

Strategies of Temporal-Spatial Appropriation in Postmodern Aesthetic Performance: Part II

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48 *(The first part of this article appeared in Theater Three, volume 6, Spring 1989, pp. 69-86. The first part contends that modernism and postmodernism can be distinguished by their different attitudes toward time and history. The author introduces Lyotard's concept of the "master narrative" in relation to postmodern performance aesthetics. The master narrative refers to the way in which social reality schedules the "appropriate" time and space of aesthetic experience. Postmodern performance seeks to appropriate time from master narrative organizations of consciousness in order to produce a superior condition of freedom in which distinctions between art and life, between media and modes of representations, become blurred and "uncommitted." To achieve this objective, postmodern performance pursues four complex, even concurrent, strategies of temporal-spatial appropriation, and these include: 1) strategies of occurrence; 2) strategies of duration; 3) strategies of temporal segmentation; and 4) strategies of temporal interaction. In strategies of occurrence, postmodern performance seeks to redefine the "appropriate" time at which aesthetic performance begins. The author therefore examines the significance of various performances that occur at "strange" times and often in unexpected places. In strategies of duration, postmodernism questions the pervasive belief that the time needed to justify aesthetic performance demands only 2-3 hours. The*

first part thus concludes with exploration of the significance of performances that are either very long or very short.)

Strategies of Temporal Segmentation

Some postmodern performance groups have attempted to revise the relation between the emotional value of actions and narrative context by exploring the segmentation of performance time, in which the group does not repeat the same show for different dates or audiences. Rather, the group collaborates to develop a "work" (a large set of interpretations, versions, constructions of a theme or problem) whose elements can be edited, modified, recombined, or newly juxtaposed, so that a distinctly different performance occurs for different moments. No one ever sees the "work" in its "total" or "final" form, because the dynamic perception of reality defining postmodern consciousness does not encourage the notion of a final interpretation for anything. The contextual unity of action provided by the master narrative gives way to the unity of feeling defining a specific time and audience: narrative thus accommodates a context rather than prescribes it.

The Amsterdam Werkteater (1970-1983) produced "works" which emerged from efforts to dramatize the emotional conditions defining relations between different combinations of members within the group; different combinations of actors constructed different responses or

scenarios for showing how emotions motivate, sustain, and mutate relations between people. Each scenario objectifies, not only the emotions exchanged between the actors, but the way in which the emotions result from the actors' perceiving someone else in themselves and in each other. Thus, the emotions bonding actors X and Y may achieve powerful representation when both actors impersonate cripples, invalids, severely handicapped identities: X may then perform her role entirely within a wheelchair, while Y, assuming the identity of a deaf-mute, attempts to communicate with her through a variety of extraordinary physical actions, such as performing a wheelchair dance with her as she sings. Each scenario develops entirely through improvisation; the actors never write down anything, even though they use a great deal of language. The actors do not memorize text; they memorize actions, moods, meanings which evolve from rehearsal to rehearsal. The performance constantly changes because the emotion of the moment, not a text, governs the actor's memory. The actor does not listen for his "line;" he must listen to what the other actor is actually saying to justify his own action. Not dominated by a text, memory provides a general structure or logic for action without filtering out potentially exciting, unanticipated actions during performance. The emotional and dialogic complexity of some Werkteater scenarii is such that no author is capable of imagining, anticipating, and inscribing them, for the literary imagination inscribes only those actions which are "worth repeating," not those actions which, because of peculiar circumstances defining the moment of performance, are impossible to repeat.¹ The "work" consists of all the scenarii being developed by the group;

but the *performance* consists of a particular arrangement of a particular set of scenarii for a particular time and place. Consequently, a basic implication of the Werkteater aesthetic is that a new, compressed, emotionally intense economy for the relation between language and action depends on perceiving a text as a sign of master narrative consciousness which one overcomes by treating voice and body as uninscribed signifiers, as spaces of unrepeatability.²

The Amsterdam Werkteater developed an actor-centered, rather than author-centered, strategy of segmenting performance time in a manner which challenges the master narrative organization of time. But this strategy of appropriating time does not necessarily depend on avoiding the inscription or "textualization" of time. In a 1986 play written for the Women's One World Cafe in New York, *Lady Dick*, the author, Holly Hughes, enters the performance of the work, which "consists of a series of vignettes set in a sleepy, no-name lesbian bar" similar apparently to the performance site itself, to speak to the actors and the spectators. The author herself interrogates, deconstructs, and "terrorizes" the characters she has created, and inserts her own, "real" voice into the performance of her words.³ Although it is not clear to what extent, if any, this rupturing of the narrative depends on improvisation, Hughes' subversion of her own text indicates a potential postmodern strategy for re-segmenting performance time whereby author and actor, text and performance, do not assume discrete functions. Whereas the Werkteater constructs a new temporal economy for dramatizing the relation between language and action by exploring conflicts which are "beyond" inscription or textualization, Hughes' play suggests a new

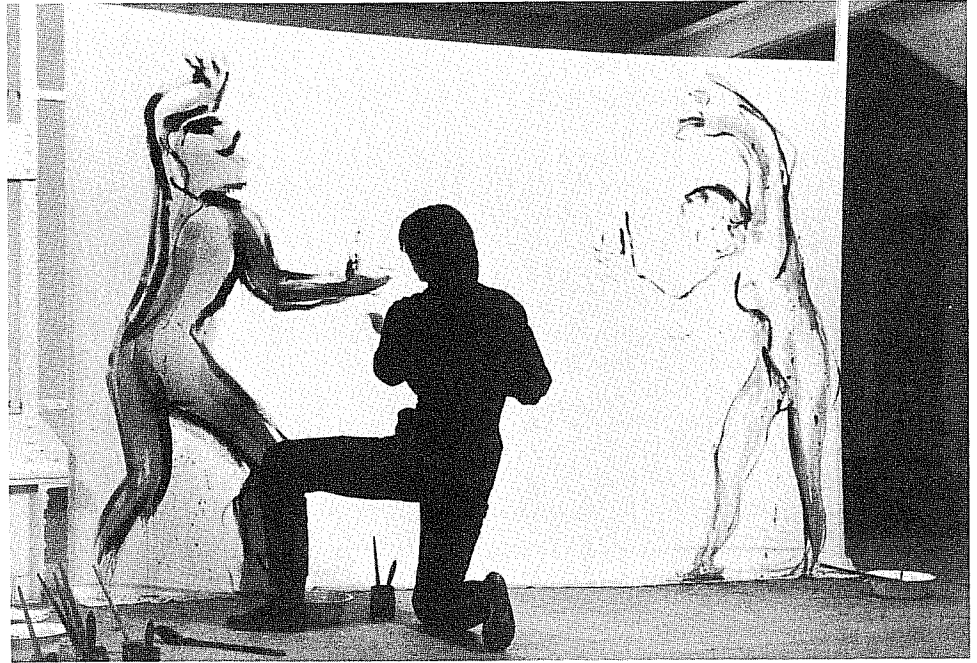
economy based on conflict between text and performance or between two or more texts *in* the same performance or "moment." But the lesbian subject matter of this play and the gender specific environment of performance also indicate that this new economy, this blurring of distinction between represented time and "real" time, between actor and author, between voice and writing, evolves out of a powerful desire to undermine "normal" distinctions between male and female "roles."⁴

50 This idea of linking a new temporal economy to the deconstruction of sexual difference achieves even more radical performance in the work of the German artist Barbara Heinisch. Heinisch produces paintings in a highly theatrical manner. A large, diaphanous cloth separates the artist from her model. To the spectator, the model appears as a silhouette behind the screen. The artist paints the model, who is usually nude, as he or she moves across the screen, assumes different poses, or touches the screen in various ways. The artist tries to "freeze" the movement of the body by painting the contour of the silhouette with different colors or strokes. Each model encourages the image of several bodies in convulsive tension with each other. During construction of the painting, the artist engages in dialogue with the model and even the spectators. At an agreed upon point, the model tears the screen, then "breaks through" the image and walks naked toward the artist and audience, a very dramatic effect for disclosing an art which does not "rob the model of breath" or life by its power to live on, "immortally," in a gallery or museum. Heinisch has developed a *method*, rather than a text, for constructing performances which dramatize the conflict between the live body and the

desire of an artistic Other to "freeze" or possess the body through art. The painting negates the mortality of the body, but the body must "break through" its shadow, through the image the Other makes of it, to prevent the body from becoming submissive to the image, from "dying" under the spell of the Other's desire to transform and transcend it through representation.

The situation is the reverse of what Hughes does: in *Lady Dick*, the author interrupts her own text to disclose a desire which the text fails to represent; with Heinisch, the model interrupts the "text" which the artist "inscribes" on the screen to signify a limit to the power of representation to protract a moment indefinitely, to "immortalize" it.⁵ The method enables the artist to repeat this message again and again, but because neither the artist nor the model follow a text, the performance differs significantly with the creation of each new painting. Speech is important in dramatizing the relation between artist and model, but the speakers bring to each other before. Heinisch's method creates a performance that does not need rehearsal, does not need to consume much time before it is "ready," and it is because the performances are unrehearsed that they produce a substantially different image each time.

For Heinisch, the live, naked body is a sign of a "presence" which limits the power of time and representation to appropriate or re-create human identity, it is the phenomenon above all responsible for the difference between performances. With Heinisch, performance appropriates writing in the sense that painting is a way of inscribing the body, of transforming it into a text: the performance "gives birth" to the text.⁶ By contrast, Karlheinz Stockhausen, in *TRANS* (1970-1974), adopts a



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Barbara Heinsch: images of the artist interacting with her model.

more metaphysical, sonic approach to defining the function of presence, of the body in making live performance "different." An orchestra of strings, bathed in a mysterious violet light, plays "completely synchronously, like dolls," before a great curtain; behind the curtain are four different orchestral groups, each separated by a sound-proof wall. The spectator hears the music of these groups through loudspeakers positioned throughout the auditorium. But the performance includes tape-recordings of the music being played as well as music not being played. During the performance, the great curtain opens very slowly to dramatize the feeling that "the essential is 'behind' but one cannot see it." But the rear stage is dark, and the

spectator has difficulty determining the number of musicians or even what instruments they are playing. The score prescribes in great detail the coordination of sound, movement, and light. But the sound of the piece encourages one to "suspect" that more musicians are playing than one sees.

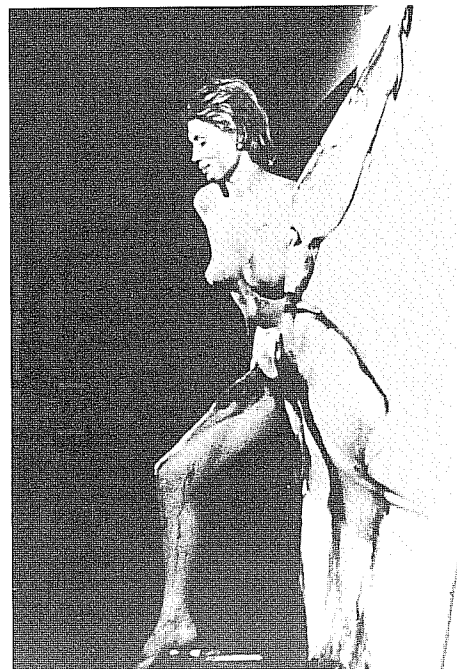
This mode of performance challenges Heinsch's perception that "presence" in performance is a matter of seeing the live body behind the representation. For Stockhausen, the performer "adds" something invisible: "psychic waves," which no electronic technology can reproduce, but which are, nevertheless, "electric." Stockhausen contends that live performance becomes as programmed and reproduc-

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ible as a tape recording when the “psychic waves” are absent. The performer’s aura or “transmusical” energy therefore discloses itself only when the musical text tests the capacity of the performer to play it; performance becomes an encounter with death, with a profound *fear* of making a terrible mistake, of divulging the human limit to one’s artistry. This fear arises because the performer “cannot depend on the notes,” on the text, and thus must *add* “vibrations” or “waves” which allow tones and rhythms to differ from moment to moment, from performance to performance. But only new and difficult music, only a complex *text*, can awaken this auratic fear. Presence in this sense has little to do with a feeling of “nearness” and much to do with a feeling of *transcendence* from an inhuman, perfect, utterly programmed state to a “wonderful” state of unpredictability and unrepeatability that is luminously human.⁷ For Heinisch, the body becomes increasingly visible (or naked) as time passes in aesthetic performance; for Stockhausen, the body becomes increasingly ethereal, increasingly like a “vibration” or “wave,” as the duration of performance protracts. It is not clear, however, whether this contrast between physical and metaphysical perceptions of the relation between time and action, between text and body, conceals a more fundamental difference between male and female modes of perception.

Strategies of Temporal Interaction

In the previous strategies of temporal control in performance, time structures new meanings without itself being represented. In some postmodern performances, time itself becomes a subject of representation—or rather, modes of dramatization appear which include *interactions between different times*. Thus,



Barbara Heinisch: nude model breaking through the painted image.

a performance might use same-time “dialogues” between one moment in a person’s life, such as childhood, and another, such as old age, with different actors playing the same person at the same time and yet at different times.⁸ Even more complex are experiments which dramatize the tension or interaction between one historical moment and another, so that one moment in history actually “speaks” to another.

In several productions of the early 1970s, Klaus-Michael Gruber employed multiple staging areas to juxtapose different historical times. A single action could propel a character from one historical moment to another—or rather, it became evident that an action beginning in one historical time

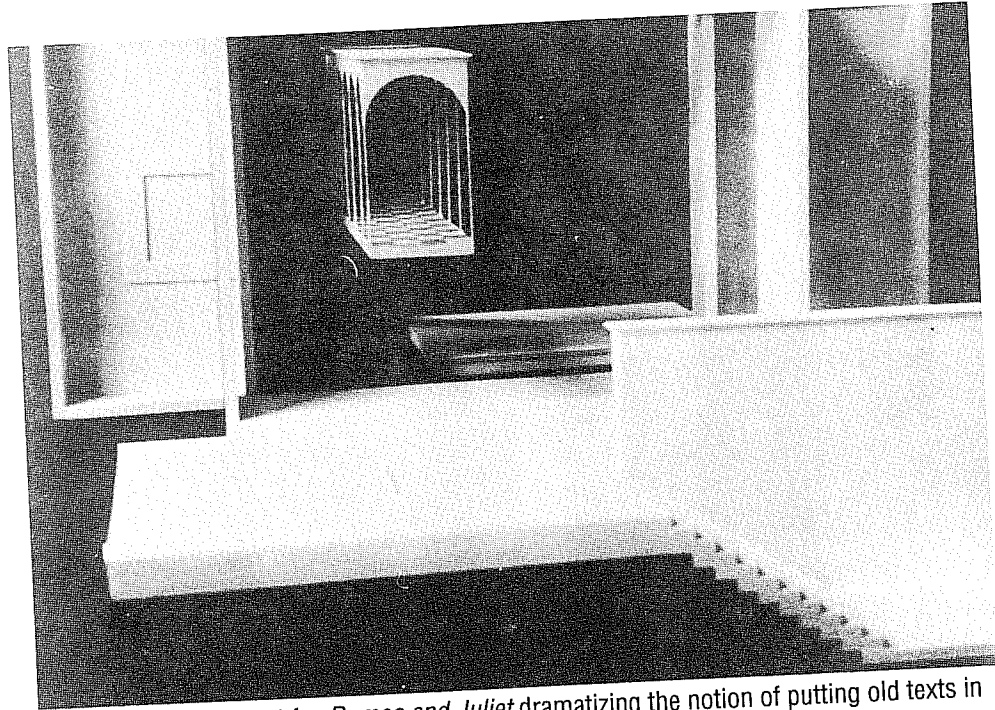
was "complete" only through its connection with another time. In a 1976 production of Hölderlin's *Empedocles Death* (1801), the *location* of performance functioned as a dramatic signifier of history, when Gruber staged the play in the 1936 Berlin Olympic Stadium, which for many spectators placed the text's heroic monumentalization of the archaic, classical past in powerful tension with totalitarian efforts to monumentalize, through architecture rather than language, the heroic, Olympic ideal in this century. Theater then became the "actual" site at which poetic and political representations of history intersected and then deconstructed the mythic appeal of the classical ideal.

But Gruber went even further. Hölderlin produced three versions of the play; Gruber compiled a text from the different versions. He then commissioned translations of various passages into different languages, such as English, Hebrew, French, Persian, and classical Greek. With this strategy, different languages, different readings, rather than different staging areas, construct different historical moments and dramatize the perception that a historical moment is basically a "translation" of an action into a motive which is *not* readily "understandable." The medium of translation, language, contains its own history or historical associations, and this condition prevents unity ("understanding") between word and action. History thus appears as a mode of misunderstanding, and the idea that one can "see" the operation of historical forces more clearly, through the dramatic, dialectical interaction of different historical spaces, is itself a myth. Indeed, history now appears more difficult to understand.

In the early 1970s, Ariane Mnouchkine pursued a different strategy of temporal

interaction. In *1789* (1970) and *1793* (1972), different staging areas presented different actions simultaneously, rather than in dialogue with each other, to show how the historical moment, the revolutionary year, comprises layers of action which are indifferent, even oblivious, to each other as a result of class-structured motives. History does not project a unified or unifying sign of itself. Temporal interaction does not occur between "stages" of history, but between each stage and its spectator, who is "free" to enter into dialogue with the actors, "free" to question history, "free" to move from one stage to another according to class-motivated priorities or "interests," for each stage presents a version of the Revolution as understood by a particular class of people.⁹ It is medieval "mansion" staging with a historical consciousness that was utterly absent from the medieval theater.

Mnouchkine hoped that this strategy would enable theater to achieve a more "popular" level of communication. But the limitations of the strategy became obvious once one acknowledged that popular consciousness is not synonymous with an innately "liberating" communication process. Consequently, in the 1980s, Mnouchkine moved toward a more complex aesthetic in which temporal interaction and simultaneity of action are difficult to separate. On a single stage, the performing ensemble *fuses* theatrical and literary codes from different historical eras to create a *single* moment, a *single* action comprising, or at least signifying, different histories which are neither completely in tension nor completely synchronous with each other. With her Kabuki-style versions of Shakespeare and Hugo (1983-84), Mnouchkine has suggested that effective dramatization of temporal interaction is not a matter of dialogue between



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Image of Svoboda's set for *Romeo and Juliet* dramatizing the notion of putting old texts in new contexts.

different *spaces* of history; it is a dialogue between different signifying *codes*. But it is also apparent, from the internationally elite audiences her recent productions have attracted, that such dialogue is too difficult to engage the attention of popular consciousness.

However, the strategy of *appropriating* different signifying codes within a single performance space to dramatize temporal interaction is now so pervasive in the theater that "advanced" audiences treat it virtually as a convention of postmodern aesthetic performance. Robert Wilson, who constantly contains his theater pieces within a proscenium frame, may divide the stage into three zones, prehistoric, pre-modern, and modern. Cartoon dino-

sours, pyramids, and locomotives can provide a setting for human figures, who, by their costumes and signifying practices, appear to be fugitives from various historical contexts.

Since the 1960s, Nam June Paik has explored interactions between video and live performance. "I hope time goes by obliquely," he says, "Neither fast, nor slow, nor 'rerun.'"¹⁰ To sustain this "asiatic" experience of time, live performance must appropriate electronic image technology which makes all time *appear* as a type of loop. Paik treats television as a signifier of an ubiquitous everytime and anytime: its presence normalizes every environment. It normalizes by its capacity to objectify as electronically looped images, an abs-

lute time, which does not "accelerate" or "de-accelerate:" it objectifies time as a video image, as an electronic impulse, which subdues or anesthetizes whatever it signifies according to absolute laws of electron physics. From this perspective, television cannot "electrify" spectators; instead, it normalizes perception within the absolute physics of ionization. No matter how abnormal or extreme a live performance is, such as a nude woman playing a cello or a person disembowling and burning a grand piano, as soon as the performance includes video imagery of itself or something altogether different and "abstract," the action becomes normalized, controlled, de-fused, and "oblique."

In postmodern dance, Twyla Tharp and Merce Cunningham have used video in live performance to allow the spectator to see movement that is otherwise "invisible" to the eye alone. This strategy equates the sense of time with the act of seeing: the excitement of live action is due precisely to its "ephemerality," to such a complexity of dynamic variables, that even the most sophisticated image technology cannot enable the spectator to "see everything:" technology doesn't give us "more time" to see better.¹¹ On the other hand, for the staging of conventional dramatic texts (especially opera), the Czech designer, Josef Svoboda, has used film, mobile mirrors, and dynamic projections to dramatize, expressionistically, the constant changing of the represented environment at the mood of the moment rather than only at decisive moments. Dynamic projections destabilize the environment of performance, in contrast to video, which can interact with live performance only within a highly stable scenic context, of which (according to Paik) video is itself a signifier. Svoboda's idea, no

doubt influenced by Marxist doctrine, is to animate the entire space of performance, not just elements within it: as people act, so, too, does the environment of action. But postmodern Marxist performance tends to bog down in trying to find a new context for "great" moments past, for history, for canonic texts. The new context so often signifies itself through spectacular visual technology, but what animates the performance environment is a text and even a mode of acting from another time. The environment depends on old language and old motives, on "classics," to justify its transformation. Of course, this strategy can still awaken controversy in audiences accustomed to believing that performance should objectify an authorial "intention." But when (1979) Pierre Boulez and Patrice Chereau created such a fuss by setting Wagner's mythic Niebelungs in the 19th century industrial environment in which the author himself lived, they were actually pursuing a strategy initiated by modernists of the 1920s who sought to "contain" myth within history.¹² The business of dramatizing the tension between past and present as a tension, within a single space, between text and image (scenic context) is perhaps the simplest strategy of temporal interaction, and yet for a vast number of people, it is still a "difficult" strain, to see more than one time at once.¹³

Slightly more difficult in concept are such plays as *Cloud Nine* (1979, 1984) and *Top Girls* (1983) by Caryl Churchill. In the first part of *Cloud Nine*, for example, figures of and in the past (19th century colonial Africa) speak a language which is not "authentic" to their time; instead, they speak an abbreviated, idiomatic language of the unconscious which present-day consciousness ascribes to feelings and attitudes that people in the past

left unspoken, unacknowledged, and unthematized. But in the second part, several of these historical figures re-appear in present-day London, where they encounter the people their attitudes have spawned: the imperialist rhetoric of the unconscious interacts with a "liberated" rhetoric of self-consciousness. But this interaction clearly means that the rhetoric of self-consciousness cannot escape the rhetoric of the unconscious and that present-day society is no more "liberated" from illusions of dominating the "dark continent" of sex and the female body than the archetypal figures of patriarchal colonialism. In *Top Girls*, several women from different historical eras gather around a banquet table and discuss their unfortunate destinies in a language that is entirely self-conscious, as if, at last, they were able to "speak for themselves" using the rhetoric of modern and postmodern discourses: Marxism, feminism, Thatcherite conservatism. Churchill wants to *sexualize* history, present it as an interaction of bodies and desires, rather than spaces or codes, and to achieve this objective, *voices* must operate through an intricately ironic language permeated, not with historicized detail or vernacular, but with historical consciousness.

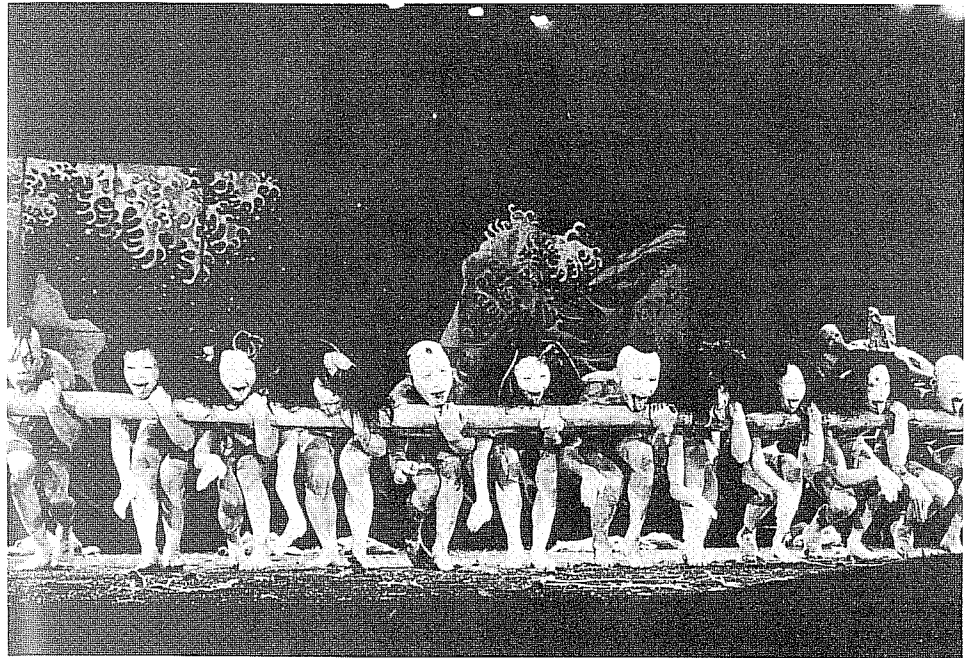
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In spite of Churchill's international success with these plays, very few, if any, other writers have explored this essentially literary strategy of temporal interaction within a single space. The vast majority of contemporary dramatists prefer instead to rely on the well-worn device of the flashback, if, indeed, they do not think, in master narrative terms, of history as something that happens before what happens now. Even if it still causes "difficulty" for many audiences, the scenographic strategy of setting an "old" text in tension with a "new" scenic context con-

tinues to inspire countless productions throughout the world. But Churchill's literary strategy of building texts in which tensions between "old" and "new" are not *between* human figures and the environment, but *within* voices, bodies, language, seems too "difficult" a concept for other dramatists to explore with any confidence.

In *The Motion of History* (1976), Amiri Baraka constructs a panoramic "pageant" of black history from colonial times to the 1970s. The play has a large cast of characters, but no protagonist, except the black race and working class people generally. Baraka does not tell the "story" of slavery in conventional (chronologically linear) fashion; instead, he goes backward and forward, backward and forward from scene to scene to dramatize the cause and effect relation between one event and another. But this strategy is not interactive: the Marxist ideology controlling the text assumes that every event in the past "points," deterministically, to a later development in society. In a sense, the past "enslaves" the present; contemporary reality is not "free" to engage in dialogue with history, to question the representation of history, or to act in relation, not to past events themselves, but to the conditions, the signifying practices, which construct the representation of the events.

Strategies of temporal interaction are the most complex modes of action devised for live aesthetic performance. Even if performance confines the interaction to a single playing space, it risks being a "difficult" experience for the spectator, whose ability to appreciate the aesthetic depends largely on bringing to the performance a greater consciousness of history than the culture industry generally ascribes to its audience. Strategies of temporal interaction do not accommodate "popular," myth-saturated modes of



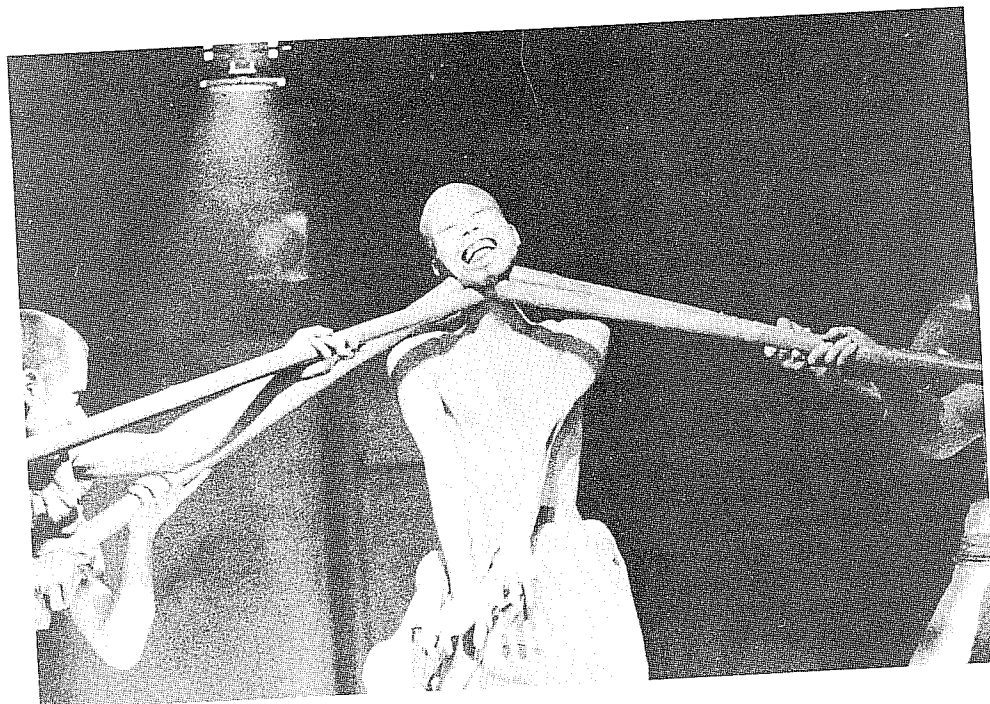
Butoh's performance (1) which ambiguates distinction between dance and theater, male and female.

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consciousness. Yet these strategies offer extraordinary possibilities for dramatic excitement. The idea of dramatizing tensions between historical moments as tensions between staging areas deserves greater application than has been the case so far.

Imagine, for example, a play about the history of romance or erotic life in America from prehistoric times to the present. Suppose, too, that the play shows lovers or erotic companions from six distinct moments in history on six separate stages: 1) 800 BC; 2) 1700; 3) 1822; 4) 1903; 5) 1930; 6) 1990. The actors embody attitudes, values, desires peculiar to their era; but not only do lovers interact with each other within their own time they engage

in "dialogue" with the attitudes, values, and desires of other times; they may even act "outside" of their own time by leaving one stage and entering another; each actor can shift to different signifying codes within each space, character, or moment.¹⁴ But perhaps history is more complex than this strategy allows. After all, as we have seen, tensions between historical moments involve not only tensions between spaces, but tensions between signifying codes and tensions within bodies and voices. Thus, an even more complex strategy for dramatizing temporal interaction would exploit multiple staging, multiple signifying practices within each stage, and multiple discourses within in each signifying body.



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Butoh's performance (2)

But postmodern *artists* (rather than audiences) have yet to contemplate such a "difficult" level of action. Reinhild Hoffmann ventures in this direction with her 1987 dance piece "Tango," which is a "segment" of a larger, constantly changing "work," *Föbn (Sirocco)*, which no one can see in its "totality."¹⁵ In "Tango," two masked dancers, male and female, are bound to each other by thin ropes or wires. They assume a kind of polka position, but one pair of hands meets wearing shiny gold boxing gloves and the other pair meets holding a parasol. A small table is *between* them as they dance. But they do not dance a polka; instead, they dance slowly, in protracted lunges, abrupt spasms, twisting undulations. The dance

simultaneously appears awkward and elegant, as if the dancers were struggling against each other *at the same time* as they balance each other, desire to be one with the Other. The dancers fight and love *at once*. And as they dance, they move the table, they bump into things, knock them over, re-arrange them, artifacts from different historical eras. They transform and disorder the environment: the transformative power of the dancing, sexual body is such that the "mess" it makes is of much greater aesthetic interest than any "scene" which properly "contains" the movement without violence to itself. It is an intensely emotional performance. But an especially mysterious aspect of it is the "music," which

consists of at least two separate pieces played or mixed simultaneously. One track includes electronically-generated sounds and indistinct voices while another track presents highly distorted strains of popular and classical music. The music engages in dialogue with itself as the dancers engage in dialogue with each other. The dancers do not dance *to* the music, which is "undanceable" in the sense that it contains no clear rhythm. The dance is neither the image nor the negation of the music. Rather, the dance engages in dialogue with the music. It's as if the dance and the music try to appropriate each other; it's as if each rhythm, each temporal structure seeks to absorb *and* escape the other *at the same time*. Of course, the next step would be to incorporate spoken dialogue itself, instead of or in addition to music. But at the moment, no other postmodern performance aesthetic combines as many strategies of temporal interaction as this profoundly mysterious piece. The *slowness* with which even the postmodern performance world acknowledges the dramatic potential of these aesthetic devices means, quite likely, that a great deal more time will pass before strategies of temporal interaction operate in tandem with the other categories of strategy discussed here, strategies of occurrence, duration, and segmentation.

Time in Space, Spaces of Time

All these strategies for controlling and signifying time in performance have the effect of urging the theater to redefine the nature of the performance space. It is clear that attitudes toward time and history control definitions of space. The master narrative ideology strives to produce a unity of time, space, and action. The postmodern performance strategies

examined here tend to involve collage rather than linear presentations of action, and the collage aesthetic asserts itself through exploration of 1) an increased *number* of playing spaces (stages) required to present one performance or even one action; 2) the *types* of stages required to produce a "presence;" or 3) the *division* of a single space into zones which allow actions occurring in different "worlds" to appear simultaneously or at least within the same field of perception.

An assumption of postmodern artists is that an aesthetic action can transform *any* space and "appropriate" it. Thus, theater companies have moved into warehouses and slaughterhouses.¹⁶ Giant public garages offer fascinating performance opportunities; the Snake Theatre (Marin County, California) staged some of its work in an abandoned gas station.¹⁷ Aesthetic performance appropriates rooftops, department store windows, shopping malls, gardens, galleries, and even undeveloped "nature."¹⁸ Meredith Monk choreographed a dance on the curving stairway of the Guggenheim Museum; the audience followed the dancers and observed them from different levels within the building. In the early 1980s, the Japanese Butoh dance company, Sankai-juku, gave performances in a huge, torchlit cave containing a subterranean waterfall; part of the dancing took place in a large pool of water.¹⁹ Performance artists like Valie Export, Stelarc (Stelios Andriou), Chris Burden, Otto Muehl, Colette, Hermann Nitsch, Carolee Schneeman, Helmut Schober, Günter Brus, and the late Rudolf Schwarzkogler use their own bodies as a performance space which can emerge, suddenly, anywhere: the body, disgusted by its oppression, its marginalization within technologized society, acts upon itself, through mutilations, defilements,

crucifixions, masturbations, vomitings, convulsions, excretions, ordeals of torture, or bizarre exhibitionist posturing.²⁰ What determines the duration of performance? The time it takes to show the power of the "poisoned" body to transform its pain, corruption, and palpitating viscerality into aesthetic phenomenon: the less one looks, the longer it takes and the more likely it is that the performance will require repetition, more extreme manifestations.

60 The body artists want to strip the body of all masks, all signifiers of a socially-constructed identity, and present the spectator with a strange, raw organism. But is this "liberated" objective possible as long as human beings can make use of language? In *Oidopos, Oidopos* (1972), the Dutch author Harry Mulisch constructed a drama which calls for three Oedipuses, three Jocastas, and two Tiresiases, performing on three separate stages. The text itself appears on the printed page as three separate columns which unfold concurrently. Language fragments identity into different bodies; the "heroic" figure is he who acknowledges that it is always language which makes his "own" identity belong to someone else, somewhere else. An even stranger enactment of the Oedipus myth was the *Itinerario-Corpo* given by the Teatro Autonomo di Roma in 1979. The very psychoanalytically-oriented action took place in seven rooms of an apartment building, with each room representing a phase or aspect of the oedipal development of human identity: the bathroom, the kitchen, the play room, the guest room, the bedroom, and so forth. "It was the assumption of the presentation that alienation is formed inside the family, in the routines of everyday life. A different psychopathological manifestation was

assigned to each room."²¹ Each room allowed the spectator to participate in the "materialization" of an oedipal fantasy. In the bedroom, for example, the psychoanalyst-director invited the spectator to touch a nude woman, Jocasta, the mother-imago:

By speaking disconnected phrases of the character, [the actress playing] Jocasta would begin the seduction of the spectator-Oedipus, to the point where he would touch her sex organs. Depending on the mood of the actress and the spectator's reactions, details of the seduction and its length varied from evening to evening. The surge of desire that may have built in the spectator was then abruptly interrupted by the father-psychoanalyst who sent him out of the room, forcing him to separate his drives and repress them.²²

The performance becomes increasingly theatrical, as the actors from the various rooms gather in the living room to perform the conclusion to Sophocles' tragedy. Oedipal pathologies "formed inside the family" in response to the raw organism of the naked body *lead* to theater, to the construction of *roles*. Yet "the last act" consists of the actors and spectators eating together and discussing the performance. Talk goes on, even after it has demythologized the mythic, oedipal identity of the anonymous spectator and the mythic site of its origin (the family): this "last act" implies that the performance includes its own psychoanalysis, but in the "final" relation between the actor and the spectator, it is no longer clear who is the psychoanalyst and who is the patient. Talk appears as "natural" to the body as eating; language goes on creating roles and interactions between them which disclose an inescapably mythic, rather

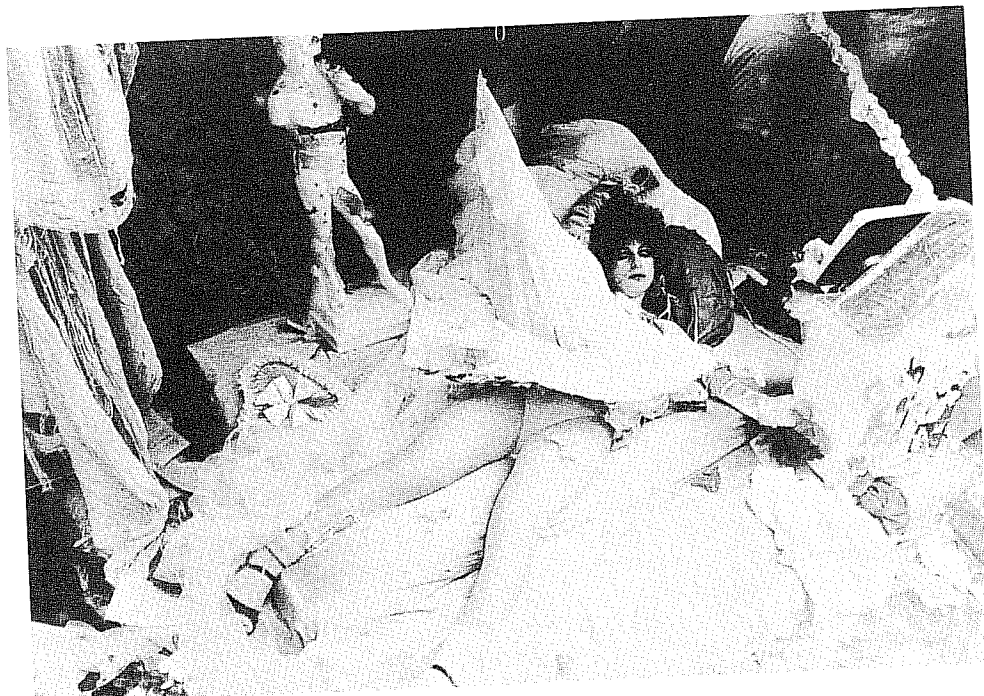
than historical, perception of time and space.

Such deployments of space as those described here obviously urge aesthetic performance to dissolve "borders" between the world of aesthetic action and "the world." All these postmodern performances attempt to extend the playing space beyond an institutional, master narrative context into nature, into the social context, into the street, into spaces "normally" associated with quite different functions. No doubt someone might make a case for considering performances on Caribbean cruise ships or within the giant multi-stage environment of Disneyland as applications of postmodern strategies of occurrence, duration, segmentation, and interaction. But these performances always operate within the context of a powerful master narrative or super-text, which, for one thing, treats the performance as something *confined* to vacation or "leisure" time: the performance remains safely insulated within a normatively stabilized institutional context. By contrast, postmodern performance constantly "appropriates" other times and spaces. It invades territories of consciousness governed by the master narrative ideology.

But the strategies of appropriation driving postmodern aesthetic performance function primarily at the *formal* (rather than referential) level of signification. Indeed, the new relations between time and space in performance constitute the basis for "new" forms of art which dissolve boundaries between forms. In other words, a postmodern aesthetic self-consciously ambiguates institutionalized differences between theater and other modes of performance, such as music, video, dance, film, architecture, sculpture, painting, fashion, and photography. It is only

when aesthetic experience upsets the categories of form, genre, and media assigned to it by a cultural super-text that the social context acknowledges the power of the experience to redefine the distribution and economies of power structuring relations between time and space, language and action, bodies and desires, structuring the perception of identity itself. Taken together, the elaborately "staged" photography of Arthur Tress, Joel-Peter Witkin, Hady Van Zaack, Cindy Sherman, Robert Mapplethorpe, Deborah Turberville, Les Krims, Manon, and Steven Arnold function as a lurid sign of the theatricalism controlling postmodern aesthetics. These images attempt to "freeze" in time that moment in which human identity and action awaken intensely dramatic emotions *because* body, image, and perception all appear appropriated and motivated by "realities" of contrivance, artifice, theatricalization.²³ The postmodern aesthetic is fundamentally theatrical in the sense that the appropriation of forms means that one form masks, disguises, hides itself within or behind another form. One form impersonates another; appropriation is a mode of impersonation. And of course, this ambiguation of differences between forms has the larger and even more uncertain consequence of blurring distinctions between political and theatrical action, art and commerce, past and present, theory and practice, beauty and "normality."

In the case of Mishima (see II, no. 6, pp. 72-73), aesthetic performance (which includes the repudiation of "literary life") collapsed distinctions between art and death; but the other strategies of appropriation examined here self-consciously regard aesthetic performance as a "liberating" signal, an invitation, to collapse distinctions between art and life. The



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Colette performing her own life.

aesthetic performance of daily life depends on appropriating time and space from master narrative (cultural super-text) structurings of consciousness. Postmodern aesthetic performance is a type of discourse; and discourse, as Foucault has demonstrated, is the prime manifestation of power. The theme of appropriation objectifies an intensifying conflict between the signifying codes of postmodern performance and the cultural super-text for power over the time and space of human action. It is the theme of appropriation which invests aesthetic phenomena and experience with an incalculable political significance.

But the pressure for introducing new perceptions of time-space relations in performance comes primarily from performers, directors, and artists, not from

dramatists or literary intellectuals. Dramatists, as text-producers, generally still seem "trapped" within master narrative organizations of time and space. They tend to associate text and performance with the signification of a "context" which "explains" the actions of a "character." They tend to equate command over language with a power to make an audience "believe a story" which didn't "really" happen. This idea of power in language necessarily depends on language which does not call attention to itself, language which is always "about" its speaker or its "context." The master narrative preserves its "invisibility" precisely because it treats all signifying codes as transparent structures *through which* one sees "reality." Literary imagination resists unmasking the formal devices by which it con-

structs "belief" in language; but this resistance means that the dramatist must accommodate master narrative organizations of time and space, which insist upon clearly identified, institutionalized times and spaces for the enactment of imaginary actions, for the appearance of "characters," for the performance of moments that didn't "really" happen.

This resistance means that dramatists will continue to objectify attitudes toward time and space which were already firmly institutionalized before the modernist disturbances in the early decades of this century. They will write plays that are "new" only because they are "about" something which no one seemed to have written "about" before. The strategies of appropriation driving postmodern aesthetic performance by no means preclude the involvement of the literary imagination; indeed, the chief limitation of postmodern aesthetic performance is its reluctance to exploit the *potential* of language,

of aesthetically complex speech, in redefining relations between time and space. Language always complicates the time and space needed to "justify" an action, and of course, the more language calls attention to itself, the more "aesthetic" it becomes, the more "difficult" its performance becomes. The performance becomes "difficult" because it is saying that "reality" embeds itself in signifying practices, not in referents, not in objects of "belief." But more intense exploration of this potential depends upon a further strategy of appropriation: either performance power must appropriate literary power or literary power must appropriate performance power. It is a matter of finding a strategy for constructing an aesthetic language which makes the difference between text and performance, between writing and speech, between art and life, much more obscure than the world has so far contemplated.

Notes

¹Information about the Amsterdam Werkteater appears in Dunbar Ogden, *Performance Dynamics and the Amsterdam Werkteater*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987; Rense Royaards, *Werkteater. Teaterwerksinds 1970*, Utrecht: Van Boekhoven-Bosch, 1980. Ogden's book, which relies heavily upon interviews with Werkteater members, discusses the history of the Werkteater, biographies of its actors, and the intentions of the group, but does little to theorize the performance aesthetic of the group or situate the aesthetic in relation to any postmodern attitude toward performance.

²Indeed, published transcriptions of Werkteater performances do not make very

interesting reading, not because the words the performers use are particularly banal or trite, but because the conventions of writing and printing contain no means for signifying the extraordinary things the actors do to the words.

³See Kate Davy, "Constructing the Spectator: Reception, Context, and Address in Lesbian Performance," *Performing Arts Journal*, 29 (10/2, 1986), 43-52, 47-52.

⁴In other words, the desire to transcend or expand the signifying practice assigned to each sex by the social order can satisfy itself only by disrupting the social order's signification of the real and the represented, text and performance. Such disruption depends entirely on strategies of temporal segmentation

which disturb a set of equations defining the social order: male: female: :reality: representation: :text: performance.

⁵See Barbara Heinisch, *Barbara Heinisch*, Braunschweig: Kunstverein Braunschweig, 1985, 126. See also "Barbara Heinisch," in Anna Tüne (ed.), *Körper, Liebe, Sprache*, Berlin: Elefant Press, 1982, 116-125.

⁶Heinisch 1985, 128.

⁷See notes to the recording of Karlheinz Stockhausen, *TRANS*, Berlin: Deutsche Grammophon, 1974, 2, 4. These notes consist mostly of a lengthy interview with Stockhausen conducted in Kurten by the Kunstring voor onkonventionele Muziek en Klankenkonfiguraties on 23 June 1973. The recording contains two versions of *TRANS*, "to point out how very much the sound picture of *TRANS* changes, through interpretation, acoustic of the hall, various methods of instrument amplification and recording technique" (4).

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"The Polish modernist writer, Stanislaw Witkiewicz seemed tempted by this strategy in his play *The Mother* (1924), which features a scene in which the protagonist encounters his mother as she was before he was born. While this encounter takes place, the mother as she is now, dead, lies on the stage. However, the mothers do not engage in any dialogue, a startling dramatic possibility which was perhaps too radical even for Witkiewicz. See Stanislaw Ignacy Witkiewicz, *The Madman and the Nun and Other Plays*, translated by Daniel C. Gerould and C.S. Durer, Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1968, 153-162.

⁹For more detailed descriptions of these productions, see Anne-Marie Gourdon, *Théâtre, Public, Perception*, Paris: Editions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1982, 82-94, 134-155.

¹⁰Wulf Herzogenrath, *Nam June Paik. Fluxus. Video*, München: Silke Schreiber Verlag, 1983, 13.

¹¹For a brief theoretical discussion of rela-

tions between dance and video, see Vera Maletic, "Videodance—Technology—Attitude Shift," *Dance Research Journal*, 19/2 (Winter 1987-88), 3-7.

¹²A provocative ideological analysis of the Boulez/Chereau interpretation of Wagner appears in Jean-Jacques Nattiez, "Chereau's Treachery," *October* 14 (Fall 1980), 71-100. Jarka Burian, *The Scenography of Josef Svoboda*, Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1971, examines Svoboda's work from a largely formalist perspective which tends to minimize the relation of the work to Marxist theory of representation.

¹³But dramatists, perhaps even more than audiences, seem to prefer flashbacks and flashforwards in time rather than interactions between times. Harold Pinter, in *Betrayal* (1978), constructs action which moves backward in time from scene to scene, but in this work, as in others, such as *Old Times* (1971), he focuses on how memory "betrays" one's sense of the difference between past and present. Past and present do not interact because the past is always a construct of the present and therefore really has no identity outside of what is now. Yet the past is always more than anyone remembers of it; indeed, the past, as history, as something remembered by others, acts upon the present in unconscious or unrememberable ways. The flashback technique may work well to dramatize the operation of memory or the conscious construction of the past, but it is irrelevant in dramatizing the past as a mode of otherness which memory either represses or fails to include. The "difficulty" of seeing two times at once is perhaps similar to the "difficulty" of seeing allegorical abstractions, such as Beauty, Vice, and Friendship, given "body" on the stage. The signifying practice attached to the signification of such abstractions, though familiar to the late medieval theater in such plays as *Everyman* (ca. 1499), is completely obscure to the "modern" sensibility. Even

though the signifying practice peculiar to a *time* or "period" (as the theater calls it) is more accessible than the signification of an allegorical abstraction, the idea of dramatizing "dialogues" between times appears very "difficult" because, as Pinter's work suggests, dramatists simply cannot find "voices" for any time but their own, which is to say, frankly, that they remain trapped within some kind of master narrative organization of memory: the "voice" of the past is merely the voice of the master narrative, not any new postmodern narrative that is at least conscious of the problem. In a historical play, *Het leven en de werken van Leopold II* (1970), by Hugo Claus (Amsterdam: Bezige Bij), one encounters allegorical abstractions as nations, England, Germany, France, America, in dialogue with themselves and with Leopold, King of the Belgians, on the creation of the Belgian Congo, but the play does not present any times in conflict with each other; or rather, the text, through its allegorical aesthetic and its anachronistic language, shows how the present "says" something about the past which the past could not or would not say about itself. Claus's technique anticipates Churchill's in *Cloud Nine* and *Top Girls*. For an English translation (by David Willinger and Luk Truyts) of Claus's play, see David Willinger (ed.), *An Anthology of Contemporary Belgian Plays*, Troy: Whitston, 1984, 104-186. It should be pointed out that while it is commonplace for directors to find a contemporary context for an old play, it is almost impossible to imagine an old context for a new play. No one dares to set a Pinter play in, say, the 18th century, although the experiment might well prove appealing.

¹¹Thus, for example, an actor could shift from a working class mode of speech to an upper class mode or to an "ethnic" mode or to a "popular" mode derived from the speech of characters in movies, operas, or classical tragedies. These "shifts" could occur within a particular time, such as "1903," and between

lovers in that year, or between lovers from other times ("1903" "speaks" to lovers of "1700"), or as a result of the actor moving from one time to another (leaving the space of 1903 and entering that of 1700). With conflict operating simultaneously on at least three levels, time, space, language, the relations between six different historical moments can produce an enormously complex performance. Yet it is exactly this complexity which actually allows one to "see" history without "illusions." In *Intolerance* (1916), a film so far ahead of its time that it still remains an astonishing, unsurpassed achievement, director D.W. Griffith intercut between four separate historical narratives, the Fall of Babylon, the Story of Christ, the Bartholomew's Day Massacre, and the Modern Story, all of which dramatized the theme of "intolerance." By intercutting the narratives, Griffith showed that intolerance is not a historical problem which recurs episodically; it is a problem of how one narrates action, or, more precisely, how people construct themselves as characters in a narrative which they do not realize, as the film spectator does, is "interacting" with other historical moments or narratives. By intercutting the stories, Griffith drives home the point that people "in history" cannot "see" the narrative conventions defining the stories of their lives, and it is this "blindness" to one's being in a narrative, rather than "in history," that is the basis for intolerance. I mention this work because it's possible to believe, as Hollywood has since 1916, that such a complex interaction between historical times requires enormous technological (cinematic) resources. But both the film and my own hypothetical theater example indicate that interaction between historical times depends less on technological complexity than on complexities of narrative signifying practice. Far less ambitious than *Intolerance* in its attempts to construct one time *in* another is the BBC television series of Dennis Potter's *The Singing*

Detective (1986), directed by Jon Amiel, in which *only* the hospitalized hero drifts into different temporal-spatial zones: 1) "objective" reality; 2) childhood memories; 3) paranoid fantasies about people in the objective reality; 4) the developing fantasy which forms the plot of the mystery novel he is writing. It is basically an elaboration of the flashback technique, but the mystery novel scenes are especially interesting because they contain actions and characters, including the adult hero, which appear in the other temporal-spatial zones, even though the plot of the novel takes place entirely in the 1940s, when the hero was a child: the insight here is that when the overall narrative represents the complexities of a single, individual consciousness (the hero's), it adopts strategies, a rhetoric of fantasy, which allow one time to appear *in* another without any tension or interaction *between* times. The theme of one time in another achieves even greater reinforcement through the estranging device of having old recordings of popular songs issue from the mouths of characters from the objective reality.

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¹⁵Hoffmann's dance appears in a videotape of her work, along with that of Pina Bausch and Susanne Linke, distributed by Inter-Nationes in Bonn. Claudia Jeschke, a professor of theater at the University of Cologne, showed this tape at the Goethe Institute in San Francisco, 19 March 1988. For further information about Hoffmann, see Susanne Schlicher, *Tanztheater*, Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1987, 231-266, which, however, does not discuss the tango.

¹⁶Mnouchkine's company, Le Théâtre du Soleil, has, since the early 1970's, made its home in the Cartoucherie, formerly a huge slaughterhouse. In Winter 1978-79, the Bremen Theatre, under the direction of Frank-Patrick Steckel, staged Hans Henny Jahnn's gigantic expressionist "historical tragedy," *Die Krönung Richards III* (1920) in a great warehouse to include, among other grandiose ef-

fects, equestrian spectacle. As an example of how such an immense production in a "new" space can generate an equally immense amount of talk which does not really discuss the production itself, see Bernd Goldmann, Hedda Kage, and Thomas Freemann, *Hans Henny Jahnn Woche 27 bis 30 Mai 1980. Eine Dokumentation*, Kassel: Stauda, 1981, 176-283.

¹⁷Theodor Shank, *American Alternative Theatre*, New York: Grove, 1982, discusses the Snake Theatre and several other theater groups which have "appropriated" spaces from the functions that created them.

¹⁸Lucy R. Lippard, *Overlay. Contemporary Art and the Art of Prehistory*, New York: Pantheon, 1983, gives numerous descriptions of postmodern aesthetic performance "in nature," which she tends to associate with a "prehistorical" consciousness that is, fundamentally, "timeless." Time from this perspective is the manifestation of an impulse to dominate nature.

¹⁹Interesting information about Butoh appears in Michael Haerdter and Sumie Kawai (eds.), *Butoh. Die Rebellion des Körpers: ein Tanz aus Japan*, Berlin: Alexander, 1986. Much less useful are Jean Viala and Nourit Masson-Sekine, *Butoh. Shades of Darkness*, Tokyo: Shufunotomo, 1988; Ethan Hoffman, *Butoh. Dance of the Dark Soul*, New York: Aperture, 1987.

²⁰For commentary on the performance work of Valie Export, Chris Burden, Helmut Schober, and Rudolf Schwarzkogler, see Peter Gorsen, *Sexualästhetik: Grenzformen der Sinnlichkeit im 20. Jahrhundert*, Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1987, 395-499. For Stelarc: James D. Paffner (ed.), *Obsolete Body/Suspensions/Stelarc*, Davis: J.P. Publications, 1988. For Otto Muehl: Peter Gorsen, *Sexualästhetik: zur bürgerlichen Rezeption von Obzönität und Pornographie*, Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1972, 166-180; Ludwig Leiss, *Kunst im Konflikt*, Berlin: De Gruyter, 1971, 457-472. For Hermann Nitsch:

Hermann Nitsch, *Das O.M. Theater Lesebuch*, Wien: Freibord, 1985; Leiss 1971, 472-490; Hermann Nitsch, *Orgies Mysteries Theater*, Darmstadt: März, 1969; issue No. 2 of *protokolle* (edited by Otto Breicha), Wien: Jugend und Volk, 1981; Wilhelm Höck, *Kunst als Suche nach Freiheit*, Köln: DuMont, 1973, 63-77. For Colette: Edith Almhofer, *Performance Art. Die Kunst zu leben*, Wien: Böhlau, 1986, 99-123. For Carolee Schneeman: Carolee Schneeman, *More than Meat Joy*, New Paltz: Documentext, 1979; Almhofer 1986, 50-70.

²¹Pietro Favari, "Oedipus on Via degli Scialoia," *The Drama Review*, 84 (23/4 Fall 1979), 56.

²²Favari 1979, 57.

²³For examples of postmodern "staged" photography, see Arthur Tress, *Talisman*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1986; Manon, *Identität, Selbstdarstellung, Image*, Bern: Benteli, 1981; Cindy Sherman, *Cindy Sherman*, New York: Whitney Museum, 1987; Steven Arnold, *Epiphanies*, Pasadena: Twelve Trees Press, 1987; Robert Mapplethorpe, *Robert Mapplethorpe*, Tokyo: Parco, 1987; Richard Marshall, *Robert Mapplethorpe*, New York, Boston, Greenwich: Whitney Museum, Little Brown, New York Graphic Society, 1988; Joel-Peter Witkin, *Forty Photographs*, San Francisco: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 1986.