

DISSERTATION

THEATRE CROSSING TELEVISION: AN INQUIRY INTO THE THEORY
AND PRACTICE OF INTERMEDIAL PERFORMANCE FROM THE 1960S
TO THE PRESENT

Submitted by

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This dissertation by Andrew Starner is accepted in its present form
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Acknowledgments

My mother came from a large family with parents who were very active socially. Not infrequently the children would be left to their own devices (to use a phrase that has a very different meaning today) while their parents attended evening functions. Although they were strictly forbidden to turn on the television in their parents' absence, they would cram together on the sofa to watch. They were playing a dangerous game and they knew it, so they took special care to watch the drive for approaching headlights. If the car was spied, in a flash they'd turn off the set and make a mad dash for their beds. All seemed in order, but my mother's mother knew to check for dull heat on the back of the television set. Rousing the children from their supposed slumber, she'd line them up in the living room while she brandished a set of kitchen shears. With a quick snip, she temporarily eliminated the temptation of television. Or so she thought—my mother became adept at rewiring the plug. And so the scene was played out again and again, each time the cord becoming shorter, until finally the television had its back against the wall. It's an image I have returned to more than once during this project, many long years in the making.

I could not have completed this work without the help of my family, my brother, Greg, and his wife, Charity, especially for giving me a place to live in the final stretches of its writing. Thanks to my dear friends Jason Groves, Hans Vermy, and Ric Royer, who each inspired me in their own ways to find new and better accommodations between academic life and life-life. To friends I made in Abu Dhabi—Awam Ampka, Una Chauduri, Deb Levine, Carol Martin, Ken Neilsen, Richard Schechner, Mark Swislocki, Kat Williams, Marion Wrenn—it was a wild ride and I don't regret it for a moment. Thank you to Sarah Courteau, Virginia Millington, and Caroline Preston, talented friends from my pre-grad school days whose thinking and writing and editing (Sarah, where would I be without you?) have helped propel me forward. Thanks to Mariner and Gideon Padwa, brothers in arms who've contributed to my movement—though not always in the most goal-oriented way—and who transformed my understanding of the world.

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A FORCE ILLEGIBLE

Did Cornell know what he was doing? Yes, but mostly no. Does anyone fully? He knew what he liked to see and touch. What he liked, no one was interested in. Surrealism provided him with a way of being more than just an eccentric collector of sundry oddities. The ideas of art came later, if they ever did come clearly. And how could they? His is a practice of divination. Dada and surrealism gave him a precedent and a freedom. I have in mind especially their astonishing discovery that lyric poetry can come out of chance operations. Cornell believed in the same magic, and he was right! All art is a magic operation, or, if you prefer, a prayer for a new image.

“In murky corners of old cities where everything—horror, too—is magical,” Baudelaire writes. The city is a huge image machine. A slot machine for the solitaires. Coins of reverie, of poetry, secret passion, religious madness, it converts them all. A force illegible.

—Charles Simic¹

¹ Charles Simic, *Dime-Store Alchemy: The Art of Joseph Cornell* (New York: NYRB Classics, 2011), 30.

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Forward: Theatre-vision: Atavism and Adaptation in the Media World

...[H]istory includes too much contingency, or shaping of present results by long chains of unpredictable antecedent states, rather than immediate determination by timeless laws of nature.

—Stephen Jay Gould²

I've long been interested in exploring theatre's at times uneasy relationship with other cultural forms, often characterized as mass media. "Reality television" and the "theatre of the real" (to borrow a phrase from Carol Martin's book of the same name) both seem to respond to the increasing virtualization of our social worlds.³ The key question is, how does thinking about theatre and television together change our understanding of each, and indicate how contemporary performance practices—even those that seem the most innovative—have deep historical ties to precedent forms? Although this study includes an investigation of the actual use of televisions on stage and of plays on television, I am more interested in how an approach that seeks to find the origins of the televisual in theatrical practice might present a new vista on our increasingly mediatized world. This thesis offers readers a new paradigm for the experience of both theatre-going and television-spectating. Through close readings of a number of well-known and less well-known theatrical productions, I argue that media viewing might paradoxically be more and less passive and possess more and less potential for political and social salience than scholars suggest.

The chapters that follow explore how old theatrical forms are recycled into new ones, and supposedly novel stage techniques have their roots in centuries-old precedent.

² Stephen Jay Gould, "The Evolution of Life on Earth," *Scientific American*, vol. 271, no. 4 (October 1994), 85–86.

³ Carol Martin, *Theatre of the Real* (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

The intent is to spark new discussions around theatre, technology, and community. Connecting these observations with a longstanding interest in applying an ecological lens (i.e., situating cultural phenomena within a wider context that includes other forms of social organization, as well as factors beyond human control or humans themselves) to the question of theatre-making and theatre development will offer a more robust account of theatrical change than can be constructed out of chains of influence or the lasting attraction of particular schools or movements. I'm not calling for an end to theatre criticism that explores and explains theatre as a reflection of certain cultural conditions (as conceived by a design team and enacted by actors in concert with theatre technicians), but I do think it is important to reinsert theatre into the environment from which it supposedly precipitated. Human actors cede place to uncontrolled interactions of masses and almost imperceptible vectors of suitability.

Makers of theatre make do, in at times ramshackle and also startlingly simple ways. (Recently this has started to change, with increased investment in complex theatre systems like the Metropolitan Opera's enormous and enormously expensive movable stage expressly built for Robert Lepage's Ring Cycle. But perhaps like the instructive example of bucks whose antlers have become so oversized that they no longer contribute to reproductive fitness, the niche for such theatrical behemoths is narrow.) Just as atavisms appear in the natural world, so, too, do old techniques make startling new appearances in different situations. This creative reuse is not a conscious recycling of previous modes but a kind of unavoidable regression—which is of interest when discussing technological innovation through time and across continents.

I don't know if I am ready to concede that we live in a new time or a new dispensation, defined as much by the acceleration of social change as the penetration of capital into the many crevices of everyday life. On an anecdotal level, it is possible to identify a proliferating array of communicative media devices that exceed anything I can remember in the near past. Theatre, in its increasing use of video, recorded sound, and amplified speech, might offer a comment on the expanding role that technological implements appear to play in our negotiation of the lifeworld. This is often the route taken by critics who see contemporary theatre returning this "new condition" to us in the form of mechano-media-theatrical magic. Less frequently do we consider how the use of technology is simply the result of the wide availability of these devices and tools, which are unquestionably part of the reservoir that theatre artists draw on when conceiving and producing "new" work.

Baz Kershaw's book *Theatre Ecology* could serve as a jumping-off point for this discussion, but his ecology is focused more on the environment as an element of scenography and as an absent-present threat (in the form of what was previously unthinkable—global ecological collapse). Kershaw doesn't want to get into this other relationship between theatre and "its" environment. When he does briefly mention the other (our) potential meaning of the term ecology, he discusses Richard Dawkins' addendum to evolutionary theory that argues for a biological basis for the maintenance of culture in the form of memes. The survival of traditional performance practices might provide evidence for a possible genetic residue of theatrical technique: "hence the transfer of performance, theatrical or otherwise, between generations in, say, commedia dell'arte or Japanese Noh theatre becomes a 'memetic' affair. So the longevity of

particular artistic genres may be explained by the quasi-scientific ‘fact’ that some memes passing between brains are fitter for survival than others.”⁴ Sadly for those of us who might be looking for a theory of how theatre is an environment (and exists within it), he dismisses this idea almost as soon as he articulates it. Also instructive is how he conceived the environment (theatre itself) contributing to the endurance of an obsolescing form, as if Noh theatre couldn’t possibly have a function in today’s Japan.

Confronted with both familiar and unfamiliar stagings, let us posit not a chain of influences but a confluence of factors, and the reality that every performance tradition, every kind of stagecraft, every school of acting or dancing or directing carries within it certain suppressed features—call it the junk DNA of theatre. This may be taking this metaphor borrowed from the life sciences a little further than seems advisable, but doing so is worthwhile. And in the same way that “evolution” is widely misunderstood, so theatre evolution is also wrongly seen as being part of some sort of teleological process, a progress-oriented narrative with Western, serious drama at the apex...four thousand years in the making. Yes, time progresses, but theatre does not. New adaptations to new conditions are constantly becoming apparent. Not the decadence of Hegel’s trajectory of art, but a new, much more fluid form of inheritance is emblemized in theatre.

The same is also true in art history. Here a figure like Aby Warburg is useful. Like Darwin’s exhaustive cataloging of the finch’s adaptations, Warburg’s obsessive index of certain gestures in Western art might be seen to be part of the collecting instinct at the base of humanist knowledge(-production). For this perspective, scholarship is oriented less to some unattainable goal of total understanding or mastery, but toward an

⁴ Baz Kershaw, *Theatre Ecology: Environments and Performance Events* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 20.

acknowledgment of the wonderful multiplicity of nature and culture. What narwhales, then, of theatre lie before us? The historiographic method used in this thesis has been influenced by new historicist models that seek to reintroduce “history” into literary analysis, by offering, in essence, a *look* into the past. Not surprisingly, the technique emerged in the latter part of the 20th century, as this promise is arguably the result of televisual thinking. The world is brought into your living room, but it is a world that you cannot hope to change. Is this not precisely how a historian operates? Stephen Greenblatt’s accounts of life in the early modern period underscore the role of history and context in understanding a work of literary representation. This technique is sometimes derided as anecdotal, and those who employ it are accused of extrapolating too wildly from the particulars of a moment far removed in time and place, but arguably such an approach is determined by a televisual conditioning of perception. Call it displaced transmission (Joseph Roach), the fold (Gilles Deleuze), or mediation (Pierre Macherey).⁵ This survey isn’t a history manqué so much as it is a recuperation of the unpredictable and potentially untheorizable in history—a history of the virtual, or a virtual history, leading not so much to counterhistories as counterpresents. The events of the 20th century frustrated expectations of historians and humanists alike; speaking to the seeming failure of history as a discipline, Vilém Flusser writes that “‘history’ was only a diversion,

⁵ See Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, translated by Tom Conley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012); Pierre Macherey, *Theory of Literary Production*, translated by Geoffrey Wall (New York: Routledge, 2015).

and...we are now in the process of turning back to two-dimensionality, into the imaginary, magical, and mythical.”⁶

While the flatness of televisual media is an identifiable (and, to some extent, defining) feature of the theatrical productions I address in this project, its primary motivation is a conviction on my part that it is necessary to co-articulate ideas about immersion, interactivity, and distance, as well as perception and experience. My path takes unusual turns and may appear to deploy wholly unorthodox methods; my skepticism around the relative value of contemporary productions that privilege immersion and participatory aesthetics, for instance, prompted me to question certain shibboleths of theatre history. There is a good-natured impertinence in this pose, and I adopt it for the purposes of exploring divergent lines of argument. Not being a scholar of 17th-century France, or a theorist of the Baroque, or even a researcher focused solely on technology and its role in society, I nonetheless defend my foray into each area on the basis that it has liberated a set of thoughts that have not emerged in the ordinary course of things. Namely, that what we recognize as televisual spectatorship (and which seems to occur with increasing frequency in theatre in the 21st century) begins in, and resonates with, spectatorship in early Baroque France. Three important things about that spectatorship that are common to theatre and television consumption are: anti-immersion, the two audience construction, and the "box" of theatre as a critical framing element.

In suggesting that television started in the 17th century, I propose that many aspects—the opposable thumb, for instance, or the prominent proboscis of daytime TV—

⁶ Vilém Flusser, *Into the Universe of Technical Images*, translated by Nancy Ann Roth (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 6.

were (are) present in opera and neoclassical French theatre, so that soap operas might not be the oxymoron that the coiner of that phrase intended. I take televisual to mean a mode of dispersing the senses in space and time. Though it has been brought to prominence by the technological innovation of television, televisuality predates television, film, and video. The televisual, then, is a structure of relation, and specific televisual forms contribute to reading across time and genre. An historical survey that attempts to interrogate the medial crossing of theatrical practice might explore how Baroque theatrical techniques are conditioned by the Baroque context to arrive at television.⁷ But this dissertation will explore how history passes through televisuality to arrive at something like a Baroque period. And what is more important, it will suggest the limitations of the technique and offer a new method of “historical” analysis.

In a rumination on, among other things, Marina Abramovic and the potential of re-performance, Sarah Bay-Cheng, a theatre historian and scholar of digital technology, offers a series of premises on theatre historiography for the digital age.⁸ Bay-Cheng

⁷ Baroque art and literature emerged in an era when the incipient Scientific Revolution was already troubling those inheritances of the Renaissance: knowledge, scholarship, symmetry, balance, stillness. New scientific instruments such as the telescope greatly extended the reach of human perception but far outstripped its understanding: growth overtook measurement. The infinite had arrived, but in a universe that Copernicus had de-centered. The Baroque is a form of generation, and it is generative. It is an instantaneous and spontaneous straining against frame and form to capture thought in motion. I believe that the new forms of literature that emerged in the Baroque presage (if I may be so “historical”) many 20th-century developments in media, whether they are machines for repetition, machines for transmission, or machines for multiplication. The Baroque charted new territories for human expression, beyond the reach of the individual. In its folded relation of interior to exterior, it offers an aesthetics of the infinite. And in its rigorous spontaneity, its overflowing of forms, it marks a new chapter in the history of mimesis, and perhaps even a counter to it.

⁸ Sarah Bay-Cheng, “Theatre Is Media: Some Principles for a Digital Historiography of Performance,” *Theatre* 42, no. 2 (2012).

writes, “Situating theatre and performance history within a media ecology moves our historical investigations beyond the binary of the live and recorded, beyond the question of authenticity and presence (perhaps beyond the ‘liveness problem’ itself), to a model of performance history in which the goal is neither to recount what ‘really happened’ nor to reconstruct an event as a ‘ghostly’ substitute for the performance that no longer exists” (40). If we do live in a new cultural regime that flattens hierarchies, then perhaps this is the way that we are living “beyond” taxonomy. But instead of accepting Frederic Jameson’s word that pastiche (a parody without depth, a collage without history) is the dominant mode of postmodern artistic expression, we might find ourselves nested in a dense web of relations. We are not less connected to the past than ever before, but more able to see the connections—thanks to the apotheosis of the free market that has at least had the laudatory effect of forcing theorists to grapple with contingency and accident.

Kershaw makes reference to Gregory Bateson’s 1972 *Ecology of the Mind* (itself a source text for early performance studies theorists). In a section called “Redundancy and Coding,” Bateson talks specifically about metacommunication and the stage, and in a key passage describes how environment and organism inter-*lock*:

There is redundancy in the system, organism-plus-environment, such that from the morphology and behavior of the organism a human observer can guess with better than random success at the nature of the environment. This ‘information’ about the environment has become lodged in the organism through a long phylogenetic process, and its coding is of a very special kind. The observer who would learn about the aquatic environment from the shape of a shark must deduce the hydrodynamics from the adaptation which copes with the water. The information contained in the phenotypic shark is implicit in forms which are complementary to

characteristics of other parts of the universe, phenotype plus environment whose redundancy is increased by the phenotype.⁹

I quote this passage at length to show that an appreciation of theatre ecology does not invalidate the attempt to make theatre objects tell us about the culture that produced them (which surely must be one of the most important tasks before a theatre scholar), but actually *saves it from arbitrariness*.

Perhaps it is necessary to create something resembling a taxonomy of technologically mediated theatre after all, but one that shows that it is never simply that kind of theatre that concerns itself with technology, only it is the kind that is always using mechanical and other means to make certain kinds of statements about the world. Theatre is fundamentally a statement about the world. And it can be a form of first-hand experience. We run into trouble when we fail to see it as such, when it is a reflection only on the world out there. This kind of theatre, which is made perhaps easier to create with the advent of televisual media—the first time you can have images from the outside onscreen—but there have always been painted images and people trying to represent outside events in various ways (although the simultaneous, live-feed aspect of telematic performance might truly be newly new).

In a corollary to this research into the theory and practice of intermedial performance, I will compare experiments in bidirectional communication among the U.S.-based avant-garde from the 1960s to the present to another era of elevated anxiety about audiences and audience reaction: early 17th-century France, when theatre and theatre censorship was an important context for discussions about the state and state

⁹ Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind; Collected Essays in Anthropology, Psychiatry, Evolution, and Epistemology* (San Francisco: Chandler Pub. Co., 1972), 308.

power. The “evolving” milieu of life in the metropolitan centers of France in the first half of the 1600s conditioned these new performances. Taking as an example Pierre Corneille’s *Comic Illusion*, it will be necessary to take into account the structures his immediate surroundings provided: in terms of the architectures theatres made use of, scenic construction within theatrical space (both onstage and in the parterre), and new configurations of social relations. We shall see that when Corneille’s magician Alcandre commands, “N’avancez pas!” (come no further), this is an injunction not only to the character he shares the stage with but to the audience, as well. Viewing this play and others against a “backdrop” of theatre “becoming” a “public” art form (it was still heavily supported by the sovereign but exhibited a new outwardness, lending what had previously been mandarin court performances the quasi-permeability to spectators we now associate with sophisticated artistic production) is to recognize new kinds of emergent publicity.

Another novel aspect of this theatre was that it tried to use the newest technologies to create ever more impressive and elaborate pageants. This is in part due to the role of theatre as a bridge from court to commerce. Opera, which emerges out of a set of transnational practices and exchanges, is a wonderful example. But it did not come into being of its own, any more than the eyeball did. And just as we cannot at present adequately theorize the origins of the eyeball, so too theatre is and theatre practice must be looked at in the way media archaeologists do, as a series of discrete points in time when things emerge.

For instance, in the latter part of the 15th century, Leon Battista Alberti made use of sophisticated optical instruments to devise the rules of perspective, changing the way

paintings were made and the way viewers made sense of them.¹⁰ Further research into the laws of perspective, particularly by Italian architect Sebastiano Serlio (who produced what he believed were faithful reproductions of scenic design from the time of the Roman Empire), was adopted and first employed by Italian artisans devising elaborate theatrical festivals and events. According to George Kernodle, the set of theatrical conventions that compose perspectival staging are a combination of these new methods in painting with existing techniques of the body, such as *tableaux vivants*, which were common throughout medieval Europe.¹¹ Incremental changes in set dressing techniques or dramatic writing can, over a significant period of time, contribute greatly to what in retrospect seem like transformations. Ideas about how courtly performance could contribute to the effectiveness of a monarch were indebted to Italian Renaissance models. In Florence, an obscure family called the Medici rose to enormous wealth and prominence on the back of an extensive banking empire. The magnificence of the Medici court was a way for these merchant-princes to display their power and sophistication. The convertibility of Italian court spectacles—into traveler’s accounts, depictions of publications circulated in engravings and books, etc.—made them particularly useful for extending the practice and scope of the Medici “brand.” Italian princesses who became French queens brought with them a whole spectrum of customs that began subtly to alter French courtly practice, which in substantive ways was little changed from the time of the first Frankish kings (at least in the eyes of Catherine de’ Medici). The popularity of

¹⁰ See Christopher S. Wood and Alexander Nagel, *Anachronic Renaissance* (New York: Zone Books, 2010).

¹¹ Kernodle’s magisterial *From Art to Theatre: Form and Convention in the Renaissance* (1944), like many theatre histories of the early Modern period, emphasizes this continuity of dramatic forms.

courtly dance (and progenitors of modern-day ballet in particular) exerted an enormous influence on, above all, courtly architecture. Large halls for dancing and performing (as distinct from feasting and “holding” court) were common in palaces and courtly homes built from 1550–1650.¹² The Italian expertise when it came to perspective in painting played an important role at this time. Two seemingly unrelated (and conflicting) theatrical techniques—the open-space dancing plan (situated and surrounding three-dimensional set pieces akin to sculpture, and captured in the design of formal French gardens which often served as a backdrop) and vanishing-point scenery depicting city scenes and landscapes (which the same gardens also “articulated,” but in a different way) combined in ever more sophisticated displays of illusionism in scenic design. Purpose-built theatres from the late 1500s struggled to achieve a perfect image for the King; the King’s seat structured and oriented the playing space in important ways, and represented a sea change from theatrical precedent in ecclesiastical and secular drama.¹³

My dissertation offers a new context for understanding mass media, and television specifically, that relies less on technological developments and looks to a suppressed genealogy of formal concerns. I argue that theatre is not a virtual reality machine waiting

¹² For more on the history and development of the Great Hall, see Colum Hourihane, *The Grove Encyclopedia of Medieval Art and Architecture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

¹³ Matthew Wikander explores the vital role of royal patronage in both enabling and channelling/changing theatrical production, in particular in France, in *Princes to Act: Royal Audience and Royal Performance, 1578–1792* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993). Drawing on, among others, the theory of Ernst Kantorowicz on the sovereign’s two bodies, Wikander explains why theatre held such fascination for French monarchs in the early modern period: “As the drama’s patron—and, increasingly over the seventeenth century, its only patron—the monarch has a hold over actors that exceeds his grasp over courtiers and commoners” (4). This is not without irony, however: according to Wikander the king’s patronage is in a real sense “self-destructive” due to the “double danger [that] ensues when the king attends the theatre, for his real political power depends precisely upon that ability to see things as they are” (150).

for the invention of computing, and that any contemporary idea of theatre or performance as/in an immersive environment is only the latest in a series of negotiations between stagecraft and statecraft. To make this argument, I have looked to mobile categories (such as flow, interactivity, duration, circuits) that cut across historical periods; I believe there is much to be gained by, for instance, looking at staging practices in 17th-century France and 1960s art performances like Robert Whitman's *Prune Flat*, or artist Joseph Cornell's boxes alongside tennis player John McEnroe's on-court antics. The project provides a corrective to accounts of technologically mediated theatrical performance that tend to dichotomize the body on stage in avant-garde performance either as disappeared and disappearing *or* as emphatically material. The irreconcilable dichotomy between disappearing body and material body opens up the question of flatness, which "foregrounds" the importance of the screen, both in terms of the body as screen and the stage as screen. If you start with the screen, it's possible to recognize that theater is not just the domain of three-dimensional live bodies and that television is not only a lifeless screen.

We must write about the idea of selective adaptation and pressures on the theatre organism. Theatre architecture is actually the result of interaction between designers and forces of contingency and selection—many theatres have burned to the ground because of the favored flammable systems of theatrical lighting, but only good ones were rebuilt with the same dimensions; otherwise, new solutions were found for the smoldering building's deficits—in acoustics, audience capacity, backstage space, etc. Yes, theatres evolved, but it was not a directed evolution. This is what must be understood by evolution, and the kinds of adaptation that theatre makers practiced is akin to the use

animals (and humans) unthinkingly make of whatever capacities and capabilities they possess.

Theatre forms—like animal species—are a compendium of adaptations that once produced “reproductive” fitness. We must find a way to talk about when old conventions take on a new importance as conditions change.

Chapter 1: Introduction

It is imperative in this age of giddy technological innovation in theatre practice that we interrogate the overlapping and intersecting spaces of the theatre, the screen, and the audience. Frequently, the phenomenon of technologically mediated theatre is discussed as a development or an outcome of technological change, and certainly theatre does incorporate, reflect, and respond to new resources. But, importantly, these changes have returned the focus of commentators to an underlying aspect of theatre they name as its intermediality. I want to go one step further than this discussion and argue that ours is an era of not just intermedial but *televisual* theatre, not only because of the common (to the point of cliché) physical presence of monitors and attendant equipment on the stage, but because of a political and social relationship between actor and spectator that lies somewhere between the here and now of theatre in its most optimistic moments of *communitas*, and the out-there, streaming-toward-us nature of television. An attention to theatre as televisual, to theatre's inherent "televisuality," reframes the intermedial as a reiteration of theatre's oldest trick—to present action at a distance, or, more properly, (in)action at a distance, that distance bridged by the visual apprehension of a plane of performance.

Remarks on Flatness

In this dissertation, I interrogate television and the televisual as they relate to the overlapping and intersecting spaces of the theatre, the screen, and the audience. Television, literally seeing at a distance, is first and foremost a tautology; all seeing occurs at a remove. The forces, conditions, and constraints of this remove are what

interest theorists not only of television, but theatre and performance as well. By crisscrossing temporal registers in my effort—17th-century France, 20th-century avant-garde performance—I acknowledge that television is foremost a relationship of time and space that brings discrete moments into new relation. This project, too, brings disparate historical trends and critical discourses together in an attempt to employ the very televisual operations I believe pertain in theatrical practice, whether it involves technological mediation or not. In offering new interpretations of Baroque scenography and televisual performance, I model a critical practice that participates in the same performative, flat, dispersed, and playful network that the interrogated texts do. Furthermore, when the following chapters discuss contemporary technology-driven theatre practice that usually falls under the rubric “multimedia performance,” these discussions will attempt to uncouple these works from the devices that mark them as such. Contemporary productions that make the stage like a television (through their use of projections, among other techniques), I suggest, are in actuality rediscovering a “flatness” that was already there.

Flatness is the term I use to open out and into a host of related issues and controversies. Flatness is variable and relative, but always it refers to a screen, extant or not, that separates the viewer from the thing viewed.¹⁴ As Samuel Weber puts it,

¹⁴ A possible analogy is that of the rood screen in English medieval church architecture—the perforated wall that made seeing the consecration of the eucharist difficult, heightening its mysteriousness and power. See Jacqueline Jung, “Seeing Through Screens,” in Gabriella Giannachi, Nick Kaye, and Michael Shanks, eds., *Archaeologies of Presence: Art, Performance and the Persistence of Being* (New York: Routledge, 2012); Gabriella Giannachi and Nick Kaye, *Performing Presence: Between the Live and the Simulated* (Manchester, UK; Manchester University Press, 2011).

“television is a screen that screens.”¹⁵ To say that theatre in the early 17th century “achieved” an essential flatness is to acknowledge that a constitutive separation between performer and audience began to structure plays and playing spaces. Moving forward from this period, this idea of a gap that prevented a play from becoming real and protected the audience from becoming actors was oriented by the fourth wall, as it has come to be called. But the fourth wall implies a real depth to the space of the stage, mirroring an actually existing depth in the audience, whereas the crucial aspect of theatre is a performative collapse of these two spaces—not that they become equivalent, or that they become a single, shared space, but that they become “flat” to each other.

“Flat” of course means two-dimensional, having width and length but no depth. Nothing is completely two-dimensional. Even a depiction of a rectangle has the thickness of an ink line on paper. And, interestingly, flatness is not an impediment to other dimensions. In fact, it is the enabling constraint in *Flatland*, Edwin Abbott’s parable of geometry and calculus in the form of a novel, first published in 1884. In *Flatland*, time or change takes the “place” occupied by the so-called “third dimension” of depth.¹⁶ The third dimension of depth can nevertheless be displayed by a two-dimensional surface. This is the operative and persuasive practice of *trompe l’oeil* and illusionistic techniques that attempt to seduce the viewer into the phantasmatic perception of depth. Theatre, the place of seeming and seeing seeming (for what it is), makes extensive use of this technique. The scenic expedient of painted flats has long furnished the visual apparatus (or support) for the necessary illusion of space on stage.

¹⁵ Samuel Weber and Alan Cholodenko, *Mass Mediauras: Form, Technics, Media* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), 122-123.

¹⁶ Edwin Abbott, *Flatland: A Romance of Many Dimensions* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2006[1884]).

While the flat can evoke the not-flat, it can nevertheless seriously disappoint. If we expect the satisfying ting of a carbonated beverage but it's gone flat, we see that this is just a very colloquial usage of "flat" to describe anything that fails to live up to expectation; it has fewer dimensions than we'd expected, it's not fizzy, it's past its prime. The flat is what remains when the carbonation has completely dissipated from the sparkling drink.¹⁷ Flat is often a term used to index the failure to express the fullness of humanity, its fleshiness, its well-roundedness. We are conditioned to recognize these failed performances even in people we interact with who are single-minded, or fictional characters we encounter who present little beyond being a cipher, or the actor who fails to embody the wholeness of a character with all its psychological dimensions—its depths. Michael Kirby identifies a counter-movement in 1960s avant-garde theatre and performance that tries to move the actor's responsibility off of character and onto action, like being part of a system. Kirby uses the term "matrix" to indicate the parameters these performers must negotiate—their expected duties, their permitted movements, etc.¹⁸ Intriguingly, another meaning of flat (or flattened, really) comes from a matrix in an entirely different context: the realm of mathematics and information theory. When two

¹⁷ Given this meaning of flatness, Tracy Davis's use of "percolation" as a metaphor for historical change and the transmission of knowledge and performance traditions is telling. Davis argues that theatrical modes and gestures can bubble up, as it were, and to a certain degree remain distinct from the medium in which they travel. Like Joseph Roach's account of displaced transmission, this concept of percolating bubbles of performance does capture the erratic and unpredictable ways that tropes (or memes) circulate and endure across time and culture. But these things do not come up from the depths. No, they have always existed...on the *surface*. They are part of the total picture, which we either apprehend or "fail" to apprehend. Tracy C. Davis, "Repertoire," Lecture (Brown University Graduate Colloquium, Providence, RI, October 24, 2008).

¹⁸ Michael Kirby, *A Formalist Theatre* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 4-7. This is also the basis of Anne Bogart's "Viewpoints" system, which streamlines and coordinates performer interaction based on a grid and a set of values.

matrices are multiplied, the result is a new matrix with new values. The resulting matrix is said to be *flattened*.

Flatness (ultimately) is a concept with a rich and varied application in the plastic arts and art history. The “discovery” of the flat plane of painting by abstract expressionists in the 1940s obscures previous (and strategic) uses of flatness. If the invention of perspective in 15th-century Italy heralded a new mode of painting rooted in the flat mechanics of depth, it did so in tension with prevailing pictorial traditions, which themselves harkened back to humans’ earliest attempts to represent the world through the plastic arts. (This term “plastic arts” is used deliberately, in order to put pressure on the extent to which the performing arts are also involved in this process of translation. Mimetic fealty in theatre is no easier to accomplish than in painting solely by virtue of the “availability” of depth.) According to Czech media philosopher Vilém Flusser, the depiction of the hunt on the walls of caves was not only an attempt to capture the three-dimensional world of phenomena on a two-dimensional surface, but to “evoke” also the dimension of time, which is closely related if not to the hunt per se than to the *ritual* of the hunt, of which these paintings form a part. The all-over pictorial field was not Rothko’s (or Pollock’s or Newman’s) *sui generis* invention. Likewise, cave painting could be considered proto-cubist, even, insofar as it attempted to create the very codes of painting that Picasso and Braque sought to dethrone in their use of multiple perspective and the dynamism of the canvas. The surviving examples of the cave painter’s art (at Lascaux, at Chauvet) speak to us in more than one way. On the one hand, they seem to offer mute testament to the “human” drive to mark (or alter) the environment—an embryonic aesthetic impulse of which we represent the highest and fullest realization—as

well as allow the material world to speak (albeit in terms we understand). Hence, and in ways that are hard to recognize without seeing them “in the flesh” (or on film, thanks to Werner Herzog’s inventive if paradoxical use of 3D film technology in *Cave of Forgotten Dreams* [2010]), bulges in the cave wall—masses of limestone that ripple and flex, especially when illuminated by a flame to cast animate shadows—direct our attention to the animals *in* the wall. While we regard the irregularity of form as an indicator of artistic deficit, it also serves to capture “Bison”—bison in their very bison-ness—in more than one attitude, while also offering tools for identifying the animals. Tracks and hoofmarks accompany these looming shapes in various orientations, redoubling the traced-ness of these paintings.¹⁹ These images capture the hunt in its entirety—beforehand, the knowledge required to track (“this” is hunting), the confidence to kill, and the celebration afterwards.

I don’t intend to offer a complete treatment of image culture in Medieval Europe, but will briefly consider how images “meant” (distinct from how they signified or represented) in this period. Hans Belting and Edmund Jephcott’s *Likeness and Presence* explores the range of practices that church educators, artists, and the believing public engaged in during the period 800–1300. Long considered a dark age of artistic decline, this period actually unleashed an explosion of images and image makers. The ongoing evangelization of Europe necessitated large numbers of images that “related” to their circumstances in such a different and unusual way that their difference was one of kind as

¹⁹ Werner Herzog, *Cave of Forgotten Dreams* (United Kingdom: IFC Films & Sundance Selects, 2010).

well as degree.²⁰ Of course, the already-existing cultural repertoire of the pagan North included visual depictions of local deities and commemorated important events in the lives of its peoples, but for the first time an image came to them that bore no such relation to the life and history of the place it came to. Perhaps this is how icons and sacred images came to possess a *fullness* quite distinct from representational accuracy—they were endowed with the unique presence of God (the new one), and as such eclipsed and overshadowed the pattern-making and -discerning apparatuses of the newly converted tribes. These rude, often rough wood-cuts (a form of printing that long antedates Gutenberg’s “revolution”) depicted biblical tales and scenes from saints’ lives. They bore an impression—another difference from freely drawn representations, and that provides a link also with the trace and tracks of the cave wall. Importantly, they opened into a world that was complete, that was traceable to a source, and that had meaning precisely because it was a form of distribution and co-ordination. These images created a style that continued to hold sway long after Christian beliefs and practices supplanted or became incorporated into non-Christian modes. In time, monastic workshops began to create ever more elaborate and refined versions of these imagescapes, that could rival in sophistication and aesthetic accomplishment the greatest feats of Rome and Greece (although their legacy is more rooted in three-dimensional forms like sculpture or architecture). But they did so using “primitive” forms that betrayed neither ignorance nor lack of skill, but a keen appreciation of surface delight (the quasi-sumptuary use of precious materials like gold and lapis lazuli) and theological commitment to God-in-the-world.

²⁰ See Hans Belting and Edmund Jephcott, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

When, during the Renaissance, the Classical Era became available again, it should be no surprise that the all-over pictorial field predicated on flatness and bearing “alien” life from the outside (by this I mean extant, living God in the painting) should seem perfunctory and limiting. “Advances” in optics—inspired by and often dependent upon scientific sources from antiquity, like “advances” in architecture, did, over time, lead to real change in representational technique: the invention of perspective. The convincing portrayal of space (three dimensions) in a space that lacks it has no counterpart in the Classical era (or any previous era). Shallow bas-relief sculptures do reflect some awareness of how flattening a pictorial plane might affect the distribution of figures in a three-dimensional mass, but perspective as a *flat* mechanics of depth emerged in the high Renaissance. In distinction to previous modes, these paintings open “onto” a scene—two dimensions “of” three dimensions—where previous artistic models opened *into* one. Perspective was not immediately mastered—first attempts to use multiple-point perspective or vanishing-point perspective could wreak havoc in the visual field. Eventually, however, these experiments were so successful that they set the standard (the Old “Masters”) for artists for the four hundred years that followed. Only later did the revolt against calculation—and *into* feeling (authentic feeling that, presumably, optical precision negates)—usher in the modern era in painting. The effects that the Impressionists were able to create were like a “mottled screen”: a shattering of the pictorial plane into an ever more complex and prismatic whole.²¹ This obsession with surface effects runs through all the “isms” that crop up in impressionism’s wake, culminating (at least in the opinion of the visual art critic Clement Greenberg) in the

²¹ For this insight, I refer readers to Mieke Bal, *The Mottled Screen: Reading Proust Visually* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997).

apotheosis of painting as a complete expression of the canvas's unique attribute: its flatness.²²

Most people consider the decline of pictorial realism to be a reaction to the increasing availability of non-human devices for recording and depicting the world. They do not consider them a parallel movement, each in their own way retreating from the three-dimensional "world" and into the fullness of the surface. In this way, medial forms that emphasize flatness don't necessarily represent an abandonment of the world and its "realism." In the words of Jacques Rancière,

It is this relationship that is at stake in the supposed distinction between two-dimensional and three-dimensional space as "specific" to a particular form of art. To a large extent, the ground was laid for painting's "anti-representative revolution" by the flat surface of the page, in the change in how literature's "images" function or the change in the discourse on painting, but also in the ways in which typography, posters, and the decorative arts became interlaced. The type of painting that is poorly named abstract, and which is supposedly brought back to its own proper medium, is implicated in an overall vision of a new human being lodged in new structures, surrounded by different objects. Its flatness is linked to the flatness of pages, posters, and tapestries. It is the flatness of an interface. Moreover, its anti-representative "purity" is inscribed in a context where pure art and decorative art are intertwined, a context that straight away gives it a political signification.²³

In the realm of contemporary philosophy, flat ontology has emerged as an important component of the "New Materialism." Flat ontology refers to dynamic states that seek stability, not a sequence from top to bottom (a directive from the most highly organized to the least organized); instead each element interacts with all the other

²² See Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," in *Forum Lectures* (Washington, D.C.: Voice of America, 1960).

²³ We could also say that the intermedial "revolution" was facilitated by the "flatness" of theatre, by its televisuality. Jacques Rancière and Slavoj Žižek, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2004), 16.

elements.²⁴ Political sociology has begun to document and theorize diverse efforts to eliminate social hierarchies, especially in the Global South, under the term *horizontalidad*: “by attempting to create more direct and open communications, one can hear the other better, and thus break down many of the prejudices and preconceptions we have coming from a society constructed on the hierarchy of difference. From this place of direct listening and building trust new relationships form and old biases and power assumptions begin to break down.”²⁵

Jean Baudrillard’s 1979 work *Seduction* offers some potent observations on surface that shed light on this evolving consideration of the stakes of flatness for theatre and politics. It is no accident that the Baroque façade is the starting point of this discussion, as the “worldly and aesthetic seduction of the baroque” was predicated on what Baudrillard calls a “strategy of mass desire and a society of mass seduction.”²⁶ The façade is seductive—its very flatness intrigues. Though we know full well that it is surface without depth, still we ask, “What lies behind it, beneath it?” Baudrillard describes the compulsion this way: “If you were to see written on a door panel: ‘This opens onto a void.’—wouldn’t you still want to open it?” (75). Interpretation is opposed to seduction. The very impenetrability of surface demonstrates the labor of interpretation. Surface exposes the dynamic of reading that must always seek the latent in the manifest. Seduction is an energy and a movement, and it lays bare this architecture of thought in

²⁴ See Levi Bryant, “Ontological Principles: Flat Ontology” in Levi Bryant, Nick Srnicek, and Graham Harman, eds., *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism* (Melbourne, Australia: re.press, 2011).

²⁵ See S. Motta and A. Gunvald Nilsen, *Social Movements in the Global South: Dispossession, Development and Resistance* (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 262.

²⁶ Jean Baudrillard, *Seduction*, translated by Brian Singer (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1990), 176.

the emergence of meaning. The hermeneutic tradition and, coincidentally, psychoanalysis rely on this depth model.²⁷ Seduction, by contrast, is the postmodern gesture that reveals the desire for desire that is the secret of psychoanalysis. A surface that denies depth inverts this relationship; in its very seductiveness, the surface “turns its back on the deeper order (whether conscious or unconscious) in order to invalidate it, substituting the charm and illusion of appearances” (53).

Of course some surfaces seduce in their “depth”—the *trompe l’oeil* façade. But there is a vertiginous pleasure in this deception, where “[d]epth appears to have been turned inside out” (Baudrillard, 63). The *trompe l’oeil* is simultaneously too full and not full enough. In its flatness, it makes reading impossible, because there is no time for it: “the *trompe l’oeil* functions in weightlessness, as indicated by the vertical backdrop, everything being suspended, the objects, time, even light and perspective” (61). The story of the painter who painted grapes that fooled birds is comical on the face of things; the *trompe l’oeil* is not realer than real, it is a rupture in the real, a break in time and space. In this abyss, Baudrillard writes, we experience “the giddiness of feeling oneself fall” (63).

My interest in the psychological phenomenon of surface derives from a recognition that flatness is full of information and that reference to depth elides or obscures as much as it exposes. Immersion, one might say, “refuses” the flatness of

²⁷ A new form of “surface reading” is now being proposed (or identified) by literary theorists that acknowledges the deficiencies of reading for/in depth and also reminds us that many subjects have been denied both psychological depth and access to it. The 2009 title essay for a special issue of *Representations*, Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus make a powerful argument for surface reading as an “embrace of the surface as an affective and ethical stance,” as well as a “practice of critical description” on its own terms (Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus, “Surface Reading: An Introduction,” *Representations*, vol. 108 no. 1 (Fall 2009), 10, 11.

theatre, which may ultimately be constitutive of theatre as a medium. From the perspective of theatre studies, I will answer how theatre accesses and “broadcasts” this flatness, televisually. Further, if distance is already implied in the word “television,” how does this help us understand the action (or inaction) of that distance, and does performance “do it”? To be sure, debates surrounding the liveness of theatre, or the evanescence of performance, or drama as a form of meaning, or theatre as a corrupting influence were what first attracted me to the subject. If I include a second term, television, the same questions take on new scope and tone; without becoming a scorekeeper in these disputes surrounding presence or semiotics, I will point to the ways that acknowledging the continuity between theatre experience and television experience encourages new and better understandings of what is being argued about.

The Never-New of Media and Performance

We are witnessing a rapidly accelerating deployment of technical stagecraft and a profusion of locative media and communication technology alongside film images, video cameras, amplified sound, and electrical lighting. Some of these features are not new; almost as soon as moving pictures were invented, for instance, they were used on the stage. Nevertheless, there is a difference between how an audience would experience a projected film if they were sitting in a theatre in the 1920s and how they would do so in the present, and that difference is us: we live in a world of media. We are inundated with it, and no one can say entirely or with certainty what far-reaching effects it has had and will have on our capacity to communicate or to empathize with each other. One of the places where people try to work out an understanding of our newly mediatized world is

the stage. Frequently, these attempts take the form of a kind of paranoia, a dystopian world of automatons, a post-human landscape. The decline of character and plot in favor of barrage and collage is one response to a new society predicated on new relationships. Most importantly, we are being immersed (sometimes literally) in theatre pieces that feature the screened or screenal, and this multimedia performance is couched either as a new problem or a new solution, when it is neither. We might call this the problem of the never-new in multimedia performance.²⁸

Normally, we think of theatre and television as different modes or genres, and even as diametrically opposed. In distinction, *Theatre Crossing Television* analyzes the theatre-like qualities of television and the television-like qualities of theatre. I argue that the kind of spectating required or facilitated by both is characterized by several elements: the presence of two audiences, adherence to the unity of place, a two-dimensional stage picture, a performance that is framed or boxed, the ideal vantage point of the King's seat, distanced viewing, a relationship between spectator and performer that oscillates between reciprocity and non-reciprocity, and a performance that the audience is made to believe is created especially for them. In the course of this analysis, I will also look at how, in many (if not all) instances, theatre and television negotiate the twin poles of immersion and anti-immersion, with special emphasis on US practices in the period 1960 to 2015. By immersion, I mean the desire for actual physical contact, verifiable exchanges of information and emotion, and the illusion that one is part of the performance or that the

²⁸ Or, to go one step further, as Bill Blake explains, we are forever being exhorted by theatre boosters whose misplaced “digitally motivated theatre entrepreneurialism” obscures that “what our theatre culture is responding to with respect to the digital is just as uncertain as how it is responding.” Bill Blake, *Theatre and the Digital* (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 11.

world is in your living room. By anti-immersion, I mean gaps, keeping ideas at a safe remove in a fictional world, inserting a critical distance, and sustaining uninterrupted bicameral constructedness.

The 20th century is unique insofar as the technology of television appeared, inaugurating a division of labor between non-immersive television and immersive theatre. It is important to note that film, another cultural form nearly as popular as television and nearly as critically acclaimed as theatre, has also garnered critical attention from theatre theorists. While the relationship between film and theatre as image technologies is relevant to this discussion, the situation of television and theatre offers an isomorphism and an isochrony that is different not just in degree but also in kind.²⁹ Neither theatre nor television seems capable of the same “poetics of total mimesis” that saw decorated cinema interiors from the 1920s give way to undecorated ones, the better to prioritize the screen (Pedullà, 48). While not completely neglecting cinema and how it shaped social interactions in the period 1960 to the present, I focus on the potential commonality between domestic interiors and theatrical interiors.³⁰ During this period of television’s ascendance as a popular cultural form, theatre makers increasingly focused

²⁹ For more on the relationship between film and theatre, see Gabriele Pedullà, *In Broad Daylight: Movies and Spectators After the Cinema* (Brooklyn, NY: Verso Books, 2012). In a lengthy discussion of theatrical staging in a chapter titled “Vitruvius’s Sons,” Pedullà lists the features of cinematic viewing that are holdovers from a type of theatre spectating that predominated in late Renaissance Italy: “Raked stage, perspective scenery (where actors had to play on the forestage to avoid shattering the illusion of depth), strict separation of the completely dark house from the marvelously illuminated stage (by means of the proscenium arch and the curtain): in the course of the sixteenth century we see a multiplication of the strategies that, if followed precisely, would make it impossible for the public to reject the fiction offered to them” (47–48).

³⁰ For an interesting exploration of forms of interiority in theatre, see David Kurnick, *Empty Houses: Theatrical Failure and the Novel* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011).

on excavating/re-creating theatre's immersive functions. I want to show that the immersiveness is what fragmenting achieves, and total effect actually serves to isolate the viewer in a discursive space. There is a sense not only of intimacy but involvement in the production that these performances generate that not even traditional performance art and avant-garde environmental theatre of the 1960s, which try to eliminate the divide between performers and audience, can better. Media theatre makes the resources of performance, the ability to model social relations and critique them, reflect mental constructs and mottle them, available again, in a new way. Media theatre not only incorporates frames as frames within the frame, the proscenium arch; it exerts a pressure on the space of the stage, and raises the question of the place of place in "telematic society."

I identify several theatre artists who keep both immersion and anti-immersion "alive" in their work, among them Robert Whitman and Robert Rauschenberg. Looking closely at their technophilic work leads to the conclusion that theatre's proper distribution might be one that pivots ambivalently between immersion and anti-immersion, holding out on the one hand the complete reversibility of the flow of affects, ideas, and intentions, as well as its impossibility. Theatre may have a unidirectional flow, but this does not mean that there is no congress between audience and stage; only, those flows work differently, and are differently directed, so that a performance is not geared to a solipsistic gathering of intelligences "in" the theatre. Acknowledging and underscoring this potential outcome of traditional theatre-going is ever more important in the opening decades of the 21st century, when so-called immersive theatre predominates as the form

of avant-garde theatre par excellence, and new technologies are paradoxically employed to close the gap opened by theatre's ambiguous anti-immersiveness.

I am looking specifically at contemporary productions in the US that take the technological mediation of theatre in interesting directions, and offer an opportunity to assess the potential these medial forms have to add to and augment theatre and performance's existing obsessions and questions.³¹ Unexpectedly, performances that incorporate screenal media to a large extent might encourage us to see mass media and TV as more similar to the experimental practices of avant-garde theatre. Recorded media, for instance, offers a new kind of ventriloquism that allows for the detachability of subjectivity from subject, with all the seams, leakages, and potential for spooky adherence and spectral adhesion. Contemporary theatre makers do seem intent on expanding the traditional definition of theatre, and theatre scholars have responded by charting the rise of intermedial theatre and immersive theatre (albeit rarely at the same time). In a way, it's possible to look at intermedial theatre as the symptom of an increasingly mediated, virtualized, post-human society lacking in forms of belonging, affirmation, and mutual support, and to see immersive theatre as its cure; however, these twin reactions to shifts in the social allocation of labor and resources, among other things, track similar drives toward immersion and anti-immersion that are a (just-)recognizable

³¹ Christel Stalpaert, Katharina Pewny, Jeroen Coppens and Pieter Vermeulen make a similar argument in their introduction to a 2016 collection of essays called *Unfolding the Spectator* (in an echo of Deleuze's book on Baroque aesthetics, *The Fold*), in what they see as "a paradigm shift from the spectator as a subject-position to a set of what we would like to call historically variable corporeal capacities in co-creation." They advocate the "interplay of media in performance," rather than intermedial theatre as such, because of "the moments of disturbance it causes, highlighting further aspects of spectatorship and interplay of media, which have so far been neglected by Theatre Studies, such as the optical illusion." *Unfolding Spectatorship: Shifting Political, Ethical and Intermedial Positions* (Ghent, Belgium: Academia Press, 2016), 5, 13-14.

component of modern European theatre since the 1600s. In conversation with attempts by critics (and theatre artists) to define and delineate modes of technologically mediated theatre, I'll use these provocations to argue that theatre owes a lot to television (or at least that we need to acknowledge a televisual component to theatre spectating) and, surprisingly, to tennis (in Chapter Three). The resulting study explores what happens when we acknowledge more resemblances across theatre periods and performance traditions, and fewer novelties or revolutions. If intermedial or multimedia theatre and performance is an engaging enigma (with potentially useful things to say about contemporary social formations), then the promise of the ensuing rounds of theatre history and criticism will be that this new idea of televisual theatre will yield some unexpected insights into spectatorship and agency.

By arguing for new candidates for intermedial theatre, or at least new coordinates, I will show how technologically mediated theatre in multimedial form is a paradoxical return to the flatness of a screen. I do so by arguing for the essential televisuality of theatre, as well as charting the increasing prominence of theatre in a televisual key. Is theatre inherently (or at least historically) televisual, as I argue, or is it moving toward a more televisual model thanks to the infusion of technology? Arguably, both things are true, and theatre has “taught” television in ways that have enabled the televisual to find its way back to theatre. Writing in the early 21st century with both historical antecedents and recent developments in mind, it's possible to appreciate and delineate the “serve” and “volley”—the vibratory relationship between theatre and television across the last several centuries.

The Image of Theatre, or the Limits of Intermediality

In addition to the aesthetic dimension, I want to underscore the importance of discussing theatrical media (or the relationship between theatre and media) from an ontological, ethical, and political perspective. The artists I discuss in this dissertation are rarely if ever given any status as political actors or politically minded artists. Allan Kaprow famously wrote, “The modern artist is apolitical...Political expertise belongs to the politician. As with art, only the full-time career can yield results.”³² Artist’s choices and the effects those choices have on their audiences do reflect a real investment in understanding how individuals relate to each other and to themselves—the basis of any political organization. This is especially true in the case of intermedial theatre, with its potentially expedient prefix “inter-.” As Brian Massumi explains with reference to the idea of “inter-”:

[T]o the extent that the in-between is conceived as a space of interaction of already-constituted individuals and societies, middle-feeders end up back on the positional map. The tendency is to describe the in-between as a blending or parody of the always-already positioned. Social change is spatially relegated to precarious geographical margins, where unauthorized positional permutations bubble up from the fermenting mixture. Even more precariously, in the case of theories of subjectivity as performance, change is confined to sites whose “marginality” is defined less by location than the evanescence of a momentary parodic rupture or “subversion.”³³

In this way, a work that pursues questions of mediated liveness or deferred presence not only has implications for the theatre but for society at large. Indeed, theatre’s past-ness, its status as a longstanding institution within and across historical periods, is part of what

³² Allan Kaprow, *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, Lannan Series of Contemporary Art Criticism 3 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 50.

³³ Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 69.

makes it so useful at a time when change seems unrelenting and accelerating. Theatre provides, as Richard Schechner puts it, a “scenographic model for sociometric processes,” and importantly it can function as a backdrop—a static image, perhaps, but one that has the value of showing what has been imagined and achieved previously.³⁴ Putting theatrical media and contemporary media technology into new configurations can help us guard against both Silicon Valley triumphalism and neoliberalism writ large, and remind us of the dangers of the private made public or of the individual removed from the collective.

But even if theatre can help “guard” against the normalization of evolving and ever more destructive social and economic processes, it is by no means clear if it can provide a satisfactory model in and of itself. If theatre can be an image of society, then it is a haunted one. A 2015 book by Joe Kelleher titled *The Illuminated Theatre* anticipated this question, and by way of an answer offers insightful performance critiques of recent work by Romeo Castellucci and other contemporary European theatre makers.³⁵ Kelleher’s title comes from Edmund Husserl, in an evocative passage from *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time*, where what stays in the philosopher’s mind isn’t a play or performance that he attended, but the image of the theatre at night. Writes Kelleher, “we cannot know for sure whether he actually goes to see a show at the theatre or merely passes the theatre building in the street, lit up in the glare of gas-lamps and (as we might imagine it) the glitter and bustle of the assembling crowds. That is because all that the philosopher says is the following: ‘I remember the

³⁴ Richard Schechner, *Performance Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 184.

³⁵ Joe Kelleher, *The Illuminated Theatre: Studies on the Suffering of Images* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

illuminated theatre” (11). Husserl is at pains to explain that he is not recalling his perception of the theatre, his “act of seeing,” but, as Kelleher puts it, “the appearing theatre itself” (11). In this way, Husserl (and Kelleher) detach that theatre from an ongoing act of bodily perception and transpose the theatrical situation into a very different register: the visual or the conceptual, and quite possibly (at least according to Kelleher) the ethical and the political.

Kelleher is a scholar who is truly plagued by visions (the subtitle of the book is “Studies on the Suffering of Images”): “the insidiousness, the seduction, the beauty and the waste of images.” Just as importantly, he’s haunted by questions “about the spectators who generate images upon the bodies of actors and then suffer the images to haunt them, to bother them; and about the actors, the figures in the images, who bear up the images, who suffer the images to exist.” (4). To say that the productions Kelleher writes about in *The Illuminated Theatre* share a common theme would be to miss an important aspect of his theorizing: that the sovereignty of the suffering body obliges witnesses to maintain the difference and singularity of each “image” of suffering. He writes, “this is the sort of relinquishment of certain narrative and imaging operations, and acknowledgement of fractured temporality, I sometimes think, that contemporary theatre grasps intuitively, practically, while recognizing what it cannot help but harbor in its own operations” (9). He illustrates this effect by collecting intriguing works of theatre and performance that continue to work on him long after he leaves the theatre, due to their engrossing visual images, sometimes of bodies in extremis. Drawing on witnessing and the image of suffering as theorized by contemporary philosopher Adi Ophir, who provocatively claims that suffering is a “transmission of sorts,” Kelleher observes that in distinction to the

prevalent idea that a witness's supreme responsibility is to cause the traumatic event to circulate as knowledge in a society that might otherwise forget it, there is an ethical imperative to *dis-engage*: "[i]t strikes me that this demand to disengage, this demand made upon the one who receives that call, who witnesses that suffering, is like a demand made upon the spectator to be there in some other way than she is: to be there still, but differently" (9).

Eager to engage, but differently, I write to assail the impassivity of history and the failure of participatory, interactive theatre.³⁶ I will at times be offering an account of theatrical practice that emphasizes its lack of immersion—its flatness. At other times, I will argue that images we receive televisually exercise a bodily attraction. This is the particular paradox of the televisual, that it presumes both flatness and an excess of dimensionality. Reading Alois Riegl's *Historical Grammar of the Visual Arts* (published posthumously in 1966), Erwin Panofsky's *Perspective as Symbolic Form* (1927), and Hubert Damisch's *The Origin of Perspective* (1994) to find a history of perspective as the flat mechanics of depth, I also look to systems theory for a robust understanding of flatness.³⁷ To flatten a data set by performing an algorithm is to generate new values; so it is with a collage. Flatness, then, is also a form of relation. If perspective is composed in

³⁶ TV is constructed discursively as two-way communication while having no potential for the interaction or interactivity of theatre. Everything is happening at a distance, and we television viewers see everything at a remove, feel everything at a remove. We are not "in" the "moment." How, then, can we affect the material conditions of life? Is not our ability to affect our immediate environment severely curtailed by the fact that we are at "a remove"? I'm trying to explain why we have so little control over our lives, not because we have so little control over the world, but because we have so little feeling that we can affect the world: the construction (theatrically?) (televisually?) of impassivity.

³⁷ See Alois Riegl, *Historical Grammar of the Visual Arts* (New York: Zone Books, 2004); Erwin Panofsky and Christopher Wood, *Perspective as Symbolic Form* (New York: Zone Books, 1991); Hubert Damisch, *The Origin of Perspective*, translated by John Goodman (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994).

the brain, as argued by Hubert Damisch, participation in an image might be constituted in the haptic register, by movement, by belonging. I claim not that television is anti-immersive and theatre immersive (although they can be), but that the stakes of immersion are precisely those of political action, presence, and desire.³⁸ This work builds on an already existing body of literature on perspective in visual studies, scenic design in theatre studies, and audience reception theory in media studies.

W. J. T. Mitchell's writings in art history have substantively shaped how images are discussed in contemporary scholarship. His 2005 book encouraged us to think not only about what viewers want from images but what images themselves want.³⁹ Recent work by Maaïke Bleeker and Jeroen Coppens, among others, has assayed the impact of visual studies on theatre scholarship and performance practice.⁴⁰ Their writings register theatre's limited representativeness not as a deficit but as a defining and enabling quality. The stage has a limit, and that limit is an audience who experience(s) it as an image of the

³⁸ Pedullà's exploration of film's impact on a viewer's political sensibility, or capacity for political thought and action, not surprisingly emerges from the capacity to confine that theatre and cinema appear to share. Inspired by Stanley Cavell's arguments in *World Viewed*, Pedullà writes (in striking language that recalls the immunity previously discussed), "The theatrical or cinematic spectator's stasis, then, is a preamble to action. We would like to intervene, but we cannot. Yet this very discomfort is the theatrical experience's most precious fruit—a sort of vaccine, taken in small doses, with the power to stimulate antibodies necessary for civic life" (Pedullà, 109). He further elaborates: "Instead of being a brake, the audience's voluntary captivity is in the end the most powerful impulse to action. With respect to Aristotelian catharsis, the emotion Cavell speaks of is in fact uniquely capable of liberating the spectator, pushing him to practice in real life the empathy that in the theatre has no outlet" (Pedullà, 111).

³⁹ W. J. T. Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want?: The Lives and Loves of Images* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

⁴⁰ Maaïke Bleeker, *Visuality in the Theatre: The Locus of Looking*, Performance Interventions (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Jeroen Coppens, "Visually Speaking: A Research into Visual Strategies of Illusion in Postdramatic Theatre" (dissertation, Ghent University, 2015), <http://hdl.handle.net/1854/LU-7009093>; Kelleher, *The Illuminated Theatre*.

stage. The image mediates between actor and spectator, subject and object, here and there, then and now. And it holds out the potential that the viewer can enter into it (the image), symbolically, psychologically, imaginatively, and even literally (especially in the case of images created by mirrors, or by a technical apparatus linking media of capture with media of display).⁴¹ I'm also indebted to Rebecca Schneider's writing about the relationship of theatre to photography as both document and that which is documented, in ways that challenge our understanding of the temporal limits of each, and I see my research as responding to Schneider's call in "Intermediality, Infelicity, and Scholarship on the Slip" in *Theatre Survey* to recognize "that theatre's history is not solely theatre's history, but photography's, television's, and cinema's.... Theatre's history bears kinship with 'screenal' media of all sorts as well as media that aim to rupture the screen, such as the multiple media used in processional or durational performance art."⁴² Theatre studies benefits from a truly icono-critical attitude, with special care not only to how theatre is composed as an image but how the image relies on theatrical tropes and performance dynamics. Finally, it is via performance studies that I recognize the multisensorial capability of images. They are not just a channel of visual information, but can and do activate other senses, including touch, taste, and even being in space (proprioception).⁴³

⁴¹ See Martin Jay's chapter "Scopic Regimes of Modernity" in Hal Foster, *Vision and Visuality* (Seattle, WA: Bay Press, 1988).

⁴² Rebecca Schneider, "Intermediality, Infelicity, and Scholarship on the Slip," *Theatre Survey*, vol. 47, no. 2 (November 2006): 253–60. See also "In the Meantime: Performance Remains" in Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

⁴³ Mitchell opens a chapter titled "There Are No Visual Media" with the following assertion: "'Visual media' is a colloquial expression used to designate things like TV, movies, photography, painting, and so on. But it is highly inexact and misleading. All the so-called visual media turn out, on closer inspection, to involve the other senses (especially touch and hearing). All media are, from the standpoint of sensory modality,

Images thus can have a haptic quality, can address the body and not just the eye.⁴⁴ But I argue that this mode of address, especially in theatre, can have the un-looked-for effect of altering our three-dimensional bodies. Could it be that, beckoned to and appealed to by an image, “we” become “one” (image) ourselves?

Contrary to the discourse surrounding visual studies and haptic images discussed above, it’s still common for communications scholars and critics to segregate the effects of media along channels of information delivery. In a study of anthropology and mass communication, Mark Allen Peterson argues that mass media

[d]isrupts the rich multichannel feedback that occurs in face-to-face discourse. Recipients have no immediate, apparent effect on the media they consume through subtle feedback cues. This returns us to the concept of the mass audience. Insofar as the function of mass media is seen as transmission, it would seem they can only be recipients, never participants.”⁴⁵

Culture critic William Irwin Thompson makes a similar argument, reaching back to the Golden Age of Athens and the role of media in that political system:

Drama presented in the open space of Greek theatre was a popular art form that brought the community together in the face-to-face manner that contributed to the open space of direct democracy in the Greek polis. Television, however, now brings forth this new kind of public space, and it calls into being this new world, not of the educated

‘mixed media.’” W. J. T. Mitchell, “There Are No Visual Media,” *Journal of Visual Culture*, vol. 4, no. 2 (August 1, 2005): 257.

⁴⁴ “The philosopher Alois Riegl’s idea of the ‘optical-haptic’ was taken up by Durand and others to explore the notion that when we look at photographs we often move from pure opticality to the optical-tactile as our attention moves from a thing being represented to an awareness of the texture of that thing (for example, the grain of skin or the weave of foliage), until a point is reached where we identify this with the very texture of the photograph itself.” Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart, *Photographs Objects Histories: On the Materiality of Images* (London: Routledge, 2010), 9.

⁴⁵ Mark Allen Peterson, *Anthropology & Mass Communication* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2003), 20.

citizenry of the republic, but of the electropeasantry in the state of Entertainment.⁴⁶

Thompson's rage is palpable, but his observation is no less valid for its bombast.

Democracy in the Age of Media has for many become a dispiriting exercise in passivity: vote not for someone you agree with or can work alongside, but whom you like, an image or brand you want to "participate" in. But the comments above obscure much of what can and should be learned from an "archaeology" of media, in the suggestive phrasing of Erkki Huhtamo and Jussi Parikka.⁴⁷

To ascribe to new media technologies the power to usher in a new age of "interactive" performance, with genuine audience "participation," obscures the long history of theatrical negotiations of spectatorship. I want to get away from "the media" in mediation. When I refer to the tele-visual in 17th-century European theatre, I necessarily cannot speak of television itself, the technology. Neither do I mean those aspects of performance that are well suited to capture by the apparatus of television. What I offer in this dissertation is a history of the tele-visual that acknowledges how television as a way of seeing conditions, conditions, and will continue to condition the reception of performance. Because our social relations have already become flattened, what kinds of modes of representation does theatre become, offer, and, finally, perform?

Theatre is not immune from the rapidly accelerating social change that has produced large scale transformations of political structures at every level, culminating in the form of civil society which now predominates globally. Political systems which held

⁴⁶ William Irwin Thompson, *The American Replacement of Nature: The Everyday Acts and Outrageous Evolution of Economic Life* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 31.

⁴⁷ Erkki Huhtamo and Jussi Parikka, eds., *Media Archaeology: Approaches, Applications, and Implications* (Berkeley, Calif: University of California Press, 2011).

the promise of delivering all the contingent goods of liberal democracy—its freedoms, rights, and liberties—increasingly appear incapable of resisting supranational economic imperatives. Further, the economic system harasses the individual, actively encouraging the atomization of society through the enshrining of consumer preference as the key constitutive element of identity; money dissolves the community and in so doing “becomes the *real community*.”⁴⁸ New expressions of capitalist domination can and must be met with new modes of collectivity: it is imperative to interrogate the relationship between contemporary theatre and political economy from this communitarian perspective. In effect, theatre practitioners ask with new urgency, “What sort of community does theatre make?,” although equally the question could be, “What sort of theatre does ‘community’ make”—“community” figuring as the authentic expression of a social whole that is (and has seemed for some time) increasingly fragmented.

It is not a question of how consensus is formed, but how individuals perceive their participation in the social groupings which are meant to confer meaning. A liberal democracy is above all a *pluralist* democracy; its genius [what do you mean by genius?] is in embracing a multiplicity of viewpoints, in [why IN?] (not too) widely disparate ideas of the good. The potentially explosive interplay of opinion and desire requires the presence of institutions that establish a specific dynamic between consensus and dissent. Indeed, “politics” can never overcome conflict and division; as political theorist Chantal Mouffe explains, “[i]ts aim is to establish unity in a context of conflict and diversity; it is concerned with the formation of a ‘we’ as opposed to a ‘them.’” What is specific of democratic politics is not the overcoming of the we/them opposition but the different way

⁴⁸ David Harvey, *Consciousness and Urban Experience* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 4.

in which it is drawn.”⁴⁹ So, if modern “societies tend to organize self-descriptions by way of an internal boundary of reflection through *protest communication*,” there can be no resolution to the conflict, because the opposed communities would then cease to have any rationale for existence.⁵⁰ When alternative publics are naturalized as social movements, they are perceived in terms of their relation to the state as agents of social change. They enter the temporality of politics and adapt themselves to the *rôle* of ration-critical observers of society, but they do so through their particular lenses of protest and issue; taking any other perspective would amount to acknowledging that one observes society from within society, i.e. in competition with other observations and without any claim to exclusivity. It is precisely this privileging of the exclusive group as a mythic totality that makes real engagement in the political process, or with capital at any level, so difficult: as Daniel Boorstin's “everywhere community” or Benedict Anderson’s “imagined community” suggests, the myth of group identity is everywhere present in the modern world.

The theatrical expression of community: this is the fantasy of a performance or set of performances that is responsive to a discrete locality, featuring a certain set of residents who participate in its planning and execution. Should there exist any actual intent to resist the domination of the state, it “is dissipated because the myth of the community does not take into account its actual political and social construction.”⁵¹ The fantasy life of a community composed in unbounded mutuality destroys any remnant of political life that might have remained. “Community theatre” in this sense is an example

⁴⁹ Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (London: Verso Books, 2001), 101.

⁵⁰ Dirk Baecker, *Problems of Form* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 156.

⁵¹ Jonathan Hill, ed, *Occupying Architecture: Between the Architect and the User* (London: Routledge, 1998), 64.

of a false middle where tensions inherent in any community are patched over in an ineffective attempt to create an idealized condition between individual and state. Space, because it is so bound up in the capitalist domination of humanity, is always “stolen”—it can never truly be emptied out (and thereby filled by theatre).

What sort of community, then, are we talking about [when we talk about what? Where has the term come from in this context?]? On the one hand, the immediate circle of artists at work in the theatre seem to constitute the degree zero of theatre’s community. Consider how Peter Brook describes the functioning of the Living Theatre’s “nomadic community” in his 1968 treatise on theatre “rough” and “holy, *Empty Space*:

[The Living Theatre] provides a complete way of life to every one of its members, some thirty men and women who live and work together; they make love, produce children, act, invent plays, do physical and spiritual exercises, share and discuss everything that comes their way. Above all, they are a community; but they are only a community because that have a special function which gives their communal existence its meaning. This function is acting. Without acting the group would run dry: they perform because the act and fact of performing corresponds to a great shared need. They are in search of meaning in their lives, and in a sense even if there were no audiences, they would still have to perform, because the theatrical event is the climax and center of their search.⁵²

The Living Theatre is a community for “practical” reasons: it has the ability to generate income and sustain itself economically as well as spiritually. And it does so by drawing a rent from the audience it only needs for this “incidental” purpose. At nearly the same historical moment, Victor Turner’s important anthropological study of ritual process, published in 1966, demonstrated how performance (and especially performance’s ability to negotiate transitions and borders) contributes

⁵² Peter Brook, *The Empty Space* (London: Penguin Books, 2008 [1968]), 62

to the maintenance of community in a wide variety of contexts.⁵³ When Performance Studies theorists have applied this insight to theatre and performance, they often find themselves corroborating it without much comment. Recently, however, a number of theorists from a diversity of perspectives have addressed how theatre's community and the community that theatre creates function alongside and within larger ideas of community. This is alongside pre-existing and longstanding research into applied theatre and theatre for social change that has always taken as a first principle that the community forms a reservoir that theatre productions and associated performances activate in different ways. For theatre scholars draw on philosophical sources such as Giorgio Agamben's "The Coming Community," Esposito's *Immunitas*, or Jean-Luc Nancy's *The Inoperative Community* (1985, published in 1991).⁵⁴ Each of these works in specific ways seeks to deconstruct the notion of community. Another common approach, exemplified by Christopher Balme, is to combine the insights of Jurgen Habermas and Benedict Anderson into a rearticulation of the public sphere in theatrical terms: theatre becoming an instance of public space, which itself relies on theatrical methods to circulate meanings.⁵⁵

Theatre can often function as a mimesis of community—representing a real thing, but in a fictional frame. In the introduction to their 2016 edited volume *Critical*

⁵³ Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (New Brunswick: Aldine Transaction, 2011 [1968]).

⁵⁴ Giorgio Agamben and Michael Hardt, *The Coming Community* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993); Roberto Esposito, *Immunitas: The Protection and Negation of Life* (Malden, MA: Polity, 2011); Jean-Luc Nancy and Peter Connor, *The Inoperative Community* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).

⁵⁵ Christopher Balme, *Theatrical Public Sphere* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

Perspectives on Applied Theatre, Jenny Hughes and Helen Nicholson detail the 20th century history of these strains in the practice of theatre, showing how theatre professionals began to self-consciously consider certain of the productions they undertook for audiences to be “community theatre” and later “applied drama.”⁵⁶ A 2017 call for papers from the *Theatre & Performance Research Association* (TAPRA), asked for contributions about how “theatre and performance practices, alongside their theorisation, work to reveal or resolve political aporias currently emerging in the public sphere,” further asking “What can this work do to push beyond rational or indeed irrational frames of representation?”⁵⁷

Philosopher Jacques Rancière’s 2004 address to the 5th International Summer Academy, later published with additional material as *The Emancipated Spectator*, is an extended meditation on the potential for participatory action and theatrical space, (from the) inside and (from the) out(side). To get at the ambivalences and paradoxes within theatrical practice, he casts theatre as an institution divided against itself, a conflicted amalgam of divergent attitudes and impulses. Theatre is its own judge and jury, speaking from both stage and house, as it were: “Theatre accuses itself of rendering spectators passive and thereby betraying its essence as community action. It consequently assigns itself the mission of reversing its effects and expiating its sins by restoring to spectators ownership of their consciousness and their activity. The theatrical stage and performance thus become a vanishing mediation between the evil of spectatorship and the virtue of

⁵⁶ Jenny Hughes and Helen Nicholson, *Critical Perspectives on Applied Theatre* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

⁵⁷ “Performance, Identity and Community: Frames of Legibility,” *Theatre & Performance Research Association*, accessed July 15, 2017, <http://tapra.org/performance-identity-and-community-frames-of-legibility/>.

true theatre.”⁵⁸ Referencing Brechtian and Artaudian paradigms, which both in their own way have internalized the idea that a spectator is a “bad thing” to be, he proposes that “theatre is presented as a mediation striving for its own abolition,” while a few pages later he notes “[t]he refusal of mediation, the refusal of the third, is the affirmation of a communitarian essence of theatre as such” (13, 16). But perhaps it is not so much the theatre that is to blame, but certain practices that articulate it; looking more closely at what Rancière says, it is that theatre is “presented” as an art form at war with itself, seeking its own abnegation in the collapse of the first and the second in an ecstasy of communication. So it might be possible for theatre, finally, to move beyond the fear that theatre has to move beyond “itself.” This appears to be the unvoiced outcome of a conjecture Rancière makes toward the end of his lecture: Rancière observes that “live” theatre increasingly incorporates recorded media, which does not challenge the belief in its community and collectivity-affirming attributes:

Projected images can be conjoined with living bodies or substituted for them. However, as long as spectators are assembled in the theatrical space, it is as if the living, communitarian essence of theatre were preserved and one could avoid the question: what exactly occurs among theatre spectators that cannot happen elsewhere? What is more interactive, more communitarian, about these spectators than a mass of individuals watching the same television show at the same hour? (16)

His answer: the powerful presupposition that theatre is “in and of itself communitarian.” Technologically mediated theatre, however, by posing the question, might also serve to undo this same powerful belief while restoring the validity of the distance necessary to theatre and performance. By way of conclusion, “[w]hat our performances—be they teaching or playing, speaking, writing, making art or looking at it—verify is not our

⁵⁸ Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator* (London: Verso Books, 2014), 13.

participation in a power embodied in the community. It is the capacity of anonymous people, the capacity that makes everyone equal to everyone else. This capacity is exercised through irreducible distances; it is exercised by an unpredictable interplay of associations and disassociations” (17).

Theatre has a conundrum at its center, and that is its own antagonism (or at least its role as an instigator, a questioner of hierarchies, an additive that disrupts the orderliness of the social, etc.) to the public and public-ness vs. the individual and the private. An article by Simon Bayly that appeared contemporaneously with the publication of Rancière’s lecture in book form also comments on theatre’s potential for speaking to how the public (both theatre’s public, the audience, but also the public more broadly) is an emanation and mediation of its fractional components (ironically, by exploring a performance that does not take place in a theatre). In “Theatre and the Public,” Bayly contends that Rancière’s “deconstructive logic [suggests] that the suppression of the distance between actor and spectator might actually be constitutive of that same distance....”⁵⁹ Bayly describes a work called *Je et Nous* (a possible English translation could be “I and Us,” but the title of the work in French can also sound like a homophone that would translate “I Am Us”) by the collective Campement Urbain: the creation and maintenance of a space for solitary contemplation within a local open space on the outskirts of Paris. It proposes “a place open to everyone, where people can step away from the community under the protection of the community... [not] a place for hanging out and getting together but a ‘one-seater,’ as it were, where people can sample the attractions of solitude” (Bayly, 21). Above all, Bayly claims, “what matters is that right-

⁵⁹ Simon Bayly, “Theatre and the Public,” *Radical Philosophy* (2009), 25, accessed March 7, 2017, <https://www.radicalphilosophy.com/article/theatre-and-the-public>.

thinking spectators and performers become both narrators and readers of their own stories and do not succumb to the incoherent temptations of pseudo-activity, pseudo-collectivity, or pseudo-community” (25). Like Rancière, and connecting to Husserl in an interesting way, Bayly lands on the idea that “the concept of appearance itself...may be problematically structured via a kind of rudimentary theatricality in which one is *either* actor *or* spectator, onstage or offstage, visible or invisible, in the streets en masse or sequestered in private.” This problem can only be overcome when, instead of traditional theatre arrangements, “other configurations of secularization—with different temporal and spatial dimensions—are at work” (29). Lest this diagnosis and cure sound distressingly like a recipe for immersive, participatory theatre, we must remember that the success of *Je et Nous* for Bayly hinges on the right *not* to speak, *not* to participate, even as it maintains the “prescribed individual acts of critical imagination,” so long as these are not thought out in advance in service of an artistic goal or outcome (22). For Campement Urbaine in their staging of *Je et Nous*, the audience exists as a principle of receptivity, not its condition. This receptivity inheres whether or not the audience’s actual existence does or does not lead to it making “its” presence known. Complicating the typical role a spectator plays “for” a performance (for instance, making a communal response visible), *Je et Nous* is a radical proposal for an audience member to play a role of his or her own choosing.

Chapter Overview

This dissertation provides an overview of theatre “experiments” with communicating across the actor/audience divide (in both directions), specifically focusing

on theatre and performance by predominantly US-based artists between 1960 and the present. To do so, it introduces the idea of “theatre crossing television” as a way to think about how theatre’s most recognizable features—the co-presence of the audience, the delimited duration and spatial extent of a performance (its “event-ness”), its unpredictability or irreproducibility—might occlude ways of understanding how theatre, the same art form, can appeal to multiple audiences (present, distant, imagined, and absent), occur in multiple places or in temporally distributed form, and provide a record of historical events and attitudes that belies its seeming novelty. For theatre professionals and theatre historians, I make a case for historical accounts that focus on continuities, yes, but also discontinuities, and forms of continuity that are continuous only insofar as they recycle previous modes in new circumstances (akin to atavism in the life sciences). For everyone else who goes to theatre and cares about our world, I also hope to give an account of the community that happens in the theatre and how that relates to community outside of the theatre.

Chapter One: Introduction

I began in this introductory chapter by exploring how theatre’s foremost illusionistic gambit is its seeming depth in “Remarks on Flatness.” Yes, theatrical playing space has/is a volume, but there are strict limits to its extent and, above all, to what can enter into it. Theatre can and does celebrate surfaces and the play of/at the surface, whether in mirrors, masks, or the seductive confusion of *trompe l’oeil*. Surfaces have begun to feature increasingly in daily life, in the form of screens, and this change is reflected in theatre productions that incorporate screens and that interrogate screenality to

various degrees. What this incorporation sometimes obscures, in critical accounts of theatre practice, is theatre's pre-existing flatness, its flatness as a medium, rather than a medium that accommodates the flatness of other media. One interesting potential corollary of seeing theatre as a two-dimensional medium (against all evidence) is that the audience (though perhaps not individual audience members) also is drawn to the status and condition of image. This is connected to the kind of thinking that can cross medial forms, either in the form of interdisciplinarity or intermediality. This is not such a new concept—theatre comes from the Greek, meaning place of seeing, and has always relied on images. New kinds of seeing (satellites, streaming video, etc.) might not so much show theatre's limits as suggest how theatre's ability to see and be seen always "exceeded" human vision. The phrase "theatre crossing television" is one way to suggest how theatre exceeds "itself" (i.e., our previous understanding of it) by way of pointing to its commonalities with a form—television—that appears to offer new powers, new possibilities. Arguably, theatre has always had this hidden potential, a potential that has sometimes appeared in startling and unexpected places—such as 17th-century France, as described in the opening section of the following chapter, "The Magic of Theatre."

Chapter 2: "Television-Like Qualities of Theatre,"

This chapter takes up ideas of audience presence and absence by discussing a series of theatre examples: the text of a French Neoclassical tragic-comic play, productions and criticism by artists and scholars working in the idiom of technologically mediated theatre, and a contemporary production of a Baroque opera. The central goal of each intervention, such as looking at the circumstances of Jean-Baptiste Lully's *Atys* aka

“The King’s Opera” (1676/2011), alongside the nightly news, is to arrive in the current moment with a better understanding of the ways that theatrical audiences are conceived and addressed. This understanding takes the form of the multiple ways that theatre spectating is “like” television viewing: two audiences, deferred or displaced liveness, a flat or flattened playing space, boxiness, specific viewing angles, oscillation between one-way and two-way communication, seeing at a distance, and a feeling that a performance is especially for the viewer. I’ll explain how a performance that can be streamed live to an audience in different places, or that features material that was recorded at a different time and place, or that is being disassembled and reassembled through media interventions in the real time of performance in front of an audience, nevertheless offers a vision of audience and community that actually illuminates and augments the one associated with traditional theatre.

In the first part, I discuss a 1636 play by Pierre Corneille, who is justifiably famous for his contribution to theatre and theatre history, both for the scripts he wrote and the controversy they engendered (cf. the *Le Cid* controversy). His *Illusion Comique* reflects how the constraints of neoclassical theatre—on time, on place, on action—generated a novel solution that showcases theatre’s ability to extend the audience’s range of view. While the play’s novel reordering of space and perception is usually interpreted as a form of metatheatrical commentary, it also represents the potential of televisual theatre not just to comment on relationships inside the playhouse but those outside it as well. Since its advent, theatre makers have used the technology of television in various ways, often with the intent of dramatizing the difficulty of accessing the so-called truth of a character, narrative, or idea. Following my analysis of *Illusion Comique*, I will examine

how artists and theorists working in contemporary theatre are deeply invested in an idea of intermedial or immersive theatre that offers a way for theatre to renew itself through new scenic, audio, and video technologies.

Certainly, attending the theatre and watching a play can be a frustrating or confounding experience. And if we stop to think about it, our experiences are just as often about being out of synch—before or after an imagined experience (of spectating, even). This is instantiated by television, especially as augmented by video. Television, a flow carried along by time, seems to retain aspects of liveness (recorded and broadcast in real time) even when accessed remotely and at a temporal remove. In a section about recent performances at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, I ask if the same is true of a video recording of live performance, and I attempt to enumerate the aspects of theatre spectating that can be re-created by watching a recording. While a viewer can't have the same level of "access" to a performance when watching it on a video screen (notably, he/she can't interrupt the performance, whether intentionally or not), the viewer becomes a "second" audience that nevertheless retains key attributes of the "first" audience.

I was watching theatre on a "box," or in one (a television and a theatrical loge). But this is the viewing situation of nearly all theatregoers in the present, a legacy of theatre history in the West that continues to impact performance traditions across cultures. Yes, some theatrical productions break the frame by leaving the theatre, as it were, but the norm is to enter an enclosed space for playing. The examples from the previous chapter, both from 17th-century France, each originally took place indoors, in purpose-built spaces for theatre and music. Theatre, then, has an inherent boxiness. It is a container that we must enter into, and this of course encourages us to imagine that we

enter into and engage the dramatic spectacle as well. This discussion is complicated by the prominence, especially in France in the early modern period, of spectators seated onstage, who themselves engaged in performances of display and selective attention that mirrored what occurred in the house. By the 19th century, conventions of the playing space consolidated around the idea that the stage is an inviolate area screened off by the fourth wall. Art galleries are “white cubes,” and experimental theatre labs and flexible theatre spaces with a minimum of décor are known as “black boxes.” Purpose-built sets for television were also generally configured as cubes, to economize on set dressing.

Chapter 3: Synchronizing Theatre: Art and Technology

The work of 20th-century artist Joseph Cornell offers a prominent example of suggestive boxiness. Cornell’s works offer an intriguing blend of history and fantasy when they combine images we recognize from popular culture with ones from long-forgotten eras. They encourage us to reflect on how biographies are created and how our own lives have been impacted by history in ways we both can and cannot recognize. This is the “force illegible” that Simic credits in my opening epigraph. A Cornell box appears to contain its meaning, but there is nothing straightforward about this. Even more unusual, the viewer frequently encounters himself or herself seeming to beckon from inside the box, when his or her image is reflected in the glass pane forming its semi-permeable face. Importantly, the box is not truly permeable. Incursion is not possible. Deeper layers of meaning are not accessible. There is no drawing back of the curtain to reveal an inner core or kernel of truth. Instead, the box in its boxiness is a prompt for the viewer to recognize the masquerade of identity, or perhaps history. If you did not have

access to the interior of the box you couldn't know that it was a masquerade, but now that you do you see it's no longer a masquerade. You are confronted by both modes at once, but this perception comes from outside the box, outside the "world" of the box. The combination of secret meaning and overt display of these collages has led critics to describe Cornell's work as theatrical, and some have taken it one step further and described actual stage sets as Cornell boxes. (Not surprisingly, this is a reference to how Mel Gussow evokes the ambiance Richard Foreman frequently created in his productions for the stage.) I will briefly discuss how Foreman's staging techniques play with stage depth and surface, and how this connects with his ideas about theatre and its relationship to publicness and privacy.

Next, I discuss a performance that hinges on technological means to alter the stage environment: microphones and speakers to impact the sonic space, radio-controlled lighting to change the visual palette. Of course, the techniques Robert Rauschenberg used in *Open Score* (1966) are now ubiquitous in all forms of theatre and performance. At the outset when these technologies were becoming more widespread, both the Fluxus movement (with which Rauschenberg and other artists I discuss were associated) and the collaborations between artists and engineers in the Art + Technology initiative (which facilitated *Open Score*) explored how theatre ambivalently offered a space and a vocabulary for innovative experimentation and a means of "remediating" previous forms. Interestingly, though *Open Score* did not feature a screen or screenal technology (other performances that were part of *9 Evenings* did), it nevertheless sheds light on our emerging understanding of theatre as a machine for simulating and dissimulating depth by virtue of its mimesis of a tennis match. The performance is striking in its simplicity.

The absence of representational performance elements (beyond the representativeness of the human body itself, and tennis, etc.) highlights and emphasizes the viewing behavior of the audience. In this way—like John Cage’s infamous piano score 4’33” that eliminated struck piano keys for the purposes of isolating performance elements that are usually ignored, such as the bodily attitudes of the audience, acoustic properties of a room, etc.—Rauschenberg’s *Open Score* proposes and produces the receptivity of the audience as an audience, by intervening with technology in the typical circuit of affects and perceptions. The theatrical tennis match was punctuated and interrupted by the very communication technologies used to disseminate it.

The preceding discussion of a theatrical tennis match summons the image of the theatre’s obscure origin in tennis, “theatre” in this case referring to the space where the drama is performed (as was discussed earlier in the section about purpose-built theatre buildings in early modern France). A performance that makes this link vividly apparent is Liz LeCompte’s version of Racine’s *Phèdre* (1677/2002), called *To You, the Birdie!* The birdie referenced in the title is the shuttlecock of an onstage badminton game that maintains and intersperses the performance. This show is part of a trilogy of 17th-century plays the Wooster Group produced in the early 2000s that prominently featured screenal technology in a style that theatre scholar Branislav Jakovljevic calls “Wooster Group Baroque.” Alongside insightful commentary on the production, Jakovljevic examines the surprising relevance of the Baroque in contemporary and specifically postmodern cultural products. This follows from the crucial insights of philosophers such as Deleuze and Foucault, who have resuscitated early modern figures and modes of reasoning, almost as a way of contesting modernity from its inside. Jakovljevic cites contemporary

commentators who point to how our era recapitulates features from the early modern period: rapid advances in communications technology, abrupt shifts in population patterns, major shifts in economic and social relation, and an undermining of long-held assumptions about identity and what it means to be human. But even as Jakovljevic's review of *To You, the Birdie!* does elegantly detail how fitting it is for Racine's play to be given the Wooster Group "treatment," I'd like to offer a corollary: the show exposes not only how literary strategies (and even scenographic techniques) from previous historical periods remain viable in the present, but also how present conditions (and even technologies, or technological modes) seem paradoxically present in the period. *To You, the Birdie!* is thus televisual to the extent that the incorporation of present-day communications technology exposes how 17th-century France already contained the kernel of television, if we understand television as a mode of coordinating audience receptivity and interactivity. In ways that we now take for granted, television presents the possibility that you can enter into previous moments as if they were present moments, and also perhaps conceptually link a near-at-hand place with a distant one (the world in your living room).

Stated this way, of course theatre has always relied on "television" for its magic. But the peculiar purchase of the stage with regard to synchronicity and synchronization owes a great deal to its flatness, which I will explore through Robert Whitman's *Prune Flat* (1965). *Prune Flat* is a performance by two actors who insert themselves into the space created by a film projection. In this case the film consists of scenes that have been pre-staged for/by the camera for performance interaction during its projection. The "seeming" interaction, though impossible, is by turns humorous, intriguing, and

beguiling. The actors at different times of superimposition are completely matched, slightly matched, or not matched at all. This new index of acting competence—the ability to coordinate one’s movements with a moving image—leads to a set of questions about interactivity, screens, and embodiment in an era where screens proliferate. It seems to call for a new understanding of images and their relationship to dimensionality, a subject that Czech media theorist Vilém Flusser addresses in *Into the Universe of Technical Images*. Flusser argues that technical images have a different relationship to reality than traditional ones; rather than failing to adequately represent the world they purport to capture, they now serve to compose the world according to their own logic. I will also discuss a more recent production by Whitman, *Passport* (2011). Though Whitman was a major player in the 1960s, he is now more of a footnote; perhaps his work is too “televisual”—too anti-immersive in an era when experimental theatrical practice has gravitated toward the immersive. I am not interested in offering a new candidate for the ur-site of mediatheatre, so much as in questioning why Whitman’s work and that of art performers like him does not feature more prominently in accounts of postwar theatrical experiment, which often focus instead on the twin impulses to foreground theatre ritual (e.g., the Living Theatre) or to eliminate theatre altogether (e.g., Grotowski). Both of these routes obscure how theatre, at least since the 17th century, has been televisual, a technology for exploring the divide between public and private, stage and audience, command and exchange. If media technology does offer a “newness” now, it might be in the truly telematic performance of the kind that Whitman choreographed simultaneously in Beacon, New York, and Montclair, New Jersey. But the truth of this theatre “piece” is bound up in the very same questions of person (the personal), flatness (abstraction), the

televisual (crossing), and sincerity/irony that theatre makers have trafficked in since the early modern period.

Chapter 4: Pursuing Theatre's Community

In the last chapter, I collect the insights about coordination, participation, and involvement derived from different theatrical and art-historical examples to examine more closely the form of community that theatre engenders. Theatre and television both seem to promise community, but they actually deliver something that is not community (and which might be immunity). Community is a subject of considerable interest and debate among contemporary scholars of theatre and performance, from discussions of theatre as a public sphere to the potential for fleeting utopian moments of community formation. Likewise, television and media scholars trace competing ideas of how television produces and maintains communities of viewers, consumers, and producers (see Richard Serra's *Television Delivers People*). Sometime-sculptor Allan Kaprow's *18 Happenings* (1959) is only infrequently discussed as part of theatre's lineage (and only then by way of the "paratheatrical" performance genre of the happening it helped inspire and shape). It's even less likely to be talked about by television scholars, but its staging is strangely reminiscent of a TV set, as well as Joseph Cornell's boxes. Importantly, the way the piece interrogates event and event-ness has enduring implications for an understanding of theatre as a coordination of times and places. Twenty years later, another sculptor would also turn to theatrical situations to explore his ideas about space and spacing: Dan Graham. In Graham's hands (though in the case of *Performer/Audience/Mirror* [1975] he's actually working with his voice), the psychology of the audience becomes a key (the sole!) ingredient in a performance that explores

community, projection, and the space of the stage. This experiment, and others by Graham, modeled television's role in structuring our social experiences, but also featured theatrical situations that confronted the viewer with an image of her own desire for contact.

Taking the premise of closely attending to audiences to a different kind of extreme, the final section involves thinking about oneself as an audience of one's own work. I revisit a performance I staged before beginning this project that has propelled and inspired it, *Pleasure Dome* (2009). This play re-created a 1960s television studio in a black box space for the primary purpose of creating a present absent audience; my collaborators and I were interested in new kinds of acting and spectating that might serve to short-circuit the typical route of empathic identification by mimicking television, a medium we (wrongly) believed was impervious to it. Or really, what we hoped was that television inside the theatre would have the effect of eclipsing theatre's "magic circle" (a term introduced by Johan Huizinga and taken up notably by Peter Brook in *The Empty Stage*), and theatre would have the effect of negating its ability to disseminate information from a really-existing outside.⁶⁰ What we learned by probing the viability of the category of the televisual, as a performance methodology, as a critical apparatus, and as a structuring element in our lives, is how theatre relies on television-like qualities of spacing and coordination that ultimately determine the type of community it can create.

This introductory chapter has established many of the frameworks for discussing intermedial performance, mediality, television, audience, and community—but with a difference. This difference, that of thinking of theatre and television together on a

⁶⁰ Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955 [1938]).

continuum, will be put to the test in Chapter 2. The production, reception, and dissemination of plays and performances seems to be undergoing a sea change, and theatre now relies more and more on a feeling of liveness and intimacy that is recognizable as a quality of *television*, insofar as television has always had to “cover over” the distances that it covers. Theatre that is dispersed in time and space by the displacement of performers, performance elements, audience members, and audiences requires not so much a new term (reflecting a new form of theatre) as a greater historical awareness of precursors and theatrical precedent. “Theatre Crossing Television” is an analytic proposition born out of a critical reappraisal of television and theatre practice in the postwar American context. It also relies on enigmatic excursions into other performance terrains, notably French neo-classical drama. It may seem unwise, given the unlikelihood of the premise that theatre is television, to push it further with a corollary: television as we know it “began” in 17th-century France. This is meant to underscore some commonalities across performance forms and historical periods that are too often siloed by academic convention.

Chapter 2: Belonging and Being Beckoned: The Television-Like Qualities of Theatre

In the following chapter, I will discuss theatre as television. This calls to mind images from the early, golden days of television when programming often meant contemporary drama screened live before a home audience. And it might conjure the use of television's mass "appeal" to reach audiences inured to theatre's charms, so that the British Broadcasting Company could ensure that Shakespeare's plays had some continuing relevance in a TV-dominated cultural landscape. Or it could mean more recent experiments in live-streaming performance that turn computers into receivers for a networked/dispersed performance that only fully exists on the internet. My contention that "theatre is television" is not some semantic game, emphasizing the theatre-like qualities of television and the television-like qualities of theatre to such a degree that the two modes of communication merge into an amalgam called theatre-vision (although this might describe some recent blockbuster multimedia spectacles on the stages of Las Vegas Casinos, the West End, or the Metropolitan Opera). Instead, I explore the twin impulses in the European performing tradition that seem to pull it in opposite directions: immersion, on the one hand, and a kind of anti-immersion that does not oppose or negate immersion as such but acknowledges and even validates the reciprocity of performer and audience that is only ever a near or quasi-reciprocity.

The Magic of Television and the Illusion of Theatre

In 1637, the Parisian theatre world erupted into a frenzied debate surrounding a new play by Pierre Corneille. The "*Le Cid* Controversy," as it came to be known,

centered on the playwright's supposed violation of the reigning orthodoxy in dramatic writing at the time—the three unities of place, time, and action. As outlined by Ludivico Castelvetro, these unities require that the playwright exercise his ingenuity to create a scenario that can unfold in real time in front of an audience. Yes, the theatre could “transport” the audience anywhere and anytime and show them anyone, but after that imaginative and dramaturgical leap has been made, all human laws and natural ones return to order the ensuing spectacle. The challenge for the writer of plays that respected this limitation was to select a moment (or a three-hour series of moments) that would completely express the single action that the play was meant to describe and explain. While the French Academy worked tirelessly to police these guidelines, stage architects and designers were engaged in their own process of molding and remolding the theatrical paradigm.

Various sources on baroque theatre explore changes in scenic design in France during the period 1600–1700 that reflect differing assumptions about the plasticity of stage space and, importantly, the activity that was taking place in the audience.⁶¹

The brief discussion of the characteristics of theatre in Western Europe in the early modern period that follows underscores the push and pull of theatrical architecture and

⁶¹ See canonical accounts of theatre history by T. E. Lawrenson, *The French Stage and Playhouse in the XVIIth Century: A Study in the Advent of the Italian Order* (New York: AMS Press, 1986); William L. Wiley, *The Early Public Theatre in France* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press Publishers, 1972); George Kernodle, *From Art to Theatre* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1964); and Margarette Baur-Heinhold, *The Baroque Theatre: A Cultural History of the 17th and 18th Centuries* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1968). More recent studies of French neoclassical theatre highlight salient features such as the negotiation of public and private identity and the intersection of sovereignty and ideology; see Kristiaan P. Aercke, *Gods of Play: Baroque Festive Performances as Rhetorical Discourse* (Albany: State University of New York, 1994); Barbara Mittman, *Spectators on the Paris Stage in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1984).

dramatic technique that continues to this day, but it has particular relevance when discussing French theatre forms that by the beginning of the 17th century came to harden around the tennis court theatre. Seen from our perspective, theatre “evolved” toward its present form, but at each moment in this progression, competing elements led to different articulations of the form.

During the Middle Ages, theatrical space had been dramatically reconfigured. Secular drama in purpose-built theatres gave way to religious spectacles meant to aid the faithful in understanding and interpreting biblical mysteries. These were performed in obvious readymade spaces: the naves and narthexes of the church itself. Gothic churches and church forms evolved slowly over this period, and the eventual shapes they took over time determined the scenic element that predominates in these church “theatres”: simultaneous staging. Within discrete sections of the church, distinct scenes would be played out in front of backdrops (“mansions”) that became increasingly elaborate. Small make-shift stages were constructed in naves of churches and chapels to allow for events widely separated in time and space—up to and including places of eternal torment and everlasting delight. Church drama, then, lacked a central playing space, and also made it difficult for audiences to watch each story unfold in its entirety without moving around.

Beginning in Italy and Spain in the late 16th century, purpose-built venues were an enormous improvement in allowing for larger numbers of stationary spectators than before, but they created new challenges for theatre makers and their audiences. Theatregoers and actors no longer shared the same space: the interior of a church, or the public square in an open-air performance. A section of these Spanish proto-theatres was set aside for playing, and another part for watching. Could the part of the room for

watching see more than one place for playing? How would it be possible to save the scenic space from a visual cacophony of competing stage locations? In Spain, this was solved by the use of a shutter stage, to shuttle between spaces. Only one half of the stage was used at any one time, while the other side was decorated for its ensuing location. In this way, the stage could show several locations albeit no longer at the same time/at once.⁶² Elizabethan theatre makers later solved this problem by wiping the stage completely between scenes, using the well-known technique of linguistic scenery (e.g., “Here we find ourselves in the Forest of Arden”). French dance extravaganzas from the late 16th century used a similar technique, employing movable three-dimensional sculptures and set pieces for dancers to maneuver around. But with the increasing sophistication of perspectival scenery, “plein-air” staging was replaced by theatre spectacle in front of impressively painted canvas backdrops. French theatre employed a different form of the multiple stage known as the “ferme,” for (en-)closing. Doors onstage could lead to progressively more interior and intimate spaces. A palace in Act One could lead to a prison cell in Act Two—and this was considered the great strength of theatre, to showcase reversals, set-backs, and rebounds, instantiated as much by stage dressing as by stage action.

A rising population, years of good harvests, and increasing trade contributed to the emergence of a nascent bourgeoisie in provincial capitals and especially in Paris. So it is not surprising that it was in Paris (and Lyons and Rouen) that what had largely been

⁶² It is instructive that Corneille’s play *Le Cid* derives from a Spanish source (an anonymous chivalric romance, *Los Mocedades de Rodrigo*), as it also represents a French innovation in staging that is itself indebted to Iberian antecedents. The “multiple stage” of Spain (as William Shoemaker’s book about Spanish theatre in the period immediately preceding and including the Golden Age is called) was a source for a major change in how stage space was distributed and interpreted.

itinerant performance troupes became more regularized. Two groups in Paris took up “residence” in the waning years of the 16th century. Although not stable enough to erect theatre facilities of their own, they did colonize available spaces and annexed them to the performance calendar. Propitiously, just as theatre was becoming the rage, interest in a form of competitive indoor play—an ancestor of today’s tennis—was falling out of favor. The presence of empty *jeu de paume* arenas and the need for performance venues was opportune. The tennis courts proved excellent for the staging of productions first created for a traveling theatre company. In his book *The First Frame*, Pannill Camp dwells on a sort of “curse” of the tennis court—not only the manifest unsuitability of repurposed tennis courts for performance but also the durability of the form of the narrow rectangular box well after purpose-built theatres began to be erected.⁶³ When we attend the theatre today, we are still in an important sense in a viewing situation descended from the game of indoor tennis.

Travelling theatre companies that were accustomed to performing in ad hoc theatres and outdoors adapted to this more regular space. Audiences in effect were witnessing outdoor theatre in indoor spaces, though the forms of these productions began to change in time and especially as purpose-built theatres altered the dynamics of seating and ticket selling. This configuration also retained, according to Darren Gobert, “the memory of an earlier kind of theatre-going, with its intermingling actors and spectators (allowed not only to sit on the stage but also to wander backstage if the mood struck); it thus encouraged its inhabitants to perform the same seepages—between self and other, inner and outer, individual and collective—that the play’s characters understand as

⁶³ Pannill Camp, *The First Frame: Theatre Space in Enlightenment France* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

passionate, bloody contamination.”⁶⁴ Theatre’s cultural prominence in this time period can be traced, on the one hand, to an upsurge in theatrical activity tied to improved economic conditions. At the same time, because the places where performance occurred took on an increasingly heterogeneous cast, the theatre’s appeal lay as much in the fact that attending was by its very nature an occasion to mix with people of different stations and backgrounds, who you might not ordinarily share an intimacy with. Performance venues—whether converted tennis court, purpose-built playhouse, or court theatre—provided a peculiarly public space for the exchange of privacy: glances, overheard remarks, glimpses of skin, gleaming eyes, intoxicating smells, and, perhaps most importantly, affects. The danger of this exchange may in part have motivated the French Academy to attempt a form of theatrical regulation, that while falling short of censorship nevertheless greatly impacted the shape that drama took during the second half of the 1600s and beyond. The credible, almost stale, way that plots unfolded in this time period does not mean that great emotion or intrigues were not possible, only that they resulted from intricate mechanisms at the heart of the play, set in motion by an all-powerful God. Playwrights increasingly came to respect the so-called unities of place, time, and action, inherited from Italian scholars who believed they were accurately and transparently disseminating the tenets Aristotle identified as essential to the drama in his *Poetics*.

As the theatres became more settled, the limitations of tennis courts as performance spaces not only became apparent, but operative, spawning adaptation and accommodation. Play makers and play goers increasingly made themselves at home.

⁶⁴ R. Darren Gobert, *The Mind-Body Stage: Passion and Interaction in the Cartesian Theatre* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013), 14. The play he is discussing in this quote happens to be Racine’s *Phèdre*, which premiered at the Hotel de Burgogne in 1677.

They were well-established by the time dramatists and acting troupes who relied on the patronage of influential aristocrats and, above all, the French king began to seek out opportunities to perform outside of the court circuit. This progression presents an interesting conundrum: plays, written in the court by court hangers-on at the behest of members of the court and with the intent of settling scores at the court, began to be performed in an entirely new, and “newly” public (in something approaching the modern sense), space.⁶⁵ Adapting the theatrical vocabulary of court performance required more and more expensive set dressing, which ultimately reproduced the King’s aforementioned seat. Importantly, the King himself almost never occupied this seat; this created an unusual gapping in the social field. Plays written for the King and intended to be performed before him no longer were. Meanings immediately apparent to members of his coterie—through elaborate allusion, punning, and in-jokes, might be entirely lost on the theatregoers who encountered them. This threatened to collapse an entire edifice of sense (predicated on the King’s actual, physical presence as a guarantor of meaning). In response to this danger, and others, the creative misreading of Aristotle’s *Poetics* stepped in to provide a new purchase for theatre makers and audiences. While it’s doubtful that *philosophes* of the early 17th century questioned the audience’s capacity to comprehend dramatic irony (even if the term didn’t exist yet), the *variability* in responses necessitated a narrative arc that conferred a unity of experience on the audience. In this way, the three

⁶⁵ See discussion of Versailles as “the future of architecture” in Paul Virilio, *Crepuscular Dawn* (New York: Zone Books, 2002).

unities might be seen as an unwieldy attempt to achieve one unity: transforming the diversity of spectators to a single spectating body.⁶⁶

Pierre Corneille is remembered for his central role in establishing Neoclassicism as the dominant style on the French stage in the 17th century. His tragedies, indebted to Greek and Roman antecedents, attempted to offer new models of social relation for the period in which he was writing. What we recall as hallmarks of this drama—decorum, verisimilitude, the three unities—emerge in the context of centralizing political authority and proliferating centers of commerce. Although not noble by birth, Corneille was given a Jesuit education in the port town of Rouen, which leading up to the middle part of the 17th century had been an important stop on the traveling theatre circuit. Biographies of the playwright cite as an early influence a production of *The Tempest*; certainly, the impact of that play is easily recognizable in the play that we will now investigate, *L'Illusion Comique*, with its powerful father figure who practices a mixture of magic, broken magic, and pseudo-magic.

L'Illusion Comique (*The Comic Illusion*, or the *Theatrical Illusion*) was first performed in 1636 in a newly converted tennis court theatre in the Marais and later published in 1639. It's a sprawling tragicomic play that follows a distraught father's search for his lost son across multiple time periods and literary genres that, for all its silliness and spiraling profundity, opens onto a terrain where ideas of sovereignty, identity, and desire play across a gradient of social control. It's also curiously reliant on

⁶⁶ Interestingly, Corneille's response to attacks on his play makes a very similar argument, as he claims that it was entirely necessary for the didactic purpose of his play to show action both inside and outside the walls of Castille. See the chapter on *Le Cid* in Mary Jo Muratore, *Cornelian Theatre: The Metadramatic Dimension* (Birmingham, AL: Summa Publications, Inc., 1990).

an understanding of telematic control and televisual spectating, which further highlights how theatre cum television spectating is not a new relationship but one that has been present in Western theatre for a long time. *Illusion Comique* cannily outmaneuvers the prohibition on plays that present distended, discontinuous action dispersed across multiple locales. It also attempts a compendium of theatrical idiom in a kind of last gasp of baroque stage thought before it becomes subordinated to neoclassical equipoise. The plotting of the play is an opportunity to explore the metatheatrical dimension of early modern theatre, which commonly featured scenarios that reflected and commented directly upon theatre process from the stage, while indirectly referencing quasi-theatrical processes offstage.⁶⁷ In three separate acts, Corneille is able to write in the style of romance, adventure, and pathos, all the while “avoiding” the key motivating force of fate, or more specifically hubris, that is an important ingredient in Greek theatre. He does so by orchestrating a series of what today we might call acting exercises, or rehearsals for different plays. The same performers figure in each, a common feature of repertory or stock companies. What saves this choice from becoming too much like a variety show or smorgasbord is that there is an onstage auditor desperate to reconnect with his estranged son, who is (unbeknownst to him) an actor in the company.

A metatheatrical perspective encourages us to think of the father, Pridamant, as our delegated representative, reflecting our spectating habits. Additionally, his presence onstage is an invitation to engage in what Niklas Luhmann calls second-order

⁶⁷ See Mary Ann Frese Witt, *Metatheatre and Modernity: Baroque and Neobaroque* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013).

observation.⁶⁸ Luhmann writes, “Second-order observation observes only *how* others observe” (62). He notes that this operation reduces the complexity of the observing situation, while in no way removing the density from the perspective of the first order observer. For example, the father, Pridamant, has no reason to question the probability of the visions he sees: while this presents itself to the audience, it’s a possibility that is only latent in what *he* sees. The situation *L’Illusion Comique* dramatizes, then, is a potentially fascinating example of how theatre itself can model two distinct orders of observation—two audiences—in the newly public activity of theatre going.

In the play, we follow the story of a father who is eager to learn the whereabouts of his son. He searches everywhere to no avail, but meets a magician named Alcandre who claims he can help. Alcandre promises Pridamant that he will show him a phantasmatic image of his son, wherever he is at that moment. The father agrees to descend to a cave or grotto with the magician, where he is staggered to find that indeed he can see his son (although the young man is going by a different name), who is at this moment on the verge of marrying a rich noblewoman. Overcome, Pridamant lunges toward his son. The magician catches him up short, admonishing: “Don’t get carried away by your emotions, and don’t let your feet carry you anywhere, either” (Don’t be afraid, whatever you may see,/ And do not leave this cave ahead of me,/On pain of death [2.1]). The magician is at pains to explain that the image is not one that can be grasped physically. For his purposes, this is so that the father doesn’t unwittingly interrupt the rehearsal and expose the magic as chicanery. For ours, it should also serve as a reminder

⁶⁸ For more on the second-order observation and the loop of vision/observation, see Niklas Luhmann, *Art as a Social System* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000).

of theatre's (enabling) constraint. In Kushner's adaptation, Alcandre warns, "Violate the boundary between their world and ours only at the greatest peril to yourself."⁶⁹

The magician won't allow the father to watch for too long, and tells him to come back the next day. When the father returns, he is shocked to discover that in the meantime, his son has been thrown into prison and is in danger of losing his life. Also surprising is the fact that the son is being called by a new and different name. The father can barely restrain himself from calling out, but he is reminded that these are just phantoms and that any attempt to communicate with them will break the spell and cause the illusion to evaporate. The magician assures the father that his son will come to no harm, and that he should return the next day. At which point, of course, the son is in an entirely new situation and it is unclear how he will get out of it. The father is increasingly surprised by the twists and turns of his son's life and grows more and more fearful for him. Finally, when he can take it no more, he demands that the magician take him to his son—he is no longer satisfied with the images only. The magician declines to do so, but says that if he wants to see his son he should go to Paris the next night where the theatre company he is part of will be performing. Paris: the very place where the play is being performed (for the first time in 1637), and where the audience at its first showing also finds itself.

Seen in this way, *L'Illusion Comique* adopts the unity of place that is at the basis of the televisual relationship. You can be in the same "place" as the studio audience, at least in the same structural position of receiving. And in so far as each transmission carries traces of the original time of its production, likewise you are able to experience

⁶⁹ Tony Kushner and Pierre Corneille, *The Illusion* (New York: Broadway Play Publishers, 2003), 7.

the time—again, not for the first time, but in the same “place.” Adding to all this confusion/felicitous coincidence is the fact that members of Corneille’s audience were *already* sitting on the stage.⁷⁰ And oddly, though these seats offered some of the best views and therefore, supposedly, the greatest intimacy with the actors on the stage, they were not paying seats but reserved for grandees.⁷¹ *L’Illusion Comique*, then, is an example of remote viewing. The father is persuaded because the images appear to close a great distance. If that distance didn’t exist, and there was no chasm to bridge, there’d be no magic, no vision, no revelation scene (or recognition scene, *anagnorisis*). In the final scene of *L’Illusion Comique*, Alcandre “reveals” that Pridamant was watching a play. Having been revealed as an actor, Clindor can now be recognized as a son. In this sense, the effect in *L’Illusion Comique* is to produce a kind of television, or seeing at a distance—and it is a different kind of seeing, predicated on distance *that can be traversed*. Corneille’s play offers a glimpse into the prehistory of television for the purpose of recognizing how intermediality as such is not a function of technologies of capture or display that transmit media but a condition of the faculty of vision. Theatre, however, does not rely on or make use of vision in some frictionless way; it is a historical form that can at times offer a corrective to the prevailing images of the world and society. This is what is to be gained when theatre makers and theorists approach, in the words of Joe Kelleher, “theatre as an obstruction, as an anachronism even, a particular historical technology of representation, of time and motion management.” The confusing and

⁷⁰ See Jeffrey S. Ravel, *The Contested Parterre: Public Theatre and French Political Culture, 1680–1791* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999).

⁷¹ See “Space, Society, and Symbol in the Seventeenth-Century French Theatre” by Virginia Scott in Paul Castagno, ed., *Theatrical Spaces and Dramatic Places: The Reemergence of the Theatre Building in the Renaissance* (Tuscaloosa: University Alabama Press, 1996).

complicating part, though, is that this same potentially liberatory institution of theatre “infects contemporary sensibilities just as much as it informs them.”⁷²

William Egginton argues that the stage is the terrain par excellence of nested spaces—crypts secreted within tombs, desires hidden within hearts.⁷³ Egginton establishes that the Baroque audience was attuned to and highly attentive to those moments when the theatre reflected an increasing stylization (if not theatricalization) of daily life. Shakespeare’s dictum that “all the world’s a stage, and all the men and women are merely players” was not a philosophical truth, but a sociological truism appropriate to a historical period in which increasingly the operative force of identity came in the form of character; the repeal of sumptuary laws, for instance, did not suddenly make clothing more egalitarian, but pointed to the increasing necessity for codes of dress to “perform” in ever wider contexts, as well as an awareness that these styles of identity were convertible, mobile, and transitory. This underscores that identity is less a series of Russian dolls (where dispensing with social roles might bring one closer to an authentic self) and more like a mask that can and is exchanged with frequency. Attendees at the theatre become an audience not through their recognition of a mirror image of themselves on the stage, but through a misattribution and misrecognition of themselves as the subject of the address of the stage. By which I mean: it was only when playtexts could be (and perforce were) disconnected from the immediate context of their composition that they could have fugitive meanings capable of adhering to polyglot audiences, in this case

⁷² Joe Kelleher, *The Illuminated Theatre: Studies on the Suffering of Images* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 5.

⁷³ William Egginton, *How the World Became a Stage: Presence, Theatricality, and the Question of Modernity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002).

when the plays were performed in the absence of their patron, outside the system of courtly theatres.

When in *L'Illusion Comique*, the father misrecognizes his son in a synthetic character whose biography bridges the action of Acts II and III of the play (as he goes from being a lover on the verge of marriage to a prisoner), he is displaying precisely how ignorance (the inaccessible real) structures spectating in the theatre. The audience, who generally speaking is meant to benefit from dramatic irony—possessing more knowledge about the events transpiring on the stage than the participants “themselves”—is in a position, no less powerful, of knowing less. And intuiting more? The father and the magician represent the two audiences, shoulder to shoulder. Is it, then, simply a question of one audience being slightly more fashionable, slightly more in the know than the other? On the contrary, both audiences are equally capable of sophistication or thick-headedness. Instead, it is a matter of direction, and a feeling of having missed, or been missed out. Pridamant is under Alcandre’s “spell,” though we know there is nothing magical about it. He is completely absorbed, and unable to act, and yet is able to pursue real knowledge of his son across several imaginary locales.

To be clear, when it comes to the theatre and its dramatic settings, “those” places—the places the play conjures—are located in that one place, the theatre. Is Corneille setting “conjuring” against “reflecting” within the contested idea of representation? In a sense they are only ever taking place in the one place, the theatre, with the result that even the most radically time- and space-bending play really does only take place in that one place, the theatre. A play, when played, always obeys the unities, whether it knows it or not. This compliance is useful. Perhaps a theatre that does not

champion the pulsating bodies of performers and audience members mixing in a real space, but instead explores a different kind of shared space, offers enormous potential for understanding the forms social interaction will take as communication technologies continue to proliferate: this is the potential of televisual theatre. This theatre would not pretend to a total knowledge, but would make space for new and competing knowledges.

Toward a Televisual Theatre

The conviction that television has an important role to play when discussing past, present, and future performance is not mine alone; a 2011 call for papers by the *Journal for the Theatre and Dramatic Criticism* with the name “As Seen on TV” asked for scholars of theatre and performance studies to consider television’s challenge to theatrical practice. The contributors to that issue, while offering many unique and compelling moments of transaction between theatre and television practice, neglected to consider how the debate over liveness and ephemerality as personified by Peggy Phelan and Philip Auslander, among others, takes on an entirely new tone when the living medium, television, enters. While some argue that television and film have displaced theatre as the site of narrative, I would like to make a different kind of argument, in order to explore a different idea: that, just as theatre has shaped the possibilities of narrative over time, it determined the parameters of the televisual long before the invention of the cathode ray tube. Although this study includes investigations of the actual use of televisions on stage, plays on television, and television acting and production techniques, it is much more concerned with how seeding the origins of the televisual in theatrical practice might begin to offer a new vista on our increasingly mediatized world.

Above all, I'm interested in how thinking about how theatre and television together offers new insights to critics, historians, and theatre makers alike. This project was partly inspired by a performance that I staged in 2009, *Pleasure Dome*, that attempted to recreate the experience of a 1960s television studio. A strange kind of synchronicity was at work opening night. As I drove around Providence making last-minute preparations, I was surprised to find neat and not-so-neat piles of televisions on nearly every corner. It happened that our show coincided with the end of terrestrial broadcasting in the U.S., when old televisions would cease functioning because "television" would no longer be broadcast in the frequencies we'd become accustomed to: there'd be nothing to tune to, there. Yes, it was possible to buy a set-top box that would convert the new digital broadcast for your now-obsolete monitor, but I could see that many if not most people had opted to replace their old sets with newer, flatter ones.⁷⁴ This accident of timing, alongside the show itself, encouraged me to rethink theatre in the key of television: to recognize the vital role of theatre's essential flatness and to interrogate television and the televisual as they relate to the overlapping and intersecting spaces of the theatre, the screen, and the audience.

In his *On Innovative Performance(s): Three Decades of Recollections of Alternative Theatre*, Richard Kostelanetz writes that alternative theatre has a particular American lineage in variety performance, vaudeville, and musical theatre, insofar as

⁷⁴ These new sets had the benefit not only of receiving the signal, but also of using less power, and taking up less space. But something is lost when the television retreats to the edges of living room or bedroom, increasingly seen as part of the wall or decor rather than an essential appliance; and perhaps television begins to retreat from the cultural landscape, joining theatre in the museum of outdated entertainment, or becoming just another screen alongside ubiquitous computer monitors, iPhones, and other "smart" devices.

these “offered a more expansive and multi-sensory perceptual experience than the highly focused presentation of television or traditional literary theatre.”⁷⁵ Like their more experimental or radical counterparts, these popular forms reflected the “superior exploitation of aesthetic values indigenous to live performance.” In other words, in developing a “true” multimedia practice, alternative theatre reclaims a complexity of perceptual experience that has, in Kostelanetz’s eyes, otherwise been excised from traditional theatre (with its focus upon the presentation of dramatic texts) and the technology of television. In this view, both television and theatre fail to give audiences the dense, rich, ambiguous, and multivalent sensory inputs that avant-garde performance (and, presumably, reality) deliver.

The two decades since the publication of this study have only served to extend and widen the offerings available to a theatre scholar interested in alternative or avant-garde production. We are increasingly encouraged to think “outside the box.”⁷⁶ From the productions of Ontological-Hysterical Theatre to The Builders Association, the drive to multiply and layer the audience’s sensorial experience is evident. Interestingly, however, many of these performances seem to straddle the very divide Kostelanetz believes separates alternative theatre from *both* popular and traditional forms of entertainment, such as television and the sort of serious text-based theatre associated with the European tradition. Books such as Hans-Thies Lehmann’s *Postdramatic Theatre* (1999) suggest that Europe may have overtaken the American theatre in the variety and profusion of new

⁷⁵ Richard Kostelanetz, *On Innovative Performance(s): Three Decades of Recollections on Alternative Theatre* (London: McFarland, 1994), 53.

⁷⁶ I, of course, would argue for thinking *inside* the box—i.e., the television set.

forms of theatrical transmission.⁷⁷ At any rate, on both sides of the Atlantic, theatres (and warehouses and repurposed hotels, etc.) now regularly marry televisual media and text in a new type of performance that Jennifer Parker-Starbuck calls “cyborg theatre” (2011).⁷⁸ Actors, their technological prostheses, and machines increasingly share stage space to a degree that augurs what Ray Kurzweil calls “the singularity”: the point at which it will become possible for you and me to upload our consciousnesses to a cybernetic network and continue existing when our own bodies reach the end of their product cycle.⁷⁹ But until we reach the point where we no longer need media because we have become them, the theatre will continue to exist in a communicative ecosystem characterized by the importance of television and film in transmitting information between bodies and across space. If impossible-to-resolve arguments about the co-presence of audience and performers tell us anything, it is that the status of the frail human body is the source of a great deal of anxiety and confusion. In the meantime, if the live actor broadcasts or communicates anything with her signaling through the flames (pace Artaud), then the audience must be there to receive it and respond in kind. Televisual performance showcases this transmission in startling and revealing ways.

Theatre critics and historians of performance generally discuss theatre and technology in one of five ways: they deride technology as a corrosive or corrupting influence; they champion technologically mediated theatre as a means of updating an

⁷⁷ Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, translated by Karen Jürs-Munby (London: Routledge, 2006).

⁷⁸ Jennifer Parker-Starbuck, *Cyborg Theatre: Corporeal/Technological Intersections in Multimedia Performance* (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

⁷⁹ Ray Kurzweil, *The Singularity Is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology* (London: Duckworth, 2016).

archaic practice; they discuss how theatre can act as a vehicle for remediating various forms; they explore how theatre is a medium where other media can meet; or they point to how the stage can undermine the very borders of medial forms. According to the first of these premises, technology corrupts theatre because theatre in this view is an event among living participants in a temporally bounded space that technology necessarily erodes and degrades. This obviously recapitulates in a theatrical vein the root concept of technophobia, namely that these devices just “get in the way.” Of course, they really can and do get in the way: cameras block audience members, sound cues don’t arrive on time, computers freeze midway through performance. In this view, technology as such is inimical to authentic theatrical experience and has to be avoided at all costs. And where technologies can’t be avoided, they need to be hidden under a layer of greasepaint to be palatable. The seeming paradox of this approach to theatre presumes it is always already immersive, and that technology is inherently anti-immersive. (Interestingly when technology is not manifestly visible, be it climate control, lighting, stage lighting, or sound amplification, there seems to be less concern.)

The second impulse we see in the contemporary literature on theatre and technology is toward addressing the perceived outdatedness of theatre. Where movie palaces once tried to rival theatres in the opulence of their settings, theatres today must try to adopt the audiovisual technology of the multiplex. Philip Auslander’s *Liveness* addresses the many ways that these technologies, once viewed as inimical to live performance, are now essential to it: for audiences used to the sound of a singer in a

recording studio, unassisted vocal projection from the stage is off-putting and alien.⁸⁰

Thus, if theatre hopes to continue to attract audiences, it must adopt these technologies just to remain relevant. Thirdly, in an attempt to remain popular theatre can remediate (translate into theatrical idiom) other medial or performance forms that come with a ready audience, one eager to encounter familiar characters and events in a different medium. This is the logic of Broadway musicals that move from graphic novel to film to theatre in not always seamless succession (witness *Spiderman: Turn Off the Dark*).

The stage, however, can also be viewed as a kind of neutral zone where different cultural products intersect and ramify each other—this is the rhetoric of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*.⁸¹ Different medial forms appear in the same frame and can be assessed at will, preserving their individual characteristics: the symphonic score and the film image combine without losing themselves. This is the source of the idea of theatre as a hypermedium, or medium of media, as discussed in Freda Chapple and Chiel Kattenbelt's introduction to *Intermediality in Theatre and Performance*.⁸² Chapple and Kattenbelt group discussions about technology onstage under the new category of intermedial theatre, but the stability of that category is precisely what I want to call into question here. At least as valid a definition of "intermedia" would be one that privileges

⁸⁰ Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (London: Routledge, 2011).

⁸¹ See Chris Salter, *Entangled: Technology and the Transformation of Performance* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011) and Christopher Grobe's probing review of that book, "Refined Mechanicals; or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Share the Stage with New Scholarship on Theatre and Media" *Theatre*, vol. 42, no. 2 (2012), calling into question a number of Salter's assertions.

⁸² Freda Chapple and Chiel Kattenbelt, *Intermediality in Theatre and Performance* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006). This book emerges from the IFTR intermedial theatre working group, which for the last two decades has consolidated and promoted the use of the term for performances with and about media.

the “inter-”: the mingling, not-quite-distinguishable mixedness of a term like intersex or intertext. Finally, the theatre is held out as a place where the above discussions might become hopelessly fraught with confusion, contradiction, and pain.

Theatre, then, has been conceived as a kind of cross-platform hosting (theatre is the medium of media) where various media maintain their integrity, something that reinscribes medium (as a form of re-mediation, or the translation of one medium into another) in a kind of transmedial hospitableness, and as something that escapes medium (theatre is fugitive). This last instance holds out the hope that technologically mediated theatre or intermedial theatre, as it is styled, might be the very place to explore how these different forms seep into each other, and lose and gain intelligibility in the process.

Strikingly, the preoccupation among theatre makers and scholars with theatre’s apparent “liveness,” with all the attendant threats of dying, disappearing, being interrupted, failing, and so forth, abuts a key logic of television that distinguishes it from film: the (now) historical fact of instantaneous, simultaneous mass screening, aka broadcasting. But this “feature” of television, it has become clear (whether due to historical transformation of the industry by introduction of cable channels, or time-shifted viewing, or new internet-based subscription services), exists on a continuum of immediacy. The (feeling of) liveness of a show like the 1960s-era television program *Laugh-In* was a product of the fact that it had been at first broadcast live, and some trace of this liveness continued to be legible however many years later. As John Ellis writes in *Visible Fictions*,

[t]he notion that broadcast TV is live still haunts the medium; even more so does the sense of immediacy of the image. The immediacy of the broadcast TV image does not just lie in the presumption that it is live, it lies more in the relations that the image sets up for itself. Immediacy is the

effect of the directness of the TV image, the way in which it constitutes itself and its viewers as held in a relationship of co-present intimacy.⁸³

If television's liveness is less than it might appear, so, too, with theatre: it has become all but impossible in the first decade of the 21st century to attend a theatre performance that does not incorporate some form of technological mediation, whether amplified speech, recorded sound, or the projection of still or moving images onto the stage. Called variously videated performance, teleperformance, multimedia performance, digital performance, mixed media, or hybrid theatre, these are performances that have televisions on stage, or film screens, CCTV, cartoons, digital animations, slide projectors, telephones, loudspeakers, microphones. These complicate the here, now, new, or original of *the theatre*, in the flesh, on the body, with a beginning and end and can be interrupted, but with difficulty. They draw the productions to resemble *media*, at a distance, on a screen, the speed of data flowing from a continuous transmission machine for pleasure and entertainment. Diverse directors and performing groups have made significant efforts to disentangle theatre from these technological encroachments. Chapple and Kattenbelt write,

It is interesting to note that although endangered, at this time [the 1960s and 1970s] theatre was also praised as *the pure* and *immediate* anti-medium: the residue of *real* and *authentic* culture in a world of mass media and televisual daftness. Directors such as Grotowski, Brook, and Mnouchkine were celebrated as high priests of *pure theatricality*. (103)

However, according to these authors, there is every indication that the only way forward is to consider the impurity and mixedness of theatrical events.

⁸³ John Ellis, *Visible Fictions: Cinema: Television: Video*. (New York: Routledge, 2002), 132.

The critical impasse of liveness and media are a source of intense scholarly interest, from Peggy Phelan's *Unmarked* (1993), which sets up an ontology of theatre that defines performance through its non-reproducibility, to Auslander's argument in *Liveness* (1999) that liveness is only an artifact of mediatization, that theatre only became "live" when it had to be distinguished from things that looked like theatre, but weren't.⁸⁴ More recently, Matthew Causey's *Theatre and Performance in Digital Culture* engages with the postmodern theory of simulation but argues that we are now approaching a new kind of embeddedness. The era of virtuality, with the problems of illusion and representation, has given way to a more troubling model of embeddedness, where materiality and embodiment are infected from within such that the real itself is reordered. Media in performance are not incorporated merely as frames within the frame (the proscenium arch), but exert a pressure on the space of the stage, and on the body of the performer. As Causey observes,

the inclusion of the televisual screen in live performance and the practice of performance in the screened world of virtual environments constitutes the staging of the privileged object of the split subject, that which assists in the subject's division, capturing the gaze, enacting the subject's annihilation, its nothingness, while presenting the unrepresentable approach of the real through the televisual screens.⁸⁵

The presence of the performer thus undergoes a sea change.

Robert Lepage's *Far Side of the Moon* (2001) is theatre scholar Cormac Power's candidate for a performance that "presences" in a unique and exciting way.⁸⁶ This production was dizzyingly successful in continuously morphing before the audience's

⁸⁴ Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

⁸⁵ Matthew Causey, *Theatre and Performance in Digital Culture: From Simulation to Embeddedness* (London: Routledge, 2013), 6.

⁸⁶ Cormac Power, *Presence in Play: A Critique of Theories of Presence in Theatre* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2008).

eyes: walls became floors and doors became windows as the single performer, Lepage himself, transformed into a succession of wildly disparate characters—all in full view of the audience, without special effects, relying only upon the audience's ability to re-picture the scene anew after each change. Lepage's eight-hour epic *Lipsynch* (2009) at the Brooklyn Academy of Music took this aesthetic to new heights (lengths). Feeling like nothing so much as a distracting but ultimately banal mini-series, the story features scores of characters whirling through times and spaces. This is nothing new in drama, to be sure, but the spaces were instructive: film set, radio studio, the space of the television itself.

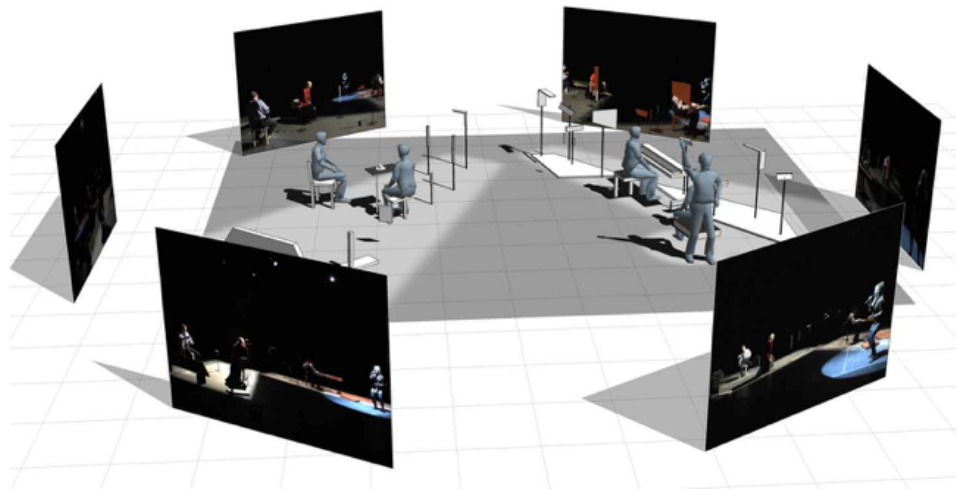


Figure 1: A 3D model of the visual catchment areas of onstage cameras in Lepage's *Lipsynch*



Figure 2: Four moments in *Lipsynch* when onstage action is juxtaposed with on-camera/in-camera composition of image

What do I mean by the space of television? Several moments in *Lipsynch* belie their mundane description. We watch as the actors assemble a set before our eyes. But this is no ordinary set. And these are not ordinary eyes. It is the television eye that sees, an eye that admits no depth and only surface. Across the back of the stage, an image of the stage action is projected four stories tall. The television camera is onstage and in full view of the audience. During the course of the scene in a hospital lounge, small bits of wood are placed between the actors and the camera, a floating trapezoid just to the left of the cardiac surgeon, a thin column of birch to the right of the nurse. At first, the effect of this interposition is amusing if bizarre. When cups of tea are brought onto stage they rest on podiums a few feet distant from the doctor and nurse, who must strain to reach them. It is only when the scene travels to its conclusion and the camera zooms in closer for the dramatic denouement that the rationale behind the jig-saw puzzle is revealed: when the two actors are in close frame, the previously unrelated bits of scenery coalesce into the

table across which the scene has been played, in perfect perspective. The depth of the stage has been converted into the flatness of the screen, an “effect” that is met with applause—applause only a “video audience” could deliver. Later, the same method is used to create an exploded piano that stretches 15 feet across stage right. When the same heart doctor wallows in drunken despair, he sits at the piano and weeps. The falling space of his anxiety is literalized as he actually collapses into the piano. On the screen it appears as if he is being digested by it, remorse and all.

The approach described above makes seeing more bodily a kind of “haptic visuality,” as Laura Marks puts it in *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media*. Perhaps *Lipsynch* calls “into question cinema’s illusion of representing reality, by pushing the viewer’s look back to the surface of the image. And it enables an embodied perception, the viewer responding to the video as to another body and to the screen as another skin.”⁸⁷ While discussing how theatre manages to “take” place, it is instructive to adopt a scenographic perspective in its most capacious sense, to recognize, as Joslin McKinney and Philip Butterworth do in their *Cambridge Introduction to Scenography*, that theatre designers not only deploy visual techniques but also kinaesthetic (the sense of movement through space), proxemic (pertaining to distances between people), and haptic (understanding through sense of touch) ones.⁸⁸ Unfortunately for anyone wishing to reconstruct the work of these designers, directors, and architects, it is difficult to capture the “multi-sensory experience of live scenography” when it comes to archival material or

⁸⁷ Laura Marks, *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2002), 4.

⁸⁸ Joslin McKinney and Philip Butterworth. *The Cambridge Introduction to Scenography* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 7.

recordings; here “the auditory and visual are prioritized while spatial dimensions involving depth, scale, and proportion” don’t always translate (8).

Another theatrical example, further removed in time and closer to the glory days of television, is Squat Theatre, a performance troupe that operated out of a store front at 307 West Broadway in New York in the 1970s. The theatre was set up with the audience facing the space’s large window out onto the street, and the commerce with this space behind the transparent “screen” was often deployed in production. But how to read this architecture? Must the audience decide not which side of the “camera” it is on, but which side of the *screen*? In Squat Theatre’s 1977 play *SoHo Books*, the climactic scene involves a confrontation between two characters on opposite sides of the glass. One actor shoots the other through the window, the retort of the gunshot shattering the space. The actor inside the theatre falls dead. Defying expectation, the window is intact. Squat Theatre’s aesthetic borrowed from the techniques of performance artists, who, theatre scholar Elin Diamond notes, were beginning to use video technologies to attack the auratic body, depicting it instead as an increasingly precarious “I-place”:

In its signifying operations language splits the speaker from the presence of her own words; at the moment of utterance the signifier is always traveling to another context, arriving from still another. Presence, then, is never simply present. The “auratic” uniqueness of the performer’s body, its apparent “unity” as logical and experiential home of the subject, is dispersed by its “own” discourse, the discourse it cannot own.⁸⁹

The idea of auratic communication through a glass that does not break recalls, of course, a television screen.

⁸⁹ Elin Diamond, *Unmaking Mimesis: Essays on Feminism and Theatre* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 151.

Diamond's comments show how contested "presence" has become in the field of performance; Cormac Power's *Presence in Play* (previously referenced with regard to the work of Robert Lepage) offers a survey of the complications. He interrogates the idea of presence in terms of its formation through audience reception, acting theory, and narratology. Presence, then, opens into three main categories: make-believe, charisma, and story. Intriguingly, Power relies on film theory to make many of his points. He references Christian Metz and Andre Bazin to argue that whereas the film spectacle produces a strong impression of reality because it creates a "vacuum" (which dreams are ready to fill), the theatre presents actual objects that the spectator must transform through creative imagination into something they are not, moving them from physical reality to abstraction, particular to universal. For example, the character Juliet's presence is made possible to the extent that the audience can imagine that the actor playing her is *not present*. For film, it is exactly the opposite. The absence of the actor playing the part of Juliet calls on the audience's ability to imagine that the actor is present. Power argues that the theatregoer doesn't suspend disbelief so much as see without believing, through imagination. In effect, this is to "see beyond the materially given" (30). Power then explores the condition of a performer who "has" presence, or aura. To talk about the spiritual or mystical aspect of theatrical performance, Power travels back to the early years of modern theatre. Edward Gordon Craig, Adolphe Appia, and Richard Wagner all appear.

Utilizing examples from advocates of the sacred such as Antonin Artaud and Jerzy Grotowski, Power explores their claims that the essence of theatre is to transmit the inner life of the actor or performer over and beyond the external trappings of theatrical

display. A performance should embody—directly and without mediation. In place of theatre, Grotowski wanted “meetings” to experience “the human being in its totality—that is to say what is sensory and at the same time shining through, as it were: soul is body, body is soul, sex and luminosity” (quoted in Power, 69). Hence, in a famous production like Grotowski’s *Akropolis*, the performance does more than represent a vision; it actually *becomes* that vision. Discussing the Open Theatre’s production of *The Serpent*, a powerful work of theatre that attempts to capture the shock, horror, and violence of President Kennedy’s death by explicitly referencing biblical themes, Power argues that while the Open Theatre

...may have maintained a ceremonial quality through the foregrounding of actors and the non-naturalistic acting idiom employed, it was quite unlike the “holiness” of Grotowski’s *Akropolis*, or the staged ritual of the Living Theatre’s *Paradise Now*. Indeed, *The Serpent* can be read as a critique of the “transcendentalist agenda” associated with many experimental ensembles of the period, while it posits a somewhat different approach to aura in performance. (81)

An influential member of the Open Theatre, Joseph Chaikin, wrote in his 1972 book *The Presence of the Actor* that the stage performer has not one but two bodies—the actor’s and the character’s—and the craft of performance is to make them both present, trying to avoid precisely overcoming the loss of aura that is the supposed result of technological reproduction.⁹⁰ Presence is revealed in the motion between actor and the “emerging” image rather than within the actor him- or herself.

An additional form of (or rationale for) presence, according to Power, is the literal mode of presence: a paradoxical present-ness of story and narrative that moves both

⁹⁰ Joseph Chaikin, *The Presence of the Actor* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1993).

forward and backward. As Gertrude Stein notes, the audience and performers are in a relation of syncopation, with different times governing the stage and the world of the play. Dramatic tension directs the attention of the audience away from the immediacy of the stage (with which they are co-present) toward the present in which the performance exists. Writes Stein, “the business of art is to live in the actual present, that is the complete actual present, and to completely express that complete actual present” (quoted in *Power*, 91). But while the story may point forward in each moment of dramatic action if it is conforming to the Aristotelian ideal, the performance necessarily points backward to its scripting. The illusion of presence, and of present-ness, then, depends on the masking and effacement of the text or written script, facilitating the illusion that the actor is behaving and speaking spontaneously.

Time(d) Delay: TV's Archive and the Phenomenon of Deferred Liveness

If spontaneity is collapsing time and space into one singular expression of immediacy, then theatre fails to do it, as does television. Television, like theatre, emphasizes the quality of liveness, but it does so in a way that draws our attention to its constant deferral. With the benefit of retrospection, I can see that the production of *Pleasure Dome*, at the beginning of the last section, was an attempt at instantiating televisual theatre. To that end, my collaborators and I thought it would be closer to the spirit of television (or at least the television event) to ignore the basic instinct to record and archive the performance. Though we used two full-size studio cameras (borrowed from the defunct Brown TV studio) to create real-time effects on the stage and had at least one camera trained on the stage action at all times, we intentionally removed the

magnetic tape so that a recording wasn't made. We congratulated ourselves on the elaborate apparatus, the appearance of dissemination that made it seem as if what was happening inside the black box was going to have some other life outside of the Production Workshop. True, it was theatrical pantomime of broadcasting, set in an ersatz television studio, but the transparent pretense still seemed caught up in a version of diffusion and propagation. We didn't "broadcast" it, but we did show it to several hundred people. We wanted the audience to feel trapped, to feel like the show was being performed for them (which it was, but in the "style of" not being performed for them), and also that it was for another audience (which, in the same sense, it was and it wasn't). This is a common aspect of dramatic forms across many periods, from Greek drama, performed under the watchful eye of the gods with the chorus as intermediaries, to plays-within-plays in Elizabethan drama, to modern playwrights (Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author* is an interesting case in point). Although we precluded the possibility of a future audience that might access the show through recorded footage, and although we did not broadcast to a second, simultaneous audience, we nevertheless attempted to make theatre that reflected the dilemma of two audiences that rests at the heart of the theatrical archive.

The question becomes whether, with the dual decisions not to record nor to broadcast, I was being more true to television or to *performance*, whose only life is in the present. A performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations. *Pleasure Dome* came to rest in a blank, as did the audience, a gapping of time that was made possible only by crossing the logics of television and theatre, flattening space and deepening the screen. By exploring

television's aesthetic (and also its technologies) in a theatrical setting, *Pleasure Dome* exposed both theatre's own television-like qualities and television's theatre-like ones. Further, it showed how they both rely on a complex double movement toward ever-greater intimacy and communion on the one hand and ever-greater attenuation and atomization on the other.

If my work on *Pleasure Dome* was a catalyst for the thinking in "Theatre Crossing Television," my "exposure" to theatre history (and theatre's history) in the era of video recording (which is my era) has led to an understanding of the work of the theatre critic and the theatregoer to be that of accessing things in a displaced way, which is at the heart of television watching. A key TV memory for me was receiving VHS cassettes of a wildly popular show in the mid-1980s when I lived in Germany as a child on a U.S. Army base with my family. The thing about those videotapes wasn't that we couldn't see the show any other way at the time: we could. This was possible not through elaborate time-shifted and place-shifted viewing technology like Roku, TiVo, DVR, Sling, or on-demand subscription services, but because the Armed Forces Network (AFN) included the program in its line-up. But AFN was always several weeks behind, and anyway, they didn't broadcast the commercials, or any commercials, which would leave awkward voids at the end of each episode (thus, a show slated for a half hour, for instance, would have only had 24 minutes' worth of material). In primetime, the gaps would be collected and agglomerated into 10-minute-long public service announcements, which sometimes even featured my favorite program, *Gasthaus*, a brief chat show hosted by public affairs officers that would fill the audience in on recent happenings in the Army community of West Germany and "the Benelux" (AFN also broadcast to servicemen in

BELgium, the NETHERlands, LUXembourg). These segments were cringe-inducingly amateurish, but at the time I wasn't at all concerned by the disjunction caused by the juxtaposition between their home-grown television and the programming from the major networks. Regardless, I knew that I preferred to get my "fix" of American TV in its entirety, and a little bit closer to air date, but also in large chunks of successive episodes, a precursor to the binge-watching that is now common. And as pleasurable as that was, and as thankful as I am that my grandmother would send us those tapes, they forever reminded me of how I wasn't "really" part of the larger whole, the broadcast audience. Or if I was, it was in a displaced, even tenuous way.⁹¹

Television as industrial product has undergone a dramatic revolution in the last 20 years. My experience of being displaced is now widely shared by audiences who watch programs that were created for niche audiences, made available through networks that parallel but differ in important ways from the major broadcasters, at times and in places (on their phones!) they now choose. People spend less time in the recognizable activity of watching television, but they watch more television than ever. To take an example from my own viewing habits, I may "watch TV" for at least an hour every day, but the show I watch, *Democracy Now*, I've only ever streamed through a web browser. This is because I've never been in a "broadcast region" that carried it over the terrestrial bandwidth. So at 8am EST in Providence (or a few moments before), I'd log onto democracynow.org for

⁹¹ This language can't help but echo Joseph Roach's theory of performance genealogies, in which cultural practices and forms of knowledge are maintained and disseminated not by direct transmission but through displaced transmission—surrogation rather than reproduction. I am working my way toward understanding the televisual as a performative that engages the viewer as surrogate, and displaces the narrative from the media to the spectator. For more on Roach's theory, see *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

the live-stream of the broadcast. If I missed it for some reason and had time later in the day, I could stream it then. When for a period I spent time outside of the country in the Middle East, I had to decide: do I watch it “live” at four or five in the afternoon (which doesn’t “feel” right), or do I watch it in the morning, aware that the news it conveys could be out of date? Interestingly, this seeming dilemma of programming and the challenge of synchronizing my leisure time with other watchers also relates to the social or psychological role the program played: it helped me keep in touch with what was going on “in” the USA (though the show is oriented toward a very specific sub-segment of politically active and left-liberal viewers). Now that I’ve moved back, I realize that it continues to fulfill the same function, that I am no more or less in synch with America now that I’m living here again.

I associate the theme music of *Democracy Now* with this sense of connection, however illusory. And as with all remote access of televisual material, there comes the possibility, perhaps illusory as well, of remote control. The music is played at the time you’d expect: at the start of every show. If you do manage to get to the website “early,” a message is displayed in the browser window to the effect that the broadcast will begin soon. At the stroke of eight, the music thunderously begins. The same thing happens when you press the play button on a cached live-stream video window after the fact. And when I press that button, my thinking is pulled in two directions: I am pressing this button causing the video to play but also, yes, the show is beginning as I am pressing the button. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of remote control and telematic action is the

way they can both represent the ultimate realization of sovereignty while also, unnervingly, correspond to a willing submission to something “outside” one’s control.⁹²

Above all, time-shifted viewing has underscored an anxiety about how audience members respond to the television they see. In past decades, a previous evening’s broadcast could be reliably counted on to create a kernel for social interactions, say, in the workplace. Now the audience is so hopelessly segmented and out of synch that critical response increasingly occurs in a virtual space—Twitter feeds or Facebook pages. The dismay of certain TV critics at the demise of what Robert Putnam called “water-cooler conversations” in his 2000 book on the decline of American community, *Bowling Alone*, reveals that some of the same beliefs about the community-building or community-maintaining work of (“immersive”) theatre adhere to television, the anti-immersive media par excellence that theatre had been defending itself against.⁹³

I can’t help but think of that concern when I watch footage of Wooster Group shows I haven’t seen or the Met in HD or any theatre production caught on tape and screened now, feeling like *that* audience must have felt “really” present for a “really” live show. I think of how excited I was when in 2012 the Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM) revived Philip Glass’s opera *Einstein on the Beach* (dir. Robert Wilson), which had been such an artistic success and scandal when it was first performed at Lincoln Center 36 years earlier. Since my previous exposure to the piece was through existing audiovisual recordings, I was determined to obtain the closest and best seat I could. As a

⁹² On the self-deceptive pleasures of channel surfing, see Caetlin Benson-Allott, *Remote Control* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing USA, 2015), especially chapter 2, “Convenience, Necessity, and Nuisance.”

⁹³ Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2007).

general rule, I buy the tickets closest to the stage, regardless of the angle of viewing. In the Howard Gilman Opera House, where the BAM production was to be performed, this proved not to be a sound strategy. My party of four was seated hard against the wall of the theatre stage right, directly beneath a protruding box that obscured about a quarter of the stage—unexpectedly, the part directly in front of us. This is not to say that I didn’t enjoy the show. The visuals were frustratingly but also delightfully occluded. Shuffling viewing positions with my seatmates a few times, it was struck by how great a difference two seats seemed to make, as the production featured very shallow staging, minimal scenic décor that when it did make an appearance was either an actual theatrical flat (a scene that took place onboard a train referenced previous conventions of theatre by having the performers awkwardly [albeit awkwardly in a slow, almost vindictively Wilsonian way] interact inside it “as if” it were an actual train compartment) or composed of a flat array of artificial lighting. The effect, then, was not unlike being confronted with a neon sign whose message is impossible to read without walking some distance in a new direction. Looking back, I feel as if I saw the show and didn’t see it at the same time. I saw it and recognized I wasn’t seeing the same thing everyone else was seeing, and that most everyone was missing it, “too.” This is no accident, as Wilson’s performances are notorious for being keyed into the director’s viewing position almost willfully to the detriment of all the other ones. Was the production’s inaccessibility on one level making possible a different kind of accessibility altogether? Or is there a kind of interactivity present in media even when the media itself isn’t “interactive”?

The aforementioned extreme case of spectatorial misalignment reveals that at the kernel of theatre you will find the “lie” that all the members of the audience are seeing

the same show.⁹⁴ Alan Read and Joe Kelleher have both written about how irritating and obstructive theatre remains (i.e., makes a lasting impression), and in visual studies Irit Rogoff's work in museum curating theorizes how looking away from the designated object can complement, inform, or destabilize a reading of that object. There is something worthwhile about an aspect of theatre going that we all experience but only infrequently theorize: the very real danger that the presence of other spectators poses to our enjoyment of the show. But in their absence, what sort of show would we be seeing? In the next section, we turn to a contemporary remounting of a Baroque opera to further explore the relationship between bad theatre seats, watching videotape productions of live theatre, and out-of-date TV shows.

Watching Watching Atys

In September 2011, the Brooklyn Academy of Music presented *Atys*, a 17th-century French opera by baroque master Jean-Baptiste Lully. *Atys* was presented as part of BAM Fall Opera, but what if we consider the possibility that an opera first performed in 1647 might nevertheless participate in the *next wave* of theatrical practice ("The Next Wave Festival" is how BAM promotes its more experimental offerings)? In many ways, BAM has provided precisely the experience that the Next Wave Festival was supposed to do. Over the last ten years, it has introduced me to a number of cutting-edge performances from a range of contemporary artists: the previously mentioned *Einstein on the Beach*, Heiner Müller's *Quartett* (also directed by Robert Wilson), Sarah Kane's *4.48*

⁹⁴ Alan Read, *Theatre in the Expanded Field: Seven Approaches to Performance* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013); Joe Kelleher, *The Illuminated Theatre: Studies on the Suffering of Images* (New York: Routledge, 2015); Irit Rogoff and Daniel J. Sherman, *Museum Culture: Histories, Discourses, Spectacles* (London: Routledge, 1994).

Psychosis, the Frankfurt Ballet's version of *Decreation* (a text by poet Anne Carson) under William Forsythe, Lepage's *Lipsynch*, an Icelandic version of Georg Büchner's *Woyzeck* by Vesturport and the City Theatre with original music by Nick Cave, among others. This performance by Arts Florissants, however, was something else entirely: a sumptuous, historiographically astute attempt to give modern audiences access (though just how tangible this access is we'll have reason to explore) to baroque musical performance, and introduce them to some of the important social and political tensions of its time.

As Rebecca Harris-Warrick writes, “[t]he central conflict within Atys—both the opera and the hero alike—concerns the dissonance between his private desires and his public duties.”⁹⁵ Modern audiences are more familiar with the story than they might know; Atys is Phrygian for Adonis, with whom the Goddess Cybèle, Cronos’ wife and the mother of the gods, is in love. When he does not return her affection, she drives him out of his mind, leading him to castrate himself before being turned into a pine tree, whereupon “violets sprang from his blood.”⁹⁶ In the opera, the myth is expanded: King Célénus of Phrygia is to wed the nymph Sangaride. Sangaride loves Atys, who happens to love her back, even though Célénus is his friend. The goddess Cybèle, who also loves Atys, first appears to help the lovers, only to try to win him for herself. Later, in Act III, “she sends him two sets of dreams while he is asleep on stage: first, happy dreams [which] reveal the joys that await him if he returns her love, then nightmares, [which]

⁹⁵ Rebecca Harris-Warrick, *Dance and Drama in French Baroque Opera: A History* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 15.

⁹⁶ Phil G. Goulding, *Ticket to the Opera: Discovering and Exploring 100 Famous Works, History, Lore, and Singers, with Recommended Recordings* (New York: Random House, 2011), 478.

threaten him with dire consequences should he reject her” (Harris-Warrick, 16). The bulk of Act IV is set in the river world, where dances and singing can’t mask how unhappy Sangaride is at the prospect of marrying King Célénus. Harris-Warrick observes, “the celebrations among the gathered divinities of rivers, streams, and fountains, which go on at great length, make us realize how impossible it is for Sangaride to escape the roles that are being imposed on her, even as they simultaneously provide needed relief for the audience from the tensions mounting within the opera” (16). To conclude, Cybèle uses her magic to blind Atys and make him believe that Sangaride is a monster, whom he stabs to death. When he realizes what’s happened, he tries to kill himself only to be turned into a pine tree.

Based on her reading of the play, Harris-Warrick almost makes an argument for a *proto-horizontalidad* morale, or at least leaves open a contemporary interpretation that acknowledges both how power is exercised and how individuals fare in the face of it: “the fact that no single individual governs all the group scenes illustrates for the audience how broadly distributed are the social forces with which Atys and Sangaride have to contend” (17). Arguably, at least at court in the late 17th century, the governing presence might actually have been in the audience? Certainly, the presence of the King is palpable from the outset, in the form of an extended prologue celebrating the royal patron. Geoffrey Burgess explains that such prologues have bedeviled contemporary directors looking to revive French operas from the 1600s, posing an obstacle, in their minds, to modern stagings. There is some evidence that the prologue was considered superfluous by opera goers even in the period: “Until recently the French operatic prologue has been dismissed as little more than hollow praise of the king, of questionable artistic value and,

because of the lack of cogent connection with the ensuing five acts, of little dramatic interest. Shortly after Lully's death audiences fell into the habit of arriving late at the opera, knowing that a missed prologue was no great loss."⁹⁷

The director Jean-Marie Villégier "solved" the prologue by turning the stage into a mirror of the French court, down to architectural elements copied from 18th-century engravings of life at court. In this version, we are witnessing a rehearsal of the opera under the watchful gazes of courtiers and aristocrats. At the center is a mysterious interloper: a figure robed in black who in an obvious nod to the composer Lully assumes control of the entire scene, "coach[ing] the chorus and dancers, beat[ing] time with the sickle grabbed from the hand of Time, cue[ing] the actors, and add[ing] finishing touches to the stage action" (470). At the conclusion of the prologue and the beginning of the narrative proper, the figure engineers an impressive set change. With the flick of his wrist, the painted backdrop depicting the interior of the palace flies away and the performers, still garbed in attire appropriate to the court, are drawn into a deep, dark marble room. Burgess writes, "This sudden and violent act also signals the shattering of the illusion of historical reconstruction. In the prologue we witness a rehearsal, itself witnessed by the court of Louis XIV. The members of the on-stage audience in the prologue become the courtiers enacting the tragedy of *Atys*" (472). This is clearly not an attempt to re-create the literal staging of *Atys* from Lully's time, which would have paralleled the kind of deference to the original that musical director William Christie was attempting in the orchestra. While Villégier was steeped in knowledge of the period, he nevertheless was able to exercise substantial freedom in his staging. Burgess writes,

⁹⁷ Geoffrey Burgess, "Revisiting 'Atys': Reflections on Les Arts Florissants' Production," *Early Music*, vol. 34, no. 3 (2006): 466.

[Villégier's] interpretations result from intense rehearsal periods in which historical conventions are explored in detail; this process is usually preserved in the final staged version. Examples include his observation of historical gesture, classical stage blocking, such as the V-formation and *côté du roi*, *côté de la reine*, established at the outset of a scene, but disrupted in response to the dramatic interplay of the characters. Villégier does not work with these elements in a purely historical-reconstruction manner, but interprets them as the tools to elaborate the psychology of the drama. (476n5)

Harris-Warrick describes the opera as lacking a strong governing presence, but in this staging Villégier has supplied it: the figure in black becomes an omnipresent master of ceremonies, an “anachronistic *metteur en scène*,” in Burgess’ words. An inspiration for this character, the director explained in the program, was an engraving from the period that terrified and fascinated Villégier while he worked on the project. Pictured below, it is a menacing and portentous portrait: “an emblem for the impossibility of direct communication with the 17th century, as a palimpsest for the research and creative play with historical resources that are necessary in any historical endeavor” (Burgess, 475).



Figure 3: A man in the shadows, shrouded by the past

Reflecting briefly on the conditions of baroque theatre affords an opportunity to discuss how both television and theatre offer (or appear to offer) an experience “especially for you.” I trace the idea that the show is especially for you retroactively to early 17th-century France, when performances were manifestly geared to the singular experience of a sovereign spectator. This feature of public theatre in France in the 1600s is more clearly visible at work in the “direct address” of television programming, when you, the viewer, are addressed in your proper person: “We’ll see *you* tomorrow.” But this is absurd on the face of things. You most emphatically will not be seen by the presenter, as the television broadcast is one-way only. A great deal of work is done to make it appear as if communication were happening in two directions, with the intention of singling you out, as an active recipient. You are activated by the message, and ready to,

in the case of 20th-century television, consume. You are directed to consume television, as well as the products advertised on the screen.

This same feature might work in the public theatre in France in the 1600s through the active involvement of the King that “electrifies” the theatrical environment. This is true even in his absence; the question of presence becomes less one of co-presence and something closer to distance-presence (or telepresence) and its consequent warping of the social order. When the King is present, the play does seem to become predominantly about him. To a lesser extent, this geometry always pertains due to the use of painted backdrops in vanishing-point perspective that lose their coherence the further an audience member sits from the ideal, imagined viewpoint of the monarch. In either case, then, it is in the interest of the theatre maker or television producer to create a sense of uniqueness in order to generate the maximum amount of *purchasing*. It is more than a suspension of disbelief, though that’s understandable, given how important it is to enter into the spirit of the thing, to play along. Here, the belief that you are the sole intended audience is being generated, a credulous attachment to an impossible fact. Each play, like each television program, is of course being directed at other people besides yourself. Likewise, accepting the show as a traffic of two or three hours on the stage (or screen)—that the show is a time-bounded product—effectively obscures the rehearsal, the afterlife, the subsequent and previous performances, which are all present and which collectively dwarf the single spectator.

Theatre and television, then, evidence a strong desire to deceive (that is, persuade) the viewer that the ideal viewing situation would be only or especially for them. This may explain why certain proponents of immersive theatre go to great lengths to singularize

and particularize their attendees. London-based immersive theatre company Punchdrunk's productions, for instance, routinely require audience members to don masks during the performance. While on the one hand this might seem to have the effect of rendering each audience member just another featureless face, the active obscuring of audience reaction serves to highlight and promote the individual audience member's specific spectatorial position and behavior. This desired impact is also the source of the current enthusiasm for theatre arrangements geared toward solitary audience members, the so-called "Theatre for One" (described as "intimate exchanges in public spaces"⁹⁸ or, in the words of *New York Times* critic Ben Brantley, "where theatre meets confessional"⁹⁹). Even the Signature Theatre got into the act in 2015, installing a small theatre within the theatre's lobby featuring brief works by resident playwrights Lee Blessing, Charles Fuller, John Guare, David Henry Hwang, Bill Irwin, Charles Mee, Suzan-Lori Parks, Regina Taylor, and Naomi Wallace where audience members could watch individual performances (of the playlets). While this form of theatre spectating might be unfamiliar to many of the theatre's subscribers, it may actually be pitched at an entirely different set of theatregoers: those who are new to the experience of theatre going entirely.¹⁰⁰ While productions of *Atys* that underscore and emphasize solitary spectating

⁹⁸ "Home," *Theatre for One*, accessed March 14, 2017, <https://theatreforone.com/>.

⁹⁹ Ben Brantley, "Review: 'I'm Not the Stranger You Think I Am,' Where Theatre Meets Confessional," *The New York Times*, May 22, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/23/theatre/review-im-not-the-stranger-you-think-i-am-where-theatre-meets-confessional.html>.

¹⁰⁰ In recent years, declines in paid theatre subscriptions have led theatre companies to consider how to expand their appeal, especially to potential patrons who are not familiar with theatre going as a practice. In *Audience as Performer*, Caroline Heim chronicles and theorizes the rise of new theatre audiences alongside alternative performance forms. Although her book appeared before the "intimate theatre" initiative referenced above, Heim uses the Signature Theatre as a case study for this new dynamic in contemporary

might suggest a return to previous modes of royal performance (that is, appealing to spectators on the basis of being “uniquely for you”) to compensate theatregoers for the feeling now common of being cut off from society and each other, they may be popular precisely because they are more familiar: resembling far closer the TV relationship, so that the theatre for one is actually “the theatre for many” (i.e., television) that we experience more regularly. Or it could be that the presence of our fellow audience members is uncomfortable-making.

My YouTube screening of Arts Florissant’s *Alys* took place years after its filming, which itself involved no real attempt on the part of the camera operator to make the video into anything more than a document. This contrasts with more recent attempts like the Met in HD that try to give audiences the “feeling” of live theatre by simulcasting footage from the stage to movie theatres. Onstage action is delivered onscreen through a multitude of camera angles that recall a similar proliferation in professional sports. This is not necessarily a new phenomenon; PBS’s long-running program *Great Performances* has given millions access to Broadway shows that they wouldn’t ordinarily have, and similar programs deliver high-quality content across Europe. Gathering the audience in one place seems essential to the Met’s product, however, as if an important part of opera going was being seen to go to the opera. Notably, as early as the 1960s, there were instantiations of theatre simulcasting. A 1964 stage version of *Hamlet* starring Richard Burton may be familiar to contemporary theatre scholars by virtue of a contemporary

theatre programming. Caroline Heim, *Audience as Performer: The Changing Role of Theatre Audiences in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

transit, a 2005 Wooster “update” that played at the Public Theatre in New York in 2007, as well as other venues internationally before and after.

The film of Shakespeare’s play (or should I say Burton’s?) provided the movement score for the performers to an impressive degree. Scott Shepherd as Hamlet staggers across the stage, but his every step is calculated in advance to match Richard Burton’s reeling gait. The production, directed by John Gielgud, had been made for the stage, but seventeen cameras were used to capture the action. The resulting document was shown simultaneously in movie theatres across the country for one weekend only—an early attempt at network performance. In their production, the Wooster Group devised an elegant solution to the problem of multiple camera angles: the stage was built to pivot with each change in angle. A close-up of Gertrude? The stage lurches forward and the actors scurry to the apron. The effect is impressive and engaging and good fun. And it’s not easy: you see the actors strain and sweat to keep up with the film, even if Hamlet (Shepherd) can at times call “Cut” and ask the technicians in the booth to advance or rewind the film.

The overall feeling is not, as might be expected, a televisual suturing of past and present. Even if Shepherd’s movements exactly follow Burton’s, the impact of this exacting imitation is precisely to throw into relief all that this synchronization cannot accomplish. Rather than bringing 1964 and 2007 together on a single plane, this attempt at televisual crossing seems to squeeze the 50-odd years of history that separate the performances out of the seams and onto the stage. The shadowy digital erasures that occasionally occlude sections of the washed-out film footage in certain sections augment this sense of leakage, eerily evoking the ghost dancers of Rauschenberg’s *Open Score*,

which will be discussed in the next chapter. This sense of the apparitional should perforce enter into any discussion of the televisual. Theatre studies is perhaps more open to these questions and concerns than other disciplines, especially as regarding traditional performance. The spiritual dimension of performance practices is outlined by Ralph Yarrow, editor of *Sacred Theatre* (2007) and co-author, with Peter Malekin, of *Consciousness, Literature and Theatre* (1997):

to take the receiver out of the ordinary is the task here; not just in the sense of presenting something slightly unusual, but much more “radically” or fundamentally opening up the capacity for seeing anew, for beginning to get in on the ways things put themselves together. To do that, you have to go “back” to “before” preconceptions, to a “place” “prior to” language.¹⁰¹

The performer’s body, rather than bearing the burden of representation, instead became an incandescent opening in time. Detached from a body, detached from a language, the voice of the performer shaman haltingly “speaks” a hidden knowledge to the spectator.

Shakespeare’s text is foregrounded; it’s the most you’ll ever hear the play, while seeing a production of it. Also pertinent is the fact that the Wooster Group has spliced the film together to recreate the pentameter that Burton felt he could disregard from time to time. Burton and Shepherd tend to cancel each other out, in a way, because Shepherd isn’t trying to do Shakespeare, he is trying to do Burton in an indissoluble paradox. Note that Shepherd’s fidelity to Burton’s performance roughly paraphrases Hamlet’s relationship to his father’s ghost, which is, like the filmic image, another sort of apparition. In critic Bruce Barton’s opinion, the enchainment of roles is not as vexing as it would seem. He explains:

¹⁰¹ Ralph Yarrow, ed., *Sacred Theatre* (Bristol, UK: Intellect, 2007); Peter Malekin and Ralph Yarrow, *Consciousness, Literature and Theatre: Theory and Beyond* (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 15.

theatre's directorial approach effectively channels the tension(s) in a *premeditated* intersection of conflicting aesthetic expectations and circumstances. Admittedly, Wooster productions often deny any clear or stable relationship between corporeal and mediated presence...the eccentric intelligence and singularity of theatre's vision overtly orchestrates and instrumentalizes the anxiety thereby generated. The audience is, in a sense, *shown* its own anxiety, expertly manipulated at a distance.¹⁰²

There are flat-screen panels that show footage from onstage, akin to the monitors actors in the wings or in the green room sometimes use to follow the action (and which are used to great effect in another Wooster group production, *To You, the Birdie!* discussed in the next chapter). However, these screens are dwarfed by rear projection of the film footage across the back of the stage. This effect returns the theatre to the flatness of a television set but eliminates one of the great pleasures of human-televisual media interaction, when bodies become screens for images.

This has put me in mind, once again, of television's two audiences: a studio audience and a larger audience watching at home. Yes, some shows are in fact shot in the absence of a live audience and most are re-broadcast at a later date so that these two audiences are rarely co-temporal. But this does not invalidate the point that television creates two separate populations that share similar spectatorial "predicaments." As a group, the studio audience is present at the filming of the eventual television program. If it is being transmitted (streamed or broadcast) live, the audience can interrupt or otherwise alter the show in interesting ways. A successful television program relies on a receptive, cooperative, and above all compliant audience (if, for instance, retakes are necessitated), but it is not intended for them. The economics of the TV production would

¹⁰² Bruce Barton, "Paradox as Process: Intermedial Anxiety and the Betrayals of Intimacy." *Theatre Journal*, vol. 61, no. 4 (May 12, 2010), 584.

not make sense if the show were only being performed for the studio audience. No, it is the larger audience at home, as represented in the Nielsen ratings that the program courts. However, it is the strange magic of television that encourages both of these audiences—in the studio and at home—to misrecognize the program as meant for *them*. The live audience helps achieve the effect of interactivity to the broadcast audience. But those spectators in the studio miss the single most important component of the program: the advertisements on which it depends.

While recognizing how the two audiences of television result from the technological operation of the machinery involved, we should nevertheless consider additional aspects of televisual theatre that predate the apparatus of television. Take the example of a production that is staged more than once. (While this is not the *sine qua non* of theatre, it is helpful in this context.) For each and every audience that assembles, the combined energies of the cast and crew are on display: time and expense congeal however awkwardly on the stage. Often we in the audience have the feeling that the show does not merit our attention—our discharge of two or three (or, in the case of *Atys*, four) hours. But this is only if the show is not to our liking, and if we can somehow ignore the outlay I just mentioned. If we watch with the awareness of the time that has gone into the production, how can we feel shortchanged by the performance? Arguably, this enters into the calculus of the performers and production staff, as well: they are performing not just for the audience assembled on any one night but for all the audiences they will ever perform for (witness the global peregrinations of *Atys* in the late 1980s). Their energy is thus amortized across multiple nights or afternoons. (In the case of an expensive production like an opera, this is especially important. The Metropolitan Opera often uses

the same staging, sets, etc., for decades. I saw the 1987-vintage Franco Zeffirelli *Turandot* in 2004. If you wanted to buy a ticket, you could have seen it again in the 2015–2016 season at Lincoln Center, or at your local cinema, if it was participating in The Met: Live in HD. In a very literal sense, theatre, too, has the same “two audiences” as television, when the market is involved; the market, like an invisible, ideal spectator that can in certain circumstances be visible.¹⁰³ The King is the reason the production exists, though the production can happen for an audience that doesn’t include the King. But arguably it happens because the King wants or needs it to happen, similar to the way that the market is what makes these shows happen, though we don’t see that as the primary reason.

Increasingly, theatre scholars are gaining access to audiovisual records of productions, often simultaneous to their runs. The Metropolitan Opera in HD not only augments its box office draw, but enlarges the possible pool of critics and commentators. Watching theatre on television both exerts a theatre-like pull and also indicates television’s commonality with theatre in regard to distance. I was, without intending to be, part of *Atys*’ second audience. Though I enjoyed it and found it fascinating, I was not rapt, if it is possible to be so. And though I was “transported,” treated to an affective experience that was totally outside my normal routine, I was just as easily taken to other places while doing so, by opening additional browser windows, for instance. Even while reading using analogue technology, however, the mind wanders, meaning that “active reading” is always accompanied, not by passive non-reading, but by activity of another kind. This activity resembles distracted viewing as invited by television, which often does

¹⁰³ One-off productions, vanity productions, and ritual productions perhaps do not have this two-audience structure, but it is valid enough across a wide swath of theatre to be useful to our current discussion.

not even require you to watch. You can listen, while you cook, while you polish shoes, while you organize the notes for your dissertation. And you don't need to get the narrative completely, because the form of television is discrete, involving recursive segments of content in a televisual wash or flow. Even if you are distracted while you watch, this does not at all diminish the role television plays in your life. In *Television and the Quality of Life: How Viewing Shapes Everyday Experience*, Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi (famous for his theories of creativity and "flow") explains how television can serve as ego maintenance: "except for daydreaming, television may well provide one of the least expensive and most effective waking retreats for those weary or frustrated by reality demands."¹⁰⁴ It also serves to structure the day, as in the case of "I know my show comes on at four o'clock, and that's what I'll be doing then."

This distracted state has led some theorists to observe that "an involved television viewer is less defended and more suggestible—as in hypnosis" (102). Likewise, television-viewing throws into question our beliefs and attitudes about the relationship between rest, relaxation, and pleasure that recalls debates about art that date back to Aristotle and Plato. TV is often derided as a debased leisure activity, but Csikszentmihalyi reminds us that "[t]he Greek word for leisure, *scholē*, is where the word 'school' and its derivations originate, because for the aristocracy of that time learning and leisure were synonymous" (14-15). There is something that distinguishes television viewing from other pastimes, and that seems to be the quality of attention. By distributing and tabulating involved questionnaires about concentration and relaxation

¹⁰⁴ Robert Kubey and Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi, *Television and the Quality of Life: How Viewing Shapes Everyday Experience* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 103.

and viewing habits to scores of volunteers, Csikszentimihalyi was able to determine that this low-attention condition perpetuates itself:

Television can involve us and attract our attention but it does so without effortful concentration. In other words, in terms of concentration, television is a low-involvement activity. The paradoxical consequence is that low-cognitive effort by the viewer may make it harder, not easier, to continue concentrating. With time, people may miss being challenged and actively involved and may feel somewhat worse and more passive as a result. (135)

Distinguishing reading from watching a movie on a big screen and watching it on your smart phone is as easy as following the movement of the eye. Reading demands active eye movement, as does film viewing on a large screen. Csikszentimihalyi explains, “by contrast, because the screen is much smaller, television is viewed with much less eye movement. Along with other factors, this helps explain why the television viewer may be ‘involved’ but why it is a different form of attentional involvement, one requiring little concentration or active, intentional control” (136).

My *Atys* viewing involved sitting at my desk and screening in short segments. I didn’t watch the whole thing, and I made no attempt to understand what was going on, but I did appreciate the opulence and impressiveness of the staging, as well as the weirdness—and the fact that I could not “enter into” the show in any way. Based on my viewing of other productions of operas, I doubt that my experience would have been markedly different if I had sat in the audience at BAM on a night in September 2011 (or any of the other nights in Brooklyn, in Montpellier, in Bordeaux). The total illusionism of theatre as achieved by its most skilled practitioners creates a form that is almost inviolable. This shimmering object is not endangered by the audience by virtue of its aloof flatness. Is it because the audience couldn’t interrupt (on pain of social exclusion) or

because the audience would not interrupt (because the machine is so well oiled)? When we see the conventionalized audience (alert, attentive, respectful) descending from a tradition of court theatre, the spectator's seeming agency and autonomy retreats further still. The same vectors exist in the present, leading us to consider how the absolute monarchy as epitomized by Louis XIV came into being because the feudal structure was no longer adequate; the King had to play a positive role in directing the productive capacity of the nation, paving the way for the market to coordinate and shape it in the same way.

Atys was more in keeping with BAM's otherwise overwhelmingly intermedial line-up than it seemed at first glance. After all, "we" were watching 300-year-old media erupting into the present. The authorizing presence of the patron (*and also* his or her absence) creates an environment for social energy to circulate—determined by the prevailing economic structure. Imagine a PBS broadcast of the show in the style of "Broadway Milestones": asking us to be involved, donate. Why does high culture gravitate to public broadcasting? Because, the argument goes, the people won't support real art. They simply want entertainment. (But this is the lie of television: that it is something that people watch for amusement and so they can talk about it the next day "at the water cooler." It is intended first and foremost as an inducement to consumption. This is why that second audience is so important.)

Let us return to the production, by way of the "original": *Atys* was first performed in the palace of Saint-Germain-en-Laye on 10 January 1676 (where Louis was born) in 1687. It later was shown at the Paris Opéra in April of that year. Interestingly, *Atys* is not a machine play; it did not rely on spectacular effects like winged chariots and

thunderstorms or shipwrecks. In the eyes of some critics, this is an indication of an elevated seriousness and greater art: “The elimination of stage machinery and use of a single décor for the five acts of the tragedy were not only the result of practical and economic considerations. They also served to concentrate the work’s tragic tone” (Burgess, 475). The text, written with the King’s patronage, was intended for the King’s pleasure, and, as was common in that period, features veiled reference to the King’s person. When it was later performed in public, the King was therefore present “in absentia.” This is instantiation in the negative: a gapping in the social field that made audiences who attended the theatre in Louis’ absence a second audience, much like myself—and anyone who watches TV at home.

In his introduction to a volume on the Baroque period, Larry Norman appropriately situates theatre as a key artistic form in that epoch. His short essay sketches how theatre contributed to the success of absolutist monarchs and vice-versa, and also discusses how a form of representation that reveled in the play of light and darkness, surface and depth, was perfect for a period in which established hierarchies were imperiled by economic change and social upheaval. But theatre’s metaphors and theatre as a metaphor doesn’t (didn’t) come without some danger; Norman “cautions” against the perils of Baroque-era vanishing-point scenery: “the illusions of perspective forced the actors to stay far enough away from the background scenery to avoid aberrations in the comparative relationship between their height and that of the painted buildings or landscapes. Lighting required the same attention, since the disproportion of shadows

could lead to absurd effects.’’¹⁰⁵ This threat to the stage’s perfect picture frame and its illusionism can have a profoundly destabilizing impact, one that we might call the “Gulliver effect”—whenever effects from two different registers come too near each other. Perhaps this is precisely what it is about *Atys* that allows it to be read productively. In attempting to create an authentic experience of a 17th-century opera, Christie and BAM show that history and historical investigation are prone to this same Gulliver effect. And in this way, the show can perhaps achieve in and for its viewers that peculiar awareness of being doubly addressed, becoming an audience that *sees* both addresses. But surely this is what theatre should always aim for: intentionally cultivating in whatever way it can the Gulliver effect, becoming itself a technology for showing the technology at work.

¹⁰⁵ Larry F. Norman, ed., *The Theatrical Baroque* (Chicago: The David and Alfred Smart Museum/University of Chicago, 2001), 12.

Chapter 3: Synchronizing Theatre: Art and Technology

We might be tempted to say that the content of a picture is never more than its contents, and that *trompe l'oeil* is the exception that proves the rule. The back wall of the theatre is flat, unless it is made less flat through scenic overpainting, which encourages the eye to see a depth that is not there. But is it possible for the eye to see the depth that *is* in a flat surface? This is the paradoxical question that I turn to now in my discussion of intermedial theatre reliant on screens and screenal technology, via an unusual transit into theatrical engravings, theatre engravings, and the “illegible” art of Joseph Cornell.

Theatre in Two Dimensions

Continuing to use flatness as a framework that pertains to both three-dimensional and two-dimensional material on paper, onstage, and on screen, a 1777 engraving by Jean-Michel Moreau le Jeune of an elaborately dressed *grande dame* taking her place in a box at the opera represents an interesting threshold moment. The illustration comes from a compendium of French manners, *Monuments de costume physique et morale* (1777–83) that famously captured a wide range of fashions, gestures, and attitudes in social circulation in Paris on the eve of the Revolution. (Intriguingly, Moreau’s popularity continued unabated during the Revolutionary period and after.) *Les Adieux* (Leave-taking), also called *At the Door of the Box*, depicts a woman stepping into a private stall from which to view a performance. This hesitant instant is not simply a suspension of time in a non-space between corridor and box, but choreographs a peculiar inversion of public and private space. The hallway is a place for the woman in a floral dress to meet the public, or at least other members of her social circle. Bodies navigate a space in

common and come into dangerous contact with each other. Note the perfectly manicured hand raised to the greedy lips of an admirer in the intimacy of touch.



Figure 4: A threshold moment

The woman's escort is already in the box. He does not see the attention being paid by the courtier in the hallway. His attention is already rapt by what is happening in the theatre. We see what he cannot see, and the maidservant sees that he *does not* see. This stolen kiss does not take place in darkness but is powerfully lit by a wall sconce that is not pictured. Light is cast *into* the scene from the right, throwing the shadow of the lady's maid onto the door and brightly illuminating the gallant. Tellingly, *darkness* is also projected into the picture from left, emanating from the stage itself. The darkness of the theatre spills out of the box in a perfect parallelogram behind the woman in the floral dress. (The light emitted by the wall sconce cannot help but recall the flashbulb of a celebrity photographer, a more contemporary example of a threshold moment when the intimacy of public space is deployed to close the very gap that celebrity opens in the circuit of desire.) The light ray attenuates as she pivots to enter the box—her formal dress does not permit her to walk through the door straight on. Angling, she aligns with the pictorial plane of the engraving. Entering into the televisual space of the theatre (which means both stage and audience), she becomes flat.

The box (no. 13) is shared with the lady's intimates and affords a degree of distance and comfort. Crucially, it does not provide anonymity; the box is a place to be seen. The box is a performance that stages the social distance between those who can afford to hire it and those who sit in the hall below. As performance, though, the play in the box is constrained by the limits of its own visibility. The lamps that cast light on the stage (which before was emitting a dark energy all its own) also shine light on what is happening in the boxes, but this has a peculiar effect, like a room illuminated by a television set. Those who sit in the box can *be seen* to respond to the actions of the stage,

but not to actions in the auditorium (even if that *is* what they respond to). Anything that occurs in the box becomes a response to what is happening in the stage space. It is crucially performed not for the actors but for fellow audience members, who see it by virtue of the same candles that light the stage action. In this way, *At the Door of the Box* suggests a world where the preeminently social question of how bodies circulate is displaced onto a question of how those bodies are constrained by their very circulation as image.¹⁰⁶

When does the two-dimensional tell us about the third dimension? This question is particularly apt when we're confronted with depictions of theatre in prints and photographs. Theatre historians rely on such images to corroborate various surmises about the use of scenery, theatrical technology, costuming, and gesture. Extrapolating from them allows us to augment textual traces of performance in the form of plays, accounts by audience members, tallies by theatre managers, and public edicts pertaining to the theatre. Jacques Callot (1592–1635), a talented artist who made work for the theatre and also documented that work, is representative in this regard. Much of Callot's oeuvre is dedicated to theatrical matters: portrayals of commedia characters, depictions of theatrical pageants, and plays. A particularly striking example of his technical skill is a set of engravings created to commemorate a Medici pageant, the staging of *The Liberation of Tirreno and Arnea* that took place in the Uffizi Theatre on February 6, 1617, as part of the entertainment celebrating the marriage of Caterina de' Medici and

¹⁰⁶ Transposing this same phenomenon to the contemporary moment, it is possible to identify the para-televisual activities that take place at the “door” of the box that is television: obsessive television watching and fan culture, yes, but also attempts to remake television as a more recognizably two-way medium, such as YouTube's amalgam of uploaded user content and live television.

Ferdinando Gonzaga, Duke of Mantua. The etching depicts the conclusion of the first part of the *veglia*, when the ballet moved from the stage to the auditorium and involved the participation of Caterina and Ferdinando, and is an incredible trove of information about the era in which it was made.

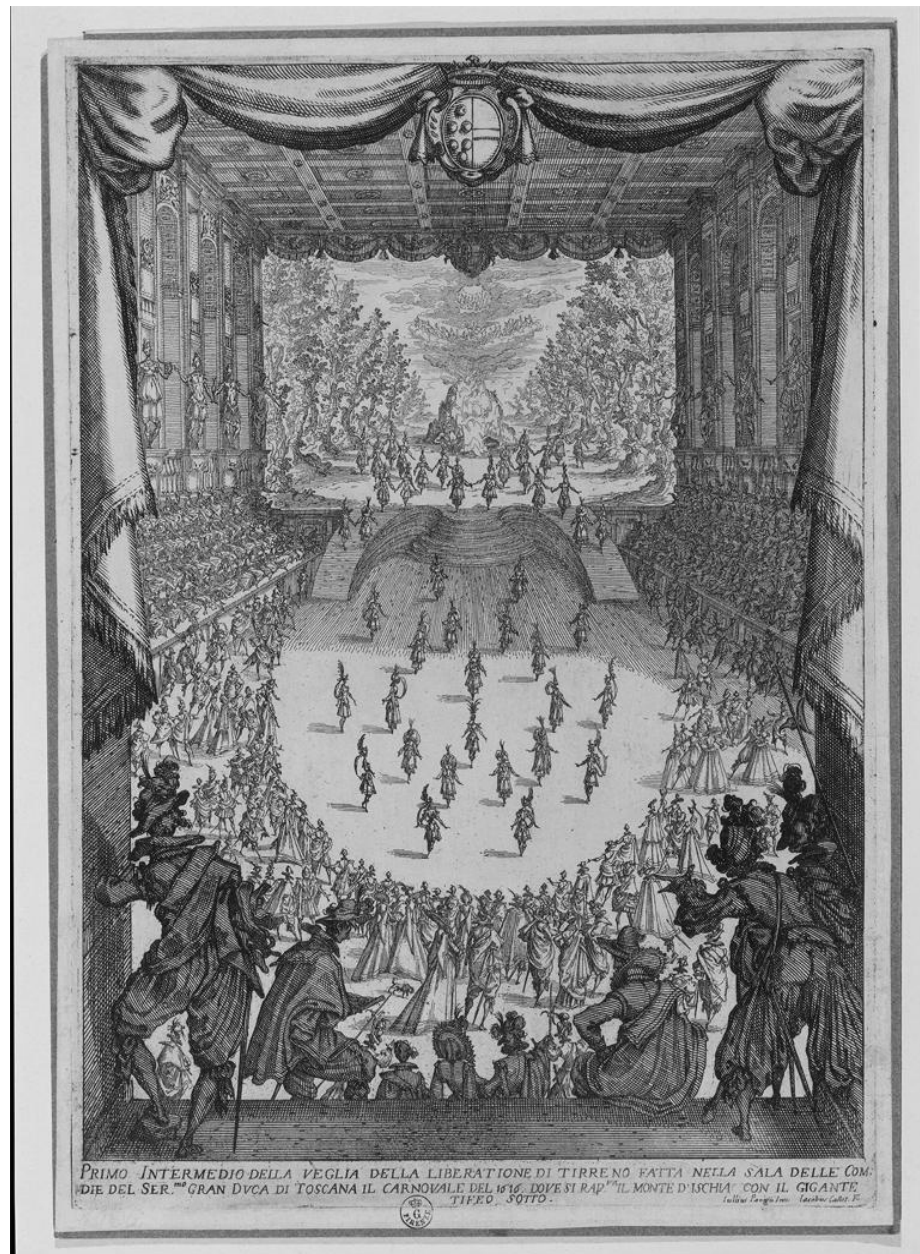


Figure 5: Callot's engraving of the first intermezzo of the Veglia of the Liberation of Tirreno, performed in the Theatre of His Serene Highness the Grand Duke of Tuscany.

The presence of figures on the cusp of the proscenium (in this case, the edge of the image) directs the viewing eye into the space and helps indicate the relative sizes and distances of all the other depicted elements. This is a frequent convention in painting that suggests that the goal is not to convince the viewer that they have access to the scene as if it were real life, but that they have a portable version of it, with congealed depth.

I've been discussing Callot's two-dimensional representations of a three-dimensional, immersive environment (even if there is a clear delineation of audience and performing space). The two-dimensional "picture" can become an "image" when endowed with the private meaning of its maker. There exists a belief that three-dimensional representations are "more" than two-dimensional ones. Perhaps it is the terms themselves that are the problem: a deeply sedimented naming system for ways of representing (it's all representation anyhow) that discourages critical reflection on what is missed out on *in any given form*. Perhaps it is duration, or depth, or personal meaning. All escape, or fail to inhere in the picture. But are they perhaps reconstituted in the image? Is this not the value (so-called) of two-dimensional thinking? By virtue of thinking in two dimensions, new political, social, economic, and aesthetic combinations are released, mobilized, made visible: the critical interpretive faculty collides in heretofore unknown constellations.

I prefer a term like "register" or "system" to talk about pictures (and this includes televisual media) rather than medium, level, and so forth. And so "systems of representation" makes it possible to talk about (disparity in) time(s), slammed together in a single pictorial plane: your television screen, your mental picture. So when footage of a

hurricane in Florida and a Walgreens' opening in Minnesota follow each other in quick succession, you might have the illusion that they have both been in the room with you, which is of course not true. And you haven't been transported there(s), either. But if you take a second to put aside your fear of and voyeuristic interest in extreme weather or your just-acknowledged need for personal hygiene products, you might see how it is possible to take the space out of space, and turn it into a concept: here and now.

The images of the 1617 marriage celebration speak eloquently about what Callot and his patrons wished to project: imagination, creativity, ingenuity—the very attributes that made the Medici banking empire so successful. Though we may not be able to accept the images as factually true, they have considerable evidentiary relevance. They attest to an intense investment in theatre as a form of spectacular and extravagant entertainment, to the display of status, and lastly to the engraver's art, where he tested the limits of what could be depicted in the narrow channels of a copper plate.¹⁰⁷ I originally encountered these engravings in a book on the Medici festival performances and later in a special exhibition at the Museum of the Rhode Island School of Design in Providence, Rhode Island. The reproductions in the book do not betray how much was lost in translation. To see the paper cratered and filled with ink is to be struck by the resourcefulness of the designer—how the size of the engraving (about the size of a sheet of 8½" x 11" paper) sucks the viewer in. In person, the artwork doesn't appear shallow, like a narrow paper theatre behind glass; instead, you find yourself bodily pitched into the engraving. Partly this is a sort of small-scale vertigo induced by how close to the image one must be in

¹⁰⁷ The depth of the engraving is "flattened" by the process of printing. The depth of the plate is transformed into the flatness of an image, and that depth is represented by image (though using ink, which does have thickness, albeit infinitesimal).

order to make out its finer details. This image, and others by Callot, provoke a type of viewing behavior that at the very least holds out the possibility of a surface being deep and having depth.

The intense concentration of these scenes (by which I mean both the minute focus of each image on their subject matter and the exceptionally acute handiwork of the master engraver) call to mind enigmatic American artist Joseph Cornell and his precisely constructed memory boxes. A box is both a particularly useful object and a powerful metaphor for the mysteries that all interior spaces mask. Peter Lloyd and Andrew Crawford explore the fascination collectors feel for certain bibelot and jeweled boxes by suggesting that the box itself exerts a semiotic and psychological pull: “The ‘box’ is representational. The locked box becomes more. The box with the ‘secret’ lock represents the primal quest to discover the unknown and stretch the boundaries of consciousness.”

¹⁰⁸ Another way that theatre and television relate is in their boxiness. Theatres are boxes when they’re indoors, and televisions are, too (no matter how flat they’ve become). Earlier models of television made this isomorphism more apparent—the large televisions of the 1950s that in their solidity made a statement about the importance of television, and staked a claim for the medium in the heart of the family, the living room. I say theatres are boxes when they’re indoors because of course the outdoor theatre doesn’t have to have the walls and roofs and so forth that the theatre house does. We remember with fondness the Athenian amphitheatre cut out of a hillside that demonstrated the continuity between the play, the performance, the city, and the environment it took place in. The form that the theatre of Dionysus took guaranteed a certain democracy of the

¹⁰⁸ Peter Lloyd and Andrew Crawford, *Celebrating Boxes* (Fresno, CA: Linden Pub., 2002), 50.

gaze, and was an apt scenographic model of the sociometric process at work in ancient Greek drama. In what follows, I provide a reading of a Joseph Cornell assemblage that emphasizes its intimacy and constructedness, how it offers the body intimate clutter—small, easily manipulated spaces that are progressively subdivided to the level of micro texture, affording the eye plenty of the information it craves.



Figure 6: Untitled (*Medici Slot Machine Series*)

Untitled (*Medici Slot Machine Series*), is typical of Cornell's output. A box 19 inches by 11 inches by 5 inches sandwiches a miscellaneous collection between a reproduction of a Renaissance painting by Sofonisba Anguissola (1532–1625, notably one of the most accomplished female artists of her time) and a pane of glass. Between the image of nine-year-old Massimiliano Stampa, third marquis of the small northern Italian city of Soncino, and the plane, several tiny toys are arrayed. In other boxes, these are stuffed birds or tea cups or bits of jewelry—anything that Cornell could find to convey a lost world, or the same world opening into infinity. Looking more closely at the image, painted to commemorate Stampa's elevation to marquis upon his father's death, it is possible to note the sword more common in adult portraiture. Here the grieving subject is positioned halfway between youth and adulthood. Describing the piece for the *New Yorker* magazine, Adam Gopnick observes,

The Medici boxes are the most “haunting” of all Cornell's works, and they haunt us because we are not sure if the princess is imprisoned or on display, or if there is really a difference. The grave and overburdened princess, surrounded by children's blocks and stenciled numbers and pinballs and pinball chutes, is allowed back into the childhood that her position kept her from so many centuries ago. At the same time, the balls and blocks and jacks become accessories of aristocracy; they suddenly have the weary dignity of court art.¹⁰⁹

The Renaissance image also calls to mind the tradition of epicurean collecting that displayed the wealth and discernment of Renaissance princes and potentates, through cabinets of curiosity and *Wunderkammer*. But instead of bones of saints or the tusks of narwhales, Cornell's boxes elevated the mundane discards of American consumer society and combined them with the peepshow and the arcade game. If Cornell was showing a

¹⁰⁹ Adam Gopnick, “Sparkings: Joseph Cornell and the Art of Nostalgia,” *The New Yorker* (February 17 and 24, 2003), accessed March 10, 2017, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2003/02/17/sparkings>.

lineage traceable to high art background, he was also influenced by the Surrealists and their interest in juxtaposition and collage, an artistic technique that became a literary one through the conquest of the dream space thanks to psychoanalysis. More than anything, *Medici Slot Machine* collages history, a temporal mixing of past and present in the universally available vocabulary of circulating images. In the words of art critic and Cornell biographer Deborah Solomon, “[a] Renaissance princeling is made to seem part of the present, and a candy machine in a subway station becomes the vaulted palace in which he resides.”¹¹⁰ Perhaps this fatherless prince had a special significance for Cornell, who lost his own father at an early age. The box is a dream biography that allows Cornell to cross-affiliate through time and space.

Solomon’s consideration of Cornell’s life, *Utopia Parkway: The Life and Work of Joseph Cornell*, begins with the caution, “History creates us, but not as much as we create it” (xii). She writes this over and against formalist critics who dismiss biography, and Marxist ones who dismiss the individual. But history for Cornell was a different matter entirely: the past as represented here by a picture of an Italian renaissance boy is not flat, two-dimensional, and impossible to answer, but is more like a plane where a projection of the present can meet with a projection from the past. Rather than being a sculpture, the Medici print slot machine is a theatre. Not all art is televisual; to be clear, the collaging of different image sources into a Cornell backdrop is not what I mean by a televisual crossing. That crossing takes place on the pane of glass, where your reflected image can be caught. Deborah Solomon notes that the “Prince’s face appears in the space where a

¹¹⁰ Deborah Solomon, *Utopia Parkway: The Life and Work of Joseph Cornell* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997), 140.

child would ordinarily find his own image reflected,” but crucially she neglects to note the reflection of the viewer’s *own* face on the pane of glass, like the plane where the audience and actors meet in theatre (139). The pane hermetically seals the contents of the box, like a coffin or crypt, but makes them still visible. The effect is even more pronounced when a Cornell box is itself enclosed in a museum vitrine, or hung with others in a prismatic field of dream imagery. Multiple Cornells are collected like treasures within a large frame against a wall; in this way, their scant three-dimensionality serves as the tantalizing invitation to look and look more closely, to which we must respond. Much like the proscenium arch, the glass limits a space that is supposed to be a whole world. Approach at an angle, and some objects are lost, as actors in the wings.

Cornell’s life has been brought to the stage by Charles Mee in a collage-play called *Hotel Cassiopeia*. First performed at the Actors Theatre of Louisville in March 2006, it came to the Brooklyn Academy of Music in October 2007 in a production by Anne Bogart and SITI Company. Mee chose a worthy subject, as Cornell’s witty reappropriations of stage icon images of Lauren Bacall into a personal cosmology fit well in Mee’s technique of collaging existing texts into new works. As Scott T. Cummings describes it, “Charles Mee demonstrates his view of culture as a process in which a society sifts through the past and its artifacts, salvages what is of interest and value, and redefines itself by recombining recycled materials in a new way, from a new perspective, and with new ideas and materials.”¹¹¹ For Mee, text can exist without stage directions, concrete linear dialogue, or well-defined characters. In fact, Mee destroys the Western idea of a well-made play, giving his readers a page of suggestive thought. Cummings

¹¹¹ Scott T. Cummings, *Remaking American Theatre: Charles Mee, Anne Bogart and the SITI Company* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 5.

suggests that Mee's plays refrain "from the law of history" (232). Even more, they augur a new kind of history, as do the Cornell boxes—not quite a three-dimensional rendering of events and experiences, but also not *not* that. In a sense, *Hotel Cassiopeia* turns the stage into a Cornell box. In fact, the stage directions in the play indicate Mee was thinking of the very Medici Slot Series I've been discussing until now. The stage setting is described as follows: "A black and white photograph—with a musky light blue overlay—of a painting of a Renaissance princess is projected on the back wall. A huge yellow cork ball. A train whistle quietly the sound of a locomotive. Joseph goes to his brother Robert who lies in bed huddled against the wall."¹¹²

Using vocabulary that registers her association of hollowness and vacuity with surface attractions, critic Caryn James of *The New York Times* writes:

Still, the ambitious "Hotel Cassiopeia" is a far better representation of what Mr. Mee can do than the muddled "Iphigenia 2.0" (which closed on Sunday), the first of three Mee plays the Signature Theatre is presenting during his season as its writer in residence. If you're going to update a Greek play, you'd better have something more substantial to say than "the Greeks had wars too." While "Hotel Cassiopeia" suffers from a similar hollowness, it has glittering surface charms.¹¹³

James is right to point to the similarities: there is something inspired in the meeting of this playwright and Cornell; they share a collagist's instinct. Mee often uses shards of classical plays in his works, and he posts the texts of his theatre pieces on his Web site (charlesmee.org), encouraging others to sample and transform his lines into works of their own (although not to the point of copyright infringement). James seems to object to

¹¹² Charles Mee, *Hotel Cassiopeia*, in Adrien-Alice Hansel and Julie Felise Dubiner, eds., *Humana Festival 2006: The Complete Plays* (New York: Playscripts, Inc., 2007), 213.

¹¹³ Caryn James, "He Lives in the Basement, but His Life's in the Boxes," Review of *Hotel Cassiopeia*. *The New York Times*, October 11, 2007. sec. Theatre. <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/11/theater/reviews/11hotel.html>.

the everydayness of *Hotel Cassiopeia*. She writes, “The backdrop of stars, designed by Neil Patel, creates a frame that makes all the action seem to exist within a Cornell box. The dialogue never matches that visual grace, though. Cornell frequently recites lists — of desserts he likes or names of streets—that are poor equivalents for seeing them.” James describes how Hollywood fantasies and screen celebrities (Lauren Bacall is one of the named characters in the script) are “juxtaposed with Cornell’s banal, even pathetic everyday existence.” At a certain point, however, the reviewer begins to feel like the production and performance have fallen flat: “[b]ut ‘Hotel Cassiopeia’ indicates those ideas without truly capturing how Cornell fused his romanticized obsessions with the ordinary, transforming them into art.” SITI’s clear emphasis on the two-dimensional and hermetic qualities of the image are critiqued as failings.

Solomon also describes Cornell’s stage-door syndrome of turning actresses into personal icons. Some of Cornell’s earliest memories were of vaudeville troupes on the whistle-stop circuit through his hometown of Nyack, New York, and he collected librettos as mementoes of trips to New York City to visit the Metropolitan Opera. Deborah Solomon writes, “one imagines he valued them as much for the way they looked—ruled, black-and-white, vaguely antique as for the mist of memories they stirred in him long after the stage lights had dimmed” (38). Solomon is able to evoke the passionate correspondence that Cornell felt for discarded images and “lifeless” scores, even if such an approach risks becoming an explanation and justification for his working method rather than an exploration of it. I’ve indicated in these few pages some of the tensions and paradoxes of image making as a form of historical recovery, which bear on the practice and theorization of theatre. Even more, theatre’s labor may not be solely on

the side of making mute scripts speak and dead characters live. What if we were to focus on the work that theatre can do on images and image culture? Bogart's staging of Mee's text makes these questions especially relevant. At a key moment early in the show, the production takes a turn away from naturalism and into something more fanciful: actors become cut-out figures from a paper theatre. They come and go carrying white teacups, a single teabag, a ballet barre, a bare tree with intertwining leaves (sometimes decorated with birds), and a large picture frame. The props float up to the heavens and then down again, to be disassembled and removed from the stage.

Bogart's production is hardly the first time that theatre's boxiness has been made operative in a theatrical space. Cornell's constructions provide a particularly apt context and counterpoint for theatre's boxy ways and other directors have explored it in their work, notably Richard Foreman. Foreman's work often registers as a kind of box of illusions, a self-contained world of pseudo-magic and enchantment. Indeed, that was how *New York Times* critic Mel Gussow described a 1989 production:

...the Performing Garage has been turned into a Foreman equivalent of a Joseph Cornell box. Strange objects (and bizarre-looking characters) are firmly fixed in place, but the connection among them is in the eye of the beholder.

Before "Lava" begins, there is ample time to contemplate the setting (designed by Mr. Foreman), crisscrossed with his customary string and so crammed with gewgaws as to look like a black magical museum installation.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ Mel Gussow, "On a Feather-Strewn Stage, Multiple Flights of Fancy" *The New York Times*, December 13, 1989, sec. Theatre. <http://www.nytimes.com/1989/12/13/theater/review-theater-on-a-feather-strewn-stage-multiple-flights-of-fancy.html>. Gussow had previously drawn attention to the Cornell-like aspects of Foreman's scenography in a 1987 review of *Film Is Evil: Radio Is Good* when he wrote that the director transformed "the Tisch Mainstage 1 into a cavernous radio studio of the imagination - the Foreman equivalent of a Louise Nevelson environment lined with Joseph Cornell boxes." Review of *Film Is Evil, Radio Is Good*. *The New York Times*, May 5, 1987, sec. Theatre. <http://www.nytimes.com/1987/05/05/theatre/stage->

For anyone familiar with Foreman's staging techniques, this description should ring true. Foreman excels at multiplying the forms and kinds of separation between audience and stage, slicing the space with horizontals and verticals whose transparency only seems to heighten their ability to create removes. In *Unbalancing Acts*, Foreman describes a technique he developed early in his career of using string to "connect" different parts of the stage and to various bits of stage business: "if a character stabbed another in the back, I might have introduced a third performer to stretch a string from a far corner of the stage to the point where the stabbing takes place."¹¹⁵ Discounting the idea that this could be emphasizing or highlighting the onstage murder, which would be pointless and redundant ("a stabbing onstage could hardly be made *more* important," Foreman notes), instead the desired result is a (to repurpose a phrase from Rancière) redistribution of the visible, across the entire playing space so that "the whole stage participates in the event" (56). Arguably, this interrupts any idea an audience might have that the stage space is a volume that can be entered, or at least creates a vibratory tension between what we think know about space and how we suspect it might work in these worlds.

Expanding on this understanding, Foreman underscores his ultimate aim of encouraging, rather than closing, distance:

Often I introduce a railing, or some string, or even a wall of glass as an obstruction between the front row of the audience and the playing space. These barriers reinforce aesthetic distance. I do not want the audience to be sucked into the resonating chamber of the stage. I want the spectator to

film-is-evil-radio-is-good.html. Nevelson was a noted sculptor who created monochromatic environments halfway between bas-relief and enclosure using wood.

¹¹⁵ Richard Foreman and Ken Jordan, *Unbalancing Acts: Foundations for a Theater* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1993), 56.

keep his distance, precisely so that the action can bounce against that subtle fourth barrier. Too often in the theater, the play of resonance onstage is dampened because the ‘wall’ between audience and stage has softened to mush; empathy will erode that wall and pull the audience onto the stage so they will identify with the actions or characters, which undermines aesthetic distance. (58)

As is amply demonstrated in the quote above, this is theatre that takes place in a bounded space set off from the outside world, that you pay to go into, that you leave when you’re done: theatre in a box that “contains” all of the reciprocities that it entails. The authors of a study of boxes (primarily European jeweled bibelot) explain the allure, psychologically, of boxes in the following way:

The container. The “container”—the holder of contents—is central; every thing is a container.

A box is one of the most fundamental forms of manufactured container. It is the contemporary descendent of the found container, the naturally occurring object with an adapted purpose.

The ‘box’ is representational. The locked box becomes more. The box with the ‘secret’ lock represents the primal quest to discover the unknown and stretch the boundaries of consciousness.

This is apparent, consciously or unconsciously, to most people and can be observed in the widespread fascination and response to the “puzzlebox.” It is an archetypal and primal response.¹¹⁶

When Foreman writes about his own work, he is at pains to explain that he is not interested in creating some sort of cosmic union between actor and audience. In fact, he’d be happier if everyone left the theatre feeling a little more alone. “...When I make theater, I prefer to think I’m directing it toward the individual, sitting in isolation from everyone else in the audience” (73). While acknowledging that “[t]heater is the ultimate public art, all about social relations, and most people are attracted to theater specifically because it is a community activity” Foreman bodily recoils from this kind of theatre: “I

¹¹⁶ Peter Lloyd and Andrew Crawford, *Celebrating Boxes* (Linden Pub., 2002), 50.

violently resist being so absorbed,” he writes. “I despise all social phenomena.” (72-73)

Foreman’s work, like recent work from the Wooster Group, does not offer an invitation to come inside the production, or if it does, it’s not an invitation that many would want to take up. In this way, they serve to underscore the ambivalence of all such arrangements. Some recent scholarship on 60s avant-garde performance corroborates this view by offering new and better understandings of the context and content of the prototypical form of audience participation, the Happening. Judith Rodenbock’s exploration of 60s Happenings, *Radical Prototypes*, provides a corrective to accounts of these performances that fail to underscore their fundamental ambiguity, how they critiqued the very forms of participation that they activated and maintained.¹¹⁷

In a particularly engaging chapter called “The Black Box,” Rodenbock references social science experiments (the Skinner box), anechoic chambers (John Cage), as well as a plethora of art boxes. She explains, “Since the early twentieth century, the ‘black box’ has named both an electronic casing and a modernist, experimental theatrical space. A ‘black box’ theatre is, first and foremost, a blank or even abstract architectural space, manipulable in all its formal terms, but most especially in its configuration of distinctions between audience and action.” (76) Rodenbock poses the fascinating question, does the model of the black box “have anything to offer to an understanding of the turn to a (problematized) ‘theatrical’ mode by artists involved, for example, with happenings, Fluxus, task dance, or minimalism?” (80).

If, following from these thoughts and also from Cornell’s artistic choices, we begin to see that the past is as flat as the television is deep, or as contained as a Cornell

¹¹⁷ Judith F. Rodenbeck, *Radical Prototypes: Allan Kaprow and the Invention of Happenings* (Boston: MIT Press, 2014).

box, then we enter into some very new and exciting territory. The radical promise of this research is to recognize that theatre is not only a domain of living bodies in three dimensions, and that media visions are not inherent ossifications of real life. A media scenography articulates environment and theatre together in such a way so as to fundamentally challenge our idea of how social relations are structured. Television can be deep without having depth.

Tennis and Theatre

You will hear the body broadcast its sounds/ You will see without
light/ You will witness a deaf-mute interview/ You will see
dancers float on air/ Those of the audience who are willing will
become more than spectators/ you too can actually float/ It's art
and engineering and little theatrics/ It's important that you attend.

—from a poster advertisement for *9 Evenings*

The collaboration between Robert Rauschenberg, Robert Whitman, John Cage, and David Tudor, among other artists, and Bell Labs engineers led to *9 Evenings*, a series of linked technologically mediated performances on the evenings of October 14–23, 1966, that created new challenges for both parties. In an era before miniaturization, the technical requirements of the productions would have overwhelmed existing theatre infrastructure: enormous banks of machines, coiled power cords, and literally miles of cable were required for the devised effects. The cavernous 69th Regiment Armory in New York City on Lexington Avenue at 25th Street (site of the famous Armory show of 1913, the first large-scale exhibit of modern art from Europe and America) was well-matched to these requirements. While teams of engineers made adjustments to mask and

tame the unruly acoustics of the space, the performers rehearsed as best as they could on the margins.

Billy Klüver, an electrical engineer at Bell Labs who helped found Experiments in Art and Technology (EAT), explains on the jacket of the DVD of the recent release of *9 Evenings* that in the first of a series of planning meetings, artists were told they could ask “for anything they wanted,” while engineers responded with their best guesses at how to achieve them. Rauschenberg drew up a long list of requests, including that the engineers make a “light-sensitive chemical which changes color; temperature and pressure sensitive colors; live fabrics; nowhere sound; use of time delay in general; printing on tape manually without using tape recorders; infrared TV...forms of rebroadcast, snooperscopes, TV sets, Eidophor.” Some of these requests were impossible to fulfill with the existing technology—in point of fact they would still be difficult to achieve today. One element that played a major part in the performance was obtainable, just: “We needed to find television pickup tubes that operated in the infrared end of the spectrum. Engineer Larry Heilos quickly discovered that any good infrared equipment was held classified by the U.S. government. He solved the problem when he located a supplier in New Jersey who had an infrared videcon that was of Japanese make and could be installed in a Norelco video camera.”¹¹⁸ In the end, the Rauschenberg piece called *Open Score* would require a unique combination of radio, infrared, and televisual media that upon viewing today still impresses with its simplicity, ingenuity, and sincerity.

While the ethos of these evenings of Art + Engineering was very much about a one-to-one collaboration between artists and engineers, it is hard to avoid the conclusion

¹¹⁸Experiments in Art and Technology and Bell Telephone Laboratories, *Open Score* videorecording (E.A.T. [and] Artpix, 2007)

that as free as the exchange might have been, it's the artists who ultimately received all the credit. In a more recent interview that accompanied the DVD, Rauschenberg explained that the openness of *Open Score* was paramount for him and his engineer buddies: "No direction—that's the way art should be going...Infinite possibilities and impossibilities." He marveled at the technician's willingness to, like the performers, work for nothing: unpaid labor in an uncertain endeavor.



Figure 7: *Open Score* by Robert Rauschenberg

At the core of the piece is a set of specially prepared tennis racquets with tiny crystal-controlled FM transmitters fitted into their handles by Bell engineer Bill Kaminski. Radios tuned to the proper frequency were ranged around a regulation tennis court on the floor of the giant space. Each time the racquets struck a ball, a corresponding tone was picked up by the radios and relayed and amplified to fill the space with a resonant *bong!* The choice of a tennis game as the structuring element of the first section

of *Open Score* meant that it was easily assimilable to the audience's experience.

Everyone—or, at any rate, most New York experimental theatregoers—is familiar with the basic premise of tennis, and the game provides its own expectations and form. One major difference, however, was that this wasn't competitive tennis but collaborative: the two players were trying to keep the ball in play as long as possible.

The structure of the piece was conventional, almost classic; in an interview included with the archival footage, fellow participant in *9 Evenings* Robert Whitman explains that *Open Score* had a recognizable arc and gave the feeling of a journey. Downplaying the novelty of any of the technology involved, he claims it was something “straight out of the 18th century—someone born then would understand what this was like.” In a separate reminiscence for the Robert Rauschenberg Oral History Project, Whitman follows a similar tack. It is worth quoting his mischievous description at length:

It's a tennis game. First, people come out and I think they set up the net and stand there because they have to hold the net taut. You couldn't just mount the net on the floor of the armory where it took place. Let's see. Each time the ball was hit, the sound of the ball was amplified through the space and the speakers. One can talk about the technology, but it's just too boring to talk about that stuff.

So you heard the cosmic pock of the sound of the ball hitting the racket. And each time the sound came, a light went off, until the space was in complete darkness. I think the sound continued—I'm not sure—for a while. In the dark, you heard people say their names. There was a rustling sound of a lot of people in the dark. You couldn't see the people until they were projected—he had gotten a hold of infrared video cameras and projected images of this crowd of people who were like ghosts, appearing on the floor in front of the audience. They made gestures that were cued by lights that they could see, that were behind the audience. They made simple gestures like embrace your neighbor, wave, or something simple like that. And then somehow they got off the floor.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁹ Alessandra Nicifero, “Reminiscences of Robert Whitman,” Interview, *The Robert Rauschenberg Oral History Project* (New York: Columbia University Center for Oral History Research, 2015).

Lights with an infrared filter illuminated the crowd as infrared sensitive television cameras picked up their movements. The television images were projected onto three large screens hanging in front of the audience. The audience could sense the presence of the crowd, but could only see them through the projected television image. Rauschenberg used banks of flashlights attached to the balcony railings to signal his cast to perform simple movements he had devised: touch someone who is not touching you; hug someone quickly; move closer together; move apart; draw a rectangle in the air as high as you can reach; sing one of ten songs being sung loudly or sing one of your own choice, etc.

This is how (soon-to-be-noted Abstract Expressionist) Frank Stella and his tennis partner, Mimi Kanarek, found themselves on a tennis court laid out on the Armory floor on the night of October 14, 1966. The audience included men in tuxedos and women in glimmering gowns with towering beehives, looking like they were attending the Metropolitan Opera. The tennis players, in their immaculate whites, begin to methodically volley the ball back and forth. You can imagine, but you can't hear on film, the sound of heavy breathing and the ball bouncing on the floor. What you can hear is the wonderfully strange result of the ball hitting the racket: the vibrations of the strings were picked up by the contact microphone and transmitted to an FM radio receiver, amplified, and fed to the speakers, resulting in a loud bonging sound, which also turned off one of the klieg lights overhead. (This bit of technological wizardry malfunctioned shortly before the piece began and technicians operated the lights manually.) The game proceeded as the light faded into darkness inside the Armory, at which point the 500

additional performers Rauschenberg had held in reserve entered the space and moved onto the court—another meaning of court performance.

Resurgent Baroques

Revisiting *Open Score* is a welcome corrective to the short memories of theatre historians interested in ushering in a new era of multimedia theatre. It also offers a provocation to a piece of theatre that follows in the second, rematerializing vein of alternative theatre, and not incidentally, also involves racquets and a net: the Wooster Group's 2002 remediation of Racine's 1677 version of the Greek myth, *To You, the Birdie!* (*Phèdre*). Liz LeCompte directs Kate Valk, Frances McDermond, Willem Dafoe, and Scott Shepherd in a translation of Racine's *Phèdre* by Paul Schmidt: the text of the play, though intact, is almost unrecognizable in the midst of high-decibel sound scores, amplified voices, and live performers competing for viewers' attention with videotaped versions of themselves on multiple monitors that litter the stage. The Wooster Group's interpretation is, as Branislav Jakovljevic suggests in "Wooster Baroque," a hysterical overdoing and overlaying of the text: a postmodern, fragmentary reflection of the fragmented, hypermediated world we find ourselves in.¹²⁰ But it is the flat surfaces of the tennis court and the television monitors that return us to the questions of the façade that bedeviled us in Chapter Two.

¹²⁰ Branislav Jakovljevic, "Wooster Baroque," *TDR/The Drama Review*, vol. 54, no. 3 (August 25, 2010).

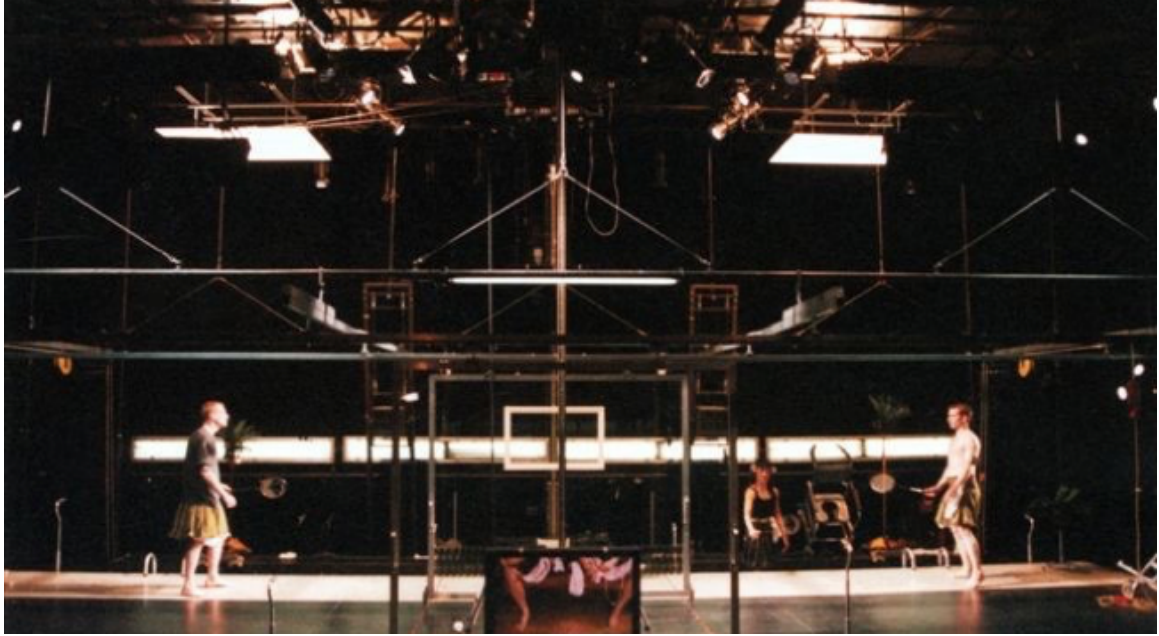


Figure 8: Wooster Group production of *To You, the Birdie!* at the Performance Garage

When Liz LeCompte and the Wooster Group began rehearsing their production in early 2000, they inadvertently re-created the operating conditions of *Open Score*. The rehearsal notebook from March 20 reports an early discovery: “We begin by playing badminton. The rules were very important because they constitute the form: form over content. We put a wireless microphone on the rackets and listened to the resounding hollow whack that came with shuttle contact.”¹²¹ The badminton gave the company a shared physical vocabulary and helped to underscore the speed of the play. But there is a difference between making up rules to follow for the sake of having rules, and following

¹²¹ Andrew Quick, *Wooster Group Workbook* (New York: Routledge, 2007), p. 223. Racquets would seem better suited to Euripides’ version of the myth, *Hippolytus*, with its customary use of rapid-fire alternating lines of stichomythia. Although French classical dramatists were eager to deploy many Greek archaisms, Racine and Corneille were reluctant to use the technique, favoring instead long recitative passages. John Leonard Hancock, *Studies in Stichomythia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1917), 67ff.

rules that are or appear to be immutable—this is the difference between the Wooster Group and Rauschenberg. The Wooster Group is about the rules (like an acting exercise or improvisation), whereas Rauschenberg seems to be about something else, though in being about that something else, there turn out to be rules that must be followed. Rules become a very important part of matrixed performance; actors begin to act more like disciplined athletes playing in a complicated multimedia game, and attending the theatre becomes akin to spectating at a sporting event.

This is a happy contemporary echo of the 17th century in more ways than one. Consider how the newly forming public theatres in France made their homes in disused tennis courts when the *jeu de paume* lost some of its novelty. Permanent theatre began in Paris when a sufficient population density was achieved to permit a dependable source of audience and obviated the need to travel. Traveling theatre companies that were accustomed to performing in ad hoc theatres and outdoors adapted to this more regular space. Audiences in effect were witnessing outdoor theatre in indoor spaces, though the forms of these productions began to change in time and especially as purpose-built theatres altered the dynamics of seating and ticket selling (witness how the Hôtel de Bourgogne maintains a rectangular shape, though it begins to incorporate more elaborate sets in the Italian fashion).¹²² Traveling back to the present (or near-present, as I am referring to the late 1950s and early 1960s forward), artists interested in exploring

¹²² See T. E. Lawrenson, *The French Stage and Playhouse in the XVIIth Century: A Study in the Advent of the Italian Order* (New York: AMS Press, 1986); Lily B. Campbell, *Scenes and Machines on the English Stage During the Renaissance* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1960); Kristiaan P. Aercke, *Gods of Play: Baroque Festive Performances as Rhetorical Discourse* (Albany: State University of New York, 1994); William L. Wiley, *The Early Public Theatre in France* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press Publishers, 1972).

performance were hard-pressed to find space in existing theatrical venues, and so had to pursue alternative arrangements like armories, galleries, churches, garages, gymnasias, movie theatres, lofts, and abandoned factories (the result of changes in New York in the production landscape—without SoHo, there might not be a Big Art Group or Wooster Group).

But to return to the central concern of the Wooster Group's recent productions, both in terms of production design and dramaturgical concept, how much is the use of media about rules? Certainly, the limitations on Rauschenberg were more severe than those on Liz LeCompte; many of the devices on his wish list from 1966 are now readily available, often obtainable at your local consumer electronics store. The impressive reductions in the cost of such goods in the last decade in particular now mean that the Wooster Group can really do almost anything they dream up, technologically. Technology is what created rules for Rauschenberg's piece (and, weirdly, it's the technicians that have to deal with that); the sport component creates the rules for the performers, but they're interrelated. In the case of the Wooster Group—there are no technological rules; rules are supposed to be one-way—the Wooster Group has a two-way relationship with its rules, which is its own form of masking, so that they can appear to break them...but it could always do something else.

The arbitrary rules end up creating a live television experience—one-way masquerading as two-way, not a televisual theatre experience. What is the difference between breaking the proscenium and reflecting off of it? Reflecting breaks it, but also reinforces it. How is this also about sensory overload? I'm interested here in the rules question, and how it can come back in here, and how it relates to one-way/two-way. The

difference in *Open Score* is that the game is not about the skill of the players, how hard they hit, or the fact that they are hitting the ball while all these other things are happening. No other thing is happening. Now, if you go to a space where racquet games are customarily played and instead you encounter theatre and that has an effect on your experience, then the same is true of attending the theatre and finding yourself in the middle of a badminton match.

Wonderfully inventive transpositions reorient the action of the play to a sporting arena. Water for swabbing the deck of ship cleans the court between matches. Scenes that could be taken from Greek vases seem less out of place when the nudity is clothed in the trappings of locker room or spa. But it is in the use of flat-panel screens that the production really distinguishes itself. Multiple displays are in a constant ballet both in front of and behind the main playing area, which is configured as a badminton court. Often recorded action is screened in front of actors. This superimposition often involves relatively banal material, so that Hippolytus and his tutor are obscured behind screens that depict them lacing their athletic shoes or adjusting their tennis “skirts” (the actors are dressed in a style meant to evoke Greco-Roman French Renaissance athletic gear). More emphatic displays of emotion are also magnified by screens, with freeze frames of the queen’s anguished visage swinging into and out of position before Kate Valk. The screens serve to scissor and distort Dafoe’s body, as different body parts in different orientations are splayed across the panels. Though the footage is of Dafoe’s very live flesh, the video takes on the quality of shattered sculpture remnants.

In an interview with Andrew Quick for the *Wooster Group Workbook*, LeCompte describes her first glimpse of a flatter future: “As soon as I saw one of those flat-screen

TVs, I thought it looked as if somebody had stepped on it and smashed it. These TVs were like the see-through walls, the glass windows, where you can see everything through them and then this becomes the world. These TVs also captured something about reflections, something around the way light works in our reflections—because you see the flat-screen as a plate of glass at the same time as you see it as something that has depth in it. And I play with this idea” (Quick, 264). But I think this all too easily demotes the televisual component of *To You, the Birdie!* to a scenic element, a jazzy, up-to-date way to create a stage environment. Of course, the screens are used for some interesting/amusing bits of stage business: we “see” under the skirts of Hippolytus and Theramène, played by Ari Fliakos and Scott Shepherd, a manly display that might have been challenging for lighting tech.

Tennis matches are a kinetic experience for more than just the players. In some ways, the essence of the game as far as spectators are concerned (insofar as it is incumbent on them if they wish to follow the action) is the incessant movement of their heads as they follow the trajectory of the little yellow ball from one side of the court to the other. This expectation is used to great effect in Hitchcock’s *Strangers on a Train* (1951) when amateur tennis star Guy Haines (played by Farley Granger) is unnerved when he notices the fixed gaze of Bruno Anthony (Robert Walker). No matter how exciting the action or how close the point, Bruno’s head is isolated and unmoving in a sea of spectating heads pivoting left and right as the ball is hit back and forth across the net. This movement of the head in active spectating is rendered unnecessary by the advent of televised broadcast of tennis matches. Although the first broadcast of a tennis match was on July 12, 1928, in Schenectady, New York (the image transmitted was not much larger

than a deck of cards), several decades passed before the two cameras were used to isolate and enlarge the players. The televised tennis game separates the two participants. You could just as easily substitute footage from two separate games, since the emphasis is on the return—the suturing effect of television montage cuts together two (increasingly) discontinuous spaces, although most often both players are present in the shot. Richard Kostelanetz makes similar observations in a short piece titled “Artistry in Football” in *Theatre of Mixed Means* from 1966: “Thus does the screen guide the home eye to where it wants ideally to be but physically cannot go—two different places at once; or, with playback, at various times in the past! These mediumistic techniques radically rearticulate the characteristic space and rhythm of the game; and so truly restructured has my own perception become that ‘live’ games do not seem peculiar, inept, incomplete, and pedestrian.”¹²³ If the two players (and the viewers at home) are segregated more than usual by the camera angles of sportscasting, the audience in the theatre is “free to look.” But are these audience members not especially drawn to screens? Does the audience at the Wooster show bob their heads from screen to screen like a tennis crowd? Where should the audience look in a Wooster show: do they watch the birdie? They don’t—at least, not as a mass, but individually, directing their focus where they like. It can be said, then, that the production itself proceeds along the lines of training the spectator, furnishing rules for the spectator.

Though it is a strange (re-)starting point for this excursus into theatre and technology, it has been worthwhile for us to dwell briefly in the 1600s at different points

¹²³ Richard Kostelanetz, *The Theatre of Mixed Means: An Introduction to Happenings, Kinetic Environments, and Other Mixed-Media Performances* (New York: Dial Press, 1968), 252.

in this dissertation. Recent texts like Timothy Murray's *Digital Baroque: New Media Art and Cinematic Folds* (2008), Lambert's *The Return of the Baroque in Modern Culture* (2004), and Angela Ndalianis' *Neo-Baroque Aesthetics and Contemporary Entertainment* (2005) signal a renewed interest in Baroque aesthetics and their potential applicability or relevance in the present. The historical conditions of Baroque art lie in a period of economic innovation and social reorganization. In a sense, then, it was an aesthetic expression of the success *and failure* of economic and political systems, a melancholic working-through of undigested historical processes. I'm less keen to see how "the Baroque," or the historicity of the Baroque, has become a source text for the present than I am to explore the concepts, relations, and sensibilities it makes available today. The very ubiquity of the term "baroque" (its ready availability in New Media discourse especially: neo-baroque, digital baroque) suggests something unusual about "the Baroque" as a periodizing type. Recursive and mobile, its usefulness is precisely that it exceeds any temporal fixedness. Indeed, the Wooster Group might be the perfect place to begin to answer the question, what, if anything, is "new" about the use of televisual media on the stage in the last fifty years? Or, to put it slightly more pointedly, how *should* theatre incorporate new technologies?

Jakovljevic's article on the Wooster Group and their neo-baroque aesthetic assembles three productions from the 2000s that to various degrees (but mostly to a large degree) take as their precedent text a play (or opera) from the 17th century: Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (published 1603), the Cavalli opera already mentioned (1641), and Jean Racine's *Phèdre* (1677). Consider their 2010 production of *La Didone* ("In Space"). The common Wooster group formula of juxtaposition and medial crossover was employed to create a

synthetic performance that combined elements of *Barbarella* (Roger Vadim's 1968 film based on a French space-themed comic and starring Jane Fonda) and Baroque opera—actors costumed in period-appropriate attire, but made with reflective space-suit material, adopting gestures and poses out of 17th-century engravings while carrying electric guitars, etc. Viewing this production might provoke thoughts of how generic flux operated in the context of Baroque theatrical practice, or expose the continuities in the epic form, even as it is updated and reconfigured for a post-human, technologically inflected world—provided that we acknowledge some (necessary) relationship between the source texts.

Jakovljevic begins with the Wooster Group's 2002 take on Racine, *To You, the Birdie!* Jakovljevic's meticulous analysis takes pains to address the piece's many beguiling aspects, beginning with an interesting idea about its use of television screens. He is struck by the thinness of the screens in the show, screens that act both as a mask and as a modern-day "coulisse." He writes:

...as an object, the video monitor loses its sculptural properties and becomes more like a two-dimensional painting: it can be easily hung, suspended in space, lifted or lowered, and moved. In theatrical terms, it ceases being a prop and becomes a coulisse. (96)

What a wonderfully specific word from the storehouse of theatrical historical knowledge: the coulisse is a painted wing flat, part of the "innovation" of 17th-century theatre that supplanted simultaneous décor. Re-introducing the coulisse is a creditable form of time travel. Arguably it does not take us "back" to the 1600s, but across Jakovljevic and Liz LeCompte, into early 17th-century France. Early modern theatre has been labeled metatheatrical (cf. *How the World Became a Stage* by William Egginton); I want to suggest that this is inadequate to the full range of conceits and feints this theatre

produced. Instead of “reflecting” a more heightened “performativity” in courtly life, the strange space of the stage became more fundamentally a domain for a set of discrete operations that combine and recombine places and times and things and personal attributes/feelings...not in an illusionist playing “space” characterized by depth, but in a comparatively flattened space. Real space falls away, and theatre representation becomes a kind of projection (both with and without the psychological implications of the term). We will interest ourselves in Neoclassical rigidity that calcifies the Baroque impulse. Continuing, Jakovljevic describes how, in the arc of Wooster Group technique, video has gone from being used “structurally” and began to be used “theatrically”—but in this case he mostly means that the video monitors are front and center. It is a mistake to fail to see how the entire viewing experience is dispersed and gathered together again, like in a television-viewing situation. Jakovljevic observes that this new kind of TV can be easily interposed between performer and audience, giving access to all sorts of new ways that the screen can comment on the action on the stage, in real time, with plenty of interesting opportunities for live video.

Whereas I dismissed the camera-up-the-kilt as a gimmick, Jakovljevic argues that it “introduces ambiguity into the visual field” and that, importantly, we not only don’t know *what* is being screened, but have serious difficulty determining *when* we’re seeing (95). I will return to the use of time-delay in the next section involving Dan Graham.¹²⁴ A lot of the screened action is either sped up or slowed down, undermining the very idea of synchronization. Jakovljevic writes:

¹²⁴ Jakovljevic himself brings Graham into his discussion of video and live performance to point out that his work and that of TV art pioneers like him used the technology to interrupt any easy identification with the performer by the audience.

Their de-synchronization transforms the present into an unforeseen: simply, there is no way of knowing if actions taking place behind the screen correspond to the images that appear on screen. The gap yawns between the two-dimensional image and the three-dimensional body, and that rupture sucks the future into the present moment. Of course, the video image does not have the magic property to alter the flow of time. What it can do, however, is engage the spectator's faculty of anticipation. (97)

Jakovljevic is struck by the "systematic revisiting of 17th-century theatre" by the Wooster Group since 2000, how they "retroactively highlight the Baroque aspects of their aesthetic which were always there, latent and unrecognized" (90). There is no "accident" and there is *only* accident. LeCompte claims, "I didn't really find out until we were six months into the badminton, when I looked into the history of the badminton and tennis and discovered that they played these games at the French court" (Quick, 262). The potentially unanswerable question of whether or not the use of the tennis court is intentional (can we really trust the Wooster Group?) is made superfluous if we acknowledge that the court, net, and racquets are *atavistic* as well as incongruous, anachronistic, weird. Andrew Quick notes that a certain understanding of survival did motivate the director during the rehearsal process. LeCompte wanted to "compel the performer to relinquish their control in the playing space which induce[d] the production of 'survival' techniques" (272). Consciously attempting to move away from psychological narratives, or even technique as a knowable reservoir of replicable gestures or movements, this attempt to suborn the thinking brain might have made a different kind of survival possible: the efflorescence of a long-forgotten episode in theatre history, via its practices (the royal enema cleansings, the tennis game).

The Wooster Group, among others, has lately been making a virtue of the presence of technicians in the theatre by putting them in full view of the audience,

leading to a new kind of pleasure: watching a cue being executed. Are we entering a new era, when the divide between performer and technician is becoming increasingly blurred? Perhaps the advances in terms of speed and flexibility and improvements in processing power have created a momentum that might one day result in fewer productions having a pre-existing sound score and instead have a more dynamic relationship among performance elements that includes performer and light, sound, etc. It's not that the quality of the sound design isn't very high—in fact, it's quite sophisticated. It's just that sound design is often used to both solemn and comic effect—even at the same time, as each step Willem Dafoe takes as Theseus resounds deeply. By displacing the text from the bodies of the characters who normally support it (Shepherd recites many of the characters' lines into a microphone from just offstage, though in view of the audience), the stage action takes on a quality of relayed narration, just as in a radio play. The live transmission we encounter on television is often equipped with a delay that edits its own liveness. Likewise, live theatre incorporates delay in/of the relationship between presentation and reception. Returning to *Open Score* is a welcome corrective to accounts of multimedia theatre that emphasize recent technological change as a driving force, whether it is the ascendance of internet communication, miniaturization of circuit boards, or so on.

The Place of Place in Telematic Society

Disappointed, we stop bending, straighten ourselves up, and stretch out our arms against the world to point an index finger at it. From now on, all pointers, signs, traffic signals, and indicators point eccentrically away from us, and nothing more points toward us. From now on, we are the ones who project meaning on the world.

Robert Whitman's 1960s avant-garde performance *Prune Flat* is often found in the history of Expanded Cinema, but it should figure more prominently in the chronology of technologically mediated theatre performance. Further, it will also serve to extend an understanding of scenography, such as the one offered by Joslin McKinney and Philip Butterworth in their *Cambridge Introduction to Scenography* that in theatre, "performers and audience imaginatively engage each other from their respective spaces. This inevitable spatial dynamic is in a constant state of flux irrespective of the nature of the occupied space."¹²⁶ Spectators and actors engage from—arguably, they engage *in*—their respective spaces, and this is why *Prune Flat* is so instructive.

A theoretical frame for this discussion is provided by Vilém Flusser (1920–1991), whose ideas about television and telematic action provide a backdrop for changes in both technology and artistic practice. Flusser, a Czech philosopher active after the Second World War who wrote primarily in English and Portuguese (for many years, he lived and taught in São Paulo), was heavily influenced by work in phenomenology by Martin Heidegger and others. Toward the end of his life, he began to write primarily in the vein of media philosophy, making important contributions in the philosophy of communication and the understanding of images. I apply a Flusserian lens to two theatre pieces by Robert Whitman separated by nearly 50 years that index and bookend five decades of communication revolutions. This work is important because it serves as a

¹²⁵Vilém Flusser, *Into the Universe of Technical Images*, translated by Nancy Ann Roth (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 46.

¹²⁶Joslin McKinney and Philip Butterworth. *The Cambridge Introduction to Scenography* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 105.

corrective to interpretations of *Prune Flat* (1965) and *Passport* (2011) that would overly accentuate the dizzying technological change that occurred between the two productions as significant in and of itself, and neglect the underlying continuity between them. We will be able to articulate what has changed, what has not, and what might be differently accessed by virtue of new technologies.

In his 1985 book *Into the Universe of Technical Images* (published in English in 2011), Flusser offers a conceptual archaeology of the space of western thought from the Pleistocene to the near-future that explores the effect of increasing levels of abstraction on how humans relate to their environment and to each other. Importantly, he uses performance at key moments both to illustrate his principles and to suggest how they might be applied. His discussion of telematics is tied to the history of European music; chamber music, for example, emphasizes linear progression and subordinates improvisation to a sequential order, whereas new forms of performance no longer depend on shared time and space:

telematics, on the other hand, occurs in a simultaneous time and space, and all players in all places make decisions relating to themes and their variations all at once. That is the difference between pressing on a piano key and on the key of the apparatus. (163)

Aside from chamber music or theatre as an apparatus, Flusser offers theatre as a space for negotiating social relations in an interesting way, for discriminating and coordinating dialogue and discourse, two key terms for Flusser that are very much like the one-way and two-way communication I address in relation to *Prune Flat*.

In *Communicology*, published posthumously in 1996 from the late 1970s lectures, Flusser develops a science of communication in which both terms are always present; it is

merely that in a given situation, one form generally predominates over the other.¹²⁷

Intriguingly, classical theatre, by which Flusser means theatre in ancient Greece, is a paradigm of two-way communication in which the audience member “can even stand up, storm the scene, turn to the public, and address it.” Flusser calls this a “revolution,” implying again a double political and literal meaning, “the gesture of revolving, the transformation of spectator into actor, of student into teacher.” Mass media takes the form of an amphitheatre, a structure that, in contrast to the theatre, is characterized by “cosmic openness and a complete absence of frontiers, as the protective wall in the back has been disposed.”¹²⁸ Anke Finger explains the special potential of the space in this way: “[t]he receivers are present in the form of dust afloat in the limitless space around the central sender. ... The receivers can only receive but are unable to become senders themselves. They are isolated consumers without any contact with each other” (Finger et al., 95). Flusser also offers the net form, which seemingly ought to correspond to the global communications network, a situation in which telematic call and response through technical images make for instantaneous creative uptake and feedback.

Flusser’s distinction between traditional and technical images—the first are observations of objects, the second computations of concepts—might be helpfully illustrated by returning to the scene from *Lipsynch* by Robert Lepage at the Brooklyn Academy of Music I described in Chapter 1. In that performance, a camera was used to capture onstage action which was then screened live against the back of the stage, turning it into a gigantic television set. What makes this image different from a normal image,

¹²⁷ Available in English in Vilém Flusser and Andreas Ströhl, ed., *Writings*, translated by Erik Eisel (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

¹²⁸ Anke K. Finger, Rainer Guldin, and Gustavo Bernardo, *Vilém Flusser: An Introduction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 93.

and distinguishes it as a technical image, is how the camera calculates and composes. We recognize this as a clever reverse engineering of the video image from real elements that do not correspond to it—the jigsaw of set pieces that appear to magically assemble themselves in the projection.

In an article that addresses Flusser's links to Benjamin and McLuhan, Sjoukje van der Meulen suggests we consider Bertolt Brecht's comments on radio as an analogy for what Flusser wants to accomplish with his reappraisal of the camera and televisual media: the transformation of radio into a two-way medium, from a "mere apparatus that the listener turns 'off' and 'on' into a participatory medium."¹²⁹ How would one speak of a hierarchy in this new Brechtian theatre? Is it possible to isolate the strains of mediatic content to better identify the uses to which they are put, or is the stage a dynamic field, an interplay between intention and responsibility in which communication and production technologies are used to create (extend, multiply, critique) the framing that has always been theatrical? Experience is always retreating from grasp, and yet might always be there at the touch of a button. TV experience (remote-controlled, always on) and theatre experience (wait in line, buy your tickets, see the show) both take place indoors and appear to have no material impact on the world. So we are indoors, and we are having an experience and we do not necessarily have that first-order access. This is partly what Flusser writes about in his *Toward a Universe of Technical Images*. Man (when he was still animal) lived in four dimensions. The conquest of the environment over time gradually flattened this experience to our present day, which Flusser argues is increasingly lived in no-dimensions.

¹²⁹ Sjoukje van der Meulen, "Between Benjamin and McLuhan: Vilém Flusser's Media Theory," *New German Critique* vol. 37, no. 2 110 (2010): 189.

Theatre makers are now engaged in a visual dramaturgy of multiple images in which, according to Hans-Thies Lehmann, media surfaces offer “more stimulation.”¹³⁰ Lehmann offers this thought in a section called “Play with the density of signs.” Later, he writes, “McLuhan’s world had to become a world of overabundance.” It is difficult to parse the meaning of this “had.” Does Lehmann report this with sadness, was McLuhan wrong, or was the world, or were all of us? The global circulation of data is also invested with dramatic potential, and so a new relationship of the scenographic to the telemetric is created, as is made abundantly clear in the last decade of work from the Builders Association and Rimini Protokoll. Even as we look to concepts of media theatre, or media in theatre, theatre can remain locked into audiences that are still composed only of spectators, or in which the performer is present only to serve as a guide or curator for the programming on the screens that she shares space with. While this might be seen as theatre artists’ response to an ever more mediated and technologized society—an attempt, perhaps, at a precise reflection of emerging digital culture—surely it does not represent a new development in representational technique.

The increasing affordability of digital projectors has led to an explosion of their use in performance, exposing more and more audiences to the experience of intermedia, a term coined by Dick Higgins in 1965 to describe Fluxus events (meaning that the history of intermedial performance should not be tied only to the invention of new media technologies). From the very inception of film, a place was found for it on the stage. Of course there was mutual traffic between these two representational forms, with early film adopting much of the vocabulary of the stage, so that the use of film could be seen as

¹³⁰ Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, translated by Karen Jürs-Munby (London: Routledge, 2006), 89.

returning a gift to theatre itself. However, the films that were used in performance were not the 19th century melodrama-indebted nickelodeon fare that seduced the viewing public, but fell mainly into two camps: documentary footage that brought the outside world into the theatre, and film experiments in montage and multiple exposures that were used to evoke dreamscapes. Both forms of cinematic intervention worked against the mimetic impetus of representational drama; newsreels and early special effects cinema each in their own way brought a different kind of reality to the stage. McKinney and Butterworth identify two modes in which media is used in the theatre: the aforementioned Builders Association as post-Brechtian approach that uses media to fracture, or media technologies that contribute to an immersive *Gesamtkunstwerk*. There is a sense not only of intimacy but involvement in the production that these performances generate that not even traditional performance art and avant-garde environmental theatre of the 1960s, which try to eliminate the divide between performers and audience, can better. Media theatre makes the resources of performance, the ability to model social relations and critique them, reflect mental constructs and mottle them, available again, in a new way. Media theatre not only incorporates frames as frames within the frame, the proscenium arch; it exerts a pressure on the space of the stage, and raises the question of the place of place in “telematic society.”

The use of projected media to transform gallery spaces or black-box theatres into media environments seems like just the most contemporary manifestation of the idea of theatre as an empty space, as in Peter Brook’s *The Empty Space: A Book about the Theatre: Deadly, Holy, Rough, Immediate* (1968). As Freda Chapple and Chiel Kattenbelt write, Brook considers the bare stage to be the ideal playing space: “The

restrictions on time and space in theatre is an advantage because the stage provides the performer with an arena: that is to say an empty space in which he can use unrestrictedly all his expressive skills.”¹³¹ Scenography is not the same as stage design; it is the perception of stage space. Starting with pioneers such as Adolphe Appia, Eugene Dalcrouze, Edward Gordon Craig, and Wassily Kandinsky, and continuing into 1960s experimentation with Jan Svoboda, or more contemporary production design by Tal Yarden (working often with Ivo von Hove), new solutions to the challenges of shaping space onstage have made scenography an essential tool for assessing and addressing intermedial relations, or the relationship between media.

Many recent books assess the new uses to which traditional concepts of stage design have been put, as well as the need to both reinvigorate and extend them in order to address radical changes in scenographic practices.¹³² Alison Oddey and Christine White’s *Potentials of Spaces: The Theory and Practice of Scenography and Performance* takes a special interest in new media performance scenography. Oddey and White inquire into the “dialectics” of stage spaces by using “the imagination, technology, and the notion of

¹³¹ Freda Chapple and Chiel Kattenbelt, *Intermediality in Theatre and Performance* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), 35.

¹³² See Johannes H. Birringer, *Media & Performance: Along the Border* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998); Gay McAuley, *Space in Performance: Making Meaning in the Theatre* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010); Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (London: Routledge, 2011); Elizabeth Klaver, *Performing Television: Contemporary Drama and the Media Culture* (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 2001); Günter Berghaus, *Avant-Garde Performance* (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Arnold Aronson, *Looking into the Abyss: Essays on Scenography* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005). Each in their own way assesses the new uses to which traditional concepts of stage design have been put, as well as the need to both reinvigorate and extend them in order to address radical changes in scenographic practices.

being transported in space.”¹³³ They reflect on how spectators respond to images: “the larger the image, which is projected or transmitted, the greater the presence responses from the spectator” (19). Arguably, this conviction is misplaced or misattributed. The presence response itself is under question, if we follow the media philosophy of Flusser, and it is to the presence response we turn in our discussion of *Prune Flat*.

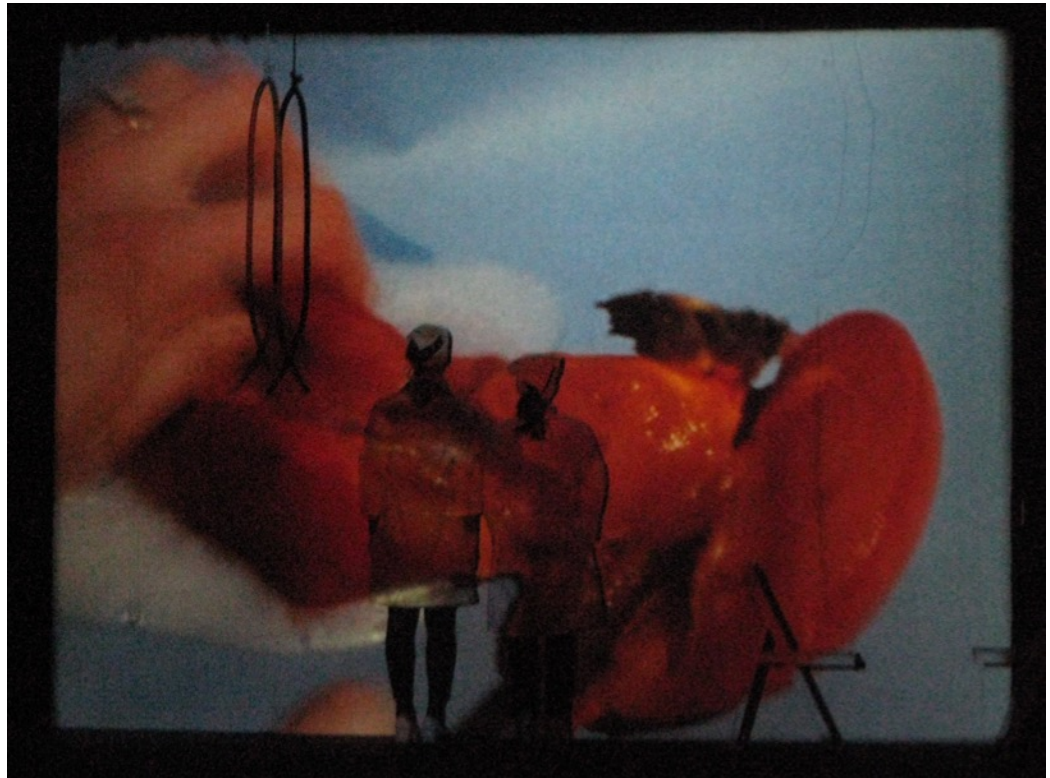


Figure 9: Image from 2013 re-performance of *Prune Flat* at Eyebeam Art+Technology Center, New York, NY, March 14, 2013 (Photo credit: Julie Martin)

¹³³ Alison Oddey and Christine A. White, *The Potentials of Spaces: The Theory and Practice of Scenography and Performance* (Bristol, UK: Intellect Books, 2006), 11.

A year before *9 Evenings* blossomed at the 69th Regimental Armory, Robert Whitman showed a film at the Cinematheque in New York City.¹³⁴ He brought his actors along, not so they could answer questions after the screening but so that he could “expand” the cinema experience. Expanded Cinema is the name given to a loose movement of alternative film makers in the 1960s and 1970s who sought to find new ways for film to become part of the world, and for the world to become part of it. This involved outdoor screenings that went beyond the then-common experience of the drive-in, projections onto readymade and purpose-built surfaces; often three-dimensional structures and sculptures were used to enclose spectators, etc.¹³⁵ Jonas Mekas reviewed the New Cinema Festival One, which also included performance work by Claes Oldenburg in addition to Whitman, for the *Village Voice* in December 1965, writing:

Whitman’s show combined live action with the filmed image. He played his performers against the images, for humor and for surprise (the same performers appeared in the film and on stage). Like any good magician, he had a good bag of tricks ready; as an artist, he let the tricks fail, sort of, and used their imperfections as a formal quality. Still, Whitman’s show very often came close to being just a display of virtuosity.¹³⁶

¹³⁴ Whitman was part of *9 Evenings*. His offering, *Two Holes of Water-3*, incorporated some of the same techniques described in this section, though notably also involved several muscle cars serving as mobile projection booths.

¹³⁵ See Haidee Wasson, “Networked Screen: Moving Images, Materiality, and the Aesthetics of Size,” in Janine Marchessault and Susan Lord, eds., *Fluid Screens, Expanded Cinema*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 74-95. Wasson writes, “artists and corporations alike employ a range of screens that can last no longer than the moment of the performance: bodies, trees, paintings, shop windows, sidewalks, buildings. Any object flat or not can in practice be turned into a screen” (76).

¹³⁶ Jonas Mekas, “Movie Journal,” *The Village Voice*, December 23, 1965, n.p.

Read outside of their context, Mekas' words could continue to apply to much 21st-century mixed media work. Intention and virtuosity remain hotly contested terms that seem to have a new-found importance in debates that surround art and work.¹³⁷

Prune Flat begins with a shot of the projector, underscoring the material conditions of its production and display. In the sequence that follows, several pieces of fruit are revealed to be hiding unusual depths beneath their skins. An orange is cut open only to display a cascade of ball bearings where fruit segments ought to be. Two women dressed in white walk on and off the narrow stage that juts out beyond the film screen. While the actors are still in the screen space, another orange appears, and this time a cache of glitter gently bathes the pair. Next, the performers strain with their hands, reaching out for a green pepper filled with feathers. The actors have established their role (or seem to have) of indexing the strangeness of the contents of the objects that are projected onto the screen.

When the scene changes to a forest, the actors all but disappear in the play of light and dark on the forest floor and against the trees. They move deliberately across the frame/stage, and it is only when they step away from the screen that they reveal their presence by casting a shadow onto it. Then the same woman appears in the film! Now a woman and her scopic double share the same space. Another layer is added when space, in time at that screening, and on the screen, is created by Whitman, who during the process of filming had held his hand in front of the camera. Now the woman's body has become isolated in the projected cone of darkness. A second projection clothes her body,

¹³⁷ For more on virtuosity and its connection to labor practices under the regime of neo-liberalism, see "Immaterial Labor" in Maurizio Lazzarato, *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

rapidly changing color and style. Suddenly, the woman is taking her clothes off in the street. The backdrop has changed from forest to seashore to now a city street.

The new media Whitman uses exposes once again the famed not-not of theatre; you know the actor is clothed, and yet you cannot help but feel there *is* a naked woman on the stage. She is naked, and she is not naked, and partly she appears naked precisely because she is not; her body, sheathed in fabric, becomes a screen for the projected image of her own nakedness. There is something surprising, shocking, in this realization. Richard Kostelanetz recalls an audible response the night he saw the show: “The audience gasps as we discover that the woman we thought undressed is actually besmocked.”¹³⁸ Are these women acting? Are they live models, or dancers? One consequence of the light levels used to show the film image is that their faces are obscured. Perhaps this diminishes their humanness and points to an automata-like role. Or maybe they *were* actors when the film was being made; now they are just doing what the screen does. “You really were in sync with the film” seems to be the best and only compliment a spectator could offer. This recalls a contemporary example of using film as source text, for example, the Wooster Group’s *Hamlet*, which in some regards reproduces much of the dynamic of Whitman’s *Prune Flat*. Though the performers have credibly adopted the film as a movement score for their production of the play, many have noted the virtuosic control of the actors; one aspect of watching involves paying special attention to the discrepancies that nevertheless enter into their playback.

¹³⁸ Richard Kostelanetz, *The Theatre of Mixed Means: An Introduction to Happenings, Kinetic Environments, and other Mixed-Media Performances* (New York: Dial Press, 1968), 144–45.

Interestingly, Whitman seemed to have been drawn to the use of a film to score action from the other direction. In an interview from 1998, he recalls that he wanted to go back to theatrical precedents that had been overlooked. He gives the example of clowns and clowning, noting that at the time he did not want his performers to try too hard. Whitman doesn't appear to want to downplay the technical skill involved in clowning, but to indicate the comparative lack of seriousness on the part of the audience, at least when compared to avant-gardists. Instead, Whitman explains, he knew he could count on the performer matching up precisely, purely by chance, no matter how casual the performer was being. And when the sync occurs, the effect was something like, as he describes it, "bursting into superreality or super-nality." Bodies become "part" of the screen; they cannot really be... out of sync. Whitman, then, by depending on the actors only occasionally ever getting it "right," sets up such moments to approach hierophany—when some seemingly divine force intervenes. This would seem an almost diametrically opposed effect (and effort) from that achieved by the Wooster Group in *Poor Theatre*, among other productions, in which their attempts at technical perfection and fidelity to a movement score provided by a theatrical performance prototype create the conditions for the "anyday everyday" of the actors themselves to take place. One way to look at the show from 1965 is to say that *Prune Flat* is a theatre piece in which performers are stand-ins for the TV audience that appears to converse with the programming, or of the TV medium conversing with itself. The performers respond as if they are in a bidirectional space, but they cannot alter or change what is coming. If the projector should stop and image cease, they would have nothing to do. Except that they are in the position to do anything, as, in a way, the spectators are; all restrictions have been lifted. But when the

film comes to an end, the performers' bodies become a problem, a moment of awkwardness that disappoints when we are left with the unadorned bodies, stripped of their media attractions.

Branden Joseph addresses the potential political attachments of Whitman in an article in *Grey Room*. In Joseph's account, Whitman created this work in part to offer an alternative to Allan Kaprow, whose happenings became operative precisely because they went beyond painting into three dimensionality with physical enclosure.¹³⁹ Interestingly, Kaprow's pieces (which militate against being called theatre) progress from Happenings to Activities to Environments, moving ever further into the realm of pure or natural perception, freed from artifice. In contrast to underscoring the corporeality of its participants, Joseph writes that the *Prune Flat* performers became "depthless, decorporealized as though part of the movie had detached itself and moved forward" (75). Joseph interestingly speculates about the extent to which the spectrality of these images acted to disturb "the seamless reality effect of media," as well as re-invest the body with precisely the ghostly form of presence that adheres in the commodity when animated as fetish (80).

Whitman's *Prune Flat* provides a unique vantage from which to critique and describe the use of projective and communicative media in theatre. Its pioneering approach may have relegated it to a subsidiary position in the history of "media theatre" (although accounts from the time, such as Richard Kostelanetz's *Theatre of Mixed Means*, prominently featured it as representative of avant-garde technique). A phrase like "media theatre" is admittedly redundant, because theatre is itself a medium, and is always

¹³⁹ Branden W. Joseph, "Plastic Empathy: The Ghost of Robert Whitman," *Grey Room* (October 1, 2006): 74.

composed of various media. “Technologically mediated theatre” and “multimedia theatre” are also less-than-ideal terms. Chiel Kattenbelt offers a helpful set of elementary propositions in an article in which he delineates the at times intersecting and overlapping meanings of multimedia, transmedia, and intermedia when applied in a theatrical context:

“multimediality” refers to the occurrence where there are many media in one and the same object; “transmediality” refers to the transfer of one medium to another medium (medium change); and “intermediality” refers to the co-relation of media in the sense of the mutual influences between media.¹⁴⁰

The “where” and “what” of media are crucially important topics for any consideration of new technologies of capture and display, but theatre offers a unique “hypermedium,” in Kattenbelt’s phrase, in which to assess the ramifications of these developments. Thea Brejzek observes: “in contrast to the classical, built theatre space, the mediated theatre space is liberated from a linear time axis: it is competent in the communication and visualization of the temporal structures of simultaneity, of anticipation, and of recollection” (Oddey and White, 161). But why “in contrast”? Arguably, distance is the condition of emancipation. Total immersion is closer to a non-relation than a relation. Television, then, is a kind of separation and coordination, like the theatre.

Space is abstract, surrounding. Place serves as a locative; think the power of place. Returning to the *Cambridge Introduction to Scenography*, its authors write: “the special characteristic of the stage space is that anything that happens in it is offered for the attention, reception and consideration of the audience and is presumed to have some kind of intended effect or meaning” (104). Can we really continue to speak in terms of

¹⁴⁰ Chiel Kattenbelt, “Intermediality in Theatre and Performance: Definitions, Perceptions and Medial Relationships” in *Cultural Studies Journal of Universitat Jaume I* (2008): 20–21.

intended effect? Better to say that the “what” that is performed is made available to the performers and audience... as... they... will: stage space (what it is)/presentational space (what it is made to be)/fictional space (what it is imagined to be). Plays happen in space, or really a space—dramatic space. It is the immaterial space of character relations, but it must “draw its stable forces from elsewhere.”¹⁴¹ Like the material stage of scenery and props but also the imaginary stage, like audible offstage action, etc. Both contribute to the stability of this dramatic space where characters can introduce change. Sometimes the dramatic space is so tightly constructed that the material stage is less of a crutch; much of Elizabethan theatre uses localizing language to create the stage space, and does not depend on scenery, for instance. How innovative are fragmented productions like Robert Lepage’s *Lipsynch* (2009) if the medieval stage was fragmented to begin with? Characters in the Lepage play, rather than being segmented, are readily communicable to each other. The play is not about fragmentation at all; it is about the conditions for relation. What is the adequate ground provided for this representation? Is theatre itself the guarantor, the purchase? Consider that the play does not so much create a mimesis of fragmented reality as serve as a mimesis of the desire for communication. But the desire itself is not in the play, the communication is. And if the communication is already there, what work do we in the audience have to do?

Almost twenty years ago, Erika Fisher-Lichte wrote about the resources of the theatre that designers and directors on the cutting edge of European performance were making use of then: “the stage no longer represents a real place (living room, grove

¹⁴¹ Jiří Veltruský, “Dramatic Text as a Component of Theatre” in Ladislav Matejka and Irwin R. Titunik, eds., *Semiotics of Art : Prague School Contributions* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1976), 97.

before Diana's temple, forest, or cave), nor is it symbolic of an idea (archetypal world, suppression of people, consciousness). Rather, it presents, above all, an artificial space as stage space."¹⁴² There is no "place" onstage. So a theatre maker who takes her show into the street or down to the docks turns that place into a space for playing, only to reinvest the space with the place that the play putatively presents. These extra-theatrical performances work to create through the space its *own* simulacrum.

Theatre is a particular form of performance in that it takes place or often took place in that special place apart. This place-making role of theatre (theatre inaugurates things) is a surprising thing; in Richard Schechner's imagined origin of drama in ecological ritual from *Performance Theory*, it is described as a dance over coveted land, that in mitigating the conflict, for that brief time, makes the source of conflict go away – its *space*? The space that is under threat is covered over by a new space, however provisionally or briefly: the space of theatre. So theatre has a unique ability to take the space or "locality" out of space. And it does so in any number of ways, but one particularly useful way is to consider how theatre designers ingeniously work out how to make the space of the stage disappear under a space that is many times larger or smaller, or protracted in time, or sped forward. Theatre has the ability to telescope space, while also changing times. We should pay special attention to this opening gambit, that this space is another, this time is another: this space is (one) other/this time is (one) other. And this action is (one) other. The internet makes theatre's simultaneity possible in a new way, but still relies on older modes of mystification, technology, and mediation. It is

¹⁴² Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Show and the Gaze of Theatre: A European Perspective* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1997), 99.

underwritten by a belief that you are there, whether in an e-mail, or internet chat, or Skype. Your image is active, alive, invested with fullness and presence. Anne Ring Petersen writes, “The viewer must enter in order to experience its spatiality from within and *in relation* and construction *of* physical space.”¹⁴³

Recently, Robert Whitman pursued these same questions of interrelation, interactivity and communication in a new work. On the nights of April 16 and 17, 2011, Whitman presented *Passport* at the Dia:Beacon on the banks of the Hudson and at the Kessler Theatre at Montclair State University, simultaneously. In an echo of Flusser’s definition of the technical image, Whitman used video projection to capture and stream sound and images from one location to the other, in effect staging how theatre theatricalizes and television televises. Both forms act by screening out instability. However, things can go wrong, the set can collapse, there can be a breakdown. So if theatre’s exclusions are provisional, what of its inclusions? Perhaps theatre is important because it stages the breakdown of one-way and two-way communication, or more properly shows that each form is utterly dependent on the other.

I never went to see *Passport*. But in fact I did one better because I was able to screen (at some remove) both images and compare them in “real time”—that is, simultaneously. Amateur recordings from the two venues are available for streaming on the internet. And so I saw *Passport* in two windows on my screen, inadvertently recreating the conditions Dutch theatre director Theo Uittenbogaard once proposed for the live broadcast of theatre. In September 1986, The Dutch Broadcasting Company

¹⁴³ Anne Ring Petersen, “Between Image and Stage: The Theatricality and Performativity of Installation Art,” in Rune Gade and Anne Jerslev, *Performative Realism: Interdisciplinary Studies in Art and Media* (Copenhagen, Denmark: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2005), 210.

(NOS) and the International Federation for Theatre Research (IFTR) organized an international conference in Hilversum, Holland. Bart Geeraedts presented “Theatre on TV: All the World’s a Screen,” a discussion of some experiments in televisual broadcast of theatrical productions. A Jane Bowles play for Dutch television, *In the Summerhouse*, adapted by Theo Uittenbogaard, deals with the problem of stage picture and television picture, the question, fundamentally, of how an audience chooses to look, in an interesting way: a long shot in a small box at the bottom of the picture. The close-up has such strong appeal that it resulted in “reverse viewing behavior,” so that in distinction to how theatre semiotics conceives of audience reception, the audience watches the close-up, then looks to the larger picture to see how it relates.

Uittenbogaard decided that camera and actors would be the only manipulators of what happens, without an editor later (as this is not allowed in theatre) and dealt with the unequal position of television viewers opposite a live audience by filming the production in a closed studio. The only people who would attend the performance were the viewers at home. Uittenbogaard suggested a further innovation that was not put into practice. He wanted to broadcast the production on two channels simultaneously, using different camera feeds for each. The viewers at home would set up the TVs opposite each other and sit between them, thus giving them a different kind of choice over how to watch the show. The presenter believed this to be an ideal approach; Geeraedts asserts, “the audience is sitting prepared; the TV sets are arranged in the right way; the seats are

positioned in between them; the two sets are switched on; the performance can start: This is theatre!”¹⁴⁴

From my computer screen, I watched earthmovers pile dirt on the bank of the river while the audience gathered in the Kessler Theatre. Then, as cardboard boxes were assembled into a large rectangle across the front of the stage, I compared a trailer being backed into position in a cloud of dirt. The fog and smoke, which create atmosphere, or environment, but would disperse very quickly in the unbounded playing space, drew attention to the lack of wind in the auditorium. My eye was caught by billowing white apparitions in the Beacon cam that by comparing with the indoor shot I realized were giant empty shirts that were used as screens to display images of rotating planets. When the wind caught the shirts they became emphatically bad surfaces for projection (the image is not stable), but the “uninflected” image as it appeared onstage was still, flat, (like soda that’s lost its fizz).

¹⁴⁴ Robert L. Erenstein, *Theatre and Television* (Amsterdam: International Theatre Bookshop, 1988), 203.



Figure 10: Excavator featured in *Passport*, imaged in Beacon, NY

I watched the tiny image of a man dangling in space and compared it with the wonder of seeing the man lifted in a harness from the stage. A man riding a white horse crossing a field was not nearly as impressive projected onto a small screen. 36 minutes in, a voice-over delivered a mini course on linguistics: “A word: uttered in isolation. Morpheme: smallest unit of meaning.” In Beacon, the performers began to ceremonially tear white sheets and hang them on a line like white shrouds or Japanese temple flags ...or laundry hung out to dry?



Figure 11: Flags and oversized dress shirt from *Passport*, imaged in Beacon, NY



Figure 12: The “same” scene, imaged in Montclair, NJ

Let us return to what the Cornell box appears to contain: it has a meaning, but you participate in it. When you are confronted with your own image, you realize you are outside the box...that is reflecting you...that you trying to communicate with. It allows you to look at the masquerade, as opposed to trying endlessly to draw back the curtain. If you don't see it, you don't know it is a masquerade. But if you do see it, it's no longer a masquerade.

Whitman's latest production in collaboration with Montclair State University's Peak Performances premiered on March 26, 2015. *Swim* offered a form of immersive theatre that both acknowledged and superseded many of the terms I've been using. Similar in form and content to Fluxus performances or Happenings, the show displaced narrative and characterization for an open-ended invitation to observe, to be patient. Whitman has a long history of creating non-narrative theatre works that unfold in environments where multiple actions and events take place at the same time. Each member of the audience is therefore free to compose his or her own experience of the work. *Swim* is meant to be enjoyed by blind and sighted people alike. It presents a rich succession of images and activities in which sound, movement, and smells join the visual as an equal part of the experience. Whitman explains, "an image, an object, a performer, or an action may not be seen, but it can be heard; it can be smelled; it can be perceived and felt; and in this shared experience the audience, sighted and blind, can be brought into a single community."¹⁴⁵ It is intriguing that this latest performance is an experiment in community formation and maintenance. While seemingly far afield from the telematic

¹⁴⁵ BWW News Desk, "Peak Performances to Stage World Premiere of SWIM, 3/26-29." *Broadway World*. <https://www.broadwayworld.com/article/Peak-Performances-to-Stage-World-Premiere-of-SWIM-326-29-20150304#>. Accessed July 15, 2017.

coordination of spaces and images Whitman explored in *Passport*, it could suggest that the form community takes may indeed depend on such coordination. Far from abridging the audience's sense of connection and involvement, these techniques might be the source of their feeling of inclusion to begin with, as well as their literal inclusion (if, like me, they are screening the performances using communication technology, or if their spectating is dependent on sensory data being translated into different perceptual streams using technology).

Media culture evacuates place, merges all places in a continuous corporate mediaverse, the debased residue of four-dimensional concrete existence. But in this zero-dimensional surface-life—Flusser calls it “visionary, superficial thinking”—of our digital near-future, performance might remain a key terrain for negotiating and interrogating the new spaces of telematic society (38). The radical promise of this research is to recognize that theatre is not only a domain of living bodies in three dimensions, and that media visions are not inherent ossifications of real life. A media scenography articulates environment and theatre together in such a way so as to fundamentally challenge our idea of how social relations are structured. The mediatized theatre works discussed “do” both one-way and two-way communication.

The time has come to square, as it were, the circle of media theory, and recognize the role theatre plays in the mediaverse. I have shown how the essential flatness of multimedia theatre trades in techniques and attitudes that have been with the theatre since at least the 17th century, when theatre became a key site for negotiating new forms of publicness. If Callot's engravings took a private affair from the Medici court and made it public (and, in doing so, showed how the public circulation of the wealth and prestige of

its patrons was a major impetus of the pageants and theatricals to begin with), 20th-century artist Joseph Cornell's work shows how it is possible to take an "anonymous" object and "endow" it with private meaning.

This chapter moved telescopically to examine the collapse of space into two dimensions, and by taking a painting and pushing space into it. A contemporary production of a play based on Cornell's life, Charles Mee's *Hotel Cassiopoeia*, furnished an opportunity to talk about how collage texts are like a language version of televisual crossing. I discussed the art performances by Robert Rauschenberg and the Experiments in Art + Technology initiative from 1966 in order to explore how theatre offered (offers) a space for experiment and to remediate previous forms, which led me to a discussion of the Wooster Group, the highly influential and long-lived performance collective whose work often represents the pinnacle of postmodern cool. Their versions of *Phèdre* and *Hamlet* are notable as much for their lack of originality as for any signs of technical advance.

Post-war theatrical experiment often focuses on what I've described as the twin impulses to foreground theatre ritual (think the Living Theatre) or to eliminate theatre altogether (culminating most recently in the profoundly antitheatrical work of Marina Abramović). Both of these routes obscure how theatre, at least since the 17th century, has always and importantly been *televisual*, a technology for exploring the divide between public and private, stage and audience, command and exchange. Each in their own way is anomalous in a theatre history that has always been televisual. Television watching is, of course, also a ritual. But the truth of the theatre "pieces" I've examined in this chapter is bound up in the very same questions of person (the personal), flatness (abstraction), the

televisual (crossing), and sincerity/irony that theatre makers have trafficked in since the early modern period.

Chapter 4: Pursuing Theatre's Community

If part of the pleasure of *Hotel Cassiopeia* is the intermedial translation of Joseph Cornell from art object to art performance, Anne Bogart's 2003 treatment of Robert Rauschenberg's combines in *bobrauschenbergamerica* is also instructive (and also by Charles Mee). Rauschenberg's prominence as a visual artist is rightly understood alongside his pioneering work in happenings and alternative theatre in the 1960s, when he joined poets, painters, choreographers and filmmakers like Claes Oldenburg, Allan Kaprow, John Cage, Yvonne Rainer, and Robert Whitman in exploring the potential of performance to destabilize existing boundaries between the plastic arts.¹⁴⁶ The roots of the contemporary avant-garde in this period are in two parts: the legacy of dematerializing artists in pursuit of art without objects (performance is fleeting and ephemeral) and of rematerializing theater makers seeking to displace the importance of text and find meaning in real action, real bodies, and ritual. That these two parallel tracks of artistic experimentation should converge in present theatre practice (the Wooster Group comes to mind) might surprise them. Performance studies is firmly planted in this second camp, as one of its key contributing influences, Richard Schechner, also made

¹⁴⁶ This is a common thread across most 20th-century art movements. As Günter Berghaus has observed, early modernist experiments such as Futurist *serata* and Dadaist *soirees* served to "challenge the criteria of what constitutes a scenic work of art and to create performances that were not just interpretations of dramatic texts, but autonomous, transient events that attained power and impact from their temporal and physical immediacy" (23). The question of physical immediacy once again comes to the fore in the time period I'm discussing here, when "social practices shifted even further from public to privatized, home-centered activities," says Berghaus, also noting the importance of television in the process (56). Günter Berghaus, *Avant-Garde Performance* (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

work in the Performing Garage that follows in that line.¹⁴⁷ This chapter makes a foray into recent theatre history in search of models for audience interactivity that are not coercive and pessimistic. We'll begin with Allan Kaprow and *18 Happenings in 6 Parts*, the art event that gave rise to an entire new genre of art performance. Gathered in a cubical construction covered in translucent scrims that in photographs have the appearance of ghostly televisions, the participants (though we will explore how appropriate this term is) were essential elements in a new kind of living sculpture. The Happening's conception and orientation of the audience links it to my theme of television-like theatre, and conscripts Kaprow into a troop of artists who make the complexity (and frustration) of audience their overriding concern. In *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* Kaprow hoped his attendees would cease in some real way to be audience members, causing the theatre-like qualities of the performance to recede. This highly scripted audience behavior, while at the time strange and occasionally confusing, now regularly features at art performances and theatre productions, with no attendant annihilation of the art object.

18 Happenings in 6 Parts was radical in as much as it changed the way the audience was meant to participate in the co-production of meaning: not in terms of *the happening*, but of *the not-happening*. On the face of it, this seems impossible.

"Something" is always happening in a performance. This is one lesson of John Cage's celebrated 4'33", a score for piano in which not a single note is played that nonetheless

¹⁴⁷ Artists interested in exploring performance were hard-pressed to find space in existing theatrical venues, and so had to pursue alternative arrangements like armories, galleries, churches, garages, gymnasia, movie theatres, lofts, and abandoned factories (the result of industrial change in New York—without SoHo, there might not be a Big Art Group or Wooster Group).

results in *music* when performed before an audience.¹⁴⁸ This music is not imagined, it is the unintentional music—aka noise, however muted—that a typical musical performance covers over. The not-happening of Kaprow's *18 Happenings* is very different. Rather than featuring the unintentional as Cage does, it radically re-intends intentional action. If *4'33"* makes the absence of performed music an occasion for unperformed music, Kaprow takes the *presence* of performed action and makes it an occasion for unperformed participation. After discussing Kaprow, the chapter moves to an analysis of Dan Graham's work that also turns on ambivalent performances of self projected into boxes and out of screens.

Theatre for a Prepared Audience: The Problem of Event in Kaprow

...[T]here should not be (and usually cannot be) an audience or audiences to watch a *Happening*. By willingly participating in a work, knowing the scenario and their own particular duties beforehand, people become a real and necessary part of the work....A *Happening* with only empathetic response on the part of a seated audience is not a *Happening* at all; it is simply stage theatre.¹⁴⁹

In 1959, Kaprow invited the public to attend *18 Happenings in 6 Parts*. In a significant shift from his previous work, which consisted of mixed media sculpture and collage, the artist created a set of instructions for participation in an immersive

¹⁴⁸ As Liz Kotz points out, what made *4'33"* great was that it could "be described and notated entirely in words and numbers" (13). If, at its core, Cage's piece is an inscription that activates a performance, then Kaprow inverts this: *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* is a performance that activates an inscription. Liz Kotz, *Words to Be Looked At: Language in 1960s Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007).

¹⁴⁹ Allan Kaprow's 1966 essay "The Happenings Are Dead: Long Live Happenings!", reprinted in Allan Kaprow, *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 64.

performance in New York's Reuben Gallery. The 18 happenings were diverse: there were balls being bounced, instruments being played, slides being shown, tape players being turned on, paint being smeared, movements being made, blocks being stacked on a table, and words being read aloud. One of the 18 happenings was, simply, nothing. The performance was so unusual that it created a new category of performative event and earned a new name: taking a cue from the title of the piece, the "Happening" was born.

Reviewers of *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* in contemporary newspapers and magazines put this term in quotes, both to show that they were borrowing the term from Kaprow, and also to suggest that Kaprow's artwork was infelicitous to the point of being deceptive. The public, in the minds of reporters such as *The Nation*'s Fairfield Potter, was in danger of being duped by Kaprow's trivial event, a term that Potter put in quotes to indicate that he wasn't entirely sure it even warranted that designation.¹⁵⁰ Attendees risked believing that a work of art had happened, when in fact all they had witnessed, to Potter's mind and others', was a confused mixture of sound and silliness, a non-event. So, to call the piece a "Happening" was a way of suggesting that nothing worthwhile had taken place in the gallery space during the so-called performance. In this way, the scare quotes serve as a set of instructions to the reader: *Don't take this seriously*. Potter meant this sarcastically, believing he was putting the lie to Kaprow's event. But perhaps we should follow his lead, and consider the ways that the Happening failed to rise to the level of event—remained, in a sense, a non-event.

This chapter will explore how Happenings are determined by Kaprow's idea of the non-event, and will arrive at a defense of the very desirability of a not-happening. I

¹⁵⁰ Eva Meyer-Hermann, Andrew Perchuck and Stephanie Rosenthal, eds., *Allan Kaprow—Art as Life* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2008), 131.

will compare his 1959 art performance *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* with a 1952 piece by John Cage, *4'33"*, that was equally ground-breaking and also instrumental in inaugurating a new era in music. We'll look at the techniques Kaprow deploys to disrupt the audience's experience of *18 Happenings*, particularly the ways he disperses the performance in time and space and attempts to incorporate the audience. From *18 Happenings in 6 Parts*, we'll advance seven years to *Self-Service*, an Activity from 1966.

It is clear that Kaprow was trying to find ways to prevent non-art from becoming art. In other words, to prevent performances from becoming art "events." If we can arrive at an understanding of how Kaprow saw the status of event for the audience at a Happening, we might begin to offer our own assessment of how these performances did or did not achieve an idealized non-eventness. We can chart Kaprow's definition of the non-event even as he fails to achieve it, which might in the final analysis give us a new perspective on art performance (or, more preferred, performance art) in the second half of the 20th century, especially as it relates to museums and archiving in general. Aside from Kaprow's own dilemmas, I ask if there is such a thing as a non-event, and how it might be maintained in relation to performance. In response, I explore documentation that pre-scripts and post-scripts performance and affects its passage from event to non-event (or vice-versa).

Like Kaprow, we are looking for a performance that is not an event. Of course, we can look to definitions that totally change our understanding of the event: we can recognize that what we call an event is always what has happened or what is about to happen, it is never happening now; that an event, precisely because it is a rupture or a break, does not belong "in" time. Aside from generating a theory of the event from

Kaprow, we might also be tempted to see Kaprow as somehow demonstrating an already-existing definition. Stephen Zepke, writing an essay in *Deleuze and Performance*, interestingly relates Kaprow to Deleuze and Guattari. As might be expected, Kaprow is seen as embodying “the event” as it is re-interpreted and re-deployed by these two thinkers. Event “for” Kaprow, as it is “for” Deleuze and Guattari, is no longer discrete, but arcs across a plane of immanence. Zepke cleverly points to the close relationship of plan to plane when he narrates Kaprow’s stylistic evolution in the 1960s and 1970s: “Kaprow’s method moves toward constructing a plan(e) of composition from the early 1970s, when the Happenings become largely banal in their actions, and increasingly organized around aleatory events feeding back into the performance.”¹⁵¹

What I call a non-event (or a not-happening) might at first seem nothing more than an audience becoming aware that there are things happening that are part of the performance to which they don’t have complete access. This is hardly different from any other performance, even in traditional theatre, from which Kaprow is at pains to distance himself. But there is a crucial difference: whereas audiences can be “seduced” by the skill and charisma (or occasionally the celebrity) of performers, which act to cover over these gaps in their experience, the architecture of *18 Happenings* and its use of non-actors offer none of these compensations. And, further separating it from theatrical presentation of narrative, the Happening inverts the typical formula that allows an audience to fixate on the dramatic action of the play to the exclusion of everything else that can’t be directly observed.

¹⁵¹ Stephen Zepke, “Becoming a Citizen of the World: Deleuze between Allan Kaprow and Adrian Piper,” in *Deleuze and Performance*, Laura Cull, ed. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 115.

At the time, Kaprow attempted to explain the Happening's appeal by reference to its spontaneity, writing that "[a] modern play rarely has such an impromptu basis, for plays are still *first written*. A Happening is *generated* in action by a handful of ideas or a flimsily jotted-down score of 'root' directions" (Kaprow, 19). Clearly, Kaprow is attempting to absent his role as the originary intelligence behind the performance script. No, *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* did not offer an easy handle in the form of story or narrative arc, but neither was it an autopoetic distillation of the ether. It is not Kaprow's instructions to the performer that interest me, but his instructions to the *audience*. We might even be tempted to go so far as to call a Happening "theatre for a prepared audience"—riffing on the prominent role of prepared pianos (pianos whose internal workings have been altered to create alternate harmonic scales) in Cage's experimental compositions.

Although Kaprow inaugurated Happenings, within a few years he had moved on to other forms: by the late '60s, he was making Activities, and by the '70s, Environments. A 1976 essay, "Nontheatrical Performance," explains this trajectory and exposes his lack of sympathy for theatre as it relates to performance. Finding a performance style that was distinct from theatrical presentation required moving beyond a concept as simple as audience participation. Although these are not the terms he uses, Kaprow was looking for something close to audience actualization. (Not that the audience becomes itself, but that the members of the audience become *themselves*.) He dismissed his early Happenings (and perhaps Happenings in general) as "theatre." Instead, he looked for performative actions that would encompass spectators, so that the pieces would make good on his

understanding of performance as “an attitude about involvement on some plane in something going on” (Kaprow, 174).

Rather than being participatory because of the co-presence of audience and performer in an environment (the “plane”) charged with chance and experiment—the dice rolling and randomizing measures we associate with Cagean aesthetics—the participation of the audience at/in *18 Happenings* (if, that is, it *is* participation) is first and foremost an expression of equality: allowing all participants equal access to information regarding the performance (the “plan”). Contrary to what Kaprow said about the death-dealing effect of the script in modern drama written *before*, the scenario *must be* written in advance, because it must be discussed by everyone in advance of their participation. Participation is not the hand-off of speaking roles and movement choreography (the “sing-along”) between performer and audience/spectator. The non-event, then, is characterized by a horizon of expectation that is determined not by the contingent and unpredictable, but precisely by what is preordained and who has given consent. Is this emancipation? Is this liberation? Or is this merely an attempt to construct an object that is resistant to discursive interpolation *by art into art*?

Kaprow himself suggested that this was the case. In a poster advertising the event, he freely admitted that “the actions will mean nothing clearly formulable so far as the artist is concerned.” This is Kaprow distancing himself from the work (and the critical response to it), and allowing audience members to formulate their own responses. Cage’s was emphatically not an instruction piece; the audience wasn’t coached, wasn’t invited to “participate.” In fact, much of the power of *4’33”* came from the way it exposed the audience’s expectations about music and its relationship to the conditions of its

production. The first audience of 4'33" expected a musical performance, even if it was to be decidedly experimental in nature. But what if they had been informed in advance not to expect one? How different would the experience of 4'33" have been if the audience had been instructed beforehand what to expect, if they had been issued a set of directives that included such actions as shift agitatedly in chair, cough to hide discomfort, etc. If Cage had activated their responses this way, would they not be participating in the piece far more constructively and favorably?¹⁵² Initial critics of Happenings were perhaps justified in questioning if a Happening was an event at all, but rather than seeing this as pejorative, it should be seen as a recognition of the reality of the not-happening, i.e., how the audience was called on to be aware of not-witnessing parts of the performance.

More text from the poster gives some idea of how Kaprow intends to make good on this promise: "There are three rooms for this work, each different in size and feeling. The rooms are nearly transparent. No matter where a person is, he is aware of something happening in another room." Folding chairs were arranged into three cells, each 20 feet square, connected by a long corridor. The walls dividing the cells from each other and from the corridor were all made of plastic transparent enough to allow those seated in one space to glimpse what was happening in another, to see outlines and colors under certain lighting conditions, and to hear actions as they occurred. The audience took their seats before the performance began, but between the second and third parts had to move to

¹⁵² This raises a different but equally compelling question about the work of spectating. If Kaprow's instructions script a response from the audience that in effect requires them to enact the work, it is hard not to think of this gesture in relation to delegated art in general. Consider the modern-day workshops of Conceptual and Minimal Art, where a Donald Judd is assembled by workers employed by the artist. They are presumably being paid for their work. The audience, if it is to become a co-participant, is also assembling the work. However, it is presumably *not* being paid for engaging in what is not work but *leisure*.

another room, giving them access to a heretofore-unavailable space of the performance, while denying them the part they had initially encountered. The cells featured tables, assorted props, some artwork leaning against the “walls,” and a jumble of audiovisual equipment: turntables, slide and movie projectors, quadraphonic speakers.

The precariousness of the installation suggested a kind of improvisatory aesthetic (which Kaprow widely extolled at the time) in tension with the specificity of *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* (that we can no longer ignore). The program/manual for the event detailed what was about to happen:

18 HAPPENINGS
IN SIX PARTS
BY ALLAN KAPROW

THE REUBEN GALLERY
61 4th AVE., N.Y.C.
OCT. 4,6,7,8,9,10--8:30 p.m.

CAST OF PARTICIPANTS

Allan Kaprow - who
speaks and plays a
musical instrument

Rosalyn Montague -
who speaks and moves

Shirley Prendergast -
who moves and plays a
musical instrument

Lucas Samaras - who
speaks, plays a game
and a musical instru-
ment

Janet Weinberger -
who moves and plays a
musical instrument

Robert Whitman - who
moves, speaks and
plays a game

Sam Francis, Red Grooms,
Dick Higgins, Lester
Johnson, Alfred Les-
lie, Jay Milder, George
Segal, Robert Thompson
- each of whom paints

The visitors - who sit
in various chairs

INSTRUCTIONS

The performance is divided into six parts. Each part contains three happenings which occur at once. The beginning and end of each will be signalled by a bell. At the end of the performance two strokes of the bell will be heard.

You have been given three cards. Be seated as they instruct you. That is, be sure to change your place for set three and for set five.

Between part one and part two there is a two minute interval. Remain seated.

Between part two and part three there is a fifteen minute interval. You may move about freely.

Between part three and part four there is a two minute interval when you will remain in your seats.

Between part four and part five there is a fifteen minute interval. You may move about.

Between part five and part six there is a two minute interval. Remain seated.

There will be no applause after each set. You may applaud after the sixth set if you wish, although there will be no "curtain call".

The visitors are please asked not to smoke at all in the loft. They are also asked not to leave the building during the longer intermissions.

Figure 13: Program for *18 Happenings in 6 Parts*

To what extent was this performance “by” Allan Kaprow? Arguably, Kaprow’s status as author of this event is intentionally (if not convincingly) ambiguous. By situating the audience in a position of greater knowledge and inclusion than is ordinarily the case, it could be argued that he is “elevating” them from the debased position of mere audience into co-producers—not only of meaning, but of the performance itself. I also want to posit that the directives can be assimilated to the category of pedagogical instruction. That is to say, Kaprow is daylighting the typically submerged demands on audience participation—quiet attention, engagement, posterior reflection—and making them explicit. On the one hand, he wants people who come to the Reuben gallery to focus on what unfolds before them, but he also wants them to focus on their focus, observe their observing.

If the phrasing of my previous sentence evokes Gertrude Stein’s style of writing, it’s because her 1926 piece “Composition as Explanation” seems strangely relevant to this discussion. In it, she writes, “Any one creating the composition in the arts does not know it [life] either, they are conducting life and that makes their composition what it is, it makes their work compose as it does.”¹⁵³ Admittedly, it is very challenging to isolate a main idea “in” Stein’s text because she is so intent on identifying the many factors outside of a text that influence its production and reception. (Or the challenge might lie in the near-opacity of her writing at certain moments, which in paradoxical fashion is very near to the transparency of a shallow pond that nevertheless at moments reflects sunlight and then refracts it, sending it shooting to the bottom in a ripple of inflected meanings—not to mention when the water is disturbed.) These factors are too numerous to list: the

¹⁵³ Gertrude Stein and Ulla E. Dydo, *A Stein Reader* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1996), 498.

sum total of actions (“doing everything”), which I take to mean both artworks/books but also real actions aka “life” undertaken by “everybody.” But (and of course this is what Stein’s biography might lead us to conclude) I think this essay is a reflection on the status of the avant-garde and the possibility of living one’s life in tension with the status quo. The artist is “conducting” her life, and that is how the art comes to be. But in the quote above the word “compose” is being used in a very odd way: “it [the contingent factors of a person’s life] makes their work *compose* as it does” (italics added). This is so strange that it almost seems like a typo, even to readers familiar with Stein’s unorthodox syntax. The work appears to be the agent that does the composing. Something in the material orders itself in a certain way? And perhaps the creator herself might not understand it, or see the beauty in it. Perhaps the artist is in the same position as the rest of us who only recognize it as art or beauty when it is canonized by the art community, “when it is accepted and classic.” There is an ironic tone in that quote that seems to indicate that what is stimulating and irritating in an artwork is vitiated by the process of acceptance. So that only non-“art” can be stimulating? Kaprow’s “un-art” or “non-art” encourages us to see composition as a part of life, and to recognize life as part of it, but for other reasons. Stein wants to arrive at a piece of writing, say, that is not finished, but still fully formed: organic, reactive, vital. Kaprow wants to avoid arriving at a product; instead, he wants to create affects, attitudes, and shared emotional states among Happening participants that are bound up with a unique experience, but that continue to impact them even after the Happening stops (though that boundary might not be easy to recognize).

The audience members, “the visitors—who sit in various chairs,” are included in the column along with the other members of “the cast.” The audience was called, in effect, not only to witness the performance’s failure to gel (it remains a non-event) but to participate in it by virtue of knowing the score in advance, and thus being aware that many of the happenings are happening simultaneously (and so an indeterminate number of them must remain unseen). To further interrogate Kaprow’s not-happening in an even more difficult and complex manner, it is important to look at the linguistic coding of the event, the “instructions” that were made available to the audience before every performance. The instructions were a crucial component of the performance, and preceded not only the “action” of the piece, but even the audience’s attendance. A poster for the exhibition is instructive in this regard; it suggests that the experience of *18 Happenings* was available to those who did not attend, at least on the level of precognition. Language has a part to play in staging the non-event of the not-happening. If the advertisement provides a foretaste for spectators and non-spectators alike, it is a linguistic frame that determines the “event,” whether or not they see it. Those who did make it to the Reuben Gallery are again confronted with words: they are given a set of instructions: “You have been given three cards. Be seated as they instruct you. That is, be sure to change place for set three and for set five.” The happening “be-in” of 1960s hippiedom required the participants (both spectators and artists) to surrender at least some of their control.

Viewed alongside the Happenings of Jim Dine, Al Hansen, and Claes Oldenburg (contemporaries and colleagues of Kaprow who began innovating on the form in their own ways), *18 Happenings* refuted the premises of originality and mastery that Mark

Rothko, Jackson Pollock, and Barnett Newman exemplified, and replaced the singular act of the great artist with a plurality of simultaneous actions (sometimes destructive to the artists' bodies, or to the art object) in a seemingly random "relation" to each other, performed by a collective. If Abstract Expressionism is the genre of work that the Happening evolved in distinction to, this is another understanding of the idea/ideal of the non-event: as a way to escape from the figure of the artist. The male artist and his singular actions (action painting) were the backdrop for Happenings. "He" continued to haunt the form even as Kaprow and other figures like Fluxus pioneer George Brecht sought to innovate new performance vocabularies. Kaprow came to call his work "Activities," but they were widely recognized as belonging to the category of "Mail Art," for reasons which will become clear. In many ways Mail Art seems to come closer to the non-event. As Happenings became more spectacular throughout the 1960s (I think here of Robert Whitman among others), they became all too recognizable as being art and relating to the art world. The seemingly improbable commercial success of conceptual artists up to the present-day demonstrates that "non-art" was far easier to recuperate to art than originally expected.

In response, Kaprow's actions became less theatrical and more conceptual over time. The later, more intimate works—the Activities and then the Environments—dispensed with large casts, and could be experienced by a couple, or solo. Yet they never lost their emphasis on the time of art, on something that happens. The pieces became less about making events happen, and instead about letting them happen, focusing on self-observation and the limits of perception. An excerpt from the score for *Self-Service* (1966) gives the flavor of this work:

NEW YORK

(Available Activities)

Everyone watches
For either: a signal from
someone

a light to go on
in a window.

a plane to pass
directly over-
head.

an insect to
land nearby.

three motor-
cycles to
barrel past

Immediately afterwards, they write
a careful description of the oc-
currence, and mail copies to each
other.

The status of “New York” as an event is made clear: there are myriad “available activities,” and you may choose from among any (i.e., any activity is “fair game” to be made into an Activity, but only if you write about it afterwards). “Everyone watches,” so the performed action is spectating, being part of an audience. Everyone watches “New York,” even though everyone’s observations will be unique. They cease to be an audience the moment they translate their experience into a careful description, which is really only a (disguised) set of instructions for another Activity.

Earlier, I made reference to the ways the *18 Happenings* failed to rise to the level of event—now I'd like to examine how the success of the Happening might be measured in how far it goes toward becoming a non-event. For Kaprow, it is not simply a question of the material remains of performance. "Art" is the result of theatre and musical activity no less than painting and sculpture. It is a residue that categorically reorients the spectator toward the commodity culture that Kaprow increasingly hopes to escape. But he still wants to *make*, even if he hopes to avoid making things. He sees five ways to proceed in "Nontheatrical Performance": You can use an art mode in an art context (that is, paint a painting and hang it in a gallery), or a non-art mode in an art context, like giving someone a haircut, but do it in a gallery. You can paint a painting, but paint it in a barbershop. You can cut someone's hair in a barbershop but present it as art, or you can cut someone's hair in a barbershop and secretly maintain a "private consciousness" that you were involved in doing something other than haircutting. It is this "private consciousness" that the act of writing injects into the Activity of *Self-Service*. It's why it can truly be called "self-service": you serve as your own performer and audience, or perhaps as your own object and subject. We'll explore how theatrical situations can encourage the formation of this "private consciousness" in the next section when we encounter Dan Graham's experiments in the merging of public and private space.



Figure 14: Dan Graham performing *Performer/Audience/Mirror*

Audience Mirrored Mirrored

Through the use of the mirror the audience is able to instantaneously perceive itself as a public mass (as a unity), offsetting its definition by the performer(’s discourse). The audience sees itself reflected by the mirror instantly while the performer’s comments are slightly delayed. First, a person in the audience sees himself “objectively” (“subjectively”) perceived by himself, next he hears himself described “objectively” (“subjectively”) in terms of the performer’s perception.

—Dan Graham on *Performer/Audience/Mirror* (1975)

The use of televisual media in productions by Ivo von Hove, particularly Toneelgroep’s *Roman Tragedies*, with its roving camera men, or the work of Annie B Parsons (e.g., *Comme Toujours Here I Stand...* at the Kitchen), or Katie Mitchell’s well-regarded Woolf adaptation, *The Waves*, or Robert Lepage’s *Lipsynch* raise the possibility that theatre is spilling into the everyday world. Cameras trained on the audience feed their footage to onstage screens, where audiences aren’t supposed to be. The actors, like

the audience, gather around onstage monitors to screen the action, and close-up shots support the main narrative axis of play, which serves to update the nexus of private and public natures in the lives of Julius Caesar, Antony, Cleopatra, and Coriolanus to our present-day obsession with celebrity and accelerated cycles of news and information. The multimedia dimension is the most familiar aspect of these productions, and so the media does not serve an interruptive or interrogative function. A slightly different approach to the subject is provided by American artist and provocateur Dan Graham. *Opposing Mirrors and Video Monitors on Time Delay* (1974) used time delay and closed-circuit monitors to explore the interpenetration of public and private space in unusual if not altogether new ways. This experiment, and others, modeled television's role in structuring our social experiences, but importantly also featured theatrical situations that confronted the viewer with an image of her own desire for contact. The question I'm hoping to answer is, what, if anything, is substantially interesting about comparing the experiences, as an audience member, of seeing fellow audience members onstage, seeing oneself onstage in real time through closed-circuit television, seeing oneself reflected in an onstage mirror, and actually being onstage?

It is conventional wisdom that mirrors have no place on the stage: the mirror confuses who is/can be represented in the space of the stage, distracts the actor who is reflected in the mirror, and makes the audience appear on stage. Really, this prohibition only makes sense with the advent of artificial lighting (i.e., the danger of a lighting instrument's beam catching in a mirror and being reflected out, blinding actors or audience-members and detracting from the illusionism of the constructed set), but it seems to have been in force long before. In an undoubtedly apocryphal story about a performance of Marlowe's *Dr.*

Faustus, an onstage mirror had a particularly unfortunate effect on the production: the devil “himself” emerged from it, danced with the onstage demons and caused the lead actor to die of fright. The mirror in itself can also evoke the “liminal” space actors inhabit. Kirsten McDermott writes, “Actors routinely walk in that perilous liminal space between reality and fantasy, life and death, comedy and tragedy. The actor who regularly ‘puts on’ the emotions, voice, and identity of someone else — someone who doesn’t even exist, frequently — puts her soul in danger of losing its way in the unseen boundary between the real and the unreal.”¹⁵⁴ It’s possible that this dim view of mirrors derives from their status as a luxury good, as well as an attempt to maintain a certain level of decorum on the stage. Perhaps the mirror could only reflect the actor, not the aristocrat he was portraying? Discussing this anxiety, and thinking about the mirror as a metaphor for the stage in relation to mirrors actually on stage or as the stage provides an added impetus for considering Dan Graham’s mirror-pieces from a theatre studies perspective. The mirror, then, can help us think through the contemporary desire (among theatre makers and theatregoers) for theatre that features what might be called the four I’s of new performance: intermediality, immediacy, immersiveness, and interactivity.

We are familiar with the definition of interactivity, which the *Oxford English Dictionary* gives as: “Pertaining to or being a computer or other electronic device that allows a two-way flow of information between it and a user, responding immediately to the latter’s input.” It is instructive before we go further to consider what Annet Dekker states in “The New Art of Gaming, or What Gaming Can Learn from Installation Art,”

¹⁵⁴ Kristen McDermott, “Angels and Ministers of Grace: Theatrical Superstitions Through the Ages,” *The Journal of Mythic Arts* (Winter 2005), <http://www.endicott-studio.com/rdrm/theatricalSuperstitions1.html>.

that “interactivity” was considered a design flaw among computer engineers, insofar as the term was used to describe a human operator *interrupting* a computer’s operation.¹⁵⁵ Dekker’s text engages with artist-built environments to see if there is something game designers can learn from them.¹⁵⁶ Theatre artists could do a similar thing. We could also revisit some particularly interesting examples from the near past that were *themselves* trying to draw on theatrical spectating, such as Dan Graham’s mirror installation boxes from the 1970s and beyond.

But first, should changes in contemporary theatrical technique/technology (read: the use of consumer electronics, from portable video recorders to surveillance cameras to hi-fidelity audio equipment to internet telephony) be understood as achieving true interactivity? The problem is with what these pieces do to a narrative of theatre, which is also of course a narrative about society more generally. The thrall to interactivity is not only a compensation for the failure of traditional theatre to do what contemporary “interactive theatre” does, but is also an index of the anxiety produced by telematic action and communications technologies. To counter an overwhelming and pervasive sense that “social” media, among other configurations, cement social personae in place, I’d argue that actually seeing what you do (as if in a mirror) could be a powerful incitement for change. Mirrors, in this study, are a complication that help us trace the bifurcation of

¹⁵⁵ Kas Oosterhuis and Lukas Feireiss, ed., *The Architecture Co-laboratory: Game Set and Match II: On Computer Games, Advanced Geometries, and Digital Technologies* (Amsterdam: Episode Publishers, 2006), 117.

¹⁵⁶ She follows up the observation about undesirable interactivity with a quote from Lev Manovich’s *The Language of New Media* that warns of the danger of interactivity (bodily interaction) replacing *psychological* interaction. So interactivity as the sine qua non of gaming experience is put under question, both as it relates to the smooth functioning of the computing regime and to the cumulative synthetic experience of the gamer player (quoted in Oosterhuis, 117).

theatre, and the necessary separation between the activity occurring onstage and the activity occurring in the audience.

How do alternative theatre arrangements complicate and contest the stage picture offered by the delimiting power of the proscenium arch? In a theatre, shouting “fire” might cause a stampede, and possibly your arrest, but that won’t interrupt a television broadcast. A campaign ad on television can make you feel that your vote will count in this year’s election; you can text a different kind of vote to *American Idol* and see how the cumulative results of doing so impact next week’s broadcast. We might say, then, that television is one-way communication that masquerades as two-way communication. It may offer us choices, address us directly (though it did this more in the early years of television when broadcasts were live—i.e., more like theatre), and suggest our capacity to make changes to what we see, but it does so by directing our engagement and activity elsewhere. What we can change is never what we’re looking at; we simply look at something else. The bidirectional experience of television viewing depends on the stability of television’s “unique sense,” without which it would be too invasive. TV is so satisfying precisely because there is the security of unidirectionality. If the TV could talk to you, just you, to offer personal hygiene products it would be terrifying. Direct address is directed to “the audience” but not any single audience member. Consider stand-up comedians interacting with their audience: this is enjoyable because it is the rare occasion when the general is made particular, preferably to someone else.

Of course, the idea that one-way and two-way modes of communication don’t seep into one another is problematic. Perhaps we might think of it like a shift, according to which one mode dominates the other. In this respect, our perception of one mode

depends on the possibility that the other one is at work, or may soon be at work. A useful analogy, and also an example, might be the effect of seeing yourself in the reflection of the television, when it cuts to black just before a commercial break. The eye that craves information suddenly catches a glimpse of its own desire, confronted with the fact of craving. Or the flash of a mirror onstage that forces your awareness to what can be seen sitting there. Televisual performance, when it reminds us of our presence, takes these juxtapositions to their logical conclusion, but in doing so such productions deprive us of the reflection's most disruptive characteristic—that it is not supposed to happen. We aren't inside, and yet we are; we are being spoken to, and yet we might just be speaking to ourselves.

In his 1970s-era works with closed-circuit television, two-way mirrors, and glass, Dan Graham brought television into gallery spaces with a particular emphasis on audience engagement and interaction. To look at it one way, visitors to the gallery spaces were called upon to make their own TV shows and watch them. After moving to New York City from Urbana, Illinois, where he grew up, he founded the John Daniels Gallery together with friends in 1964. Dan Flavin and Sol Le Witt, among others, exhibited there. The gallery lasted about a year. Then Graham started working in sculpture, photography, video, essays, architecture—what Donald Judd termed “non-art.” But it was *not* non-theatre. In fact, he was drawn to theatrical encounters and situations. Graham created unusual installations that were a combination of TV studio, mental hospital, prisoner holding cell, and theatre.

A particularly interesting work from the 1976 Venice Biennale (themed “*Ambiente*,” environment) is *Public Space/Two Audiences*. That work grew out of a

series of different experiments which began with *Two Consciousness Projections* of 1972. In that installation (although you could really call it a short improvised play), a camera is connected to a monitor. A camera operator looks at a woman through the viewfinder, and the woman focuses on her own image in the monitor, which the audience sees. The performers are asked to “verbalize” their thoughts as intuitively as possible. Graham writes, “Each’s verbal impression, in turn, affects the other’s perception: the man’s projection on the periphery of the woman’s affects her consciousness or behavior. A field is created in which audience and performers place reciprocal controls on each other.”¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁷ Dan Graham and Alexander Alberro, *Two-Way Mirror Power: Selected Writings by Dan Graham on His Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 38.



Figure 15: Dan Graham's *Public Space/Two Audiences* (1976)

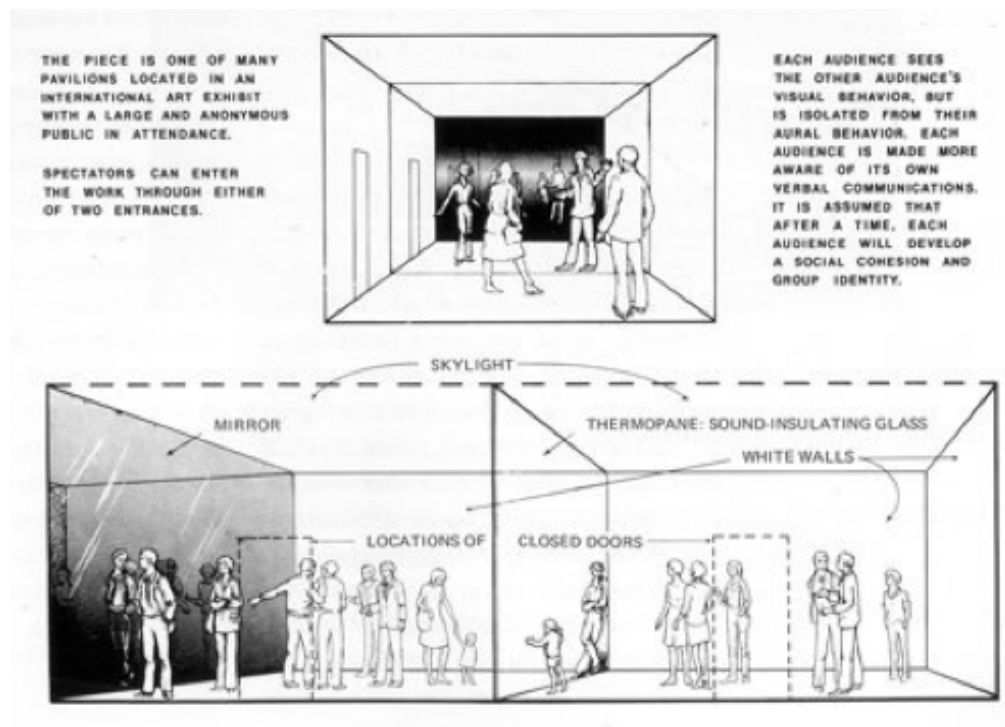


Figure 16: Schematic for *Public Space/Two Audiences*

Graham next experimented with delay in *Opposing Mirrors and Video Monitors on Time Delay* (1974) and *Yesterday/Today* (1975), the latter of which featured audio and video from the same space, separated by 24 hours, screened in that space. Graham believes this approach “historicizes” the gallery space in a particular way, “contrary to the neutral ‘timeless’ quality implied by most architectural spaces” (44). Then came the very interesting *Performer/Audience/Mirror* of 1975, which is described in Graham’s words at the outset of this chapter. Simply put, Graham would face an audience with his back against a mirror (a common arrangement in a dance studio, among other environments) and describe what he saw into a microphone. The audience would see their reflection and also hear his ongoing narration of their activity—really, the activity of individual spectators but raised to the level of exemplars of the audience qua audience. By the time he arrived in Venice, Graham had discovered a way to eliminate the cameras and the role of narration in one fell swoop: by doubling the audience.

A section on “The Mirror Image/The Video Image” references Lacan and the role of mirrors in Western philosophy as a concept of the self. But more interestingly, Graham writes, “A mirror’s image optically responds to a human observer’s movements, varying as a function of his position. As the observer approaches, the mirror opens up a wider and deeper view of the room-environment and magnifies the image of the perceiver. By contrast, the video-image on a monitor does not shift in perspective with a viewer’s shift in position. The mirror’s image connects subjectivity with the perceiver’s time-space axis” (154).¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁸ More than intermediality, these performances seem to rely on a form of intramediality—caught inside a medium. Through specific devices, spatializing and viewing angles, methods, and techniques, certain auteurs using cameras can contribute

In “Notes on Public Space/Two Audiences” (written in 1978 and first published in *Aspects* magazine), Graham writes, “The observer is made to become psychologically self-conscious, conscious of himself as a body which is a perceiving subject; just as, socially, he is made to become aware of himself in relation to his group. This is a reversal of the usual loss of ‘self’ when a spectator looks at a conventional artwork. There, the ‘self’ is mentally projected into (and identified with) the subject of the artwork” (158).

The problem is this new kind of work is premised upon “introducing” a two-way-ness into a medium that it treats as having long been one-way. But it doesn’t need to be “re”-introduced. Theatre has always been bidirectional. I use the term “bidirectional communication” because it makes clear that the activity that takes place in the theatre goes in two directions. This is slightly different from saying that theatre is a form of interactive art or that it’s a collaborative activity, although it can be; there is a specific form of relation that can be isolated and discussed with respect to theatre. The two-way-ness of theatre has at times predominated in obvious ways. In 18th-century London or 17th-century Paris, the “performance” of spectators in their boxes was as important as anything that happened on the stage. This is simply to say that theatre space can form a circuit and that theatre spectating can be theatrical. Can we take this idea one step further to suggest that the activity of the audience has material effects on the discrete performers (over and above interrupting them)? We wouldn’t say that what happens in the mirror never impacts the person on the other side. Could this also be true of what takes place in front of the television screen?

this feeling, such as David Cronenberg and David Lynch, as well as ones who don’t, like Richard Foreman.

The two-way movement of information and emotion is not new in theatre, but the current vogue for technology-driven interactive and/or immersive theatre is. This question of the real implications of audience activity on theatrical practice has new purchase in an era of technological encroachment. These technologies, or technologies that were often used to bring the action of the stage closer to the audience (sound amplification, electric lighting, video), now have the potential to bring the audience closer to the actors. It's all too easy to turn theatre into a kind of *Choose Your Own Adventure* medium where members of the audience exercise control over the contours of a production through instantaneous feedback mechanisms, whether in plain view, as through viewer response buttons at each seat, or through a delay, via Twitter. Compelled by fears of theatre's ever-arriving obsolescence, are theatre makers consciously trying to incorporate the audience into the performance?

Video art or TV art that emerges in the 1970s in the work of Vito Acconci, Nam June Paik, and Dan Graham, among others, was trying to break the heretofore unquestioned unitary velocity of TV, from the stations to you. They made numerous videos that captured scenes that would never ordinarily appear on television and showed them in public or in galleries, in order to democratize the production of content. Theatre makers now are using the latest high-definition projectors and cameras because they can afford to for the first time. So it's the same old song played on new instruments, but these theatre spaces can often resemble the very video art or TV art installations that preceded them by 40 years.

This new kind of theatre creates this specter of "old" theatre that only talked at us, and now we are given the opportunity to talk back. New technologies are presented as an

“act of inclusion” that we’d been missing. In order to figure theatre as newly interactive, with the potential to close some kind of gap in the communication loop, that gap has to be instantiated over and over again. But it seems to be a different sort of gap from the one that has traditionally divided stage and house. A production by Rimini Protokoll called *Call Cutta in a Box*, which first appeared in Berlin in 2008 but has since traveled extensively, helps to illustrate this. The promotional material explains how the play works:

Imagine you are buying a ticket at the box office for an individual show on a specific day, but are not led to the auditorium of the theatre. Instead, you get the key for a room and a sketch of how to get there. It might be a room in the theatre, an office, or an apartment somewhere close by. You open the door and you find a phone ringing. You pick up the phone and a person with a strange accent strikes up a conversation with you. The person seems to know the room you are sitting in, even though he is about 10.000 km away. The voice belongs to a call centre agent from Calcutta, India. He and his colleagues usually sell credit cards and insurance on the phone to people on the other side of the globe or provide navigational help in cities that they have never been to themselves. But this time you are not supposed to buy anything. By now, you are standing at the window and your transcontinental conversation partner is pointing some curious people in the opposite building out to you. On the notebook desktop in your room images and videos are opening up out of nowhere. A story is about to develop and you realize that the call centre agent and you and your city are the very first protagonists of the plot.¹⁵⁹

The contours of the piece are familiar from a survey of contemporary performance practice: isolating audiences members into small groups or even “groups” of one, creating the sense of theatre as an event that happens only once (can happen only once), incorporating as much as possible the actual conditions of the theatre making into the theatre (the question of labor), and wherever possible including identifiable attributes of

¹⁵⁹ “Call Cutta in a Box.” *Rimini Protokoll*. <http://www.rimini-protokoll.de/website/en/project/call-cutta-in-a-box>.

the audience into the production, all while using cameras, screens, and an ironic detachment.

Pleasure Dome and the Absent Present Audience

Media, by altering the environment, evoke in us unique ratios of sense perceptions. The extension of any one sense alters the way we think and act—the way we perceive the world.

When
these
ratios
change,
MEN CHANGE.¹⁶⁰

This mantra from media philosopher Marshall McLuhan's *The Medium Is the Message* scrolls across a 28-foot screen as space rhumba plays. Thus begins *Pleasure Dome*, a 45-scene, 75-minute tele-theatrical extravaganza I created at Brown University alongside co-director David Harrington and a cast of 14 undergraduates in 2009. Our intention was to explore what we believed to be the affinity between theatre and television, or more specifically between the sort of theatre we were interested in and the sort of television no one watched anymore. The show, we hoped, would address the proliferation of screens in the daily lives of denizens of the 21st century, which from our perspective was only the latest manifestation of a long process of media extension and intensification that McLuhan first described in 1968. Together, the ensemble built a piece of environmental theatre whose environment was the screen. In this way, we gave the audience an opportunity to experience canonical texts such as the poetry of Samuel

¹⁶⁰ Marshall McLuhan, *The Medium Is the Message* (Corte Madera, CA: Gingko Press, 2001), 41.

Taylor Coleridge, the writing of Lewis Carroll, and the work of directors David Cronenberg and Sidney Lumet anew, as always already mediated elements of a multimedia performance that never ends.¹⁶¹ Endeavoring to examine our position and complicity as spectators in mediatized constructions of consensus, *Pleasure Dome* deployed televisual conventions and mechanisms of repetition, duration, and feedback to confront the spectator and splinter their relation to the whole.

In effect, our *Pleasure Dome* was a “made for TV” spectacle for which we turned the theatre into a television studio. Stacking the audience against one wall, we surrounded them with cable, lighting trees, and enormous camera equipment. There was no “stage” per se, only a raised platform inside a giant television and a little playing space in front of it delimited by the lights. Most of our efforts went into creating images and moments that looked best in the camera viewfinders and on the screens the crew used to time lighting and sound cues (including but not limited to “green screen” sequences where we transported our actors to different places onscreen by capturing their movements and inserting them into a video sequence, all the while leaving them gesticulating into the emptiness of the stage). This was our gamble: that by creating a show “for the viewers at home” (i.e., only intelligible when accessed via a television screen) we could unsettle the theatre audience gathered each night, with the intention of dislodging any straightforward sense of being part of an audience or community (tricky business, admittedly, as an academic theatre setting generally means a good proportion of the spectators know each other). Rather than work against the seeming loss of community, we sought novel

¹⁶¹ We were heavily influenced by Lumet’s luminous 1976 film *Network*, especially the density of detail that screenwriter Paddy Chayefsky’s own experience in the world of television gave it. Interestingly, avant-garde director and intermedial theatre pioneer Ivo van Hove is working on his own version of the film, to premiere in London in fall 2017.

ways to increase and extend it: to create a strange experience that appealed on the one hand to absent spectators for its purchase, while at the same time instantiating a gap in the experience of those present, primarily through staging, lighting, “bad” angles, awkward timing, and a combination of intensely focused and nonchalant acting. We recreated the heyday of television, when the lack of sophistication and the limits of equipment facilitated an environment of immediacy, via the jerry-rigged, the spontaneous, and the improvisatory.

Later, I realized that the lingering preoccupation of *Pleasure Dome*—the question of how the audience was faring, if the audience was indeed experiencing itself as an audience at all—was a hallmark of the phenomenon of two audiences that both theatre and television articulate, by simultaneously or in quick succession constructing and then challenging the existence of a single or primary audience, either in the shared space and time of performance or as a medial product that circulates in its own time and takes with it (retains) the conditions of its production. We’d gone to great lengths—rearranging the audience! rehangng lights!—to highlight what inheres in the theatrical situation to begin with. This production, by foregrounding what is televisual about the theatrical experience and vice-versa, drew my attention to how both forms rely on a movement between immersion and anti-immersion, between feeling part of things and not getting them at all.

The show followed in a long history of offending, annihilating, or eliminating the audience; we’d intended for our audience to feel as if they were missing something—the broadcast, clearly, but maybe also the performance. We didn’t want bad acting, but we did cast non-actors, and the only direction we gave them was, “You *aren’t* you. You are *you...on TV*.” This meant being alive to the moment but with a new kind of seriousness,

because it wasn't just happening in the Production Workshop (Brown's student-run theatre space), but in millions of homes across the country. We explained to the actors that we wanted them to make no accommodation for the placement of the audience (no cheating!), reassuring them that we'd use the cameras to articulate and frame the proper angle and attitude (though of course we just as frequently instructed the camera operators to take the camera into odd places, creating still stranger vistas). The camera feed was sent to a bank of monitors in a control booth that partly obscured the stage where the directors cum segment producers sat to watch how the broadcast (would have) looked going out on their (our) tiny monitors. We selectively fed the simultaneous footage to the giant television. At times, we could and did allow the images to stream into the space behind it—a 14-foot-square set within the set—and onto the actors' bodies. Or occasionally we would show an "empty" TV, "filled" with electro-snow.

We sought to create a new idea of environmental theatre that was an antidote to bad, immersive theatre. Before conceiving of the project, my co-director and I had attended a student production of Chuck Mee's *Big Love* that got too close and wanted too much to feel "real" and "inclusive," and it provoked our desire to use avant-garde techniques (as we understood them) to explore the opposite inclination: the retreat from touch and the pulsating human body.¹⁶² We were also interested in television as the monolith of popular culture—both the fact that it's monolithic and that there's something strangely powerful and opaque about it, like the monolith from Arthur C. Clarke's *2001: A Space Odyssey*—and the pat-ness of broadcast television ("pat" meaning obvious, easy,

¹⁶² It's worth noting that Mee's work, with its postmodern play with authenticity and originality, is much closer to the spirit of *Pleasure Dome* than the quasi-immersive student production that engendered it.

persuasive, ratified, agreed-to, accepted). In short, *Pleasure Dome* was a protest against an overly earnest, aggressively intimate theatre, which in the mouths of its proponents often sounds like the only kind of theatre there is. We were aware of the tradition (anti-tradition?) of environmental theatre, first documented if not originated in the late 1960s by Richard Schechner in “Six Axioms of Environmental Theatre.”¹⁶³ Following Schechner’s structure, our production did feature “flexible and variable focus” (axiom 4 in Schechner’s account), albeit not for the audience’s benefit. We were trying to capture the special feeling and focus of a TV production crew. We thought we’d created entirely different zones for audience and performers (axiom 2), but something about the single-minded intention behind that contributed to a completely unlooked-for blending of the spaces, or showed how this axiom is at least as applicable to more traditional theatre situations as it is to environmental ones. If Schechner’s axioms reflected a belief that theatre needed to be more real and life-like, it is a wonder that immersive theatre—the contemporary analogue of environmental theatre—has become so popular in an era that is otherwise characterized by the logic of what Baudrillard calls the simulacra, when the real, as such, is hardly conceivable.¹⁶⁴

From the outset of *Pleasure Dome*’s development, we aimed to interrogate mediation. We collected source texts that shared a common preoccupation with creative process, inspiration, how nonsense precedes sense, desire, and where madness, hallucination, live television, and the real collide: Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s “Kubla Khan” (1797, published 1816), Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*

¹⁶³ Richard Schechner, “Six Axioms of Environmental Theatre” *TDR* vol. 12 no. 3 (1968): 41-64.

¹⁶⁴ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, translated by Sheila Faria Glaser (Minneapolis: University of Michigan Press, 1994).

(1865), Sidney Lumet's *Network* (1976), and David Cronenberg's *Videodrome* (1983), alongside *Laugh-In* (1968–1973). Our source material may have been unusual, but it was well-suited to our purposes. Most of the “structure” of our piece was taken from what you might call “post-dramatic television,” that fascinating region of 1960s live television that included wacky game shows, off-the wall talk personalities, and bizarre holiday specials.

One notable feature of this landscape was *Laugh-In*, a weekly variety show that ran from 1968 to 1973 on NBC. It relied on traditional forms like *commedia dell'arte* and vaudeville for its content, as well as topical sketches and celebrity appearances. The appeal of this form is significant, as illustrated by the nearly 40-year run of *Saturday Night Live*. Importantly, *Laugh-In* was a prime-time show that attracted a large percentage of television viewers, with a significant demographic spread. The show would begin with an introduction by Dan Rowan and Dick Martin, winking and mugging for the camera: they seemed to be aware of themselves and appeared differently from the other members of the cast. Rarely featuring in any of the sketches, Rowan and Martin maintained a kind of sovereign dignity (even if they liked to make corny jokes). After the hosts welcomed the studio broadcast and inaugurated that night's show, the camera cut to the memorable “Sock It to Me” portion—during which different members of the cast (and celebrity guests) asked to be punched in the face, uttering the words “Sock it to me.” It's hard to overemphasize just how strange and exhilarating it can be when John Wayne makes the request, or when Republican nominee for president Richard Nixon asks, “Sock it to...me?” while giving an almost Zero Mostel wide-eyed glance to the camera. Then comes the Party scene, with music playing and the cast dancing. As if it were a version of

musical chairs, when the music stops, a single line is spoken by one of the actors. It could be the punch line of joke, an absurd saying by a fake guru, an observation, or a non sequitur—in fact the whole thing comes together like the snatches of discontinuous conversation you might overhear at a particularly groovy party. Then the show moves on to a smattering of sketches, often based on news items, like the Black Panthers. The sketches feature a lot of “broad” humor, such as sight gags and slapstick, as well as musical numbers with very creditable singing and dancing, that are take-offs and send-ups of people from the galaxy of popular culture.

The executive producer of *Laugh-In*, George Schlatter, was looking for a way to make money, and the “only” way to do that was to have a show that was immensely popular with low costs: some of the performers (the celebrities) might even do it for free! It was wild, quick-paced, and irreverent. Some of this was an attempt to outwit and outpace self-imposed codes of morality and acceptability. In fact, the show had “live-in” censors for the purpose of preventing any untoward breaches of the public trust. Much of the show’s signature look was based on economy, from minimally suggestive set pieces in vibrant colors to the frequent use of video cut-ins. This led commentators at the time to observe that it was pretty “avant-garde.” Media historian Hal Erickson explains:

The standard cause-and-effect, even-flowing “continuity” was sliced and diced to a fare-thee-well, resulting in an anarchistic leapfrogging from segment to segment, dispensing sketches, jokes and puns with such relentless rapidity that the audience was literally defied *not* to laugh—even at the oldest gags and biggest groaners. The “accepted” limits of 1960s videotape technology were extended well beyond their boundaries and stretched nearly to the breaking point. And yet, *Laugh-In* tempered its unpredictability with its reassuringly “square” emcees, its instantly recognizable recurring characters, and its innumerable catchphrases,

creating its own rhythm, continuum and skewed sense of logic.¹⁶⁵

The show was filmed before a live studio audience, and their presence continues to emanate from the screen all these decades later. It was, however, heavily edited before being broadcast, and the audience at home viewed a discontinuous, re-edited version of what took (takes) place in the studio. For instance, a (series of) bit(s) about the many “zany!” and “spectacular” ways that a duel can go wrong was shot in sequence, only to be sliced and positioned throughout to make it possible to change sets, costumes, etc., without dead time for the audience at home. *Laugh-In* also included film footage from outside the studio, both in the form of silly skits and more “artistic” (incorporating editing and defamiliarizing techniques from advertising) intros and short sequences. It was part variety show, political burlesque, and silent majority-lamprooning vaudeville: incorporating and remediating (if you will) previous forms of popular entertainment.¹⁶⁶ The hallmark of television, its discursive intertextual flow, was reproduced on a micro level by *Laugh-In*, but also by each of its segments, ad infinitum.

Important for our purposes was the striking use of flatness, which can be seen to offer a comment on media personalities. The performers were generally filmed in a medium shot that shows from the thigh up, which is somehow more “flat” than close-up; the close-up encourages us to think about psychological depth, perhaps, or celebrity, or reminds us of those two-story-tall images of Greta Garbo on the movie screen. Of course celebrity guests were an important part of the show’s appeal and success, but they also helped make the program seem more and more reflexive. As Daniel Boorstin once

¹⁶⁵ Hal Erickson, *“From Beautiful Downtown Burbank”: A Critical History of Rowan and Martin’s Laugh-In, 1968–1973* (London: McFarland, 2000), 3.

¹⁶⁶ The imminent suitability of these performance traditions to television should begin to make us question just how new and different TV is (was).

famously observed, a celebrity is someone who is known for being known.¹⁶⁷ In the world of *Laugh-In*, performers were on the TV on Monday night appearing on *Laugh-In* not because of their talent or attractiveness (though in all likelihood, they did have those) but because they were TV stars.

Our production did not feature stars in any real sense, but we did engineer sequences that seemed to take certain of its members out of the show and into something like a higher atmosphere: these moments of “pure theatre” were paradoxically made possible only by isolating and reproducing certain tendencies of mainstream television. We had our own Cronkite in that great ideological formation, the nightly news. His desk, projecting out from the back wall of the theatre some 30 feet in the air, towered over both the television “set” and the audience. Before his segment began, a production assistant in fuchsia platform shoes climbed precariously up to his level to make him up. Clouds of face powder hung in the light for the entirety of the scene. It was a beautiful scene, made all the more striking by the halting delivery of news from Vietnam. The heightened theatricality of this moment highlighted and accentuated the role of the TV anchor, seated on a throne of sorts. Though the actors playing both Cronkite and his makeup artist had to ascend a narrow ladder that seemed only marginally safe, the segment did not shade into slapstick. Yes, we exposed the artificiality of the broadcast and the constructedness of the anchor’s position, but when our Cronkite appeared projected on the TV screen, he was still a comfort, and the distance between the actor Paul Cooper and Walter Cronkite fell away in that 20-foot-tall image of his face.

¹⁶⁷ Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America* (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2012 [1961]), 59ff.

Though we had no celebrities in *Pleasure Dome*, we did try to recreate the tension between on-camera and off-camera bodies, and to link this tension to the way the ability for television to “capture” moves in two directions. At the end of the “broadcast,” which initially read as the end of the show, we thanked our sponsors and said goodnight and hit the lights and milled about. But the woman playing She (“Alice,” like “Macbeth,” wasn’t allowed to be said in the theatre) continued to recite a monologue over and over again. We wanted to suggest that being captured “on” but also “in” television, as She was, is a trip down the rabbit hole, an immersive experience of multiple worlds. Importantly, the immersion of She indexes “immersion” as not a suspension of disbelief, but rather a practice that subjects the audience and the text to the same discipline, a flattening and laminating of separated bodies onto one another through simultaneous performance. In this way, the individual is laminated by generalized experience. Subjectivity re-enters from outside revealing a common condition, etc.

At the conclusion of the run, I had an illuminating conversation about the show with a professor of mine who’d spent his career exploring both western and non-western performance traditions that privilege interactivity, community, ritual, real things, and real changes. He avowed that he had never felt so excluded or outside a show, so much a part of an audience. And, he made clear, he hadn’t liked the experience—not at all. “Wow!” I thought, “We *really* did something!” Or had we? Stepping back, I reasoned that in *Pleasure Dome*, this professor had encountered theatre as television and didn’t like it. The problem, however, is that theatre has been “television” all along. The situation is not new; it’s only that the technology allows us to see the forces of individuation, separation, nomination. Practitioners and critics invest in a phantom of theatre (an imagined theatre)

that is “not” television, that is a straightforward instance of community, or at least community-building. Equally vocal, however, are scholars like Alan Read, whose *Theatre in the Expanded Field* makes an impressive case for theatre not as a form of community but of *immunity* (*immunitas*, pace philosopher Roberto Esposito).¹⁶⁸ The title of Read’s 2013 book consciously echoes Rosalind Krauss’ 1979 essay on works of sculpture that challenge the perceived limits of the medium. Read makes a related claim about theatre, examining its potentially troubling annexation of its near-cognate, performance. Read utilizes an impressive array of sources; alongside theatrical events, the author draws on a range of personal experiences, from 1980s community-building in the Docklands to a stretch in public relations and community outreach at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in the 1990s, to a more recent extended period of immersion in academia, first at Roehampton University and now at King’s College. His books *Theatre, Intimacy & Engagement* (2008) and *Theatre and Everyday Life: The Ethics of Performance* (1993) might be said to explore community formation and maintenance. “Community” is almost certainly not the best word for this area of research: Read points us in the direction of terms and ideas from Esposito as well as Giorgio Agamben, Jean-Luc Nancy, Jacques Rancière, and Paul Virilio. In the end, it is a convincing argument: theatre is a problem, but it is our problem. Performance rubs up against theatre to make it more engrossing and less satisfying, more like torture, and less like a ratification of the status quo. Thus, “our willingness to enter the contract of performance stems from a genetic preference for immunity *from involvement*. That is what going to the theatre is all

¹⁶⁸ Alan Read, *Theatre in the Expanded Field: Seven Approaches to Performance* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013); Roberto Esposito, *Immunitas: The Protection and Negation of Life* (Malden, MA: Polity, 2011).

about. It is not a pathology, is not a disease of outmoded theatre; it *is* theatre” (Read, 193).

If, as Read suggests above, theatre has always held out the threat of certain kinds of pollution and therefore has always dealt in issues of consent and coercion, the art world is increasingly coming to terms with audience participation as well. Claire Bishop’s *Artificial Hells* acts to bridge the adjacent areas of performance, theatre, and social practice art, and it’s no accident that her title indicates the potential hellishness of artworks that seek to problematize or eliminate boundaries (even those that safety and self-preservation would keep in place).¹⁶⁹ In *The Nightmare of Participation*, Markus Miessen takes up a version of the same argument, drawing on contemporary debates in European sociology and political theory, including the work of Chantal Mouffe. The nightmare in this case is the inescapable logic of both liberal democratic practices and artistic ones that rely on ratification rather than reciprocity. In her introduction to the volume, Eyal Weizman writes: “At the horizon of the concept of participation—its very absolute extreme—is that of collaboration.” He continues, “[t]he dilemma of participation/collaboration implies a closed system in which the options available for choice, and those who present them, cannot be challenged.”¹⁷⁰ Later in the book, Meissen puts forth what he sees as an urgent and necessary intervention in the discourse of participatory art and politics, figured importantly as an incursion from outside: “to promote an understanding of ‘conflictual participation,’ one that acts as an uninvited irritant, a forced entry into fields of knowledge that could arguably benefit from spatial

¹⁶⁹ Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London: Verso, 2014).

¹⁷⁰ Markus Miessen, *The Nightmare of Participation* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2010), 9.

thinking” (90). In a sort of inverse of Augusto Boal’s invisible theatre, rather than prompting unwitting participants to become part of our drama, it’s important that we become involved in practices and exchanges—whether or not we’ve been “invited” to participate—as “*uncalled* participator[s]” (Meissen, 104, emphasis added).

Conclusion

At the outset of this project, I had planned to pursue insights of scholars and practitioners into how new scenography incorporating screenal media was impacting other aspects of theatre. However, I realized I wanted to address additional questions as well, foremost those of history (historical progression) and community. While the scholarship surrounding intermediality and technologically mediated theatre was invaluable to this new tangent, I had to look further afield to other theorists and material to address issues of agency, belonging, and desire. I had to look to television.

Theatre Crossing Television charts an attempt to connect media theory to theatre through television, a predominate form. Theatre does not “contest” television. ...But it might show the erroneous beliefs of television’s (lack of) reactivity and theatre’s (supposed) efficacy. This dissertation began with a set of varied intuitions and strong inclinations—the “force illegible” in Charles Simic’s memorable phrasing—that drove forward my exploration of the flatness of theatrical media. Early on, a series of unusual coincidences among my sources and main collocutors encouraged me to focus on the boxiness of the tennis court and the specificity of courtside spectating practices. While considering trends in contemporary performance towards the increased use of screenal media, I became convinced that the fourth wall is “like” a television screen in its porousness, and also like a tennis court in how it coordinates and orders the separate spaces of audience and performer. Thus, the presence onstage of racquets and nets in *Open Score* and *To You, the Birdie!* is incongruous, anachronistic, and weird but it’s also *atavistic* as well, as I discussed in the Forward, suggesting how theatre recycles and represents its path organismically.

I have argued that categorizing contemporary performance that employs technology as multimedia performance seems to suggest that performing media have only recently come to theatre. Accounts of the rise of what is variously described as postmodern theatre, postdramatic theatre, new formalism, multimedia performance, intermedial performance, or paratheatre, while identifying salient characteristics of evolving theatrical practice, nevertheless make a fetish of the technological elements of “new” performance.

A key concept has been right under our noses all along: television! And more importantly, it's been under our noses for quite some time, since it “began” in 17th century France. I have explored the eight (plus one) ways that theatre and television are alike, delving into theatre history and exploring the role of royal patronage and censorship on theatre spectating. And also architecture: the first public theatres in France were repurposed tennis courts. I argue that this fact (usually related as an anecdote) should play a larger role in our understanding of theatre; it is not merely that plays were performed in tennis courts, but that theatre had to become tennis, and was transformed thereby. No, it's not a matter of an Antigone facing a Creon on a grass court (although this thought has occurred to the Wooster Group, see *To You, the Birdie!*), but that the audience might take part in the tennis match. This raises the spectator to the level of co-participant, as player-on-the-other-side-of-the-court, and also offers different ways to imagine how we “respond” to what happens on the other side of the net (proscenium arch) and to what enters our space. To bring this point home, I look at a play from 1636 that not only looks like television, but is television, and knows it: *The Comic Illusion* by Pierre Corneille. Moving on from Corneille but still remaining in 17th century France, the

dissertation next turned to an opera by Lully to explore the convergence of contemporary stage technique and baroque opera convention. The image of a figure from the period that haunted the production I write about then led us to a discussion of the relationship between two-dimensional and three-dimensional representations of reality with reference to the work of engraver Jacques Callot and sculptor Joseph Cornell. Interestingly, their work directed our focus to the peculiar way that theatre takes the shape of a box, and what can be made to appear inside that box.

Following along from this, an experimental work by Robert Rauschenberg was compared to a Wooster Group version of Racine's *Phèdre* (as discussed above). These performances were seen to engage in a special form of synchronization, which was further explored by an examination of two works by Robert Whitman which typify how theatre can serve to coordinate time and place. Chapter four builds on the insights of the previous chapters but introduces some elements of ambivalence and ambiguity. Early "adopters" of audience participation Allan Kaprow and Dan Graham are shown to have much more complex ideas about how to structure the experience of their spectators, less as a summing of audience experience and more as a kind of deferral of it. In the final section of the fourth chapter, I detail a production I was involved with that explored similar themes by intercutting theatre techniques with television history, only to reveal that the two were not so easy to separate.

* * * * *

In my first year in graduate school I was deluged by ideas and concepts from critical theory and performance studies. In every class I took I was exposed to texts I'd never read before and also came to see familiar ones in new and exciting ways. By the

end of the spring term I felt like I'd reached a kind of limit, and when classes came to an end I picked up a novel for what seemed like the first time in months. That book was Virginia Woolf's *Between the Acts*.

Published after her death, it follows the last-minute preparations and performance of an amateur theatrical troupe in a small English country town. The bulk of the book describes the sincere and at times hilarious attempts by the villagers to present various historical scenes and performance tropes. It's a pageant of English history, and like many of Woolf's books features impossibly close observations paired with sweeping perspectives, in this case on the English Empire and its collapse, climate change, the relationships between adult siblings, and so forth. It also has a great deal to say on the subject of theatre and specifically theatre audiences. Woolf's characteristic use of free indirect speech (giving access to character's inner voice) in this case has an unexpected consequence: the internal divisions (as it were) of the audience fall away and we are left wondering about how theatre performances impact their audience. Does this idea or conviction we read about originate in that specific audience member, or did she catch it from a neighboring spectator, or was it an emanation from the stage that had an impact, intended or not?

Read in this way, *Between the Acts* performs a sociological analysis of audience behavior that is all the more striking because it does something that a play-text would struggle to do: acknowledge and include the real presence of an audience. Indeed, in the final scene of the play, the actors bring mirrors onto the stage so that the audience can catch a glimpse of their image. This is her description of the audience in the final moments before it disperses at the conclusion of the pageant:

Like quicksilver sliding, filings magnetized, the distracted united. The tune began; the first note meant a second; the second a third. Then down beneath a force was born in opposition; then another. On different levels they diverged. On different levels ourselves went forward; flower gathering some on the surface; others descending to wrestle with the meaning; but all comprehending; all enlisted. The whole population of the mind's immeasurable profundity came flocking; from the unprotected, the unskinned; and dawn rose; and azure; from chaos and cacophony measure; but not the melody of surface sound alone controlled it; but also the warring battle-plumed warriors straining asunder: To part? No. Compelled from the ends of the horizon; recalled from the edge of appalling crevasses; they crashed; solved; united. And some relaxed their fingers; and others uncrossed their legs.

Was that voice ourselves? Scraps, orts and fragments, are we, also, that? The voice died away.¹⁷¹

Woolf's stunning writing and her vivid insights seem an appropriate place to conclude, for the moment, our investigation into the effect of spectating in common, a phenomenon I've been calling theatre crossing television.

¹⁷¹ Virginia Woolf, *Between the Acts* (San Diego: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2008 [1969]), 128.

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