

CHAPTER 6

THE CHARGED AND PRIMITIVE SPACE OF THEATRE

> HUMAN ACTION

Much of this chapter proceeds in an extended series of metaphors. On the stage of theatre we witness the evolution of a *human action*. Human action is a force, not physical or mechanical, but one which arises directly out of human will, emotion and need, and which can have as profound consequences as any mechanical force. Human action is like a wind that blows, not through space, but through time, propelling the course of events, ever onwards towards its conclusion. It is the essential life blood of theatre. While it is played out in the behavior of each individual as it pulses through time, it remains primal, beyond any individuality. While it requires time to play itself out until it is spent, it is beyond time. For space to give adequate voice to its movement through time, it must be empty in the sense of being able to provide it resonance. Thus, in theatre, space must still be in a formative and receptive state.

> THE FLOW OF ACTION

The flow of human action through time resembles the flow of water through space. As with water to the ocean, once the action begins, with the indifference of gravity it must reach its conclusion. *How* it flows however varies with local topography. It surges rapidly when an attempt is made to contain or confine it, as water in a narrow ravine. It is least noticed when it flows leisurely and quietly, as when water spreads out shallowly in a broad plain. There its motion is slower, but proceeds as inevitably. Obstacles can impede it, but it will *always* reach its final destination because it has available to it endless time and endless space.

> THE RESISTANCE TO ACTION

Human action is also invisible, as is the air. Like it, action becomes appreciable to the senses if and when it encounters obstacles or is resisted. The air whistles shrilly down the valley when the hills close in and attempt to confine its dimensions. The characters in the play like leaves quiver if lying in the path of the action's progress. Being fixed to the branches they have no choice but to resist. As the wind opens their apertures, they provide a symphony of voices to mark the action's motion.

The first circumstances in the play provide the first resistance to the action. The ruler has died and will be succeeded, the ruler would divide his kingdom, the parent would give h'er daughter in marriage. From this beginning, the action works irrevocably towards a conclusion, and only subsides as the conclusion is reached. Then there is calmness, the action diffuses away, as when the water in the river dissolves at last into the ocean. As when a storm abates, those who remain bear witness to the destruction or change left behind.

Action is noticed most when it is most strongly resisted. When at a gale, its force can cause the sturdy trunks of trees or men to bend or break. A boulder that has lain centuries in a stream, will be

swept away in a cataract because it stubbornly opposed its surface to the water's flow. A person who has been inactive for many years may suddenly be faced with an overwhelming decision. Humans will react as blindly as stones when motivated by greed, passion, or ecstasy, and be hurled just as precipitously, in a direction against their conscious choice or towards their unconscious desire. As the storm rages people's lives are swept off course, propelled beyond previously experienced norms, sometimes for good, sometimes for ill. People's sounds and sighs, groans and laughter, attest to the force. However, until a set of initiating circumstances occurs, the action does not enter time. Once in time it seeks to complete and leave time. The demand for actualization given potential creates time.

> THE SECONDARY ROLE OF SPACE IN THE UNFOLDING OF HUMAN ACTION

Action exists not so much to manifest itself in space but in order to consume itself in time and so no longer exist. As it works itself out through time, it produces effects recognizable in space. Cities and men may rise or fall. However, it is primarily within time that action arises, is resisted or is succumb to, resolves and passes away. Space is passive during this process: it houses the action during its passage in time, and it becomes alive because it is charged by the passage of this action. Space resonates to the action, but the locale in space is secondary to this, functioning at most to add focus to the image that is formed of the action. It adds details, perhaps familiar ones, that we can grab onto, so as to gain temporary footing in the tossing sea of time. On an essential level, however, it does not matter whether an action occurs in France or Spain, indoors or outdoors, in sunshine or in rain. It matters more whether the two countries are at that particular time at war or at peace.

> SPACE RESONATES TO THE ACTION

Space becomes alive in response to the charge of human action. Its primary role is to provide resonance to action, like the body of a violin which, by being empty, but appropriately shaped, allows the strings' resistance to the bow to become amplified, and so brought to our attention though we are at a distance. The box's inside is invisible to us, but its resonance is nonetheless there. The theatre space surrounds and holds in the action, and functions as the sound box of the musical instrument. As dance *created* and defined space, theatre action *charges* a space that is *already* there. Motion, which was essentially temporal yet visible in space, has turned invisible by entering into the new artistic entity: the human soul. Here, as e-motion, it is revealed outwardly through its affects on human character rather than in changes of spatial position. Motion takes the dancer from place to place in space. The places aren't important, but the motion makes a statement about how time was used in-between. Action reveals how a person gets spiritually from one event to the next in time.

> WORDS

In poetry words were essential. Here in theatre their status is more ambiguous. On the one hand they are no longer a requirement, for theatre can occur wordlessly, or with few words. If words *were* essential, and the primary significance of the play locked up in their meanings, theatre would be a species of literature. However, words often play a very large role in a play. How they arise can be approached by way of an analogy. As the actors are buffeted by the waves of action, they

resist, trying to maintain their grounding and stability. If they then open their mouths in the face of the action, the wind of the action enters their bodies and resonates within them, giving off words, words whose individuality matches the individuality of the character into whom the action has entered. Words in theatre then are not the action itself, but evidence of its pressure upon the characters.

Words form a conscious light of self-awareness that illuminates an action that would otherwise remain darker. When we are under stress, the act of doing something can interfere with our reflective awareness of what we are doing and its possible ramifications. The hero has set h'erself as a sail in the face of the wind of the action. At the boundary where the surface of the sail encounters the wind, consciousness attempts to become aware of what is happening. Words indicate a pause in the height of action, just long enough to turn and witness it. Deeds should be witnessed, not go unrecorded into posterity¹. An extra dimension, an eddy in time, should open to allow in this witnessing. Thus Hamlet's final request, remember me, else the event of his death and the meaning of his life are swept away in the un-harnessed flow of time. Thus a hint of posterity, of a future beyond the performance's time, begins to occur in theatre. Theatre is the first art in which expression can act to slow time. In literature expression goes much further towards halting the action.

> FROM DANCE TO THEATRE

Motion in dance has become e-motion in theatre. We said in the previous chapter that story telling is an added-on feature in dance, not part of its essential temporal or spatial makeup. In this chapter we have said that a play can occur wordlessly. The combination of these two facts allows us to draw an authentic line between theatre and dance. We could not do this if story telling is an essential feature of dance *and* words an essential feature of theatre. For then we could effect a smooth transition between the two. We would begin with a dance that is attempting to tell a story in movement. At some point the press of motions would abate and words would pick up the slack. Motion would become less continuous, words more continuous. Actors would descend from those dancers who have slowed up and started talking. Words though are *not* a requirement in theatre, which is why mime is considered more akin to theatre than to dance. Movement in mime is not an aesthetic end in itself but is at the service of human meaning. And plot is *not* a requirement in dance, which is why a ballet such as the "Nutcracker" is considered dance rather than theatre.

The boundary line between theatre and poetry is also clear. Words in theatre can sometimes sound like everyday speech, sometimes like poetry, sometimes like polished prose. There is no one style. Because words are *not* essential to theatre, the fact that words used in a particular play, considered on their own, constitute poetry, does not make a theatre work into a work of poetry, any more than painting the surface of a sculpture makes us forget we are looking at a sculpture.

> INTUITION OF STATE OF BEING INSTEAD OF STATE OF MOTION

In dance, though the observer is distanced in space from the dancer, that breadth of space can be nullified when the observer intuits the dancer's motion. Similarly, in theatre, though the observer is distanced in space from the actor, that breadth of space is nullified when the observer experiences internally through affective states what is occurring to the actor. We understand that the dancer is

feeling the physical effects of h'er exertions, but we don't ourselves feel them. We do not ascribe much to the dancer's state of being other than the qualities of h'er motions. In contrast, while we understand that the actor is feeling the emotional effects of h'er acts, we also feel them within us through sympathy and empathy. This feeling isn't absolute, though, we are spared the total force of the negative or positive consequences that h'er actions have on her. We do not die. We are not made king or queen. But then again, neither does the actor. What may have begun as human sacrifice and propitiation of the gods, changed into proxies, then to imitators who could function in the same role again and again by entering the artistic time. Otherwise we would run out of Hamlets, if a new one was needed for each performance. To summarize: in dance and theatre *space* is there, but as something to be overcome in time through internal, qualitative states. The inner experience of performer and observer are to be the same, their difference being *only* a manifestation of space.

> THE COMBUSTION OF ACTION THROUGH TIME

Action, though outside of time, requires time to become manifest. It is born *into* time, where in becomes enmeshed with the mechanisms of human motivations and feelings. Without time, and without human resistance, the action would run its course in an instant, its purpose achieved trivially, mechanically. Time is thus the delayer and thereby the cause of the very spectacle we see. Action ignites as it enters time, is gradually burned away by time, the flame of its combustion visible in space. An action's time therefore cannot be infinite. What is born in time must endure through time and then perish in time. Eventually, for good or ill, the purpose of the action is achieved. Then like the wind at the end of a storm, it dies down and no longer exists: the play is over.

Space responds to action passing through it, as space in dance responded to motion through it. We know that space is charged by the combustion of action in time by the way we react, for instance, to Gloucester's eyes being put out right in front of us. We see it happening, but it is far more than just the image of it occurring. Even if the act were performed in darkness we would still shudder. It is as if waves of energy from the action were transmitted to us through the emptiness of space and cause us to shudder. It is more than hearing too, the pain is tangible. To accept this charge and respond to it, space must be in a receptive state. It must be able to take within its formless embrace, and without resistance, the action's charge. It must make few demands upon the action. It is for action to bring *it* alive. Until then, space must wait, empty and receptive.

In summary, action is blind, just as the *will* through which it acts is blind. Action devours time until its energy is satisfied. Its essence is never exhausted in its physical appearance in space. Space is empty in the sense of a vessel waiting to be charged and filled, to become pregnant with use.

> TIME, AND HOW IT BEHAVES IN THEATRE

> TIME AND ACTION

A boulder perched on top of a cliff can remain there indefinitely, until a chance occurrence causes it to begin to fall. The potential enters time and becomes actual. The fall results in the boulder's finding a new state of equilibrium at the bottom of the cliff. The action is once again outside of time. As it accelerated, it attained its fullest expression when at the verge of its annihilation near

the ground. In retrospect, action's purpose was not so much to become manifest to the senses, but to go through time in order reach a new state of rest. Time separates the beginning and ending of an action *in order* that the action may achieve this purpose. At the end, only time triumphs, then departs into the everyday reality. Time is the true subject of most plays, as space was the subject of dance.

Action to unwind must use time, but time extracts a price in return. It acts as a delayer, as the escapement regulating the rate of unwinding in the wound up spring. The spring doesn't burst apart scattering its energy instantaneously. If Hamlet finds out on a Friday night that Claudius murdered his father and goes directly to him and kills him, the action will have reached its destination in a geodesic way in time, but the play will not have happened. On the other hand, if Hamlet delays too long, we lose sight of the action. Someone else, Fortinbras perhaps, may invade and remove both him and Claudius, perhaps killing them in the process. Rarely does a wish immediately cause the event that fulfills it. The delay is time itself, and it becomes the play. The next stage of the action must always wait until some secondary event, a lemma, occurs to bring it to its next stage.

> A SECOND FLOW OF TIME WITHIN THE WORK: THE HISTORICAL TIME

In theatre, for the first time on the spectrum, we encounter the presence of two different flows of time, *both within* the work of art. In dance, it is not within the scope of the work's time to consider what may have happened to the dancer prior to the performance. There simply is no past before the performance. In theatre, the dancers, who were just *movers*, have become *characters*, a full living beings, each containing within themselves their own past. It was during this past that they each developed the unique personality we observe in the present. During the past, events took place that are relevant to the unfolding of the action in front of us. The actor can share these things with us at any time, things initially unknown to us when the play began. At the moment the drama begins, a new, general past opens up, extending indefinitely backwards in the time of the *work's* "history". Denmark did not come into existence at the moment we first join Horatio on the platform. Hamlet's father existed prior to Hamlet. If we search into the historical past of the work, we find it filled with Danish kings. This history comes forward out of its own past and picks us up, like the mail at old train stations, at the moment our present joins the action.

The presence on stage of actors creates loci in space, each one of which can draw us out of the present into a past not currently on stage. This is new on the spectrum. Rather than indicating a growing power *of* time on the spectrum, it represents a growing power *over* time. A wider past exists than in the previous arts. The past begins to become weightier as compared to the present. The present begins to lose its special status relative to the past. The forward flow of time in the work, coalesced around the present moment, begins slightly to slacken. By literature it will slow significantly. It will come to a complete halt in painting.

Historical time doesn't only exist prior to the beginning of the play, it exists in tandem with time during the play. I see someone at nighttime sitting by a candle. In the next scene I see h'er again: same place, same candle, only the candle has burnt down to the bottom. I conclude that time has passed in the *historical* time of the play but not in the artistic time of the play. Two different times on the clock of the historical time have been projected onto adjacent times in the artistic time. This

sort of contraction can occur even within a single scene. A scene that represents a luncheon may last five or ten minutes, but we have no trouble accepting that maybe an hour has passed on the *everyday* (sic), i.e. historical, clock on the wall of the luncheon room. We've been spared remarks such as "please pass the butter", and nobody seems to have actually finished their dishes. The heightened nature of the language, the heightened interactions between the characters, was sufficient to give the scene a certain heft that in its significance seems that of an hour.

Hamlet vacillates. He is unable to act decisively. Would the significance of this hesitation seem different to us if we attributed it to just several hours of Hamlet's historical life, i.e. the time it takes *us* to see the play. On the other hand, if we actually had to observe the hesitation through the full duration of the historical time, perhaps months, the delay might become so diffuse that we wouldn't really notice it.

What we have seen introduced at this point of the spectrum is the beginning of a discrepancy between the time it takes a certain event to occur and the time it takes for the artistic depiction of that event. Right now the discrepancy is minor, but by literature, minus the presence of action in front of us, the time devoted by the narrator to describing an event can vary widely against the time it would have taken the event actually to transpire. With the addition of historical time we now have three times: two on a clock, the everyday clock and the historical clock within the play, and then the artistic time of our experience of the work. Two exist within the artistic experience, one does not. The flow of time in art has become slightly diffused and less certain.

> FURTHER WEAKENING OF TIME: THE SEQUENCE OF EVENTS

Once historical time can be projected onto artistic time, the possibility exists that a sequence of events that would have occurred in a certain order in the historical time of the work may be projected onto the artistic time in a different order. Here is an example. In the climactic battle scenes of Shakespeare, we may see both battle camps on opposite sides of the stage. The action switches rapidly back and forth between them. The question arises whether what we witness at the current moment in one camp is happening subsequently to or concurrently with what we just saw in the other camp. Either interpretation is valid because of the separation in space. Space causes time to break down when there are two noncontiguous parts of space represented simultaneously on stage. The forward flow of time breaks down across the stage because of the division of space and the dependency of historical time on location in space. In general, as we move across the temporal arts, space is slowly gaining the power to disrupt time. Eventually it will have the power to freeze time. When there is a change of scene in a play, and we are taken to a new place in space, we do not know at first *when* we are in the chronology of the historic time of the plot relative to the end of the previous scene. Moments or months may have elapsed. We may have gone backwards in historical time.

> TRAGEDY

The relation of time to human will is expressed in Spinoza's fifth postulate in the "Ethics": "All beings in that they exist wish to continue existing" [check Unamuno}. In that time appears endless to us, our wish to endure knows no limit: existence must be eternal and death is the ultimate antagonist. *Maya's* greatest deceit is not the world of sense experience woven around us, i.e. not the

content of space, it is the illusion that our will must fill time as well. In tragedy, we have the opportunity to become aware that time is an illusion. Otherwise time remains a prison to us.

As we move from dance to theatre, the inertia experienced by a body trying to change direction turns into the stubbornness and fear that reduces a character's ability to change course of action. Short of the perennial antagonists of time and death, there is also resistance to the hero's will in the form of the will of others. Each person's will by definition wants to be all encompassing, the presence of more than one character means conflict. Each tree in the forest is programmed within to expand to its fullest innate form in space. In carrying this out it finds its fate literally intertwined with the trees near it. Given the frame of space (or the stage) the expansion of one will can only mean the contraction of another.

The stronger the force against which the hero struggles in tragedy, the greater is the possibility of aesthetic value being embodied in that resistance, and the more likely that death or ruination will eventuate. Only if the hero dies, it would seem, can h'er actions express to the fullest extent h'er life. Ultimately life has used death to reach a higher state.

> SCHOPENHAUER: MOTIVATION AS A TYPE OF CAUSE AND EFFECT

Schopenhauer, a pessimist at heart, believed that human behavior was deterministic, subject to rules of causality no less strict than those governing the interaction of physical particles. If we could see the clearly the competing motives at play in us when faced with decision, it would be obvious that there is no decision at all, simply a prevailing of the stronger motive. If, in dance, physical cause and effect determines what motions are possible, then in theatre, Schopenhauer would say, cause and effect, in the form of human motivations, determines what will happen. As dance motions must be allowable with the nature of the human body or else be impossible, so the actions of the characters in a play must be compatible with the nature of the their character or their actions would be unbelievable. The distance between wish and fulfillment is worked out through time according to the causal laws of motivation. The effects of these motives propagate slower than effects arising from inorganic causes. A mechanical effect ensues immediately when the requisite proximate cause is present. An effect from a motive may be delayed indefinitely. There must be transmission of information which is affected not so much by physical distance as by psychological factors such as the desire to know, the desire to mislead, etc..

> DIMINUTION OF CHOICE THROUGH TIME

What one is now impacts on what one shall be. At the beginning of the play Hamlet is the bright hope of Denmark's future. Choice is at its most unfettered. He can do anything, the future embodies a feeling of expanding possibility. But with his very first action, this changes, there is a already diminution in the set of possibilities that may further ensue. With each further action, less possibilities remain, and the future becomes more determined. As the inevitable approaches, choice is narrowed down to a single inevitability. This process can occur without the hero being aware of the diminution, that actions are less and less the embodiments of real choices. Throughout the drama we want to cry out to Hamlet "be careful", but the press of events charms us mute. Even at the very last minute it would require that we warn him of the poison. On stage, however, time has charmed space: there is no escape for him.

Diminution of choice acts to set a time limit to work because choice eventually reaches zero. The present progressively bears the growing weight of the past in the form of consequences of past deeds and decisions. The hero finally bogs down under its weight and succumbs. Things can go on no further. The last present is but a reflection of the entire past. The urgent push of time, that has worked relentlessly towards the conclusion, abates. The space and time of the work disappear. In comedy there is often an opposite tendency: for possibility to expand until will or desire is satisfied.

> COINCIDENCE IN THE ORDER OF EVENTS

A certain set of events, any one of which could have occurred at *any* time, depending on the order in which they do occur, can result in drastically different plots and outcomes. "If only s/he had met so and so sooner, s/he would have learned the news, and disaster would have been averted". And indeed, there may have been no pertinent reason why s/he did not meet this person sooner. Plots are often built of such coincidences. How different this is from a situation in which space is already dominant over time, so that order in time has little impact on outcome. In a connect-the-dots puzzle, for instance, as long as we connect the dots in a pre-established order, the result will always be the same. It does not matter with which dot we start as long as we end at the same one. A railroad train consists of many individual cars: sleepers, diners, baggage, etc.. There is no logical order in their assembly. That order however becomes critical if one of the links between cars is severed, for then the fate of a particular car's continuing to move depends on its position in the sequence.

> CONDENSING TO JUST THE ESSENTIAL

Things in the play can take longer or shorter than on the clocks of the historical or everyday time. Artistic time can either dilate or contract relative to the others. If shorter it is often the result of removing what was inessential in the other. In science, significant data emerges often only after a multitude of extraneous data has been filtered out from the total collected. In mapmaking choices are made regarding scale and coloring to help reveal information that would otherwise be lost in a maze of detail. When transitioning to the artistic from the everyday time, the creator often omits irrelevant data, thus tightening up of the new time's fabric. For instance, it is hard to get a sense of the significance of a human life when we must live through *all* its events, including endless breakfasts, trips to the bathroom, commutes to work, etc.. A play or story about a human life can omit all but the most significant - plus a little leavening thrown in as relief. The normally hidden workings of reality are thereby brought within the grasp of a duration that we can comprehend. Where everyday time masks truth, the play removes this mask. The impact of "To be or not to be" is not diluted by Hamlet afterwards arranging to have his laundry done. We do not stay up and watch him sleep and then have breakfast. In this concentration, signal events may be magnified and take longer to transpire than in everyday reality. This dilation of the significant event is in reflex to the partial vacuum created by the omission of the inessential².

There is a precedent in our normal lives for the omission of events. It lies in the nature of our own awareness. We go to sleep. The next time we look at the clock it is morning. What happened to the time in-between? It was there, but not within the continuity of time of our own consciousness. Again there are two clocks, one in our consciousness, here analogous to the artistic time, and one on

the night stand, the more everyday time. In the play, what we are not aware of from the historical time of the work has no affect on the our experience of the continuity of the work's artistic time. We need only to be told that it is now morning and no longer night. If something happened during the night about which we should know, someone will probably inform us. What we do not know of is not missed. So much is going on in the world around us at every moment of our lives, that being aware at all is more the exception than the rule. Nescience the norm. When we reflect back on our life, the temporal adjacency of events accounts for less than their similarity in theme and importance. The lapsed time between those events are now lost in the past, and merely forms a hypothetical dimension to swallow up the workings out of cause and effect that would have had to intervene when we did experience the events. There is in theatre a vague implication that, though set in the present, it represents such a looking back on events. The difference between past and present is starting to blur. In the arts so far, what may have been omitted in order to gain intensity and relevance is unknown to us because it lay in the everyday reality, which is outside our experience of the work's artistic reality. In theatre, for the first time, it is as if everyday reality has migrated, taking up a new residence *inside* the work in the form of historical time. We can be more aware of what is left out since the latter is now within the *work's* reality.

> SEQUENCING VERSUS SIMULTANEITY

On a given day, during a war, fighting may be taking place in many places at once. Only in retrospect can we sort things out and understand how the individual battles related to each other. When they happened, they could not have yet linked up causally with one another. Everyday reality can be confusing, so much is happening, and much of it at the same time. One way of adding comprehensibility to an artistic depiction of human reality is to separate sequentially in time what occurred simultaneously. To the extent that theatre uses words, sequencing becomes a necessity. In music two voices can speak simultaneously without a loss in musical comprehension. On stage, discourse dissolves into gibberish if more than one person speaks at once. When sounds bear the extra burden of meaning, it becomes more difficult to follow two trains of thought simultaneously. A musical antagonism can be expressed in a simultaneous harmony, a theatrical antagonism is expressed sequentially until perhaps at its climax when words may give way to simultaneous physical action.

There are additional differences that can occur between stage and everyday conversation. The latter, being unrehearsed, can include hesitations and digressions. Thoughts are left incomplete. Meanings may be hard to discern. People are interrupted. The second person may not even be aware that the first person has not yet finished expressing their thought. People don't have *time* to choose words with great care. Words may be mispronounced. The speech is not organized for rhetorical or aesthetic effect. If we now take this conversation and put it backwards into the creation and rehearsal phrase of the work of art, all undesired features of the conversation can be pruned. Gone are the "ums". The best words to express a thought can be chosen, even if they are chosen to appear *not* well chosen. Each thought can come to full bloom uninterrupted. No one breaks in on Hamlet's monologue to tell him that he has a call waiting on line one, at least not until he has finished his thoughts. In "dramatic" conversation, actors take turns, we are able to focus on one what one person is saying without worrying too much about the other. It is a stately dance, with

stylized gestures, like a fight in a dream where two boxers move with exaggeratedly slow gestures and each waits for the other to take a jab before responding.

> THE EFFECT OF AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION ON TIME

If I as an audience member enter onto the stage, either I lose my sense of my own past and become part of the ongoing action on stage, or I remain myself and act to dissipate the flow of time on stage. What might happen, in a performance of *Lear*, if someone walked up on stage, and in a voice audible to entire audience, said to Cordelia that her father will probably banish her if she comes off to haughty or idealistic? What would Cordelia do?

> MORE ABOUT SPACE IN THEATRE

> THE STAGE

The space of the dance stage does not portray a space other than itself. It is in identity with itself: it is simply *where* it is. The theatre stage can *roam*. It can be *wherever*, whether the French throne room or a tavern in England. Space can only affect secondarily the course of action through time: offering shortcuts or creating detours, providing opportunities or delays. The stage space also acts as a snare in space: once characters enter it they are compelled to interact with each other. The stage space can embrace a space wider or smaller than what is contained in its everyday dimensions. It can seem to be a tiny room or it can contain both France and England in the same scene. Prior to a battle, each side of the stage can represent one of the opposing army's camps. Though we hear speaking from both, we assume that they do not hear each other. The stage also acts as a lens to gather space around it, bringing what would move off to the side back towards the center. In the everyday reality if two people are moving as they are having a dramatic encounter, we would soon lose sight of them. We could follow after them, but that might be awkward³.

> SPACE UNITES: WE SHARE THE SPACE WITH THE ACTORS

In a physically intense scene one actor may hit another. The sound it makes reverberates through the air we share with the actors. Compared to this aliveness, the narrator's voice in literature can start to sound a bit like a recorded performance, something from the past that relies on my presence to make it live again. In theatre, connection is tangible. We can link hands, one person to another, until someone is holding the actor's hand. The actor could pull that hand and we would feel the pull.

> SPACE SEPARATES: SPACE AFFORDS SAFETY

Joining with the dancers participating in a religious rite might at most make me look ridiculous, it wouldn't harm me. It is different if I joined a battle or sword fight. There are two layers of immunity in theatre from the consequences of action. One is mimesis. The actor playing Hamlet doesn't really die, s'he gets to go home to dinner. The other is spatial. Even if I make no distinction between the character and the actor, I am removed in space from the reach of the worst consequences of the action. As speaking adds reflection to doing, so distance in space adds reflection both to doing and speaking. Only if I identify entirely with the character, do I dissolve

the protection that space offers me. Generally my distance from the action is just enough so that, were I fleeing in terror from the action, it is at this distance that I might turn around and look back without risking being turned into a pillar of salt. Abject terror, and the need to protect myself, subsides into pity and fear. In tragedy danger is charmed. We are able to behold the face of the gorgon and not be turned to stone, because like Perseus, we behold it through the mirror of art. If I continue to move away, I cease to care at all⁴. My safety is also enhanced by the fact that the actors don't seem to notice me. I can approach them fairly closely to the action without provoking any reaction. The nature of the observer as an invisible voyeur increases further in literature and film.

> SETS, SCENERY

Space in theatre is empty in the sense that it transmits the force of actions. This primary quality is not changed by the secondary, material presence of scenery. Scenery may vary from production to production, and can be done away with entirely, without altering or impeding the flow of the action.

Some portion of the artistic space must always be missing, at least by implication. It lies in the direction in which we would expect to find ourselves viewing the work. If we were *in* a painting of a woods, we would not expect to see a person standing in a museum room, if we chanced to look in a certain direction. The theatre set must be missing the side that would block our view of the stage. Yet if we picture the actors looking in our direction, we do not expect that see *us*. It is a one-way mirror. We imagine them seeing the scene extending in all directions about them.

> THE THEATRE BUILDING

The theatre building is a work of architecture, but once it is activated by the action of the play, the stage space is no longer considered by us as being part of the building. I used to sit high in the balcony at Carnegie Hall because the acoustics were so good⁵. I felt intimately close to the music despite my distance from the musicians. In a play it is more important to be within a certain distance. Being in the balcony can dilute our awareness of the artistic space, allowing it to turn back into part of the everyday space. Other things claim our attention, such as the presence of the audience or the architectural characteristics of the building. We are not in the part of space brought alive by the gaze of the actors. We can feel too far *above* things. Shakespeare's theatre had the advantage of having the action taking place on different levels, enabling those audience members who were higher perched to still be on the same horizontal plane as some of the action. Certain other positions also have drawbacks. Too low and the action might seem too far above us to relate with. From the wings, we would see the play as the actors do when they are *not* acting. Too close we would see the actors' makeup and sense the exaggerations in their speech and gesture. We become too aware of how they are creating the work and would grasp the cause rather than the effect.

> SPECTATORS

Conventionally, the distinction between performer and spectator is made before a performance begins. Perhaps we are too afraid to be a part of the tragedy, or too ashamed to be part of the comedy. Perhaps we are spell-bound and cannot move. We are more likely to say that we have

been trained in the etiquette of attending theatre, we do not want to disturb our neighbors by moving. Regardless, the restraint on motion in space is not spatial in nature. If we could become invisible, we could go on stage and witness things from close up without risk of danger or the ability to interfere. This will happen in literature and film. It will happen because we are entering a part of work's past that has expanded to include a denatured version of the work's present. We are not entering its present.

> THE ACTOR

Action is transmitted to us through two stages of an analogy. The undifferentiated being of action individuates at various times, and in various loci in space, as actors. The actor stands second to the action, at one remove. By letting the action happen to h'er, it sets the precedent for the action to then move from h'er to us. As we move further and further from the center of the action, identity changes to empathy, to sympathy, and eventually to apathy. Actors, by being in space, act as lenses that can focus and refocus the action in different directions⁶. Without the resonating board of the actor, the action would flow by largely unnoticed. Space is awakened wherever and whenever they act. Space is pierced in the direction their eyes look. Yet while we *see* human action in the actors, action itself remains *blind*. Physical cause and effect leaves a physical trail behind, but the trail of motives is less externally observable.

If a character is killed on stage we may speculate as to whether the actor truly dies or just the character? If we ask this question of dance the question doesn't really fit. Unless the dance is trying to tell a story, there is no distinction between the person using h'er body to move and the person to whom we see the motion happening. During a stage fight between two characters, if the actors emerged out of their acting personas and continued to fight as hard as they could in the everyday reality, the outcome of the struggle would not necessarily be the same as in the script. Literature benefits only indifferently from having different people available to read the lines of different characters. If we ask whether the person in the painting is indeed the person represented the answer seems easier. There *was* a person, real or imagined, who sat for the portrait, and we see that person's likeness, but not really that person in the same room with us in our space and time (though the likeness can often reveal more about the true nature of the person than if we *were* in the same room). We might then, in analogy to painting, say that the actor, in that s'he is separate from the character s'he portrays, is somewhat like the person sitting for the portrait, except that s'he *is* physically present on stage at the same time as h'er represented character. Theatre, it would seem, requires, in order to come alive, the presence of someone who *is* and *isn't* that which s'he represents.

> WHICH SENSES ARE MOST IMPORTANT IN THEATRE

Sight and sound both come to us from the space of the work and are thus *primary*⁷ in the sense defined in chapter one. As to whether they are of *equal* importance, the best test lies in comparing just listening to a play without seeing it to just seeing it but not hearing it. Hearing would seem to provide us with a more complete experience, allowing us to feel tangibly in the space of the action. Data from any sense from the stage can reach us through the shared space. In film, in comparison, any sense beside sight that is to reach us from the work must be separately added in, and moreover from the *everyday* space and not from the artistic space.

> THEATRE RELATIVE TO THE OTHER ARTS DISCUSSED SO FAR

In the middle of the temporal half of the spectrum, space starts to become more prominent in relation to time, but still confines its role largely to that of being transcended back into time. The explanation for a dance motion can always be sought for within the nature of the motion itself. In theatre, when there are motions, they arise for reasons outside of their formal, spatial content. In music, the soul of the performer is replaced by the soul of the listener. In theatre, the soul of the viewer becomes *one with* the soul of the performer. The actor, as against the musician, is an entity of whom we must be aware, as effect and not cause. A double ambiguity, performer versus creator and performer versus character portrayed, will remain until the spatial arts in which both the creator and the performer disappear outside of the time of the work.

The everyday theatre stage space can expand and contract relative to the portrayed space. To a lesser degree the types of movements the dancers make, and the apparent ease of their execution, can make us feel that that space is smaller or larger. Both the dancer and the actor move through space to accomplish an act in time. The throne room of England is assumed to persist as an entity throughout the implied, historical duration of a play. This is not true of dance, where is no implied historical time⁸. The environment in which a dance takes place has a life span equal to the duration of the dance.

In theatre, if the content as well as the location of space started changing rapidly in time, not just at the discreet points of scene changes, but constantly from moment to moment, the unity of the action would become diffused, the force of the action would no longer ring through space but would disrupt space. We would be approaching the condition of poetry.

Notes

¹ The understanding is nevertheless limited by time in that the unwinding of the action is not yet complete.

² This last fact becomes quite prominent in the narrated art of literature.

³ It would be wonderful to have a performance of *Midsummer Night's Dream* occurring in the woods, with the audience following the actors about.

⁴ This same sensitivity to distance applies vicariously to the distances between the actors themselves, affecting how we perceive their safety or danger relative to one another. This variable, appreciated largely subliminally, provides a constant source of modulation through the drama.

⁵ At least until [19??] when the architecture of the hall was "restored" to its original specifications, with the unfortunate result that there was a sad decline in the quality of the hall's acoustics.

⁶ Otherwise the action flows by, its effects noticed in the rearrangement of things in space, but without concern to us. Action must meet with the resistance of flesh and blood. Then it weeps or laughs and becomes relevant to this person in this place and time.

⁷ Theatre is the only temporal art in which sight and sound are both primary. The special, and ambiguous case, of sound in film is discussed in the chapter devoted to that art.

⁸ This becomes confused when dance emulates theatre and tells a story. Story telling however, as previous mentioned, is added onto the trunk of dance which resides in the aesthetic of movement and changing spatial arrangement.

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