

Theatricality: The Specificity of Theatrical Language¹

Josette Féral

To define theatricality, or the specificity of the theater, is not only to attempt to define what distinguishes theater from other genres, but to define what distinguishes it from other kinds of spectacle—dance, performance art, or multi-media art. It is to bring the nature of theater itself into focus against a background of individual theatrical practices, theories of stage-play, and aesthetics. It is to attempt to find parameters shared by all theatrical enterprises from time immemorial. Although such a project may appear overly ambitious, its pertinence requires an attempt to establish such a definition. This article is such a step, seeking to establish points of reference for subsequent reflection.

During the 20th century, the very foundations of theater were turned upside-down, as were those of other arts. What had been a clearly defined theatrical aesthetic at the end of the 19th century, outlining normative practice, was, during the 20th century, systematically reexamined. At the same time, stage practice began to distance itself from the text, assigning it a new place in the theatrical enterprise.² Once under siege, the text was no longer able to guarantee the theatricality of the stage. Thus, it is understandable that those concerned began to question the specificity of the theatrical act itself, especially since this very specificity appeared to influence other stage practices as well— dance, performance art, opera, and so on.

The emergence of theatricality in areas tangentially related to the theater seems to have as a corollary the dissolution of the limits between genres, and of the formal distinctions between practices, from dance-theater to multi-media arts, including happenings, performance, and new technologies. The specificity of theater is more and more difficult to define. To the extent that the spectacular and the theatrical acquired new forms, the theater, suddenly decentered, was obliged to redefine itself.³ From that time on, its specificity was no longer evident.

How then are we to define theatricality today? Should we speak of it in the singular or in the plural? Is theatricality a property that belongs uniquely to the theater, or can it also be found in the quotidian? As a quality—

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understood here in the Kantian sense of the term—does theatricality pre-exist its manifestation in the theatrical object, with the object then becoming the condition of its emergence? Or is theatricality the consequence of a certain theatrical process related either to reality or to the subject? These are the questions I would like to consider here.

The Historical Context

The notion of theatricality seems to have appeared at the same time as the notion of literarity. However, its dissemination in critical literature was less rapid; in fact, the texts that I have been able to assemble dealing with theatricality date back only 10 years.⁴ This means that attempts to conceptualize the notion of theatricality are linked to recent preoccupations with the theory of theater. One might well object, maintaining that such works as Aristotle's *Poetics*, Diderot's *Paradoxe du comédien*, and the prefaces of Racine and Victor Hugo, among others, are efforts to theorize in matters related to the theater. But "theorizing" understood according to contemporary usage as a reflection upon the specificity of genres and upon abstract concepts (*sign*, *semiotization*, *ostension*, *fragment*, *distance*, *displacement*, etc.), is a much more recent phenomenon. As Roland Barthes has pointed out, the attempt to define a theory of theater is itself the sign of an era fascinated by theory.

Recent dissemination of the notion of theatricality can lead us to forget its more distant history. In fact, we can retrace the notion of theatricality back to the first texts of Evreinoff (1922) who spoke of "*teatralnost*," stressing the significance of the suffix "*ost*" in order to underline the importance of his discovery.⁵

Lexically speaking, theatricality is both poorly defined and etymologically unclear. It seems to be much like the "tacit concept" defined by Michael Polany: "a concrete idea that one can use directly but that one can only describe indirectly."⁶ It is a concept that one associates in a privileged way with the theater.

Theatricality as a Property of the Quotidian

By examining conditions that accompany various manifestations of theatricality both on and off stage, one can demonstrate that theatricality is not strictly a theatrical phenomenon. Let us look at a few possible scenarios:

1st scenario: You enter a theater. The play has not yet begun. In front of you is a stage; the curtain is open; the actors are absent. The set, in plain view, seems to await the beginning of the play. Is theatricality at work here?

If one answers in the affirmative, one recognizes that the set alone can convey a certain theatricality. Although the theatrical process has not yet

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been set in motion, certain constraints are already imposed, certain signs are already in place. The spectator knows what to expect from the place in which he finds himself; he knows what to expect from the scenic design—a play.⁷ Because a semiotization of space has already occurred, the spectator perceives the theatricality of the stage, and of the space surrounding him.

We can therefore draw a first conclusion: the presence of the actor is not a prerequisite of theatricality.⁸ In this instance, space is the vehicle of theatricality. The subject perceives certain relations within that space; he perceives the spectacular nature of the stage. Space seems fundamental to theatricality, for the passage from the literary to the theatrical is first and foremost completed through a spatial realization of the text.

2nd scenario: In the subway, you witness an argument between two passengers. One is smoking and the other strongly protesting, reminding the first that smoking on the subway is against the rules. The first refuses to comply; insults and threats are exchanged; tension mounts. Spectators of this exchange, the other passengers watch attentively; several comment, taking sides in the argument. The train pulls into a station and stops in front of an imposing billboard advertising cigarettes. The smoker exits the train, and for the benefit of all the interested observers, points out the disproportion between the small NO SMOKING sign in the train and the huge billboard promoting smoking that occupies the entire wall of the station platform.

Is theatricality present in this instance? One would probably say not, for the argument did not appear staged, nor had the non-participants been formally invited to watch. Furthermore, the exchange did not appear to be a fictional situation, for the parties seemed genuinely involved in the quarrel.

However, spectators exiting at the same station would have discovered that the two antagonists were in fact an actor and actress taking part in what Boal defined as an "invisible theatrical production." Knowing this, and bearing in mind that the spectators' participation was involuntary, would one now claim that theatricality had been present? After the fact, it would seem so.

We might conclude that in this instance, theatricality seems to stem from the spectator's awareness of a theatrical intention addressed to him. This awareness altered the way in which he looked at what was taking place; it forced him to see theater where before he saw only a chance occurrence.⁹ The spectator thereby transforms into fiction what he thought was a quotidian event. Re-semiotizing the space of the subway car, the spectator was able to displace signs and to interpret them differently, revealing both the fictional nature of the performers' behavior, and the presence of illusion where only commonplace reality had been expected. In this instance, theatricality appears

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as a result of the performers' affirmed theatrical intention. The spectator
 must be aware of the performers' secret; without such awareness there is
 misunderstanding and absence of theatricality.

3rd scenario: You are seated at a sidewalk café watching passers-by who
 have no desire to be seen, nor any intention of acting. As they pass, they
 project neither pretense nor fiction, nor do they behave as if showing-off.
 Only by chance might they be aware of the watchful eyes following them.

However, your eyes perceive a certain theatricality in their figures and
 gestures, in the way they occupy the space around them. As a spectator, you
 inscribe this theatricality in the real space surrounding them. It is the simple
 exercise of watching that reassigns gestures to theatrical space.

Considering the constraints that it imposes upon the spectator, this last
 example is perhaps the most marginal. Nonetheless, we can draw an
 important conclusion from it: theatricality has little to do with the nature of
 the invested object—the actor, space, object, or event—nor is it necessarily
 the result of pretense, illusion, make-believe, or fiction. Were such conditions
 prerequisites of theatricality, we would have been unable to identify its
 presence in everyday occurrences.¹⁰

More than a property with analyzable characteristics, theatricality seems
 to be a *process* that has to do with a "gaze" that postulates and creates a
 distinct, virtual space belonging to the other, from which fiction can emerge.
 In our first examples, this space was created by the conscious act of the
 performer, understood here in the largest sense of the word to include the
 actor, director, designer, lighting director, and architect. In our last example,
 the spectator's gaze created a spatial cleft from which illusion emerged—
 illusion whose vehicle the spectator had selected from among events,
 behaviors, physical bodies, objects and space without regard for the fictional
 or real nature of the vehicle's origin.

Theatricality has occurred under two conditions: first through a
 performer's reallocation of the quotidian space that he occupies; second
 through a spectator's gaze framing a quotidian space that he does not occupy.
 Such actions create a cleft that divides space into the "outside" and the
 "inside" of theatricality. This space is the space of the "other"; it is the space
 that defines both alterity and theatricality.

Thus, theatricality as alterity emerges through a cleft in quotidian space.
 The cleft can be the result of an actor's seizing control of the quotidian and
 turning it into theatrical space; it can also be the result of a spectator's gaze
 constituting space as theatrical. By instituting a Husserlian qualitative
 modification in the relationship between subjects, this active gaze constitutes

the condition for the emergence of theatricality. In the case where the initiative belongs to the actor, the "other" becomes actor through an avowed act of representation; in the case where the initiative belongs to the spectator, the "other" is unwittingly transformed into actor through a gaze that inscribes theatricality in the space surrounding him.

Therefore, we may conclude that theatricality consists as much in situating the object or the other in a "framed theatrical space" (scenario 3), as it does in transforming a simple event into signs in such a way that it becomes a spectacle (scenario 2). At this stage of our analysis, theatricality appears to be more than a property; in fact, we might call it a process that recognizes subjects in process; it is a process of looking at or being looked at. It is an act initiated in one of two possible spaces: either that of the actor or that of the spectator. In both cases, this act creates a cleft in the quotidian that becomes the space of the other, the space in which the other has a place. Without such a cleft, the quotidian remains intact, precluding the possibility of theatricality, much less of theater itself.

Initially, theatricality appears to be an almost fantastical cognitive operation set in motion either by the observer or the observed. It is a performative act creating the virtual space of the other, the transitional space discussed by Winnicott, the threshold (*limen*) discussed by Turner, or Goffman's "framing." It clears a passage, allowing both the performing subject as well as the spectator to pass from "here" to "elsewhere."

Theatricality does not manifest itself in any obligatory fashion. It does not have any qualitative properties that would permit our identifying it beyond any shadow of doubt. It is not an empirical given. Theatricality is authorized by the placing of the subject with respect to both quotidian and imaginary dimensions, the latter being founded upon the presence of the other's space. To see theatricality in these terms poses the question of its own transcendent nature.

What Permits the Theatrical? The Theater as Pre-Aesthetic

If one is ready to admit the existence, outside the theatrical stage, of a theatricality of acts, events, situations, and objects, then one must be willing to consider the philosophical nature of theatricality.¹¹ In Kantian terminology, we are confronted with the possibility of attributing a transcendent nature to theatricality, and of thus defining stage-related theatricality as only one expression of a transcendent phenomenon.¹²

Seen in this way, theatricality appears as a transcendental structure whose general characteristics are assumed by the theater. Thus stage-related

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theatricality is possible only because of its transcendent nature. In other words, theater is possible only because theatricality exists and because the theater calls it into play. Once evoked, theatricality takes on specifically theatrical characteristics that are collectively valued and socially meaningful. However, the theatricality of the stage could not exist were the nature of theatricality not transcendent. Seen in this way, the playwright merely takes his place within this transcendent structure, plunging into the cleft in space that theatricality has opened, that he has chosen, and that we have imposed upon him.¹³

Stage-related Theatricality

Although the *sine qua non* condition for the emergence of theatricality as defined above is the creation of a distinct, fictional space, we can create such a space, as we have seen, outside the theater. What then are the signs of theatricality that are specifically characteristic of the stage?¹⁴ What characteristics of theatricality can the theater alone produce?

According to Evreinov, stage-related theatricality rests essentially on the theatricality of an actor who, moved by a theatrical instinct, attempts to transform the reality that surrounds him. Evreinov presents theatricality as a property that springs from the actor and renders his surroundings theatrical. Thus these two poles (self, reality) are the fundamental points of focus for all reflections on theatricality: its point of emergence (the acting self), and its point of arrival (reality). The modalities of the relationship between these two points are governed by *performance*, whose rules are both transitory and permanent. In fact, movement between these poles is varied and non-restrictive, bringing into play three elements whose relationship defines the process of theatricality and whose possible interactions—taking into account historical, sociological and aesthetical variations—encompass the totality of theatrical practices.



The Actor

When the actor is viewed as the source of stage-related theatricality (a view defended by Peter Brook), all other signifying systems (scenic space, costumes, makeup, dialogue, text, lighting, props, etc.) can disappear without scenic theatricality being significantly affected.¹⁵ The actor's presence alone

is enough to assure that theatricality will be preserved and that the theatrical act will take place—proof that the actor is one of the indispensable elements in the production of stage-related theatricality.

The actor is simultaneously the producer of theatricality and the channel through which it passes. He encodes it, and inscribes it with signs within symbolic structures on stage that are informed by his subjective impulses and desires. As a subject in process, the actor explores the "other" he creates, making it speak. These perfectly encoded symbolic structures are easily recognized by a public that appropriates them as a mode of knowledge and experience. All are forms of narrative fiction (fantastical characters, acrobats, mechanized marionettes, monologues, dialogues, representations) that the actor brings to life upon the stage. As staged simulacra and illusions, these structures evince possible world-views whose veridical and illusory aspects are grasped simultaneously by the spectator. At the same time, the spectator's double-edged gaze penetrates the actor's mask, questioning the presence of the other, his know-how, his technique, his performance, his art of dissimulation and representation. The spectator is never completely duped. The paradox of the actor is also the paradox of the spectator: to believe in the other without completely believing in him. As Schechner reminds us, the spectator must deal with the "not-not not" of the actor.¹⁶ Understanding the fragmentary nature of momentary illusion, the spectator looks at a simulacrum created by the actor, a simulacrum that invites the spectator to cross over into the realm of the imaginary, to yield to the desire of being the other, of transformation, of alterity. His performance transforms into signs the displacement by which he distinguishes himself from the "other."

Thus, we may situate the actor's theatricality in a process of displacement in which his very self is at stake—in a dynamic whose symbolic structures are riddled with static moments during which the actor must confront the ever-present menace of the return of the self. In aesthetic theory, a value is assigned to the tension thus created between symbolic structures and self. At one extreme we find Artaud; at the other, oriental theater, and in between, the great diversity generated by various schools and individual practices.¹⁷

The body of the actor is the privileged locus of the self's confrontation with alterity. It is a body in motion on stage, an impulsive and symbolic body sometimes yielding to hysteria, at other times, controlled through a willful act by which it becomes the locus of knowledge and of mastery. Moreover, it is a locus continually threatened by a certain inadequacy, by faults, by a certain lack. By definition, it is imperfect; as matter, it is vulnerable. Although it knows its limits, it is shocked when it surpasses them.¹⁸ However,

will be preserved and that the theatrical actor is one of the indispensable elements of theatricality. The producer of theatricality and the channel through which it flows, inscribes it with signs within a space informed by his subjective impulses. The actor explores the "other" he creates, and encodes symbolic structures that are easily decoded as a mode of knowledge and communication. He relates them as a mode of knowledge and communication (fantastical characters, acrobats, dialogues, representations) that the audience perceives as staged simulacra and illusions, these elements whose veridical and illusory aspects are perceived by the spectator. At the same time, the spectator's perception of the actor's mask, questioning the presence of the actor's technique, his performance, his art of acting. The spectator is never completely duped. The paradox of the spectator: to believe in the actor, to believe in him. As Schechner reminds us, "the actor is not-not not" of the actor.¹⁶ Understanding the nature of the theatrical illusion, the spectator looks at a simulacrum that invites the spectator to participate in a dynamic, to yield to the desire of being the actor. His performance transforms into signs that distinguish himself from the "other." The actor's theatricality in a process of displacement occurs in a dynamic whose symbolic structures are in flux, during which the actor must confront the question of the self. In aesthetic theory, a value is defined between symbolic structures and self. The actor's relationship to the other, oriental theater, and in between, various schools and individual practices.¹⁷ The actor is the privileged locus of the self's confrontation with the other on stage, an impulsive and symbolic performance, at other times, controlled through a dynamic of the locus of knowledge and of mastery. The actor's performance is threatened by a certain inadequacy, by a certain imperfection; as matter, it is vulnerable. The actor is shocked when it surpasses them.¹⁸ However,

this body is more than just performance. Transformed into a system of signs, it semiotizes everything around it: space, time, story, dialogue, scenery, music, lighting, and costumes. It brings theatricality to the stage. More than a simple bearer of information and knowledge, more than a vehicle of representation and mimesis, it manifests the presence of the actor, the immediacy of the event, and the material nature of the body.¹⁹ As space, rhythm, and illusion, as both opaque and transparent, as language, story, character, and athlete, the body of the actor is without doubt one of the most important elements of stage-related theatricality.

Acting

The second fundamental notion of stage-related theatricality is acting, which Huizinga has defined as undertaking a

... free activity standing quite consciously outside "ordinary" life as being "not serious," but at the same time absorbing the player intensively and utterly. It is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it. It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and in an orderly manner. It promotes the formation of social groupings which tend to surround themselves with secrecy and to stress their difference from the common world by disguise or other means. (13)

In other words, acting is the result of a performer's decision (as actor, director, designer, or playwright) to consciously occupy the here-and-now of a space different from the quotidian, to become involved in activity outside of daily life. Acting demands a personal effort whose objectives, intensity, and material manifestations vary according to the individual, the period, and the genre.

Acting is codified according to rules derived on the one hand from rules governing performance in general (use of the stage, of scenic space, freedom of action within scenic and spatial constraints, transformations, transgressions, etc.), and, on the other hand, from more specific rules derived from historically defined theatrical aesthetics that vary according to period, genre, and practice.²⁰ These rules supply a framework for the action, and it is within this framework that the actor takes certain liberties with respect to the quotidian.

The dimensions of this framework are larger than the physical—i.e. the visible boundaries of the stage—for they encompass a virtual aspect imposed by the liberties and restrictions of acting. The framework becomes visible only through a tacit encoding of the space and of the players who create the theatrical phenomenon. It is better therefore to speak of a "theatrical

framework," which, as Irving Goffman reminds us, has the advantage of stressing the dynamic aspect of the term. More than a simple result or an imposed final product, the framework is, on the contrary, a process, produced as the expression of a subject in action. It is perceived in the light of relations between subjects and objects transformed into theatrical objects. In this process of transformation, we have the imbrication of fiction and representation. Theatricality does not emerge passively from an ensemble of theatrical objects whose properties one could enumerate at a glance, but as part of a dynamic process belonging to both the actor and the spectator, who takes possession of the action he watches.²¹

Fiction vs. Reality

The third notion about stage-related theatricality brings reality into play. To speak of the relationship between reality and the theater is to pose the problem of the existence of a reality conceived as autonomous, knowable and capable of being represented. Contemporary philosophy maintains that we can speak of reality only as the product of scientific observation; that reality is itself a result, a representation, a simulacrum. However, it is important to underline the relationship between theatricality and reality, for until the beginning of the 20th century this relationship was the focus of much theoretical reflection, and many "poetics" of the theater (e.g., Stanislavski and Meyerhold) are profoundly marked by its imprint. In other words, is the seeming equivalence between theatrical representation and reality to be interpreted as indicative of theatricality?

For certain artists in fields other than theater, as well as for certain ones within the field, the notion of theatricality has a number of pejorative connotations. G. Abensour writes:

Nothing is more odious for the lyrical poet than the idea of theatricality that initially designates an attitude completely extraneous, unconnected with any intimate feeling that is supposed to inspire it—an attitude one readily identifies with a deliberate absence of sincerity. In such a light, to be theatrical is to be false. (671)

Michael Fried notes that the success, even the survival, of the arts has come to depend to a great extent upon their ability to destroy theater. He has gone so far as to maintain that art degenerates as it approaches theater (1968, 139-141). In the popular imagination, "theatricality" is opposed to sincerity, which each person claims from a different perspective.

Stanislavski attempts to make the spectator forget that he is in a theater, the term "theatrical" being pejorative to those engaged in "artistic theater."

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In his view, the truth of the play depends upon a proximity between the actor and the reality he represents. For Stanislavski, theatricality appears as a kind of distancing from reality—an effect of exaggeration, an intensification of behavior that rings false when juxtaposed with what should be the realistic truth of the stage.

On the other hand, Meyerhold believes that theater must aim at a kind of grotesque realism, but one quite different from the realism described by the naturalists. Theatricality is the process by which the actor and the director continually remind the spectator that he is in the theater, face-to-face with a consummate actor who is playing a role. To affirm the "theatrical" as distinct from life and from reality is the condition *sine qua non* of stage-related theatricality. The stage must speak its own language and impose its own laws. For Meyerhold, there is no equivalence between representation and reality. On the contrary, theatricality is not to be found in any illusory relationship with reality. Nor is it to be linked to a specific aesthetic. Rather, it must be sought in the autonomous discourse that constitutes theater. Meyerhold insists on a truly theatrical specificity.

Meyerhold's concept of theatricality is concretized in the actor's ostentatious demonstration to the spectator that he is at the theater; his is an act that designates the theater as distinct from reality. The distinction is fundamental. On the one hand, it proposes a theatricality centered exclusively on the function of the theater as theater, thus transforming it into the sort of cybernetic machine about which Barthes spoke. On the other hand, the distinction defines a space in which the process of theatrical production is important, a space in which, outside of any relationship with reality, everything becomes sign.

Contrary to Meyerhold's definition of theatricality, Stanislavski's is marked by history, since it carries traces of bygone debates over "naturalism" in the theater—a naturalism opposed to the widely-condemned artificiality of the late nineteenth century. Although these debates over naturalism are not completely dead, today they are understood differently, with naturalism itself being recognized as a form of theatricality.

Today's response to the question of whether theatricality can be defined according to any specific relationship between the stage and the reality that is its object, appears clear, for we believe that there is not any single, privileged subject more appropriate to the theater than any other. Theatricality is a process that is above all linked to the conditions of theatrical production. As such, it poses the question of representational processes.

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The Framework and the Forbidden

As with all frameworks, that of the theater has a double edge: working against forces coming from the outside, the framework guarantees order; from within, it authorizes the violation of that same order.²² "Doesn't the essence of theater consist, above all, in the capacity to violate norms established by nature, the state, and society?" asked Evreinov.²³ This possibility of violation guarantees the freedom of the actor and the strength of free will of all contributors.

The freedoms authorized are those of reproduction, imitation, duplication, transformation, deformation, the violation of established norms, of nature, and of social order. Nevertheless, as Huizinga has shown, the play in general, and the stage-play in particular, consists of both a limiting framework and a transgressive content. The framework both authorizes and forbids. However, it does not authorize all freedoms, but only those initially sanctioned by rules shared by all participants, and by the liberties a given period allows within a given genre.²⁴ These liberties are frequently linked to specific aesthetics and to norms of reception that constitute a code of communication shared by actor and spectator. Although it is possible to extend the boundaries of the framework, *i.e.* stretch the code to surprise or even shock the public, limits must nevertheless be respected.

However, these liberties must not make us forget certain fundamental interdictions. Were these to be violated, the framework of the stage-play would come apart, and the mingling of stage with reality would destroy the sovereignty of theatrical space.²⁵

Activities that violate the "law of reversibility" are forbidden. In the theater, this law guarantees the reversibility of time and event. As such, it opposes any act in which the subject is mutilated or executed. For example, barred from the stage are certain practices of the 1960s in which bodies were mutilated or animals killed for the supposed pleasure of representation.²⁶ Such acts break the tacit contract between spectator and theater that guarantees that what one witnesses is representation, inscribed in a time and space different from the quotidian, in which the forward march of time is suspended and thus reversible, an act in which the actor reserves the possibility of returning to his point of departure.²⁷ In actually attacking his own body (or that of an animal), the actor destroys the conditions of theatricality. Henceforth, he is no longer in the alterity of theatrical space, but has crossed back into reality; his act has transgressed all shared rules and codes and is no longer perceived as illusion, fiction, or play. Such acts

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particular, consists of both a limiting
t. The framework both authorizes and
e all freedoms, but only those initially
ticipants, and by the liberties a given
These liberties are frequently linked to
reception that constitute a code of
l spectator. Although it is possible to
ork, *i.e.* stretch the code to surprise or
evertheless be respected.

ot make us forget certain fundamental
ated, the framework of the stage-play
of stage with reality would destroy the

of reversibility" are forbidden. In the
ersibility of time and event. As such, it
t is mutilated or executed. For example,
ctices of the 1960s in which bodies were
supposed pleasure of representation.²⁶
t between spectator and theater that
es is representation, inscribed in a time
lian, in which the forward march of time
an act in which the actor reserves the
t of departure.²⁷ In actually attacking his
, the actor destroys the conditions of
longer in the alterity of theatrical space,
his act has transgressed all shared rules
ved as illusion, fiction, or play. Such acts

transform the theater into a circus ring and violate one of the limits of the theater.²⁸ Although theatricality may yet be present in the event, theater as such has disappeared.

Conclusion

From these observations we can conclude that theatricality is not a sum of enumerable properties or characteristics, but can be discerned through specific manifestations, and deduced from phenomena termed "theatrical." However, these examples are not theatricality's only form; it is not limited strictly to the theater, but can be found in dance, opera, and performance art, as well as in the quotidian.

If the notion of theatricality goes beyond the theater, it is because it is not a "property" belonging to the subjects/things that are its vehicles. It belongs neither to the objects, the space, nor to the actor himself, although each can become its vehicle. Rather, theatricality is the result of a perceptual dynamics linking the onlooker with someone or something that is looked at. This relationship can be initiated either by the actor who declares his intention to act, or by the spectator who, of his own initiative, transforms the other into a spectacular object. By watching, the spectator creates an "other" space, no longer subject to the laws of the quotidian, and in this space he inscribes what he observes, perceiving it as belonging to a space where he has no place except as external observer. Without this gaze, indispensable for the emergence of theatricality and for its recognition as such, the other would share the spectator's space and remain part of his daily reality.

Theatricality produces spectacular events for the spectator; it establishes a relationship that differs from the quotidian. It is an act of representation, the construction of a fiction. As such, theatricality is the imbrication of fiction and representation in an "other" space in which the observer and the observed are brought face to face. Of all the arts, the theater is best suited to this sort of experimentation.

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Notes

1. This article was first published in French in *Poétique*, Paris, Sept. 1988, pp. 347-361.
2. Results of a survey undertaken in 1912 by editors of the journal *Les Marges* reflect the importance of this change. *Les Marges* put the following question to its readers: "Which, in your opinion, is the superior person: the one who loves to read or the one who loves to go to the theater?" The majority of those participating in the survey responded in

favor of those who read. (Cf. André Veinstein, *La mise en scène théâtrale et sa condition esthétique*, Paris, Flammarion, 1955, p. 55)

3. An identical situation occurred in painting when the invention of photography forced artists to redefine the goals and the specificity of the art form itself.
4. Cf. the works of Mercea Marghescou, Charles Bouazis, and Thomas Aron, as well as early notions of literarity by the Prague School.
5. Cf. Sharon Marie Carnicke's article, "L'instinct théâtral: Evreinov et la théâtralité" p. 98. Please note that the French use the expression *théâtralité*, while the English oscillate between "theatricality" and "theatricality" (cf. the special issue devoted to the "Theory of Drama and Performance" in *Modern Drama*, vol. 25 March 1982), in a less precise fashion, thus de-emphasizing the importance of the term. In Spanish, the expression is *teatralidad*.
6. From the *Tacit Dimension* as quoted by J. Baillon in the article entitled "D'une entreprise de théâtralité" in *Théâtre/Public*, No 18/19, January-June 1975, pp. 109-122.
7. He expects a play rather than dance, opera, music, or film. In this sense, the space that he enters is already coded.
8. The absence of the actor poses a certain problems. Is there theatricality without the actor? This is a fundamental question. Beckett tries to respond to this question by forcing the actor to work in a space in which he is scarcely visible.
9. Guy Debord writes that one must not identify spectacle with the act of "looking at," even when coupled with "listening." Spectacle is the opposite of dialogue.
10. This permits us to approach the second scenario (the scene in the subway) from the opposite direction and to answer the question about the presence of theatricality in the affirmative. Yes, theatricality was present in the subway, even if the spectator didn't realize that he was witnessing a theatrical production.
11. Evreinov sees theatricality as an instinct, as that which "transforms the appearance of nature." This instinct, named elsewhere by Evreinov as "the theatrical will," is an irresistible impulse felt by all (Cf. *Le théâtre pour soi*), similar to the instinct for play felt by animals (Cf. *Le théâtre chez les animaux*). According to Evreinov, theatricality is a kind of universal quality present in man and anterior to any aesthetic act. It is the love of disguise, the pleasure of creating illusion, of projecting make-believe images of the self and of reality in plain view of others. In this act, which transports and transforms, man appears as theatricality's point of departure; in creating simulacra of the self, man is theatricality's source and primary object. Evreinov speaks of transforming nature (we will not develop here the theoretical problems introduced by the notions of nature and reality), another name for reality. One must conclude that for Evreinov, man is central to the process; he is the fundamental cause of the emergence and manifestation of theatricality.

For Evreinov, theatricality is thus linked first and foremost to the body of the actor and appears initially as the result of a game-like, physical experience before taking form in an intellectual undertaking focusing upon a given aesthetic. Thus the founding process of theatricality is a "pre-aesthetic" calling upon the subject's creativity, but preceding the aesthetic act of the accomplished artist.

I would maintain that Evreinov's view of theatricality concerns anthropology and ethnology more than theater. Because he has inscribed theatricality in the quotidian, Evreinov has caused the specificity of stage-related theatricality to disappear.

12. In other words, is theatricality a transcendent property that encompasses all forms of reality (artistic, cultural, political, economic), or are we only able to induce theatricality through the empirical observation of reality, taking as our frame of reference only those artistic practices in which theatricality is present?
13. For example, the participation forced upon the spectators by the actors; the experiences of the Living Theater in *Antigone*, or those of the entire practice of the 1960s in which the

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of the entire practice of the 1960s in which the

spectator suddenly found himself forced to enter into the action of the play, into the
"other's" space, and often to defend himself from the feeling of being violated.

14. J.M. Piemme writes that theatricality is that which the theater alone is able to produce; that which other arts can not produce. (Cf. *Le souffleur inquiet*, special edition of *Alternatives théâtrales*, nos. 20-21; December 1984.)
15. Cf. Peter Brook, *L'espace vide* (Paris: Seuil, 1977), p. 25: "I can take any empty space and call it a stage. For a theatrical act to begin, it suffices only that someone crosses this empty space while someone else watches."
16. "All effective performances share this "not-not not" quality: Olivier is not Hamlet, but also he is not not Hamlet: his performance is between a denial of being another (= I am me) and a denial of not being another (= I am Hamlet)." Cf. Schechner, 123.
17. The relationship of the actor to his body varies greatly according to the school. Certain schools, such as that of Grotowski, emphasize the complete mastery of the body, basing their practice upon an athletic methodology. Others, such as Artaud are more introspective and de-emphasize the corporal presence; still others, such as Craig, strive for the complete mechanization and total transparency of the actor.
18. This shock is identical to that felt by the spectator at an athletic competition. The parallel between sports and theater has often been discussed. Cf. *Théâtre/Public* no. 62 (March-April 1985) as well as *Les cahiers de théâtre Jeu* no. 20 (1981-1983).
19. According to Piemme, the body, made anachronous by new technologies, is material, singular, and vulnerable. Although its interactions with reality are increasingly indirect, it remains whole, unique, singular. "At the moment when the experience of reality is more and more indirect, when the human being is bowled over by the force of images produced by the technology of modern reproduction, the body, by its fundamentally material presence in space, continues to become increasingly important." (Piemme, P. 40)
20. The rules of stage play are different during the Elizabethan period than during the classical period, just as plays belonging to the *Commedia dell'arte* tradition never impose rules that, for example, would have governed the representation of a Sophoclean tragedy. Today, rules differ according to one's stance with respect to traditional practices *vis-à-vis* those inherited from the 1960s. Thus, any attempt to elaborate a history of the rules of stage-play must be carried out within the framework of a history of theatrical aesthetics.
21. A list of the characteristics and properties of theatricality would include the following elements: 1) a representational act that transforms reality, the subject, the body, space, time; 2) a creative act that goes beyond the limits of the quotidian; 3) an ostentatious act of the body, a semiotization of signs; 4) the presence of a subject who, through the use of his body, structures the imaginary.
22. Violations authorized by theatricality depend upon the rules of various periods, genres, countries, and upon theories of aesthetics. In this regard, theatricality, singular, yields its place to theatricalities, plural, the latter being a concept approaching that of aesthetics. It would be interesting to explore the distinguishing aspects of specific, theatricalities linked to given periods or genres, and compare them with theatricality, singular, which "transcends" these conditions. For example, the nudity accepted on today's stage, or even upon the stage of the Middle Ages, was viewed as scandalous during the 1950s. Although the virtual framework governing staging was well delineated during the 1950s, the freedoms and violations that had been authorized by the aesthetic theories of earlier periods did not, in the 1950s, permit the exposure of the actor's naked body. Thus even though one of the theater's functions is to assume responsibility for the violation of norms, the virtual framework delineated by the theatrical process does not authorize all liberties, which are governed by constraints of period, aesthetic, and genre.
23. As Dostoevski has remarked, "In the theater, two times two make three, or even five, depending upon the degree of theatricality at work." (Quoted by Evreinov in Sharon Marie Carnicke, p. 105)

24. However, in this case, the concerns of the spectator do not count, for if they did, there would be intrusion on the part of the spectator into a space that is not his.
25. This process parallels Winnicott's in affirming that the actor's emotional investment in the stage-play must distance itself from subjectively felt desires. When this distance is not maintained, the actor leaves the realm of stage-play, entering that of reality.
26. For example, the spectacles of Stuart Sherman in the 1960s. Focusing upon what is forbidden, the process of killing animals seems more easily incorporated with representation than is mutilation of the actor. However, this form of mutilation often elicits fierce opposition from the spectators.
27. Cf. Diderot's *Paradoxe du comédien*.
28. These interdictions do not however constitute the limits of theatricality. In this regard, cf. Bataille's notion of the "sacred."

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