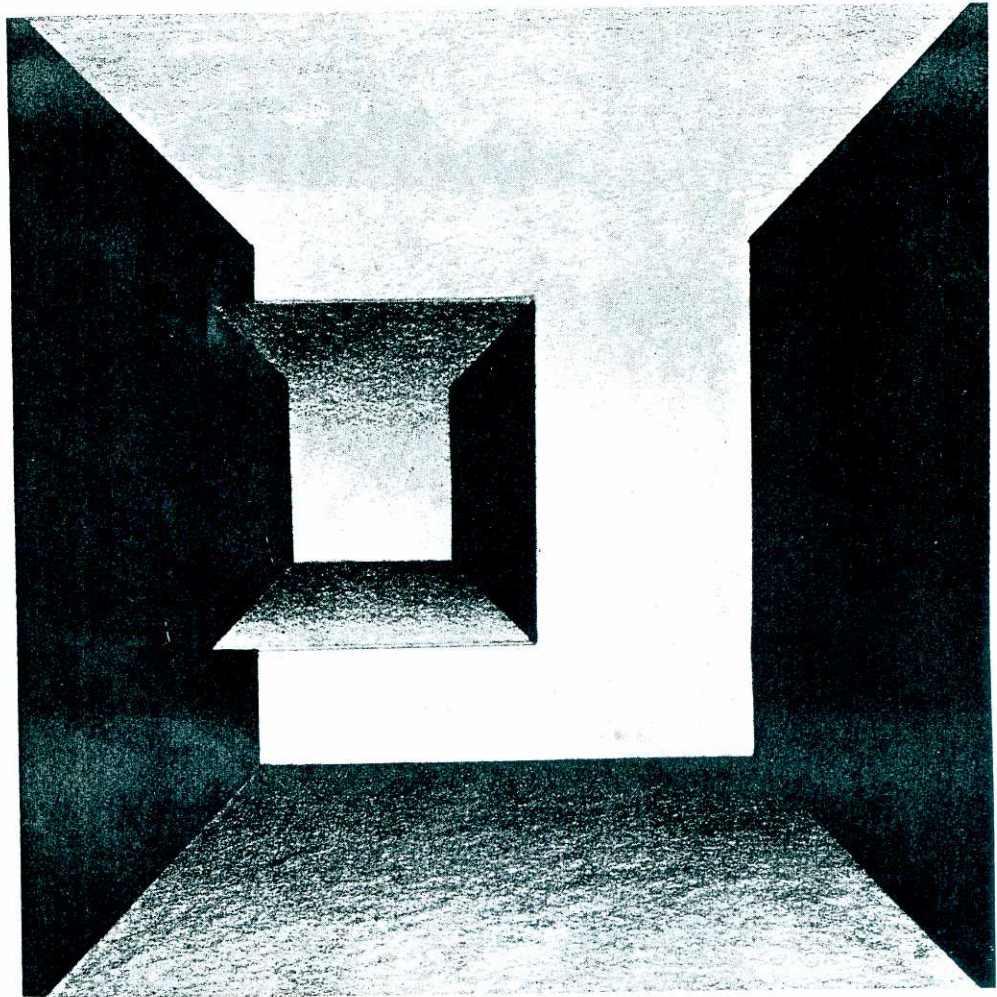


THEATRE RESEARCH INTERNATIONAL



VOLUME 20 NUMBER 2 SUMMER 1995

Oxford University Press in Association with the
International Federation for Theatre Research

VOLUME 20 NUMBER 2 SUMMER 1995

I — Theatricality

Introduction: Theatricality: A Key Concept in Theatre and Cultural Studies

ERIKA FISCHER-LICHTE

This volume is dedicated to the memory of Michael Quinn.

At the Theatre Historiography Symposium, held during the 1993 Helsinki IFTR/FIRT Conference, a specific term came into circulation which infiltrated and permeated the discussion to such an extent that it appeared to adopt the position and function of a key term in theatre historiography: 'theatricality'. This was no great surprise, however. For the symposium set out to consider two basic issues: first, to examine the application of analytic strategies from other disciplines to theatre history and, secondly, to identify the distinctive features of theatre history as a single discipline. Both concerns are closely related to the concept of theatricality.

In the search for analytic strategies recently developed in other disciplines, theatre historians and theoreticians find themselves confronted with a puzzling situation. Many studies in philosophy and psychology, in anthropology, ethnology and sociology, in political, historical and communication sciences, in cultural semiotics, in the history of art and literature employ the concept of theatre as a heuristic model to a wide extent. Foucault conceived a 'Theatrum philosophicum'; Lyotard observed 'the philosophical and political stage'; Baudrillard studied 'the stage of the body'. Clifford Geertz explored the 'theatre state Bali'; Paul Zumthor declared the performance of narrators in oral cultures to be 'theatre'; Ferdinand Mount investigated the 'Theatre of Politics'; Hayden White explained 'historical realism as tragedy'; Richard van Dülmen analysed the history of tribunal prac-

tice and penal ritual as a 'Theatre of Terror'; culture'. The list can be continued *ad infinitum*.¹

Such generally metaphorical usage of the term 'theatre' and other related terms in different disciplines which deal with cultural studies in the broadest sense of the word is not a recent development. It already occurs in the works of Sigmund Freud, Marcel Mauss, Michel Leiris and Henri Lefèbvre—to name a few of the most significant—and, from the 1960s onwards, in quite a number of sociological studies, among which the most prominent are Erving Goffman's *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), *Interaction Ritual* (1967), *Frame-Analysis* (1974) and Guy Debord's *La Société du spectacle* (1967). From the late 1970s, however, the dissemination of 'theatre' not only as a metaphor, but as a specific cultural model in different disciplines has increased to such an extent that nowadays it seems to be the most widespread heuristic model in cultural studies. Thus theatre historians searching for new analytic tools and strategies in other disciplines are referred back to their own field, which is the second aspect addressed in the symposium.

For, in order to be able to delineate the distinctive features of theatre history as a discipline, a certain consensus regarding the object whose so-called history is being explored and written up must be reached. Yet there is no reason to assume that such a consensus, actually exists.

Historians, in particular, are well aware of the fact that the term 'theatre' is culturally and historically determined and that, within Western culture from the sixteenth century, the concept of theatre has constantly changed. Accordingly, the term 'theatre' has been applied to quite different cultural, social and political events, just as it has been employed as a purely aesthetic term in the narrowest sense of the word. At times, different uses of the term competed with each other.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the avant-garde movements promoted two quite different uses and meanings of the term 'theatre'. On the one hand, they restricted it to a particular art form which, as Craig explained, was defined by its very material as essentially different from the material of any other art form. On the other hand, the same movements claimed to close the gap between art and life and to fuse theatre and reality. This demand resulted in a considerable expansion of the concept 'theatre'. The term was gradually transferred to the most divergent fields. In the end, it was applied to signify any kind of exhibitory, demonstrative, or spectacular event including performance by circus artists, jugglers, clowns, entertainers; dadaist and surrealist 'happenings' which took place in streets, cafés, parliaments, churches and other public places, May Day celebrations, rallies, meetings, union sport days, Party conventions and so on.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the rediscovery of a so-called 'ritual theatre' as well as a newly developing performance culture resulted in an even wider range of meanings of the term 'theatre'. Wherever a person exhibited her/himself, someone else, or something to the gaze of others, the term 'theatre' was applied. Not only did this 'enormous activation of the semantic field theatre'² blur the boundaries and transitions between the many metaphorical uses of the term; it also caused a considerable expansion of the field of theatre studies.

Thus, the situation in which theatre historians find themselves when facing the challenges of the symposium, resembles a painting by Escher, or something which Hofstadter calls a 'strange loop': setting out on a journey to other disciplines in search for new analytic tools, the theatre historian returns to the home field. In

the attempt to delineate the discipline from all the others by clearly defining its object and by drawing strict boundaries around its field, the theatre historian is forced to transgress borderlines to many adjacent fields and ends up dispersed over a vast area whose diverse segments are claimed and occupied by other disciplines.

It would seem wise, therefore, to avoid the trap of such a dilemma right from the start. In this respect, the introduction of the term 'theatricality' appears to be a potentially useful strategy.

The concept of theatricality (théâtralité, Theatralität; teatral'nost) was first developed in the context of manifestos and proclamations made by avant-garde movements at the beginning of this century. In accordance with the twofold principal meanings of the term 'theatre' which they promoted, the concept was articulated and used in two basically different formulations.

Georg Fuchs in *Die Revolution des Theaters* (1909) was the first to advocate a re-theatricalization of theatre (rethéâtraliser le théâtre; Retheatralisierung des Theaters) and he insisted on considering theatre as a specific art form. His aim was to identify clear criteria by which theatre may be distinguished from other art forms. It also interprets theatricality as the sum total of materials or sign systems used in a theatrical performance beyond the literary text of the drama which define the theatrical performance as such: movements, voice, sounds, music, light, colour, and so on. Nikolai Evreinov's formulation in his article *Apologija teatral'nost*³ (1908; *Apologia of Theatricality*) embraces a broad concept of theatre which defines theatricality outside the frame and scope of theatre as an art form or even theatre as a social institution. In order to be able to construct a precise and comprehensive definition, Evreinov explored highly diverse disciplines such as sociology, ethnology, history of criminal justice, political and cultural history and psychology. His aim was to reveal the workings and basic function of theatricality in each of these fields and in this respect, he might be regarded as a precursor to today's scholars of cultural studies. Evreinov's efforts led him to define theatricality as a pre-aesthetic instinct. Although this definition appears too broad and too general to allow any useful application—just as Fuchs' definition seems too narrow—it must

be emphasized that Evreinov was the first to recognize and pose the problem of how, in what respect, and to what extent the concept of theatre can be identified and applied as a cultural model beyond a purely metaphorical use of the term.

In the field of theatre studies, it was only in the 1970s that discussion on theatricality was taken up again—without reference to Evreinov, however. In her pioneering study, *Theatricality* (1972), Elisabeth Burns proceeds from the assumption that the concept of theatre is historically and culturally determined. Therefore, she argues, theatricality cannot be defined as a particular mode of behaviour or expression, for it does not depend on 'degrees of demonstrativeness' (p. 2). Instead, Burns suggests, it is 'determined by a particular view point' and, accordingly, she defines it as 'a mode of perception' (p. 13). It is the particular perspective which determines whether a situation will be regarded as theatrical or non-theatrical. By modifying Goffman's concept of framing and referring to Brecht's technique of making gestures quotable, Burns strives to delineate the factors that determine and shape the mode of perception which she locates in social conventions. Insofar as these conventions are not developed within the theatre alone but also in culture in general, she proposes a history of theatre which is to be realized as a history of perception and its social and cultural conditions.

Although today some of her arguments, hypotheses and results may seem outdated or, at least arguable in the light of some recent studies on the history of perception in Western culture, Burns must be given credit for having shown a viable way of explaining theatricality as the common denominator of theatre and culture, or as the focus in which both intersect and coincide, in her definition of it as a mode of perception.

More recent scholars who deal with the question of theatricality agree, in principle, with Burns inasmuch as she insists on the historicity and cultural determination of the concept of theatre. However, they do not all share her conclusions. Joachim Fiebach (1978),⁴ for example, refers to Brecht's *Straßenszene* (Street scene) to argue that the definition of theatricality must be

based on the consideration that it is not only a mode of perception but also a mode of behaviour and expression.

In his *Arbeitsjournal* (6 December 1940) Brecht writes:

As a result of the explorations undertaken in the STREET SCENE, one should describe all other kinds of similar everyday theatre; discover every moment where theatre is part of life, in the world of erotica, business, politics, law, religion, and so on. one should study the theatrical element in customs and rites; I've already worked a little on the fascist theatricalization of politics. but alongside this, one should also study the everyday theatre that the individual performs with no audience, the secret 'play'. in this way, one would encompass the most elemental need for aesthetic expression.⁵

Given the premise that the concept of theatre is historically and culturally determined on the one hand, and taking Brecht's ideas on everyday theatre, on the other, Fiebach concludes that there can be no single criterion for a general definition of theatricality beyond the fact that it is a process of production whose product is 'consumed' and which vanishes within the process of being produced. In order to comprehend and define theatricality as a mode of behaviour and expression, it must be described and analysed in terms of a particular epoch in a given culture. For, obviously, no mode of behaviour and expression can be defined as theatrical *per se*. Accordingly, in *Die Toten als die Macht der Lebenden* (The Dead as the Power of the Living) (1986), Fiebach embarks on a project to define and analyse theatricality in different epochs of different African cultures as a particular mode of communication which foregrounds the body as the main means of presenting a role and self-presentation.

The concept of theatricality in the 1970s also gained a certain prominence in theatre semiotics, despite its very different contexts and functions. At the risk of over-simplification, two principal directions can be identified which, in a way, can be related to the concepts put forward by Fuchs and Evreinov, although they do not refer to them directly. In his *Dictionnaire du théâtre* Patrice Pavis compiles definitions which

aim to represent 'les éléments indispensables à tout phénomène théâtral'. (p. 397). Pavis proceeds from a narrow, purely aesthetic concept of theatre. Consequently, theatricality is defined as 'ce qui, dans la représentation ou dans le texte dramatique, est spécifiquement théâtral' (p. 395) or, approaching Fuchs's understanding, 'la théâtralité s'oppose à la littérature, au théâtre du texte, aux moyens écrits, aux dialogues et même parfois à la narrativité et à la "dramaticité" d'une fable logiquement construite'. (p. 396). Since these definitions are based on the narrow concept of theatre as an art form only, they may, for the purpose of this discussion, be left aside.

In *The Semiotics of Theatre* I have defined theatricality by referring to the particular relationship between the signs brought forth by and the semiotic processes being performed within different cultural systems, on the one hand, and theatrical signs and sign processes, on the other. I have argued that in a certain sense, theatre involves the 'doubling up' of the culture in which it is played: the signs engendered by theatre denote the signs produced by the corresponding cultural systems. Theatrical signs are therefore always signs of signs.

This has two important consequences. First, since theatre produces signs using heterogeneous material which can, in principle, be identical to the material of any cultural system, the human being and its total environment may function as theatrical signs in their specific material quality. Secondly, however, whilst human beings and the objects of their environment in every culture always exist in certain communicative, practical and situative contexts which do not permit a human being to be replaced by another or by an object at random or vice versa, mobility is the prevailing feature in the case of the human body and the objects from its surroundings which they are used as theatrical signs. Here, a human body can indeed be replaced by another body or even an object, and an object can be replaced by another random object or a human body because in their capacity as theatrical signs, they can signify one another. The material existence of the human body is not of interest to the theatre because of its uniqueness nor its specific functionality alone, but foremost in terms of its ability to be used as a sign of sign.

Accordingly, theatricality may be defined as a particular mode of using signs or as a particular kind of semiotic process in which particular signs (human beings and objects of their environment) are employed as signs of signs — by their producers, or their recipients. Thus a shift of the dominance within the semiotic functions determines when theatricality appears. When the semiotic function of using signs as signs of signs in a behavioural, situational or communication process is perceived and received as dominant, the behavioural, situational or communication process may be regarded as theatrical. Moreover, since this shift of the dominant is not an objective given but depends on certain pragmatic conditions, 'theatricality' in the end, appears to be no more than a floating signifier in an endless communication process. This is to say that the term theatricality necessarily remains diffuse; as a concept it becomes indistinct, if not void.

Helmar Schramm has drawn some conclusions which open up new perspectives on the use and function of theatricality at the intersection of theatre and cultural studies. In Preliminary studies towards a history of the concept of theatre (1990)⁶ he sets out to construct three different frames of reference to investigate historical material on the concept of theatre: 1) theatre as a metaphorical model; 2) theatre as a rhetoric medium; 3) theatre as an autonomous art. Schramm underlines that such frames of reference are not to be applied in succession, as for example, 1) the seventeenth century, 2) the eighteenth century and 3) the nineteenth century; rather all three are often found to co-exist, overlap, compete or even contradict each other in writings of the same period, depending on the kind of discourse dealing with theatre. His exploration and evaluation of a huge body of thoroughly diverse and multifaceted historic material leads to the conclusion that theatricality may be understood and defined simply as an element functioning in different discourses within a range of disciplines that are devoted to cultural studies such as sociology, ethnology, anthropology, psychology, philosophy, the historical sciences, art history, cultural semiotics and so on, as well as theatre studies. The notion of theatricality depends on the respective discourse as to what kinds of

cultural, social, political events and processes are regarded and addressed as theatrical and what kind of arguments are used to show the existence and functioning of theatricality in everyday life.

Therefore, it seems a potentially fruitful approach to examine the use, function and meaning of 'theatre' in different discourses when dealing with the relationship of theatre history (or theatre studies in general) to other disciplines and with the circulation of terms, concepts, theories and methods between them.

The following four papers, which were originally presented at the Helsinki Symposium are a response to this challenge.⁷ They proceed, however, from different perspectives. Helmar Schramm focuses on the correlation between the history of theatre and the history of science in Western culture, identifying traces of the theatre model in scientific discourse from the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. He seeks to uncover the analogous structure which he identifies working in the conceptualization and stylization of three important cultural factors — perception, movement and language — in the scientific as well as the theatrical discourse. Thus, he proposes a new approach to theatre history, widening its scope considerably.

Marvin Carlson enquires into the use of 'theatre' in philosophical discourse taking, as his example, some writings of Bruce Wilshire. He suggests that the reasons for Wilshire's failure to achieve his aim of establishing a clearly defined field of ethical philosophy is because he uses 'theatre' as a model of activities which are distinct from any activities in 'real life'. Wilshire's argument stems from a very narrow concept of theatre whose historical and cultural limits can easily be demonstrated and challenged by any theatre historian.

In his examination of the function of 'theatre' in the discourse of art historians, Michael Quinn analyses the opposition between 'theatricality' and 'authenticity' as the driving force dominating the discourse. In line with Carlson's conclusions, Quinn argues that either the restricted range, lofty ideological constructions or other shortcomings of the discourse under investigation are caused, at least to a considerable extent, by reference to a very narrow

concept of theatre. A wide field opens up for a promising collaboration between theatre history and other disciplines.

My contribution tests the range of theatricality as an interdisciplinary element in the theatrical discourse. With reference to Reinhardt's production of *Sumurun* (1910) and its reception in Berlin and New York, particular theatrical devices are related to some fundamental cultural changes in perception and meaning generating, and this correlation is discussed in the light of radical constructivism, highlighting theatricality as the capacity of constructing reality.

The publication of these four articles is intended to stimulate and intensify a lively debate on theatricality, to encourage and celebrate a fascinating experiment which has brought about an unconventional collaboration of disciplines and the beginning of a fruitful cross-fertilization between the fields of theatre history and other disciplines.

Erika Fischer-Lichte is Professor of Theatre Studies, Johannes Gutenberg-Universität, Mainz.

Notes

1. In the seventeenth century, when the metaphorical use of the term theatre was most widespread, a series of books flooded Europe which used the term in very similar ways to those found today in cultural studies as, for example, *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* (1570), *Theatrum Europaeum* (1627 ff.), *Theatrum Cometicum* (1681), *Theatrum poenarum, suppliciorum et executionum criminalium* (1693-7).

2. Helmar Schramm, 'Theatralität und Öffentlichkeit. Vorstudien zur Begriffsgeschichte von "Theater"', ed. Karlheinz Barck et al. *Ästhetische Grundbegriffe. Studien zu einem historischen Wörterbuch* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1990), p. 206.

3. See Tony Pearson articles on Evreinov in *Theatre Research International*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (Summer 1987), pp. 147-67, 'Evreinov and Pirandello: Twin Apostles of Theatricality' and Vol. 17, No. 1 (Spring 1992), pp. 26-38, 'Evreinov and Pirandello: Two Theatricalists in Search of the Main Thing'.

4. Joachim Fiebach, 'Brecht's "Straßenszene". Versuch über die Reichweite eines Theatermodells', *Weimarer Beiträge*, 1978, 2, pp. 123-47.

5. Bertolt Brecht, *Arbeitsjournal*. Vol. 1 (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1973), p. 204.

6. See note 2.

7. With the exception of Schramm's article which was specially written for this issue.

Theatre History, Methodology and Distinctive Features

MARVIN CARLSON

We are living at a time when we are particularly conscious of historical change and of the impermeability of institutions, political, social, intellectual, and educational. The old disciplinary structures that organized our Western educational system for so long seem to have accelerated from the slow and comfortable evolution which gave rise to, for example, the various social sciences and, indeed, our own discipline of theatre studies into a dizzying whirl of new inter and cross relationships that the stunning proliferation of centres, institutes, and special programmes reflects but by no means adequately represents. The world of intellectual discourse, within which theatre studies, historical studies, and for that matter the cognate fields toward which and from which analytical ideas of theatre and performance circulate, has become in the last quarter of a century extremely complex, and seems to offer an almost infinite variety of methodologies vying for critical attention. There are a number of concerns and assumptions that run consistently through a great deal of this varied discourse, however, and one of the most important of these has obviously also contributed significantly our sense of a conceptual world in flux. This is the wide circulation in modernist thought of historical and cultural relativism, the rejection of traditional essentialist beliefs in favour of an attitude that regards most human institutions as culturally generated and thus always changing or changeable through the continuing negotiations of cultural activity.

This is not the most comfortable of intellectual positions, especially for those who would like to believe that the institutions around them have some eternal validity and are not subject to what may seem to be purely arbitrary whims of

historical circumstance. Ignoring the complex interrelationship between an ever-changing social situation and the weight of the inherited culture, conservative critics are tempted to regard supporters of relativist position as at best whimsical subverters of established values which, having stood the test of time, should be accepted as absolute, or, at worst, wilful anarchists. The resistance of conservative scholars to relativist thought has fuelled bitter battles in the American educational establishment in recent years. One of the best known of these has concerned what has come to be known as the canon, the standard 'great books' (or plays) of the (primarily) Western world that are presumed to be a part of the knowledge of every well-educated person. There are certainly some participants in this struggle who still hold the traditional position that certain works stand above the historical process and can be counted upon to continue to speak deeply to all persons in all cultures, past, present, and future. On the whole, however, both those who defend the canon and those who attack it agree that the canon is an historical phenomenon, created out of a historical process and reflecting the concerns and values of certain historical groups. Those who defend it do so in significant measure because they believe in the cultural values that it historically reflects, which are on the whole those of liberal Western humanism, and those who attack it do so in significant measure because they feel that alternative voices within and outside this particular historical tradition have not been allowed expression. There are still those who believe that the canon exists outside history, that a 'great book' defines itself outside the historic process and remains always a 'great book', regardless of

cultural change. But even when the defenders of the canon are willing to accept as given a certain degree of historical relativism, they may remain concerned about how quickly serious or sweeping changes in the canon should come about.

Although that body of works known as the canon has been the focus of particular attention and debate in recent years, the same tensions and cultural forces can be seen operating in a wide variety of groupings of material and phenomena that for convenience of analysis or for more complex historical reasons have come to be considered together and subjected together to scholarly study or analysis. Once such a grouping is established, there is a strong tendency for it to become naturalized, for its historical and cultural contingencies to be forgotten and for critics to begin assuming (or seeking for) a 'natural' or even 'universal' justification for its existence, a process related to what Marxists call reification. Consider, for example, the enormous power exercised in the history of theatre studies by the concept of genre, most strikingly developed in relation to tragedy. Once such a term is well established, it takes on a life of its own, and the assumption is commonly found that since the class exists, there must be an abstract originary model of 'tragedy' that authenticates and supports the term, and enormous energy may be expended arguing over such questions as whether a certain play can legitimately be called a tragedy or not.

Against this background I think we may begin to see how problematic the second of our general questions in fact is. When we try to determine the 'distinctive traits, methods, evidence, and subject matter of theatre history as a separate or independent discipline', we must first confront what distinguishes theatre itself from other phenomena that might be considered historically. Here, if we are honest, we must admit that 'theatre' is, if anything, even less 'fixed' as a phenomenon than 'tragedy'. This does not mean that 'theatre history' cannot and has not possessed 'distinctive traits, subject matter', and so on, that have separated it from other scholarly endeavours, but it does mean that these are historically and culturally conditioned, and that these 'distinctive features' may vary greatly in different periods and in different locations. If we look at what has been the

'distinctive subject matter' of theatre history, in America at least, we find a very strange and seemingly almost arbitrary collection of material. Puppet theatre, for example, a major part of the world's theatrical tradition, is not generally considered a part of 'theatre history'. If we say we are concerned only with works involving human actors (arbitrary decision), then why do we essentially exclude from theatre history the entire realm of dance? Indeed theatre with a strong musical component is likely to receive only modest attention by theatre historians, even opera, despite its obvious theatricality. Some of these anomalies we can explain by theatre's traditional emphasis on the written drama, but other anomalies remain. Think how strange it is, for example, that any well-trained theatre historian is expected to be familiar with the practices and the major names of the great baroque scenic designers, but the same historian is not expected by the profession to have the slightest idea of what sort of works were actually presented in these settings, nor even (odder still in terms of the presumed focus of the discipline) what sort of acting or physical staging took place in relation to these settings.

The actual 'subject matter' for historiographic study is not only inconsistent as a whole; it is also clearly subject to historical change. We are all aware of how recently popular entertainment of various kinds has become acceptable 'subject matter' for theatre history (even though a few popular manifestations, most notably the *commedia dell'arte*, have been traditionally acceptable). But there is still much controversy about the limits of such study, and while the field now has no problem with, for example, nineteenth-century melodrama, there still is some doubt about the 'legitimacy' for theatre historians of studying such activities as circus, or medicine shows or professional wrestling. As the more general field of performance study has developed, such questions proliferate. Should theatre historians study film and television, and if not, how can film and video records of stage plays be considered legitimate documentation? Should theatre historians study rock concerts, sporting events, political demonstrations? When does theatre become paratheatre, and is paratheatre part of the 'distinctive subject matter' of theatre history?

Some of these questions are more heatedly debated than others, but in a sense they are misleading questions, since they imply a defined or definable boundary to the methods and materials of an intellectual discipline such as theatre history, when in fact, like any field of human endeavour, it utilizes methods and materials that are constantly changing and constantly overlapping in different ways other fields of endeavour.

This is not to say that a field such as theatre history cannot be defined, and that certain general features and strategies of it cannot be determined, but only that these features and strategies do not derive from some essence of the discipline, but from a specific cultural situation and subject always to change. Therefore, if they are to be discussed meaningfully at all, they must be discovered inductively and not deductively, and with a recognition that in practice they are constantly open to negotiation. The traits, methods, evidence, and subject matter of theatre history are determined by the interests and activities of those who designate themselves, or are designated by the culture, as practitioners in that field at any particular point in time. It is the general consensus of this group that defines what 'theatre history' is, and although the particular configuration of methods and materials at any one historical moment may allow a distinction between this scholarly field and some other, it is, I think, a hopeless endeavour to try to determine any ongoing distinctive methods or materials, since any of these will be in continual circulation and negotiation among many fields.

It is particularly important to recognize this reality at a time like the present, when most traditional intellectual disciplines, at least in America, are in a very fluid state and when there is, as a result, a good deal of pressure to 'purify' or 'stabilize' the disciplines. There would appear to be good pragmatic reasons for this. If we cannot say clearly what distinguishes theatre history from literary history, art history, music history, social science history, or cultural history, then is there not a danger that the university administrators, legislators, or funding agencies that provide most American scholars with a livelihood may now begin to wonder why our activity cannot be as easily

taken care of by one or several of these other disciplines? Certainly in an era of shrinking resources, it is only prudent to consider what arguments can be raised in defence of the research and activities that engage our own particular interest. Nevertheless, if this is our major motivation, the strategy of seeking to establish precisely what distinguishes our discipline from the rest seems uncomfortably close to modern marketing strategy, where publicists for each product devote much of their intellectual energy to fixing in the public mind the unique features of their particular automobile, toothpaste, or detergent. To the extent, then, that we wish to convince outsiders of the importance of support for this field, then our efforts would be better employed in asking how our research, whatever its features, contributes to such general goals as cultural enrichment, humanistic enlightenment, or the mission of the modern university, regardless of whether our activities are clearly distinct from those encountered elsewhere.

In any case, we cannot change the reality of the modern interpenetration of scholarly fields of study, reality that by its nature presents precisely these same concerns in greater or lesser measure to these other fields as well. Just as we are now drawn to ask what is the 'subject matter' of theatre history, so art historians and literary historians now wrestle over the boundaries of their own disciplines, once considered fairly clearly established. I shall presently return to this dynamic by analysing the specific example of a contemporary phenomenologist and ethical philosopher much concerned with the encroachment of theatrical and performance metaphors into his field of study.

Obviously the documentation and study of the process of the physical enactment of a narrative structure is a major concern of theatre history and, one may argue, the 'essence' of theatre history. But even this minimal definition presents problems. The rise of performance art, which few would reject as a subject outside the proper concerns of theatre historians, challenges not only traditional narrative structure but even the more basic assumption of mimesis. And even more traditional theatre studies often wander far from the specific concern of the physical performance. Consider

economic or administrative studies of particular theatres, for example, or demographic audience studies, or architectural studies, especially those that are not primarily concerned with performance space. The methods, evidence, and analysis employed in these varied studies may be quite different and might very likely have more in common with methods, evidence, and analysis in economics, sociology, anthropology, or architecture than with other projects in theatre history. One can always say that theatre history is distinct because its central subject is theatre, but falling back upon tautological truisms does not clarify matters much, and perhaps less so today than at many periods in the past because there is no longer a clear cultural consensus even of what theatre is.

By no means all of the pressures to define the distinctive scope and strategies for what comprises theatre history come from within the community of theatre historians. The modern overlapping and interpenetration of disciplines and the widespread use of the terms 'theatre' and 'performance', even if only as propaedeutic metaphors, means that more people than ever before, and more people outside the traditional grouping of theatre researchers, have now an intellectual and professional stake in what theatre means, and thus what theatre research and indeed theatre history may mean. So long as this development adds to the richness and variety of theatre study, I see it as a positive one, but it does not always work that way. Scholars in fields outside traditional theatre studies can also, knowingly or not, work to restrict and thus hinder the full range of theatre study by seeking to define the distinctive subject matter and research strategies of theatre for their own purposes, either because this definition aids them in the development of some research strategy of their own or because they are attempting to limit and purify their own presumed discipline and feel that this can in part be done by excluding a specific area, called theatre, from it. A recent, familiar, and ultimately not very productive example of this was the great concern by a number of theorists of performance in the early 1980s to valorize performance by defining it entirely outside the presumed boundaries of theatre.

Perhaps the most interesting attempts to define the boundaries of theatre from outside have been stimulated by the process of the transfer and appropriation of theatre and performance as concepts and metaphors by other disciplines. By way of illustration, I would like to focus upon certain writings of Bruce Wilshire, an ethical philosopher and phenomenologist, whose ideas on this subject are of particular interest because he does not simply utilize the metaphors as others in other disciplines have done, but also discusses and critiques the process of appropriation (or misappropriation) itself.

In his major book, *Role Playing and Identity*,¹ Wilshire discusses thoughtfully and at some length one of the best known examples of theatre utilized as a metaphor for analytic work in another discipline, the work of the sociologist Erving Goffman, who looked to the theatrical roles assumed by actors as a model for social roles. Indeed Wilshire's entire book may be considered as an extended refutation of Goffman's model of the self. Briefly stated, Wilshire feels that in Goffman's theories, the theatrical metaphor becomes more than a metaphor, that Goffman seems to view social roles as essentially duplicitous and evasive of the moral responsibility of an ethical self. 'In aestheticizing behavior through his role theory', says Wilshire in summary, 'Goffman contributes to the devitalization of the self.'²

A part of Wilshire's disagreement with Goffman is based not on philosophical, but on theatrical grounds. Wilshire argues that Goffman not only misunderstands everyday relationships between persons, and between persons and actions, but that he also misunderstands the relationship between actors and audiences. The kind of deceit Goffman associates with role-playing is, Wilshire argues, not found in theatre, where the audience is perfectly aware that the character is being consciously created by the actor, and indeed accepts that knowledge as a part of the tacit 'socially sanctioned contract' which allows acting to produce its desired effect.

While both acting and social role-playing are more complex and ambiguous than Wilshire is able to suggest in developing his disagreement with Goffman, his basic assumption seems at

first glance reasonable enough that in real life an over-arching self makes ethical choices for which it must take responsibility, regardless of 'role-playing', while the stage role is recognized by actor and audience alike as a game for which such responsibility is missing. As Wilshire observes, 'I am responsible for my behavior off-stage in fundamentally different ways from my behavior onstage.' Yet if Wilshire knew more about theatre, either contemporary or historical, he might be more cautious about the clarity of this distinction. Certainly no audience member expects actors to be held responsible outside their fictive world for their on-stage declarations of love or hate, but in other important ways they are in fact responsible for their onstage behaviour in a manner which cannot so readily be separated from the offstage world. Consider the recent case of Karen Finley, for example, whose confrontational performances were considered at least by many U.S. Senators to be so threatening to public order that not only was her governmental funding cut off, but the entire funding operations of the arts came under attack, in a controversy still not resolved. The whole history of censorship and continuing tension between actors and civic and religious authorities unhappily argues against the neat ethical distinction Wilshire proposes.

Were Wilshire's speculations to be directed to a readership of persons primarily concerned with philosophy, this serious oversimplification of theatrical dynamics could perhaps be condoned on the grounds that he, like Goffman, is a theorist without a good deal of knowledge of theatre drawing upon a general view of theatre as a metaphor for his actual interest and audience. Recently, however, Wilshire has entered the domain of direct theatre speculation, as Turner did in his later years, contributing an article, 'The Concept of the Paratheatrical', to *The Drama Review*. In this context his assertions become more troubling. His concern moves beyond a consideration of acting to the entire theatre occasion, and particularly to those performances which stretch or even defy the traditional boundaries of theatre. Once again, Wilshire emphasizes what he considers to be a basic and unequivocal difference between what an actor does and says on stage and what he or she does in real life. There is a 'gaping distinc-

tion' between 'real-life events' such as cocktail parties and plays, and this distinction is the same as that adumbrated in his earlier book: 'At the cocktail party we address each other in *propria persona*, in one's own person', while we assume 'fictional characters' on stage. Again, it is hard to imagine how Wilshire would understand, for example, a Spaulding Grey monologue, recounting his own real-life experiences, or with Split Britches' *Anniversary Waltz*, celebrating and exploring the ongoing real-life relationship of its two actresses Peggy Shaw and Lois Weaver, or indeed in the whole tradition of autobiographical performance so important in contemporary American gay and feminist performance, where comfortable 'gaping distinction' clearly does not exist.

But, further in the essay, the 'gaping distinction' is extended to performance as a whole. The grounds of this distinction remain the same: theatre, as a fictive world, can have no consequences outside this fiction, especially consequences that Wilshire considers socially negative. 'Nothing is to occur in the playing area', he insists, 'which generates consequences in the outside world that are considered there to be illegal or seriously destructive.' Once again one must ask, if this blanket statement is true, then what is the motivation for the centuries of censorship and of official uneasiness about the theatre? Wilshire's attempt to remove theatre entirely from any negative social effects recalls Lamb's famous defence of Restoration comedy, built on the rather extreme position that the apparent negative social concerns in such plays should cause no concerns because such plays are set in what Lamb calls a 'fairylane', with no implied relationship to the real world, and where we should be 'as unconcerned at the issues as at the battle of the frogs and mice'.³

Most writers consider that paratheatrical manifestations have allowed a certain vagueness on the boundaries between 'real life' and 'fictionalization' in such manifestations, and a certain measure of ambiguity in these operations. Not so Wilshire. For him the paratheatrical, which he loosely equates with performance, must be as distinctly bounded as conventional theatre, and he wishes these boundaries to protect the outside world not or from illegal or socially unacceptable effects arising from perfor-

mance, but indeed from any effects whatever. His final argument, and the one he considers most telling, he insists that 'no extension of the categories of the paratheatrical' could cover so phenomenological and ethically charged an event as an actual human death. This is not entirely a moral matter, since Wilshire insists that, *pace* the Roman circuses, 'even the theatrical execution of convicted felons' cannot be considered performance, since, whatever the opinion of the corrupt audience, the felon himself could not possibly consider this a 'playful act'.

Obviously this is an extreme case, and Wilshire means it to be so, but even here there is room for disagreement. Not all performance is 'playful', and the use of the word reveals once again the distinction Wilshire insists upon making between the 'serious' business of everyday life and the 'play' of theatre. And yet history is full of examples of condemned persons 'performing' their final moments for the benefit of onlookers or posterity, and drawing upon cultural tropes or developing their own unique variations to achieve a particular effect. Let me give but two familiar examples from the public executions under Mary Tudor in 1555 and 1556. On the day of his death Thomas Cramner read a recantation in St. Mary's Church, Oxford, then added that he above all regretted the statements he signed in fear of death, concluding 'foreasmuch as my hand offended, writing contrary to my heart, my hand shall first be punished therefor, for it shall be first burned'. Indeed, Foxe reports, as the flames neared his body, Cramner stretched out his hand and held it 'steadfast and immovable, that all men might see his hand burned before his body was touched. And using the words of Stephen, "Lord, receive my spirit" in the greatness of the flame he gave up the ghost.'¹⁴ Even more familiar is the advice of Hugh Latimer to his fellow martyr, Nicholas Ridley, on their joint pyre in 1555: 'Be of good cheer, Master Ridley, play the man; we shall this day light such a candle, by God's grace, in England, as I trust shall never be put out.'¹⁵

Clearly both Cramner and Latimer were well aware of the performative element in their deaths, and utilized that element to impress their audiences, hoping to affect the future.

Cramner announced not only his theatricalized gesture, but how it was to be interpreted, and Latimer's final advice specifically contradicts Wilshire, as a condemned 'felon' accepting and indeed exalting his death as a 'playful' act, where the 'playing' is undertaken with the hope of the most serious consequences.

Much of what Wilshire has to say about theatre and its perception is astute and stimulating, and I do not wish to give the impression that I find his approach totally or even largely mistaken. Nevertheless in his desire to isolate artificially onstage and offstage human activity, he encounters serious problems which seem to me analogous to the problems within the operations of theatre history with which I began. Just as certain scholars studying the theatre would like to protect their claimed discipline by seeking the clear boundaries that set it apart from other fields of study, such as sociology or philosophy, Wilshire attempts to protect his claimed discipline, ethical philosophy, by seeking the clear boundaries that set it apart from such activities as theatre or performance. In both cases this urge to define and to delimit produces a model of 'theatre' that in practice is clearly inadequate to deal intellectually with this complex human activity. Both models deny the historical placement and historical change of 'theatre' — a result that should be particularly disturbing to those that call themselves theatre historians — by attempting to construct an abstract definition of theatre that stands outside the corrosive effects of a historical situation. Wilshire's model is particularly disturbing on these grounds because he is so concerned with removing theatre from a pragmatic relationship to offstage life. Strictly followed this approach would seemingly not only deny the name of theatre to specifically engaged drama such as that of Karen Finley, or for that matter Brecht, Shaw, or *Waiting for Lefty*, but apparently would deny to theatre any power to produce, consciously or unconsciously, a real effect on the world outside it.

The evidence of these attempts both from within the traditional field of theatre history and from outside it to define discipline boundaries and to seek the distinctive features of various activities and fields of study does not augur well for the success or even the viability

of such endeavours. At a time when the interpenetration of fields has become an accepted fact of intellectual life, it seems both time-wasting and futile to spend energy in the defending of disciplinary turf or in the protection of the presumed purity of any particular area of academic pursuit. Rather we should consider how the new landscape of shifting and permeable boundaries opens new opportunities for research and for understanding of whatever aspects of human culture and society most interest us. This is not to advocate the naive or faddish appropriation of materials or methods from other fields but a intelligent and sensitive utilization of them. I admit that there has been a good deal of such naiveté, both by theatre researchers and by some in other fields, who have appropriated uncritically materials and methods from theatre. Nevertheless, those of us who think of ourselves as theatre scholars should find both stimulus and excitement in the current fluid situation in academic study. Of course some will continue to pursue work in the public theatre of ancient Greece, the religious drama of the middle ages, the court theatre of Louis XIV, in the work of Stanislavsky, or Reinhardt, or Brecht, Brook, or Mnouchkine, but others can, or should, feel free to follow their interests in human performance, into circus, or professional wrestling, or rock concerts, or political meetings without feeling the need to justify to themselves or others, that such activities can fall within the proper boundaries of theatre historiography.

Moreover, this freedom in the choice of subject matter needs to be matched with a similar freedom in methodology. The test of a strategy should not be whether it is 'proper' to some abstract idea or to the tradition of our discipline, but whether it is a tool that seems promising to develop interesting new insights. New subject areas naturally will encourage the use of new tools, some of them likely borrowed from other fields of study but of course it is also true that new tools of research may also yield surprising

new insights when applied to the most conventional of subject matter. It has become more difficult than ever (if indeed it was ever possible) to define clearly what are 'the' methods or strategies of theatre historiography, and this situation naturally brings with it some sense of insecurity. On the other hand, the benefits are great. As individual researchers we can feel free to pursue our studies of human cultural phenomena without worrying about justifying to ourselves or to others, that what we are doing is really 'theatre history'. And even more important, the overlapping with other areas has placed at our potential disposal a stimulating array of methodological strategies, offering the potential of exciting new discoveries even in the areas most thoroughly covered by traditional research. To take advantage of these benefits, though, we need to shift our basic concerns from such totalizing ones as 'what are the methods and subject matter of theatre history?' to more pragmatic and case-based concerns such as 'what research strategies are available to me from whatever field that will allow me to ask the most productive questions about the historiography project that I am currently pursuing?' I would hope that future conferences could focus more on exchanging information on such strategies than on seeking some sort of consensus about what our field is or should be.

Marvin Carlson is Professor of Theatre Studies, CUNY Graduate Center.

Notes

1. Bruce Wilshire, *Role Playing and Identity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), p. 280.
2. Bruce Wilshire, 'The Concept of the Paratheatrical', *The Drama Review* 34,4 (Winton 1990), p. 178.
3. Charles and Mary Lamb, *Works* (London: 1903), 2 p. 144.
4. John Foxe, *Acts and Monuments*, 8 v. (London, 1841 VIII, 90).
5. James A. Froude, *The Reign of Mary Tudor* (London Dent, 1913).

From Theatre to Theatricality— How to Construct Reality

ERIKA FISCHER-LICHTE

At the end of the nineteenth century, the dominance of language, so typical of Western culture since the Renaissance, was increasingly challenged. As early as 1876, Nietzsche wrote on Richard Wagner in *Thoughts Out of Season*:

He was the first to recognize an evil which is as widespread as civilization itself among men; language is everywhere diseased, and the burden of this terrible disease weighs heavily upon the whole of man's development. Inasmuch as language has retreated ever more and more from its true province—the expression of strong feelings, which it was once able to convey in all their simplicity—and has always had to strain after the practically impossible achievement of communicating the reverse of feeling, that is to say, thought, its strength has become so exhausted by this excessive confusion of its duties during the comparatively short period of modern civilization, that it is no longer able to perform even that function which justifies its existence, to wit, the assisting of those who suffer in communicating with each other concerning the sorrows of existence. Man can no longer make this misery known unto others by means of language; hence he cannot really express himself any longer. And under these conditions, which are only vaguely felt at present, language has gradually become a force in itself which with spectral arms coerces and drives humanity where it least wants to go.¹

The disease of language which Nietzsche here diagnoses, can be described as a degeneration of language from the state of being a polyfunctional, ambiguous, flexible semiotic system that allows people to express their feelings, con-

stitute their selves and communicate with each other, into a restrictive technical language. Such terminology was neither capable of expressing strong emotions nor of serving to communicate between human beings any more. Rather, it estranged them from themselves as well as from one another. However, this focusing of language on its denotative-conceptual, logical-grammatical capabilities does not seem to have enhanced its cognitive qualities, as Hugo von Hofmannsthal's 'Letter of Lord Chandos' (1902) shows. Here, Lord Chandos complains:

At first I grew by degrees incapable of discussing a loftier or more general subject in terms of which everyone, fluently and without hesitation, is wont to avail himself. I experienced an inexplicable distaste for so much as uttering the words spirit, soul, or body. I found it impossible to express an opinion on the affairs at Court, the events in Parliament, or whatever you wish. This was not motivated by any form of personal deference (for you know that my candour borders on impudence), but because the abstract terms of which the tongue must avail itself as a matter of course in order to voice a judgement—these terms crumbled in my mouth like mouldy fungi. [. . .] For me, everything disintegrated into parts, these again into parts; no longer would anything let itself be encompassed by one idea. Single words floated round me; they congealed into eyes which stared at me and into which I was forced to stare back—whirlpools which gave me vertigo and, reeling incessantly, led into the void!²

On the one hand, the *abstract words*, the terms—the tools of cognition—decompose the very moment they are about to be used to for-

multate a judgement. On the other hand, the forms dissipate, so that the terms cannot refer to them any longer. In the process of total disintegration, the crisis of language turns out to be a crisis of perception and of cognition. Since language is not able to structure or control perception and cognition any more, the world seems to fall apart. Words appear as turbulences that do not lead to the perception or interpretation of reality but, instead, to a complete void.

The 'cultural crisis' at the turn of the century, thus, seems to have sprung from the absolute dominance of language over the other semiotic systems; it was sensed the moment the crisis of language became apparent. In order to overcome the cultural crisis it was necessary to restructure not just the individual semiotic systems—particularly language—but also their interrelationships. The 'retheatricalization of theatre' as proclaimed by the twentieth-century theatre world can be described and understood as the attempt to deconstruct the traditional system of semiotic systems employed in Western culture and to restructure the whole system as well as its sub-systems in order to open up possible solutions to this crisis.

I will not take the proclamations and theories of the avant-gardists as my point of departure, but instead a popular production by Max Reinhardt which ran from 1910 to 1912 in Berlin, London, Paris and New York: the pantomime *Sumurun* by Friedrich Freksa. This production deviated in many respects not only from the usual productions of dramatic theatre of the time, but also from other—innovative—productions by Reinhardt.

The action of the pantomime takes place 'in an imaginary Orient, perhaps in the legendary Samarkand'.³ It consists of a string of somewhat unrelated situations, unconnected by the logic of action or by psychology. The individual situations feature scenes of passion (scenes of love and murder), on the one hand, and, on the other, comical scenes dealing with the Hunchback (with his suicide, his corpse, his resurrection). In order to achieve a rhythmically structured sequence from these more or less independent scenes, music (by Victor Hollaender) was introduced. The music, however, was not supposed to distract the attention of the spectators from the mimicry of the performers and thus ceased

at 'the very great moments', as Freksa put it. Accordingly, the coherence between the scenes was not established nor was it guaranteed by the linearity of their succession (i.e. it was not based, on logical connections between them or the psychology of the dramatic figures) rather, it depended solely on the rhythm of the succession, emphasized by music.

The production was conceived as an experiment. In place of language, the performer's body should dominate. Not, however, like 'the old pantomime which replaces the words by stereotypical gestures, so that one wonders why the people do not rather speak'. On the contrary, scenes were to be created, 'that, basically, could do without words'.⁴

The shift of the focus from language to body had already been discussed and advocated for some years by Edward Gordon Craig and Georg Fuchs. In his article 'The Dance' (1906) Fuchs defined dance as the basis of the theatre since, in principle,

Dance and acting are one and the same art [...] rhythmic movement of the human body in the space, caused by the creative impulse to represent an emotion by the expressive means of one's own body, and with the intention of pleurably releasing this inner drive by setting other people in the same or similar rhythmic vibrations.⁵

Fuchs even went so far as to proclaim the culture of the body as the foundation of a new culture. That is to say, Fuchs did not restrict his reflections on the dominance of the body to the realm of theatre, rather he tended to think of the body as a means to overcome the crisis of culture. To a certain extent, the body was meant to replace language. Accordingly Fuchs, a disciple of Nietzsche, propagated the development of a physical culture:

The culture of the naked body is the presupposition of the culture of the dressed body [...]. Our child care, hygiene, massage, gymnastics, physical exercises and sports and whatever else related to that are being permanently refined, so much so that they are being transformed into aesthetics, quasi by themselves and without any explicit artistic intention. The strata of the most refined,

fact, already enjoys again the appearance of a perfectly developed human body and its movements.⁶

Fuchs held the development of such physical cultures as a prerequisite to the process which transforms 'the body into a means of artistic creation' and, in this way, the dancing body into a perfect semiotic system that will be able to realize all the tasks and functions language can no longer fulfil. Thus, the focus, as well as the dominance, shifts from language to the body.

In *Sumurun* Reinhardt brought about another radical innovation. For the first time, he employed the *hanamichi* from the Japanese kabuki theatre, the 'flower-path', as he called it. Reinhardt was informed about the *hanamichi* and its particular possibilities by one of his stage designers, Emil Orlik. Orlik had lived in Japan for about a year in 1900-1 to study the art of the wood block print. When he told Reinhardt about the *hanamichi*, its concept was already quite well-known and discussed among theatre reformers. Information about the *hanamichi* was available through many publications that appeared on Japan and the Japanese theatre from the 1880s. In 'Le Théâtre au Japon' (1888) Alfred Lequeux, for example, describes the spatial conception of the *hanamichi* as well as the actors' use of it. He comes to the conclusion:

La vie du drame gagne beaucoup à ce procédé. Toute la salle participe, pour ainsi dire, à l'action. On voit quelle proportion prend la scène empiétant ainsi jusqu'à l'entrée du parterre par dessus les têtes des spectateurs.⁷

This spatial conception allowed the simultaneous representation of different actions taking place on the path and a subplot evolving on the stage. Lequeux concludes: 'Chacun se trouve ainsi au milieu du drame, il y prend peut-être un intérêt d'autant plus vif.'⁸ Lequeux interprets the *hanamichi* as a device which creates a totally different kind of interaction (compared to Western standards) between actors and spectators. This point is also made by Adolf Fischer in his article 'Japans Bühnenkunst und ihre Entwicklung':

Often two scenes unfold before the eyes of the spectators at the same time: one on the stage

and the other on the *hanamichi*. You will not believe to what extent the audience, sitting between both parties, becomes emotionally involved and wrapped up in the action, and sometimes, carried away by its mood, even participates.⁹

Thus, the activity of the audience seemed, from a Western point of view, the most remarkable trait of the kabuki theatre.¹⁰ It is small wonder, therefore, that the avant-gardists turned to the spatial conception of the kabuki theatre. In *Die Schaubühne der Zukunft* (1905) Georg Fuchs also considered this device:

And it is of great importance never to forget that drama, by its very essence, is at one with the festive crowd. For it comes into existence the very moment it is experienced by the crowd. Performer and spectator, stage and auditorium are, in origin, not opposed to one another, they are a unity. The Japanese theatre has kept this unity right up to the present time by use of the bridge along which the actor proceeds out of the auditorium onto the stage.¹¹

The dissolution of the strict separation between stage and auditorium which, from the very beginning of the century, theatre reformers such as Peter Behrens, Fuchs, Reinhardt and Meyerhold never tired of postulating and trying out, was not meant to be just another spatial device but also a principal change in the communicative conditions underlying theatre. While from the end of the eighteenth century, the focus of interest lay on the dramatic figures on stage and the internal communication between them, it now shifted to the relationship between stage and auditorium. The external communication between actor and spectator was emphasized and marked. Accordingly, Fuchs proceeded from the assumption that 'drama' is created by the spectator in the process of his/her experience. Thus, the very act of looking on was understood as an active, creative process which is obstructed by the external spatial conditions of European theatre: box-set and raised stage. Accordingly, the avant-gardists held the abolition of both as a necessary prerequisite for setting free the process of looking on as a creative activity.¹²

The conclusion drawn from the reports on the kabuki theatre was that its spatial conception seemed to provide ideal conditions for emphasizing external theatrical communication. Adolf Fischer had already suggested such 'an experiment with the *hanamichi*'.¹³ It was Reinhardt who executed this experiment in *Sumurun*. The play was the beginning of a series of experiments which opened up new theatrical spaces such as the *hanamichi*, circus arena, market place, church, parks, meadows, woods and many others.

The production *Sumurun* opened on 24 April 1910 in Berlin, was recast in London in 1911 and toured to Paris and New York in 1912. Wherever it went, it was an overwhelming box-office success, although the critics' response was quite different. Nonetheless, whatever stance was taken, the reviews provide us with a wealth of information concerning the structure and the effect of the production.

Most critics noted the dissolution of the linear structure. Oskar Bie, who was somewhat unhappy with the production because of its 'Stillosigkeit' (restlessness), wrote in the *Neue Rundschau*: 'Towards the end, Reinhardt has set prominent murder scenes in the manner of the Japanese: it is striking and, rhythmically, tightens up the play. During the second half, in the love and murder scenes (love and murder are silent), my impression was one of strong intensity.'¹⁴

Bie refers—in rather positive terms—to a totally new experience of time. The replacement of a tension caused by the action and/or the psychological development of the dramatic characters with an intensity released and foregrounded by one single independent moment annuls time as an unbroken continuum. Instead, time is realized as a rhythmically structured, discontinuous sequence of discrete moments of different intensity. Because of their intensity, the moments gain a time quality of their own which, ultimately, is based on the subjective experience of each spectator: depending on the degree of intensity, one moment can even stretch into eternity. Thus we can conclude that the particular structure of the performance brought about a 'subjectification' of time: it realized time as the subjective experience of intensity.

The dominance of the body as means of expression in the production was given general attention and lengthy description. Oskar Bie emphasized the accomplishments of the dancer Grete Wiesenthal. She 'is the true future unity of acting and dance, i.e. of psychic representation and plastic elaboration in an independent sequence of postures and excitations, which overlay the play like a corporeal melody which, moreover, is sweet as such'. That is to say, Grete Wiesenthal did not employ her body in such a way as to produce clearly delineated and well known signs, to which the spectators could attribute more or less the same meanings. On the contrary, she presented an 'independent sequence of postures' as a sequence of rhythmically structured asemantic elements. This procedure resulted, on the one hand, in drawing the attention of the spectator to the pure materiality of the elements: to their corporeality that must be perceived as such and, on the other hand—following from this—it allowed each spectator to bestow his/her own subjective meaning on the element in question according to his/her own presuppositions. Thus, the emphasis on the materiality of the body presented on stage went together with a shift from the tendency towards clarity in the signs of acting to a tendency towards ambiguity. It is small wonder, therefore, that most critics received the acting as 'telling a story',¹⁵ interpreting the perceived gestures and movements as signs of a story they themselves superimposed. The critic of the *New York Review* even went so far as to discuss the effect of the production in the context of physical culture theory:

Sumurun is a great feather in the cap of the physical culturists who hold that the body is the instrument of the soul and mind, designated by the creator solely for the purpose of expressing its emotions and thoughts and all that. [...] The physical culturists have possibly never before had such an excellent demonstration made for them as this *Sumurun*. It proves, better than all the books on the subject ever written, or all the lessons in 'bodily expression' ever given by teacher or professor, 'how eloquent is silence'.¹⁶

Since this eloquence of the body, however, was not realized according to a given code, the

process of meaning generating referring to its elements (gestures, postures, movements) was open to different results depending on the different subjective presuppositions of each spectator.

The emphasis on materiality determined not only the use of the body but the use of colour as well. The New York critics stated that the use of colour was 'not only beautiful, but novel and refreshing [. . .] Reinhardt seems to have studied the soul of each color. He gets his effect of Oriental wealth by getting each color to a glow and then adding other colors but sparingly until he gets the effects he wants.'¹⁷ That is to say, in *Sumurun* only those theatrical sign-systems prevailed that either did not have a coded meaning—as music and colour—,¹⁸ or they were used in a way that divested the system of any coded meanings—as acting. Thus, the materiality of body, colour and sound was stressed, a materiality that was *per se* asemantic. As a result, the two processes of perceiving and of meaning-generating were related to each other in a new way. First, the spectators perceived the presented elements in their particular materiality. Then, depending on their perception and their universe of discourse, the spectators could attribute meanings to the elements they perceived. That is to say, perception determined the constitution of meaning or, to put it even more radically: perception was interpretation. The process of perception, moreover, was emphasized by the introduction of the *hanamichi*.

In *Sumurun* there is a narrow runway reaching from the back of the orchestra floor over the tops of the seats and on to the stage. Along this runway most of the characters of *Sumurun* cross from the back of the theatre over the heads of the audience and on to the stage. This is a daring device for one who is working on your imagination to create the effect of delusion. And it is all the more tribute to the acting of the German company, who present *Sumurun*, and to the staging that, although some of the audience could put out their hands and touch the garments of the actors as they passed them, none of the spell that enveloped the actors on the stage left them as they crossed the runway at the end of the play and made their way back.¹⁹

This positive judgement of the *hanamichi*, is decidedly contradicted by another critic who writes that the *hanamichi* 'distracts the audience's attention', because 'the actors make their entrances at some vital point in each scene of the play'. This is fatal, since no spectator is able, 'to resist the temptation of turning round or looking skyward as a flock of very fat eunuchs or a bevy of gaily fledged ladies of the harem come clattering down the centre of the theatre just two feet above your head'. The critic comes to the conclusion, that the *hanamichi* was not only totally superfluous, but moreover directly counterproductive: 'It destroys a great deal of the illusion and it makes the audience miss many points of the play'.²⁰

What can we gather from these two reviews about the function and the effect of the *hanamichi*? First we learn that the spectators did 'not resist the temptation of turning round'. They looked toward the stage as well as toward the *hanamichi*. The spectators had two different levels of interest and two different perspectives. They were able to let their eyes wander not only over the stage but between stage and *hanamichi* as well. Since the actors made 'their entrances at some vital point' the spectators who turned around in order to see who was coming missed what was happening on stage at that moment. On the other hand, if they chose to keep their eyes fixed on the stage, they missed what was going on on the *hanamichi*. Thus, whatever the spectators elected to watch, they missed something that their neighbours—deciding otherwise—would perceive. Since it is quite impossible to let the eye rest at two different points in space at the same time, each spectator was bound to perceive something different, and obliged to make an individual selection and combination of the elements presented on stage and on the *hanamichi*. In the end, therefore, everyone brought forth an individual production.

The subjective conditions underlying the process of reception were marked by the *hanamichi* in yet another respect, since the characters appeared 'from the back of the theatre over the heads of the audiences'. The critic from the *Erie Dispatch* describes the *hanamichi* as 'a flower-decked path, illuminated by coloured lights'. The characters 'in the wordless drama came

apparently from nowhere and walk upon the stage over this symbolic pathway to take their places in the moving scenes of the amusing melodrama'.²¹ The coloured light established relations between the *hanamichi*, the costumes of the actors and the stage space. The flowers on the path—the pictorial translation of the word 'flower-path'—indicate that the dramatic figures do not reach the stage via the hard boards of reality, even if they come from the same direction as the spectators when they enter the auditorium. However, they do not appear from 'nowhere': in making their entrance 'over the heads of the audience', they seem to have sprung from their heads; they appear as the creatures of their imagination, as the creatures of their dreams.

Most New York critics underline the fact that the production had an 'atmosphere of unreality', that 'seeing *Sumurun* [...] is like looking on in a tense, vivid dream', that 'there is a quality of unreality, a rich mysteriously exotic spell which the pantomime weaves about the spectator as he sits looking at it, that is like nothing as much as the feeling in a heavy dream'.²² Bearing this in mind we can conclude that the *hanamichi* also functioned as a connecting path between the spectator's imagination and the dream world on stage. Thus, the *hanamichi* brings the awareness that the dream world on stage is not to be taken and understood as a representation of an objectively given reality somewhere else, but instead, is constituted as a subjective creation of the spectator's imagination. It is his/her reception—as perception and meaning constitution—that brings the world of the stage into being as the world of his/her own dreams. Whoever appears on the *hanamichi*, emerges from the imagination of the spectator and, via this path, enters the world of the stage—of the dream—where his/her desires and fears are acted out.

Summarising our investigation so far, we can list the following findings:

- 1) The continuity of linear time is displaced by a discontinuous sequence of independent moments, structured rhythmically.
- 2) Non-coded theatrical sign systems dominate. In this way, the materiality of the theatrical sign is emphasized, par-

ticularly the materiality of the actor's body.

- 3) The spatial conception realized by the device of the *hanamichi* invites the spectator's eye to wander between different points in space.

Such deviations from the 'norm' of contemporary theatre (naturalist as well as symbolist) result in a radical subjectification of the process of reception: of experiencing time, of perceiving, of generating meaning. These processes depend on the subjectively determined conditions of each spectator and, thus, differ from spectator to spectator. Not only does the process of reception turn out to be a process of production but each spectator brings forth her/his own performance. The process of reception is realized as a subjective construction of theatrical reality.

The semiotic systems and their interrelationships are restructured in several respects. First, the relationship between the semiotic systems is fundamentally changed: language is excluded and the dominance shifts to the materiality of the body. Secondly, the relationship between the semiotic levels is altered: the semantic level is no longer dominant; the focus shifts to the sign bodies, on the one hand, to the materiality of the theatrical signs employed and to the pragmatic level, on the other. Thirdly, the principles underlying and ruling the combination of signs are changed: instead of linearity, causality, logic (of action), or psychology (of dramatic figures), rhythm governs the combination of the theatrical signs chosen. These basic changes result in another alteration regarding the general function of the theatrical signs: for the most part, they no longer serve a representational function but an expressive and relational function instead. In this way, the traditional sign systems and their interrelationships, typical and determining of European culture, at least since the eighteenth century, are deconstructed and, at the same time, re-constructed in a completely new manner.

This restructuring of the semiotic systems deeply affects the process of perception and cognition. European theatre, from the Renaissance to the naturalist and the symbolist theatre, realized the performance as a representation of a given *other* reality—whether as its

actor's
by the
e spec-
different

ntem-
bolist)
process
eiving,
depend
ons of
ator to
ception
at each
ance.
subjec-

ation-
First,
systems
cluded
ity of
en the
vel is
e sign
iality
o the
prin-
on of
ality,
matic
on of
anges
neral
most
onal
unc-
sign
and
ance
and,
etely

ems
and
ais-
list
en-
its

illusion or as its symbol. Theatrical reality was intended as the representation of another reality. In this respect, theatre functioned as a model of reality. It demanded that the spectator should look and listen carefully in order to understand the model presented. Accordingly, it was assumed that the spectators would not differ essentially in their understanding of the performance, as long as they were able to recognize it as a model and to interpret it by relating it to the represented—objectively given—other reality.

Sumurun, however, challenged such assumptions. The performance did not represent any objectively given reality. Rather, it functioned as a model of the process of how to construct reality. The factors most fundamental to this process highlighted by the performance were the experience of time and the perception and constitution of meaning as, basically, subjectively determined experiences and processes. Theatrical reality turned out to be the result or product of the spectator's subjectively executed construction.

European theatre up to the beginning of the twentieth century presupposed a clear cut difference between the subject of cognition (the spectator) and its objects (the representation of reality on stage as well as the represented reality). As far as *Sumurun* is concerned, this difference no longer existed: it was the subject of cognition who brought forth his/her objects in the process of cognition. The role of spectators was no longer to recognize and understand one representation of reality but, instead, to create their own reality. As a consequence, theatre was no longer to be defined through its representations but through the processes of construction which it triggers. Since this capacity is not restricted to theatre (or art in general), yet is explicitly focused and marked by it, I call it theatricality.

Theatre proclaimed and established a new kind of relationship between the subject and the object of perception and cognition, as well as between theatre and reality. As early as 1886, Ernst Mach had shown that the psyche and the physical are not essentially different and that, consequently, the assumed dualism between subject and object, is no longer valid:

In popular speech and philosophy, we are used to setting *reality* against *appearance*

(*Schein*). I observe the pencil I hold to be straight, but placed at an angle in water, I see it as bent. In the latter case, we say: the pencil *seems* bent, though in *reality* it is straight. What justification have we, however, for saying *one* thing is real and *the other* is merely appearance? In both cases, certain facts exist which represent different relations of elements determined by different causes. The pencil is *optically* bent because of its surroundings; *haptically* and *metrically*, however, it is straight [. . .] If no opposite exists, the difference between [. . .] appearance and reality is utterly superfluous and worthless. [. . .] The opposition between the self and the world, as that between the senses or appearance of things and object dissolves completely.²³

It seems as if *Sumurun*, by emphasizing its own theatricality, exemplifies or even verifies Mach's insight. There is no opposition between a given reality and its representation (illusion) on stage; rather, there are as many realities as the different spectators can construct by relying on their own perception of the performance. Since they are not forced to follow a logic of action or a psychology of character, they are allowed—invited even—to delve into the 'turbulences' of single sign bodies—to look down on to that which made Lord Chandos's head reel—and, arriving at the 'void' of their sheer materiality, to allow totally new meanings to emerge, well aware that these are their own subjective meanings and not meanings inherent in the sign bodies.

By restructuring the semiotic systems in a way that made it possible for each spectator to perceive the presented material independently and to generate meaning accordingly, the process of 'retheatricalization' foregrounded the subjective conditions of perception and cognition. These are, as Mach discovered, generally valid. There can be no difference between theatre and 'reality', or everyday life, for in theatre as well as in every day life we construct our own reality, proceeding from our perception of more or less the same kind of material (human beings in an environment). In any case, reality is the product of a subjectively conditioned and performed process of construction.²⁴

That does not mean, however, that there would be no difference between everyday life and going to the theatre. Whereas in everyday life we construct reality without being aware of it and without reflecting on it because we are kept busy realizing our intentions and reaching our goals, in the theatre the focus of our attention shifts to the very process of construction and the conditions underlying it. While constructing a reality of our own, we become aware of doing so and begin to reflect upon it. Thus, theatre turns out to be a field of experimentation where we can test our capacity for and the possibilities of constructing reality.

The retheatricalization of theatre during the first decades of our century has paved a way out of the cultural crisis so virulent at the turn of the century. At that time, only a rigorous stance against language, a turn to non-coded theatrical signs as well as a liberation of these signs from the chains of linearity, causality, logic of action or psychology were able to bring about a radical shift of the focus from any given reality and the problem of how to represent it to the subjective conditions underlying perception and cognition and, consequently, to the problem of how to construct reality.

The theatre of the avant-garde movement as well as the much later post-modern theatre sought to accomplish this shift by opening up new theatrical spaces which invited spectators to let their eyes wander and/or by predominantly employing non-coded signs, that allowed spectators to attribute whatever meaning they chose. In this way, they emphatically stressed theatre's faculty to serve as a field of experimentation where each spectator can experience and test her/his possibilities of constructing reality.

This faculty of theatre, however, neither depends on nor is advanced by forms of post-modern theatre alone. The spectator's awareness of the process of constructing was awakened in the spectator by avant-garde theatre in the first decades of this century and is constantly being heightened by post-modern theatre, with the result that even today, on a box-set stage on which a so-called realistic performance is unfolding, spectators are aware that they are in the process of constructing theatricality as well as how they are constructing it. Even under such conditions, by reflec-

ting theatricality, the spectators reflect on the conditions underlying and guiding the process by which they construct reality.

Erika Fischer-Lichte is Professor of Theatre Studies, Johannes Gutenberg-Universität, Mainz.

Notes

1. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, translated by Anthony M. Ludovici (Edinburgh and London: T.N. Foulis, 1910), Vol. V. pp. 132-3.
2. Hugo von Hofmannsthal, *Hugo von Hofmannsthal*, translated by Mary Hottinger and Tania and James Stern (New York: Pantheon 1952), pp. 133-5.
3. Friedrich Freksa, *Hinter der Rampe-Theaterglossen*. 2nd. ed. (Munich/Leipzig, 1913), p. 114.
4. Ibid.
5. Georg Fuchs, 'Der Tanz' (Stuttgart: *Flugblätter für künstlerische Kultur*, 6, 1906), p. 13.
6. Ibid. p. 6.
7. Alfred Lequeux, 'Le Théâtre au Japon', *Revue d'art dramatique*, April/June 1888, p. 2.
8. Ibid. p. 3.
9. Adolf Fischer, 'Japans Bühnenkunst und ihre Entwicklung', Westermanns *Illustrierte deutsche Monatshefte*, No. 45, Vol. 89, 1900-1, p. 502.
10. Both articles by Lequeux and Fischer were widely read. Lequeux's article, first published in 1888 in an issue of the *Revue d'art dramatique*, appeared in book form one year later. In 1890 it was reprinted in three languages with numerous pictures added, in *Le Japon artistique*, a high-circulation journal, edited by the art collector Samuel Bing. Meyerhold read this article and, in 1909, he explicitly refers to it, inserting whole passages from Fischer in his writings on Japanese theatre.
11. Georg Fuchs, *Die Schaubühne der Zukunft* (Berlin & Leipzig, 1905), p. 38.
12. Erika Fischer-Lichte, *Kurze Geschichte des deutschen Theaters* (Tübingen: Franke Verlag, Universitäts-Taschenbücher 1667, 1993), p. 263 ff.
13. Adolf Fischer, *Japans Bühnenkunst*, p. 502.
14. Oskar Bie, 'Sumurun', *Die neue Runschau*, No. XXI, Vol. 6, June 1910.
15. New York, 4 February 1912. The Theatre Museum, Vienna, has a number of reviews in its collection from the New York *Sumurun*. Unfortunately, most of them are not identified, some show either the name of the journal, or of the critic, or give the date. Thus they are listed in the bibliography and quoted in this truncated form.
16. *The New York Review*, January 1912.
17. Joseph Gollomb, 'Sumurun'. Unidentified review from the archives of the Theater Museum, Cologne.
18. There is no doubt that light and colour can be attributed to a particular cultural code. (See Fischer-Lichte, 1992: 110 ff.) But since this is not obligatory and since several different codes may exist simultaneously, the out-

come of the process of meaning generating is not predictable: subjectivity prevails.

19. 4 February 1912, unidentified New York journal, from the archives of the Theater Museum, Vienna.

20. 'Why Lot's Wife Could not Have Sat out Sumurun'. Unidentified New York review from the archives of the Theater Museum, Cologne.

21. 'Sumurun', *Erie Dispatch*, 28 January 1912.

22. Joseph Gollomb, 'Sumurun', op. cit.

23. Ernst Mach, 'Notes on the Antimetaphysical', *Die Analyse der Empfindungen und das Verhältnis des Physischen zum Psychischen*, 9th ed. (Jena: Gustav Fischer 1922), p. 8 ff.

24. In the conclusion and argumentation I have drawn on my own theory of meaning (Erika Fischer-Lichte, *Bedeutung. Probleme einer semiotischen Hermeneutik und Ästhetik*. Munich: Beck, 1979 and *The Semiotics of*

Theatre. Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1992) as well as on the theory of Radical Constructivism (see Wolfgang Krohn and Günther Küppers, eds., *Emergenz: Die Entstehung von Ordnung, Organisation und Bedeutung*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1992; Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela, *Der Baum der Erkenntnis. Die biologischen Wurzeln des menschlichen Erkennens*. 2nd. ed. Bern/Munich/Vienna: Scherz Verlag 1984; Siegfried Schmidt, *Der Diskurs des Radikalen Konstruktivismus*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp 1988 and ed., *Gedächtnis. Probleme und Perspektiven der interdisziplinären Gedächtnisforschung*. 1991; Francisco J. Varela, *Kognitionswissenschaft—Kognitionstechnik. Eine Skizze aktueller Perspektiven*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp 1988; Paul Watzlawick, ed., *Die erfundene Wirklichkeit. Wie wissen wir, was wir zu wissen glauben! Beiträge zum Konstruktivismus*, Munich & Zurich: R. Piper & Co., 1981).

Concepts of Theatricality in Contemporary Art History

MICHAEL QUINN

Theatre historians often turn to art history, not only for information about source images that can help with the speculative reconstruction of lost performances, but also for lessons in historiographic method.¹ Historians from both disciplines have long shared the difficulties of 'ekphrasis', i.e. the translation of non-discursive images into descriptions, and vice versa,² as well as other vexing problems of general history like periodization, documentation of events, and so on.³ Unlike theatre history, art history has a recognized pantheon of interpreters, which has been subjected to overview studies like Michael Podro's *The Critical Historians of Art* as well as specific treatments of major critics and their influence, like Michael Ann Holly's work on Panofsky.⁴ Theoretical concerns about historiography, sometimes assumed by literary critics of 'master narratives' to be synonymous with postmodernism, developed somewhat earlier in art historical writing, which would appear to be an advantage.

Yet as contemporary art historians abandon traditional narratives of style like Wolfflin's,⁵ and of connoisseurship, like the work of Bernard Berenson or Clement Greenberg,⁶ they have tended to concentrate on the historical contexts of painting, and have frequently used general notions of theatricality as a way to explain the frameworks that establish those contexts. These theatrical contexts can be characterized quite differently depending upon their relation to other philosophical considerations. Like 'literariness', which formalist literary theory tried and failed to define, theatricality is not especially amenable to the reductions of theorists, and especially not to those who hope to use a singular idea of theatre as a way to enable their historical narratives. In some cases

theatricality is used prejudicially as a context for dismissing the authenticity of art works. In other cases theatricality can be seen as the key to a new kind of expressive authenticity, often figured since Joseph Beuys in terms of constitutive performances.⁷ In either instance the critical evaluation of major works, and even of whole traditions, sometimes turns on the way a historiographic approach constructs a theatrical metaphor.

Of the many 'theatricalities' circulating in art historical writing, the best-known contemporary version is undoubtedly Michael Fried's. His viewpoint in a famous essay from the mid 1960s, when he was involved in the reception of the second generation of American abstract painting, was that the historical emergence of an art with genuine 'objecthood' would be required to 'defeat the theatre.'⁸ Such a negative attitude toward theatricality is of course the antithesis of post-modernism, which valorizes a qualified epistemology making only qualified claims to truth. But more importantly to theatre historians, Fried's attitude seems to make of theatre a special negative example, as if there were some essential flaw in theatre as an art form. What many theatrical critics of Fried's essay fail to consider is its relation to a classic Wittgensteinian problem, the problem of 'seeing' vs. 'seeing as', of taking an open attitude toward perception rather than focusing on recognizing or interpreting an image.⁹ In terms of its historical moment, Fried's work was concentrating on the basic phenomenal properties of relatively simple works, and theatricality represented in this case a crisis in the definition of the art object. A similar tension surfaced in the reception of Andy Warhol's Brillo boxes, a conundrum which gave rise to the ultimate

recent contextualism, George Dickie's institutional theory of art.¹⁰

Fried's view has not remained fixed on Wittgenstein's problematic, though one could argue that the same pre-occupation has merely taken different forms; for example in his book on eighteenth-century French painting, *Absorption and Theatricality*, Fried historicizes the Wittgenstein paradox, finding a similar structure in the anti-theatrical theories of Diderot and Rousseau.¹¹ In this case Fried tends to adopt the rhetoric of authenticity that Diderot developed in his salons. Theatricality becomes an aspect of the subjects inside the painting, their organization in the picture plane, the thickness of the paint, and so on. Turned out poses, i.e. heavily painted pictures of people who seem to be aware of the painter's act of representing them, are devalued in relation to other more 'absorbed' kinds of behaviour, like play or work, by thinly painted subjects who do not acknowledge the artist (or the gallery viewer) as a spectator; Greuze is defeated by Chardin.¹²

In more recent work Fried has characterized Courbet and Thomas Eakins in similar anti-theatrical terms, yet his view is also subtly changing.¹³ *The Gross Clinic* by Eakins is a painting of an operating theatre, yet it is redeemed in Fried's *Realism, Writing and Disfiguration* by a realistic sublimity, an acute effect on the viewer in which scalpel and brush seem to merge in a paradoxical play of subjective perspectives. Recently Fried has shifted his view of Jacques-Louis David's work from a triumph of absorption—in actions like the oath—to a more anxious 'anti-theatrical prejudice', figured in images like the blind Belisarius.¹⁴ It seems quite possible that Fried, in relation to his suggestive work on theatrical subjects in Watteau and Manet, may make a transition similar to the one Austin makes from Wittgenstein, i.e. a movement from authentic objectivity toward the authentic performative act.¹⁵ In the meantime Fried has served, for performance theorists like Josette Féral and Phillip Auslander, as a handy reference for anti-theatrical critiques that seek to promote aesthetic innovations.¹⁶

Svetlana Alpers, in her work on Rembrandt's relation to imaginative performance, first seems to describe theatricality as 'an interest in outward display—of feelings and of dress', which

can then be linked to a critique of finance and ostentatiousness in her description of Rembrandt's 'enterprise'.¹⁷ She expresses her frustration that Rembrandt's reception has been so concerned with issues of authenticity—i.e. of attribution—that the quality of his genius for creation has been more assumed than explained. To rectify the situation she uses a working notion of theatricality, without deciding about Rembrandt's attitude toward the term's usual connotations of falseness. Alpers herself has some sympathy with the Dutch Puritans' moral suspicion of the theatre; she tends to consider busy subjects as theatrical ones, and does not consider, for example, that an actor might imitate an activity like sleep. Yet Alpers finally redeems the importance of theatricality in Rembrandt's creative process by using theatrical imagination as a metaphor for a technical perspective on the construction of images and the organization of the larger world. She summarizes the argument well herself:

I have proposed that Rembrandt got at 'real' life by attending to the acting of it in the studio. We got to this description of Rembrandt's outlook on the somewhat narrow but specific basis of three types of pictorial examples: the depiction of narrative figures who play roles; the artist as actor in self-portraits; and student apprentices serving as actors for biblical drawings. Studio lore was cited, and Rembrandt's use of the phrase 'natural movement' was read in theatrical terms as bearing out his practice. Later commentators were introduced to show that a theatrical view of Rembrandt had been widely entertained and also to sharpen the issues it raises about his art.

The corollary, the flip side as it were, of the artist acting as a model is the recognition that to model is itself to act—that modelling is itself a performance or a narrative action to record. It is to view the performance not only from the inside, the actor's point of view, but from the outside, from the point of view of the observer—the one who made the drawings that we have been looking at. In saying this we are saying that not only is the artist an actor, but that he looks on others as actors too—as they present themselves, that is, as his models.¹⁸

In Alpers's case the theatre is not an epistemological problem, but a crucial tool for the imagination and understanding of others' experiences. Rembrandt emerges in Alpers's account as a painter of enormous sympathy, and consequently his theatre of the world is ultimately enlisted in service to his humanism, enabling him to conceive of the free-market economy, for example, as an opportunity to escape patronage and enter a new arena of free self-definition. Few contemporary art or theatre historians read emergent capitalism in such liberating theatrical terms.¹⁹

The common anxiety about Rembrandt, and the concern that drives Fried as well, comes from the understanding that paintings are singular objects. Unlike performances, art objects have some historical and material stability, and can be collected; from a historiographic standpoint this, too, can seem like an advantage, though in practice art historians must still remain sensitive to the shifting values of the art's semantic background, and to the decay of the material artefact. Theatricality becomes a concern, though, not just because of an ontological difference in the two arts, but because that difference can be performed in the art collector's worst nightmare, forgery. If art historians were stoutly 'objective' in matters of aesthetic response, like for example the American New Critics with their 'intentional fallacy', then the act of forgery would be secondary to the quality of the canvas, or the vividness of the experience it creates. But originality does more conceptual work than that; an original canvas is typically signed (in a gesture of performative testimony), and thus it gains a specific historical milieu and interpretative context. Like Kant's bird song in the *Critique of Judgement*, a famous example of philosophical suspicion about off-stage acting, the painted forgery seems to be something that it is not, so the violation is one of theatrical deception; what would seem to be an ontological argument against imitative art is more nearly a political argument for sincerity.²⁰ Other forms of reproduction—engravings, prints, slides, optical scans—tend to increase the value of genuine works by increasing their communicative accessibility; the forgery, because it is a historical pretender, degrades the context.

Denis Dutton makes the performance problem of forgery explicit:

It is essential that forgeries be understood as a subset of a wider class of misrepresented artistic performances. Since all art can be seen under the aspect of performance, whether or not the art in question is conventionally called 'performing', there exists always the possibility that the nature of the achievement involved in the performance may be misrepresented or misunderstood.²¹

Even in a *theatrum mundi*, then, forgeries would remain a problem, for their active role is not to imitate beauty (which they might well do), but rather to deceive, like actors who play to advantage without others' knowledge of the game; in a word, they are frauds.

Social historians of art are also not so torn between a respect for originality and a regard for the distinctness of theatre that they refuse to use such *theatrum mundi* metaphors. Thomas Crow, in his study of French painting, emphasizes a theatricality that is rooted in dramatic texts, but has no necessary relation to theatrical images. He argues from historical performance in the unlikely case of Watteau, but against literal stage imagery in the republican works of David. Watteau's work, as much theatrical fantasy as historical observation, imitates not only the materials but also the creative style of the *Fêtes galantes*, the noble performances that imitated fairground theatres. Consequently his theatricality can be construed creatively, as Alpers does for Rembrandt, but there is insufficient evidence for Crow to argue that Watteau was a painter, as so many would like to make him, of actual theatrical performances.²² With David, Crow cleverly associates the subjects of paintings like Brutus with the roles those characters played in contemporary plays like those of Voltaire. In this instance there is no need to make the case that David copied images from the stage; rather, he imitated the politics of the stage through images that carry their own revolutionary gestures fully expressed through the idiom of painting. Recent work by the historian Wolfgang Kemp on the planned installations of David's revolutionary paintings, like *The Tennis Court Oath*

only confirms that David's theatricality is not literally imitative, but based, once again, on a performative expressivity, founding the art works like one would found a government.²⁴

Robert Herbert concentrates on paintings of the theatre by considering it as part of a social cluster of activities. He then uses the many ambiguous artistic renderings of Parisian theatrical society as a way of emphasizing the social and economic dissent implied by Impressionism. Theatre would seem here to be taken at its common-sense value, but in a theatricalized culture like mid-nineteenth century Paris, theatricality carried both a cultural complexity and a moral charge that Herbert's readings tend to reinforce. The theatrical paintings that Herbert admires most are ironies: Mary Cassatt's views of women with opera glasses watching the audience as they are themselves watched by others; Manet's serving girl at the Folies-Bergère, who seems to look out to the painter in the crowd but who is, upon reflection, facing a male's proposition; and especially Degas's tired, regimented little ballet girls, in views that alternate between the performance perspective of the imperial loge and backstage intimacy of rehearsal and preparation. For Degas, one set of images debunks the other, and the dancers are not romanticized by their social lives in the theatre so much as they are roboticized, consumed and victimized.

Backstage at the opera was a veritable fiefdom of wealthy men, who treated the ballet dancers as a kind of game preserve. Subscribers to the principal loges had ready access to the dancers' foyer known as the 'green room', to corridors and dancers' dressing rooms, and to the wings of the stage, even during performances. Degas represented them making free of all these places in any number of paintings, pastels and prints.²⁵

This kind of complexity, in which theatricality has a more or less seamy underbelly connecting it to prostitution, appeals to Herbert much more than a picture like Renoir's naive idealization of the taxi girls at the Moulin de la Galette. Theatricality is thus an aid to the kind of painting that Herbert values, but only if artist and spectator refuse to accept a romantic view of the

theatre; otherwise the image is simply supposed by Herbert to be false.

T. J. Clark takes this social criticism one step further, using the ideological perspective of a Marxism drawn largely from Walter Benjamin and Guy Debord. Like Benjamin's idealized *flâneur*, Clark's roving theatrical attitude is a way of understanding the cityscape, as well as the city itself, in the terms of a production *mise en scène*, and the painted model becomes a social subject who plays roles within—and against—the ideological order. As Clark explains in the introduction to *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and his Followers*, his effort is to describe the possibilities of dissent within a 'situationist' context:

I wish to show that the circumstances of modernism were not modern, and only became so by being given the forms called 'spectacle'. On the face of things it seems that Impressionist painting was one of those forms, but the question is: how completely? Are we to take Impressionism's repertoire of subjects and devices as merely complicit in the spectacle—lending it consistency or even charm—or as somehow disclosing it as farce or tragedy?²⁶

When Clark constitutes the world as an ideological theatre in this and other books, it is the paradox of acting that continues to animate his 'idea of heroism in modern life', so that the actors in everyday Parisian drama are still people, too; ideological criticism has merely added a layer of self-consciousness to their existence which the painters can then be shown to have understood and expressed, in politically sympathetic images. Manet's *Olympia* is a crucial ideological image, for example, because the mute, knowing gaze of the naked model can be argued by Clark as a figure for defiance, for dissent from the capitalist structure of demimondaine existence, individuated by her return of the bourgeois gaze. This same dynamic is often argued in psychoanalytic discussions of *Olympia*, in terms both of the model's agency, and of the anxiety that the confident gaze of the painted subject can conjure in a desiring spectator; not too surprisingly, this painting

has sometimes been 'performed', as in the Robert Morris piece, *Site*, featuring Carolee Schneemann as the Olympia figure.²⁷ This gesture nicely reverses Fried's evaluation of the gaze of the painting's subject. On the other hand, theatre functions here for Clark only as an analogue, as a metaphor for Olympia's active awareness; there is no reference to the wealth of dramatic literature and performance history on the problem of *Olympe*.²⁸

Of course there are other kinds of ideological theatres besides that of Clark, such as the ideological feminist perspective of Griselda Pollock, who has sought not only to describe the 'staging' of the culture and its gazes, but also to stage the performance of the art historian, as in her dramatization of art historical scholarship, 'Feminism and Foucault: Sexuality and Surveillance/A Play in Art History: Staging Representation', presented at the NEH Institute in Art History and theory at the University of Rochester in 1989. Perhaps the most common use of a *theatrum mundi* occurs in the discourse of psychoanalytic criticism, where critics who view the world as a theatre of fantasy have gradually dominated several other strong critical methods, like that of semiotics and the theory of creativity. The critics surrounding Rosaline Krauss, for example, at the journal *October* routinely practice this kind of criticism, in which the art work, and behaviour, are conceived as symptoms of a play that is ultimately performed in the unconscious mind.²⁹

Very few psychoanalytic critics are frank about admitting this displacement of reality into deeper consciousness, but one of the best ones has done so, and has described the sub-conscious in theatrical terms, too. Richard Wollheim is certainly not an orthodox post-Lacanian psychoanalytic theorist, but he is a fluent reader of Freud and he has produced an impressive, sustained body of art-historical writing, including recent books like *Painting as an Art*.³⁰ Wollheim is certainly too cagey a philosopher to commit to a naive metaphor of theatricality, yet at a crucial point in his exposition of Freudian theory in *The Thread of Life* he does resort to a theatrical analogue for his theory of the imagination, and this submerged structure seems to continue through his later work, especially in his theory of the spectator and his

version of iconic, token:token representation. Imaginative sympathy and iconic coherence are constructed through a submerged, interiorized theatricality:

How does this account of the theatre and its constitutive roles illuminate the nature of iconic mental states?

It does so by providing us with a way of describing what goes on in the mind when we entertain such states; for we can think of them as the work, the conjoint work, of internal counterparts to the three roles of the theatre. An iconic mental state, we can say, arises out of a collaboration, though not on equal terms, between the *internal dramatist*, an *internal actor*, and an *internal audience*. The purpose of this comparison is to get clear description, it is not to get sound explanation. It has no explanatory force.³¹

I am tempted to argue, on the contrary, that explanatory force is *all* this analogy has, since it is in Popper's phrase, utterly unfalsifiable.³² And Wollheim's is certainly not a complete theory of the theatre, though it is a clear case of criticism in which theatricality is being used to figure the theatre of the mind that is in turn being made to explain a somewhat more material, psychoanalytically conceived theatre of the world.

Mieke Bal, like Alpers the author of a book on Rembrandt, summarizes the perceived potential of 'theatricality' for the study of art in a long review article for the journal *Semiotica*, and in a special overview of the field of 'Semiotics and Art History', co-written with Norman Bryson. Of all the writers considered here, Bal idealizes an idea of theatricality with the greatest enthusiasm. A literary critic recently drawn from narratology to art history, Bal explains in 'Close Looking and Reading' that 'Theatricality . . . becomes a metaphor for my pursuit of non-oppositional relations between verbiage and visuality'.³⁴ Unfortunately this idealized theatricality is theorized almost entirely in terms of a set of unspoken assumptions, ideas of theatre based mostly on a normatively conceived proscenium arch (i.e. illusive, Italianate painterly) stage. For example, Bal suggests that

The theater itself is the non-autonomous *par excellence*. For most of us, a performer

without an audience is more obviously unthinkable than a text without readers, or a painting without a beholder; yet the case of performance makes the case for the other two. Theatrical painting draws attention to that extreme position of the theater and, by implication, claims the same status for painting. It is not a coincidence that the theater is also the art in which word and image can neither be ignored nor separated.³⁵

The idea of a word-image union is the one Bal uses, to considerable interpretative effect, in her Rembrandt study. But unfortunately, as any theatre historian knows, most of these assumptions about theatricality are unfounded; word and image can be separated in performance, in any variety of ways from the Bun Raku to the voice-over. Plays can be performed without audiences, or for virtual ones like cameras. Even painting in the theatre has not necessarily been subject to Bal's integrative, somewhat Wagnerian vision; otherwise Wagner's dream of synthesis would hardly have been a compelling idea in the first place (let alone other dreams of visual integration, in major conceptual developments like the introduction of historical consciousness and specific scenic appropriateness to the stage performance). It might be nice if the theatre could do everything for painting that Bal, a good semiologist of narrative structures, wishes it would do, but this theatre of Bal's is a normative construction, with no theoretical scope as it involves actual performance practices. Like many gaze theorists, such as for example Barbara Freedman, Bal hopes that the theatre, because it brackets its world, can somehow provide a device for the dissolution of the ideological frameworks that structure the larger, supposedly extra-theatrical world.³⁶ But the theatre exists in ideology too, and so Bal's pro-theatrical bias is finally, at least in the context of ideological theory, as insupportable as its opposite in Fried. And like all the art historians I have cited here, she shows remarkable lack of awareness of the discourse on theatricality that theatre scholarship itself has developed (even when these theorists, like for example Elin Diamond, might in many ways help to support her libertarian feminist goals).³⁷

I suggest that though theatre historians should be encouraged by the interest of art historians in ideas of performance, they should remain aware that historiographic assumptions are a general problem from which art historians are far from immune. And so theatre scholars should be cautious even—or especially—when they rely upon art-historical attitudes toward theatre for information about the authenticity of solely visual records. Theatricality in art history will always be haunted, if not by metaphor then by the problem of exhibition. Even when a painting requires theatrical knowledge for its understanding, or when the issues of gallery display are crucial to its explanation, theatricality in art historical discourse continues to serve as an antithesis to authenticity; recently this contest of virtue has shifted from material objectivity to a Foucauldian critique of exhibitions as displays of abusive power, but the spectacular is still part of the evil the art works are supposed to perform or to be unable to *avoid* performing.³⁸ Meanwhile the theoretical engagement of major art historians with scene painting remains conspicuously absent from the field, even in comparative arts treatments in which their contributions can be argued as dominant aspects of the theatrical culture of the time.³⁹

Painting and theatre, despite similarities, are phenomenologically different, a tension which 'action painting' and the 'tableau vivant' exploit most effectively; moreover, in any rigorous phenomenological theory, the quality of the object and its definition is renegotiated with every new enquiry—rebracketed, one might say. The theorists of art history—like theatre historians suddenly confronted with conceptual installations and performance art—have yet to come to terms philosophically with the categorical difficulties those differences of form continuously re-create. Perhaps the art historian who has come closest in recent years is Anne Hollander, whose hermeneutically enabling metaphor for a survey of art history, in *Moving Pictures*, is not the theatre but the cinema.⁴⁰ Yet even Hollander's comparative formalism will date quickly, and the anti-theatrical reasons she gives as arguments for turning to film, such as theatre's ephemerality as opposed to the permanence of painting and film, are hardly convincing in a world where celluloid and canvasses

also disappear. Meanwhile the technology of image production and reproduction moves inexorably from the model of photography, and the metaphoric potential of its simultaneous optics, to the superior speed, resolution and storage of the digital video graphic scan.⁴¹

Notes

1. Perhaps the first great modern theatre history book deriving performance history from artistic conventions was George R. Kernodle's *From Art to Theatre: Form and Convention in the Renaissance* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1944). In 1992, issues of theatre and iconography were the theme of the annual meeting of the American Society for Theatre Research.

2. For the best theoretical statement of the problem, see Murray Krieger, *Ekphrasis: The Illusion of the Natural Sign* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992). David Carrier supposes that ekphrasis has been replaced by an emphasis on interpretation, though this is by no means a simple substitution; Carrier, *Principles of Art History Writing* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991).

3. Thomas Postlewait uses art history for his examples of these problems in his now-standard essay, 'Criteria for Periodization in Theatre History', *Theatre Journal*, 40, 3 (October 1988), pp. 299-318.

4. Podro, *The Critical Historians of Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982); Michael Ann Holly, *Panofsky and the Foundations of Art History* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984).

5. Heinrich Wölfflin, *Principles of Art History: The Development of Style in Later Art*, 7th ed., trans. M. D. Hottinger (New York: Dover, 1932). For a convincing analytic breakdown, see Marshall Brown, 'The Classic is the Baroque. On the Principle of Wölfflin's Art History', *Critical Inquiry*, 9, 3 (December 82), pp. 379-407.

6. Berenson, *Aesthetics and History* (NY: Pantheon, 1948); Greenberg, *Art and Culture* (Boston: Beacon, 1961). Berenson still seems to command a measure of respect for his work on attribution, as for example in Mark Roskill, *What is Art History?* (Amherst, MA: Massachusetts University Press, 1976), but Greenberg is often attacked—sometimes by former students—for his evaluations; for a reasoned exchange, see Greenberg, 'The Notion of Post-Modern', and Donald B. Kuspit, 'The Unhappy Consciousness of Modernism', in *Zeitgeist in Babel: The Postmodernist Controversy*, ed. Ingeborg Hoesterey (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991).

7. See for example the description of Beuys's influence by Robert Hughes, *The Shock of the New: The Hundred-Year History of Modern Art—Its Rise, Its Dazzling Achievement, Its Fall*, revised ed. (New York: Knopf, 1991).

8. 'Art and Objecthood' in Gregory Battcock, ed. *Minimal Art* (New York: Dutton, 1969). See how much

more sanguine Harld Rosenberg, a critic of action painting, can be about the same situation, 'Mobile, Theatrical, Active', *The Anxious Object: Art Today and Its Audience* (New York: Collier, 1966).

9. The conundrum is figured in terms of the 'rabbit, duck or drawing', problem in Pt 2, xi, Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (New York: Macmillan, 1958); David Carrier comes close to this assessment when he talks about Fried's theory as a kind of indexical self-evidence in *Artwriting* (Amherst: Massachusetts University Press, 1987), p. 76.

10. Dickie, *Art and the Aesthetic* (Cornell University Press, 1974). See also Arthur Danto, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace: A Philosophy of Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), who solves Warhol's boxes differently, in terms of an almost theatrical expressivity (which is quite different, from the early Danto essay, 'The Artworld', *Journal of Philosophy*, 15 October 1964, pp. 571-84, that inspired Dickie).

11. Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Berkeley: California University Press, 1980).

12. I have explained in an article on Watteau that Fried's is not a necessary dichotomy, on the basis of an example of figures 'absorbed in theatrical performance', Quinn, 'Watteau's *Commedia* and the Theatricality of French Painting', *Commedia dell'arte Performance: Contexts and Contents*, Theatre Symposium 1 (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1993), pp. 77-93. Others have made similar arguments about Manet's *Olympia* (Bernheimer).

13. Michael Fried, *Courbet's Realism* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1990). Fried had an interesting argument with the feminist historian Linda Nochlin over the issue of gender and identification in Courbet, see their essays in *Courbet Reconsidered*, eds. Sarah Faunce and Linda Nochlin (New York: The Brooklyn Museum, 1988).

14. Fried, *Realism, Writing and Disfiguration: On Thomas Eakins and Stephen Crane* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1987).

15. J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* ed. J. Urmson and M. Sbisà (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1975); see also the very interesting theatrical application, David Saltz, 'How to Do Things On Stage', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, XLIX, 1, Winter 91, pp. 31-45.

16. Féral, 'Performance and Theatricality: The Subject De-Mystified', *Modern Drama* 25, 1, March 1982 and, more recently, Phillip Auslander, "'Presence" and "Theatricality" in the Discourse of Performance and the Visual Arts', presented at the 1992 meeting of the American Society for Theatre Research, Newport, Rhode Island.

17. Alpers, *Rembrandt's Enterprise: The studio and The Market* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1988), p. 35.

18. Alpers, p. 55.

19. See, for example, Jean-Christophe Agnew, *Worlds Apart: The Market and the Theatre in Anglo-American Thought, 1550-1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

20. Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, trans. J. H. Bernard (New York: Hafner/Macmillan, 1951), p. 145.

21. 'Artistic Crimes', in Dutton, ed. *The Forger's Art: Forgery and the Philosophy of Art* (Berkeley: California University Press, 1983), p. 181.

22. Thomas E. Crow, *Painters and Public Life in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (New Haven: Yale University Press 1985); for another performative view of Watteau, see Mary Paula Vidal, *Painted Watteau's Conversations* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

23. Compare Crow with Marvin Carlson, 'David's Oath of the Horatii as a Theatrical Document', *Theatre History Studies*, 10, 1990, pp. 15-29.

24. Kemp, 'The Theatre of the Revolution: David's 'Tennis Court Oath'', in N. Bryson, K. Moxey, and M. Holly, eds. *Visual Culture: Images and Interpretation* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1994). This volume contains papers from the 1989 University Press, 1994). This volume contains papers from the 1989 University of Rochester NEH Institute on the theory of art history, for which I prepared an unpublished commentary on Kemp's paper, 'Theatricality in David's Tennis Court Oath'. Crow comes to something like the same conclusion about performing subjectivity in his essay 'Saturday Disasters: Trace and Reference in Early Warhol', in Serge Guilbaut, ed. *Reconstructing Modernism: Art in New York, Paris and Montreal, 1945-64* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990).

25. Robert L. Herbert, *Impressionism: Art, Leisure, and Parisian Society* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), p. 104.

26. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 15; see also his *The Absolute Bourgeois: Artists and Politics in France, 1848-51* (London, 1973) and *Image of the People: Gustave Courbet and the 1848 Revolution* (London, 1973), in which the Marxism is a little less complicated and less theatrical.

27. See Maurice Berger, *Labyrinths: Robert Morris, Minimalism, and the 1960s* (NY: Harper & Row, 1984); Schneemann's voice can be sampled in the interview with Andrea Juno, 'Carolee Schneemann', *Angry Women* (San Francisco: RE/SEARCH, 1991), pp. 66-77. Also note Charles Bernheimer.

28. See for example Emile Augier's *Olympe's Marriage*, trans. Barret H. Clark in *Camille and Other Plays*, ed. Stephen S. Stanton (New York: Hill and Wang, 1957).

29. This thesis becomes perfectly clear in her *The Optical Unconscious* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), when she adopts an autobiographical (therapeutic?) tone for her sustained attacks on her mentor, Clement Breenberg.

30. Wollheim, *Painting as an Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987).

31. Wollheim, *The Thread of Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), p. 69. See also, most recently, *Mind and Its Depths* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

32. This is just a standard way of testing theories, described in *The Logic of Scientific Discoveries*, trans. Popper, J. Freed and L. Freed (New York, 1959).

33. Bal, *Reading Rembrandt: Beyond the Word-Image Opposition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Bal and Bryson/'Semiotics and Art History', *The Art Bulletin*, XXIII, 1, June 1991, pp. 174-208.

34. Bal, 'On Looking and Reading: Word and Image, Visual Poetics and Comparative Arts', *Semiotica*, 1989. I am quoting from a galley copy, p. 26.

35. 'On Looking and Reading', p. 25.

36. Freedman, *Staging the Gaze, Postmodernism, Psychoanalysis and Shakespearean Comedy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991). I have tried to demonstrate the difficulty of creating closure in both theatre and painting by comparing Italian art and drama; see my 'The Comedy of Reference: The Semiotics of Commedia Figures in Eighteenth-Century Venice', *Theatre Journal* 43, 1 (March 91): 70-92.

37. Diamond, 'Mimesis, Mimicry and the "True-Real"', *Modern Drama*, 32, 1 (1989), pp. 58-72, or more generally, Elizabeth Burns, *Theatricality: A Study of Convention in Theatre and in Social Life* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972).

38. See for example Timothy W. Luke, *Shows of Force: Power, Politics, and Ideology in Art Exhibitions* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1992), and Peter Vergo, ed. *The New Museology* (London: Reaktion Books, 1989).

39. As someone who uses theatrical 'trappings' to locate literary theatricality, but never supposes that such trappings might be authentic art, see, for example, David Marshall, *The Figure of Theatre: Shaftesbury, Defoe, Adam Smith and George Eliot* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

40. Hollander, *Moving Pictures* (New York: Knopf, 1989).

41. William J. Mitchell, *The Reconfigured Eye: Visual Truth in the Post-Photographic Era* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press 1992).

The Surveying of Hell. On Theatricality and Styles of Thinking

HELMAR SCHRAMM

In 1529 Agrippa von Nettesheim criticized the 'futility and uncertainty' of science. Indeed, the triumphant rise of European culture and science has always been accompanied by shadows of dissent. While, on the one hand, the rhapsodic shattering of reason was heavily criticized, on the other hand, equally sharp criticism was raised against the hermetic spirit of universal systems. The accepted authority of scientific knowledge was continually served a Lenten repast, and mighty edifices built on theory have bowed to the weight of doubt, crumbling into ruins of truths. The path which we call 'progress' is overlaid with traces of our own actions in the image of Sisyphus in Hades, who is condemned to push a huge boulder uphill. He is forever forced back to the beginning of his task, because of the perfidious nature of the stone.

Voices questioning the idea that the institution of organized knowledge represents the only true values have become more insistent in the dynamic, experiential space (*Zeitspielräume*) of the contemporary world. Bound to a high speed culture of heterogeneous systems of language, movement and perception, and equally bound to the fractal realities of appearances cultivated by the media, the provisional determination of one's position has become a natural precondition of the search for knowledge. Science, according to Roland Barthes's succinct formulation, must justify the place from which it speaks in a radically new way.¹ This refers not only to a specific presence of mind in the current labyrinth of temporal and spatial interplay; it also hints at the traumatic, repressed layers of the past. But how can the texture of history be decoded, read and re-read from a contemporary perspective? This is the background against which I should like to elaborate some thoughts

that revolve around a single question: How can the place from which one speaks—both within contemporary epistemology and the criticism of it—be determined in theatre studies?

1.

In 1588 Galileo Galilei gave a lecture at the Florentine Academy on the form, location and scope of Dante's hell.

However difficult and worthy of admiration [...] endless star gazing and dangerous sea voyages have enabled man to determine the distances between the heavens, their quick and slow movements and their relation to each other, the size of the stars, distant ones as well as near, the position of the earth and the seas—things which entirely, or in large part, can be perceived by our senses—how much more wonderful must we judge the exploration and description of the location and nature of Hell which, hidden in the innermost depths of the earth, is beyond the purview of our senses and known to none from experience.²

Referring to Dante's *Comedia*, Galileo gives an exact location for the setting of Hell which, with its sequence of concentric circles diminishing in diameter as they approach the centre of the earth 'resembles an enormous amphitheatre'.³ In Galileo's description of the terrifying regions of Hell, we discern a palpable delight in the power of the art of geometric surveying.

Galileo's lecture merits attention insofar as it documents a time of transition. Dante's conception of a huge *theatrum mundi* (a condensation of a multiplicity of philosophical, theological,

geographical and astronomical knowledge that existed at the end of the Middle Ages) signalled the approach of a new cultural epoch. But Galileo's geometrical interpretation of the great Dantean model at the end of the Renaissance announces a fundamental re-ordering of the sciences and arts. Where is the decisive difference between the two texts to be found?

Dante moves through the cosmos of knowledge condensed into a heaven and a hell as an active, participating player. His is a wanderer's description. But Galileo observed the geometric, spatial structure of Hell from a well calculated distance. His representation of it is the record of an observer who has a clear, overall view of the object from a fixed vantage point.

This is the basic motif of the dream of the total overview to which science has oriented itself increasingly since the seventeenth century. After Descartes's *Discours de la méthode* (1637), the idea of a universe composed of unquestionable certainties or truths became programmatic. The precondition of this concept was the methodological drawing of a sharp distinction between the random (physical) world of experience and a calculable (rational) world of systematic representation. The structure of representation was based on the principles of exclusion and repression. The unpredictable, paradoxical or spontaneous must be kept at a distance from generalizations derived from theoretical frameworks. The heterogeneous had no place in the system of Reason which was held to be all-powerful. Accordingly, the formalization of thought was bound to the stylization of three cultural factors: perception, movement and language—and these were conceptualized according to the extent to which they could be conceived and proved useful. To a certain extent, they were artificially synchronized into one theoretical whole which transcended their spontaneous interaction.

Herein lies a hint as to the analogical, structural correlation between the history of theatre and the history of science. The consequences of such a correlation for the discipline which we now call 'theatre studies' have yet to be worked out. No other traditional, cultural phenomenon contains the artificial, stylized interaction between perception, movement and language to the

same extent as theatre. Significant analogies exist between the determination of the location of the ideal observer in the representation of science and the spatio-temporal organization of seeing, speaking and acting in the canon of European theatre forms.⁴ This is why the trauma of repression and the pathology of exclusion inherent in the European history of science can be described in an original fashion from the perspective of the medium of theatre. In other words, theatre studies would be able to intensify its search for the place from which it speaks by uncovering traces of its structure in the history of science as well. Theatre studies could thus make discoveries that would not be possible from a reading obtained from within the restricted orientation of one discipline.

Would this not lead to an 'overloading' of the concept of theatre? Would it not entail a distancing from the 'real' object, the theatre as art? Not at all.

(a) Etymological studies have shown that the presently accepted notion of theatre as art is the outcome of a gradual strategy of inclusion. 'The word theatrum, or "showplace" was still in use at the beginning of the seventeenth century to describe any grand or magnificent place where something worthy of attention occurred.'⁵ Thus, for example, during the Renaissance, the concept of the *theatrum anatomicum* developed on a parallel with the theatre. Almost simultaneously with Galileo's 'The Geometrical Surveying of Hell', Abraham Ortelius published a pioneering work, *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum*, in 1584. Other works on the most widely varying scientific subjects were published under the title *Theatrum* until well into the eighteenth century. It was, however, principally in philosophy and the sciences that methodological reference to the theatre continued to be made. Such references cannot be interpreted simply as superficial metaphors, for it should be noted that there is an etymological link between 'theory' and 'theatre'. Both concepts originate in the idea of an observer who actively watches.

(b) Initially, science and art formed an ambivalent unity (one only has to think of Leonardo da Vinci). The classical system of art is a historical construct which was only established in the eighteenth century and promptly

challenged in a radical way by the avant-garde at the end of the nineteenth century. Simultaneously, the attack against the contemporary order of knowledge gained in influence—culminating in proposals to found science anew as art.

2.

Artaud's *Fragments d'un journal d'enfer* (1927) intimates an idea that, in his manifestos on theatre, intensifies into a vision which celebrates the destruction of the traditional borderlines of theatre. Artaud proposes a world of experience whose dynamic is strongly opposed to the principles of mimetic representation,

Je sens sous ma pensée le terrain qui s'effrite, et j'en suis amené à envisager les termes que j'emploie sans l'appui de leur sens intime, de leur substratum personnel. Et même mieux que cela, le point par où ce substratum semble se relier à ma vie me devient tout à coup étrangement sensible, et virtuel. J'ai l'idée d'un espace imprévu et fixé, là où en temps normal tout est mouvements, communication, interférence, trajet.⁶

Jacques Derrida drew on his subtle readings of Artaud to radicalize his own philosophical essays. In *Le Théâtre et son double*, Derrida sees 'un système de critique ébranlant le tout de l'histoire de l'Occident plus qu'un traité de la pratique théâtrale'.⁷ Derrida focused on Artaud's intense consideration of the 'limites sillonnant la théâtralité classique (représenté/représentant, signifié/signifiant, auteur/metteur en scène/acteurs/spectateurs, scène/salle, texte/interprétation, etc.)'.⁸ The structuring principles of such boundaries can be found not only in the arts but also in all areas of Western culture—its religions, its philosophies and its political systems. Jean-François Lyotard, following similar lines, has shown the significance of the totalizing boundaries inherent in the classical model of the theatre of representation.⁹

In terms of the orientation of theatre studies within the present framework of science and culture, there are, in my opinion, three directions:

i) As an Arts Discipline, it must take up Artaud's idea and radically question the tradi-

tional boundaries in theatre arts. If the discipline defines its institutionalized destination solely by referring to institutionalized theatre it is, in effect, an act of self-betrayal.

ii) As Cultural Studies, it can make an original contribution to the opening up of areas of history which have so far been systematically 'overlooked'. In such a case, it is also naturally linked to the idea of transgressing institutionalized borders. However, it is essential to expose the function of the organization of the theatre model beyond the theatre itself. Theatre historiography must, to a certain extent, determine its position by means of the spatio-temporal constellation sketched out by Feuerbach when he distanced himself from the Hegelian approach which: 'is a conception of exclusive time, rather than one of simultaneous, heterogeneous space. The system knows only subordination and succession; it knows nothing of co-ordination or coexistence.'¹⁰ Incidentally, similar considerations are to be found in Jacques Le Goff's essay, 'L'Histoire nouvelle', wherein he emphasizes that there are significant methodological parallels between geography and history with regard to the connection between spatial and temporal dimensions.¹¹ The comparative trait applied here can also be projected onto the historical space of the present, the virulent simultaneity of the non-simultaneous. In this way, the circle that binds together cultural-historical and intercultural research methods is completed.

iii) As Media Studies it can compare the technical projection of 'reality' by the media (*medialer Schein*) to the archive of cultural techniques involving the interplay of perception, movement and speech which are bound together in traditional theatre. This, too, suggests an epistemological shift the entire extent of which can only be hinted at here. Exactly two hundred years after Galileo's 'Geometric Surveying of Hell', Immanuel Kant praised the philosophical art of surveying as follows:

We have now not only journeyed through the land of Pure Reason, carefully observing every part of it, but also measured it and deter-

mined the proper location of each item. But this land is an island, enclosed by nature itself within unchangeable borders. It is the land of truth (an exciting name), surrounded by a wide, stormy ocean, which is the real seat of appearances.¹²

Research into the 'reality' presented by the media (*medialer Schein*) must take into account the enormous impulse Nietzsche's 'programme of philosophical embarkation on the high seas'¹³ provides in the quest for knowledge.

3.

It thus follows that the epistemic place of speaking cannot be clarified solely by the determination of the fields of objects. The conclusions that must be drawn from the relation between theatre history and the history of science simultaneously affect most profoundly the manner of conducting theoretical reflection in every possible sense. In a way, it is a question of establishing a new 'style of thinking' in the practical processes of research. Ludwik Fleck introduced this concept in 1935 with his book *The Constitution and Development of a Scientific Fact*.¹⁴ The work was forgotten, and its significance for the history of sciences was only discovered in 1962 with the publication of Thomas S. Kuhn's influential book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.¹⁵

Fleck's idea was to examine examples of medical records of syphilis cases in different historical eras. In doing so, he exposed deep contradictions between the acquired knowledge of the time and the actual variety of differing observations. He demonstrated the extraordinary persistence of these systems of opinion and proved how established theories and language systems are linked together in a 'harmony of deceptions'.¹⁶ In this respect, his understanding does not go beyond that which can be found in Wittgenstein. However it is significant that Fleck brought a sociological component into the epistemological problematic with his concept of social patterns of thinking, or the 'thought collective' (*Denkkollektive*).

An individual belongs to a number of thought collectives. As a researcher, the individual

belongs to the community in which that individual works and often unconsciously conjures up ideas and developments which soon become self-evident and not infrequently turned against their originator. As a member of a party, race, class or nation, and so on, the individual simultaneously belongs to other collectives. Should an individual find himself by chance into any society, he will soon become a member of it and bow to the pressure it exerts.¹⁷

The pressure exerted by society upon academic and scientific activity does not remain without consequence in terms of the content of such activity. Words, formerly simple designations, become slogans; sentences, formerly simple observations, become battle cries. This completely changes their conceptual and social value: they acquire magical powers, for they no longer function by way of their logical meaning—or even, as often, against it—they rather function by mere presence.¹⁸

From Ludwik Fleck's work, one can observe the extent to which the sociological aspect of the business of science contains theatrical elements, and how so-called factual knowledge reasserts itself in acts of 'orchestrated learning by rote'¹⁹ achieving recognition. It is clear that any attempt to establish a new style of thinking will meet with great resistance. Theatre studies might have an advantage in this respect, in that it can derive certain conclusions concerning the situation of the organization of the discipline itself from its contact with a theatre praxis which is distant and yet familiar to it. In conclusion, perhaps crucial methodological impulses can be obtained from those experimental artistic projects whose entire creativity spings forth in the assault against method.

(translated by Fiona Greenwood)

Helmar Schramm is Professor of Theatre Studies at the University of Leipzig.

Notes

1. Roland Barthes, *L'Aventure sémiologique* (Paris: Seuil, 1985).

2. Galileo Galilei, 'Erste Lektion vor der florentinischen Akademie über die Gestalt, Lage und Größe von Dantes

Hölle' (Due Lezione all'Accademia Fiorentina circa la Figura, Sito e Grandezza dell'Inferno di Dante. Lezione prima), Galileo Galilei, *Schriften, Briefe, Dokumente*, ed. Anna Mudry (Berlin, 1987), p. 50.

3. Ibid. p. 54.

4. A more elaborate description of this concept of theatricality can be found in Helmar Schramm, *Carneval des Denkens. Studien zur Entfaltung theatralischer Perspektiven in philosophischen Texten des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts*. Forthcoming.

5. Peter Rusterholz, *Theatrum vitae humanae* (Berlin, 1970), p. 15.

6. Antonin Artaud, 'Fragments d'un journal d'enfer', (*Œuvres complètes*. Tome 1. Nouvelle édition revue et augmentée (Paris: Gallimard, 1975), pp. 133-44.

7. Jacques Derrida, 'Le Théâtre de la cruauté et la clôture de la représentation', *L'Écriture et la différence* (Paris: Seuil, 1967), pp. 341-68.

8. Ibid., p. 359.

9. Jean François Lyotard, 'La peinture comme dispositif libidinal', J. F. Lyotard, *Des dispositifs pulsionnels*, (Paris, 1973), pp. 227-68. See also, in the same collection of essays, 'La dent, la paume', pp. 89-98, and 'Plusieurs silences', pp. 269-90.

10. Ludwig Feuerbach, 'Zur Kritik der Hegelischen Philosophie' (first published in *Hallesche Jahrbücher für deutsche Wissenschaft und Kunst*, 1839), ed. W. Harich, W. Schufenhauer, *Gesammelte Werke*. Vol. 9, *Kleinere Schriften II*, (Berlin, 1970), p. 18.

11. Jacques Le Goff, 'L'Histoire nouvelle', in *La Nouvelle Histoire*, ed. Jacques Le Goff (Paris: Éditions complexes, 1988), pp. 35-76.

12. Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, ed. Raymund Schmidt (Leipzig 1930), p. 24.

13. As Norbert Bolz put it in *Die Welt als Chaos und Simulation*. Munich 1992, p. 29. See also Bolz, *Eine Kurze Geschichte des Scheins* (Munich 1991).

14. Ludwik Fleck, *Entstehung und Entwicklung einer wissenschaftlichen Tatsache. Einführung in die Lehre vom Denkstil und Denkkollektiv*. (1935) eds. Lothar Schäfer and Thomas Schnelle (Frankfurt a.M., 1980).

15. Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. (Chicago, 1962).

16. Ludwick Fleck, op. cit., p. 40.

17. Ibid., p. 61.

18. Ibid., p. 59.

19. Ibid., p. 127.

II — The Moscow Keynote Speeches

Introduction

MICHAEL ANDERSON

The world in which the International Federation for Theatre Research first accepted the invitation from our Russian colleagues to hold its Twelfth World Congress in Moscow was a startlingly different one from that in which the Congress eventually took place: and Moscow itself had borne witness most dramatically to this transformation. Since its Eleventh World Congress, held in Stockholm in 1989, the IFTR has been coming to terms with a world in which much, including the boundaries and contents of its own discipline, has become subject to radical change. In a formal way, the adoption of a revised Constitution for the Federation is a recognition of the new world in which we are living: now the responsibility for furthering the aims of the Federation lies firmly in the democratic hands of subscribing Institutions and individual Members. More substantially, the process initiated in Stockholm of dividing Congress Sessions into Working Groups held together by a common interest, reflects the diversity of approaches which are now embraced under the title of Theatre Research, and the role which the Federation plays in bringing together scholars from a diversity of backgrounds, not only to meet colleagues from other countries working in the same field, but to obtain through keynote speeches and informal contacts in a crowded schedule of theatre-going, receptions and private encounters, a wider view of developments outside their immediate sphere of interest. At the Moscow Congress, where many of our colleagues from Russia and other parts of Eastern Europe were able to make free contact with academics from the West, often for the first time since the great changes of the last few years, this two-way exchange proved particularly vital.

The Moscow Congress, under the title 'Performance Past and Present: Current Trends in Theatre Research', followed, with some changes of emphasis, the pattern established at the previous World Congress held in Stockholm in 1989. Delegates were each assigned to a Working Group consisting of up to twenty members who met daily, to deliver their own papers and hear and discuss the papers of their colleagues. Some of these Working Groups had been established at the time of the Stockholm Congress; others were set up and held meetings in the years between the two Congresses; a number were inaugurated in Moscow itself. Nearly all of them, however, will continue into the future, in the same or a modified form. Subjects included Performance Analysis, Historiography of the Theatre, Cultural Identities, Scenography, Feminist Theatre/Women in Theatre, Acting, Dance and Movement, and Audience Reception and Research. Almost one hundred and fifty papers were delivered, many of them to be published in academic journals.

I believe that delegates who attended the Congress in Moscow will confirm that the Keynote Speeches published here demonstrate and amplify some of the issues which were central to our discussions and, moreover, give some sense of the new perspectives which are presently opening up within theatre research. Whilst the keynote speakers in Stockholm were invited to address a current issue in wide-ranging terms, the Moscow speakers included younger scholars invited to report on a piece of research, or research methodology, upon which they had recently been working. The results were illuminating, and the papers must be allowed to speak for themselves; but some general conclu-

sions can undoubtedly be drawn. Theatre research has always been multi-disciplinary, but perhaps never more than in the past few years have developments in other disciplines so radically affected the agenda of theatre research itself. Bruce McConachie acknowledges his debt to the philosopher and historian of science Stephen Toulmin in addressing the question of theatre history and the nation state; Elly Konijn shows how recent psychological studies in the field of emotions can throw light on questions discussed by Diderot in *Paradoxe sur le comédien*; drawing upon his own research into alchemist publications, Helmar Schramm placed the deconstructive techniques of the contemporary arts, including theatre, in a beguilingly wide cultural context. As Janelle Reinelt's eloquent survey made clear in the opening speech, the dissolution of unified political groupings on a global scale has coincided with the decentering and deconstruction of Western intellectual categories to which, in the field of theatre studies, post-colonial critics and feminist, gay and lesbian theatre scholars have made as major a contribution as semioticians and researchers in such developing areas as reception theory and performance analysis.

Paradoxically, whilst much of the work of Western researchers is influenced by political (often specifically Marxist) theory, many of our

colleagues from the former Eastern bloc see the new conditions in their countries as offering an opportunity to create theatre and pursue research in an atmosphere free not simply from political restraint but from political discourse altogether. And Mitsuya Mori, in a study of the early exchanges of theatre between Japan and the West at the turn of this century, points out that although interculturalism has become a popular concept, cultural differences often run much deeper than we imagine. It is true, as František Černý points out, that the Members of the Federation have mostly come from Europe (until recently, excluding Russia) and North America, and one of the urgent tasks facing the Federation must surely be to extend its membership beyond these confines, thus carrying the debates initiated at Moscow into an even wider arena.

The letter from Professor Černý accepting the post of Honorary President of the Federation is a reminder that, even though we may be standing at the brink of a new era in theatre research, we remain indebted to an earlier generation of scholars not only for their commitment and energy in establishing the Federation, but for the personal principles to which his letter refers: the need to look beyond the narrow horizons of one's discipline, to make international contact with scholars and artists, to pursue research with devotion and, when necessary, with courage.