) The music playing inside and outside her body. In the still of the night . . . Time is the bed and Then and Now are breathing in and out and you are one of the ones there waking, waking with a stretch joining Then and Now. Mourning the loss of him and of her body's dance . . . Laid out there, stiff in the sheet of time, he sleeps. And she stifles her cough. Finding her mourning breath.

In concluding his analysis, Breuer returned to Anna O.'s desire to

dance and noted, "The patient could not understand how it was that dance music made her cough; such a construction is too meaningless to have been deliberate. (It seemed very likely to me, incidentally, that each of her twinges of conscience brought on one of her regular spasms of the glottis and that the motor impulses which she felt—for she was very fond of dancing—transformed the spasm into a *tussis nervosa*)."17 By coughing instead of dancing, Anna O. changed the beat of desire within her body. Her timing, one could say, was off.

Breuer's respect for the "meaningless" connection between dance music and coughing is remarkable. The very triviality of dance music produced both the desire to dance (to escape the deadly seriousness of father's illness) and the repression of this desire (dancing is inappropriate because of the gravity of her father's illness). Anna O.'s body registered the damping of her desire through the disease of the cough. In the face of her father's impending death, marked by his audible struggle to breathe (he suffered from a subpleural abscess), a daughter with a conscience trained to "twinge" could not permit herself to dance and also could not deny her desire to dance. Her cough signaled her body's effort to renounce her conscious renunciation of dancing. Her resistance to renunciation creates the conflict that gives life to the symptom. "Overcome with self-reproaches," her body was caught in the space between sitting and dancing, between moving and watching, between exhaling and inhaling, between living and dying; gulping air in and pushing it out at the same time, she coughed, again and again.

Registering her somatic and temporal unmooring, the cough stood in for a larger uncertainty about how to move after the law of the father has been shaken, rendered mortal. Her psyche was "stuck in time," and to get her moving, Breuer and Anna returned to the events of the past:

A year had now passed since she had been separated from her father and had taken to her bed, and from this time on her condition became clearer and was systematized in a very peculiar manner. . . . [N]ow she lived like the rest of us, in the winter of 1881–2, whereas [under daily hypnosis] she lived in the winter of 1880–1 . . . She was carried back to the previous year with such intensity that in the new house she hallucinated her old room, so when she wanted to go to the door she knocked up against the stove which stood in the same relation to the window as did the door in the old room. . . . But this transfer into the past did not take place in a general or indefinite manner; she lived through the previous winter day by day. I should have only been able to suspect that this was happening, had it not been that every evening during the hypnosis she talked through whatever it was that had excited her on the same day in 1881, and had it not been that a private diary kept by her mother in 1881 confirmed beyond a doubt the occurrence of the underlying events.<sup>18</sup> This reliving of the past year continued till the illness came to its final close in June, 1882.<sup>19</sup>

Anna O.'s submission to the flow of time thus became for her a betrayal of her father. For she had promised him she could not live without him. What was unbearable to Anna O., as to most survivors, was that she had already survived the trauma that she had dreaded for so long. Anna O. placed herself back in 1880 with Breuer as witness and repeated the birth of her first set of somatic ("failed") symptoms. She wanted Breuer to assure her that she did everything she could possibly do to avert the trauma of her father's death. She described, in meticulous detail, the advent of each symptom. For example, she noted the 108 times she failed to notice that someone entered the room in which she was; off in her "private theatre" she was selectively deaf to someone's entry. The first time that this selective deafness occurred, the visitor was her father. In recounting each of these symptoms, Anna O. "relived" them in the presence of Breuer and thereby transformed her private theater, the intimate space of her psychic secrets, into a social space. More particularly, she described the advent of her symptoms in the exact order in which they occurred; if she made an error in the chronology she had to begin all over again. By lining her symptoms up in the past, she could use their narrative order as a way of getting past them. (One can only wonder at the tedium these tales must have engendered: there were 303 instances of mishearing or deafness alone.)<sup>20</sup> The search for the first time invariably revealed a failed moment with her father: she failed to see him, or hear him, or understand him. Having introjected him, she could not recognize the moment when he "joined in the conversation." Discovering that her father was both an integral aspect of her internal landscape and a person who walked in and out of rooms without consulting her, threw her. She both craved and dreaded the idea that he was independent of her. The pain of this "separateness" foreshadowed the separateness that would occur when he died. In reliving each of these moments with Breuer, who emphatically had not died, Anna O. performed the successful talking cure. Every time Breuer had to interrupt their scheduled visits, the "cure" suffered a setback.

By reliving the previous year in such excruciating detail Anna O. made plain that we refuse such repetition as a way of securing psychic health. This is a psychic adaptation—there is nothing endemic to time itself that makes it impossible for the body to relive it.<sup>21</sup> And there is nothing in the body itself that makes such reliving impossible. The body, in short, does not share consciousness's faith in narrative order. The uneven join between the body and a conscious relation to time is filtered through the expansive and expressive force of the unconscious.

This psychic adaptation to the convention of linear, progressive time is one of the founding principles of the social contract, a contract that in turn establishes the classificatory system by which doctors define mental health. The body is always a disciplined entity; one part of its disciplinary training is temporal-linguistic; another part is temporal-physical. Psychoanalysis developed the temporal-linguistic route to the cure in part by creating the talking cure as a performative speech act whose utterances transformed the body. From a system of disarticulated limbs, contrac-

tions, and paresthetic seizures, psychoanalysis sought to reproduce a free-moving, coherent, vital body.

The psychic stage on which Anna O. and Breuer danced was a stage attended by other corpses. Breaking open her "private theatre" for Breuer required opening other tombs. Six years before she was born, Anna O.'s older sister, Flora, had died. When Anna was eight, her sister Henriette died. Thus Anna O. was literally her father's "one and only" surviving daughter: she inhabited a private theater in part because her sisters had left it. Anna O.'s real name, Bertha, was the name of Breuer's mother and of his eldest daughter. (Bertha's father's name was Sigmund.) Breuer's mother had died when he was three; at the time of her death she was about the same age as Anna O. when she began her conversations with Breuer.<sup>22</sup> These deaths are the historical frames through which the death of her father was experienced, interpreted, and transcribed.

In their somatic and verbal conversations, Breuer and Anna O. learned something about the relationship between language and the body. Anna O.'s conversations with Breuer were not performances in which her body found words, so much as performances in which her body found time, and more particularly, found its past. Passing into language, the somatic symptom passes into the past. To put it in a slightly different way: if we think of psychoanalysis as a mode of psychic choreography, we can see the symptom as the body's psychic movement. Psychoanalysis and choreography are two different modes of performing the body's movement. Each seeks to give the body a system of time.

The reproduction and realignment of the symptom suggest a different way to map the body's relation to time and to death. Her father's death terrified Anna O. because she was at once remembering it and anticipating it. Her eye symptoms—periodic blindness and what she calls "clouds"—like her conscious renunciation to dance signaled by the cough—both confirmed and disavowed her image of death. Taking care of her father was traumatic for Anna in part because it reminded her that she had already survived death. This is the genius of her symptom. The analysis with Breuer allowed her to transfer her image of death within a narrative structure that assigned images to referents, people to places, events to time.

To say that trauma must be relived or reenacted in order to be "surmounted" assumes that trauma is or was a lived event. But trauma is an event of unliving. The unliving event becomes traumatic precisely because it is empty; trauma reveals the intangible center of breath itself. As an event of unliving, trauma is a performance in and above the real:

On one occasion our whole progress was obstructed for some time because a recollection refused to emerge. It was a question of a particularly terrifying hallucination. While she was nursing her father she had seen him with a death's head. She and the people with her remembered that once, while she still appeared to be in good health, she had paid a visit to one of her relatives. She had opened the door

and all at once fallen down unconscious. In order to get over the obstruction to our progress she visited the same place again and, on entering the room, again fell to the ground unconscious. During her subsequent evening hypnosis the obstacle was surmounted. As she came into the room, she had seen her pale face reflected in a mirror hanging opposite the door; but it was not herself she saw but her father with a death's head.<sup>23</sup>

The repetition of the event, the second visit to the relative, reproduced the symptom. She again saw the face, and like Saul upon seeing the face of God, she fell.<sup>24</sup> With this fall, she stopped moving physically and her psychic progress became "obstructed." Reenacting the scene and again losing consciousness, she fell into her body. In the act of fainting she became "pure body." She was the body who fell. To rejoin her body to consciousness, nothing less than the image of death had to be *re-moved*. This is the transfer that the analysis enacted.

Transfer. Transit. Transference. At the heart of psychoanalysis is an ideology of movement, of the curative potential of moving. Under hypnosis after the reenactment, Anna O. was able to "surmount" the psychic impasse that made it impossible for her to move forward. The trauma that arrested her body's movement also "obstructed" her psychic progress. While narrating her experience for Breuer, a *transfer/ence* took place. "But this transfer into the past did not take place in a general or indefinite manner."<sup>25</sup> The act of narrating allowed her to interpret the trauma of the un-lived event for the first time—and the interpretation created the cure.

On the rehearsal of the original trauma, "she had seen her pale face reflected in a mirror hanging opposite the door; but it was not herself that she saw but her father with a death's head." The analytic cure is enacted in the transfer, the psychic movement necessary for integrating the image of death into her history. Ascribing the image of death to her father, Anna O. positioned herself as the survivor, as the one who, despite falling faint, would witness the death of her father and her own death as the apple of his eye, but would again move, again live. From a killing glance in the mirror that made her fall to the safe rehearsal of the hallucination with Breuer, she was able to make her trauma history by giving it to her father, who was already "safely" dead. The phrase "but it was not herself she saw" interprets the trauma. The analysis generated the curative interpretation by moving the image of the death's head to her father's corpse and taking it away from her own face.

It is important to notice that the interpretation also betrays another level of the unconscious relations among Anna O.'s symptoms. The interpretation suggests that the image of her father's skull was superimposed on her image of her own face. Her body reproduced an image of his (hollow) body that the mirror reflected. Such a substitution involves a psychic blurring, a confusion, about the boundaries between her body and his. This blurring occurred across verbal languages as well: during the analysis she translated languages unconsciously and often made sentences out

of several different languages. Insofar as language reproduces the body (at least in the talking cure), Anna O.'s case suggests that bleeding between languages might also portend bleeding across bodies. To this idea we will return.<sup>26</sup>

Anna O.'s hallucination of the death's head stands behind the second, remarkably similar hallucination that Breuer believed was the "root of her illness." While nursing her father, "She fell into a waking dream and saw a black snake coming towards the sick man. . . . She tried to keep the snake off, but it was as though she was paralyzed. Her right arm, over the back of the chair, had gone to sleep and had become anesthetic and paretic; and when she looked at it the fingers turned into little snakes with death's heads (the nails)."<sup>27</sup> Having already experienced the image of the death's head in the mirror, Anna O. may well have believed that the image was *in* her body, oozing out of her eyes and her fingernails. She was determined not to let the death's heads alight on her father's body. The analytic rehearsal allowed her to let the image of death escape her body. The willful resummoning of the traumatic image of the death's head made possible a different interpretation of its meaning.

The final hallucination that was itself a repetition of the previous one was also reenacted and, as in Aristotelian poetics, catharsis was achieved. "On the last day—by the help of re-arranging the room so as to resemble her father's sickroom—she reproduced the terrifying hallucination which constituted the root of her illness."<sup>28</sup> This transference signaled the passage in which the memory of death's presence became a memory of *his* death: this time, the death's heads are located at the edge of her body, on her fingernails, in her body rather than in the mirror reflecting that body. Lodged inside her body, this image is "the root" that Breuer wants to pull. But in order to do so, he must, as it were, stand in for the father. Taking Breuer's hands into her own—"But she would never begin to talk until she had satisfied herself of my identity by carefully feeling my hands"<sup>29</sup>—she transferred her image of death to Breuer, who, in turn, helped her interpret the image of the death's head as her father's. In this sense, her father's death was almost reassuring. The certainty of his death gave her the psychic freedom to return to the trauma of the death's heads oozing out of her body. "The one thing that nevertheless seemed to remain conscious most of the time was the fact that her father died."<sup>30</sup> The firm fact of his death allowed her to put her symptom in the past. Anna O.'s own body was thus liberated from the psychic death spaces to which she had assigned it during her "absences." Her analysis enacted a movement, a passage, a physical and psychic *transference* from her body to the body of her father. Breuer bridges that transference.

No longer her secret repressed vision, the trauma dissolved as Anna O. gave her image of death away. Once the trauma had been placed in the past, her body no longer reproduced the vision, and her symptomatic blindness was, in Breuer's phrase, "removed."<sup>31</sup> Finding an event in the past, the death of her father, from which to divide the present from the past, also allowed Anna O. to find a map for her body's movement.<sup>32</sup>

Surmounting her fainting fall, she, like psychoanalysis itself, took “a great step forward.” The contracture in her right leg disappeared and she moved again, psychically, back into 1882, and physically, out of the sick-room (her father’s and her own).

#### IV

Hysteria, at least in the original and defining case of Anna O., involves the use of the patient’s body as a stage for the body of the other. (This is why hysteria has so often been associated with women—and historically with their wombs.) In Anna O.’s case, at her entry into hysteria, she attempted to lend her body to her father. But he had somehow already inhabited her; and her introjection (Freud’s later term) of him made it impossible for her to separate her body far enough from his to lend it to him as he fought death. Thus she may have felt herself to be responsible for his death.<sup>33</sup> Traumatized by her images of the death’s head reflected in the mirror, and snakes oozing from her fingernails, Anna O. was unsure if she herself had somehow died when her father did.

Insisting that her memories of events of unliving were communicable (across the supple syntax of English, German, French, Italian, and Yiddish) and therefore survivable, Breuer helped Anna O. discover a newly animated body. As this body translated its history into stories for Breuer, Breuer translated their mutually embodied history into stories for Freud.

In such translations, different bodies are reproduced. We shall discuss only one. A crucial aspect of the cure involved the reenactment of the trauma. The cumulative weight of these performances may have encouraged Anna O. to mark her body itself as autoreproductive. Her body had been “reconstructed” by her well-timed conversations with Breuer. The body they made was a profoundly new body, one outside the usual order of human reproduction.

This is the frame through which the tricky matter of Anna O.’s hysterical pregnancy must be seen. In an account full of errors,<sup>34</sup> Jones, whom Jean Laplanche calls “the historian of Freud’s thought,”<sup>35</sup> claims:

It would seem that Breuer had developed what we should nowadays call a strong counter-transference to his interesting patient. At all events he was so engrossed that his wife became bored at listening to no other topic, and before long, jealous. She did not display this openly, but became unhappy and morose. It was long before Breuer, with his thoughts elsewhere, divined the meaning of her state of mind. It provoked a violent reaction in him perhaps compounded of love and guilt, and he decided to bring the treatment to an end. He announced this to Anna O., who was by now much better, and bade her good-bye. But that evening he was fetched back, to find her in a greatly excited state, apparently as ill as ever. The patient . . . was now in the throes of an hysterical childbirth (pseudo-



cyesis) the logical termination of a phantom pregnancy that had been invisibly developing in response to Breuer's ministrations. Though profoundly shocked, he managed to calm her down by hypnotizing her, and then fled the house in a cold sweat. The next day he and his wife left for Venice to spend a second honeymoon, which resulted in the conception of a daughter.<sup>36</sup>

Jones's contention that Breuer broke off the analysis because of his wife's jealousy is not borne out by the published case history, Breuer's notes about the treatment, or the correspondence he maintained with Bertha's mother.<sup>37</sup> Anna O. herself decided upon the day that would end her analysis (June 7, 1882) and had accelerated her "chimney sweeping"<sup>38</sup> in order to complete her cure. Nor is Jones's implicit suggestion that Breuer displaced his "phantom" paternity by "really" impregnating his wife in Venice credible. Mathilde had delivered their youngest daughter, Dora (!), on March 11, 1882, three months before Anna O.'s treatment ended.<sup>39</sup>

Nonetheless, Jones's story, however phantasmal, is worth pausing over. A certain satisfaction emerges in this resolution of the history, a satisfaction that is hard for some readers to ignore. For if Anna O.'s performance of a phantom pregnancy has a certain allure, it comes from thinking of Anna O.'s body as something that cannot be contained by the case history. Independently of Breuer, she went on to mark the effect of their collaborative reenactments by performing her new self as an autoreproductive body. Moreover, the pregnancy signifies the supplement that cannot be contained or interpreted by the talking cure, no matter how exhaustive, no matter how loving. For many feminists, this excess is femininity itself—that part of Anna O.'s body that remains outside the discursive frame of the always already "masculine" discursive case history.<sup>40</sup> This excess marks the place of the trauma at the heart of Freud's theory of sexual difference. As Freud developed psychoanalysis, he constructed a theory of anxiety about sexual difference in which penis envy and the castration complex are psychic responses to the fear of somatic absence. But as Anna O. experienced the end of her analysis, an analysis about her response to her father's death, she created a bodily act that was *both* curative and traumatic.

It is necessary to emphasize that the entire report of Anna O.'s phantom pregnancy comes from Freud and his historian—and not from Breuer or Anna O.<sup>41</sup> In his own version in *The History of Psychoanalysis*, Freud admits that Breuer never said this [that Anna had fallen in love with Breuer] "to me in so many words, but he told me enough at different times to justify this reconstruction of what happened."<sup>42</sup> Freud, of course, had his own reasons for wanting to believe in Anna O.'s love for Breuer: it was the most convincing proof of his theory of the "universal nature" of the transference.<sup>43</sup> Since so much of Freud's history has passed for "the truth" of the history of psychoanalysis, and because the story of Anna O.'s pregnancy is continually repeated in critical commentary about this history, and finally because psychoanalysis itself insists that the phantasmatic

event and the real event can be equally traumatic, we offer this reading of Anna O.'s phantom pregnancy.

Significantly, Anna O.'s pregnancy returned her to her body, in much the way that her fainting spell returned her to her body when she saw the image of the death's head in the mirror. The pregnancy marks her body as sexed, that is to say, as a body other than her male father's or her male doctor's. Anna O.'s body sought a way to carry the hollow, the phantasmatical presence of the dead breath of the other, her father, in her own living body. Her pregnancy was an attempt to make room in her body for the loss she felt at the double death of both her father and herself as his daughter when he died. What is remarkable about the story of her phantom pregnancy is that it registers the attempt to render the fullness of loss somatic.

The somatic reproduction of the trauma of absence is, and can only be, a phantom. The trauma is traumatic because it unveils the material and affective force of the phantom. Anna O.'s reproduction of her father's hollow skull in the analysis is matched by the hollow swelling of her hysterical womb after the analysis. Anna O.'s pregnancy is the reproduction of an event of unliving, a spectacular performance, that makes her body into a living crypt. Accepting her father's death allowed Anna O. her own "rebirth." She sought to mark the entwining of these events by causing the breath of his death in her (swelling) body. His death changed her body, and she wanted her body to display that change by filling it with the life of his death.

The reasons Anna O. might settle on pregnancy as a way to mark and to make her body into this expansive utterance are overdetermined. Anna O. must have heard in her name (Bertha) "a birth" in English, the language of her initial conversations with Breuer. At the end of her conversations with him, perhaps she wanted to signify the (re)generation of that language in and on her body.

Ten years after her treatment with Breuer, Bertha Pappenheim emerged as a "new woman." She was one of the founders of the Jewish feminist movement in Germany. She became a writer and politician. She devoted herself to caring for unmarried women with children (mothering those she had not conceived—perhaps another return of the repressed). She lent her body and her life to the making of history, particularly to the making of Jewish feminist history.<sup>44</sup>

Anna O.'s case history, with or without her phantom pregnancy, represents the birth of psychoanalysis. Like all origins, it is also a termination point. It marks the end of historical narratives that assume that pasts are past. "For after the uncomfortable birth of psychoanalysis, time was no longer what it had been, 'before' and 'after' entering into new and hitherto unexamined relations of complicity and interference. . . . Psychoanalysis is . . . time and counter-time at once."<sup>45</sup> These intricate relations of complicity and interference are the performances that structure the history of the present. These interfering complicities mark the beat of our bodies' dance through the swelling and expiring choreography of time. It

is therefore appropriate that the last lines of the case of Elisabeth von R., which concludes *Studies on Hysteria*, should end on the dance floor:

In the spring of 1894 I heard that she [Elisabeth von R.] was going to a private ball for which I was able to get an invitation, and I did not allow the opportunity to escape me of seeing my former patient whirl past in a lively dance. Since then, by her own inclination, she has married someone unknown to me.<sup>46</sup>

Having seen Elisabeth von R.'s legs joining in the conversation of a different lively dance, Freud connects her dancing to marrying. Always partnered by "unknown" bodies (including our own), we attempt to turn time<sup>47</sup> into a bed still enough to lie on. In the still of the night we believe we will be held—until then we hold our own bodies stiff. The legacy of psychoanalysis allows us to see that bodies can be endlessly remade, re-choreographed, outside the traditional architectonics of human reproduction. Psychic health is in part contingent upon the body finding its rhythm in words and time. Choreography and psychoanalysis would do well to join in a conversation about the body's time.

### *The Return of the Corps*

The "logical termination" of the first feminine body reconstructed by the talking cure experiences a phantom pregnancy—or at least Jones introduces the phantom of a phantom pregnancy at the origin of the talking cure. At the "origin" of psychoanalysis we find a hysterical woman, and at the end of her cure she experiences (or is said to experience) an hysterical pregnancy, a somatic event that frames a false or unfulfilled origin, a physical and psychic event with no source in the biological real. Therefore, as Jane Malmo argues, the question becomes, "[A]re all origins hysterical?"<sup>48</sup> Perhaps the answer is yes, to the degree to which origins are associated with births and therefore with women. Femininity is that part of bodies which logic can treat only as a question: the feminine body, the psychoanalytic body, can take only an interrogatory form. Is she or isn't she? Is she or isn't she making it up? Hysterical pregnancy stages the drama of the question of "the body"—traumatized body, the seductive body, the pregnant body—on the body of women.

As a phantom, hysterical pregnancy is the somatic form that raises the question of the woman's desire in relation to masculine logic and culture. What does she want? with him? with herself? for herself? Part of what is captivating about the hysterical pregnancy is that the baby never appears; the pregnancy is overwhelmingly powerful because it makes visible the possibility of a body clinging to a permanent present. (One is pregnant as long as one is hysterical. Nine months has nothing to do with it.)

It is here that the phantom pregnancy rejoins the question of dance. Anna O.'s phantom pregnancy points to the limit of the talking cure.

Insisting that her performative symptom always exceeds narration and the will to mastery enacted by “masculine” discourse, Anna O.’s phantom pregnancy is her body’s long-deferred, long-desired, and long-renounced dance. At the end of the cure, she partners herself and touches, perhaps for the first time, her feminine body. And it swells. Her hollow hollers. (And he “fled the house in a cold sweat.”)<sup>49</sup>

One of the biggest problems with reading dance as psychic symptom is that it suggests that dance refers to something other than itself, something behind or beyond the movement itself. Within psychoanalysis, somatic utterances usually refer to something that needs to be unearthed. Dance demonstrates that somatic utterances do not necessarily refer to anything other than movement itself. Ballet, for example, makes manifest technique, discipline, and study, but what it “expresses” is bodily movement. (Admittedly this movement is patterned; strictly speaking, spasms might be closer to “pure” movement than dance is.)

Additionally, the emphasis that psychoanalysis gives to the past can seem irrelevant to an art form that can exist only in the present tense. Arlene Croce, writing about the problem of reconstructing Balanchine’s ballets, especially his *Agon*, notes, “Like all ballets, it has no past; it happens in the moment.”<sup>50</sup> But if the ballet is to have a future, it must, like Anna O., face the question of history and the attendant challenge of its reproduction/reconstruction. As Balanchine’s ballets enter pedagogical institutions, conscious interpretation of technique is turned into science. The success of this interpretation is dependent upon the femininity of the Balanchine ballerina. The success or failure of Balanchine’s ballet will be measured by her performance of his movement phrases. She will be required to have a technique that leaves “nothing to be desired,” and she will be measured according to her skill at reproducing his vision of her moving. And the performance of this transfer/ence is the true *agon* of both the history of ballet and the history of hysteria.

The irreducible kernel of femininity, as a symptom forever in need of interpretation, also returns us to the challenge of reproduction and reconstruction. For if the psychoanalytic symptom is feminine, once it is “re-moved,” how is femininity reenacted? The conjunction of Anna O. and Balanchine’s ballerina suggests that femininity is reenacted through the reproductive body—through a staging of the body as reproductive in the case of Anna O., and as a “reconstruction” in Balanchine’s ballet. That such manifestations can only be reconstructions and therefore to some degree phantasmatical underlines the power of transit, of the force of transferences and transformations, to which both bodies and time continually cling. Moreover, these reconstructions are peculiarly feminine, suggesting that the mimicry and masquerade we have so long associated with femininity are themselves attempts to reproduce what is not there. Anna O.’s phantom pregnancy carries the intangible center of her father’s last breath; her pregnancy gives an image to femininity’s desire to find a way to carry that which is lost.

Patriarchal culture’s violent renunciation of femininity has helped to

create a feminine body capable of renouncing that renunciation. The feminine body is, profoundly, an autoreproductive body, one that continues to reproduce symptoms and movement phrases that dance across the slippery stage of the paternal order.

### *Solo Steps Again*

*Whatever else my broken hip was attempting to express, it had something to do with the bafflement I felt not knowing where to put my feet after the music of my own marriage had faded. Lost in a time that seemed to have no order (once the past becomes present it is hard to know where to step), I lost the rhythm of my own limbs' utterance. Computing was an attempt to put that loss in my hands and head, to transfer the grief in my feet that formed the root of my own illness. While I cannot say I am now cured, I can say that observing this psychoanalytic dance has taught me a different way to reconstruct the loss that numbs me even while I number myself one of the very fortunate witnesses of a past I might be able to bear in the near future.*

*The dance that language cannot capture, the beckoning music that animates our flesh keeps us moving beyond the limits of our limbs. While the corps keeps time, the dance moves beyond the physical bodies on which it is staged. My attempt to choreograph Balanchine's ballets for the computer screen was based on the belief that his work exists independently of his dancers. I am not sure I quite believe this now. For the dance in its very discipline and formal measure reminds us of a beckoning formlessness to which we are at once attracted and repelled. Dance and psychoanalysis capture two different ways of framing bodies that gesture toward and away from the formlessness of their own flesh.*

### NOTES

1. Sigmund Freud and Josef Breuer, *Studies on Hysteria*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and trans. James Strachey, vol. 2 (London: Hogarth Press, 1895), 35.

2. Freud and Breuer, *Studies on Hysteria*, 35. Insofar as psychoanalysis is a theory of desire, Breuer's description of its technique as that "which left nothing to be desired" is overdetermined.

3. Freud and Breuer, *Studies on Hysteria*, 30.

4. Peter Swales, "Freud, His Teacher and the Birth of Psychoanalysis," in *Freud: Appraisals and Reappraisals*, ed. Paul E. Stepansky (Hillsdale, N.J.: Analytic Press, 1986), 50.

5. For more on the instances and justifications for massaging patients see Freud and Breuer, *Studies on Hysteria*, 51–56. Also see Swales, "Freud," for full discussion of Freud and Breuer's relationship.

6. Freud and Breuer, *Studies on Hysteria*, 168; more precisely, her right thigh.

7. Freud and Breuer, *Studies on Hysteria*, 148. This passage and the sexual connotations of its language, "arouse," "climax," and so on, are thoughtfully analyzed by Joline Blais, "Perverted Plots: Rewriting Hysteria in Jean Rhys and Marguerite Duras," unpublished manuscript, 1995.

8. These “critical” words rejoin their conversation—but we can only press on the textual body that the doctors have created, and, of course, on our own.

9. This formulation of the body as “joining in” is a common one in Freud’s case histories. In the wolf-man’s history, for example, Freud notes: “his bowel began, like a hysterically affected organ, to ‘join in the conversation’”; in Sigmund Freud, “From the History of an Infantile Neurosis,” in *Standard Edition*, vol. 17 (London: Hogarth Press, 1918), 76.

10. This reading of hysteria is ubiquitous; for representative examples, see Elaine Showalter, “On Hysterical Narrative,” *Narrative* 1, no. 1 (1993): 24–35; Steven Marcus, *Freud and the Culture of Psychoanalysis: Studies in the Transition from Victorian Humanism to Modernity* (Boston: G. Allen and Unwin, 1984); and Deborah Elise White, “Studies on Hysteria: Case Histories and the Case Against History,” *MLN* 104, no. 5 (1989): 1034–49. Showalter’s essay also provides an excellent survey of the literature.

11. Sometimes it may impose an “excess” of order. Breuer’s narrative case history ends with Anna O.’s cure, but as Albrecht Hirschmuller has demonstrated, Breuer knew that Anna was not “well” when the analysis concluded. (She was, however, “well” when Breuer wrote his case study.) See Albrecht Hirschmuller, *The Life and Work of Josef Breuer: Physiology and Psychoanalysis* (New York: New York University Press, 1989). Breuer’s “act” in writing the case study is a willful reimagination of the past of their sessions no less than Anna O.’s conversations with Breuer were a reimagination of her own past. And our narrative reconstruction here repeats the act of reimagining the past that they reimagined together. In joining their conversation, we experience, again, the physical and psychic imperatives to discipline the textual body and learn, again, how much an “act” of imposition that ordering was—for Breuer, for Anna O., for us.

12. Jacqueline Rose, *Sexuality in the Field of Vision* (London: Verso, 1989), 28.

13. For Lacan the symptom is never “gone.” But the analysis can achieve the cure by realigning the analysand’s relation to the symptom, to the inevitability of castration. For Freud, the symptom does “disappear,” but because of “somatic compliance” the same body part might become symptomatic again as the patient faces other traumas.

14. In the “Preliminary Communication” of *Studies*, Freud and Breuer report Anna O.’s paralysis: “A girl watching beside a sick-bed in a torment of anxiety, fell into a twilight state and had a terrifying hallucination, while her right arm, which was hanging over the back of her chair, went to sleep; from this there developed a paresis of the same arm accompanied by contracture and anesthesia. She tried to pray but could find no words; at length she succeeded in repeating a children’s prayer in English” (*Studies on Hysteria*, 4–5). In Breuer’s case history, the “prayer” is a nursery rhyme. The case history, like psychoanalysis more generally, partakes of the nursery rhyme, the fairy tale, and the prayer. In Anna O.’s case the allegorical implications are especially hard to ignore: a young unmarried woman cares for her father; she exhausts herself and falls ill; he dies; when he does, she becomes even sicker. The mother calls in the good doctor who loves her like a father and cures her. And they all live happily ever after. In embryo, then, here are the same seeds that develop into narratives of revolution (the ailing father and the death of the state); of romance (the reintegration of the household); of scientific progress (from chaos to clarity); and of redemption (from suffering to salvation via faith in the cure).

15. Freud and Breuer, *Studies on Hysteria*, 40.

16. From Breuer’s original notes (the notes he used to compose his case history) in Hirschmuller, *Life of Breuer*, 279. Anna O.’s talking cure is doubly marked

as translation from one sign system (the body) to another (speech) by virtue of the fact that she unconsciously translates everything into English (see Freud and Breuer, *Studies on Hysteria*, 26). The echo of her father's call in English ("Na, how are you, Miss Bertha?") is most likely reproduced as Breuer hypnotizes her and asks her, in English, how she is. She eventually "joins in the conversation" by (re)producing nursery stories. This interpretation lends credence to Freud's (early) view of the transference—here, from the father to the doctor.

17. Freud and Breuer, *Studies on Hysteria*, 43–44. It seemed very likely to me, incidentally, that each of these repetitious citations was an attempt to partner—for my lecturer and I are both also very fond of dancing—to partner Anna O.'s stutter step with prose.

18. For Anna O.'s mother, one of her daughter's most alarming symptoms was the loss of her ability to speak her "mother tongue" (German); it is therefore fitting that it is her mother's words, her private diary, that maps Breuer's reading of the temporal "truth" of Anna O.'s symptoms.

19. Freud and Breuer, *Studies on Hysteria*, 33; Breuer's emphasis.

20. But perhaps the process of uncovering held its own allure. Breuer notes that during these recitations, Anna O.'s deafness would increase and he had to write down his questions in order to be "heard" (Freud and Breuer, *Studies on Hysteria*, 37).

21. The repetition of course marks the time as "different"—that is to say, as a "second" time. In physics, classical thermodynamics proved that the same events can occur forward or backward in time. Much of Freud's theory of the drives is predicated on classical thermodynamics. For a discussion of contemporary physics' notion of a "second time," see Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 126–29.

22. For an exhaustive tracing of these and other correspondences, see Hirschmuller, *Life of Breuer*, 129–30.

23. Freud and Breuer, *Studies on Hysteria*, 37.

24. For a fine reading of *fall*, *fallen*, and *falling* in Freud's case histories of women, see Diana Fuss, "Freud's Fallen Women: Identification, Desire, and 'A Case of Homosexuality in a Woman,'" *Yale Journal of Criticism* 6, no. 1 (1993): 1–23.

25. Freud and Breuer, *Studies on Hysteria*, 33.

26. For now, though, let me just note that in the bleeding from Breuer's German to the English of the *Studies on Hysteria* this question of translation is reenacted. I am satisfied that what I say here about the English text applies as well to the German.

27. Freud and Breuer, *Studies on Hysteria*, 38.

28. Freud and Breuer, *Studies on Hysteria*, 40.

29. Freud and Breuer, *Studies on Hysteria*, 30.

30. Freud and Breuer, *Studies on Hysteria*, 33.

31. When blindness, the absence of sight, vanishes, the eye decides it is safe to return. Note that the symptom that negates must itself be negated before it can disappear. Thus the double narrative transcribed by Breuer also corresponds to the double narrative (the two negations) that enable the symptom's "removal."

32. Michel de Certeau argues that the "making of history" always requires the production of a division between the past and the present. Insofar as psychoanalysis is the search for the history of the symptom, the "historical cure" reproduces the interpretation of this division. See Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, trans. Tom Conley (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 1–15.

33. Lacan's famous dictum, "Woman is the symptom of man," is reversed by Anna O. Her father is her symptom. One wonders what transpired between the two of them. I know the "truth" is not recoverable, but when I read this in Breuer's case notes, I wonder: "One evening she told me a true story of long ago, how at night times she would creep in to eavesdrop on her father (at that time, night nurses could no longer put up with her), how she slept in her stockings for this reason, then on one occasion she was caught by her brother, and so on. As soon as she was finished she began to cry out softly, demanding why she was in bed with her stockings on" (in Hirschmuller, *Life of Breuer*, 288). And what was she eavesdropping on? What conversation was she seeking to join with her "creeping," dancing feet covered in stockings? And what is in that "and so on" after her brother "catches" her? In the published case history, Breuer notes that one cause of Anna O.'s symptomatic deafness had its origin in the trauma of being "shaken angrily by her young brother when he caught her one night listening at the sick-room door" (Freud and Breuer, *Studies on Hysteria*, 36).

34. For a discussion of the many errors in Jones's account, see Rachel Bowlby, "The Happy Event," *Paragraph* 141 (March 1991): 10–19; and Hirschmuller, *Life of Breuer*, 126–32.

35. Jean Laplanche, *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis*, trans. Jeffrey Mehlman (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 67.

36. Ernest Jones, *Sigmund Freud: Life and Work* (London: Hogarth Press, 1954), 1:246–47.

37. The correspondence and case notes are reproduced in Hirschmuller, *Life of Breuer*.

38. Hirschmuller, *Life of Breuer*, 40.

39. It is possible that there was a miscarriage or a still birth, but I have not found evidence of it. It is unlikely, however, that Jones would specify the gender if he were referring to a miscarriage or still birth.

40. The best analysis of femininity and Freudian psychoanalysis I know is Teresa Brennan's *The Interpretation of the Flesh* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

41. I am not trying to suggest that the transference and countertransference played no part in Anna O.'s case history. I am trying to question, however, Freud's version of it. Breuer, writing in 1907, did say that Anna O.'s case history taught him a lot: "I learned a very great deal: much that was of scientific value, but something of practical importance as well—namely that it was impossible for a 'general practitioner' to treat a case of that kind without bringing his activities and mode of life completely to an end. I vowed at that time I would *not* go through such an ordeal again." Paul Cranefield, "Josef Breuer's Evaluation of his Contribution to Psychoanalysis," *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 39 (September–October 1958, part V, 1958): 319–22. It certainly seems clear that Breuer's countertransference was not worked through with Anna O., any more than her transference with him was successfully analyzed.

42. *History of Psychoanalysis*, quoted in Bowlby, "The Happy Event," 11.

43. For a fuller treatment of this motivation see Bowlby, "The Happy Event."

44. For full accounts of Bertha Pappenheim's life and work, see Marion A. Kaplan, *The Jewish Feminist Movement in Germany: The Campaigns of the Judischer Frauenbund, 1904–1938* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1979); Dora Edinger, *Bertha Pappenheim: Freud's Anna O.* (Highland Park, Ill.: Congregation Solel, 1968); Lucy Freeman, *The Story of Anna O.* (New York: Walker, 1972); and Hirschmuller, *Life of Breuer*.

45. Bowlby, "The Happy Event," 13.



46. Freud and Breuer, *Studies on Hysteria*, 114. Part of the reason that Anna O.'s hysterical pregnancy is so difficult to decipher is because all of the case histories end so "novelistically."

47. Time and its attendant copyists—narrative and history.

48. Jane Malmo, personal communication, December 1995.

49. Jones, *Sigmund Freud*, 247.

50. Arlene Croce, "The Spelling of Agon," *New Yorker*, July 12, 1993, 84.



## Performance Studies

When Peggy Phelan speaks of feminine masquerade and mimicry as “attempts to reproduce what is not there” (see her essay in the “Psychoanalysis” section), she opens up the beguiling possibility of defining performance in a way that might satisfy a majority of practitioners in the field of performance studies. As “restored behavior,”<sup>1</sup> “repetition with revision,”<sup>2</sup> or “the actualization of a potential,”<sup>3</sup> performance is an executed copy of an original that does not exist, except as a retrospective understanding or prescient expectation, an implicit compact between the performer and the spectator, but one subject to renegotiation in a heartbeat. Performance, broadly construed (and few today would construe performance narrowly), is the return of an act, but not as itself. Performance remakes and unmakes mimesis, the venerable doctrine that art imitates life.<sup>4</sup> Performance is “always a doing and a thing done,” as Elin Diamond has it: on the one hand, “embodied acts, in specific sites, witnessed by others (and/or the watching self),” while on the other, “the completed event framed in time and space and remembered, misremembered, interpreted, and passionately revisited across a pre-existing discursive field.” In the time between the doing and the thing done, however, give or take “the blink of an eye,” performance theorists see “what Plato condemned in theatrical representation—its non-originality—and gesture toward an epistemology grounded not on the distinction between truthful models and fictional representations but on different ways of knowing and doing that are constitutively heterogeneous, contingent, and risky.”<sup>5</sup> Juxtaposed to performance, complementing it to a degree, but sharply corrective about what seems implausibly utopian in it (such as the possibility of revising one’s assigned role in life while engaged in the act of repeating it), is the concept of performativity. Notably derived by Judith Butler from J. L. Austin’s speech act theory, which foregrounds “performative utterances” that bring into being the conditions they iterate, such as “I do thee wed,” performativity is defined as a reiteration of norms by the citation of them. With performance, the performer makes the acts; with performativity, the acts make the performer: gender, for example, performatively speaking, exists only in the doing of it (see the “Gender and Sexualities” section). Yet both performance and performativity reflect the poststructuralist disinclination

to prop up essences or origins with superannuated notions such as a “core identity” possessed by the stable individual subject of humanism.

However performance is currently defined, the field of performance studies since the 1980s has developed new theoretical perspectives on a variety of public events and practices. Indeed, the profusion of research into different kinds of performance—from Yoruban dance to street carnivals, from performance art to the practices of everyday life—epitomizes the interdisciplinary ferment characteristic of the approach of performance studies. Ambitious in its curiosity about the work of culture as a totality of relations, it has developed research liaisons with sociology, anthropology, folklore, communications, media, and technology studies.<sup>6</sup> As investigations of behavior that is repeated, reinstated, or rehearsed for the purpose of being shown, performance research examines theatrical performances, sacred and secular rituals, and social displays of many kinds, from sporting events to shamanism. Terrorist drag, tourist traps, social work, the space shuttle, blackface minstrelsy in Ghana, and the pelvic exam have all emerged as representative objects of performance research.<sup>7</sup> The field of performance studies is not solely defined, however, by the multiplicity of its topics or even by its interdisciplinary scope; rather, it is distinguished by the focus of its practitioners on the phenomenon of copies without originals.

Richard Schechner’s essay in this section, “Invasions Friendly and Unfriendly: The Dramaturgy of Direct Theater,” takes up the mass-media appropriation of today’s globalized street theater, which, as the spontaneous convergence of carnival and revolt, is what Schechner calls “direct theater,” in descending order of sublimity: Tiananmen Square, the Berlin Wall, Mardi Gras, spring break at Daytona Beach. Carnival supposedly turns the world upside down, but, more often in Schechner’s reckoning, the world (or its politically dominant institutions) is turning carnival right-side up. Schechner writes, “The carnival indefinitely in power is the Terror.” Cultural performances such as carnival lend themselves particularly well to interpretation by means of ethnographic description, a methodology developed by cultural anthropologists to represent indigenous societies. *Ethnography* literally means “writing culture.” Like the cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz, ethnographers of performance value “local knowledge.”<sup>8</sup> Called “participant observation,” their method highlights the performative self-consciousness of the observer who participates in the cultural performances of others—others who may hail from across the street or from across the seas. Schechner writes: “In anthropology, for the most part, the ‘home culture’ is Western, the ‘other’ non-Western. But in performance studies, the ‘other’ may be a part of one’s own culture (non-Western or Western), or even an aspect of one’s own behavior.” Noting the potential for ironic (“Brechtian”) distance as well as empathic involvement, Schechner concludes: “In an active way, one performs fieldwork.”<sup>9</sup>

Performing fieldwork, both across the city and across the world, empowers the late Dwight Conquergood’s participant-observer research in “Performance Theory, Hmong Shamans, and Cultural Politics.” Conquer-

good takes up the suggestion of Victor Turner that the key to understanding performance is in its “liminality,” the state or process of living on the margins, of crossing boundaries, of literally being on the “threshold” of culture’s inside/outside, which Turner associated particularly with rites and rituals.<sup>10</sup> Borderlands traditionally exist as sites of political contestation, risk, and risk taking. This fact, which renders the liminal performer socially vulnerable, also makes the refugee the epitome of the postmodern condition. Conquergood’s knowledge of shamanistic practices derives from performing his fieldwork in Hmong refugee communities in Thailand and Chicago. The vulnerability of the shaman (healer) in performance is not only social but physical, an ordeal representing the rigors of liminal experience generally. The shaman performs not only to heal the sick, but also to assert, not without risk to himself, the dignifying perimeters of his culture in the face of external threats of humiliation from the dominant social order. Certain similarities appear in the improvisatory performances of other marginalized subcultures, including those testing the boundaries of sexual identity (see “Gender and Sexuality”) and race (see “Critical Race Theory”).

In the final essay in this section, “Animal Rites: Performing beyond the Human,” Una Chaudhuri tests the boundaries of the human and the nonhuman, exemplified by what she calls “ecoperformance” in Caryl Churchill’s play *Far Away* and Rachel Rosenthal’s performance piece *The Others*. Facing the end of nature in ecological disaster and mass extinctions, Chaudhuri presents two options for what she calls “the posthuman.” One is the machine, the cyborg (see “Mediatized Cultures”). The other, which concerns her here, is the animal. She applies the idea of postmodern shamanic ritual to “Animal Rites,” newly emergent practices that “would engage with, diagnose, and heal the historically complex relationship between humans and animals.” As with the daunting tasks of shamanic healing described by Conquergood, Chaudhuri’s pioneering ecoperformers have their work cut out for them. One of the many obstacles faced by theorists trying to rethink animal-human relations—and Chaudhuri cites Huysmans, Steiner, and Baudrillard among others—is the anthropomorphic investment that human beings have in animals as performers (“just like us, but cuter”). Animals are not just there for us; they are there instead of us, and our love for them as our stand-ins is more terrible than our hate. The performances she recounts, however, deconstruct those she critiques, an advantage that results from the instability of performance as a genre. Even ritual, putatively conservative and formally rigid, shows the efficacy of sometimes attempting to “reproduce what is not there.” As Franz Kafka puts it in an alluringly personified fable, another version of animal rites: “Leopards break into the temple and drink the sacrificial chalices dry; this occurs repeatedly, again and again: finally it can be reckoned on beforehand and becomes part of the ceremony.” Performance needs no transcendent original to make an event or a practice out of any contingency, from an efficacious memory to a prescient wish.

## NOTES

1. Richard Schechner, in *Between Theater and Anthropology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), developed a definition of performance as “restored behavior” or “twice-behaved behavior,” by which he actually means behavior that “is always subject to revision,” behavior that must be reinvented the second time or “the nth time” because it cannot happen exactly the same way twice, even though in some instances the “constancy of transmission” across decades or even generations may be “astonishing” (36–37).

2. The African and African American concept of “repetition with revision” is discussed by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. in *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 63–64, and applied to performance studies by Margaret Thompson Drewal, *Yoruba Ritual: Performers, Play, Agency* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 3–5 and passim. For a different genealogy of a closely similar idea, “repetition with critical difference,” see Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms* (New York: Routledge, 1985) and Drewal, 3 and passim.

3. Ethnolinguist Richard Bauman, in his article “Performance” in the *International Encyclopedia of Communications*, ed. Erik Barnouw et al. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), defines performance as the actual execution of action as opposed to its potential, a meaning that operates in the theatrical performance of a script, a race car’s performance on the test track, or *parole’s* performance of *langue* (3:262–66). For a definition of performance based on the idea of surrogation, where performance offers itself as substitute for something else that preexists it, see Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 3–5. For a critique of the latitudinarian scope of “performance” in performance studies, see Martin Puchner, “Kenneth Burke: Theater, Philosophy, and the Limits of Performance,” in *Theater and Philosophy*, ed. David Krasner and David Saltz (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 41–66.

4. Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (New York: Routledge, 1993); and Elin Diamond, *Unmaking Mimesis: Essays on Feminism and Theater* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

5. Elin Diamond, ed., *Performance and Cultural Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 1.

6. See Marvin Carlson, *Performance: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

7. José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999); Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Shannon Jackson, *Lines of Activity: Performance, Historiography, Hull-House Domesticity* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000); Jon McKenzie, *Perform or Else: From Discipline to Performance* (New York: Routledge, 2001); Catherine M. Cole, *Ghana’s Concert Party Theatre* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001); Terri Kapsalis, *Public Privates: Performing Gynecology from Both Ends of the Speculum* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1997).

8. Clifford Geertz, *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1983). For the paradigmatic instance of what Geertz calls “thick description” of a local cultural performance, see “Deep Play: Notes on a Balinese Cockfight,” in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 412–53.

9. Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 2.
10. Victor Turner, *The Anthropology of Performance* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1987), 25–26.

# Invasions Friendly and Unfriendly: The Dramaturgy of Direct Theater

*Richard Schechner*

. . . old authority and truth pretend to be absolute, to have an extratemporal importance. Therefore, their representatives . . . are gloomily serious. . . . And thus these personages come to the end of their role still serious, although their spectators have been laughing for a long time.

—Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*

The role of the revolutionary is to create theatre which creates a revolutionary frame of reference. The power to define is the power to control. . . . The goal of theatre is to get as many people as possible to overcome fear by taking action. We create reality wherever we go by living our fantasies.

—Jerry Rubin, *Do It!*

What is the relation between “the authorities” and “the people” when the people occupy public streets, squares, plazas, and buildings? Do carnivals encourage giddy, drunken, sexy feelings and behavior, or does the very action of taking spaces, of “liberating” them, make people giddy? Is it accidental that official displays consist of neat rectangles, countable cohorts, marching past and under the fixed gaze of the reviewing stand, while unofficial mass gatherings are vortexed, whirling, full of shifting ups and downs, multifocused events generating tension between large-scale actions and many local dramas? And why is it that unofficial gatherings elicit, permit, or celebrate the erotic, while official displays are so often associated with the military?

Festivals and carnivals belong to comic theater, comic in desire, even if sometimes tragic in outcome. When people go into the streets en masse, they are celebrating life’s fertility. They eat, drink, make theater, make love, enjoy each other’s company, put on masks and costumes, erect and wave banners, and construct effigies not merely to disguise or embellish their ordinary selves or to flaunt the outrageous but also to act out the multiplicity each human life is. They protest, often by means of farce and parody, what is oppressive, ridiculous, and outrageous.

Sometimes street actions bring about change—as in Eastern Europe in 1989. But mostly such scenes, both celebratory and violent, end with the old order restored. The old order sponsors a temporary relief from itself. Obeying strict calendars and confined to designated precincts, carnival allows the authorities to keep track of such relief while readying the police. Despite such preparations, rebellions swell to almost musical climaxes around sacrilized dates—anniversaries of the deaths or funerals of



heroes and martyrs or of earlier popular uprisings (as in China) or the Christmas season and the approach of the New Year (as in Eastern Europe). To allow people to assemble in the streets is always to flirt with the possibility of improvised rebellion.

Incipient revolutions are carnivalesque. This is because both revolution and carnival propose a free space to satisfy desires, especially sexual and drunken desires, a new time to enact social relations more freely. People make, costume, and act in ways that are “not me” and almost always excessive relative to ordinary life. They drink, fuck, loot, burn, riot, murder, and practice rough justice on those they feel have wronged them. But, sooner or later, either at a defined moment—when the church bells ring in Ash Wednesday, when school begins again after spring break, when a new government is firmly in power—the liminal period ends and individuals are inserted or reinserted into their (sometimes new, sometimes old, but always defined) places in society.

René Girard argues that “the fundamental purpose of the festival is to set the stage for a sacrificial act that marks at once the climax and the termination of the festivities.” Festive sacrifice is necessary to inoculate society against “falling into interminable violence.” Roger Caillois goes further: “In its pure form, the festival must be defined as the paroxysm of society, purifying and renewing it simultaneously. The paroxysm is not only its climax from a religious but also from an economic point of view.”<sup>1</sup> The potlatches of Native Americans on the Pacific coast in the late nineteenth century are clear examples of what Caillois was talking about. The public destruction of goods was both a display of wealth and an act of violent dissipation. After a great potlatch there was nothing left but to get back to amassing the resources needed to stage another. Unlike the Roman Saturnalia where a scapegoat slave was sacrificed or the Athenian theater of Dionysus where actors pretended to suffer and die, potlatchers gave up the real thing: the material substance of their wealth.

Caillois regarded modern European carnivals “as a sort of moribund echo of ancient festivals.” In modern times the state apparatus guarantees social solidarity. With rare exceptions today’s festivals and carnivals are not inversions of the social order but mirrors of it. “Lords of Misrule” are not drawn from the lower or oppressed classes or enabled to rule (even for a day). But unofficial culture worms its way back into public outdoor spaces. There is a long history of unofficial performances “taking place” in (seizing as well as using) locales not architecturally imagined as theaters.<sup>2</sup> Over the past thirty years performance experimenters have used outdoor spaces—courtyards, streets, walls, beaches, lakes, rooftops, plazas, and mountainsides—for purposes aesthetic, personal, ritualistic, and political. And, while modern Western dramatists abandoned the public squares of Renaissance theater for the living room, kitchen, bedroom, motel, and office, the emerging festival theater repositioned itself in places where public life and social ritual have traditionally been acted out. Doubtlessly, there has been a mutually fruitful exchange between art performances and politically radical symbolic public actions. By the 1960s these actions constituted a



Fig. 1. Tiananmen Square, May 17, 1989. The Gate of Heavenly Peace with Mao's portrait in the background. Photo: AP/Wide World.

distinct liminoid/celebratory/political/theatrical/ritual genre with its own dramaturgy, *mise-en-scène*, role enactments, audience participation, and reception. This theater is ritual because it is efficacious, intending to produce real effects by means of symbolic causes. It is most theatrical at the cusp where the street show meets the media, where events are staged for the camera.

The democracy movement focused in Beijing's Tiananmen Square in May and June 1989 is a rich example of these exchanges. Tiananmen Square's one hundred acres can hold hundreds of thousands of people. It is the symbol of official power, as Red Square had been in the former Soviet Union or the White House or Capitol is of the United States. Before the triumph of the Communists in 1949, Tiananmen Square was much smaller. The focus of power was on Tiananmen Gate, the Gate of Heavenly Peace, the southern entrance to the Forbidden City (fig. 1). "Until China's last dynasty fell in 1912, it was through this gate that the main axis of the emperor's power was believed to run, as he sat in his throne hall, facing south, the force of his presence radiating out across the courtyards. . . , passing through the gate, and so to the great reaches of the countryside beyond. . . . During the Cultural Revolution of 1966 [to 1976] the gate, dominated now by an immense colored portrait of Chairman Mao Zedong, became a reviewing stand in front of which marched the Red Guards, a

Fig. 2. The “Goddess of Democracy and Freedom” in Tiananmen Square, May 30, 1989. Photo: AP/Wide World.



million or more strong.”<sup>3</sup> Clearly, the creation of Tiananmen Square was intended to refocus ceremonial—that is, theatrical—power from behind the Forbidden City’s walls to the big open space, a more fitting symbol of what the new order promised. The image of Mao, the new emperor, was mounted in front, gazing out over the square and from there to all of China. Power was no longer to radiate from secret forbidden places but to be displayed for all people to see and share. The nation itself was renamed the People’s Republic of China. And what the students who came to Tiananmen Square in 1989 demanded, more than anything, was what they called “transparency”—an openness in government operations corresponding to the open square that symbolized the new China.

There were precedents for such actions in the dramatic May Fourth movement of 1919 and in the more recent democracy movements of 1978 and 1986. Joseph Esherick and Jeffrey Wasserstrom argue strongly that the 1989 democracy movement was political theater:

Even when improvising, protesters worked from familiar “scripts” which gave a common sense of how to behave during a given action, where and when to march, how to express their demands, and so forth. Some of these scripts originated in the distant past, emerging out of traditions of remonstrance and petition stretching back

millennia. More were derived (consciously or unconsciously) from the steady stream of student-led mass movements that have taken place since 1919.<sup>4</sup>

The struggle in China, before it became violent, was over who would control the means and style of information. The question became: Would official culture or the democracy movement write the script? The theatrical stakes were even higher in May because fortune laid ceremony atop ceremony. Hu Yaobang died on April 15, close to the anniversary of the May Fourth movement; Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev was set to arrive in Beijing on May 15, and the leadership wanted to impress him. The students also wanted to impress Gorbachev, but with a different show. If Chinese officials wanted Gorbachev to see an orderly China under their control, the students wanted him to see a powerful and seething people's movement akin to those taking place in Eastern Europe and his own country. On May 15 about eight hundred thousand people gathered in Tiananmen Square, even as Chinese officials steered Gorbachev around Beijing, pretending that this vast spectacle at the very core of power was not occurring. Official public ceremonies were held at the Beijing airport, a nonplace historically.

Within the overall dramaturgy of the 1989 demonstrations were particular molecules of theater. Student leader Wu'er Kaixi in his May 18 confrontation with Premier Li Peng put on what Esherick and Wasserstrom describe as "one of the best acts." Wu'er "appeared in his hospital pajamas [on hunger strike]. . . . He upstaged the Premier by interrupting him at the very start. And props: later in the session, he dramatically pulled out a tube inserted into his nose (for oxygen?) in order to make a point. Especially for the young people in the nationwide television audience, it was an extraordinarily powerful performance." The dramatic meeting the next day between hunger-striking students and Communist Party secretary Zhao Ziyang had the quality of a tragic peripeteia (reversal) and anagnorisis (recognition). Speaking through tears, Zhao said, "I came too late, I came too late . . . but the problems you raised will eventually be solved." And, of course, on May 30 the "Goddess of Democracy and Freedom" made her appearance (fig. 2)—a multivocal figure resembling the Statue of Liberty, a Bread & Puppet Theatre effigy, a "traditional Bodhisattva, . . . [and] the giant statues of Mao that were carried through the square during . . . the sixties."<sup>5</sup> Before the goddess the crowds had been sagging, but she brought many back to the square. Students freely adapted costumes and slogans from non-Chinese sources, including a banner proclaiming "We Shall Overcome."

Esherick and Wasserstrom theorize that the struggle in Tiananmen Square was between official ritual and student theater. But this distinction is too rigid. As Victor Turner and I have pointed out, the relation between ritual and theater is dialectical and braided with plenty of entertainment and social critique in many rituals and with plenty of ritual process in theater.<sup>6</sup> The struggle in Tiananmen Square before the entrance of the tanks

was not between rigid ritual and rebellious theater but between two groups of authors (or authorities), each of whom desired to compose the script of China's future and each of whom drew on both theater and ritual. The students took Tiananmen Square, the center stage and ritual focus of Chinese history, thereby upstaging official culture. When Deng Xiaoping, Li Peng, and the generals of the People's Liberation Army felt their authority slipping, they radically shifted the basis of the confrontation from theater and ritual to military force. But, even after the slaughter of June 3–4, there were moments of high theater, such as when an unarmed man, his fate since unknown, stood his ground in front of a column of tanks.

And, despite the orderliness of their demonstrations and the seriousness of their intentions, the students acted up a carnival. Their mood of fun, comradeship, irony, and subversion enraged and frightened China's officialdom. Students camped out willy-nilly, they sang and danced, they spoke from impromptu "soapboxes," and they granted interviews to the world press. They unfurled sarcastic, disrespectful banners, including one depicting hated Premier Li Peng as a pig-snouted Nazi officer. Even the hunger strike, in which thousands participated, had the feel of melodrama. The Chinese government called this behavior "*luan*," or chaos, a word that in certain of its uses implies dissipation and drunkenness. The Chinese leadership feared that the virus of *luan* would spread: Tiananmen Square is a very bright stage visible all over China. From the government's point of view, *luan* acted out in Tiananmen Square could not be ignored any more than the Nixon administration could, nineteen years earlier, ignore the ever more carnivalesque anti-Vietnam War demonstrations invading Washington. Meaningful theatrical *luan* is a potent weapon.

From the mid-1960s, protests against the Vietnam War and in favor of what University of California activists in Berkeley called "free speech" had pitched scores of American campuses into chaos. Much of the theory underlying these actions was developed by Jerry Rubin and Abbie Hoffman. By "theater" Rubin and Hoffman clearly meant a lot more than orthodox drama or even "guerrilla theater." According to Hoffman, "Drama is anything you can get away with. . . . Guerrilla theater is only a transitional step in the development of total life-actors." Or, as Rubin put it, "Life is theatre and we are the guerrillas attacking the shrines of authority. . . . The street is the stage. You are the star of the show and everything you were once taught is up for grabs." The Yippies, which Hoffman and Rubin helped to form, emphasized more than the Chinese the Bakhtinian/Rabelaisian mode.<sup>7</sup> In October 1967, a massive demonstration in Washington, D.C., against the Vietnam War climaxed in an effort to "exorcise" and "levitate" the Pentagon. I was not alone in pissing on the Pentagon steps in a gesture of contempt and defiance. In the spring of 1968, Hoffman, Rubin, and others planned a "Festival of Life" for the August Democratic Party National Convention in Chicago. The festival was conceived as both something disruptive to the convention and constructive of a new way of life. According to an ad in the spring

1968 *TDR*, the festival would feature “guerrilla theatre, a mock convention, and happenings.” All who participated would be provided with “costumes, paint, and props.” Of course, what happened in Chicago’s Grant Park was instead a “police riot.”

The violent, the political, the carnivalesque, and the erotic were linked again in May 1970 after the bombing of Cambodia, an escalation of the Vietnam War, triggered protests. On May 4—an ironically appropriate date given what happened in China—the National Guard, called out to repress a protest at Kent State University in Ohio, shot four students dead. Schools everywhere went on strike, students marched, and a massive rally was called for Saturday, May 9, in Washington. But, despite the occasion—a protest against bombing in Cambodia and murder at home—the march on Washington quickly turned into a carnival. At dawn Nixon, like Zhao, visited the students, attempting to make peace with them. As he spoke, some students taunted him with shouts of “Fuck Nixon! Trash Nixon!” raising garbage can lids with his face embossed on them. The demonstrations began with speeches reminding the activists of the contingent causes of their assembling in the nation’s capital. But soon, warmed by the sun and more tuned in to Woodstock Nation than “verbalism,” many youths stripped in the hot sun, smoked dope, made out, and jumped naked into the Lincoln Memorial Reflecting Pool (fig. 3). The frolic—with its characteristic whirling choreography, the dispersal of orderly ranks into many intense and volatile small groups, the show of private pleasures satisfied in public places—subverted and mocked the neo-Roman monuments and pretensions of imperialist Washington. Washington that day felt very much like Beijing in 1989. And, although there was no single massacre as in Tiananmen Square, the American “big chill” from the mid-1970s into the 1990s accomplished the same end. Nixon and Agnew were driven from office, as Deng Xiaoping and Li Peng might be, but social systems do not rest on one person or even a dozen.

The system of Communist domination of Eastern Europe and the USSR and the cold war between that system and the North Atlantic alliance were symbolized by the Berlin Wall. Existing for only twenty-eight years (1961–89), the 103-mile-long wall lacked architectural grace or ornament. Like the Bastille, it not only symbolized a hated regime and physically helped preserve it, but also was demolished as soon as that regime fell. During its twenty-eight years more than five thousand went over, under, or through the wall—climbing, leaping, ballooning, gliding, tunneling, and ramming. At least another five thousand were captured, and 191 were killed trying. Ugly and mean, the wall disgusted and attracted people, including presidents John F. Kennedy and Ronald Reagan, who used it as a theatrical backdrop for Communist-bashing speeches. Still others knew it as a tourist “must.”

The events leading to the destruction of the wall—and the collapse of Communism throughout East Europe—are complex. The system was imposed from without, sustained by military force, and failed to deliver the material goods people desired. There were many revolts and several major



Fig. 3. Swimming in the Lincoln Memorial Reflecting Pool, Washington, D.C., May 9, 1970. Photo credit: Fred W. McDarrah.

uprisings crushed by Soviet armies or the clear threat of Soviet intervention. When in the mid-1980s Gorbachev began restructuring the USSR, Eastern Europeans saw an opportunity, but the actual license for radical change was not issued until Gorbachev's declaration on October 25, 1989, that the USSR had no right to interfere in the internal affairs of its Eastern European neighbors. He may have been driven to this position by events. The social drama began in the summer of 1989—shortly after the brutal crushing of the democracy movement in China—when Hungary opened its border to East Germans. This meant that people who wanted to leave the German Democratic Republic (GDR) had a way out—and many thousands took it at rates unequaled since the building of the wall.

Throughout September and October the East German government—led by one of those who authorized building the wall, seventy-seven-year-old Erich Honecker—shilly-shallied regarding the exodus. Clearly, the GDR lacked the means to stem the outgoing tide. Meanwhile, the festival that always accompanies a “revolution from below” had begun. “A carnival atmosphere greeted the first large convoy of jubilant East Germans to arrive today in this city [Passau, West Germany] on the Danube in southeastern Bavaria,” reported the *New York Times*. “Hundreds of onlookers watched and cheered as five buses unloaded an estimated 700 East Germans who were welcomed with speeches, free balloons, bananas, beer and soft pretzels. . . . A similar welcome was given to East Germans arriving at five tent cities set up by the West German Red Cross in nearby towns.” As if following a Bakhtinian script, headlines in the *New York Times* proclaimed: “Exodus Galls East Berlin: Nation’s Sovereignty Seems to Be Mocked.”<sup>8</sup> But the climax was not yet reached; the streets of Berlin were still relatively quiet and empty.

Then, as in China earlier in 1989, an important date sparked street

protests. Friday, October 6, was the GDR's fortieth anniversary. Ordinarily, one could expect a rectangular parade of military muscle and hardware in front of and below rigidly saluting generals and commissars mounted on a viewing stand. As in China that May, globe-hopping Gorbachev was scheduled to make an appearance, and, as in China, the official celebration turned sour. "Honecker faces the birthday party," the *New York Times* continued, "humiliated, derided, and threatened." Gorbachev was seized on by both sides, soon becoming a contradictory sign. Addressing "an elite congregation gathered in the glittering Palace of the Republic . . . [he] assailed demands that Moscow dismantle the Berlin wall," while earlier many Berliners hailed him with shouts of "Gorby! Gorby!" a known code for the reforms they were demanding from Honecker's government.<sup>9</sup> On October 9 more than fifty thousand demonstrated in Leipzig. On October 18 Honecker was replaced by his "protégé," fifty-two-year-old Egon Krenz, a man who had just paid a praising visit to Li Peng and Deng Xiaoping.

The East German people replied with more demonstrations. In Dresden on October 19, fifty thousand staged a silent candlelight march. The next day several thousand took to the streets of Berlin. People were openly disrespectful of Krenz. Asked about the new leader,

a retired factory hand, speaking in the pungent accent and mocking vocabulary of the Berlin working class, nearly exploded with derisive laughter. . . . "From him?" he asked with a snort. "After he went to China to congratulate them for the blood they spilled? After he rigged our last election? After being the boss of State Security? The sparrows on the roof wouldn't believe him."<sup>10</sup>

Ferment was spreading. On October 23 three hundred thousand marched in Leipzig demanding change, including the legalization of opposition parties and an independent labor movement. Smaller demonstrations took place in Berlin, Dresden, Halle, Schwerin, and Magdeburg. The police did not crack skulls, and people grew bolder. Political debates erupted in the streets of East Berlin. Meanwhile, big demonstrations were starting in Prague. Not only were East Germans challenging their leadership, the once docile press, in print and on TV, were giving open coverage to the emergent debates.

The big demonstrations grew more and more festive. Three hundred thousand again marched in Leipzig on October 30. The "old city center was virtually taken over for three hours by people of every age and from every walk of life. . . . The center [was filled] with cheers, jeers, and chants from all sides."<sup>11</sup> On November 2 the East German government dropped its ban on travel, and thousands crossed into Czechoslovakia on their way west. On November 7 the East German cabinet resigned, but the politburo—the core of official power—held fast. By November 8 more than fifty thousand East Germans a day were streaming from Czechoslovakia into the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), where, according to law,



they instantly became citizens. Then, on November 9, the East German government opened its borders.

Once the announcement was made “a tentative trickle of East Germans testing the new regulations quickly turned into a jubilant horde, which joined at the border crossings with crowds of flag-waving, cheering West Germans. Thousands of Berliners clambered across the wall at the Brandenburg Gate, passing through the historic arch that for so long had been inaccessible to Berliners of either side.”<sup>12</sup> The Brandenburg Gate, like Beijing’s Tiananmen Gate, is heavily symbolic. Erected in 1888–89 at the western end of the Unter den Linden, soon dubbed Germany’s Arc de Triomphe, the gate celebrates the military prowess of Prussia and the unity of Germany.

On November 9, in a flash, the Berlin Wall’s symbolic value was reversed. What had been avoided or surpassed became the chosen place of celebration. Because it had been such a terrifying barrier, it was now where people acted out how totally things had changed. People couldn’t wait to climb it, sit on it, pop champagne and dance on it, and chip away souvenir chunks of it (fig. 4). Formerly murderous East German border guards went out of their way to show how friendly they were. The wall was a media bonanza. Dominating the front page of the November 10 *New York Times* was a four-column photograph of “East Berliners dancing atop the Berlin Wall near the Brandenburg Gate.” The same picture, or others very like it, appeared on front pages around the world. Again and again television showed people clambering onto and over the wall.

The wall was not “interesting” everywhere along its 103-mile route. The focus was on the segment in front of the Brandenburg Gate or bifurcating Potsdamer Platz, which, before the wall, was the center of Berlin, among the busiest intersections in Europe. Just as Tiananmen Square was the necessary stage for China’s democracy movement, so the wall at these places was where Berliners focused the “unparalleled celebration that swirled through Berlin day and night.” “Cheers, sparkling wine, flowers and applause greeted the new arrivals. . . . At the Brandenburg Gate . . . hundreds of people chanted, ‘Gate open! Gate open!’” A middle-aged East German woman broke through a police cordon to give flowers and a “vigorous kiss” to a young West German cop as “the crowd roared.” “A festival air seized the entire city. West Berliners lined entry points to greet East Berliners with champagne, cheers, and hugs. Many restaurants offered the visitors free food. A television station urged West Berliners to call in with offers of theater tickets, beds, dinners, or just guided tours.” The popular Hertha soccer team gave away ten thousand free tickets for its Saturday game. That giddy weekend the West German government gave every visitor from the east one hundred marks of “greeting money” for spending in West Berlin’s glittering shops. “In an unprecedented step for a place with the most rigid business hours in Western Europe, West Berlin banks will be open on both Saturday and Sunday for East Germans wishing to pick up cash.”<sup>13</sup> It was only a matter of time before the East German state collapsed into the arms of the West.



Fig. 4. On the Berlin Wall in front of the Brandenburg Gate, November 10, 1989. Photo: AP/Wide World.

It could have ended otherwise. Craig R. Whitney reports that “there was a written order from Honecker for a Chinese solution.”<sup>14</sup> But the politburo overrode its aging boss. Once events are in the saddle, the speed of the reversals is breathtaking. A faltering regime in China suddenly reasserts itself; a seemingly invincible state in East Germany crumbles like dust. Hindsight discloses the “inevitability” of events. But “what if” haunts all such talk. What if the Chinese leadership had not sent in the army? What if the East Germans had? At what point does a regime lose control of its military? There are too many variables for anyone to answer these questions. What can be known is that, when oppressed or angry people sense a weakening official power, they take to the streets. Their carnival can last only so long; every Mardi Gras meets its Ash Wednesday. Whether that Wednesday will see a new order or the return of the old cannot be known in advance.

China and East Germany in 1989 or the United States in 1970 are examples of festivals where the outcome was unknown. The excitement of such social dramas—not unlike what grips whole populations during some sports matches, especially those like the World Cup, where teams and nations are closely identified—is rooted in the tension between known patterns of action, stunning instantaneous surprises, and a pas-

sionately desired yet uncertain outcome. At the other extreme are festivals where written dramas are enacted. Here the excitement derives from immersing oneself in a known flow of events. One of these festivals, the Ramlila of Ramnagar, India, offers an intriguing variation on the theme of the critique of ordinary reality. In most carnivals the revolution is from below: the underdog, or the top dog disguised as underdog, rules. But in Ramlila the critique is from above. For a month Ramnagar is the place where Hindu gods and mythic heroes walk the earth and rule the realm.

The epic story tells of Rama's birth, his boyhood education, his exile, the kidnapping of his wife, Sita (also a god), his war against the demon-king Ravana, his victory and triumphant return home to his rule as India's ideal king. During Ramlila, Vibhuti Narain Singh is celebrated by hundreds of thousands of devoted spectators as the "Maharaja of Banaras," representative of Shiva and worshipper of Rama. Never mind that the maharaja was stripped of both princely title and kingdom shortly after Indian independence in 1947. The maharaja is the principal spectator and occasional participant in the reenactment of Rama's life. Spectator-participants regard Ramlila month as time-out from their daily grind. When the boy actors enact the roles of gods, spectators regard them as divine. Inversions abound. Ramlila is a time when rich persons dress simply and eat street food while poor persons dress beyond their means and enjoy expensive, voluptuous sweets; when the maharaja bows down before the boy actors feeding them with his own hand; when the barely literate farmer playing the demon-king Ravana is honored by all; when slick lawyers and gruff shopkeepers, books in hand, meekly follow the sacred text word by word. And, of course, the largest inversion of them all: five Brahmin boys become gods.

For thirty-one days Ramnagar ("Ramatown") is taken over by Ramlila. The streets, back lanes, and courtyards become theaters. Spectators dance themselves into delirium worshipping Rama and Sita. Crowds follow Rama, Sita, and Lakshman into exile; they flood the streets in majestic processions (fig. 5). The characteristic choreography of Ramlila is a procession from one place to another where a scene is performed on a raised stage or within a complex environment of stages, small buildings, and gardens. Spectators take part in the processions, then gather in front of the stages or within the theatrical environments. Moving from one place to another is so important that often one day's *lila* (performance) will stop near the end of a scene so that, shortly after the next day's *lila* begins, the whole crowd—actors and spectators alike—move off to another location several kilometers away. In today's Ramlila there is little rebelliousness. Some spectators identify with Ravana, who they regard as heroically resistant to domination by the Brahman caste. Politics were more important at Ramnagar Ramlila's origins in the nineteenth century, when the performance proclaimed Hindu nationalism against both British and Mogul authorities.

New Orleans Mardi Gras descends from European pre-Lenten carnivals, which are the basis for the theorizing of Emile Durkheim, Mikhail



Fig. 5. The maharaja of Bandras's Dasahara day procession, from the fort, Ramlila to Ramnagar, 1981. Photo credit: Richard Schechner.

Bakhtin, and Victor Turner. By the mid-nineteenth century Mardi Gras had already become what it is today—a mix of fun, sex, commercial exploitation, and hype. As in classic carnivals, inversion of social roles was the order of the day. Whites dressed as African Americans and blacks as whites. And, whatever New Orleans offered by way of sex and fun, there was more of it during Mardi Gras. Mardi Gras remains charged with ludic double negatives. Socially prominent people pretending to be kings, queens, and mythic personages ride on glittering but crummy floats throwing fake jewelry to crowds of “ordinaries” scrambling for souvenirs (and spending like crazy). The Lords of Misrule are not poor people empowered for a day but, rather, the representatives of the ruling class pretending to even greater power and authority. Those in power cannot tolerate even a temporary surrender of their power. Far from giving the poor or oppressed free play, or permitting a charivari-like criticism of established norms, Mardi Gras privileges the already privileged.

Even today the majority of New Orleans African Americans are very poor, and de facto segregation is widely practiced. In Mardi Gras blacks cannot attend white balls (except as servants or sex chattel) or ride on white floats; they walk beside the floats carrying “flambeaux” as slaves did before emancipation. There used to be a critique of official culture in

Fig. 6. Louis Armstrong as King Zulu, Mardi Gras Day, New Orleans, 1949. Courtesy of William Ransom Hogan Jazz Archive, Tulane University Library. Photo credit: Dan Perry.



the anticarnival carnival of King Zulu's parade, first organized in 1910 by a few poor and middle-class blacks. Zulu was a parody of the white parades enacted by blacks who parodied white racist attitudes toward blacks. On Mardi Gras day King Zulu followed the final, biggest, and most prestigious white parade, that of Rex, King of Carnival. While white parades had defined routes passing in front of reviewing stands loaded with notables, the Zulus meandered through black neighborhoods or chased on the heels of Rex. Looking at King Zulu's parade as it was in the 1940s (fig. 6), one can see how it functioned in the Bakhtinian sense—as popular culture playing out and mocking race relations, expressing the violent ambivalence with which blacks performed their “place” in New Orleans' society. Even the name *Zulu*—in a New Orleans not familiar with Shaka (not to mention Buthelezi)—carried a racist double message: savage, African, foreign, and dangerous; yet silly, ridiculous, and primitive. King Zulu and his court were dressed in “the traditional costume of the krewe—long black underwear that covered them to wrists and ankles, grass skirts, and woolly wigs. Faces were blackened and eyes and mouths were circled with white.”<sup>15</sup> The blackface was like what black minstrel show performers were required to wear: a theatrical reinforcing of the social “blackness” or “negritude” of African Americans.

If Mardi Gras' white elite displaced their identities upwards toward

royalty, myth, and godhead, whiter than white, the Zulus' identity was both royal and primitive and blacker than black. King Zulu's court included a garishly overdressed "Big Shot of Africa" and a "royal witch doctor" with "a horned headdress and a golden ring in his nose, carrying a spiked mace." Zulu himself "wore a gold paper crown, dangling earrings, and strings of gleaming beads about his neck. His mantle was dark blue velvet trimmed in gold and edged with white rabbit fur. He carried a jeweled scepter, with which he now and then threatened the small page boy who kept pulling at his mantle. He also wore a leopard-skin vest."<sup>16</sup> More than a little hostility marked the shenanigans of the Zulus. At least into the mid-1960s, when I last saw Mardi Gras, the Zulus acted out the feelings of many New Orleans African Americans regarding race relations in "the city that care forgot." King Zulu and his court did not toss baubles; they hurled coconuts like cannonballs at white spectators.

Today's Zulus are much different from their predecessors. With at least the appearance of improved race relations, King Zulu has been integrated into official Mardi Gras (though still regarded by many as a parody). Zulu's floats are fancier than before, sometimes borrowed from one of the white parades; the costumes are more dignified, the blackface much less common. More of the black community's elite is involved. Tellingly, the coconuts are now handed out rather than pitched. As Zulu became less offensive, it also lost its double-edged bite. Previously, many African Americans disparaged the Zulus, feeling "they satirize their own race and do nothing to uplift it, and many critical Negroes are embarrassed by their antics."<sup>17</sup> Nowadays, the Zulus are "whiter," more peaceful, co-opted, and stripped of their parodic clarity. Instead of introducing an anticarnival into carnival, the Zulus now participate in the elite masquerade.

An "invented tradition" not at all shy about its consumerist obsession is Daytona Beach Spring Break Weekend.<sup>18</sup> Occurring at the cusp between winter and spring, taking over a strip of Daytona Beach where the rectangular motels meet an undulating beach and ocean, encouraging drinking, carousing, sex, and public display, spring break has the narrative shape of carnival. In 1963, when sixty-five thousand students first descended on Daytona, the event inaugurated its reputation for excess. Sex, booze, and sun brings them south, but the narrative action of spring break is to compete and consume. Taking 1989 as an example—when four hundred thousand made the Daytona trip—contests included Twentieth Century Fox's "best buns," Budweiser's "best male body," DeKuyper Schnapps' "DeKuyper's DeBody Delight," Hawaiian Tropic's "Miss Hawaiian Tropic," Playboy Ujena's "summerwear bikini," and Caribe Suntan Lotion's "wet T-shirt," to name just some. Sex, excess, violence, and competition are linked.

All events are sponsored by brand products. "Dozens of banners for Caribe suntan lotion, Roffler hair products and other products are strewn from the balconies, a two-story inflatable Simpatico beer bottle sits near the pool, a giant inflatable Spuds MacKenzie [Budweiser beer mascot] watches over outdoor beer kegs, and hot balloons emblazoned with 'Ply-

mouth Sundance' [car] and 'Karate Kid II' [movie] are anchored everywhere." "In a half-mile stretch along the beach are volleyball games sponsored by Pontiac, Diet Pepsi, Coppertone, Coors Light, and Plymouth. The skies drone with airplanes pulling ads, and the beach—on which cars are allowed—is a parade of mobile billboards." An adman told a reporter that the idea is to "blanket the hotel-bar complex" (like B-52s blanket bombing Vietnam or Iraq?). Joanne Lipman, a company executive, said, "We're not down here for sales, we're down here for image."<sup>19</sup>

According to this executive, college-age youths are "brand conscious but not yet brand loyal." Spring break is the time to excite them, inebriate them, and burn brand names into their minds. The banners in Tiananmen Square in 1989 and the costumes of King Zulu and his court in the 1940s were made by participants. But in Daytona whatever is on display is made elsewhere by others. The students are there only to receive, cattle to be branded. But do the kids listen? One student told Lipman, "You don't even notice it because it's everywhere you look." The sponsors think otherwise. To them it doesn't matter if a student remembers which brand. The important thing is to learn that the only things worth owning are brand products. Spring break is a capitalist carnival initiating and training young upscale Americans in their lifelong roles as consumers. The scenography of spring break serves its capitalist carnival functions well. The Daytona police make sure that the revels are confined to beachfront motels, the streets immediately adjoining them, and the beach itself. Spring break is squeezed into "the strip"—a long narrow space, a kind of static parade, easy to police and control. Crowds are not allowed to mass in big circular groups as they did in Tiananmen Square, Washington, Leipzig, or Berlin. The beach itself and the airspace above are treated as billboards saturating the youths with brand name messages.

In "direct theater" large public spaces are transformed into theaters where collective reflexivity is performed, fecund and spectacular excesses displayed. Parades, mass gatherings, street theater, sex, and partying—everything is exaggerated, ritualized, done for show. Masquerading encourages experimenting with behavior and identity slippage. Rulers or ruling ideas are either exalted, as at Mardi Gras, spring break, and Ramlila; challenged, as in Washington in 1970 and China in 1989; or overthrown, as in Eastern Europe. Ramlila is complex. Worshipped as gods, the boys are also ordinary people, while the maharaja who witnesses and authorizes their sacred performance is a former king, who, for the month of the festival, acts out a recollected royalty.

Official culture wants its festivals to be entertaining. Mardi Gras and spring break are dizzying, drunk, disorderly, and mystifying—mystifying because they present official authorities as fairy-tale royalty, buffoons, clowns, laughing dispensers of free goods, and benign corporate sponsors of drunken erotic contests. It's the old "bread and circuses" trick. People have fun. Less so for obligatory mass turnouts such as those that until now have taken place in Moscow's Red Square marking the anniversary of the

Russian Revolution. For whom are these official displays staged? Since the development of television, the audiences are whomever mass media can reach. But there is another audience too. The arrogance of the leaders looking down from reviewing stands is matched by their insecurity (both actual and imagined). They demand reassurance of their popularity and invincibility. Each salute given, each tank rolling by as part of neat and obedient phalanxes, warms the hearts of these leaders, democrats and despots alike.

But when the official leadership is no longer the focus of attention, no longer in control of the means of producing or controlling public celebrations, when the power to produce public fun passes into the hands of ordinary people, events take an unpredictable theatrical turn. Effigies appear, as do homemade banners and posters; street theater flourishes; soapbox orators draw cheering crowds. Official leaders are cut down to size. If they show up, they run the risk of being mocked or chased away as Li, Zhou, Nixon, and members of the GDR politburo were. Officialdom provides scripted fun contained within ritual frames, while unofficial festivity rewrites ritual, dissolving the restrictive frames. The popular street carnival-demonstration is actually a utopian mimesis whose multifocused, idealized, heated, magnified, and transparent clarity of consciousness evaporates once the show is over. Those involved in such festivals of political desire too often deceive themselves into believing their utopian show will run forever. It is not only the tanks of Deng Xiaoping that enviously and with terrible clarity crush the fun but also the longer process, when the revolution is successful, of postrevolutionary jockeying for power. This decay of festival into "dirty politics" is what the Chinese students now underground or in exile have learned, a lesson most American radicals of the 1960s and 1970s never studied. Carnival, more than other forms of theater, can act out a powerful critique of the status quo, but it cannot itself replace the status quo. For the modern world this much was made clear by Robespierre: the carnival indefinitely in power is the Terror.

There are several audiences for direct theater: (1) the participants themselves, (2) journalists, especially television reporters, (3) the mass spectatorship television enjoys, and (4) high-level decision makers in their offices or bunkers. These high-level spectators participate in direct theater for fear of missing the worldwide TV audience. The dramaturgy is further complicated by the fact that the TV apparatus asks for news to be "made," not "found." And the same corporations who underwrite spring break sponsor TV or own the networks. This means that all programming—news as well as sports, dramas, sitcoms, talk, and game shows—are actually profit-making entertainments. Television news is not made to be kept and reshowed long after the events it records are over. It is a multilayered, throwaway flow of images and words combining on-the-spot action with sophisticated editing and framing procedures to create a narrativized and ritualized product.

Direct theater is raw material for the universally displayed second theater, TV news, which includes often improvised responses to the first theater. Direct theater is reflexive insofar as it is produced for the cameras



and designed to force a response. Events are immediate (being there), mediated (taking place on the TV screen), and responsive (reactions to what happens on the screen). Used this way, TV is hot, interactive. The millions of screens function as a collective forum (though not a free forum). Criticism of the direct theater is provided not by aestheticians but by “pundits” and official spokespersons who summarize and explain. Political direct theater is different from the neocarnival direct theater of Mardi Gras or spring break. These have been drained of political content, while the made-for-television (or at least highly “media aware”) direct theater is mainly political. Or, to put it in a slightly different way, the conservative politics of Mardi Gras and spring break are hidden. Therefore, there is no “news” coming from them except a feature story buried near the end of a telecast. Or, if the celebration gets out of hand, an account of how the police handled the rioting. Social order must be restored; the causes of the “disturbance” will be “looked into” (so it won’t happen again). On the other hand, the political direct theater of East Europe or China challenges the status quo, wants to overthrow the state.

The more political the direct theater, the more it is staged as, or ends in swirls, vortexes of activities moving in spirals and circles with not-easy-to-locate centers or heads. Multivocal and multifocal, a popular deconstructing of hierarchy, often blasphemous, irreverent, and obscene, full of small-scale dramas and guerrilla theater, the direct theater plays to the roving multiple eyes of many cameras simultaneously ingesting images. The direct theater is not “about” something so much as it is made “of” something. It is actual and symbolic, not referential and representational. Hunger-striking Chinese camped out in Tiananmen Square, Germans climbing on or chipping away at the wall, or young Americans frolicking in the Lincoln Memorial Reflecting Pool are performing more than naked actions. But their symbolic deeds are not imitations played by named characters who exist within copyrighted fictional narratives authored by individuals. Real people—from anonymous players to Wuer Kaixi, Zhao Ziyang, the East German politburo, Berliners, Abbie Hoffman—play their roles in public and pursue not only Stanislavskian objectives and through-lines of action but also historical dialectics.

Television produces and reproduces this popular drama, showing over and over again specific highly theatrical bits (or bytes), what Brecht would call *gests*, creating both *verfremdungseffekt* and a ritual effect. The layering of contending historicifications begins with on-the-spot reporters interviewing participants, ordinary people as well as leaders. Many of these “spontaneous” interviews are setups. The material is then laundered through interpretations and editings—“spin controls.” Of course, direct theater, with its low impact on global politics, such as Mardi Gras or Ramlila, doesn’t need much managing. But, for political direct theater, participants and viewers alike are told what’s going on, how to relate to it, and what the future holds. The ultimate layers are hidden from view, taking place in editing rooms and corporate or government offices. TV news gives the impression of—a performance of—“multivocality.” But,

just as aesthetic drama projects many voices deployed as characters originating from a single voice, the playwright's, so television moves in the opposite direction, knitting the many voices of the streets into a unitary broadcast.

## NOTES

1. René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), 119–20; Roger Caillois, trans. Meyer Barash, *Man and the Sacred* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1959), 125.

2. Caillois, *Man and the Sacred*, 123. For such unofficial performances, see Marvin Carlson, *Places of Performance* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1989); and Sally Harrison-Pepper, *Drawing a Circle in the Square: Street Performing in New York's Washington Square Park* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1990).

3. Jonathan D. Spence, *The Gate of Heavenly Peace* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1981), 17–18.

4. Joseph W. Esherick and Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom, "Acting Out Democracy: Political Theater in Modern China," *Journal of Asian Studies* 49, no. 4 (1990): 839.

5. Esherick and Wasserstrom, "Acting Out Democracy," 841.

6. See Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process* (Chicago: Aldine, 1969), and "Liminal to Liminoid, in Play, Flow, Ritual," in *From Ritual to Theatre and Back* (New York: PAJ, 1982), 20–60; and Richard Schechner, "From Ritual to Theatre and Back," *Educational Theatre Journal* 26 (1974): 455–82, and *Performance Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1988).

7. Abbie Hoffman, *Revolution for the Hell of It* (New York: Dial Books, 1968), 30, 183; Jerry Rubin, *Do It!* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970), 250. For more detailed expositions of their views, see these sources and Hoffman, *Woodstock Nation* (New York: Vintage, 1969); and *Steal This Book* (New York: Pirate Editions, 1971). The term *Yippie* is from the acronym for Youth International Party (YIP) founded by Rubin, Hoffman, and others. YIP never was intended as a "serious" political party but as a gadfly. *Yippy* is taken from *Hippy*, what the "flower children" of the 1960s, inhabitants of the Haight-Ashbury section of San Francisco, were called or called themselves. *Hippie* was soon applied to many of the "tune in, turn on, drop out" generation of American youth. *Hippie* is a diminutive of *hip*, or *hep*, a word from the world of jazz (or crime) first used in the 1910s by African Americans but adopted or adapted by the Beat Generation writers of the 1950s and meaning someone "in the know." All these terms connote alternative lifestyles. The 1980s adaptation *Yuppie*—a Young Upwardly Mobile Professional—is a parody of the earlier terms, signaling the very opposite in social status.

8. Ferdinand Protzman, "Thousands Swell Trek to the West by East Germans," *New York Times*, September 12, 1989, A1, A14; Serge Schmemmann, "Exodus Galls East Berlin," *New York Times*, September 14, 1989, A14.

9. Serge Schmemmann, "Sour German Birthday," *New York Times*, October 6, 1989, A1; "Gorbachev Lends Honecker a Hand," *New York Times*, October 7, 1989, A5.

10. Henry Kamm, "East Berliners March for Democracy," *New York Times*, October 22, 1989, A16.

11. Serge Schmemmann, "Another Big Rally in East Germany," *New York Times*, October 31, 1989, A17.

12. Serge Schmemmann, "East Germany Opens Frontier to the West," *New York Times*, November 10, 1989, A1.

13. All quoted examples of celebrating are from accounts reported in the *New York Times* on November 10–12, 1989.

14. Craig R. Whitney with David Binder and Serge Schmemmann, "Party Coup Turned East German Tide," *New York Times*, November 19, 1989, A27.

15. Robert Tallant, *Mardi Gras* (1948; reprint, Gretna, La.: Pelican Publishing, 1976), 232. See also Samuel Kinser, *Carnival, American Style: Mardi Gras at New Orleans and Mobile* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

16. Tallant, *Mardi Gras*, 232–40.

17. Tallant, *Mardi Gras*, 239.

18. See Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); and Richard Schechner, "Restoration of Behavior," in *Between Theater and Anthropology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985).

19. Joanne Lipman, "Spring Break Sponsors in Florida Find Too Much of a Good Thing," *Wall Street Journal*, March 21, 1989, B1, B8.

# Performance Theory, Hmong Shamans, and Cultural Politics

*Dwight Conquergood*

Shamanism is the oldest technique of theatrical performing.

—Richard Schechner, *Ritual, Play, and Performance*

In two widely cited essays, “The Sorcerer and His Magic” and “The Effectiveness of Symbols,” Claude Lévi-Strauss analyzes in a remarkably performance-sensitive way the curing practices of North and South American shamans. He demonstrates the efficacy of these healing performances through a rigorous and highly original analysis of the mythic underpinnings and symbolic dimensions of medical practice, “ours” (Western scientists) as well as “theirs” (Cuna shamans). Through concrete case studies of shamans, these essays make important contributions to performance theory.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, Richard Schechner draws on Lévi-Strauss’s subtle discussion of the skeptic-turned-shaman Quesalid as an exemplar of the epistemological predicaments and postmodern paradoxes of performance. “Quesalid did not become a great shaman because he cured his patients,” Lévi-Strauss insists in a deconstructive reversal, “he cured his patients because he had become a great shaman.”<sup>2</sup>

Unfortunately, the brilliance and deconstructive force of this insight get lost in Lévi-Strauss’s structuralist project. The story of Quesalid, the reluctant shaman, is deeply subversive, contradictory, and potentially poststructuralist. It relentlessly undermines and confuses the distinction between the “real” and the “made up,” categories that Quesalid, for all his ontological struggles, can never quite stabilize. At the end of the narrative, Quesalid comes to accept the reality of his performances as he “carries on his craft conscientiously, takes pride in his achievements, and warmly defends the technique of the bloody down against all rival schools.” But Lévi-Strauss, who as narrator identified with the early, doubting Quesalid, admiring “the radical negativism of the free thinker” and referring to him as “our hero,” at this point distances himself from Quesalid’s development as a performer: “He seems to have completely lost sight of the fallaciousness of the technique which he had so disparaged at the beginning.”<sup>3</sup> The word *fallaciousness* belies Lévi-Strauss’s sensitive analysis of the effectiveness of performed myth and symbol for the patient. Although he can understand with great subtlety how Quesalid cured his patients through performance, he does not understand how Quesalid, too, was persuaded by his own performances.

What is missing from Lévi-Strauss’s discussion of Quesalid is a performative appreciation for historical process, how practices cumulatively interact and develop through time, reconstituting agent and agency and

reconfiguring context. He notes that Quesalid “carries on his craft” but is surprised when Quesalid’s stance and attitudes toward that craft are no longer the same as they were at “the beginning” of his performance practice. The structuralist approach blinds him to the ways in which Quesalid was “carried,” caught up, and changed by performing his craft. Lévi-Strauss is excellent with the single case study of a performance, such as the Cuna shaman’s song for a woman experiencing difficult childbirth, but the limitations of his method are revealed when he deals with Quesalid’s performance career over time. At the end of the story Lévi-Strauss is still stuck where Quesalid was at the beginning, in a “fallaciousness”/foundationalist view of performance technique, but it is clear that Quesalid has moved on.<sup>4</sup>

Although I am situating Lévi-Strauss’s work on shamanism within performance studies, he did not, connecting shamanism instead to psychoanalysis. In one passage, however, he explicitly acknowledged the shaman as performer:

In treating his patient the shaman also offers his audience a performance. What is this performance? . . . we shall say that it always involves the shaman’s enactment of the “call,” or the initial crisis which brought him the revelation of his condition. But we must not be deceived by the word *performance*. The shaman does not limit himself to reproducing or miming certain events. He actually relives them in all their vividness, originality, and violence.

For all his ambivalence about the word *performance*, Lévi-Strauss powerfully articulates shamanic practice with performance theory. After this brief and tantalizing foray into performance theory, he refocuses on psychoanalysis, proposing that it “can draw confirmation of its validity, as well as hope of strengthening its theoretical foundations and understanding better the reasons for its effectiveness, by comparing its methods and goals with those of its precursors, the shamans and sorcerers.” Although Lévi-Strauss respectfully compares these two traditions of healing, shamanism and psychoanalysis, he treats them hierarchically instead of dialogically. The asymmetry is revealed by casting shamanism in the role of “precursor” to the modern, “developed” psychoanalysis, a clear example of what James Clifford calls a “temporal setup” and Johannes Fabian dubs “chronopolitics.”<sup>5</sup>

In order to distance myself from this evolutionist ideology that would celebrate the primordial, originary nature of shamanism but locate it before, behind, and subordinate to contemporary performance, I will draw on ethnographic fieldwork with living, practicing Hmong shamans whose performances are a vital and contested part of the current refugee diaspora and struggle for identity. These shamans are not ghostly precursors or avatars of theater in the West, they are our contemporaries, and their performances stretch and challenge more than they romantically confirm received notions about theater and aesthetics or about the boundaries between performance and politics.

In this way I hope to resist the problematic practice of appropriating premodern and non-Western performances as sources of inspiration or revitalization for bourgeois theater. This trend resembles the imperialist practice of “discovering” natural resources in the colonies and shipping them back to the capital as raw materials for processing and manufacture. Christopher Innes’s *Holy Theatre: Ritual and the Avant-Garde* charts the romantic fascination that “primitive ritual” has held for Western theater practitioners. Unfortunately, the promise of cultural critique, signaled in the title of the first chapter, “The Politics of Primitivism,” is not delivered. Instead of critiquing the complex interplay between desire and domination that is inscribed in Western representations of and returns to primitive ritual, Innes simply reinscribes the imperialist ideology of “primitivism” that underpins Western practices of domination and exploitation. He refers, without irony, to the shaman as “the witch doctor.”<sup>6</sup>

In *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellectuals, Modern Lives* Marianna Torgovnick conducts a much more “hard-hitting critique” of the politics of primitivism: “The tropes and categories through which we view primitive societies draw lines and establish relations of power between us and them, even as they presuppose that they mirror us.” “The idea of the primitive,” she argues, deploys “a rhetoric of control, in which demeaning colonialist tropes get modified only slightly over time; and a rhetoric of desire, ultimately more interesting, which implicates ‘us’ in the ‘them’ we try to conceive as the Other.” Michael Taussig, professor of performance studies at New York University, provides the most sustained and unflinching political critique of primitivism in his study of the colonialist image of the “wild man,” often figured as the shaman. In *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing*, he documents with gruesome detail the colonialist mythology of the primitive that enabled white colonists in South America both to seek out the shamanic performances of shamans *and* to torture and terrorize Indians as savages. He argues: “Going to the Indians for their healing power and killing them for their wildness are not so far apart. Indeed, these actions are not only intertwined but are codependent.”<sup>7</sup>

The shamanic performances of Hmong refugees I have been privileged to witness in Thailand and Chicago are not, I hope to make clear, timeless relics of prehistoric performance preserved in the cultural deep freeze of Hmong isolation from modernity in their remote mountaintop villages in Laos. As William Smalley makes clear, Hmong history has been a series of adaptations, contacts, and adjustments to other cultures.<sup>8</sup> Shamanism is a theatrically sophisticated, complex, and contextually nuanced performance practice enmeshed in the current cultural politics of Hmong people struggling to cope with the post-Vietnam War devastation of refugee upheaval, displacement, dispersal, and domination. Hmong shamans have more to teach performance theorists about what Clifford calls “critical cultural politics” than about primal roots of theater. I believe with Clifford that identity is “conjunctural, not essential,” an idea that resonates with Bakhtin’s powerful insight that meaning emerges most richly through dialogue and encounters, along borders and intersections.<sup>9</sup> By

placing Hmong shamanic performance in metonymic tension with performance theory, I hope to open more space in cultural studies for an ethnography of cultural performance that features the politics of performance.

### *Performative Restorations*

Shamanic performance displays on many levels what Schechner in *Between Theater and Anthropology* calls “twice-behaved behavior” or “restored behavior,” the fundamental characteristic, he argues, of all performance. “Restored behavior,” he explains, “is symbolic and reflexive: not empty but loaded behavior multivocally broadcasting significances. These difficult terms express a single principle: The self can act in/as another; the social or transindividual self is a role or set of roles.” In concert with the opening up and pluralizing of identities, performance as restored behavior plays with time: “Restored behavior offers to both individuals and groups the chance to re-become what they once were—or even, and most often, to re-become what they never were but wish to have been or wish to become.” Emphasizing the “restoration” qualities of performance encourages “revision,” change, and improvisatory adjustments to contingency: “That’s what theater directors, councils of bishops, master performers, and great shamans do: change performance scores.” In *Theatre of the Oppressed* Augusto Boal has developed the revolutionary potential of a restoration, processual view of performance as a revisioning, reassembling, and reworking of social reality.<sup>10</sup>

A Hmong shamanic performance is an intricate assemblage of dynamically orchestrated image and action. Every performance is loaded and layered with incandescent palimpsests, multiple exposures, superimposed doublings. The restoration of behavior occurs simultaneously on at least four levels: Hmong shamans (1) re-present the patient’s affliction, (2) reenact their own initiatory crisis, (3) relive the myth of Shee Yee (“*Siv Yis*” in Hmong), the first shaman, in the context of refugee diaspora and relocation in the West, (4) reconstitute their displaced tradition of healing within this contested space of domination and struggle. Although these multiple restorations are cathected and concurrent, for the purposes of discussion I will discuss them separately.

### *Performing the Patient’s Affliction*

The performing art of the shaman is precarious, strenuous, and intimate. In *Woman, Native, Other*, Trinh Minh-ha writes particularly of the intimate quality of the shaman’s performance:

They derive their power from *listening* to the others and *absorbing* daily realities. While they cure, they take into them their patients’ possessions and obsessions and let the latter’s illnesses become theirs. Their actions imply a personal investment. . . . The very close relationship these healers maintain with their patients remains the determining factor of the cure.<sup>11</sup>

Shamans enter into a dialogical relationship with their patients. The patient does not become the object of medical treatment but a cop performer in his or her own healing. Such intimacy leads to vulnerability on the part of the shaman as much as the patient.

In his life story, *I Am a Shaman*, published as ethnopoetry, Paja Thao describes how he and other shamans take on the afflictions of their clients during ecstatic performance ("shaking"):

When you shake to carry away the bad things with you  
 You feel heavy  
 You do not see  
 You slow down as you climb the steps to the sky  
 Your speech slows down  
 You feel tired  
 You work very hard  
 So they must pay you a little

THIS IS THE WAY OF CARRYING AWAY AN AFFLICTION<sup>12</sup>

Thao's performance is both mimetic and appropriative. It is purgative for his patients because it convincingly mimes their listlessness, depression, and heaviness of spirit. Like Quesalid, Thao "presents them with their sickness in a visible and tangible form."<sup>13</sup> Through mirroring and thereby objectifying the diffuse, subjective feelings of the patient, Thao turns them inside out. The shaman's dramatic performance functions as a condensation symbol that collects, absorbs, and, most important, displays affliction. The logic of shamanic performance is that making a spectacle of something is a strategy for control and subjugation. It is the same logic as Bentham's panopticon, the relationship between the gaze and power, surveillance and subordination, discussed at length in Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*: it is not so much that seeing is believing as that seeing situates the observer in a power relationship over that which is watched, inspected, surveyed. Foucault argued that power that could not be sighted (seen), located at originary sites, was most insulated from resistance.<sup>14</sup>

Thao describes vividly the intricate scenography and staging of another spectacular performance when the shaman "lays down his life on the ground" to rescue "the soul which sinks deep into the ground." This depressing malady is a severe and chronic form of soul loss that is imaged as the soul sinking deep into the ground and falling into a watery abyss. The shaman's restoration of this condition is a theatrical tour de force:

When you lay down your life on the ground  
 The people put one big jar of corn on your chest  
 And one big jar of water  
 And the top grindstone  
 And the sick one sits on the grindstone  
 All pressing down on the chest of the shaman<sup>15</sup>



The prostrate shaman, pressed to the ground by this multitiered edifice of heavy weights, reproduces the debilitating illness and depression of the patient. The heavy jar of corn pressing down on his chest makes it difficult to breathe. The heavy jar of water adds to the weight of the big jar of corn and dramatically symbolizes the watery depths into which the soul is sinking and drowning. And the top grindstone pressing down on top of the water jar richly evokes the grinding pressure and crushing effect of chronic illness. But through the dramatic reversal of performance the final weight added on top of the grindstone is the patient: "the sick one sits on the grindstone." A stunning stage picture of weighted-down inertia and passivity is subtly deconstructed by placing the patient on top of the grindstone, a position of empowerment, not paralysis. The participatory staging and environmental scenography not only "set things in the theatrical sense, they iconosize in the mythic-religious sense."<sup>16</sup>

This dramatic performance enacts the release from the heaviness of despair as the patient literally surmounts the weights while the shaman takes his place underneath. The shaman's performance reassembles and reconstructs the patient's situation in other ways:

Two men stand at your head and feet striking gongs  
 And a four-hands pig by your side  
 Then you shake three times  
 The sick one sits on top of the water jar  
 The people carefully steady the water jar while he shakes  
 If the water splashes on the shaman it is bad  
 THE WAY OF THE SHAMAN FOR SAVING THE SOUL WHICH SINKS  
 DEEP INTO THE GROUND IS LIKE THIS

The shamanic performance both reverses the vertical hierarchy and threatens stasis with movement. It repositions the patient from crushed underneath to triumphantly astride his problems and converts prone passivity to active agency. Friends and neighbors must steady the water jar as the entire structure of weights is destabilized by the powerful shaking of the shaman: "When he is lying down on the ground / He does not feel the heavy weights on his chest / Because he has the spirits to help him."<sup>17</sup> How heartening it must be for the audience, and particularly the sick one balancing himself on top of the weighted-down shaman, to experience viscerally the shaman's irrepressible power as he defiantly shakes and heaves, resisting all that would pull one down and debilitate.

But we are reminded again that the same performance that empowers the patient exposes the shaman to danger. Substituting himself for the sick one, the shaman now is vulnerable to the afflictions of the patient, concretely symbolized by the heavy water jar that he quite literally has taken on himself: "If the water splashes on the shaman it is bad." Indeed, the extremity of the shaman's exertions is revealed in the aftermath to this exhausting performance:



Fig. 1. Masked shaman performs healing ritual in Chiang Kham Refugee Camp, Thailand, 1987. The ring of rattles he grasps will help him trap runaway souls. Photo credit: Dwight Conquergood.

Then the people take the shaman to the altar-bench  
He is stiff  
The people flex his arms and legs  
They spray water from their mouth on him  
Then he begins to shake and speak to the spirits

The length of time it takes to recover underscores how taxing the performance has been for the shaman. Thao explains:

When you lay down your life on the ground  
With weights on your chest  
You have to stay at home for thirteen days  
If someone calls you to shake  
You do not go  
After thirteen days you can go<sup>18</sup>

When shamans perform the affliction of their patient, they are simultaneously empowered and acutely vulnerable. They embrace death to regenerate life. To control life-threatening disorder, they release themselves into an out-of-body trembling ecstasy, an exquisitely controlled chaos. They hang suspended between earth and heaven, betwixt and between

Fig. 2. Elderly shaman with finger rattles sits on special shaman's bench—the winged charger that will carry him skywards into the spirit world—in Chiang Kham Refugee Camp, Thailand, 1987. Photo credit: Dwight Conquergood.



human and spirit. They are both present and absent. The veil that shadows their face (figs. 1 and 2) signifies that they have left the side of reality that is seen. They are structurally invisible, and yet they fill the room with their charismatic presence. The shaman's performance deconstructs and reconstructs, balancing among opposites, reversals, and paradoxes.<sup>19</sup>

### *Performing the Initiatory Crisis*

In addition to performing the patient's malaise, the shamanic performance recapitulates the initiatory sickness through which all shamans derive their healing power. People do not themselves choose to become a shaman. They are chosen by special spirits who want them to become shamans by experiencing first an illness that is interpreted by another shaman as the sign of their calling. As Thao explains,

I became a shaman not because it was my will  
But because it was the will of my shaman spirits  
The shaman spirits came to me  
To make me a shaman  
The spirits make you sick  
To let you know

That you must be a shaman  
 It is not for you to choose  
 And then to do  
 The way of becoming a shaman  
 Comes from the spirits  
 You must follow them  
 They will make you sick  
 Until you become a shaman<sup>20</sup>

The sickness comes from the spirits who will keep calling the chosen one to become a shaman until he or she starts performing the vocation by calling on the shamanic spirits to cure the sick. Jacques Lemoine explains this intricate process: "They [the spirits] will make him sick in a strange way, with fever, attacks, shivering and pain, until he calls for a shaman who will diagnose his illness as the vocation." Moreover, the persistent spirits "will not leave him alone until he starts calling them regularly."<sup>21</sup> When a performing Hmong shaman calls on the spirits to help cure an afflicted patient, he or she recapitulates and reverses the initiatory affliction through which these same spirits called him or her to shamanism. The interplay between sickness, calling, and curing in the context of shaman and patient is a highly complex set of doublings and transformations.

For many shamans their initiatory illness is remembered as a harrowing and profound encounter with the forces of death. An elderly shaman in Chicago recounted that when he was nineteen years old, he became gravely ill and was unconscious for ten days. In a dream he saw his soul travel to the jagged, rocky cliffs then descend to the depths of the earth. During this time he said his soul learned many things. A shaman came and divined that he was indeed far gone, that his soul was already at Step Nine on the Twelve Step ladder ascending from earth to sky. He was laid out on a table, and the shaman beat the gong and called back his departing soul. As his soul was called back, he remembered the sensation as feeling "like a leaf that floats up from the bottom of the lake." As he recounted this part of the story, he gestured with his hand to mime the upward floating movement of a fragile leaf.<sup>22</sup>

When shamans perform, they are highly vulnerable. They conquer death through dangerous encounters with destructive forces. Accompanied by a host of helping spirits, the shaman leaves the side of reality that is seen and journeys into the invisible world of spirits and supernatural forces. There he or she will search for lost or kidnapped souls, do battle with evil ogres, and bring back runaway souls. This threshold crossing between two worlds is, like most transitional experiences, risky and intense. Because of their acute vulnerability while in trance performance, Hmong shamans are attended by assistants who help balance their bodies as they leap back and forth between the altar bench and the ground and act out the dramatic struggles in the spirit world (figs. 3 and 4). Particularly near the close of a performance, when the shaman removes the mask, attempts to



Fig. 3. Assistant balances rattle-wielding shaman with arms spread in ecstatic flight, Ban Vinai Refugee Camp, Thailand, 1985. Photo credit: Dwight Conquergood.

wind down while assistants lightly slap and massage his or her back—what Schechner calls the “cool-down” phase of performance—one can see just how strenuous the passage has been. This cool-down phase can be seen along with vivid footage of shamanic trance performances in the documentary *Between Two Worlds: The Hmong Shaman in America*.<sup>23</sup> The special power of the shaman comes from this presence achieved through an absence, this performative ability to leave one reality, enter and participate fully within another reality, and then return.

The shaman’s interpretive reenactment of his or her initial sickness in the performance of healing pushes Schechner’s idea of performance as a “restoration of behavior” to performance as “restorative behavior.” By reenacting (“restoring”) the experience of critical vulnerability, shamanic performance becomes charged with restorative power. The shift from restoration to restorative emphasizes the transformational dynamics of performance.

#### *Performing the Role of Shee Yee, the First Shaman*

At the beginning of all performances, Hmong shamans invoke the name of Shee Yee, who in Hmong cosmology is the first shaman who delivered the world from sickness and death and bequeathed to future shamans the legacy of healing. Many times, in both Thailand and Chicago, I have heard shamans chant at the opening of their performance, “Shee Yee . . . Shee Yee.” This chant does more than commemorate the name of a powerful

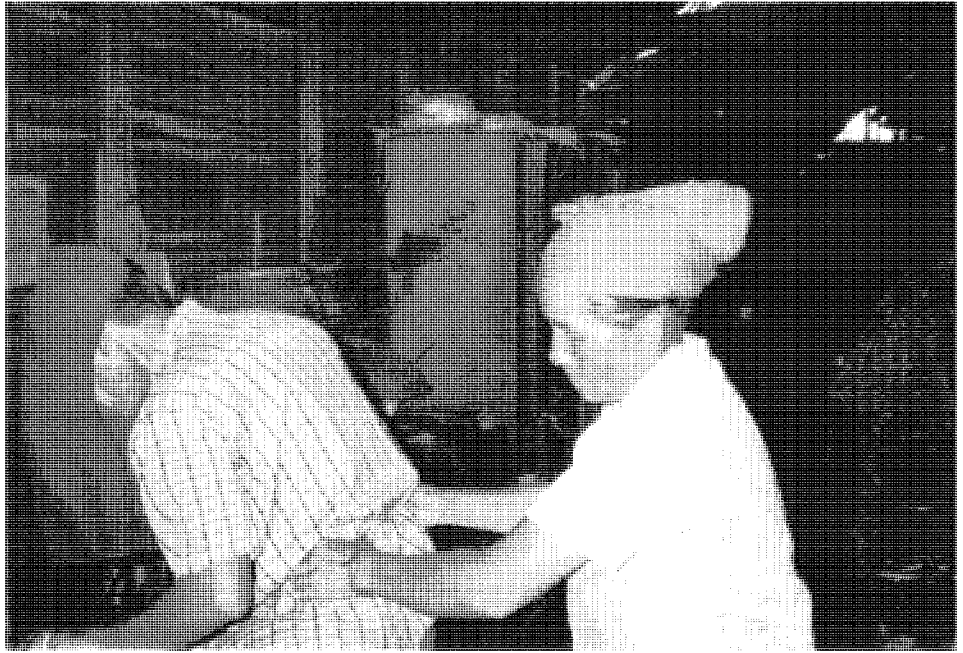


Fig. 4. A wife, who is herself an accomplished shaman, “spots” her shaman husband, who leaps between bench and dirt floor in one of the longhouses of Ban Vinai Refugee Camp, 1987. Photo credit: Dwight Conquergood.

ancestor. As Charles Johnson makes clear, contemporary shamans actually stand in for Shee Yee, acting out his role:

Shee Yee is the greatest of Hmong mythical magicians, and the chief or patron saint of Hmong shamans, with whom they identify themselves when performing their sacred functions. (Whenever Hmong shamans go on their ride into the spirit world to search for a lost soul, *they tell the spirits that they are Shee Yee.*)

Through this theatrical disguise, they reenact the power and precarious struggles of the first shaman. The story, for example, of “Shee Yee’s battling evil spirits with his saber is simulated in modern practice by the shaman, who brandishes a saber during some ceremonies in order to frighten away evil spirits.”<sup>24</sup> Contemporary Hmong shamans restore the behavior of their spiritual mentor and, through this dissembling, achieve their power. This is a wonderful example of the efficacy of theatricality, what Victor Turner calls performance as “making, not faking.”<sup>25</sup>

The Hmong example of the story of Shee Yee helps us understand how the power of a myth is constituted through performance. Anthropologist Edward Bruner states this point clearly:

It is in the performance of an expression that we re-experience, re-live, re-create, re-tell, re-construct, and re-fashion our culture. The performance does not release a preexisting meaning that lies dormant in the text. Rather, the performance itself is constitutive. Meaning is always in the present, in the here-and-now, not in such past manifestations as historical origins or the author’s intentions. Nor

are there silent texts, because once we attend to the text, giving voice or expression to it, it becomes a performed text, active and alive.<sup>26</sup>

When contemporary Hmong shamans perform the role of Shee Yee, they are reviving and reinterpreting an ancient myth to redress an immediate crisis of soul loss, attack by evil ogres, or affliction from offended nature spirits.

Hmong shamanic performance also helps us understand the different levels on which a myth can be performed. Although a long and fascinating oral narrative—transcribed and titled by Johnson, “Shee Yee and the Evil Spirits”—circulates within Hmong culture, the story of Shee Yee is performed typically through the figural enactments of practicing shamans. During 1985 I lived in Ban Vinai refugee camp for the Hmong in Thailand. Although I never came across a storytelling session where someone recited the Shee Yee myth in verbal form, I was awakened almost every morning before dawn by the drumming and chanting of shamans acting out the role of Shee Yee.<sup>27</sup>

Even though shamans embody and improvise within the role of Shee Yee, instead of orally reciting the myth of the first shaman, much can be learned by taking a close look at the verbal narrative. There are multiple episodes in the story, but I will focus on the central section, where Shee Yee is pursued by the nine evil spirit brothers, who proclaimed: “If we could only kill the damned Shee Yee, we would have a better life, and be free to eat earth people without fear or trouble.” Shee Yee eludes and resists the attacks of the evil spirits through shape shifting and a remarkable series of transformations. He triumphs over the evil spirits through the arts of performance, disguise, guile, and deception. Indeed, one of the evil spirit brothers complains: “Shee Yee is a crooked liar, a mean trickster.”<sup>28</sup>

Outnumbered nine to one, Shee Yee protects himself through multiple metamorphoses and plural identities. As a tactical response to each renewed attack, Shee Yee takes on yet another identity: he “took the form of a water buffalo,” then “disguised himself as a cloud,” then “turned himself into a drop of water,” then “changed himself into a deer,” then “changed himself into a rat,” then “turned himself into a caterpillar,” until, finally, he “disguised himself as a very tiny red ant.”<sup>29</sup> From water buffalo to very tiny red ant, from cloud to water droplet—the direction of the transformations is from big to small, from brute force to the guileful ruse of the weak. His performative transformations recall the opportunistic tactics of the weak, described by Michel de Certeau as “‘ways of operating’: victories of the ‘weak’ over the ‘strong’ . . . clever tricks, knowing how to get away with things, ‘hunter’s cunning,’ maneuvers, polymorphic simulations, joyful discoveries, poetic as well as warlike.” What de Certeau calls the creative “art of making do” is quite literally an art of performance, the ability to improvise in everyday life. He describes it performatively as “an art of being in between,” the ability to inhabit “the other’s place” but “without taking it over in its entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance.” The multiple identities and fluid role shiftings of de Certeau’s tactical tricksters

partake of the identity paradoxes of the performer, described by Schechner as the “not me” and the “not not me.”<sup>30</sup> De Certeau is useful for performance theory because he links theatricality to issues of power and domination within everyday situations of resistance.

Shee Yee changed himself into the tiny red ant in order to elude an evil spirit that had changed into a cat in order to catch and eat Shee Yee when he was in his rat form. All these transformations, beginning with the water buffalo, had been defensive moves, retreats and dodges from the stronger powers of the evil spirit brothers. Significantly, it is in his weakest and tiniest form, the red ant, that Shee Yee switches from a defensive to an offensive stance: “He quickly and fiercely bit the cat on the testicle.”<sup>31</sup> This intervention enabled Shee Yee to escape the cat and return home to his wife. It also marks a structural turning point in the narrative: Shee Yee turns from passive to active agent and initiates a new transformation of identity in which he no longer retreats into rat burrows but emerges slyly on the attack.

His switch from the hunted to the aggressor is marked by a gender reversal: “Shee Yee changed into a beautiful, well dressed girl, and . . . he pretended to be a young girl.”<sup>32</sup> This “gender play,” to borrow Margaret Drewal’s felicitous term,<sup>33</sup> was anticipated when he bit the cat on the testicle. The evil spirit disguised as the cat was the “kind of evil spirit” that “is always attracted to nice looking women and tries to seduce them.” In a double role reversal, Shee Yee, dressed as a young woman, aggressively flirts with the evil spirit seducer, still disguised as a cat, and seductively disarms and destroys him. Shee Yee then “changed into another girl” and boldly advanced to the cave that was home to the entire family of evil spirits. When the evil spirit mother spied Shee Yee approaching, she exclaimed: “There comes a pretty young girl. My, isn’t she beautiful!”<sup>34</sup>

The scene in the home of the evil spirit family is rich with gender play, sexual farce, and dramatic irony. Shee Yee disguised as the young girl announces to the family that s/he has come to marry the eldest son. The eldest son, it turns out, was the one who had disguised himself as the lecherous cat that Shee Yee killed. The other brothers, however, found his battered body, patched him up, and “made him alive again.” When he returned home with a terrible headache, Shee Yee ran to him and, savoring the irony of the situation, said: “‘Oh, darling! Today is the day I have come here to marry you. I love you very much! . . . But when I marry you, you must not go and fight with Shee Yee any more. I don’t want him to beat your brains out again!’ And Shee Yee pretended to cry and cry.” The evil spirit quickly forgot about his headache, “thinking of how he would soon enjoy going to bed with his new wife, this pretty girl.” For most of this scene, Shee Yee, brilliantly playing the role of “this pretty girl,” both attracts and defers the amorous advances of the evil spirit, insisting all the while: “I like men a lot” and “You alone will sleep with me” but “Do not touch me yet.”<sup>35</sup> Finally, while feigning solicitousness and serving the family of evil spirits gathered around the dining table, Shee Yee destroys them with hot boiling pork fat.



The elaborate constructions and deconstructions of gender enabled by Shee Yee's gender play are ideologically complex and merit a sustained analysis from the perspective of feminist critical theory.<sup>36</sup> For the purposes of this essay, the myth clearly features Shee Yee, the first shaman, as a consummate performer with an extensive repertoire of roles. He fights against evil and ultimately triumphs with tactics that are "poetic as well as warlike."<sup>37</sup> Of all his many roles and masks, his most developed, sustained, and artful performance is that of a woman. It is in the role of a woman that Shee Yee vanquishes the evil spirits. Kenneth Burke argues that "the profoundest way of symbolizing a change in identity is in the symbolic change of sex."<sup>38</sup> Shee Yee's change of sex, which is structurally connected in the narrative with his empowerment and triumph, underscores change, process, and transformation as the vital qualities of performance. Augusto Boal points to the "enormous efficacy of the transformations" celebrated in performance: "Theater is change and not simple presentation of what exists: it is becoming and not being." He argues that "mimesis" actually means "re-creation." Stephen Tyler argues for a performative, processual, postmodern theory of representation that privileges "kinesis" over "mimesis," and Renato Rosaldo privileges cultural "improvisations" and argues for "putting culture into motion."<sup>39</sup> When Hmong shamans perform today they, like Shee Yee, and as Shee Yee, wage battle against the forces of death by exploiting the recreative power of performance to resist closure, undermine oppressive structures, and revision reality in more life-enhancing ways.

### *Performing a Displaced Tradition*

The fertile idea that performance is restored behavior gets radically politicized in the context of studying shamanic performance traditions of Hmong refugees in the West. The Hmong term for "refugees" is *neeg tawg rog* ("war-broken people"), or the more evocative phrase *tawg tsov tawg rog* ("broken before the tiger, dispersed by the war").<sup>40</sup> These words capture the explosive, shattering heartbreak of displacement from home and the spirit-numbing anxiety of relocation and exile on the margins of a dominant culture. In the refugee situation of upheaval and disintegration, cultural performance, particularly shamanism, has been a powerful resource for shoring up and restoring Hmong identity. Jacques Lemoine makes this observation about Hmong refugees resettled in the West: "all their choices, even their political mistakes, have been dictated by the same collective urge to preserve Hmong ethnicity. . . . For they did not come to our countries only to save their lives, they rather came to save their selves, that is, their Hmong ethnicity."<sup>41</sup>

Shamanism takes on new political meanings when performed in a Chicago apartment, in a culture where a Judeo-Christian ethos combines with positivist science and the legal system to displace, oppress, and erase a healing performance practice that entails ecstatic trance, belief in spirits, and animal sacrifice (figs. 5, 6, and 7). Mary Strine usefully sorts out "the

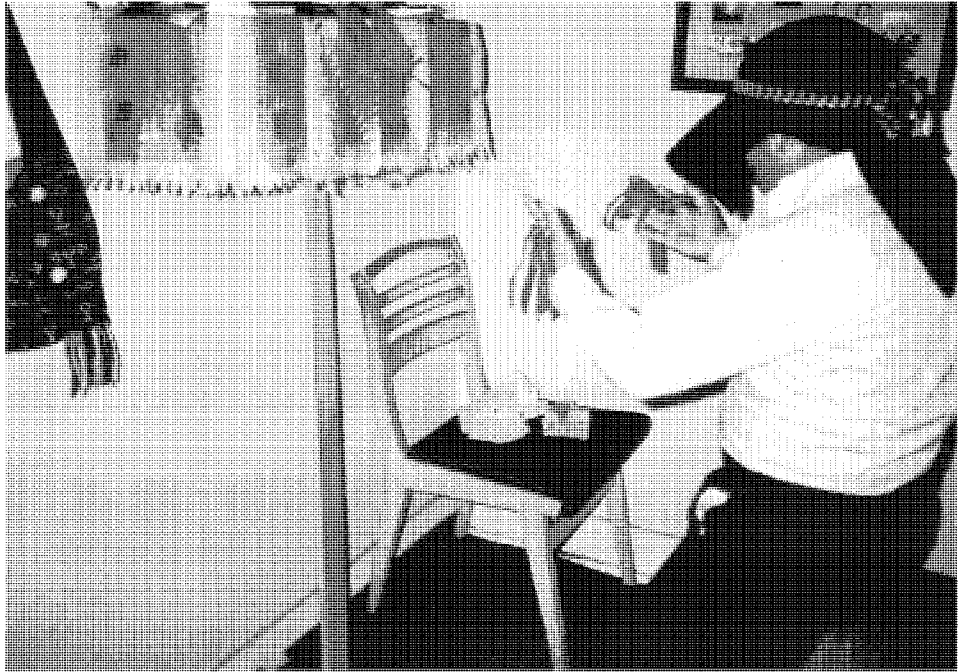


Fig. 5. Veiled shaman talks to the spirits in front of an altar he has set up inside his Chicago apartment, 1988. Photo credit: Dwight Conquergood.

*act* . . . and the *fact*" of performance practice. By the "fact" of performance she means the political implications of a performance, "the multiple affiliations that hold the performance text in place as a significant (and signifying) form of cultural expression."<sup>42</sup> Restorations of the *act* of Hmong shamanic performance in the West constitute radical distortions of the *fact* of shamanic performance. Violently severed from the multiple affiliations and web of meanings that held shamanic performance significantly in place in the mountain culture of Southeast Asia, shamanism performed in a Chicago apartment becomes at best a bizarre figure of ignorance and the occult, or, at worst, signifies moral transgression (devil worship) or illegal behavior (butchering of animals within city limits).

The political response to Hmong shamanism in the West has not been subtle. In his racist book on Hmong refugees, *The Yellow Rainmakers: Are Chemical Weapons Being Used in Southeast Asia?* investigative reporter Grant Evans associated shamanism with "village rumours and superstition" and used it to brand the Hmong as ignorant peasants steeped in a paleolithic mentality. The aim of the book is to discredit Hmong allegations of the use of chemical weapons ("yellow rain") during the Vietnam War. His rhetorical masterstroke for debunking these persistent Hmong reports of chemical warfare was to depict them as "shamanism writ large."<sup>43</sup>

In the spring of 1988, I was invited to attend a meeting of concerned Hmong leaders and elders in Chicago who had gathered to view a home video circulating within the U.S. Hmong community. The video consisted of the oral testimony of a Hmong shaman in Lansing, Michigan, who recounted how a fundamentalist Christian minister had entered his apartment with an interpreter and torn down his shaman altar. The minister then removed the altar along with all the performance equipment—gong,



Fig. 6. Unmasked, shaman relaxes on special bench in postperformance repose, Chicago, 1988. Photo credit: Dwight Conquergood.

rattles, divination buffalo horns, joss sticks, spirit paper, and so on—to the church. The old shaman told of his pain and deep sense of loss, financial as well as spiritual. The custom-made shaman drums and rattles, for example, are costly in Laos or Thailand and are almost impossible to replace in this country. The elderly shaman had carried his cherished equipment with him when he escaped from Laos and had performed with it in the refugee camp in Thailand during the years he awaited resettlement in Michigan. It had taken imagination, effort, and some expense to build the eight-foot-high altar inside his Lansing apartment. Shamans build a household altar not just as a *mise-en-scène* for performance but as the resting place for their helping spirits during all the time they are not performing. The Christian minister destroyed property as well as committing an act of metaphysical violence against the old man. Instead of being intimidated, the Hmong leaders were angry and had made the video to protest this aggression and galvanize resistance to forced assimilation.

Within this context of domination, the practice of shamanism becomes an act of resistance.<sup>44</sup> Here are the reflections of Yang Lau, an elderly Hmong shaman in Milwaukee:

If all of the Hmong were to become Christians we would lose Hmong culture forever. We Hmong who believe in Hmong culture still have shamans. . . . Now I'm very old but I hope my children and the generation following won't forget Hmong culture. I tell you this to remember for the future generation. . . . A long time ago we were born to have shamans. My grandfather was a shaman and my father was a shaman also. . . . I want to pass this on to the future generations so that they will know about the shaman. This is all I have to say.<sup>45</sup>



Fig. 7. Sacrificed pig is ritually displayed alongside patient (the author), seated behind the elevated shaman. This shamanic ceremony of soul cleansing and renewal was performed on the occasion of author's return to Refugee Camp Ban Vinai, Thailand, in the summer of 1987, where author had lived and conducted ethnographic fieldwork during 1985. Photo credit: Xiong Houa.

The quietly firm resolve underneath the meditations of this articulate old man illustrates how "performance as a site of cultural memory" can transcend nostalgia and become a site of political contestation and struggle.<sup>46</sup>

In defiance of the hegemonic forces of assimilation, some Hmong are deploying shamanic performance as a political symbol of cultural resistance. A number of Hmong cultural societies have sprung up across the country. The Hmong society in Chicago is called *Dab Ohuas* (Work of the Spirit). The Chicago founder of this society features its association with shamanism: "Without Shee Yee [the first shaman] it is impossible to conduct *Dab Ohuas* and without *Dab Ohuas* Shee Yee has nothing to do." The Milwaukee branch of *Dab Ohuas* actually took the name Society of Shee Yee. It has become incorporated as a nonprofit service organization, and its logo is the gong of the shaman. The leader of the Chicago Hmong community named his third son born in this country Shee Yee.

The defamiliarizing effect of wrenching dislocation sharply reveals the cultural underpinnings that render established performance practices meaningful by holding them in place and brand others transgressive because they are out of place, displaced. Displaced traditions are perceived as disorderly, dangerous, and dirty—filth that collects in the margins. In *Purity and Danger*, Mary Douglas argues that "dirt is essentially disorder," or "matter out of place." The restoration of a displaced performance tradition within a dominant culture intensifies the magnitude of the politics

of performance. Margaret Drewal defines performance as “re-presentation with critical difference.”<sup>47</sup> In the refugee context of re-presenting shamanic healing performances, the difference is indeed “critical,” in the manifold meanings of that word.

### *The Other as Performer*

Although a potential resource for resistance, the restoration of performance practices, especially shamanism, in the West renders the Hmong people vulnerable to discursive displacements in mainstream writings and publications about them. Reporting, interpreting, and documenting the Other are constituent moments in “the politics of representation” and control. Casting subordinate groups as performers of “tribal rites,” a pervasive motif of colonialist discourse, is a primary way of constructing their Otherness. The image of the Primitive as Performer draws on and expands the “antitheatrical prejudice” that is deeply seeded in Western culture.<sup>48</sup> Associated with feelings, emotions, and the body, performance—especially ecstatic and/or divinatory performance—is constructed in opposition to scientific reason and rational thought. Particularly when linked with archaic custom and premodern belief, performance is branded as regressive and transgressive within societies dominated by an evolutionary ideology of progress and development. Taussig argues that the performance practices (spells, sorcery, shamanism) condensed in the colonialist constructions of “magic became a gathering point for Otherness in a series of racial and class differentiations embedded in the distinctions made between Church and magic, and science and magic.” He further notes that “shamans are deeply implicated in and constituted by this colonial construction of determinism’s Otherness in which savagery and racism are tightly knotted.”<sup>49</sup>

Grant Evans constructs the Hmong in *The Yellow Rainmakers* as superstitious peasants but then historically contextualizes their irrational behavior by sweeping them into a long tradition of performing primitives:

All through history there have been outbreaks of mass hysteria—in the sense of large numbers of people being driven to behave in unusual antisocial fashion. In the Middle Ages in Europe there were outbreaks of dancing mania. There was the strange phenomenon of the Children’s Crusade. In pioneer America there were the religious manifestations of the “Shakers” and the “Holy Rollers.”

For Evans, the strange, manic, hysterical, childlike, antisocial, dancing, ecstatically performing Other is the negative mirror of “We of the west,” who “pride ourselves on the effectiveness of our application of science to human affairs.”<sup>50</sup> Evans’s writings about the Hmong epitomize a post-colonialist rhetoric of domination that positions performance against, beneath, behind, in opposition to, and as threatening to progress, order, and enlightenment.

This Other as Performer trope has been used against the Hmong since their early encounters with the West, first with missionaries and then with the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). Both groups legitimated their practices of conversion, coercion, and exploitation by constructing shamanic performance as a spectacle of primitivism. The missionary Isobel Kuhn, a prolific writer as well as dedicated evangelist, imaginatively situates Hmong shamanism within a reinforcing context of darkness, demons, death, and the forest primeval:

It is a rainy, dreary night in a little Miao [*sic*] village tucked away in the folds of almost unexplored mountains in North Thailand. From the thick forest which still closely encircles the little shanties, one had proof that human beings have only recently hacked out a clearing from primeval growth. Big jagged stumps jutting up amidst the shanties, still fresh looking, tell us where they got the materials for their wooden huts, with their long shaggy grassed roofs. But a scourge has struck the little settlement and all day long the gong! gong! of demon exorcism has been going on. Not a house in the village but is calling on the demons this dismal night.

Kuhn dehumanizes the shaman-performing Hmong by describing an audience member's response in animalistic imagery: "'Be quiet,' growls her mate." At the same time she suffuses the scene with romantic sentimentality and pathos: "the little figure on the mat in the corner moans with misery, and outside, the wet night drips its tears ceaselessly in soft splashes."<sup>51</sup>

Kuhn's scenic blending of romantic exoticism and barbarity—fascination and repulsion—is mirrored in *Journey from Pha Dong*, a CIA film that depicts the recruitment and training for guerrilla warfare of the Hmong in Laos. The anonymous voice-over narration explains: "This film is concerned with how a people learn to win a war." Over visual images of Hmong villagers awkwardly assembling and handling CIA-supplied weapons, the omniscient narrator comments: "This man has never seen a modern rifle. . . . They can get anything apart, but putting it back together again is something else. The spirits of their ancestors who fought so well for the Hans might be slightly embarrassed. There is a limit to what they can learn now; they are taught simple things. They begin with the M-1 rifle. They are difficult to train." This representation of the Hmong as childlike simpletons and technological primitives is reinforced by spectacular scenes of performing shamans with ecstatic chanting and animal sacrifice. Even the educated Yang Pao, anointed by the CIA to lead the Hmong guerrillas, is described as someone who still "half-believes himself in the spirits and spells of their animism."<sup>52</sup>

More recently, the Hmong have entered the discursive space of the West in newspaper and law journal articles that report their legal difficulties as refugees contesting assimilation and struggling within a dominant culture.<sup>53</sup> These articles often display shamanic performance as a spectacle

of Otherness. As an ethnographer who has worked with the Hmong, I was called to testify as an expert witness for a Hmong friend whose courtroom trial was sensationalized in the press when he asked the judge if a rooster could be sacrificed in a divination ceremony to establish his innocence, according to Hmong forensic practices. The *Chicago Tribune* made this story newsworthy by developing the Primitive as Performer motif:

Two Hmong tribesmen from Laos who had wanted their trial to include the Hmong custom of sacrificing a rooster were convicted in an ordinary jury trial Wednesday of beating a man during a traffic dispute. . . . The Xiongs had asked Judge Michael S. Jordan . . . to have a rooster sacrificed in the courtroom and to have drops of the rooster's blood placed in glasses of water. . . . The Xiongs suggested that the complainant and the Xiongs all swear to tell the truth and then consume the blood and water. Hmong tribesmen believe a person who lies after this ceremony will soon die and that the rooster will take the liar's spirit so that the liar can never be reincarnated as a human.<sup>54</sup>

This incident, which had enormous consequences for my friend Bravo Xiong, who received a felony conviction, was discursively staged in the press with all the titillating details that would both attract and repulse middle-class readers while underwriting their superiority over the new immigrants, the "tribesmen": animal sacrifice, blood drinking, unnatural death, reincarnation (with the suggestive hint of human-animal minglings in some reincarnations), and latent sexual sadism and kinkiness in the symbolism of a cock-killing in a public courtroom. This journalistic representation draws on many of the same fetishistic constructions of "primitive art."<sup>55</sup>

The exhibiting of the Hmong, and other ethnic Others, in print and electronic media as exotic performers is a contemporary response to and containment of the "problem" of diversity, difference, and demographic change that is transforming the sociological landscape of contemporary America. Cultural cohesion (if that ever was achieved) and hegemony are perceived as threatened by, if not unraveling under, the pressure of large numbers of refugees and immigrants, many of them from the Third World, who have entered this country since the repeal of racist quotas in 1965 immigration legislation and the 1980 Refugee Act. This contemporary staging of the Other as Performer has interesting ideological resonances with nineteenth-century people shows, and particularly Frank Hamilton Cushing's remarkable staging of Zuni culture for New England middle-class and elite audiences when he assembled a troupe from the pueblos and "brought rich travelling theater eastward in 1882."<sup>56</sup> Attention to the complex cultural politics of performance—as ambivalent front, slippery site, and shifting intersection of domination and resistance, appropriation and contestation—promises to invigorate performance theory by grounding it in praxis.

## NOTES

1. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, trans. C. Jacobsen and S. G. Schoeff (New York: Basic Books, 1963), 167–85, 186–205. Lévi-Strauss demonstrates how to conduct ethnographically sensitive performance analyses of historical texts. His brilliant performance analysis of the Cuna Shaman's song for a woman experiencing difficult childbirth (186–97) is based on an archival text, not participant observation research. Lévi-Strauss excavates the dramaturgy embedded in the text, a kind of textual archaeology of performance practice.

2. Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, 180; Richard Schechner, *Between Theater and Anthropology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), 121, 125, 130–31.

3. Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, 178. Quesalid learned from other shamans backstage how to hide a puff of down in his cheek, bite his gums to make them bleed, then suck from the afflicted place on the patient's body and, through theatrical sleight of hand, pull out the bloody mess from his mouth and present it as the palpable evil he had drawn forth from the sick one.

4. Marshall Sahlin's *Islands of History* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1985) is an exemplar of cultural studies research at the juncture of ethnography and history. See particularly his discussion of "performative structures," a concept that features the creative, constructed, and fluid nature of social forms. Many anthropologists are now productively combining ethnographic with historical research methods. See Clifford Geertz, *Negara: The Theatre State in Nineteenth-Century Bali* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980); and Smadar Lavie, *The Poetics of Military Occupation: Mzeina Allegories and Bedouin Identity under Israeli and Egyptian Rule* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990). Both Geertz's and Lavie's studies explicitly draw on and contribute to the performance paradigm in cultural studies.

5. Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, 180–81, 204. On dialogical treatment, see Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981); James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 16; and Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 144.

6. Christopher Innes, *Holy Theatre: Ritual and the Avant-Garde* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 16. For postcolonial critiques of the politics of representation, see Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literature* (New York: Routledge, 1989); Michel de Certeau, *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986); Christopher Miller, *Blank Darkness: Africanist Discourse in French* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), and *Theories of Africans: Francophone Literature and Anthropology in Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990); V. Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988); Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978); and Tzvetan Todorov, *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Harper and Row, 1984).

7. Marianna Torgovnick, *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellectuals, Modern Lives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), ix, 11, 245; Michael Taussig, *Shaman-*



*ism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 100.

8. William Smalley, "Stages of Hmong Cultural Adaptation," in *The Hmong in Transition*, ed. Glenn L. Hendricks, Bruce T. Downing, and Amos S. Deinard (New York: Center for Migration Studies, 1986).

9. Clifford, *Predicament of Culture*, 147, 11; Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination*, and *Speech Genres*, ed. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, trans. Venn W. McGee (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 140.

10. Schechner, *Between Theater and Anthropology*, 52, 36–38; Augusto Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed*, trans. Charles A. MacBride and Maria Odila-Leal MacBride (1979; reprint, New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1985).

11. Trinh Minh-ha, *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989).

12. Dwight Conquergood and Paja Thao, *I Am a Shaman: A Hmong Life Story with Ethnographic Commentary*, trans. Xa Thao (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, Center for Urban and Regional Affairs, 1989), 10. Contemporary ethnographers sensitive to the performance dimensions of verbal art argue that oral narrative should be transcribed in poetic form instead of prose paragraphs. The lineation of poetic verse captures better than prose the rhythms and pacing of oral discourse. See Elizabeth C. Fine, *The Folklore Text: From Performance to Print* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984); and Dennis Tedlock, *The Spoken Word and the Work of Interpretation* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983).

13. Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, 176.

14. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977).

15. Conquergood and Thao, *I Am a Shaman*, 8, 7.

16. Schechner, *Between Theater and Anthropology*, 179.

17. Conquergood and Thao, *I Am a Shaman*, 7, 8.

18. Conquergood and Thao, *I Am a Shaman*, 8, 9.

19. This discussion builds on and extends my analysis of shamanic performance in "The Dramaturgy of Healing," in Conquergood and Thao, *I Am a Shaman*, 62–68.

20. Conquergood and Thao, *I Am a Shaman*, 2.

21. Jacques Lemoine, "Shamanism in the Context of Hmong Resettlement," in Hendricks, Downing, and Deinard, *Hmong in Transition*, 341.

22. Conquergood and Thao, *I Am a Shaman*, 49. See also Joan Halifax, *Shamanic Voices: A Survey of Visionary Narrative* (New York: Dutton, 1979).

23. Schechner, *Between Theater and Anthropology*, 16, 99; Dwight Conquergood and Taggart Siegel, producers, *Between Two Worlds: The Hmong Shaman in America* (video documentary).

24. Charles Johnson, ed., *Dab Neeg Hmoob: Myths, Legends and Folktales from the Hmong of Laos* (St. Paul, Minn.: Macalaster College, Department of Linguistics, 1985), 73 (emphasis added), 75.

25. Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1982), 93; see also *Anthropology of Performance* (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1986).

26. Edward Bruner, "Experience and Its Expressions," in *The Anthropology of Experience*, ed. Victor Turner and Edward Bruner (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 11–12.

27. Charles Johnson, "Shee Yee and the Evil Spirits," in Johnson, *Dab Neeg Hmoob*, 23–59. See Dwight Conquergood, "Health Theatre in a Hmong Refugee Camp," *TDR* 32, no. 3 (1988): 174–208.
28. Johnson, "Shee Yee," 38, 45–46.
29. Johnson, "Shee Yee," 39–40.
30. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), xix, 30; Schechner, *Between Theater and Anthropology*, 123.
31. Johnson, "Shee Yee," 40.
32. Johnson, "Shee Yee," 41.
33. Margaret Drewal, *Yoruba Ritual: Performers, Play, Agency* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 172.
34. Johnson, "Shee Yee," 41.
35. Johnson, "Shee Yee," 43, 44.
36. Sue-Ellen Case, *Performing Feminisms: Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990). Although I have neither observed myself nor read reports from other researchers of cross-dressing among Hmong shamans, transvestism and bisexuality are found commonly in shamanic traditions in other cultures. See Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Pantheon, 1964), 125, 258, 352. Eliade states that this "ritual androgyny" is a symbolic way of underscoring the shaman's role as "intermediary" as well as the "need to abolish polarities" (352). For two contrasting case studies that explore the problematics of men performing women, see Joseph Roach's insightful analysis of eighteenth-century *castrati*, "Power's Body: The Inscription of Morality as Style," in *Interpreting the Theatrical Past: Essays in the Historiography of Performance*, ed. Thomas Postlewait and Bruce McConachie (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1989), 99–118; and Morris Meyer's provocative study of transsexuals, "I Dream of Jeannie: Transsexual Striptease as Scientific Display," *TDR* 35, no. 1 (1991): 25–42.
37. de Certeau, *Politics of Everyday Life*, xix.
38. Kenneth Burke, *Attitudes toward History*, 3d ed. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), 211.
39. Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed*, 28, 1; Stephen Tyler, *The Unspeakable: Discourse, Dialogue, and Rhetoric in the Postmodern World* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987); and Renato Rosaldo, *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989).
40. Jean-Pierre Hassoun and Michel Mignot, "Le terme 'refugie' dans les langues Hmong et Vietnamiennne," *Asie du Sud-Est et Monde Insulindien* 14 (1983): 7–24.
41. Lemoine, "Shamanism," 337.
42. Mary Strine, "Between Meaning and Representation: Dialogic Aspects of Interpretation Scholarship," in *Renewal and Revision: The Future of Interpretation*, ed. Ted Colson (Denton, Tex.: Omega, 1986), 70.
43. Grant Evans, *The Yellow Rainmakers: Are Chemical Weapons Being Used in Southeast Asia?* (London: Verso, 1983), 194, 124.
44. James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1990).
45. Conquergood and Thao, *I Am a Shaman*, 74.
46. For a discussion of Hmong refugees' confrontations with the U.S. legal system, see Dwight Conquergood, "Roosters, Blood, and Interpretations: Cultural Domination and Resistance in the Courtroom," in *Culture and Communication*, ed.

Edith Slembek (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag für Interkulturelle Kommunikation, 1991), 149–60.

47. Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (1966; reprint, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969); and Margaret Drewal, "The State of Research on Performance in Africa," paper delivered at the 1990 meeting of the African Studies Association, Baltimore.

48. Michael J. Shapiro, *The Politics of Representation: Writing Practices in Biography, Photography, and Policy Analysis* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988). On "tribal rites," see Michel de Certeau, "Ethnography: Speech, or the Space of the Other: Jean de Léry," in *The Writing of History*, trans. Tom Conley (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 209–43; and Jonas Barish, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1981).

49. Taussig, *Shamanism*, 465.

50. Evans, *Yellow Rainmakers*, 181.

51. Both *Miao* and *Meo* are racist terms, which are deeply insulting to Hmong people (Isobel Kuhn, *Ascent to the Tribes: Pioneering in North Thailand* [1956; reprint, Singapore: Overseas Missionary Fellowship Books, 1991], 110).

52. The exact date and circumstances of production of this CIA film are unknown. Through the Freedom of Information Act, however, the film is available through the Southeast Asian Refugee Studies Program, Center for Urban and Regional Affairs, University of Minnesota.

53. See, for example, David Jordan, "Hmong Sentenced to Learn Our Ways," *Albany Park News*, July 5, 1988, 1–2; Mike Royko, "A Fine Opportunity to Learn Our Culture," *Chicago Tribune*, July 1, 1988, 3; and Julia Sams, "The Availability of the 'Cultural Defense' as an Excuse for Criminal Behavior," *Georgia Journal of International and Comparative Law* 16 (1986): 335–54, and "The Cultural Defense in the Criminal Law," *Harvard Law Review* 99 (1986): 1293–1311.

54. Terry Wilson, "Two Hmong Convicted of Beating Motorist," *Chicago Tribune*, May 5, 1988. For a more detailed discussion of this case, see Conquergood, "Roosters, Blood, and Interpretations."

55. See Sally Price, *Primitive Art in Civilized Places* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

56. Curtis M. Hinsley, "Zunis and Brahmins: Cultural Ambivalence in the Gilded Age," in *Romantic Motives: Essays on Anthropological Sensibility*, ed. George W. Stocking, Jr. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 169–207.

# Animal Rites: Performing beyond the Human

*Una Chaudhuri*

The dividing line between nations may well be invisible; but it is no less real. How does one cross that line to travel in the nation of animals? Having traveled in their nation, where lies your allegiance? What do you become?

—Sy Montgomery

The animal is the sign of all that is taken not-very-seriously in contemporary culture: the sign of that which doesn't really matter.

—Steven Baker

Caryl Churchill's play *Far Away* takes the final of its many disorienting turns when a character blandly declares, "The cats have come in on the side of the French."<sup>1</sup> The concluding scene of the play is a shocking elaboration of the possibility this line contains: the possibility that the politics of division and aggression that have defined human history for so long will finally infect the nonhuman world as well. In the world that results, animals enter into alliances with human groups, themselves now bizarrely divided along postnational lines: "Portuguese car salesmen. Russian swimmers. Thai butchers. Latvian dentists" (36–37). Conflict has become the defining feature of society, the rule rather than the exception. New reasons for hatred and new opportunities for alliance abound: "Mallards are not a good waterbird. They commit rape, and they're on the side of the elephants and the Koreans. But crocodiles are always in the wrong" (39). In *Far Away*, Shakespeare's "universal wolf" seems to be on the prowl. All creation partakes of division, discord, and violence. Even the weather "is on the side of the Japanese," and "we are burning the grass that wouldn't serve" (43).

Churchill's extraordinary vision of an ecocidal free-for-all, in which nature is violently divided within itself as well as against a violently divided humanity, has more than a general ecological background. In the years immediately preceding its appearance, Britain experienced an ecological and epidemiological disaster of unprecedented proportions. From 1996 onward, the discovery of BSE (bovine spongiform encephalopathy, popularly known as "mad cow disease") in British cattle caused a national crisis that was also, in a sense, a crisis of nationalism, of national identity. The three-year-long European ban on British beef hurt more than the British economy: given the symbolic status of beef in the construction of English identity, national pride was deeply wounded as well. And when four million cows had to be destroyed, it was not just confidence in Britain's scientific and agricultural institutions that was shaken: the image

of the idyllic English countryside, so deeply inscribed in the mythology of British imperialism, suffered a traumatic blow as well.

Among the thousands of articles and opinions that the BSE crisis elicited, two strike me as particularly generative for ecocritical inquiry. That both are from unexpected sources, European philosophers George Steiner and Jean Baudrillard,<sup>2</sup> simply illustrates the fact that ecocriticism is a matter of new disciplinary alliances and fertile cross-theorizings. In a BBC interview, Steiner suggested that instead of destroying the infected cattle far from public view (as was being done), they be “sacrificed” in huge pyres by the side of main roads and major highways, where people could experience, firsthand, what was after all an entirely man-made disaster, a result of the practice of feeding meat by-products to cattle. The hideously unnatural process that had turned herbivores not only into meat-eaters but cannibals<sup>3</sup> might be ritually—that is performatively—acknowledged by the spectacle of the burning carcasses. As Alan Bleakley puts it, Steiner’s proposal suggested that our health—our physical, psychological, and ecological health—may depend on supplementing our current notions of animal rights with an understanding—and practice—of animal *rites*.

My subject in this essay is animal representation and performance as reconceived within postmodernism and ecology. Postmodernism comes to the animal as it does to other categories that have been “backgrounded”<sup>4</sup> by, or altogether excluded from, the dominant discourses of humanism. It comes to the animal as it has previously come to the lunatic, the child, the freak, the woman, and the deviant—seeing these as contentiously oppositional categories rather than as reliably and innocently descriptive ones. Beyond that, and in a more positive vein, postmodernism comes to the animal “as a reminder of the limits of human understanding, and also of the value of working *at those limits*.”<sup>5</sup> The emerging figure of this exploration, which Steven Baker has dubbed “the postmodern animal,” is the cultural product of a post-Cartesian, ecological, and neototemistic<sup>6</sup> worldview that rejects dualist thought and oppositional taxonomies in favor of models that emphasize complexity and dynamism.

Postmodernism comes to the animal as to a figure capable of inspiring and guiding a new journey—a postmodern shamanism, if you like—across the ideological borders within which modernism has kept the human separate from its many “others.” While traditional shamans undertook their spirit travels in the company of animal “familiar,” postmodern travelers favor odd and ungainly beasts, with strange—and strangely powerful—forms. I invite one such “animal unfamiliar” along on my journey here: Emily Mayer’s *Corvus Corium* (fig. 1). This imposing yet oddly melancholic creature articulates—quite literally so—the fundamental principle of animal rites: the *interpenetration* of human and nonhuman animals. Using man-made objects—rusty pipes, an old boot, parts of a leather saddle, petrified wood—Mayer creates an organic form that both acknowledges and exceeds its cultural resources. *Corvus* encapsulates the difficult yet essential double relation (a relation also captured in the term

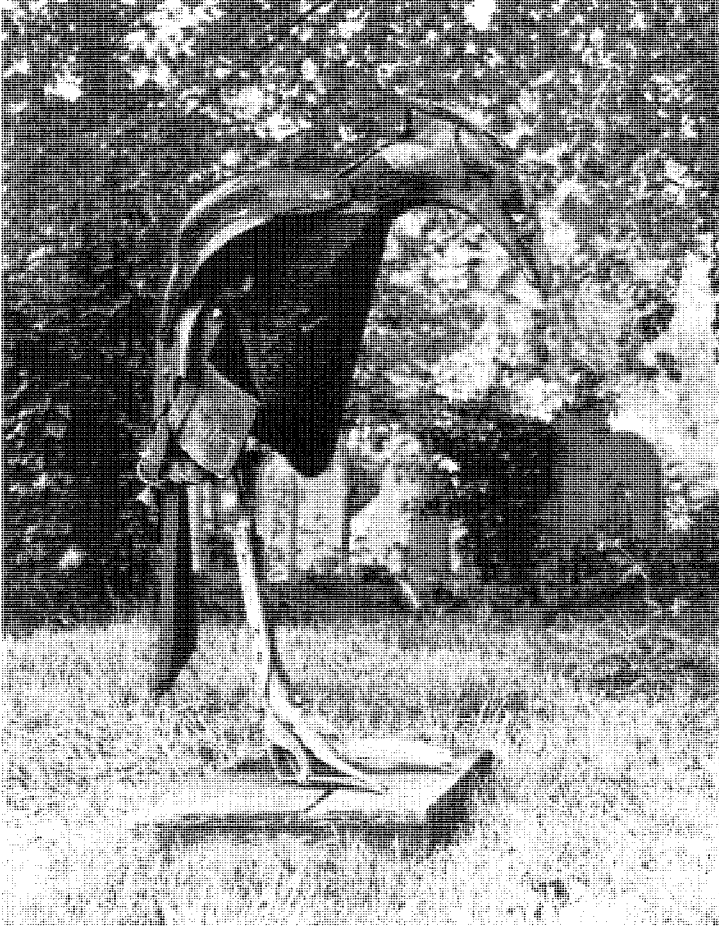


Fig. 1. Emily Mayer, *Corvus corium*, 1995, leather, steel, wood, rubber. Courtesy of the artist.

*human animal*) that is at the heart of ecopolitics and must guide the project of animal rites. Such rites would be, then, the *enactment* of the vision that the sculpture *embodies*, the vision of a reciprocal animality, binding us to “the creatures among whom we move and in whom we have our being—as they do in us.”<sup>7</sup>

From the point of view of performance, the idea of a reciprocal animality operating within and around human experience has received its most intriguing formulation in French philosopher Gilles Deleuze’s notion of “becoming-animal.” One of many transformative “de-territorializations” of fixed identity that Deleuze proposes, this “becoming” is conceived as a process that is performative and transactional without being in any way mimetic. It is not a matter (as Deleuze says in a famous example) of imitating a dog, but something much more fluid, aleatory, creative, temporary, and fleeting:

Not imitating the dog, but putting together its organism with *something other*, so that from the composite whole particles will be emitted that are canine. . . . It goes without saying that this something other can vary a great deal and can be more or less tied to the animal in question: it can be the animal’s natural diet (the earth and the worm), it can be its outer relations with other animals (one becomes a dog in the midst of cats, or a monkey with a horse), it can be a ma-

chine or a prosthesis that the human straps about the animal (a muzzle, reins, etc.), it can be something that really has nothing to do with the animal in question.

This Deleuzian becoming-animal offers a framework for theorizing animal rites, beginning with Churchill's bizarre animal act, where the divisions among the animals themselves, as well as between animals and humans, require something that goes beyond a traditional dialectics of "self" and "other."<sup>8</sup> By virtue of its emphasis on change and dynamics, Deleuze's model of becoming-animal also goes beyond the important psychoanalytical recognition that in all human-animal encounters, invariably, "deep identifications and violent denegations are acted out."<sup>9</sup> Using terms like "surfaces," "molecular swarms," "folds," and "convections" (borrowed from "the idioms of chemistry, of Lucretian philosophy, of biology, and Leibnizian monadology"),<sup>10</sup> this model for performing the encounter with alterity suggests a rethinking of encounter itself, as an event involving not whole entities but rather *facets* or *zones* of various identities. The bizarre divisions and unlikely alliances of *Far Away* are an apt image for this notion of an encounter that is simultaneously fragmenting and conjoining, simultaneously creating and destroying unities, simultaneously producing continuity and separation.

The notion of "animal rites," of a new form of ritual performance that would engage with, diagnose, and heal the historically complex relationship between humans and other animals would be one answer to the question posed in a recent special issue of *Performance Research*: "What might it mean to practice, think and write theatre beyond the human?"<sup>11</sup> Animals are a conduit into those "excluded sites" from which, according to the emergent discourse of posthumanism, the definition of humanness is carved.<sup>12</sup> But animals, surprisingly, have not been the main focus of recent explorations beyond the borders of the human: machines have. That exemplary figure of posthumanism, the cyborg, seems a little more kin to us than do the living creatures with whom we share both a long history and an inconveniently essentializing biology. Perhaps it is not so surprising, after all, that the cyborg is preferred over the animal. Unlike the animal, whom popular misreadings of evolutionary theory have coded as hopelessly atavistic, the human-machine hybrid is cheerfully forward-looking: "The cyborg has no origin story in the Western sense. . . . [It] would not recognize the Garden of Eden; it is not made of mud and cannot dream of returning to dust."<sup>13</sup> Unfettered by originary nostalgias, the human-machine offers new fields of play for identity, new liberations from old discursive formations. The animal, on the other hand, tiresomely reminds us of a nature that we have quite lost the taste for.

When, how, and why we came by our current aversion to nature have been subjects of foundational interest to contemporary ecology, generating numerous eco-etiologicals that function as lightning rods for the inherently complex and controversial nature of the issue.<sup>14</sup> From a performance studies perspective, perhaps the most provocative such formulation is the ironic

one offered a century ago in J. K. Huysmans's novel *À rebours*. Huysmans's hero holds the following proto-Baudrillardian view of our alienation from nature:

Nature, he used to say, has had her day; she has finally and utterly exhausted the patience of sensitive observers by the revolting uniformity of her landscapes and skylines. After all, what platitudinous limitations she imposes, like a tradesman specializing in a single line of business; what petty-minded restrictions, like a shopkeeper stocking one article to the exclusion of all others; what a monotonous store of meadows and trees, what a commonplace display of mountains and seas!

In fact, there is not a single one of her inventions, deemed so subtle and sublime, that human ingenuity cannot manufacture; no moonlit Forest of Fontainebleau that cannot be reproduced by stage scenery under floodlighting; no cascade that cannot be imitated to perfection by hydraulic engineering; no rock that papier-mâché cannot counterfeit; no flower that carefully chosen taffeta and delicately colored paper cannot match!<sup>15</sup>

According to this ironic formulation, the roots of our ecological crisis lie in mimesis, particularly the literalistic mimesis upon which the modern theater's most successful aesthetic—realism—rests. As technologies of artificial replication and reproduction generate ever more seductive and spectacular sound- and color-saturated versions of reality, nature itself recedes into a drab, inexpressive, and uninteresting silence.

Ironic though it may be in Huysman's original, the idea of ecological malaise as a pathology of mimesis sustains a model of ecoperformance as revelation, exposure, and disclosure. The impulse of this model is to pull back the curtain of artifice behind which nature has been shrouded, to break the "vast, eerie silence which surrounds our garrulous human subjectivity."<sup>16</sup> Rachel Rosenthal's 1984 performance piece *The Others* is an ambitious example of this model of ecoperformance; much about it, not least the fact that it includes forty-two animals, would seem to qualify it as a promising (and rare) example of animal rites. Before turning to it, however, I want to invoke another perspective on animals, one that vastly complicates the powerful fantasy of an art that would "speak for" nature, that would give voice to the suffering of animals.

Jean Baudrillard reacted to the BSE crisis with a trope even more surprising than Steiner's: he spoke of *revenge*. Calling the disease "an act of terrorism through the virus," he suggested that the cows were reacting to a history of abuse, to having been "exploited, dismantled, and damaged." This shocking idea—so like Churchill's shocking characterization of animals in *Far Away*—took one long step beyond Baudrillard's earlier discussion of the discursive role of animals in modernism. The exclusive ascription of reason to human beings, Baudrillard had previously argued, was bought at the cost of an active dehumanization of the animal: "ani-



mals were demoted to the status of inhumanity as reason and humanism progressed."<sup>17</sup> Characterizing modernity as a betrayal of "the divine and sacred nobility" that all previous ages conferred on animals, Baudrillard had (in one of his most original and important moves) singled out animals as the only category of "other" that modernity has not succeeded in rendering discursive. The fundamental fact about animals, says Baudrillard, the fact that finally accounts for our boundless cruelty toward them, is that *they do not speak*. All other "others" have capitulated to the discursive imperative of modernity:

The mad, once mute, today are heard by everyone; one has found the grid on which to collect their once absurd and indecipherable messages. Children speak, to the adult universe they are no longer those simultaneously strange and insignificant beings—children signify, they have become significant—not through some sort of liberation of their speech, but because adult reason has given itself the most subtle means to avert the threat of their silence. The primitives also are heard, one seeks them out, one listens to them, they are no longer beasts.<sup>18</sup>

For ecoperformance, Baudrillard's crucial insight is that the silence of the animals dooms them to a paradoxically vociferous fate: since they will not speak, they are ceaselessly spoken, cast into a variety of discursive registers, endlessly troped. While rationalism turned them into "beasts of burden," and "beasts of consumption," humanism followed up by making them also "beasts of somatization," forced to carry emotional and psychological identities wholly invented by—and projected onto them by—people. As literary symbols and metaphors, as pets, as performers, as signifiers of the wild, as purveyors of wisdom, in fables, in fairy tales, in nature films, in zoos, in circuses, at fairs, rodeos, fox hunts, dog shows—the animals are forced to perform *us*, to ceaselessly serenade us with our own fantasies.<sup>19</sup> "I wanna walk like you, talk like you . . ."

In the face of such discursive and ideological closure, how might an ecoperformative project of animal rites proceed? Petroleum, Brecht famously observed, "resists the five-act form," claiming that "today's catastrophes" called for new dramatic structures.<sup>20</sup> The catastrophe this time is not economic but ecological, and the formal challenge is not merely one of replacing linear forms with cyclical ones, but of finding forms that might help to reconfigure the current relation between the human and the non-human. Rosenthal's performance piece *The Others* and Churchill's *Far Away* do this in different ways, the former theorizing its project amply and explicitly, the latter employing a modernist minimalism to decidedly post-modern effect. Both share a commitment to articulating the relations among animals, both human and others, in all its difficulty, necessity, horror, and beauty. Like Mayer's *Corvus*, which literally articulates its animal form out of man-made objects, the animal rites of Churchill and Rosenthal variously evoke the mutual implication of human and nonhuman animals,

and characterize their relation as a matter of deep structure, delicate linkages, and complicated connections.

Although *The Others* and *Far Away* were published within a year of each other, they are not contemporaneous works. *The Others* was created and performed in the early 1980s. It predates *Far Away* by almost two decades, a period of time during which the discourse on animals has grown well beyond the passionate didacticism of the early animal rights movement and, like ecology as a whole, gained in theoretical sophistication through increasing dialogues with philosophy, politics, and cultural studies. This sophistication registers, for example, in the ironic (if not hilarious) horrors described in *Far Away*: “[Deer] burst out of parks and storm down from mountains and terrorize shopping malls . . . the fawns get under the feet of shoppers and send them crashing down escalators, the young bucks charge the plate glass windows” (39–40). The self-conscious unsentimentality toward animals in the world of the play is directly lampooned as a side effect of a pathology of representation now so widely recognized as to have its own name: *Disneyfication*.

*Harper.* Take deer.

*Todd.* You mean sweet little bambis?

*Harper.* You mean that ironically?

*Todd.* I mean it sarcastically. . . . I know to hate deer. (39–40)

Todd’s reference to that most iconic and paradigmatic of Disney’s neotenized animals, Bambi, marks the self-conscious distance between this play and the anthropomorphic and infantilizing mass-cultural discourse on animals (“just like us, only cuter”). Churchill’s strategy of animal representation in *Far Away* proceeds from the recognition that the trivializing of the animal in contemporary culture may be harder to combat than overt hatred would be. The play rigorously desentimentalizes animals, even at the risk of feeding the human sense of distance and disregard that has brought so many animals to the brink of extinction.

The risks of *Far Away* become clearer in comparison with the thoroughly unironic, earnest, proanimal discourse of *The Others*. The publication of this piece almost twenty years after it was created attests to the prophetic nature of Rachel Rosenthal’s performance art, which consistently tackled issues of ecology long before they were taken up in the other arts.<sup>21</sup> Like many of Rosenthal’s works, *The Others* is a lesson on its subject matter as well as a powerfully expressive and moving performance. The piece illustrates both the considerable reach as well as the instructive limitations of the model of ecoperformance as an “un-muting” of the suppressed nonhuman; indeed it may be that *The Others* is best read as a metacritical inquiry into the possibility and problematics of animal rites: the sheer scope of the piece points to an experimental “trying out” of various strategies. In formal terms as well as in substance and subject, *The Others* is encyclopedic. Every medium and every channel of performance, every element of the theatrical apparatus is pressed into service to



Fig. 2. Rachel Rosenthal, *The Others*. Photo by Basia Kenton.

deliver a mountain of information and an ocean of feeling on the subject of animals. Using dialogue, monologue, song, music, dance, movement, slides, voice-overs, video, physical movement, stage architecture, technological devices and—yes—forty-two live animals, Rosenthal embarks upon an epic missionary performance on behalf of animals.<sup>22</sup> The range of discourses she manages to incorporate makes the work a solid introduction to the major tenets of the animal rights movement.<sup>23</sup>

Early in her piece Rosenthal invokes Descartes, identifying (as most ecologists do) his notorious denigration of animals as one source of present horrors. Cartesian rationalism is, of course, a standard villain of ecological thought, as are its medieval and Renaissance precursors. The locus classicus of the religious betrayal of the natural world is the Genesis story of man's "dominion" over the animals (Rosenthal quotes Milan Kundera's famous remark that "of course Genesis was written by a man, not a horse").<sup>24</sup> The tradition of Christian exegesis further supported this betrayal, as in this often-cited lesson of St. Augustine's: "Christ himself shows that to refrain from the killing of animals and the destroying of plants is the height of superstition, for judging that there are no common rights between us and the beasts and trees, he sent devils into the herd of swine and with a curse withered the three on which he found no fruit."<sup>25</sup> The Renaissance achieved a more systematic debasement of animals by



Fig. 3. Rachel Rosenthal, *The Others*. Photo by Basia Kenton.

means of conceptual hierarchies like the *scala naturae* and the Great Chain of Being, as revealed, for example, in the derogatory animal imagery of Shakespeare's plays.<sup>26</sup> All these discourses and many others lie behind the reality that Rosenthal presents, the horrifying images of animals being tortured in the name of science and consumerism, the appalling statistics of the slaughter of animals for meat, for fur, even for entertainment (fig. 2).

As the screen behind her relentlessly presents this terrible "data," Rosenthal creates action-image sequences by bringing the factual material into relation with highly expressive performance, including dance, chanting, screaming, and violent physical movement and struggle. This is one way that she actively destabilizes the simple project of "giving voice" to "the others." Here is one of the several speeches that contain the seeds of that initial project:

I scream for the broken spirit. I scream for isolation unto madness. I scream for the paw caught in the jaw that only death can loosen. I scream for the jail barely larger than the body. I scream for the hissing skin under the brand, I scream for the eye that burns but cannot close. (95)

During this speech, a complex stage image develops around Rosenthal (fig. 3) and comments on her utterance: she speaks from within the or-

chestra pit, which is rigged to move up and down, so that she seems to be sinking as she speaks. She has been pushed into the pit and is forcibly kept there by three masked men who hold her down and make bland Cartesian proclamations: “1. Only man is rational. 2. Only man possesses language,” and so on. The whole action is watched by a group of people accompanied by animals. Behind all of them—Rosenthal, the masked men, the moving orchestra pit, the animals, their companions—loom the projected images of lab animals in steel contraptions, rabbits in traps, cattle being branded, and so on. This action sequence is followed by others, equally complex, creating a rigorous scenic discourse in which the logic of animal rights is contextualized within and countered by memories of sadism, justifications for cruelty, and elaborate renditions of the “all too human” excuses for inhumanity: “I’m not a sadist for chrissakes, I’m not a bad person! I’ve got mouths to feed. It’s nature! They’re animals, don’t you see?” (99).

*Don’t you see?* That is the fundamental logic of *The Others*: by whatever means possible, the piece concerns itself “with seeing that which it is not permitted to see, and with getting others to see it.”<sup>27</sup> *The Others* locates its “animal rites” project on the slippery ground between speaking for animals and recognizing the extent to which they have always been misspoken:

I was content to let sleeping dogs (toot) lie. But along came this cocksman (toot). He was as wolf (toot) in sheep’s (toot) clothing. He seemed real looney (toot) about me, and for a while we were love-birds (toot) and had a whale (toot) of a time. He was a tiger (toot). Woke up my pussy (toot), and although he looked like a fat pig (toot), I lost weight and no longer felt like an old cow (toot). I was proud as a peacock (toot) and looked so foxy (toot). (96)

In spite of its encyclopedic form and authoritative tone, *The Others* is ultimately an experiment, an attempt to discover a performance protocol that is complicit neither with the nature-aversive hypermimeticism of modern culture nor with the humanist assumptions that have brought it to the ecological brink. For all her commitment and desire, Rosenthal does not—cannot—speak for the animals. In attempting to do so, however, she gives powerful and honest voice to *their* “others,” the human animals who so resent them, and the reasons for that resentment:

How dare they be beyond morality? . . . Beyond theology? . . . Beyond the arduous apprenticeship of good and bad? Beyond the fretful reconciliation of opposites? What, no history? Who gave them permission to be whole? We see in them who we once were. And we deny them, like immigrants who reject the language of their origin. We dress them in people’s clothes and force them to imitate people’s ways so that, by this caricature, we may laugh at them and better measure the distance that, we hope, separates us from them. (106)

Animals are the victims, then, of an enforced dualistic ideology of distance and separation, in which “animal” has become the definitional opposite of “human,” instead of its larger context. As such, animals have been forced to play a part in the construction of those biologisms and racisms that have naturalized and justified ethnic cleansing from Auschwitz to Bosnia and beyond.<sup>28</sup>

From its title onward, *Far Away* challenges the ideology of distance by interrupting the main ideological and rhetorical protocols of animal representation. Churchill’s inclusion of animals *alongside* (rather than *instead of*) human beings in the making of apocalypse is unprecedented. It is a departure from the two major traditions of literary “animalizing,” each of which is thoroughly rooted in an anthropocentric mimesis. Churchill’s animal representation resembles neither the anthropomorphism of animal fables and Disney films nor the theriomorphism of Orwell’s *Animal Farm*, Kafka’s *Metamorphosis*, or Ionesco’s *Rhinoceros*. Churchill’s animals are not pawns in a game of human symbolization, nor are they made to stand for an undifferentiated realm of wildness, a definitional opposite to the human. Side by side instead of subordinated to human beings, the animals of *Far Away* invite us to imaginatively inhabit a world of animal agency, and thereby to explore the politics of a new mixed relation—of proximity to yet autonomy from—human beings. Their apparent presence as autonomous agents in the world of the play,<sup>29</sup> and, further, the striking *politicization* of their agency locates *Far Away* at a decisive distance from the exclusively human world given by modernism.

From the perspective of Baudrillard’s insight that in modernism “animals must be made to say that they are not animals,”<sup>30</sup> the animals of *Far Away* are remarkably self-nominating. They may do unusual things, but they do these things *as animals*, not as human stand-ins. Nor, like most other nonmetaphorized animals (such as the animals in circuses, zoos, bullfights, rodeos), is their behavior intended primarily to prove something flattering about human beings.<sup>31</sup> Rather, they act *along with yet independently of*, human beings. It is this dual relation—a relation of both continuity and separation that constitutes Churchill’s major insight and contribution to an ecologically informed, postmodern, and postnational politics. This politics, articulated through the play’s final act—its “animal act,” as it were—explains and illuminates the mysterious events of the earlier acts, giving them a significance different from the absurdist one that their content might otherwise suggest.

The first two acts of *Far Away* present an insidious dystopia, a Kafkaesque world of a deep structural brutality shrouded in performances of normalcy. Act 1 begins as an innocent conversation, in which a woman seems to want to reassure her young niece, Joan, who is staying with her and having trouble sleeping. “It’s the strange bed,” she suggests. The girl demurs, and begins to question the older woman about certain inexplicable things she has witnessed from her bedroom window. As the Aunt offers and then retracts a series of increasingly disturbing explanations, a frightening reality emerges. Gradually, our perception of the scene



Fig. 4. Emily Mayer, *Rathat*, 2001. Courtesy of the artist.

changes from cozy cottage to hostile outpost where truckloads of people arrive secretly, are imprisoned, beaten, and then carted off to an uncertain fate.

In the next act, an older Joan is at work as a hatmaker, as innocuous a profession as can be imagined. But as Joan converses with her coworker Todd, it slowly emerges that the hats they are making—each unique, hand-made, and wildly elaborate—are intended for a terrible purpose: to be worn by prisoners on a kind of “death parade” whose nature and meaning remains obscure. Some hats, we learn, are singled out as especially artistic and honored by being preserved in a museum. The others, shockingly, are “burned with the bodies.” Most shocking of all is the characters’ conversation: they worry and complain about their working conditions, showing no concern for the barbarity to which they are contributing.

In the early critical reaction to *Far Away*, Kafka was immediately invoked, as were Pinter and Hitchcock. The sense of mystery and menace that pervades the play’s first two acts suggests an affinity with midcentury modernist dramas of alienation, stories of the “little man” lost in the vast machinery of the corrupt state. The politics of that drama, because of their exclusive focus on the individual, are largely irrelevant to ecoperformance. By following the “absurdist” first two acts of her play with an “animal act,” in which animal equality and agency is imaginatively realized and taken for granted, leaving the human protagonists bewildered and powerless, Churchill reveals the complicity of those dramas of alienation in the dualistic, distanced, and ecologically disastrous ideologies of modernism.

The animal act of *Far Away* is a multiplicitous and potential-filled *event* in the Deleuzian sense. It is a whole-scale imaginative “becoming-animal” that unleashes untold opportunities for interface and exchange

with multiple alterities. By drawing the spectator or reader into a world where animals are no longer mute subordinates, the play raises the fundamental question of animal rites: "How might one interact with another whose difference is recognized as an active event, rather than a failure of plenitude?"<sup>32</sup> The first answer to that question, *Far Away* suggests, is to abrogate the sentimentalities that mask our disdain for animals. Instead of "fluffy little darling waterbirds," mallards who "commit rape" (38–39). Or, to return to the visionary animal art of Emily Mayer: instead of Mickey Mouse ears, a "rat hat" (fig. 4). On the far side<sup>33</sup> of this vision of animality as a continuum that both includes and exceeds human identity, lies a posthumanist politics of mutuality and respect. There too, far away though it may be, lie animal rites worthy of human performance.

## NOTES

Chapter epigraphs are from Sy Montgomery, *Walking with the Great Apes: Jane Goodall, Diane Fossey, Birute Galdikas* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1991), 267, and Steven Baker, *Picturing the Beast: Animals, Identity, and Representation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), 174.

1. Caryl Churchill, *Far Away* (New York: Theater Communication Group, 2000), 35. All subsequent citations are given in parentheses.

2. Quoted in Alan Bleakley, *The Animalizing Imagination* (London: Macmillan, 2000). Bleakley cites Steiner's BBC interview on page 11 and Baudrillard's *Liberation* article, "The Revenge of the Cows," on page 10.

3. It is believed that the cattle's immune systems were weakened because they were fed animal protein. Bleakley quotes a newspaper article that asked: "Why did we start feeding animals to animals?" adding: "more specifically, why did we feed animal protein to herbivores?" 4.

4. In her important contextualization of ecology within the philosophical tradition of dualism, Val Plumwood introduces and defines this term as follows: "Backgrounding is a complex feature which results from irresolvable conflicts that the relation of domination creates for the master, for he attempts both to make use of the other, organizing, relying on and benefiting from the other's services, and to deny the dependency which this creates." *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (London: Routledge, 1993), 48.

5. Steve Baker, *The Postmodern Animal* (London: Reaktion, 2000), 16.

6. "The sense of interconnectedness between nature and culture, between human and animal, social and religious institutions, which Victorian anthropology saw as a fascinating error of primitive man, a view that Lévi-Strauss in turn dismissed as an erroneous misreading of primitive protoscience, has been rehabilitated in Western scholarly thought as an accurate reflection of existential reality: in this view humankind is part of nature and everything in the universe is connected with everything else, or so the physicists assure us. Western culture, it seems, is now in a phase that might be called neototemistic." Roy Willis, ed., *Signifying Animals* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990), introduction, 6.

7. Wendy Wheeler, *A New Modernity? Change in Science, Literature, and Politics* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1999), 5.

8. For an application of the concept of "becoming-animal" to modern drama, see Una Chaudhuri, "'AWK!': Extremity, Animality, and the Aesthetic of Awkward-



ness in Tennessee Williams's *The Gnadiges Fraulein*," in *Undiscovered Country: The Late Plays of Tennessee Williams*, ed. Philip Kolin (New York: Peter Lang, 2002).

9. Jennifer Ham and Matthew Senior, eds., *Animal Acts: Configuring the Human in Western History* (London: Routledge, 1997), introduction, 2.

10. Tom Conley, "Pantagruel-Animal," in Ham and Senior, *Animal Acts*, 52.

11. Alan Read, "Editorial: On Animals," in *Performance Research* 5, no. 2 (2000): iii.

12. "The construction of the human is a differential operation that produces the more and less 'human,' the inhuman, the humanly unthinkable. These excluded sites come to bound the 'human' as its constituted outside, and to haunt those boundaries as the persistent possibility of their disruption and rearticulation." Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 8.

13. Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," *Socialist Review* 80 (1985): 68.

14. One of the best-known and most controversial of these is Lynn White, Jr.'s "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," in *Science*, March 10, 1967, 1203–7.

15. Joris-Karl Huysmans, *Against Nature*, trans. Margaret Maulden (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

16. Christopher Mannes, "Nature and Silence," in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, ed. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 16.

17. Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 133.

18. Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 129–41.

19. Cultural studies writings on animals include Susan Davis, *Spectacular Nature: Corporate Culture and Sea World* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997); Elizabeth A. Lawrence, "Rodeo Horses: The Wild and the Tame," in *Signifying Animals*, ed. Roy Willis (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990), 222–35; Gary Marvin, "Natural Instincts and Cultural Passions: Transformations and Performances in Foxhunting," *Performance Research* 5, no. 2 (2000): 108–15; Margaret J. King, "The Audience in the Wilderness: The Disney Nature Films," *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 24 (Summer 1996), 60–68; Baker, *Picturing the Beast*.

20. Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, ed. and trans. John Willett (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 30.

21. See Rachel Rosenthal, *Rachel's Brain and Other Storms: The Performance Scripts of Rachel Rosenthal*, with introduction and commentaries by Una Chaudhuri (London: Continuum, 2001).

22. Part of the mission was specific, immediate, and successful: many of the animals featured in the performances were taken from local shelters and were put up for adoption to the audiences of the shows. All were adopted.

23. A prefatory note to the published script recognizes, as the major sources of the play's data, two classics of the animal rights movement, Peter Singer's *Animal Liberation* (New York: New York Review/Random House, 1975), and Tom Regan's *The Case for Animal Rights* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1983).

24. Rachel Rosenthal, *The Others*, in *Performance Research* 5, no. 2 (2000): 94. Subsequent citations are given in the text.

25. Quoted in John Passmore, *Man's Responsibility for Nature* (London: Duckworth, 1971).

26. Most of the more than four thousand allusions to animals in Shakespeare's

plays are used to express "sensuality, stupidity, or cruelty." Audrey E. Yoder, *Animal Analogy in Shakespeare's Character Portrayal* (reprint, New York: AMS, 1947), 62.

27. Baker, *Picturing the Beast*, 218.

28. There is now a long tradition of thought linking animal abuse with the Holocaust. Among the most quoted formulations are Theodor Adorno's "Auschwitz begins wherever someone looks at a slaughterhouse and thinks: they're only animals," and Isaac Bashevis Singer's chilling phrase "eternal Treblinka" ("In relation to animals, all people are Nazis; for the animals it is an eternal Treblinka." "The Letter Writer" in *Collected Stories: "Gimple the Fool" to "The Letter Writer"* [New York: Library of America, 2004], 750. See also David Clark, "The Last Kantian in Nazi Germany: Dwelling with Animals after Levinas," in Ham and Senior, *Animal Acts*, 165–98.

29. The mysterious form of the play leaves open the possibility that the description of the animals' actions is a fantasy on the part of the human speakers, or a code, or some other counterfactual discourse.

30. Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 129.

31. For an illuminating account of how an animal act serves to bolster egoistic cultural accounts of human beings, see Lawrence, "Rodeo Horses."

32. David Williams, "The Right Horse, the Animal Eye—Bartabas and Theatre Zingaro," *Performance Research* 5, no. 2 (2000): 29.

33. The pun is intended. Cartoonist Gary Larson's *Far Side* commentaries on our relationship to animals are close in spirit to Churchill's vision in *Far Away*. See Charles D. Minahen, "Humanimals and Antihumans in Gary Larson's Gallery of the Absurd," in Ham and Senior, *Animal Acts*, 231–51.

## Mediatized Cultures

Raymond Williams, in “Drama in a Dramatised Society,” his oft-cited inaugural lecture at Cambridge University in 1974, spoke of the pervasive ways in which the televised experience of what he called “drama” was then being “built into the rhythms of everyday life.”<sup>1</sup> On the mediated construction of quotidian experience, he proved prophetic. The word *media*, once properly used as the plural of *medium*, has since morphed, not only into a singular noun itself, as in “the media spins the news,” but also into a verb: “to mediatize” is to dramatize people and events by passing them through the hall of hyperbolic mirrors that is modern mass communication in the networked world. Williams rather quaintly described this process of mediatization as a kind of theatrical casting or miscasting on a revolutionary and world-historic scale, whereby electronically designated substitutes stand in for pretty much everybody else: “On what is called the public stage, or in the public eye, improbable but plausible figures continually appear to represent us.”<sup>2</sup>

Such representations have been of principal interest to scholars in the fields of cultural studies and critical theory, of which media studies has emerged as an increasingly significant part. Already in the pretelevision world of radio and film, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno had influentially identified and analyzed the power of what they called “the culture industry” to substitute representations for reality through the false harmonization of the particular and the general: “In the culture industry the individual is an illusion not merely because of the standardization of the means of production. He is tolerated only so long as his complete identification with the generality is unquestioned.”<sup>3</sup> For them the culture industry under late capitalism was itself a culture. Responding to this emerging phenomenon in *Keywords* (1976; rev. ed. 1983) and cautioning that *culture* is one the “two or three most complicated words in the English language,” Williams strove to relate the material productions of culture (institutional continuities of physical practices such as manufacture) to its signifying or symbolic systems (such as literature and media).<sup>4</sup> But he was writing at a time when broadcast television was unchallenged as the premiere medium. Then it still seemed to him remarkable, however increasingly commonplace, “to watch simulated action, of several recurrent kinds, not

just occasionally but regularly, for longer than eating and for up to half as long as work or sleep."<sup>5</sup>

That was then.

Now culture itself has been mediatized to the point at which the most frequently quoted authorities see relations between material productions and signifying systems collapsing into a *Matrix*-like web of (dis)simulation. In this brave new world of virtual reality led by computer-generated simulations and robotic surrogates, everyone is implicated as spectator and participant simultaneously, awash in the streams of electronic data that pool into ever-deepening truth-effects. Jean Baudrillard, for example, argued in *Simulations* (1975) that postmodern simulation disguises the fact that originals no longer exist, a condition he termed "hyperreality."<sup>6</sup> Donna Haraway in "A Manifesto for Cyborgs" (1985) opined that new technologies, including mediated ones, change the previously understood conditions of what it means to be human: the word *cyborg* is a contraction of "cybernetic organism"; in the brave new worlds it describes, traditional relationships such as those between biology and gender, for example, alter with each innovation of high-tech prostheses, producing the cyborg as "a condensed image of both imagination and material reality."<sup>7</sup> More recently, tracking the rise of what he calls "the performance paradigm" in postindustrial economies, Jon McKenzie, in *Perform or Else* (2001), has mapped a new terrain of technological organization in which the historic notion of "performative presence" has been transformed by "hypermediation of social production via computer and information networks."<sup>8</sup>

In theater and performance studies, these questions have particularly manifested themselves in an extended but worthwhile debate over the ontological status of "liveness." Ontology concerns itself with the nature and relations of being; it is the philosophy of what actually is. In *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (1993), Peggy Phelan highlights what she takes to be the nonreproducibility of live performances, an ontological claim that gives liveness priority over mediated recordings of all kinds in resisting commodification and capitalist appropriation. For Phelan, the liveness of performance is predicated on the fact of its disappearance: the time of performance is always now; it remains behind only in the spectator's memory of it. She writes: "Performance's only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance."<sup>9</sup> Objecting to Phelan's ontology of performance in *Liveness* (1999), Philip Auslander sees ever-more permeable boundaries between the live and the mediated (as witnessed in such phenomena as lip-synching, for instance): "The progressive diminution of previous distinctions between the live and the mediatized, in which live events are becoming more and more like mediatized ones, raises for me the question of whether there really are clear-cut ontological distinctions between live forms and mediatized ones."<sup>10</sup> For Auslander, the opposite of the live is not the dead, but the mediatized; yet

Phelan's insistence on the ontological security of the opposition represents for him a kind of nostalgic revisionism: before the introduction of prerecorded radio broadcasts, there was no need for a separate conceptual category of "live performance." Unable to resist commodification, Auslander concludes, performance succumbs to mediatization or vice-versa; it hardly matters which comes first, the culture or the industry. Reviewing the debate between Phelan and Auslander over liveness, Matthew Causey sees both positions as problematic: "Phelan disregards any effect of technology on performance and draws a nonnegotiable, essentialist border between the two media. Auslander's material theory and legalistic argument overlook the most material aspect of the live, namely death."<sup>11</sup> Yet even in the apparently neutral diction of Causey's intervention, "performance" has become a medium rather than an event or a behavior.

Philip Auslander leads off this section with "Live from Cyberspace; or, I Was Sitting at My Computer This Guy Appeared He Thought I Was a Bot." His title foregrounds what he sees as an ontological shift. Tracing the earliest uses of the word *live* in reference to performance, he is led to the *BBC Yearbook* of 1934, which distinguishes between live and prerecorded broadcasts. Because the origin of the sound heard on radio cannot be seen by those listening to it, Auslander reasons, identifying the status of the source became necessary for the first time in the history of performance. This question, which emerged as a question only after advances in analog recording, gains a new and different urgency with the advent of digital technologies. These are exemplified in Auslander's thinking by "chatterbots," speaking machines "programmed to recognize words and word patterns and to respond with statements that make sense in the context of what is said to them, though some are capable of initiating conversations." Chatterbots put into play, not the ontological status of the performance (live or recorded?), but rather that of the performer (human or bot?). Auslander provocatively claims that such speaking (and thinking?) machines "perform live" even though they are not "alive," at least not yet, if only because they still cannot properly be said to die.

Toward the end of his essay, Auslander quotes one of most frequently cited aphorisms of Herbert Blau, which hails death as the ontological guarantor of the liveness of performance: "[The actor] is right there dying in front of your eyes."<sup>12</sup> Responding explicitly to Auslander here in "Virtually Yours: Presence, Liveness, Lessness," Blau elaborates on his earlier, hauntingly Beckettian evocation of the peculiar kind of human presence that mortality best affirms. He begins with the uncanny phenomenon of stage lights "ghosting" unbidden in the early versions of computerized lighting controls. This image becomes a metaphor or even an allegory of mediatization, but the fundamental terms of the comparison are reversed, for Blau identifies the stubbornly residual ghost light with the human body itself. The staged body's "lessness," accentuated by the increasing marginality of the "carnal theater" in comparison with more overtly mediatized spectacles, backhandedly confirms the body's presence by dramatizing the inexorability of its disappearance. The theater mediatizes the body too, and it

has always done so, making visible to the public eye those otherwise invisible figures, "improbable but plausible," which "continually appear to represent us." They remind Blau, as they reminded Williams, that even in the leading edges of mediatization, "the dematerialized figures are unthinkable without the bodily presence presumably vanished, nothing occurring in cyberspace that isn't contingent on that which, seemingly, it made obsolete." As in *Waiting for Godot*, something always has to remain behind to remind us of what's gone missing.

Finally, in nearly the same spectral place where Herbert Blau locates corporeal "lessness," Sue-Ellen Case finds something more. Pushing off from Kate Bornstein's performance piece *Virtually Yours*, which demonstrates the equivocal but beguiling space for play opened up by virtual identities, and moving on to *waitingforgodot.com*, a cyber performance space, she probes a new medium for the staging of identities. She begins her quest among the undead: "vampires" suggest but do not exhaust the possibilities she discovers and predicts, and she finds the most vivacious conditions of new electronic life flourishing among the recently drained bodies of cybernetic "avatars." An avatar is traditionally defined as the embodiment of an idea in a person. In cyber-usage, an avatar is an image on the screen that seems to represent the user. Case explains that "users may imagine their own participation within cybersocieties in the form of these avatars" because through them they can enter "a theatre of masks without actors." Unlike actors in the carnal theater, their bodies are no longer their medium, and no one yet knows for sure who or what can reliably slip through the cracks in corporate cyberspace. Wary of the vested interests slithering through the same fissures, however, Case closes with a haunting echo of Donna Haraway's as yet unanswered but still urgent question: "What kind of politics could embrace partial, contradictory permanently unclosed constructions of personal and collective selves and still be . . . effective?"<sup>13</sup> Whatever politics they might yet prove to be, they cannot be effective if users sit passively while unbidden "figures" gather to represent them in the public eye or on the public stage.

J.R.R.

## NOTES

1. Raymond Williams, "Drama in a Dramatised Society," in *Raymond Williams on Television*, ed. Alan O'Connor (New York: Routledge, 1989), 4.

2. Williams, "Drama in a Dramatised Society," 9.

3. Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (New York: Continuum, 1997), 154.

4. Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 87–93.

5. Williams, "Drama in a Dramatised Society," 4.

6. Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations*, trans. Paul Foss, Paul Patton, and Philip Beitchman (1975; New York: Semiotext(e), 1983), 1–4.

7. Donna Haraway, "A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s" (1985), in *Feminism/Postmodernism*, ed. Linda Nicholson (New York: Routledge, 1990), 191.

8. Jon McKenzie, *Perform or Else: From Discipline to Performance* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 42.

9. Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 146.

10. Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 7.

11. Matthew Causey, "Media and Performance," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Theatre and Performance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 2:825.

12. Herbert Blau, *Blooded Thought: Occasions of Theatre* (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1982), 134.

13. Haraway, "A Manifesto for Cyborgs," 199.

# Live from Cyberspace, or, I Was Sitting at My Computer This Guy Appeared He Thought I Was a Bot

*Philip Auslander*

The entry for the word *live* in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (second edition) reads: “Of a performance, heard or watched at the time of its occurrence, as distinguished from one recorded on film, tape, etc.” This is a definition that reflects the necessity of defining the concept in terms of its opposite. The earliest examples of the use of the word *live* in reference to performance cited in the *OED* come from the mid-1930s (1934, to be exact). The need to define the term *live* in relation to an opposing concept partly explains the surprisingly late date of this initial usage: performances could be perceived as “live” only when there was a way of recording them. But, since methods of recording sound had existed since the 1890s, 1934 is substantially after the advent of recording technologies. If this word history is complete (and I assume that if the word *live* had been applied to performances in, say, the Middle Ages, the editors of the *OED* would have found the references!), it would seem that the advent of recording technologies was not enough in itself to bring about the formulation of the concept of liveness. Here, I will address the question of why that took so long to happen, then go on to examine the implications for liveness of the much more recent emergence of a particular digital technology.

The answer to the question of why the appearance of recording technologies was not enough to bring the concept of liveness into being has to do, I think, with the fact that with the first recording technology, sound recording, the distinction between live performances and recordings remained experientially unproblematic. If you put a record on your gramophone and listened to it, you knew exactly what you were doing and there was no possibility of mistaking the activity of listening to a record for that of attending a live performance. As Jacques Attali points out in *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, the earliest forms of sound recording, such as Edison’s cylinder, were intended to serve as secondary adjuncts to live performance by preserving it.<sup>1</sup> As recording technology brought the live into being, it also respected and reinforced the primacy of existing modes of performance. Live and recorded performances thus coexisted clearly as discrete, complementary experiences, necessitating no particular effort to distinguish them.

It is significant that the earliest use of the word *live* in relation to performance listed in the *OED* has to do with the distinction between live and recorded sound, but not with the gramophone. The technology necessitating this usage was radio. This first citation of the word *live* comes from the *BBC Yearbook* for 1934 and iterates the complaint “that recorded



material was too liberally used" on the radio. Here, we can glimpse the beginnings of the historical process by which recorded performances came to replace live ones, a process I discuss extensively in my book *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*.<sup>2</sup> But radio represented a challenge to the complementary relationship of live and recorded performances that went beyond its role in enabling recordings to replace live performances. Unlike the gramophone, radio does not allow you to *see* the sources of the sounds you're hearing; therefore, you can never be sure if they're live or recorded. Radio's characteristic form of sensory deprivation crucially undermined the clear-cut distinction between recorded and live sound. It would seem, then, that the concept of the live was brought into being not just when it became *possible* to think in those terms—that is, when recording technologies such as the gramophone were in place to serve as a ground against which the figure of the live could be perceived—but only when it became *urgent* to do so. The *possibility* of identifying certain performances as live came into being with the advent of recording technologies; the *need* to make that identification arose as an affective response specifically to radio, a communications technology that put the clear opposition of the live and the recorded into a state of crisis. The response to this crisis was a terminological distinction that attempted to preserve the formerly clear dichotomy between two modes of performance, the live and the recorded, a dichotomy that had been so self-evident up to that point that it did not even need to be named.

I am suggesting that the concept of the live was articulated in relation to technological change. Recording technology brought the live into being, but under conditions that permitted a clear distinction between the existing mode of performance and the new one. The development of broadcast technology, however, obscured that distinction, and thus subverted the formerly complementary relationship between live and recorded modes of performance. The word *live* was pressed into service as part of a vocabulary designed to contain this crisis by describing it and reinstating the former distinction discursively even if it could no longer be sustained experientially. As a consequence of the circumstances under which this vocabulary was instated, the distinction between the live and the recorded was reconceived as one of binary opposition rather than complementarity.

These ways of conceptualizing the live and the distinction between the live and recorded or mediatized originated in the era of analog technologies and persist to the present day; they form the basis of our current assumptions about liveness. But I will argue here that digital technologies have reopened these fundamental questions. A new technology has created a new crisis that may lead to a different understanding of liveness. To bring the digital dispensation into focus, I will concentrate on the phenomenon of Internet "chatterbots."

In digital culture, the word *bot* is a shortened form of the word *robot* and refers to computer software that can respond to input and autonomously execute commands. The most familiar type of bot is probably

the search engine—you tell it what to look for, and it goes forth into cyberspace, seeks, and finds (you hope) what you wanted. It can do this not because it has access to existing lists of websites that have already been indexed by keyword but because it is programmed to conduct searches itself. In other words, if you tell a search engine to find websites about “liveness,” say, it does not simply spit out an existing list of sites that have been indexed by that term. Rather, the bot itself actually searches the web electronically, locates sites containing that keyword, and reports back to you. To translate this function into the terms of an older technology, imagine a jukebox that contains no records itself but that can actually go out and scour the world’s record stores to bring back ones you may wish to hear in response to a specific request.

There are many types of bots besides the search engine: warbots, channelbots, spambots, cancelbots, clonebots, collidebots, floodbots, gamebots, barbots, eggdrop bots, and modbots, to name but a few. The type I’d like to discuss here is the chatterbot, sometimes called a chatbot, a software program designed to engage in conversation. The first and still best-known chatterbot is Eliza, the program that interrogates the user in the manner of a Rogerian psychotherapist, developed at MIT in 1966.

Chatterbots typically operate in text-based digital environments, in which the user types messages to the bot and the bot responds in “typed” words that appear on the computer screen. Chatterbots are based on research in natural language processing and are generally programmed to recognize words and word patterns and to respond with statements that make sense in the context of what is said to them, though some are also capable of initiating conversations. The more sophisticated the programming, the more similar to human discourse the bot’s conversation will be. Since Eliza, many other chatterbots have been created, including the well-known Julia, developed around 1990. Andrew Leonard’s description of Julia in *Bots: The Origin of New Species* gives a sense of the capabilities of chatterbots:

Dubbed “a hockey-loving ex-librarian with an attitude” by *Wired* magazine, Julia has bedazzled would-be suitors. . . . Her sense of humor is well developed. She can keep track . . . of both her own statements and the responses of the human she might be talking to. Her database of conversational statements is grouped into nodes that concentrate on specific topics, such as pets. A clever system of weighting insures that her tendency to speak about pets automatically increases or decreases depending on the answers she gets to certain questions. If the response to her question “Do you have pets?” is no, the weights on all of the sentence patterns having to do with pets are automatically lowered. She can purposefully send conversations off in new directions by randomly injecting statements such as “people don’t own cats”. . . . She even simulates human typing by including delays between the characters she types and by spelling words incorrectly.<sup>3</sup>

The chatterbot phenomenon can be inserted into a historical narrative very similar to that of recorded sound and radio. Like the first stage of sound recording, the first stage of the chatterbot was unproblematic because the new technology's status was unambiguous. Accessing Eliza on MIT's mainframe computer was much like putting a record on a gramophone, at least in the sense that there was no ambiguity about where the words came from: you had chosen to contact Eliza and knew you were talking to a machine (though there are also important ways in which chatterbots are different from recordings, which I shall discuss shortly). But just as the source of sound on the radio is ambiguous, so the source of computer conversation became ambiguous when chatterbots moved from mainframe computers onto the Internet. Although you can still choose to converse with a chatterbot, it is now possible to be engaged in conversation with one without knowing it. Chatterbots can and do participate in online chat-rooms and e-mail lists without necessarily being identified as bots. Again, this situation is analogous to the shifting status of recorded sound in the historical transition from gramophone to radio. Listening to a gramophone record was an act of volition on the part of the listener, who was fully aware of the source of the sound. As long as chatterbots were confined to mainframe computers and had to be accessed by users, they were analogous to gramophone records. But online, the source of chatterbot conversation becomes ambiguous in a way that parallels the ambiguity of sound on the radio. Radio sounds are not selected directly by the listener and it is not possible to know whether the sound you hear emanates live from the broadcast studio or is recorded. Likewise, in an Internet chat-room or on an e-mail list, you do not necessarily choose to talk with bots, and it can be impossible to know whether you are conversing with a human being or a piece of software. As in the case of radio, this ambiguity results in part from the sensory limitations of the medium. Since we can neither see nor hear the sources of online chat, chatterbots can be and are mistaken for human chatters, and vice versa. One of the questions addressed in an online document entitled "I Chat, Therefore I Am?? An Introduction to Bots on IRC [Internet Relay Chat]" is "How come people [in chat rooms] ask me if I'm a bot?" The author advises that if you type too fast, lurk in the chat room without participating actively in the conversation, or use too many automated functions in your chat responses, you may be mistaken for a bot.<sup>4</sup>

Chatterbots and other types of bot raise many issues, including questions concerning the potential of artificial intelligence research and questions of online etiquette and ethics. Here, I want only to consider the implications of the chatterbot for our understanding of live performance. The chatterbot may well be the locus at which a new crisis around the issue of liveness will crystallize, this time in relation to digital technologies. As I've already suggested, the development of the chatterbot parallels the development of sound recording and radio that precipitated the initial crisis leading to the creation of the category of the live itself. The existence of chatterbots reopens and reframes the question of liveness at a

fundamental level. The ambiguity created by chatterbots differs from that created by radio in one crucial respect. While it is true that you can't know whether sounds you hear on the radio are produced live or not, you generally can have confidence in the ultimate source of the performance you hear. That is, even if you're listening to a recording, there is usually little doubt that it is a recording of a performance by a human being. The ambiguity created by radio has to do with the ontology of the performance (live or recorded), not with the ontological status of the performer (human or nonhuman). The chatterbot forces the discussion of liveness to be re-framed as a discussion of the ontology of the performer rather than that of the performance.

So far, I have emphasized some parallels between early chatterbots and sound recordings, but the differences between chatterbots and recordings are centrally important to the renewed consideration of liveness prompted by the chatterbot phenomenon. If we return for a moment to the *OED's* definition of *live*, it becomes evident that chatterbots are live performers. "Of a performance, heard or watched at the time of its occurrence, as distinguished from one recorded on film, tape, etc." Chatterbot performances are certainly live according to this definition. It is important in this context to stress that chatterbots are not playback devices. Whereas audio and video players allow us to access performances carried out by other entities (i.e., the human beings on the recordings) at an earlier time, chatterbots are themselves performing entities that construct their performances at the same time as we witness them.

The magnitude of the challenge chatterbots pose to current conceptions of liveness becomes evident when we consider how both the ontology and the value of live performance have been construed in performance theory, which often invokes the performer's materiality and mortality to describe liveness in existential terms. In *Blooded Thought*, Herbert Blau declares dramatically, "In a very strict sense, it is the actor's mortality which is the actual subject [of any performance], for he is right there dying in front of your eyes."<sup>5</sup> Peggy Phelan echoes some of the same themes in *Mourning Sex*: "Live performance and theatre ('art with real bodies') persist despite an economy of reproduction that makes them seem illogical and certainly a poor investment. . . . it may well be that theatre and performance respond to a psychic need to rehearse for loss, and especially for death."<sup>6</sup>

Clearly, performances by bots cannot address these ideas in the same way as those by human performers. Since bots are virtual entities, they have no physical presence, no corporeality; they are not dying in front of our eyes—they are, in fact, immortal. Bots can be destroyed or taken out of service, but they do not age or die in any biological sense. They perform live, but they are not alive, at least not in the same way that organic entities are alive. Performances by bots therefore do not engage existential issues simply by virtue of the performers' presence, in the way Blau and Phelan describe human performances. It is crucial to remember, however, that Blau's and Phelan's respective formulations are directed to-

ward identifying the specificity of live performance by opposing it to performances conveyed through technologies of cultural reproduction such as film and video. The quotation from Blau comes from an essay contrasting theater and film; as the one from Phelan indicates, she is positioning live performance against an economy she sees as driven by reproduction. Both emphasize the failing organicism of live human bodies to counterpoint the way those same bodies are represented through technologies of cultural reproduction and to emphasize that basic aspect of live performance stated in the *OED* definition: live performance is *not recorded*. Bots are technological entities, but they constitute a technology of production, not reproduction. Although chatterbots are programmed and draw their conversational material from databases, their individual performances are responsive to the actions of other performers, autonomous, unpredictable, and improvisational. That is, they perform in the moment.

If, as I've already indicated, the chatterbot does not demand a new definition of live performance, it does remind us of what is basic to existing definitions. Returning to the *OED* one last time, we can see that liveness is first and foremost a temporal relationship, a relationship of simultaneity: "Of a performance, heard or watched *at the time of its occurrence*." The ability to present performances that can be watched as they occur, or, to switch to a technological vocabulary, to perform *in real time*—the heart of the concept of liveness—is an ability shared by human beings and chatterbots. The appearance of the Internet chatterbot therefore does not occasion a redefinition of liveness or a realignment of the conceptual relationship between live and recorded performances, as did the earlier development of radio. But what the chatterbot does occasion is considerably more profound: it undermines the idea that live performance is a specifically human activity; it subverts the centrality of the live, organic presence of human beings to the experience of live performance; and it casts into doubt the existential significance attributed to live performance.

## NOTES

1. Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 90–96.

2. Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1999), esp. 23. The present account of the historical emergence of the live as a conceptual category modifies the discussion in *Liveness*. See also Attali, *Noise*, 85.

3. Andrew Leonard, *Bots: The Origin of New Species* (San Francisco: HardWired, 1997), 41–42.

4. Heather Peel, "I Chat, Therefore I Am?? An Introduction to Bots on IRC," available at <http://www.chatcircuit.com/tech/10/10bots.htm>.

5. Herbert Blau, *Blooded Thought: Occasions of Theatre* (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1982), 134.

6. Peggy Phelan, *Mourning Sex: Performing Public Memories* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 3.

# Virtually Yours: Presence, Liveness, Lessness

*Herbert Blau*

THE ACTUAL HUMAN BODY BECOMES OF LESS IMPORTANCE  
EVERY DAY.

—Wyndham Lewis, “The New Egos,” in *Blast* 1

I began to wonder at about this time what one saw when one looked  
at anything really looked at anything.

—Gertrude Stein, “Portraits and Repetition”

Little body little block heart beating ash gray only upright. Little  
body ash gray locked rigid heart beating face to endlessness.

—Samuel Beckett, “Lessness”

Before the opening of the Beaumont Theater at Lincoln Center in New York, as we were finishing up the lights for the first preview of *Danton's Death*, what was then (in 1965) the world's most advanced switchboard couldn't quite control the “ghosting” on stage—that is, the trace of lights after dimming, the aura here or halo there, the stubborn residue of illumination that wouldn't, for all the electronics, go entirely dark. Designed by George Izenour, the computerized system was something remarkably new, though the technology still worked at the time not through the mysteries of software but—as with the archetypal Colossus, the vacuum-tubed first electronic computer—by means of a quite hefty pack of punch cards. We shuffled the cards, or read them like tarot, but when the ghosting persisted, we called Izenour, reputed sage of techno-theater, down from Yale to see what he could do. That didn't quite solve the problem. Each time we'd set up the lights and turn them down, he'd look at the luminous trace that everybody could see and give us a theoretical explanation as to why it couldn't be. Even then, I had no indisposition to theory, “But George,” I'd say, “look again!” and again he'd look and explain why it couldn't be, as if we were somehow hallucinating. As it turned out, our technical director José Sevilla managed to operate the switchboard without the computer, running the entire show—the preview was not cancelled—by taking the dimmers between his fingers and moving them up and down the otherwise hapless console with exquisite precision on cue. The technology was primitive, but the ghosting had disappeared.

Or at least as it was in the lighting. What I'd overlooked then, however, in the urgencies of the moment, is what remains a crucial distinction in the ontology of performance, as we think of it now through the media and the prospects of cyberculture. For once you *look* in the theater, no less *look again!* (as the Furies chant in the *Oresteia*, seeming to initiate specular-

ity as the theater's compulsive tradition), then with or without lighting, the ghosts are already there, and once the lights are up (over the mountaintops from Troy or, lights, lights, lights! as on the play within the play, or in the movement from Plato's Cave to the dialectic of enlightenment, or even with Clov in *Endgame*, who sees his light dying), no matter what's there, or not, it's with *the look of being looked at*. Which is, in performance, the anxious datum of "liveness."

As for liveness in the theater, which seemed to be its distinction, that's been complicated in recent years not merely by the hyperbolic computerization of Broadway scenic effects, but by widening magnitudes of performance that seem to be leaving the theater behind. After the carnivals, festivals, pageants, and ritual forms of other cultures, performance seems to be moving beyond the ethnographic, with its residuum of the aesthetic, through technology and corporate management into outer space. I'm not merely referring to media events circling the globe by satellite transmission, but in the ever-increasing panoptic vision of performance studies, to everything from the operations of the Hubble telescope to some nomadic or dysfunctional rocket in the ionosphere, or some years back, the atomization of the *Challenger*, the radiant image of which, played over and over on television, virtually transfigured disaster as did, in those brain-draining bursts, the resplendent aureoles of the collapsing towers before they became a sepulcher. Yet remote from Ground Zero, even spaced out, through the "strange loop" phenomenon of missile guidance systems,<sup>1</sup> if there is anything theatricalized, it requires a *site* of performance; and if the scale is reduced again, down to what's basic in theater, not the old two boards for a passion or, for that matter, what Peter Brook had in mind when he said theater begins with an empty space, luring the actor in.

"There's no such thing as an empty space," said John Cage, "or an empty time."<sup>2</sup> That was the premise of an early essay on experimental music as the becoming of theater, which "is continually becoming that it is becoming" (14), which is to say, a space of performance, subject to the look, which for more than a generation has been, as folded into "the gaze," the subject of deconstruction. But with the obduracy of the gaze in mind—and a sense of its *gradations*, as with presence itself—I've written elsewhere that in the apparently empty space you don't even need the actor, the space no longer empty so long as there is someone seeing.<sup>3</sup> As for the semblance of time in space, we may not have been seeing the same, since the same can never be seen, not in a temporal form, but what Cage didn't say, looking through music to theater, is that it's the *seeming* in the becoming that invites and escapes the look, which in the consciousness of looking, as at the substance of seeming itself, suffuses time with thought—which is what theater does, even when troubled by it.

For the liability in the suffusion is a metaphysics of seeming, perpetuating in appearance the future of illusion. Less disturbed by that than the theater tends to be—or at least its canonical drama, in its congenital distrust of theater—the minimalist aesthetic of conceptual art, and the installations that followed, evolved in *theatricality*, which for an unregenerate

formalist (specifically, Michael Fried) seemed to be the end of art.<sup>4</sup> The beginning of the end could be said to have occurred in that ur-setting of theatricality, the anechoic chamber at Berkeley, in which, through the absence of other sound, Cage listened to his nerves and heart, then thought of himself listening, out of which came the performance, itself canonical now, of 4'33"—a silence lasting four minutes, thirty-three seconds.

Some years after, there were repercussions of this silence, inflected visually, in a primitive manifestation of media art: Nam June Paik's prototypical Fluxus film, made in the early 1960s, picking up on Cage's Zen. Paik's later video installations were, with a sometimes monumental array of monitors and his usual visual cunning, extravagant displays, baroque, but back then, if the aesthetic was minimal, it was somewhat out of necessity because of minimal cost: no actors, no expensive effects, optical or otherwise, no film stock to edit either. What Paik projected, inside a TV set, was nothing more than a thousand feet of unprocessed sixteen-millimeter leader, which ran imagelessly on a screen for thirty minutes, the effect on the viewer being—if not a sense of malfunction or unreflective indifference—a participatory impulse.

That was, in any Fluxus event, the performative prospect at least, presumably canceling the inertia of the passive observer, with consciousness itself emerging as the *sine qua non* of performance. As if Baudelaire's boredom, recycled, had been activated on the screen, the (seeming) tabula rasa of the illuminated space was, in subsequent viewings, complicated and enlivened, minuscule as they were, by dust and scratches on the leader stock. The liveness there, of course, was in the consciousness solicited by those chance "events," though it's possible to argue that the events themselves were symptoms of liveness, even in the absence of any human image on film, just as the "miscellaneous rubbish," the rising and falling lights, the sounds of inspiration and expiration, and the faint cries, each "instant of recorded vagitus," convey a more poignant absence—the liveness of it, no actors there on stage—in the performance of Beckett's *Breath*.<sup>5</sup>

On a larger scale, the notion of liveness entered the agenda of performance theory through film and (even more) the televisual, and the "remediation" that Philip Auslander has tracked from stage to screen to stage, and through the recording industry: from the lip-synch scandal of Milli Vanilli to CDs, DVDs, and back through rock concerts, where the performance of Madonna, U2, or Eminem, the truth of liveness there, is determined and authenticated by what's been seen on MTV. If this merely updates, according to Auslander, what we should have known all along, "that the live can exist only *within* an economy of reproduction," what's all the more true in the technological versatility of the dominion of reproduction, the fantasy-making apparatus itself, "is that, like liveness itself, the desire for live experiences is a product of mediatization."<sup>6</sup> Meanwhile, as the vacuum tubes were miniaturized, first by transistors, then integrated circuits, and afterward silicon chips, with fiber-optic bundles enabling globalization, it was to be expected that the question of liveness would extend to virtual reality, as well as to futurological fantasies of a



digitized human race that, with whatever forms of intelligence in a dematerialized body, would certainly alter our thinking about the meaning of *presence* in liveness.

Until that millenarian day, however, we'll still be contending with the banalities about "living theater," which attribute to real bodies on a stage more presence than some of those bodies may actually have in performance, no less anything like a charismatic wholeness, which this or that body may *appear* to have, if nothing more than appearance. Yet, if there was no point to stressing liveness before the advent of photography and the phonograph—though even the Festival of Dionysus or a chorus at Epidaurus was part of an economy of reproduction—the notion of living theater also has to be historicized. When we used to speak of living theater, before the insurrection of (what the French call) *the Living*—with "polymorphous perverse" bodies proclaiming *Paradise Now*—what we had in mind, by contrast, was the appearance of theater on film, though the incursion of the Living, in the dissidence of the 1960s, was also a claim to liveness as opposed to the dehumanized. And that was a condition just as possible in the theater as it was on film, or later television, not to mention the prospect that dehumanization will be, in the apotheosis of virtual reality, the (im)material condition of liveness. Relieved or distraught by the absence of presence, relentlessly demystified in theory, some who see liveness alive and well in the media—which mediatize themselves in remediation—are essentially making a defense of another kind of presence, an electronic presence, as we pass to the Internet, where, instead of metaphysics coming in through the pores, as Freud and Artaud thought, it comes in, rather, in bytes.

When we think of the age of information, and digital traffic around the globe, there's a tendency to imagine the networks as a ramification of the "superhighway" of image culture, or as the hypertrophy of image, its proliferous reification, from the age of mechanical reproduction (Benjamin) to the society of the spectacle (Debord), with its investment in, or investiture of, the precession of simulacra (Baudrillard). But the virtual realities of information are something else again. While the photographic, filmic, or televisual image is still attached to the material site of representation in a legacy of realism (however the image is produced, indexically or analogically), the substance of the virtual, digitally produced as it is through the wobble of one and zero, may appear to be three-dimensional, but in the electroluminescence of the apparency of a stage, there is only an "empty display,"<sup>7</sup> nothing to feel, nothing to touch, only the phosphorescent presence of what—unlike the object of the camera, however abstracted—was never there to begin with. In some interactive continuum of the cyberized space itself, the sensation may be that of a body virtually there, but that's it, virtual, maybe quickening apprehension in its shimmering subjunctivity, with a certain charm or enchantment, perhaps, like an alibi of the spectral wishing it could be more, maybe even mortal, but with evacuated gravity, never meant to be.

The space is interactive, and the virtual is a lure, but the real agency

is the artificial intelligence, the prior programming, that creates the virtual scene. If, through the resourcefulness of a database, that scene is analogous to the real, one can be immersed in the analogy, which is cyberspace, without the visceral sensation of being there, since there is no there *there*—not even, as things are, the appearance of it, which is with all its impediments, however unaccommodated, the vexing thing itself. With all the promise of digitality, there is also something poignant: *the subtext of the virtual is that it really wants to be real.*<sup>8</sup> And whatever that may be, the index of its truth—as with any manifestation in whatever performative mode, across any stylization or cultural practice, ritualized or mimed, masked or mediated, even performed with puppets—will always be subject to that wanting, as the body of information will be referred to the body itself, that body, the real body, and I don't mean a social construction, no less what they're calling a bot.

Still, somewhere in all this, there seems to be a new reality, as the seemingly manipulable but abstracted world of data, supradiaphanous, immaterial as it is, bears upon life as we've known it, material as it is, and unlikely to go away, unless the genetic codes are somehow added to the data, ending life as we've known it in a life without end. Which, however that may be, may vex us even more—if performance theory survives—by making liveness moot. Be that as it may, this is certainly a view of the future that Bertolt Brecht didn't anticipate when, after the bomb on Hiroshima, he revised his Epic theory in the *Short Organum*, to take cognizance of nuclear power, beyond the "petroleum complex," even before which he had thought, "Some exercise in complex seeing is needed."<sup>9</sup> In the world of feedback loops accelerated by microcomputers, and with cyborgs on the scene about to take over performance (or even, since queerer than queer, what is called "performativity"), Brecht's critique of "culinary theater" would seem to be arrested in history, without any object at all, since the disappearance of an organic body with conventional subjectivity makes the culinary a non sequitur: out in cyberspace, nothing to cook and nothing to eat. But if the audience in the bourgeois theater is there to digest its dinner, so it might all the more in front of a computer. Still, if what's programmed there is in a postculinary world, immersed in virtuality, there's no guarantee whatever that its values are improved by the data with which, in the absence of anything else, we may identify in performance. Meanwhile, for cybernauts and cybernerds, and all us foreseeable cyborgs, there seems to be—except for incompetence on the computer—no digital equivalent of the Alienation-effect. Which is to say, we're no better than ever, through all the information, in the complex seeing we need, when time must have a stop, for a reflective look, wherever we are in the virtual, at the reality passing by, susceptible to illusion, maybe nothing but appearance, all the more in the paranoia of a world besieged by terror, with "weapons of mass destruction" like a refrain on the evening news.

Even so, when performance occurs at a digital distance, out there in cyberspace, where power is a function of remote control—in a world in-

conceivable without its image, or in the unstoppable seeming, an obscenity of image—remoteness itself is the sticking point, hardly reducible to a Brechtian *gestus*. As with the smart bombs of the Gulf War or in the Shah-i-Kot Valley after Al Qaeda, in or out of the caves, or even the scandal of Enron with the shreadings at Anderson, for all we see, we don't see it, though we may be watching all the time. As opposed to the theater, or even film, what we have on television is a virtual allegory of the remote. What we see there, as we move from channel to channel, is the liquidity of culture, both in the sense of gathered, processed, edited, and collaged images, screened as they are from the cathode tube, and in the sense of commodification, with the illusion of liquidity there, the images presumably at our disposal, the remote like a magic wand or scepter, giving access to the Imaginary. Yet, for all that imperial remoteness—programs on and off at will—it's an illusion of power out of hand, a lot more feeble than fabulous, more like impotency after all. Nobody forces anybody to watch television, but very few resist, and putting aside what's brainless, or what we know we've seen before, no matter how new it appears, it's hard to watch for any length of time without feeling the saturation of apparent news, the ad nauseam of the commentary, and even if the screen is small, a frustrating diffusion of thought. Not only in surfing channels, but in what we do when we watch, the experience is that of modernity in the Eliotic sense, distracted from distraction by distraction.

In this regard, the mediatizing of culture is not only a matter of how it is represented, or who represents it, but how that is factored into a virtual ontology of distraction, which bears upon what we think and how we see ourselves in time. Or for that matter, out of time, because our sense of temporality is increasingly preempted by the allure of the televisual, and with it telepresence,<sup>10</sup> which may encounter time in its occurrence, but not in any perceptible cycle of duration, stasis, motion, or decay. Time on television—where we rarely see the process of time—is processed, and what just happened will move instantly into the archive, to be reprocessed, even images of the past susceptible, as Margaret Morse points out, to a sort of digital updating or “electronic revision to meet today's expectations,” so that the grainier black-and-white documentations of the past are not preserved as access “to flickering shadows in the cave,” but are rather shaped up to the “spatiotemporal and psychic relations [of] the realities it constitutes.”<sup>11</sup> Which are, as they now impinge on performance, realities of distraction.

At the same time, there is a certain tactility in the mediatizing of culture that has not so much to do, as we tend to think, with the formation of attitudes or the maneuvering of public opinion—the commentary on the polling that inevitably determines the polls—but rather with the activity of perception at the heart of representation; or in reverse, the activity of representation that forms perception, and therefore, indeed, the way things are thought. Thus, in the operations of television graphics, as in the close-ups of a television interview, we may have the sensation of proximity to an object, seeing it closer—in the case of virtual images, as if they

were, in extreme nearness, eliciting our sense of touch, as with fabrics on home-shopping channels or, in the magic world of the law, sexy legs on *Ally McBeal*. If what is called “blue-screen technology” can create virtual sets that make small-market studios, and their unknown anchor people, look prime-time, so complex motion design, enhanced by the computer, makes it possible not only to define but to move around an object in discursive space, with diverse angles and points of entry, the sort of topology that defies the burdensome laws of gravity in the cinema as we know it, no less on the theater’s stage. Sometimes the sense of motion is such, in computerized graphics on the screen, especially in fantasies of outer space (transposed to selling the Lexus), that the ground of representation itself seems to be taken from under us. Yet the fantasies of weightlessness are competing, as they did way back in Ibsen’s *Lady from the Sea*, with the deadweight actuality of our actual bodies. It may be that virtual worlds are preparing us psychically for the zero gravity of outer space or some virtual interior life, but for the time being or, irreversibly, the reality of being in time, our bodies inhabit a space (even floating out there in a capsule) that is irreparably down to earth.

In Datek ads or HelloMoto, Motorola’s Datamoto, it might seem it could be reversed, and every now and then we hear that either biogenetics or some high-tech implant is going to bring it about. Actually, there is considerable speculation, and some pontification, more or less idealistic, about the out-of-body promise of digital worlds, and the status of the virtual in the reality that remains, what—according to theorists from Benjamin to Baudrillard—may only be a remainder amid the ruins of time. Given that ruinous context, seeds of history upon the ground, what is virtual reality? The truth is that, psychically and otherwise, no less realistically, we know very little about its cultural substance and prospects, its possibilities for performance, nor its eventual effect on what we take to be human. And when we advance through electronic culture to this impasse, we’re somewhere beyond the horizon of performance in the media, even those films they’re now trying to make, with actors replaced by the ingenious animation of digital tech, leaving us with the question: is the increasing likeness to be thought of as liveness? And by what criteria do we determine that?

To be sure, it was the escalation of mediatization that appeared to bring into the theater itself, and to the live bodies there, reflexes and habits of mind that seemed less natural or organic than mechanically reproduced—not by some postmodern offshoot of Meyerhold’s biomechanics (which was actually derived from Taylorism) or by some recidivist sign of passion from the repertoire of Delsarte. If we’ve long been aware of the stale predictability of Broadway’s assembly line, and of actors repeating themselves, that was because, as in digital culture, it was possible to process behavior and homogenize it as code. This is all the more so today in the precession of simulacra, where it’s possible to think of liveness as playing roles on screen, precoded parts written for us in advance, so that we’re signs of what we appear to be, not even representations but

their merest facsimile. And if this is so, then the actor who appears on stage is the redundancy of a redundancy, performing an otherness that only pretends to be, so well known has it been that it can only be rehearsed, the image of an image of something that, coded to begin with, has otherwise never been. That, I suppose, is the worst-case scenario. As for actors repeating themselves, that was in any case to be expected, despite all versatility, from those who achieve stardom on stage or screen. As for any appearance in the flesh, whatever the quotient of liveness, it may of course be augmented, as well as credibilized, by previous celebrity in the media, which function in visual culture by their long-belabored expertise, whatever else they may be doing, in commodifying the look—not quite that of being looked at, in the sense I've been talking about, which seems brought into being by another liveness, the liveness overlooked, that of perception itself, as it makes its way through appearance.

If that's not always what it appears to be (or even if it is), that's also due to perception, which in abrading upon reality also makes it theater. As if he were enunciating Heisenberg's principle of indeterminacy, William Blake said that the eye altering alters all. And any way you look at it, the body on stage is suffused with the vicissitudes of appearance, which complicate the question of liveness, all the more because you look, offstage, onstage, with more or less reciprocity during the course of performance—the irony being here that sometimes less is more. Which is to say that the quality of liveness, the felt sensation of it, may not necessarily diminish as it moves from the interactive or participatory to a more contemplative mode. What mediatizes culture there, beyond any previous accretions, is the activity of perception, however rigorous or involuntary, or intently voyeuristic, "lawful espials" or "seeing unseen" (*Hamlet* 3.1.32–33), or, with one or another mode of alienating distance, the seeing or unseeing in an impersonal or clinical look. "Am I as much as . . . being seen?" says one of the figures in the urns of Beckett's *Play*, which wouldn't be as much of a question—being *seen* or *being* seen? (how should the actor say it? and how much is he being seen? depending on how he says it?)—were you to see the figure on film.

As we reflect on the difference in being, as Heidegger might have seen it, from being as being-seen, it would seem that the affectivity of presence—its liveness, so to speak—might better be thought of, through the undeniable palpability of its metaphysical absence, as gradations of presence escaping itself in a sort of microphysics. About which you can say, as the greatest of dramas do, you can only see so much—even if you put it on film, or with a video monitor, or by storing it as information in a computer's memory bank. If the theater, as I said in *Take Up the Bodies*, "is the body's long initiation in the mystery of its vanishings,"<sup>12</sup> I wouldn't count on computer memory, ready for instant messaging, to keep track of where it went, or even to serve for cultural memory, since in the mysteries of digitization it somehow erases the difference between where we were and where we are, as well as now and then. There are those, to be sure, who are hardly disturbed by that, and some of them, who have

grown up with or into cyberspace, are developing modes of performance that have already gone online, like the Creative Outlaw Visionaries or Law and Order Practitioners or, mobilizing micronetworks for an agit-prop agenda, Ricardo Dominguez and the Electronic Disturbance Theater. If Dominguez prefers the Internet to the stage because of the subversive possibilities, on quite another scale, one can imagine computer types who might indeed prefer the protocols of digital exchange, whether anonymously or otherwise, to the regimens of performance as we've known it through the impediments of flesh and blood. One of the capacities of digitality is not only to speed up exchange across unconscionable distances, but, as if it were some new outreach of ritual drama, to occult it once again. It may very well be enticing to a performer who could, in the theater, only imagine shadows, doubles, and the traces of ghostliness, to dematerialize online and resurface in code and image in a new Theater of the World, where liveness came from elsewhere than being born astride of a grave.

If then, coming back to earth, liveness comes as well with a certain paranoia, that's because—mediated or remediated as the theater might be, not only in the recyclings from film or television, but in the infinity of its repetitions (what drove Artaud mad) from whenever the theater began—there is in all the remediation something irremediable, the disease of time in a time-serving form. It can be put in various ways, more or less anodyne or evasive, but there are times when liveness itself is exalted by its most disheartening truth: it stinks of mortality, which may be the ultimate subtext of stage fright—no virtual reality that, but ineliminably there, however disguised, or (as actors may say) made use of in performance, in any case encroaching on or reshaping presence, and even if it doesn't stink, bringing us back to what, as reality principle, ghosts us after all. Even on the cybernetic threshold of a cyborgian age, "we really do die," which is what, in simple truth, Donna Haraway said when she stopped short on the utopian prospects and warned against "denying mortality."<sup>13</sup>

What is, then, the material condition of liveness, its inevitable "lessness," will continue to be so until our nanotechnology produces—as K. Eric Drexler promised when he started manipulating materials that are utterly out of sight—self-replicating subatomic engines that will not only remove diseased DNA from our perishing bodies, but also repair our aging cells, making us (nearly) immortal. Which is not to mention the visions of robotic bodies of a postbiological age into which, as into computer memory, we can download the forms of thought and desire that once went into our drama. As we might have guessed, the media—as in AT&T's "You Will" campaign<sup>14</sup>—are encouraging these prospects as something more than fantasy, not dreamt of in our philosophy, maybe, but in the more numinous spin-off from *Blade Runner*, the techno-transcendentalism or epiphanic redemption of entropy (not to mention social justice)<sup>15</sup> that comes with being Wired. Whatever the liveness dreamt of, it's not quite that which the newspapers were conscious of in NBC's prime-time coverage of the Winter Olympics in Utah. The relative reality

there was “live live” (designated “Live” in the upper left corner of the screen) or “nearly live” (a skeleton, skateboard, or bobsled event that happened, say, an hour before) or the “live that looks like live, yet is not” (Bob Costas in the studio chatting with Jim McKay) or the “nonlive, which does not mean dead, just taped.”<sup>16</sup> Or, as we’ve seen it in Afghanistan, on tape, maybe alive, maybe dead, and if no “Live” up in the corner, maybe a ticker of news at the bottom, keeping the options alive, or announcing a vote on Osama bin Laden’s liveness, as they’ve done on CNN.com.

If there is, whatever the vote, something simply obtuse or a bad puerile joke in that, the suffusion of our reality by the media, live live, nearly live, nonlive, is such that, even when you turn it off, it seems somehow to be on, as if there were channels in our heads, which at some devastating moment of history we might wish would simply go blank. Or give us a moment’s respite. But, as if the media were itself a function of our manic obsession with image that in its stupefying excess is the matrix of the real, that isn’t meant to be. Nor can we separate the superfetation of image from the mesmeric redundancy of the noise that passes as information, which is not what Lionel Trilling once meant by “the hum and buzz of implication,” to which, judiciously, you might turn an attentive ear. Nor is it even the noise that John Cage talked about, and deployed, as early as 1937—“The sound of a truck at fifty miles an hour. Static between the stations. Rain”—about which he said, “Wherever we are what we hear is mostly noise. When we ignore it, it disturbs us. When we later listen to it, we find it fascinating.” And with electronic control of amplitude and frequency, it is possible to take “any one of these sounds and to give it rhythms within or beyond the reach of imagination.”<sup>17</sup> This is not the noise we hear on the media every day.

Thus, for all the depth of grief and mourning after the disasters of September 11, the one inconceivable testament to its unspeakability would have been, at ground zero of sensation, darkened TV screens and, for one unmediated day of quiet reflection, no anchors, no talk shows, no *Imus in the Morning* or *O’Reilly Factor* at night, no Leno, no Letterman, no *Crossfire* or *Hardball*, or speaking of liveness, *Larry King Live*, no profusion of replays: *silence*. Which is, perhaps, when history hurts, the only reliable echo of liveness. That the media, however, saturate culture, both inducing and preempting what we feel, is by now, even when on their best behavior—the relief of absent commercials after the towers collapsed—an inarguable fact of life, as it is of the theater, which even before Pirandello could no longer think of art imitating life, for life is no longer the referent, but only life as mediated, as if theatricality were appropriated on its own terms, as the pure Imaginary. If it’s long been apparent that anything that goes on in our minds, almost every gesture we make, what passes as love or longing, just about every instinct, has either been determined, foreseen, programmed, or mimicked by the media, so it seems, too, that in an age of information virtually everything to be known is out there on the net for the asking, and with the savvy of software accessible on the computer. Yet the more we ask, the more demoralized we may be.

Meanwhile, the World Wide Web is the global space of performance, where the notion of living theater seems the merest anachronism, if nothing more than because the intensities and energies producible (never mind reproducible) on film, video, CDs and DVDs exceed in their cumulative affect or outright sensation anything achievable by flesh and blood on a stage, except insofar as the body's vulnerability, the weak flesh itself, becomes in its mortality the literal issue. For all the recycling of liveness, or the remediation (carrying rather insensibly the notion of a remedy), it's hard to imagine any image on the screen, however violent, lustful, demonic, barbaric, no less intimate or lyrical, that could match the close-up effect upon spectators of an actor who, as in the extremities of performance art—Gina Pane up a ladder of razors, Chris Burden having himself shot, Fakir Musaphar's self-impalings, Orlan's cosmetic surgeries, Schwarzkogler's bandaged suffocations, with live wires exposed, on the edge of suicide (which he eventually did, by throwing himself out of a window)—actually cuts his wrist or slits another's throat or (as a friend of mine did) swallows a bottle of pins, or a scene in which the lovemaking or fucking is not merely simulated, but nakedly there, cock into cunt, right there before your eyes, not garrulously so as in *The Vagina Monologues*, making up for lost time and the carnal by merely talking about it. I've seen people wince at pictures of Stelarc suspending himself by fishhooks, as they do with some of the more perilous things on *Survivor*, or recently on *Fear Factor*, when certain minor celebrities were crawled over by worms, roaches, and snakes. But suppose that were done close up, live, as in a gallery space or intimate theater, and you were sitting right there. Never mind the factitious violence as it comes with popcorn-boggling credibility from Hollywood's editing rooms—if what they apparently do in "snuff films" were done on a stage there'd be no doubt whatever about the *difference* in liveness, dead or alive, to use our president's words about the evildoer hiding out, no doubt applicable now to those in Kashmir or Pakistan who beheaded Daniel Pearl. As for the videotape not yet on the networks (and quite unlikely to be), that would be difficult to see if they showed it, but imagine it done on a stage, where what's *not* done may be done with a valence that, formed as it is by the media (and reducing the level of sensation), is something else again, like the nothing to be done in *Waiting for Godot* that, in its most elemental liveness, cannot *not* be done. Which is where, if only with the illusion of the unmediated, the most complex performance exists.

The issue remains, however, as performance extends beyond theater or performance art to fashion, politics, pedagogy, corporate management, polymeric composites, rocket boosters or missile defense, whether the narrow circumference of a stage, and *human presence*, can continue to hold attention in ways the other media can't. For the theater, as already suggested, is mediatized too, that is, something other than raw experience, not at all immediate, which in its corporeality we sometimes tend to forget. The mediatizing of culture was surely ramified and accelerated from photography and cinema through television to analog/digital technology,



but its effect upon performance was already registered before the end of the nineteenth century, in the preface to Strindberg's *Miss Julie*, which went beyond the relatively conservative dramaturgy of naturalism—purporting to focus on the documentable evidence of an external reality, its facts and material circumstances—to the multiplicity of “the soul-complex,” which is something like the Freudian notion of overdetermination, a subjectivity so estranged that it cannot fit into the inherited conception of character.

Thus the notion of a “characterless” character. “Instead of the ‘ready-made,’ in which the bourgeois concept of the immobility of the soul was transferred to the stage,” Strindberg insists on the richness of the soul-complex, which—if derived from his conception of Darwinian naturalism—reflects “an age of transition more compulsively hysterical” than the one preceding it, while anticipating the age of postmodernism, with its utterly mediated and deconstructed self, so that when we think of identity as social construction, it occurs as well as a sort of bricolage: “My souls (characters),” Strindberg writes in that proleptic preface, “are conglomerates of past and present cultural phases, bits from books and newspapers, scraps of humanity, pieces torn from fine clothes and become rags, patched together as is the human soul.”<sup>18</sup> And one of the patches is from the theater itself, as it is with the valet Jean, who says, to account for the knowingness beyond his station, that he’s been to the theater often. Unfortunately, if that brings a certain mediated presence to his pretensions, of the sort we might acquire today from film or television, it wilts before the voice of the Count coming down the speaking tube. All through the play, actually, the tube itself is a presence, as that other tube is today: the medium is the message, and it’s still a message of power.

As we move, however, toward virtual worlds, the claims of the body to presence—or attributing presence to the body, as confirmation or affirmation—may appear to be disrupted by the reformative flow of postlinear devices and systems—fast forward, rewind, stop, eject, play, and the whole array of recorders, tapes, CDs and CD-ROMs, as well as the chat rooms and chatterbots on the Internet. And we have seen performance events with more or less impacted technology that seems to parse the body, with real-time digitized contours that seem to be floating in infraspace, as in the work of Matthew Barney, that is, a performance space of image projectors that may also seem, through computer programming, to be spuming or liquefied, itself floating or hyperextended, with its payload of partial bodies, spindrifted to cyberspace. Here, corporeal identity may appear to warp, reform, dissolve, be refigured there online, but however the body is thus deconstituted and/or restored, its image persists through it all, along with—if not there in actuality—the desire to have it so. If cyberspace itself is the consensual hallucination that is the consummation of virtual technologies, the hallucinatory consensus extends to notions of performance disassociated from the mundane gravity of the corporeal body. But just as cyberspace is unthinkable without the alphabetic and mathematical system of representation that supports and

sustains the logocentricism presumably displaced, so the dematerialized figures are unthinkable without the bodily presence presumably vanished, nothing occurring in cyberspace that isn't contingent on that which, seemingly, it made obsolete.

Whatever the circularity—the looping of liveness through the space of reproduction—there is no escaping in remediation the *reductio ad absurdum*, which is to say, bereft, forlorn, alienated, replicated by technology, the nevertheless refractory body to which, unavoidably, we refer anything on a screen, in the ghostliness of three dimensions or in the wraithlike space of the virtual. That live presence has been devalued in mediatized culture, and that the degradation of the live has been compensated for in large-scale live performance, rock concerts, or sporting events, by “videation” or Diamond Vision and instant replays,<sup>19</sup> still leaves us the lamentable body in its dispossession, and given the scale of the media, “little body little block heart ash gray only upright,” which has been from whatever beginnings the carnal datum of theater. As to what passes through liveness when truly alive, no videation or instant replay can ever get at that, what's there indubitably but invisible, right there before your eyes. Merely the thought of it is sufficient to make theater, in the scenic site of the mind, what beats there, as in the incipient madness of King Lear. Which is not to say that it's realized in the theater as we mostly know it, or even in performance art. Or that the theater as an institution will ever again have the presence of the other media in our lives.

It is only to say that there's not much substance to theater that doesn't occur in the space of indeterminacy between what's tangibly there, or appears to be, and whatever images of mediatized representation are there as a supplement to (the absence of) the real. It may be that we'll eventually encounter some protovirtual version of what Schechner calls “*rasaesthetics*,” opening up performance to the whole sensorium; as if inspired by the *Natyasastra*,<sup>20</sup> the technological virtuosity of virtual reality may, in the desideratum of embracing cultures, eventually program synesthetically some aromatic and emotional fusion of proprioceptive experience, bringing it instantly across continents to the entire world. But since—however and wherever the sensorium is expanded—it will still be occurring in anthropocentric terms, the ancient problems of knowing remain, with issues of identity and otherness too. And a major question still to be responded to is the one asked years ago by my KRAKEN group, in a work called *Crooked Eclipses* (derived from Shakespeare's sonnets), its initiatory image of a suspended gaze, mirrored in the moment: “What is your substance, whereof are you made, / That millions of strange shadows on you tend?” (Sonnet 53). What, for all the resources, doesn't exist on film or the electronic media is anything like those shadows, the ghostings, which exist all the more in performance when—whether or not encroached upon by filmic or video images with more seeming presence than the bodies on stage—their presence seems most suspect.

Long before our consciousness of the media, or of mediated consciousness, this paradox was apparent at the outset of Büchner's *Woyzeck*,

which dramatizes what was, in Leipzig in 1821, the equivalent of a media event: "What a murder! A good, genuine, beautiful murder!" as the Policeman says at the end about what started as a strange sensation: "Quiet! . . . Can you hear it? Something moving! . . . It's moving behind me! Under me! . . . Listen! Hollow! It's all hollow down there!"<sup>21</sup> And so it is in Beckett's *Endgame*, when Hamm is pushed by Clov to the wall, something dripping in his head ("A heart, a heart in my head")<sup>22</sup> that, when push comes to shove, you can never get on film—even the film of Beckett's *Endgame*. As for the liveness in that drip, or the hollow, whatever it is that's moving, it can't be remediated (or, as we used to say, represented) because, moment by moment, right before your eyes in the becoming of theater (even if you could hear the heartbeat), it's inevitably something less.

## NOTES

1. See Jon McKenzie, *Perform or Else: From Discipline to Performance* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

2. John Cage, "Experimental Music," in *Silence: Lectures and Writing* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1974), 8.

3. Herbert Blau, *The Audience* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 218.

4. Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood," in *Minimalist Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battcock (New York: Dutton, 1968), 116–47. "The success, even the survival of the arts," Fried wrote in 1967, "has come increasingly to depend on their ability to defeat theater" (139). While disdaining Cage as well (in quality, relative to Elliott Carter, no comparison) Fried's animus was directed mainly against visual artists (Donald Judd, Robert Morris) who were undoing the epiphanic "presentness" or "single infinitely brief instant" that—for Fried, to this day—is grace (146–47).

5. Samuel Beckett, "Breath," in *Collected Shorter Plays* (New York: Grove, 1984), 211.

6. Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 54–55.

7. Margaret Morse, *Virtualities: Television, Media Art, and Cyberculture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 196. Of the various books proliferating in this hyperactive scene, this is the most sophisticated that I've come across—and the most evocatively written—in its own mediation between what media artists are doing, from "telematic dreaming" to virtualizing physical space, and the shadowy means required to do it, the "algorithms and abstract symbols in an imperceptible realm of data" (5). To negotiate its seemingly endless prospects, cyberculture demands a lot of imagination, and Morse respects it when it's there, while keeping a jaundiced eye on its transcendent fictions and not losing sight of those who, in the globalized here-and-now, still have next to no access to the profusion of worlds online.

8. Quite recently we've seen the equivalent of this in the universe of video games, which are deploying their newest technology for an increasing realism, while warding off abstraction and its arbitrary rules. It may be that the credibilizing effects are achieved by numerous buttons, triggers, and toggling switches, and the computer keyboard, but the irony is that the most sophisticated technology, by

Xbox or Nintendo today, is drawn upon for games with an animus against technology or with a sort of primitive reflex, as if before technology, which—in the regulated intricacy of its puzzling or fantastical worlds—departed too much from the real, with its muscular sensations or plain old blood and guts.

9. Bertolt Brecht, "The Literarization of the Theater," in *Brecht on Theater: The Development of an Aesthetic*, ed. and trans. John Willett (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964), 44.

10. Alice Rayner is especially perceptive on the rhetoric of telepresence that, promoting it, fails to recognize that it usually occurs in the language of theatricality ("Everywhere and Nowhere: Theater in Cyberspace," in *Of Borders and Thresholds: Theater History, Practice, and Theory*, ed. Michal Kobiak [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999], 278–302). Thus, while the community of telepresence is all over the place, or could be, in a global culture, the desideratum is a sense of here and now, the materiality associated with an actual theater space, which remains just that, a "place for seeing," even when the enveloped space of wings and flies, and the binary of stage and audience, is amplified or otherwise transformed by slides, films, video clips, whether for purposes largely scenic or captionlike, or as a kind of dialectical image-source for the actors or the drama. Whatever the apparent dispersal of the event, through the media or, prospectively now, by way of the Internet, most of what presumably occurs in cyberspace is there with an institutional referent and in the "language of dimensionality" (281).

11. Morse, *Virtualities*, 110.

12. Herbert Blau, *Take Up the Bodies: Theater at the Vanishing Point* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 299.

13. "Cyborgs at Large: Interview with Donna Haraway," in *Technoculture*, ed. Constance Penley and Andrew Ross (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 16.

14. See Mark Dery, *Escape Velocity: Cyberculture at the End of the Century* (New York: Grove, 1996), 11–12.

15. For many artists and social theorists, if sluggishly so in the theater, the emergence of a global economy, projecting itself on the web, requires a radical and unprecedented "upheaval in our historical perceptions of society and the subject." If behavior at local levels has not quite caught up with the revolutionary prospects of a net-based economy, much of what's happening in the artworld seems to be focused there. "Net art, from physical local installations to world-wide network computer games, has become the forum in which many of the emancipatory hopes of the historical avant-gardes are being rephrased. Web art is a form of art to which great political hopes are linked." Peter Weibel, "The Project," in *net\_condition: art and global media*, ed. Weibel and Timothy Druckrey (Cambridge: ZKM Center for Art and Media/MIT Press, 2001), 19.

16. Richard Sandomir, "In These 'Live' Olympic Games, It's a Matter of Timing," *New York Times*, February 22, 2002, C20.

17. Cage, *Silence*, 3.

18. August Strindberg, preface to *Miss Julie*, in *Strindberg: Five Plays*, trans. Harry G. Carlson (New York: Signet, 1984), 53–54.

19. Auslander, *Liveness*, 35.

20. Richard Schechner, "Rasaesthetics," *Drama Review* 45, no. 3 (2001): 27–50.

21. Georg Büchner, *Woyzeck*, in *Complete Plays and Prose*, trans. Carl Richard Mueller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1989), 111, 137–38.

22. Samuel Beckett, *Endgame* (New York: Grove, 1958), 18.

# Dracula's Daughters: In-Corporating Avatars in Cyberspace

*Sue-Ellen Case*

In *Dracula's Legacy (Draculas Vermächtnis)*, Friedrich Kittler wittily deploys the elements in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* to image the new relations between women and technology.<sup>1</sup> For Kittler, *Dracula* illustrates the anxieties, possibilities, and repressive strategies that accompany women's emerging role in the use of new technologies. Two characters represent a simple bifurcation of women's roles: Mina Murray, who knows stenography and the ways of the typewriter, and her friend Lucy Westenra, who is bitten by the vampire and thus confined by doctors and other men, who scrutinize her "hysterical" behavior.

Mina Murray figures the secretaries who will transcribe patriarchal discourse throughout much of the twentieth century, transforming the individual writing or speaking of men into an objective script that can bind together the transactions of business and nation.<sup>2</sup> She will enter the office, the workforce, as an adjunct of men, in an unequal relation to their labor, social standing, and salary. Mina will operate what Kittler, in a German agglutinate, terms the "discourse machine weapon" (*Diskursmaschinenwaffe*), the Remington typewriter, developed and capitalized by the company that made weapons for the Civil War (29). In the later twentieth century, Mina would represent not only the women at the keyboard, but also those women in Third World Special Economic Zones whose labor on the machine produces its internal parts. They produce the "discourse machine" that bears the load of First World software designers, who are, for the most part, men.<sup>3</sup> In sum, Mina signifies the gendered production of uneven power between men and women in the new techno-economy. While women enable the transmission of the discourse, they do not create it.

Meanwhile, back in the bedroom, Lucy Westenra has been suffering, or enjoying, nightly visits from Count Dracula. Her perforated body, exhibiting the tracks of his bites, along with her wanderings, "delusions," and illicit lust bring her under the scrutiny of doctors and other "rational" men. They attempt to confine her to the bed, or the divan, where she will serve as the object of psychoanalytic "truths" of the time concerning hysteria.<sup>4</sup> The rational men huddle around her body, which is clothed in a revealing and suggestive peignoir. Her misbehaving, induced by illicit penetration, provides a rationale for the men to murder the "foreign" Count Dracula.<sup>5</sup> Although it is important to bind these two roles together in order to fully understand how women have been situated in the world of emerging technologies, it is Lucy's role that I would like to develop here as the precursor of the construction of the sign "woman" within the new technologies. Her perforated body signifies the drive toward increasing interactive relations

between machinic devices and corporeality. She represents how images of women's bodies are put to the uses of virtual penetration.

Between the user and the various machines of communication, analysis, and production, the screen stages their interactivity through images that have historically represented notions of identity, desire, and anxiety.<sup>6</sup> Software design enables the play of images as functions of interactivity (the GUI, or graphical user interface). In order to do so, it necessarily borrows from the lexicon of familiar signs to represent the users and their actions in the cybersphere. As users find themselves more and more imbricated in the web of new technologies, an increasing need for some sign of location, or identity, is needed to locate users' functions. The sign for "woman" serves to manage this interaction, lending appeal and allure to the functions. As Kittler reminds us, this woman was first perceived as that sexy stenotypist who first replicated men's discourse on the machine. Soon her image began to be produced within the cultural imaginary to figure the interactive functions with machines as both seductive and threatening. She appeared as a robot in films like *Metropolis*, or *The Stepford Wives*, which narrativized the need for discipline that her seductive qualities still required from the men she would serve. The sign system was up and running in its traditional semiotic production of the sign "woman," but still required new management of her referents. "Woman" was securely in the machine, but her referents were not yet fully absorbed by the new synergies of scientific, corporate, and social technologies.<sup>7</sup> "Woman" would need to exit, completely, her referents to the "real" world in order to successfully marry into cybersociety.

A variety of performance practices stage these relations between gender codes and the virtual spaces of new media. I have selected a few examples that trace a trajectory of signification, from the staging of the sign for woman and machine as a corporeal encounter, to the screening of the completely virtualized avatar of gender. Hopefully, these few examples can function as signposts of semiotic switching between the machinic and the social. As we will see, the referents of gender coding undergo a complete alteration as the corporate virtual composes its new cyberspace.

### Virtually Yours

The title of Kate Bornstein's performance piece *Virtually Yours* wittily captures the inscription of ownership and desire in relations with the virtual.<sup>8</sup> Discovered in the light of her computer screen, Bornstein narrates how she, a transgendered male-to-female lesbian, is struggling with her girlfriend's decision to become a female-to-male heterosexual. Bornstein processes how her girlfriend's impending sex reassignment surgery confuses her own identity, based upon gendered sexual practices. She listens to a phone message from her girl-soon-to-be-boy-friend, telling her that she should play the new computer game *Virtually Yours*. Thus, Bornstein's body, already perforated by medical technologies as a reconstructed sex,

Fig. 1. Kate Bornstein, *Virtually Yours*. Photo credit: Dona McAdams.



sits before the terminal, where she will play the game of identity, prompted by the voice on an answering machine. The (stored) object of Bornstein's desire catalyzes her search for a locational identity in the new virtual space. The telephone, after all, was the first instrument of virtual interaction to really penetrate domestic spaces. In "The Telephone and its Queerness," Ellis Hanson considers various erotic uses of the telephone, insisting that phone communication is "a mechanism of fantasy and pleasure," a site of perversions, and erotic behaviors, from the private cooing of couples, to the completely commercialized performance of phone sex.<sup>9</sup> Hanson insists that through the telephone, "desire makes brazen its age-old love affair with capital," where these phone-borgs are "chips in the integrated circuit" that confuse "the conventional distinctions between human and machine, desire and commerce" (35). In Bornstein's piece, the phone messages are played on the answering machine, which, like the computer, was designed to store data. The phone voice, then, is the site of both the object of desire and the anxiety of being "cut off." The lover is already a virtual one, whose absent body is being perforated by surgical operations and hormonal injections.

Following her girlfriend's advice, and in hopes of assuaging her grief and anxiety, Bornstein engages with the computer game (fig. 1),

which promises to act as a kind of cybertherapist. She relates and performs scenarios of desire as her input into the game and simultaneously as her “live” performance. She entices her audience to interact with one of her S-M rituals, which once offered her both erotic pleasure and an identification that placed her in proximity to her lover. As her scenarios increasingly complicate the relations among identification, sexual practice, desire, and loss, the game becomes unable to sort out the symptoms. Unlike Lucy’s rational doctors, who could restrain her through analysis and cure the symptom by killing the Count, the cybertherapist ultimately suffers a breakdown of its own identity, asking: “Who am I, when you don’t play the game?”

In one sense, Bornstein performs the triumph of the bodily regime, something she also displays through her revealing costumes and seductive play with the audience. Although she performs her location as somewhere between medical technologies and two virtual systems, the “live/corporeal” performer still runs the show. In effect, Bornstein “channels” technology, rather than the reverse. In the terms of S-M, she “tops” the process of interactivity, suggesting that the corporeal representation of identificatory processes is still too complex to be entirely situated within virtual technologies. The “live” still animates the technological, even though it suffers loss and confusion in the process. Yet to stress only her triumph over loss would not do service to the delicate balance Bornstein’s piece achieves. She is, literally as well as figuratively, illuminated by the computer screen—the postmodern Lucy—perforated, but not perishing from it.

While Bornstein performs the corporeal/virtual splits, uses of “woman” appear within cyberspace, made to signify its own processes. In the simplest form, “women” appear as avatars on the computer screen. For those less familiar with online activity, avatars are images on the screen that seem to represent the user. Often avatars can be selected at a particular website, where a variety of images are stored. The more practiced user might create her own avatar, using a photo, a photomontage, or a cartoon character as her representative on the screen. Some avatars can even perform limited movements, while others remain stationary, but nearly all can be moved around the space of the screen, in varying degrees of proximity to other avatars. Users may imagine their own participation within cybersocieties in the form of these avatars.

The term *avatar* is borrowed from Hindu texts, becoming generally familiar through the text of the *Bhagavad Gita*—the first epic story of avatars.<sup>10</sup> In Sanskrit, the term means descent, or a “downcoming.” Etymologically, the term *Avatara* is formed by the verb *tri*, meaning to cross over, or save, with the prefix *ava*, which means down. Hindu theological discussions of the appearance of avatars raised issues similar to those that surround the uses of cyber-avatars today. For example, the eighth-century philosopher Sankara raised the problem of dualism in the notion of the avatar. Sankara argues that if Brahma is only One, how can he be two—both Brahma and his incarnation, or avatar? Sankara solved this seeming



contradiction by insisting that the manifestation of the god is not a "real" incarnation, but merely another image within maya—the veil of illusion (50). The online avatar raises a similar question: is the online avatar a mask of a "real" user, whose "presence" is, somehow, acting online, or is it simply a part of a complete simulation—merely another empty cipher in the veil of cyber-maya?

Jennifer Gonzalez, in her article "The Appended Subject," offers a useful mediating definition of the avatar, situating it somewhere between a cyborg, an amalgamation of the corporeal and the virtual, and a complete substitution. Gonzalez summarizes the general understanding of the avatar as "an object constituted by electronic elements serving as a psychic or bodily appendage, an artificial subjectivity that is attached to a supposed original or unitary being, an online persona understood as somehow appended to a real person who resides elsewhere, in front of a keyboard."<sup>11</sup> Applying this definition, the avatar offers an identificatory fantasy of appearance, constructed with elements of fashions in the corporeal world: industrial logos, Japanese anime, MTV, and comics. Yet no code is more crucial in configuring the avatar than that of gender. As avatars represent the user in online chat rooms, the appearance of gender often determines with whom and how the players will chat. Note that the operating definition of the avatar still seems to be in relation to the user. Before moving away from that traditional understanding, a consideration of an actual online performance might aid in understanding how avatars function in cybersociety.

### **Waitingforgodot.com**

From the many possible uses of the avatar, I have selected an online performance entitled *waitingforgodot.com* for several reasons: first, for its familiarity of reference to those who study performance; second, because it represents an actual online performance piece; and finally, because it is designed to stage some of the issues crucial to this study. *Waitingforgodot.com* premiered at the Third Annual Digital Storytelling Festival in Colorado in September 1997. It was created by Lisa Brenneis and Adriene Jenik. The performance takes place in a chat room at a site called The Palace.<sup>12</sup> In this space, where avatars roam and users seek chat-mates, two roundheads appear, reciting their version of some of the most familiar lines from the play. They do not announce their performance as such, but, as cyber street-theater, they simply perform in a public space. In fact, *waitingforgodot.com* could be perceived as a new kind of street theater in the cybersphere, erupting in social spaces where people pass through or hang out. It offers a witty commentary on people hanging around in chat rooms with nothing to do or say and nowhere to go. However, as we will see, avatars resemble people, but do not necessarily represent them.

In Beckett's play, the tramps represent a minimalist, existential version of *Everyman*. Beckett's characters are literally *Everymen*, in a world

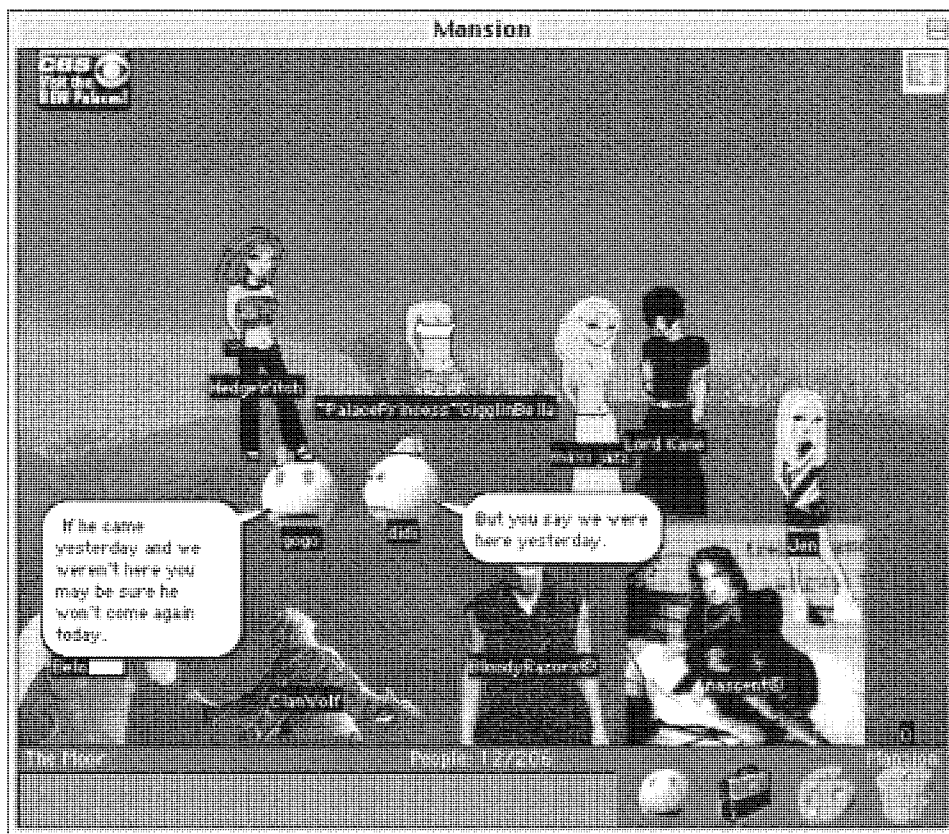


Fig. 2. *Waitingforgodot.com*. © Adriene Jenik and Lisa Brenneis. Digital capture by Adriene Jenik.

of men, retaining stable gender referents in his play.<sup>13</sup> In contrast, *waitingforgodot.com* deploys images derived from Pacman video games and happy-face logos, which seem to suggest unmarked characters. They bear no markings of gender or “race.” Every person, then, or better, “Every-signifier,” is a cartoon image developed by the computer game industry and corporate ads to signify as neutral and happy. The two floating heads are literally severed from referents to corporeal existence. Their unmarked status is part of the strategy of this performance. As is evident in the accompanying illustration, the “performers” are quite unlike the other avatars in the chat space. “Palace Princess” offers a scantily-clad female figure without a head, while Hedge Witch and Jen portray young, hip, seductive fashions (fig. 2). Those choosing to appear as male offer more punk or gothic versions of “self,” identified as Bloody Razor and Clan Wolf. They are fully clothed, signaling masculinity through their bold looks out to the screen, or the tough violence suggested by their names. Interestingly, in this example, the masculinized avatars are composed of photos, while the feminized ones are cartoon-type characters. It is important to remember that this illustration represents an accidental grouping, merely archiving a moment in a chat room. The avatars, then, reveal a characteristic array of hypergendered features in their composition.

If we identify the roundheads in *waitingforgodot.com* as performers, what does their status imply about the nature of avatars in general? Are the other avatars in the chat room also performing? Do all avatars function

like masks, or only when the user intends to perform? To understand the avatars as masks would agree with the received notion that they function as identificatory images for the user. Two sets of problems militate against this interpretation. The first has to do with traditional assumptions about the nature of masking and the second with the nature of the online conventions of representation. First, the definition of character and mask depends on the associated term of *actor*, or the indication of some "presence" behind the mask. Indeed, the sense of a subject as constituted before representation is what Judith Butler nominates as performance, against her concept of performativity.<sup>14</sup> Lurking behind the mask and the character is the "actual presence" that has somehow been altered, or represented by the mask. In other words, the mask depends upon some notion of the "real," or the "natural" for its function. Nietzsche, in his study of the classical Greek mask in *The Birth of Tragedy*, offers a hyper image of the relation of the mask to the essential that emphasizes these qualities: "The Sophoclean hero—the Apolline mask[s] . . . are the inevitable products of a glance into the terrible depths of nature: light patches, we might say, to heal the gaze seared by terrible night."<sup>15</sup> For Nietzsche, as for the Hindu scholar Sankara, the notion of mask and avatar borders on incarnation—the idea that a god, or some figure of ideality is corporealized in the process of making theater (51). In the cybersphere, the corporeal resides in the function of the user, with the avatar serving as her or his virtual mask. Either way, the sense of avatar as mask points us back to the play of essences, the necessary stipulation that there is a user, whose "real" self is altered by the avatar.

Much of the discussion about avatars does presume this relationship between avatar and user, subjecting the dynamics to a scrutiny of identificatory processes and masquerade. Utopic visions of a sphere where cross-gender identifications abound, alongside feminist warnings against any belief in the possibility of "free" play within the gender regime. Yet both sides would agree that the users are, somehow, performing versions of social identities and relationships in cyberspace. Anterior notions of "self," volition, or agency, and clear, stable attributes of social organization are required for the backdrop behind this theater of avatars. As I have argued more fully in *The Domain-Matrix*, many of these attributes are specific to an earlier form of capitalism and do not reflect the contemporary, corporate structuring of social relations.<sup>16</sup> Given the corporate, commercial takeover of what was once considered to be private space and discourse, the referents of the sign system no longer reside in the kind of natural environment Nietzsche and traditional studies of the avatar presume. Specifically in this study of the avatar, the signification of gender, or, as we will see, "race," has less to do with promoting an identificatory process between user and avatar than with promoting the avatar onscreen. In other words, avatars do not function as masks for users, but as brand names, or logos, competing in a commercial space.

Returning to those roundheads in *waitingforgodot.com*, whose function of EverySignifier is derived from computer games and corporate

“happy faces,” we can see how the avatar references structures of corporate branding and even the status of the technology itself. The cartoon avatar, such as a Disneyfied diva in the chat space, is drawn to resemble the private body of earlier capital relations, but, in its cartooned abstraction, signals the corporate reference at its root. The digital diva is a representation of gender codes used to articulate the interface between that anterior sense of the private and the live with new, corporate virtual systems. The diva is the hostess, so to speak, who promotes forms of interaction that seem familiar and enticing in the new cyberspace. The users who promote themselves through these avatars, such as Jen or Hedge Witch, are animating the interface for themselves, seduced and seducing the users to use the new products of corporate technology.

In one sense, Mark Poster prefigured this notion in his theory of how something like a subject position appears within a database. Poster notes that when so much information about a person congeals in the data, a kind of “double” of the subject actually appears there, but that that subject is one completely interpellated, or overdetermined by dominant ideologies.<sup>17</sup> I want to continue in this line of reasoning, but abandon any notion of a subject online; instead, I want to draw the relations among avatars on the screen as *interfetish object relations*. As data and functions congeal around an avatar, it acquires the seductive qualities of the fetish. Its seductive qualities compete for focus with other online objects within the competitive, commercial relations of the cybersphere.

The cyberworld of interfetish relations is simply one of the final frontiers in the development of corporate uses of the logo. Rather than serving users as masks for their identificatory fantasies, avatars actually function as forms of logos. In her brilliant study *No Logo*, Naomi Klein offers a history of the rise of the corporate “branding” that ultimately produced the logo-centric surround of the new millennium. She notes that “the first task of branding was to bestow proper names on generic goods, such as sugar, flour, soap, and cereal. . . . Logos were tailored to evoke familiarity and folksiness.”<sup>18</sup> Enter Uncle Ben, Aunt Jemima, and Old Grand Dad, who substituted for rice, flour, and whiskey. As corporate branding became more sophisticated, actual people began to stand in for the logo, as well as the more cartoon-characters. By now, we are accustomed to make a product association with movie stars or sports stars, as well as talking Chihuahuas and Bart Simpson. The personalized logos signify products or the conglomerate behind products. Magic Johnson means Nike and McDonald’s can extend its referent through any number of toys that resemble familiar cartoon characters. Klein further develops how logos are placed within movies, novels, and other so-called cultural venues. Situating the logo within civic and cultural spaces spawned what the *Wall Street Journal* identified as the “experiential communication” industry, “the phrase now used to encompass the staging of branded pieces of corporate performance art” (12). We now have branded hotels, theaters, theme parks, and even little villages. The brands loop back into their own worlds through synergies of entertainment and products, creating, as

Starbucks calls it, "a brand canopy" (148). Brands, Klein argues, "are not products but ideas, attitudes, values, and experiences. . . . the lines between corporate sponsors and sponsored culture have entirely disappeared" (30).

Gendered characterizations, particularly those that are sexualized, have been promoted in this logo culture to create the logo, or in our case the avatar, as fetish. To reverse Freud's equation, the referents of sexual practices are made to serve as fetish object of product lines. Jean Kilbourne, a scholar of advertising, emphasizes that the average person in the United States is bombarded by three thousand ads per day.<sup>19</sup> Kilbourne notes that many of these ads create what she terms a "synthetic sexuality"—one that designates a certain body type, gestural system, and fashion sense as sexy. The referent is not sex; on the contrary, sex is the referent for the product line, or more, the corporation behind various product lines. Hyperfeminized avatars, then, circulate among the other logos, competing for focus and acting out corporate and technological relations as seductive and even as sexual. Their referent is not the user, but the corporate logos that comprise the image of the avatar.

Astrid Deuber-Mankowsky has composed a sophisticated treatment of the avatar of Lara Croft, the protagonist of the computer game *Tomb Raider*, that illustrates how the sexified, powerful Lara stands in for corporate, technological success. In the narrative of the game, Lara appears as a "white," upper-class, British archaeologist off on adventures in the Third World. She is scantily clad, but tough, with weapons and martial arts in her arsenal against the Other. She is viewed from behind, suggesting that she represents, or works for, the game player. Many feminist treatments of Lara replicate the traditional focus on the user's identificatory processes, debating her subject/object status for the mostly male players, who both desire her and identify with her. Deuber-Mankowsky, however, argues that Lara Croft functions not as a character, a *Spielefigur*, but as a *Werbefigur*, an ad.<sup>20</sup> The composition and function of Lara serves to perform the imaging power of the thirty-two-bit platform and the 3-D graphics card. She is the sexy diva that attests to the imaging power of the Sony PlayStation. In other words, an avatar of a heterosexualized, white woman offers a ground for the imaging of the new convergence of filmic and digital possibilities that made the game *Tomb Raider* popular. Lara represents the high level of 3-D simulation that the successful upgrading of the computer platform and graphic card allowed in the construction of the game. Her whiteness and gender work together to create an alluring and powerful image of new technologies at work in the world.

### *Cyber-minstrelsy*

Like Lara, the majority of avatars on the net signify "whiteness," or stereotypical Anglo-American characteristics, yet there are also several uses for racial and ethnic markers in the logo-centric space. The earlier examples drawn from the initial stage of "branding," such as Uncle Ben and

Aunt Jemima, present two logos based on racial stereotyping and nostalgia for the "Old South." While today, the image of a "mammy" and a "house servant" may seem dated in their form of representation, Spike Lee's film *Bamboozled* attests to their continuing power of representation in the late twentieth century. *Bamboozled* tells the story of a TV executive who becomes successful by producing a new series called *Mantan: The New Millennium Minstrel Show*. A dancing Aunt Jemima, along with a chorus line of minstrels, helps to make the series a popular success. Lee suggests that the current enthusiasm for black performance in mass media entertainment is just another form of the minstrel show, with similar stereotypes still capable of drawing an enthusiastic audience.

Imagining that we are part of a contemporary sophisticated, urban audience, or buying public, it would seem that these antique markers of ethnicity would not produce much allure. Why would a minstrel masking of race be effective in this time of so-called multicultural social practices? The answer may lie, in part, in the kind of economic conditions that encourage such strategies of othering. In both the mid-to-late twentieth century and the mid-nineteenth century, when minstrel shows were invented, major shifts in capital investment and labor practices caused high anxiety in certain sectors of the population. In his book on minstrelsy, *Love and Theft*, Eric Lott locates the beginning of minstrel shows in the 1840s, during the depression that followed the panic of 1837.<sup>21</sup> According to Lott, the new consolidation of industrial capital caused high unemployment among the laboring classes. Lott argues that during industrialization, these minstrel shows, depicting "happy" slaves singing and dancing on the porch of the old cotton plantation, played out nostalgia for preindustrial times (148). But this nostalgia for the time of the "happy old slave" did not operate through identification with the slave. Remember that minstrel shows were the product of white entertainers in the northeast, who portrayed black, slave culture in the "Old South." The blacks were represented as unruly and uncivilized in their lusting after a good time. Their unruly behavior served two functions: to render the agrarian past as less structured and more fun than the new industrialized time, and to identify unruly behavior as specifically "black." Lott cites reviews of the minstrel shows that describe a "savage energy," with performers whose "white eyes [were] rolling in a curious frenzy" (140). He notes that when these performers cross-dressed as women, they portrayed the black women as enormous, gorging themselves on food and sex. In this way, Lott suggests, the minstrel shows displaced anxieties over unemployment to a performance of racial hierarchies. By encouraging racist and sexist prejudices, the enjoyment taken in the minstrel show displaced the uneasy contest among whites for low-level employment in the Northeast onto contempt for blacks in the "Old South." This form of working-class entertainment thus consolidated the audience, through their laughter, as "whites" (137). Further, their masculinity was shored up by the sexist rhetoric and the portrayal of heterosexual relationships as ones in which women were subordinate to men.

Many of the anxieties and solutions to the problems in the 1840s may also be identified within the current digital age. In the digital age, which arguably began in the 1980s with the invention of the Internet, the "upload" of economic prowess and employment possibilities into the electronic sphere has caused similar kinds of anxieties among workers. New firms and new job descriptions are replacing old ones, while many kinds of companies and forms of employment are disappearing. Skills with new technologies and software are required for everything from job skills to personal communication, and entertainment. Economic envy and fear among white, working-class sectors could be allayed by a form of entertainment that operates through stereotypes of black masculinity and white feminine allure. Sex and violence, those two markers of mass entertainment in the 1990s and onward, mask those anxieties through stereotypes that promise to initiate us into the land of the successful.

Imagining Internet representation as a play of racial stereotypes, Guillermo Gómez-Peña and Roberto Sifuentes opened the online "Ethno-Cyberpunk Trading Post and Curio Shop on the Electronic Frontier." In 1994, Gómez-Peña announced that they were going to infiltrate cyberspace as "cyber-immigrants" or what Gomez-Peña calls "cyber-wet-backs." Their "Ethno-Cyberpunk" trading post traded in ethnic identities both as a gallery installation and on the Internet. Avatars included Cyber Vato, a "robo gang member"; El Postmodern Zorro; and El Cultural Transvestite. Visitors to the website sent in images, sound, or texts about how Mexicans, Chicanos, and Native Americans of the 1990s should look, behave, and perform.<sup>22</sup> The artists then reproduced these stereotypes to represent ethnic identities online. In other words, these artists only reproduced stereotypical notions of how Chicanos and Native Americans seem to appear, in order to compose their avatars, or the online representatives of these members of ethnic communities. Displayed within a trading post, the stereotypes are elements of exchange. Whatever seems to be a referent to ethnicity is used for its product value.

Once more, Jennifer Gonzalez offers an insight into the construction of the avatar—this time as racialized. Continuing to operate on the assumption that avatars represent identificatory fantasies, she notes that the elements of racial stereotyping seem appealing and without threat because "Race is understood not to 'matter' . . . in this online domain," which claims to be "outside" the economic and juridical systems. She continues, "The idea of not being oneself is intimately tied to the conditions of leisure and the activity of consumption."<sup>23</sup> Gonzalez concludes: "It is precisely through an experimentation with cultural and racial fusion and fragmentation, combined with a lack of attention to social process, a lack of attention to history . . . that a new transcendental, universal, and, above all, consuming subject is offered as the model of future cyber-citizenship" (48). Even though she proceeds from a study of the subject, Gonzalez concludes that the avatar circulates in a special economic zone of privileged consumption, unmarred by considerations of labor and legal practices.

So it seems that both in this study and in studies that imagine the

avatar as a subject, racial and ethnic markers reference little else but market strategies. Yet to condemn all representations of ethnicity online would only affirm the Anglo, "white" economy of representation that controls most of the online figures, bolstering the dominant assumption that the unmarked space of representation is, indeed, "white." For an imaging of ethnicity that is funky and playful, rather than the sort deployed by corporations such as Benetton, we can return to another performance staged by Adriene Jenik. This time, Jenik uses the screen as a dreamscape, in which a player may narrate a dream that the others will inhabit and draw as it proceeds. The dream is called *Riverofsalsa*.

### **Riverofsalsa**

Catwoman, coded Latina, enters the space. The space, the *mise-en-scène*, begins as a generic, unmarked road. Scotty appears in "barrio" wear, with a boom box. Catwoman narrates her dream, while drawing on the screen visualizes it. The two avatars meet, a taco is suggested; then, suddenly, a river of salsa, flowing from the food, overtakes the space and the characters, immersing them (fig. 3). Ethnicity is marked by the fashion in clothing, in the actual drawing of Catwoman, in items such as the boom box, and in the references to a specific ethnic cuisine. Certainly, these are stereotypical images of ethnic subcultures. Perhaps they fill the formula that Gómez-Peña and Sifuentes would identify as trade in the "Ethno-Cyberpunk Trading Post."

As Beth Kolko outlines in her discussion of the online site *LambdaMOO*, there is a "growing awareness that technology interfaces carry the power to prescribe representative norms and patterns, constructing a self-replicating and exclusionary category of 'ideal' user."<sup>24</sup> In order to intervene in the construction of the ideal as "white," Kolko concludes that the user must somehow force an ethnic marking into the system by choosing a name with those specific associations, or by linguistic style, or by ethnic references (216). Kolko's work raises some key questions: how can we determine when these elements may serve an identificatory function for the user, who does participate in the Latino subculture, or when are they simply elements of ethnic fashion? Finally, would it matter whether the user who was manipulating these signs were actually within the Latino subculture or not? Isn't the point to "color" the representational vocabulary of cyberspace?

### ***Closing the Window***

As these examples have shown, the interrogation of how signs of gender and ethnicity operate online reveals less about the status of these codes in the "real" world than the basic change in the sign system of the cyber. As the frame of the real recedes from what are called immersive technologies, so, too, does its power as a referent. Cyberspace stages a theater of masks without actors, rendering the mask an antique form of the "live" that once





Fig. 3. *Riverofsalsa*. © Adriene Jenik and Lisa Brenneis. Digital capture by Adriene Jenik.

presumed the taking on of social and private faces, different from one's own identity. Hypergendered avatars and the practice of neominstrelsy reveal a transitional phase, in which evocations of the "real" are still necessary to manage the new theater of logos. Gender codes are used to signify the allure and pleasure of new technological capabilities and product lines, while neominstrelsy masks the globalizing sameness of synergies with images of difference and diversity. The happy-face logo/avatar registers the beginning of the transcendence of corporate representation in cyberspace, in which gender and minstrelsy will no longer be required for synergies to stage their competitive functions entirely without reference to social conditions.

However, while the residue of difference still plays in the increasingly monotone cyberworld, it may provide some small intervention into the upload of signification. Even if gender and ethnic codes serve only as fragments of identificatory processes for the ever-distant users, they might be used to signal the conditions of those who are not invited into the ranks of the privileged. Unfortunately, at this point, the sign for "woman" serves pretty much the same function of seductive hostess as in traditional uses, and ethnic markers seem to signal "hip," "young," and hypergendered users on the make. But what if users with more activist agendas began to people cyberspace with the images of the poor, the weak, and the disenfranchised? What if the body types of the avatars did not match the requirements of young, thin, toned, Anglo avahunks, or

digital divas? What if they did not hang around chat rooms, but used them as sites to organize, to educate, and to radicalize? What if they could imagine the “discoursemachineweapon,” as Kittler called it, as one of the most powerful tools available for intervention—turning it back onto the logos who would manage it?

What would it take to make that happen?

## NOTES

1. Friedrich Kittler, *Draculas Vermächtnis* (Leipzig: Reclam Verlag, 199). Elsewhere, I have argued for the vampire as a figure for appearance of lesbians in the system of representation. I think the work there amplifies this article’s focus on gender rather than sexual practice. See “Tracking the Vampire,” in *differences* 3, no. 2 (1991): 1–20.

2. Interestingly, Bram Stoker served as secretary to the eminent actor-manager Henry Irving. The term *secretary* derives from the Latin “keeper of secrets.” It had a more prestigious connotation for men in the Victorian era, when it suggested privy knowledge within the realm of public or governmental service. See *The History of the Secretarial Profession* on the website of professional secretaries: [www.iaap-hq.org](http://www.iaap-hq.org).

3. See Grant Kestler’s “Out of Sight Is Out of Mind: The Imaginary Space in Postindustrial Culture,” in *Social Text* 11, no. 2 (1993): 72–92.

4. Nina Auerbach, in “Magi and Maidens: The Romance of the Victorian Freud,” *Critical Inquiry* 8 (1981): 290, notes that Bram Stoker took part in the Society for Psychical Research in 1893, where he became acquainted with the notion of female hysteria. In the chapter “Victorian Mythmakers,” in *Woman and the Demon: The Life of a Victorian Myth* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 15–34, Auerbach suggests that Svengali, from DuMaurier’s novel *Trilby*, inspired Stoker’s *Dracula*. She compares an illustration of the unconscious Trilby onstage with the swooning figure of an “hysterical” woman exhibited by Charcot.

5. As we know, this practice persists today, with the taboo of illicit penetration providing a rationale for the murder of Matthew Shepard, among others.

6. I am indebted to Jeff Nyhoff for this clarification in his sophisticated, yet-unpublished work on performing the interface.

7. For a discussion of the multiple uses of the term *technology*, see the introduction to *Processed Lives: Gender and Technology in Everyday Life*, ed. Jennifer Terry and Melodie Calvert (New York: Routledge, 1997), 1–19.

8. Kate Bornstein, *Virtually Yours*, in *o solo homo*, ed. Holly Hughes and David Román (New York: Grove Press, 1998), 229–78. The visual elements of the performance described here are taken from a video of *Virtually Yours* performed at Josie’s Juice Bar in San Francisco in 1994.

9. Ellis Hanson, “The Telephone and its Queerness,” in *Cruising the Performative*, ed. Sue-Ellen Case, Philip Brett, and Susan Leigh Foster (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 37.

10. Edward Geoffrey Parrinder, *Avatar and Incarnation* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1970), 19.

11. Jennifer Gonzalez, “The Appended Subject: Race and Identity as Digital Assemblage,” in *Race in Cyberspace*, ed. Beth E. Kolko, Lisa Nakamura, and Gilbert B. Rodman (New York: Routledge, 2000), 27–28.

12. For a complete discussion of desktop theater, see Adriene Jenik's "Keyboard Catharsis and the Making of Roundheads," *Drama Review* 45, no. 3 (2001): 95–112.

13. On the point of gender, see James Knowlson's *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996). Beckett "felt very strongly that the characters in his plays were either male or female and that their sex was not interchangeable. There were many requests, sometimes fervent personal appeals made directly to him, for women to be allowed to play the male characters in *Waiting for Godot*. Beckett (or his agents) always turned them down, though he himself showed signs of wilting several times under the intense emotional pressure that was brought to bear on him" (610).

14. See Judith Butler, "Critically Queer," *GLQ* 1, no. 1 (1993): 258–308.

15. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Shaun Whiteside (New York: Penguin, 1993), 46.

16. Sue-Ellen Case, *The Domain-Matrix: Performing Lesbian at the End of Print Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996). See, especially, the section entitled "Bringing Home the Meat," which traces the commodification of social relations.

17. Mark Poster, *The Mode of Information* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 97–98.

18. Naomi Klein, *No Logo* (London: Flamingo, 2000), 6.

19. *Ms.*, December 2000–January 2001, 55.

20. Unfortunately for some, Deuber-Mankowsky's monograph is in German: *Lara Croft: Modell, Medium, Cyberheldin; das virtuelle Geschlecht und seine metaphysischen Tücken* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2001).

21. Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 137.

22. For further information on this project and its attempt to "brownify" virtual space, see <http://www.telefonica.es/fat/egomez.html>.

23. Gonzalez, "The Appended Subject," 45.

24. Beth Kolko, "Erasing @race: Going White in the (Inter)Face," in Kolko, Nakamura, and Rodman, *Race in Cyberspace*, 318.



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