

**Drama and Its Other:  
Philosophical Analysis of the Functions of Stage-Directions**

**By  
Yehia Abdelazeem**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment for the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at  
the University of Central Lancashire

**December 2025**

## RESEARCH STUDENT DECLARATION

**Type of Award**

**Doctor of Philosophy**

**School**

**Psychology and Humanities**

- I declare that while registered as a candidate for the research degree, I have not been a registered candidate or enrolled student for another award of the University or other academic or professional institution
- I declare that no material contained in the thesis has been used in any other submission for an academic award and is solely my own work
- No proof-reading service was used in the compilation of this thesis.

Signature of Candidate \_\_\_\_\_

Print name: Yehia Mahmoud Hussein Abdelazeem

## **Dedication**

For Monika, my wife, who endured my most impossible versions of myself, and  
for my family-your quiet care made this possible.

## Acknowledgment

Singular in title, centred in form: this page belongs to Dr. Robin Purves, who has been the steadfast advocate of this thesis from its first uncertain questions to its final form. For almost a decade, he read with care, argued without mercy, and refused every shortcut; he was, in the same breath, the most exacting supervisor and a generous friend. When I wandered, he steered; when I stalled, he pressed; when I doubted, he did not. His questions were sharper than my answers, his standards higher than my ambitions, and his patience longer than the project deserved. Whatever clarity, rigor, or usefulness this work has is owed to his guidance and companionship. The mistakes that remain are mine alone.

## Table of Contents

Introduction: Stage-directions and the Paradox of Drama.....	11
I. The Authorial Split .....	14
II. The Referential Split.....	15
III. The Spectatorial Split .....	16
V. Cartography of Fissures .....	17
Chapter One: The Artefact of the Gap: Stage-directions Between Page, Performance, and Theory .	20
I. The Gap and Its Returns .....	20
1. Margins of Authority .....	20
2. Framing the Gap .....	22
3. Performing the Ellipsis .....	26
II. The Dialectic of Taxonomy: Stage-Directions and the Logic of Appearance.....	30
1. Reading Between Poem and Play .....	30
2. Issacharoff’s Intertextual Split.....	31
3. Hammond and the Speculative Whole .....	32
4. Naming, Repetition, and the Resistance to Taxonomy.....	33
III. Performative Fictions and the Fiction of Performance.....	35
1. Austin’s Exclusion and Searle’s Recipe.....	35
2. Illocution, Pretence, and the Reflexive Subject.....	36
3. Staging the Gap: The Recursive Fiction of Stage-directions.....	40
IV. Narrative Disjunctions: Stage-directions and the Parallax of Drama .....	43
1. From Implied Directions to Narrative Autonomy .....	43
2. Temporal Zones and the Story/Discourse Divide .....	44
3. Jahn’s Narrative Agent and the Dramatic Text.....	46
4. Narration as Recursive Performative Logic .....	50
5. Imaginary Spatialization and Narrative Volatility .....	52
6. Stretched Temporality and Slowed Scenes .....	53
7. Parallax and Narrative Blindness in Drama .....	54
8. The Atemporal Pressure of Signification.....	55
9. Stage-directions and the Parallaxic Narrative .....	56
V. Conclusion: The Dramatic Frame and Temporal Dislocation.....	57
Chapter Two: Lacan’s Artefact in the Surviving Elizabethan Stage-directions: The Dramatist and the Gaze of the Empty Space .....	60
I. Contentious Directions and the Question of Convention.....	60

1. A Missing Stage: What Did They See? .....	60
2. Signals in Conflict: Permissive, Elliptical, Contradictory.....	60
3. From Irregularity to Discourse: A Lacanian Frame .....	61
II. Halfway Stages and the Unconscious of Convention.....	61
1. Conventions Beyond Consciousness.....	61
2. Drama Without Literature .....	62
3. From Carelessness to the Gaze.....	65
III. Carelessness and the Subject Supposed to Know .....	66
1. From Ego-Psychology to Lacan's Other.....	66
2. Carelessness and Transference .....	67
3. From Supposed Knowledge to the Gaze .....	69
IV. Stage-directions and the Mirror of Performance.....	69
1. Misrecognition and the Theatre of the Imaginary.....	69
2. The Gaze as Non-Specular Split .....	70
V. Ostension, Empty Space, and the Gaze .....	71
1. The Dramatist's Ostensive Model.....	71
2. Brook and the Blind Spot of Theatre.....	72
VI. Slippage of the Gaze and the Bar of the Signifier.....	74
1. From Eye to Gaze, from Signifier to Signified.....	74
2. The Return of the Repressed.....	75
VII. Stage-directions as Stains: The Möbius Logic of the Gaze.....	76
1. The Stain of In/Out.....	76
2. Stains of Permission and Ellipsis .....	76
3. The Grammar of Staging .....	77
VIII. Anamorphic Stains: Stage-directions and the Gaze.....	78
1. The Dramatist as Punctiform Object.....	78
2. Holbein's Ambassadors and the Anamorphic I.....	79
3. Modern Stagings and Misrecognition .....	81
IX. Stage and Direction.....	82
X. Exist pursued by Shakes-bear: The Gaze, the Coast of Bohemia, and the Thing .....	84
1. From Apparatus to Fabula.....	84
2. Topology, Not Biography.....	85
3. Two 'Blemishes' as Portals .....	86
4. Metaphor and the Dramatist's Unconscious.....	87
5. Tragicomedy Reconsidered: From Link to Logic .....	88
6. Boys Eternal, Letters Across a Vast.....	88

7. 'Verily' → 'Verier': When the Letter Arrives.....	90
8. From Jealousy to Invidia (videre).....	91
9. Caput Mortuum: Names, Noses, and the Smutch .....	92
10. When the Play Begins to Dream .....	94
11. Shakes-bear: The Cut that Moves the Play.....	96
XII. Conclusion: The Stain of Authorship and the Authorial Split.....	98
<b>Chapter Three: Shaw, the Architect: The Derridean artefact in <i>Heartbreak House</i> ....</b>	
<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>	
I. Architecture as Inscription: Shaw and the Stage of War .....	101
1. Domestic Space and Modernism .....	101
2. <i>Heartbreak House at War</i> .....	102
II. Construction, Ruin, and the Spirit of the Tower.....	103
1. Materials and Ruins .....	103
2. The Tower's Return.....	104
III. The Parergonal Frame: Kant and Derrida on Ornament.....	104
1. Autonomy and Economy .....	104
2. The Logic of Ornament.....	105
IV. <i>Glas</i> and the Unvoiced Dialogue: Derrida on Stage-Directions.....	106
1. A Theatre of Margins .....	106
2. The Last Fortress of Metaphysics .....	107
3. Archive and the Haunted House.....	107
V. Dramatic Artefacts: Johnson, Derrida, and the Material Page .....	108
1. Johnson's Architectural Reading.....	108
2. Stage-directions as Inscription .....	108
3. Assimilation and Wreckage .....	109
VI. Frames of Passage: Windows and Doors .....	110
1. The Window as Frame.....	110
2. The Door as Interruption.....	110
3. Simmel's Mobility and Hospitality .....	111
VII. Page Player: Tools, Text, and Mise-en-abîme .....	112
1. Bricoleurs of Inscription .....	112
2. The Playful Apparatus .....	113
3. The Organic Undone .....	113
VIII. Shavings and the Question of Writing .....	114
1. Excess and Voice .....	114
2. Overflowing Matter .....	115

3. Textual Shavings .....	116
IX. Littering .....	116
X. Mahogany and Heidegger: The Ontology of Spacing .....	117
1. Iterability in Mahogany .....	117
2. Sofa of Estrangement.....	118
3. The Vessel and the Wheel .....	120
XI. Wicker and Austin: The Scene of the Speech Act .....	121
1. The Woven Chair .....	122
2. Errant Weavings.....	123
3. The Hinge of Silence.....	124
XII. Teak and Nietzsche: Style, Resistance, and the Feminine .....	124
1. The Table and the Parentheses .....	124
2. Forgotten Umbrellas, Shattered Meanings.....	125
3. Woman's Veils and Sails.....	126
4. Resistance in the Grain.....	127
4. Wooden Faces, Catachrestic Ties .....	128
5. Swordstick Reveries .....	130
XIII. Conclusion: The Dramatic Artefact and the Referential Split.....	131
Chapter Four: Perduring Godot... Godot... Godin! David Lewis's Four-Dimensional Artefact in <i>Waiting for Godot</i> .....	134
I. Repetition and Grey Time .....	134
II. Lewis and the Question of Access .....	137
1. Modal Truths .....	137
2. Worlds and Gaps.....	138
3. The Absent Access .....	139
III. From Lewisian Worlds to Žižekian Cuts .....	139
1. <i>Pretending to Pretend</i> .....	139
2. Truthful Lies.....	140
3. Cuts of Appearance.....	141
IV. From Repetition to Slice .....	142
1. <i>Time as Intuition</i> .....	142
2. The Endurant Illusion .....	143
3. Absurdity Reframed.....	144
V. Perdurantism and the Signifying Cut.....	145
1. Space-Worms.....	145
2. The Signifier's Cut .....	146

3. <i>Slicing the Continuum</i> .....	149
4. Stillness as Slice .....	150
5. Everything Happens, Twice! .....	150
VI. Somatic Semblance: Estragon/Vladimir as a Plessnerian Hinge .....	151
1. Cut Bodies.....	151
2. <i>Estragon Falling</i> .....	152
3. Vladimir Laughing .....	154
4. Plessner's Hinge.....	155
VII. Estragon/Vladimir: Person-Stages of Substance as Subject.....	156
1. The Cut and the I-Relation.....	156
2. Speaking in Slices .....	157
3. <i>Substance Over Spirit</i> .....	158
VIII. Pozzo's Watch: Personal Time and the Semblance of Return .....	159
IX. Lucky's Rope: Foreclosed Coordination and Temporal Drift.....	164
X. The Boy: From Slice to Possible World .....	165
XI. Conclusion: The Stage Direction as Event and the Spectatorial Split .....	168
Conclusion: The Ghost-Script of Theatre .....	170
I. Opening Restatement .....	170
II. Synthesis of Findings.....	171
III. Contribution .....	173
IV. Methodological Reflection .....	174
V. Implications and Future Directions .....	175
Bibliography .....	178

## Abstract

This thesis examines the ontological, temporal, and narrative status of stage-directions in dramatic texts, arguing that they cannot be adequately interpreted as pragmatic instructions, paratextual supplements, or authorial indices. Against approaches which treat drama primarily through narrative, performative, or evental frameworks, the thesis asks how dramatic worlds appear, persist, and fracture. While influential philosophical readings have foregrounded discontinuity and suspension, this study argues that such models fail to account for the formal role played by stage-directions in structuring dramatic worldhood itself. The thesis proposes instead that stage-directions function as *signifying cuts*: formal inscriptions that interrupt continuity and mediate access to dramatic worlds by generating autonomous spatial and temporal relations. Through their projection beyond the dramatic page and their structural exteriority to performance, stage-directions reshape narrative temporality and dramatic ontology without resolving the gap between text and stage.

The argument begins by tracing the historical emergence of stage-directions as contested sites of authorship following the rise of the director, and by situating this emergence within a philosophical critique of speech-act theory, narratology, and dramatic theory. It demonstrates how dominant models fail to account for the parallax of voices and temporalities produced by the spatial and temporal disjunctions inscribed on the dramatic page.

Building on this groundwork, the thesis develops a psychoanalytic reading of Elizabethan stage-directions through Jacques Lacan's theory of the gaze. Ambiguous and contradictory directions are reinterpreted as symptomatic inscriptions through which theatre stages its own unconscious, exposing the dramatist's displacement within the symbolic field while giving form to lack, misrecognition, and remainder in figures such as the notorious "Exit, pursued by a bear."

The argument then shifts from subjectivity to structure through a Derridean reading of Bernard Shaw's *Heartbreak House*. Here, architectural and material stage-directions operate parergonally, corrupting their own referents and producing narratives of spacing rather than stable scenic cues. Stage-directions emerge as dramatic artefacts that defer and displace the relation between material form and textual inscription.

Finally, the thesis offers an ontological re-determination of stage-directions through a structurally temporal reading of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. Drawing on modal realism and four-dimensionalism, it argues that the play's world is generated not through continuous action or evental rupture but through temporal slicing. Characters appear as momentary person-stages, and continuity emerges only as an effect of repetition. *Godot* persists not as a world we enter, but as a sequence of signifying cuts through which world and subject appear *as if* whole.

## Introduction: Stage-directions and the Paradox of Drama

Alain Badiou in “The Common Preoccupation of Art and Philosophy” (2018) pays heed to what he names “the paradox of Plato.” Despite his opposition to epic poetry, dramatic poetry, and the tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides as “enemies to the foundations of philosophy,” Plato, who gave philosophy the meaning it has come to bear in tradition, nonetheless gives to philosophy a theatrical form: the dialogue. A contradiction becomes unmistakable: “we have a theatrical opposition to theatre, and we have the most violent conceptual attack against theatre with the means of theatre” (5). Plato’s attack on theatre cannot be reduced to the dismissal of a single artform. In Platonic thought, theatre is nothing less than the “synthesis of the arts”: it gathers poetry, music, dance, and spectacle into a single locus of presentation. To condemn theatre is therefore to condemn art in its most concentrated and potent form. What makes theatre dangerous in this schema is not only its mimetic character but its composite nature, its ability to bring into one scene the multiplicity of artistic practices and thereby intensify their effect. The attack on theatre is thus, at the same time, an attack on art as such. Yet if Plato’s paradox lies in rejecting theatre through the very means of theatre, Aristotle presents the reverse paradox. Aristotle is a friend of tragedy, but he invented the academic treatise that has characterised the dominant form of philosophy throughout its history: “So, we have a complete paradox: the enemy of theatre [Plato] creates philosophy in theatrical form and his disciple, a friend of theatre, imposes on philosophy for many centuries, against the theatrical form of Plato, the academic dissertation” (6).

According to Badiou, Plato’s apparent dismissal of art is not a dismissal of art per se, nor of aesthetics as subservient to some ideal, but derives from the dangers it introduces as an “imitation” of nature: it is “an immanent risk to prefer beauty to truth” (7). If philosophy, for Plato, is “not a knowledge” but “a movement, the goal of which is to transform subjectivity, a subjectivity which is corrupted by dominant opinions,” then theatre, as a projection of opinions, is suspicious; it contaminates philosophy with the very elements it seeks to resist. Both philosophy and art are “public actions,” and both “transform subjectivity” (ibid.). Aristotle’s apparent friendship with art is not grounded in aesthetics’ internality to philosophical enquiry but in its absolute difference, as a “subjective pleasure,” which philosophy can then, from outside, ‘objectively’ test and criticise. Theatre and philosophy cannot be reduced, for Plato, to a “quiet difference” as with Aristotle. If art is dangerous to philosophy for Plato, it is because “it’s unclear that art and philosophy are really so different. Maybe the temptation of artistic creation is inside Platonic philosophy, and in the case of Aristotle there is not that sort of temptation, and art is absolutely outside the philosophical desire” (8). Plato’s recognition of the dangers of art is paradoxically also a recognition of its potency. For this reason Badiou makes it clear that he is not on the side of Aristotle’s aesthetics, but on the side of philosophy’s natural appeal to aesthetics as “the movement of thinking itself” (ibid.)

Although Badiou's observation of "the complete paradox" (ibid.) in Plato and Aristotle leads him to trace what he interprets as Plato's philosophical theatre - or philosophical art correcting the "imitative" means of aesthetics toward truth - the reason this paradox matters here is that it circulates again in one of drama's elements that remains underexplored and underappreciated by dramatic theory: stage-directions. Stage-directions indeed occupy an obscure territory in drama's theory at least since the invention of the printing press. On one level, they are not traditionally taken as indispensable to the aesthetic realisation of the dramatic project: *they are not included in Aristotle's Poetics*. Tradition seemed to have adopted an aversion to stage-directions reminiscent of Plato's aversion to theatre, and so, unlike Aristotle's general friendliness to aesthetics, his exclusion of stage-directions is rather Platonic, as if treating them as an element of corruption. In his reading of the *Poetics*, Pierre Corneille explains:

Aristotle wishes the well-made tragedy to be beautiful and pleasing without the aid of actors and quite aside from performance. So that the reader may more easily experience that pleasure, his mind, like that of the spectator, must not be hindered, because the effort he is obliged to make to conceive and to imagine the play for himself lessens the satisfaction which he will get from it. Therefore, I should be of the opinion that the poet ought to take great care to indicate in the margin the less important actions which do not merit being included in the lines, and which might even mar the dignity of the verse if the author lowered himself to express them. The actor easily fills this need on the stage, but in a book one would often be reduced to guessing and sometimes one might even guess wrong... (96).

To the extent that a "well-made tragedy" is a cathartic experience, what is indicated in the margins should not impede the "dignity of the verse," nor should the author "lower himself to express them." Insofar as identification with images is what Aristotle sees as the essence of theatre, stage-directions should not exceed their status as marks of marginal actions that the actor can easily supply on stage without looking into the "book".

On the other hand, like Plato's "dialogues" at the centre of his philosophical text, stage-directions are the "blueprints" of the dramatic text without which the latter can hardly be realised as drama, if at all. Their designation as secondary or marginal is a domestication of some danger at the centre of the dramatic project. Stage-directions cannot be quarantined from the dramatic text along Aristotelian lines of opposition. Since at least the 1950s, stage-directions have gradually begun to claim a place within dramatic theory. What had been excluded from Aristotle's *Poetics* - his essentially Platonic suspicion of stage-directions as corrupting - has in more recent criticism been re-inscribed within the *Poetics* itself, treated as if it were latent in the very structure of his dramatic treatise. The "blueprints" of the dramatic text are thus both dismissed and reinstated from within the same discourse: an implicit shift from an Aristotelian logic of exclusion to a Platonic concern with the dangerous centrality of theatre.

And it should not surprise us that stage-directions occupy this territory of obscurity and danger with regard to drama and dramatic theory. In dealing with stage-directions, we are grappling with that which belongs simultaneously to page and stage, text and performance. Stage-directions deny their

being a form of “One,” in Badiou’s sense of an origin, but remain discursively multiple in their very advent as text. It might even be the case that stage-directions are representative of drama itself, being, as it were, a representation of representation. “Theatre is the invention of a split in the One,” as Badiou tells us. It began as a “religious ceremony, and in the religious ceremony you are under the law of a unique voice, the voice of a unified community, the voice of the divine fable, in a sense, the voice of the One. But theatre is also the introduction of the ‘second person, speaking on stage’” (13). To the extent that it is a religious ceremony, theatre is a representation of the One; but to the extent that it introduces a “second person,” it is also the representation of the One as split. And so, theatre “before philosophy, is the appearing of negation; the artistic appearing of the potency of division and negation. It’s the way out of the cave of the One” (ibid.). So, what Badiou attributes to theatre in general - its role in splitting the One - finds its concentrated analogue (dialogue?) in stage-directions. Second-ness in theatre as the pre-philosophical appearance of the One as negated and divided - that is, as the appearance of the dialectical - is what stage-directions reintroduce in their dual belonging. They are the retrospective but implicit realisation of drama as split while they belong to the same dramatic experience as such. There is thus a systematic act of division and negation that runs from the religious One of theatre to the stage, and from the latter to stage-directions. Stage, with its weight of the secondary, is to the religious and ceremonial One what stage-directions are to the dramatic text.

In theory, stage-directions are thus, like Plato’s text (dialogues), immanent to drama’s creation and appreciation, which countervails the many attempts to theorise their implications beyond Aristotle’s *Poetics*. Just as the stage splits the One in “opposition between two subjects, two opinions and two contradictory convictions” (14) stage-directions have presented to dramatic theory their own second-ness, splitting the ‘authorial’ between the dramatist and the director, the ‘scenic’ between page and stage, and the spectatorial between reader and audience. They fall between disciplines, between modes of signification. And it is this “betweenness” that seals them in paradoxes. To call them instructions is to reduce them to a practical function; to call them narrative is to ignore their non-diegetic voice; to name them theatrical is to efface their ontological remove from performance itself. They hover, ghost-like, at the threshold of text and stage, never fully subsumable under either.

It is within this paradoxical inheritance that the question of stage-directions must be posed. For if philosophy has always related to theatre through this dialectic of rejection and appropriation, then stage-directions occupy an even more obscure place in this iteration. They are not the dialogue that Plato mimics, nor the tragic structure that Aristotle codifies, but the mute inscriptions that underwrite them both: entrances and exits, gestures, silences, movements, the inscriptions of presence and its void. These are elements philosophy has found difficult to confront. They are too literary for performance, too performative for literature, and too marginal for aesthetics. If theatre as a whole is philosophy’s other, then stage-directions are the other of this other: the unassimilated remnant that exposes the structural incompleteness of every philosophical account of drama.

This thesis begins from the wager that such obscurity is not incidental but essential. Stage-directions are not simply overlooked details that should be granted more attention. Their marginality is not an error of criticism to be corrected by more careful reading. Rather, their obscurity points to something irreducible in the nature of dramatic writing itself. They are the trace of a constitutive

fracture: the interval between page and stage, between the written mark and its performance, between appearance and disappearance. What makes them difficult to categorize is precisely what makes them philosophically relevant. They resist the assimilative force of theory because they expose theory's own limits. If the dialogue of characters can be absorbed into rhetoric, or ethics, and if the tragic form can be codified into catharsis and recognition, then stage-directions mark the point at which these assimilations are happy to dissolve. They insist on a dimension of drama that philosophy has only obliquely addressed: the inscription of absence, the formalisation of disjunction, the writing of what cannot fully appear.

## Research Questions

It is from within this paradoxical terrain that the present thesis is guided by the following research questions: How do stage-directions, in their dual belonging to page and stage, operate within dramatic texts beyond their reduction to marginal instructions or paratextual supplements? In what ways do stage-directions generate autonomous spatial and temporal relations that reshape dramatic narration and the conditions of theatrical worldhood? How do stage-directions inscribe division -of subjectivity, authority, and appearance- within dramatic form, and why do these divisions resist assimilation by existing philosophical and theoretical models of drama? What does attending to stage-directions as sites of negation and second-ness reveal about the limits of philosophy's historical engagement with theatre?

## I. The Authorial Split

For a long time, stage-directions have been the birthplace of the quarrel over the legitimacy of authorial intention. As Patricia A. Suchy rightly contends, "Nowhere but in the theatre is the authorship question so essential; nowhere is it more complex" (131) The authorial force dictating how stage-directions are to be realised on stage has been a historic point of contention, generally attributed either to the playwright or to theatre practitioners, the latter eventually and consensually subsumed into the late advent of the director. In this sense, stage-directions occupy a liminal zone between the literary text and the *mise en scène*, a zone in which the dramatist witnesses the splitting of authority that attends writing for the theatre.

Corneille's banishment of stage-directions from the "dignity of the verse" already signals this paradoxical status. They function like footnotes or glosses: they facilitate comprehension but are never granted the dignity of expression. They remain suspect, as though they open the door to "wrong" guesses that may divert or even betray the dramatist's intended expression. The dramatist who dares to inscribe important actions in stage-directions risks "lowering" themselves beneath the threshold of the *Poetics*. The priority, in Corneille's reading, is to protect the pleasurable dignity of tragedy even if this means relegating the dramatist's hand to a supplementary margin, whose trace nonetheless persists as a mark of intention and its hindrance.

What emerges here is the paradox Plato had already marked in philosophy's relation to theatre: potency and corruption at once. Stage-directions embody precisely this duality in their relationship to both dramatist and theatre practitioners. As the "blueprints" of dramatic production, they inevitably mark the dramatist's corruption — a recurring threat to the integrity of his subjectivity and to the "dignity of the verse" he inscribes. They are potent to the extent that they can reproduce a life of their own through others, but corruptive for the same reason: they exceed authorial mastery by becoming available to appropriation. The history of drama is filled with dramatists who became, in this sense, representatives of Plato's paradox: Jonson, Beckett, Pirandello. Each encountered the impossibility of assimilating the potency of their stage-directions within the borderlines of their subjectivity. Each stumbled upon the structural impossibility of digesting their own inscriptions.

Nowhere is this split clearer than in the Elizabethan playscript, where the advent of print renders stage-directions materially visible. For the first time, the dramatist's marginal notations circulate widely as writing in their own right, detached from immediate performance and legible apart from any staging. Directions such as *Enter Ghost*, *Exit Hamlet*, or *He dies* may appear functional, but they expose the dramatist's voice at the margin, a voice external to character yet indispensable to fiction. More eccentric directions, "*Exit pursued by a bear*" or contradictory notations that leave space for competing realisations, intensify this paradox. The same hand that prescribes precision is also capable of ellipsis, redundancy, contradiction. Authorship appears both in control and out of control, fractured at its origin. This is the authorial split: stage-directions inscribe the dramatist's presence only as division. They are both expression and gloss, blueprint and corruption, trace and command. They disperse authorship into character dialogue while concentrating it in marginal notations that cannot be absorbed into character. They testify to authorship as neither sovereign nor effaced but fractured, marked by absence, written as a remainder. The author persists, but only in the form of interruption, inscription, excess. To read stage-directions is to encounter this fissure: a dramatist caught between intention and its betrayal, between the dignity of the verse and the margins that undercut it, between mastery and fracture.

## II. The Referential Split

If stage-directions fracture the authority of the dramatist, they equally fracture the stability of reference. The stage as the univocal referent of stage-directions seems at first to anchor their linguistic currency on the page. Expressions such as *Act I, A desert place* (*Macbeth*) appear to simply index what is there, a bare scene-setting or designation of persons. But stage-directions are never just expressions. Their referent is the stage, yet they operate just as much as functions, dictating how the *mise en scène* should transpire in performance. They both articulate and prescribe, both mark and command. Editors have long attempted to domesticate this doubleness by classifying stage-directions under the headings of "structural," "locational," "melodic," and so on. But the very coalescence of stage-directions as expression (on the page) and function (for the stage) exposes a referential discourse that lies beyond plot and dialogue: a discourse between page and stage themselves.

What follows is the recognition that the apparently homogeneous articulation of stage-directions as expressions and as functions is in fact a discourse of limits. The page inscribes not only the possibility

of action but its boundaries; it domesticates in writing the limits of character, object and prop, traversing a continuum that stretches between page and stage but never sees them coincide. Here, Plato's paradox resurfaces in sharper terms. Just as art is dangerous to philosophy because it is potent enough to return *as* philosophy, so too stage-directions are corruptive of their referent precisely because they are potent enough to reproduce it otherwise. When they exceed the limits of what the stage can bear, they return not as failed instructions but as narrative, as discursive reconstructions of what cannot be fully said because of what cannot be fully shown. The earliest distinction between stage-directions "meant to be read" and those "meant to be performed" inscribes this paradox: stage-directions turn back upon themselves as the narration of their own corruption.

This paradox comes into full relief in the modern playscript, where stage-directions cease to be marginal cues and become textual artefacts in their own right. The case of George Bernard Shaw's *Heartbreak House* is exemplary. Shaw's directions are not merely instructions but elaborate indices: furniture, architecture, actants. They collapse the distinction between function and expression, cue and narrative. On the one hand, they appear to dictate performance with minute precision; on the other, they are impossible to execute in full, excessive in their literary elaboration, deficient in their performability. What they disclose is not the smooth transit from page to stage but the instability of reference itself. They refer both to a material staging and to an imagined world that no stage can fully contain. The more Shaw insists on controlling the performance through writing, the more he demonstrates the impossibility of such control. His stage-directions expose that they are not neutral conduits but discursive elements of the playtext in their own right. They corrupt the economy of reference by introducing into the text an element that is both prescriptive and self-sufficient, directive and descriptive, performative and literary. The page asserts its authority only by revealing the impossibility of fully realising it. This is the referential split: stage-directions oscillate between expression and function, page and stage, narrative and instruction, but never reconcile them. They disturb rather than secure the referential bond. In their excess they narrativise the very impossibility of reference, becoming a discourse about their own corruption, a contamination of presentation by representation. Shaw's text only sharpens what is true in every playscript: stage-directions write a world that performance cannot wholly occupy. They are not supplements to the dramatic text but the sites where reference fractures, where the theatre's claim to presence is undone by the writing that enables it.

### III. The Spectatorial Split

Perhaps the problem that continues to demand special attention, and which seems natural only because it is peculiar to drama, is the page's negation or splitting of the stage as the object of spectatorship. Lukas Erne has rightly insisted that English Renaissance plays have a "double existence, one on stage and one on the printed page," and he calls for "a reception that takes into account the respective specificities of the two media" (10). To acknowledge this double existence is already to see that spectatorship cannot be unified. The reader and the audience do not encounter the same object; stage-directions mediate their relation by displacing stage into writing, producing a scene that exists only in the act of reading. Stage-directions do not simply corrupt authorial intention or destabilise reference; they fracture theatre in its very object. They present the reader not with a

stage but with its substitute, a written scene that generates its own mode of viewing. They enact their own failure to translate the stage by producing another kind of performance altogether: one internal to the page. Spectatorship here is not the absorption of a theatrical event but the confrontation with its dislocation, the awareness that what is seen on the page cannot coincide with what might be seen on stage.

This fracture becomes most palpable in the modernist playscript. Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* radicalises the fissure into what can properly be called the spectatorial split: the splitting of the reader's position itself. The opening notations - "A country road. A tree. Evening." - posit a world in its bareness, but one that remains suspended, skeletal, dependent on the reader's imagination to be staged. The subsequent directions "He halts. He moves. He takes off his boot" fracture this imaginative staging by insisting on recursive, halting gestures. These are not narrative descriptions of past events nor straightforward imperatives to be carried out. They are inscriptions that split reading into fragments, temporal slices that never amount to a seamless continuity. What Beckett's stage-directions disclose is that the fissure is not only between author and text, or text and performance, but between text and *readerly* realisation. The reader cannot occupy a single vantage point; reading itself is divided. On one side, the text solicits immersion, constructing a world through minimal scenic cues. On the other, it punctuates this world with absences, silences, and gestures that cannot be reconciled into a whole. The subject who reads is thus split, at once imagining continuity and confronting its impossibility before his eyes. This is the spectatorial split: not a phenomenology of theatre audiences, but the dislocation of the reading subject by stage-directions that fracture the theatre of the mind. Beckett's playscript makes explicit what remains latent elsewhere: that spectatorship in drama is always already split between stage and page, presence and absence, enactment and inscription. Stage-directions are not marginal supplements but central operators, structuring appearance through absence, continuity through interruption, presence through silence. In their oscillation between potency and corruption, they stage the fissure of spectatorship itself.

## V. Cartography of Fissures

The argument of this thesis unfolds in four movements, each of which intensifies the fissural logic inscribed by stage-directions, and each of which is read through a different philosophical frame.

Chapter I traverses the theoretical frameworks that have sought to contain or explain stage-directions. On one side stand those who addressed them directly, attempting to classify their place within the ontology of drama. Roman Ingarden conceives the playtext as incomplete until concretised in performance, with stage-directions reduced to schematic placeholders; Eli Rozik translates them into semiotic codes; Michael Issacharoff and Marvin Carlson distinguish them as annotations or supplements that mediate between text and staging. Each of these accounts names stage-directions only by domesticating them, neutralising their instability in the act of classification. On the other side are those whose frameworks I mobilise as lenses to expose what such classifications cannot assimilate. J. L. Austin, John Searle, and Slavoj Žižek confront the fissures of performativity, where force fails to coincide with itself. Seymour Chatman, Manfred Jahn, Wayne Booth, and John Brenkman extend narratology's categories to drama, only to falter at the margin

where stage-directions resist narration. Immanuel Kant, Theodor W. Adorno, and Umberto Eco frame aesthetics in terms of judgment, negativity, and openness, but stage-directions trouble each in turn, functioning as non-aesthetic conditions of the aesthetic. Across these discourses, whether explicit or indirect, stage-directions appear as residues -excessive or deficient - that escape theoretical capture. The chapter concludes by naming this impasse the dramatic frame: a structure of temporal dislocation in which the playscript imposes its own demands of signification, irreducible to models of narration, performance, or aesthetics.

Chapter II turns to Elizabethan drama to examine the authorial split. This chapter focuses on contentious stage-directions — ambiguous, contradictory, or permissive notations that refuse to stabilise meaning or dictate performance univocally. Rather than dismissing these irregularities as historical accidents or editorial noise, the analysis treats them as symptomatic inscriptions, traces of a dramatist whose authorship is already fractured. Elizabethan stage-directions emerge not as transparent guides but as torsions in the text, marks where the dramatist's authority falters and the possibility of theatrical realisation becomes uncertain. The notorious "Exit, pursued by a bear" from *The Winter's Tale* crystallises this fissure. Abrupt and violent, it refuses symbolic resolution and instead inscribes loss, pursuit, and remainder at the heart of the stage. Such directions are not marginal glosses but structural ruptures through which drama exposes its own unconscious logic. The Elizabethan playscript therefore reveals authorship not as sovereign expression but as divided inscription, where the playwright's hand betrays its own instability at the threshold between page and stage.

Chapter III turns to George Bernard Shaw's *Heartbreak House* to examine the referential split, read through the writings of Jacques Derrida. Shaw's stage-directions are not marginal annotations but sustained engagements with architecture and the "sister arts" of furniture, carpentry, and fabric design. From the play's opening notation - the house as a ship, complete with carpenter's bench and nautical furnishings - to its detailed catalogues of sofas, wicker chairs, and teak tables, the text proliferates objects that are never mere props. Each emerges as a site where material and textual functions intersect, where the object both grounds performance and destabilises its own reference. Stage-directions here continually corrupt their referent: instead of securing staging, they generate narratives of spacing, discursive inscriptions that defer and displace. In Derridean terms, they operate parergonally, neither simply inside nor outside the play but as hinges that disturb the border between text and architecture, writing and space. What seems like descriptive density is in fact structural instability: artefacts that narrate their own corruption while inscribing the impossibility of stable reference. Shaw's stage-directions thus reconfigure the relation between material and abstract, spatial and social, subject and object. They show that dramatic presence persists only through fragmentation and delay, through the very corruption of reference that makes it possible.

Chapter IV examines Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* to articulate the spectatorial split, read through David Lewis's modal realism and four-dimensionalist accounts of persistence. Beckett's stage-directions do not simply mark actions to be carried out; they cut the world into fragments, suspending continuity and forcing the reader into disjunction. Notations such as 'They do not move' or 'The tree has four or five leaves' are not neutral descriptions but operations that slice the play's world into temporal parts. Characters cease to be enduring selves and appear instead as momentary person-stages: Estragon and Vladimir reduced to bodily semblances, Pozzo and Lucky unravelled into

travellers for whom time has come apart, the Boy's recurrent entries fracturing reality into competing possibilities. What has often been read as absurdity can here be refigured as the effect of a world that appears only through discontinuity, a world in which repetition produces the semblance of continuity without ever securing it. Read through Lewis, Beckett's play persists not as a seamless endurance but as a series of temporal slices, a possible world disclosed only through the act of reading. The stage-directions are the operators of this disclosure: inscriptions that fracture the theatre of the mind, dividing the reader between immersion and its failure. *Godot* thus radicalises the fissure into spectatorship itself, where drama no longer offers a world to be entered but imposes a sequence of cuts through which world and subject appear as if whole.

Taken together, these chapters advance a single polemical claim: that stage-directions are not marginal notations but the very operators through which drama discloses its ontology. They mark the points at which authorship, reference, and perception are fractured, the points at which theory breaks down. To read stage-directions is to confront not the supplements of drama but its constitutive disjunctions. Stage-directions are not ancillary but foundational: they are the sites where drama resists assimilation to narratology, semiotics, performativity, or aesthetics, and where it instead articulates its fractured ontology of absence, interruption, and recursive temporality. It is this fractured ontology that returns us, finally, to the scene of philosophy itself. Plato dismissed theatre as corruptive of philosophy even as he staged philosophy in the form of dialogues; Aristotle codified tragedy as philosophy's friend even as he excluded stage-directions from the *Poetics*. Stage-directions, silent yet indispensable, reinscribe that contradiction. They are the dialogues Plato feared and the treatises Aristotle formalised, the locus where art appears as both potent and corruptive, both condition and excess. To take stage-directions seriously is thus not to add a supplement to dramatic theory, but to reopen philosophy's original quarrel with theatre at the very point where its exclusion has always already failed.

# Chapter One: The Artefact of the Gap: Stage-directions Between Page, Performance, and Theory

## I. The Gap and Its Returns

### 1. Margins of Authority

Back in the 1950s, it would have been possible to claim that the part of the written dramatic text which most obviously marks it off from other written texts and which is also most directly concerned with one of the central concerns of theatre semiotics - the translation of the literary text into the text of performance - had not been given enough critical attention. I refer, of course, to stage-directions. Critics had rarely departed from the assumption that stage-directions are only a precept of and for the stage. In keeping with the principles of Aristotle's *Poetics*, the author held on to their privileges through stage-directions, becoming not just the poet at the narrative level of the text but, through stage-directions, playing another role, in the text, of stage director. This distinctive but supplementary figure of the author had the purpose of facilitating the transfer of their intentions. One early example is Pierre Corneille, arguably the first playwright to justify the need for stage-directions. In his *Discours des Trois Unités* (1660), the double function of the marginal notes for small actions is brought to the surface:

We also have another reason for not neglecting this little resource as they (the Ancients) have done: the printing press puts our plays in the hands of comedians that roam the country, and it is only in this way that they can be told what to do. If we did not help them through these notes, strange difficulties might arise. (Corneille cited in Hubert 55).

The coincidence of this "little resource" and "strange difficulties" is far from incidental. In this fragment, Corneille highlights two predominant revolutions of his time that reshaped the relationship between text and performance: the invention of the printing press, with the consequent increase in readership, and the growing mobility of theatre troupes performing outside the capital cities (Pereira 2016). Stage-directions intersected both developments, not only bridging the gap between page and stage but, in doing so, gradually asserting a more visible textual presence on the page. In the time of Shakespeare and Molière, playwrights worked directly with the company for whom their plays were written and so few stage-directions were deemed necessary. In more recent times the presence of the "little resource" has become more visible, responding to a new kind of

double unfamiliarity: the unfamiliarity of the original performance to a potential company of performers, and the unfamiliarity of the latter to the authors themselves. This expansion functioned as a compensatory structure for the growing distance between author and performer, or between the former's intentions and their execution. Stage-directions started to share in the responsibility of guaranteeing the truth of the text. The playwright with a definitive vision of their own, proclaimed in the mere presence of their stage-directions, embraced the aesthetics of what Umberto Eco calls in *The Role of the Reader* the "closed" text, which "aim[s] at pulling the reader along a predetermined path... at the due place and at the right moment" (8). The dramatic text, increasingly bound by a respect for the author's intentions, sought to leave little room for interpretive ambiguity.

But since "respect" is hardly a way out of the conditions of fictional possibility - no more than "intention" is a way out of the conditions of aesthetic judgment - the destined untying of theatre from text by the very gap they had sustained (in 'print' and 'mobility') had to work through a passage into another visibility: that of the actor-manager. This appearance came to cover yet another expansion of the gap between page and stage in theatre history, now further disseminated into crowd scenes, processions, elaborate effects, etc. Figures like Robert Browne started to emerge in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, George Jolly in the 17<sup>th</sup> and David Garrick in the 18<sup>th</sup>. As performers and producers, often selecting plays, managing companies, and shaping performances, these figures marked a gradual shift from collaborative troupe-based production to centralized artistic control. The 1741 production of *Richard III* by Garrick, for example, marked a turning point in theatrical style and production, introducing a more naturalistic acting style that broke from the declamatory tradition of the time. Indeed, his portrayal of Richard III was immortalized in William Hogarth's painting, which shows Garrick startled from a nightmare, surrounded by rich visual symbolism. This image became a defining theatrical representation of the character. As actor-manager, Garrick oversaw staging and visual elements, asserting a new level of artistic control that foreshadowed the modern director's role.

It is only after World War II that the role of the actor-manager started to slowly disappear, and with it disappeared the commodification of authorial intentions as "resources". The persistent efforts to close the gap between page and stage gave form to a newly established 'concept' of directorship, an originary site of textual construction from which aesthetic visions complementary to *and* contending with the author's started to take shape. The move from the commodification of authorial intentions to a conceptualization of the role of the director witnessed a move from Eco's "closed" model to its "open" counterpart, "a paramount instance of a syntactico-semantic pragmatic device whose foreseen interpretation is part of its generative process" (3). The dramatic text became the place where the director's interpretation was imposed by the text itself to complete understanding. Here, a penchant for breaking free from the pull of the author's intention emerges as inherent to the text's "continuous generation of internal relations which the addressee must uncover and select in his act of perceiving the totality of incoming stimuli" (8)<sup>1</sup>. This reappearance of the gap between page and stage as a *question* of whether the dramatic text is "closed" or "open" has become essential enough to lead to co-authorships or, for the exact same reason, to legal proceedings<sup>2</sup> or, ultimately, to what

---

<sup>1</sup> We must not forget here, as Gerald Rabkin tells us, that "despite his postulation of this useful dialectic, Eco recognizes that on a broader level of analysis every work of art, whether or not produced by an explicit "poetics of necessity," is "effectively open to a virtually unlimited range of possible readings" (145).

<sup>2</sup> For instance, questions of co-authorship and textual authority came to prominence in disputes over Samuel Beckett's works, such as the Wooster Group's *LSD (...Just the High Points...)* (1984), which led to legal action

has been called post-dramatic theatre at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a term coined by Hans-Thies Lehmann to refer to contemporary theatre that subverts or does away entirely with the concept of text.

## 2. Framing the Gap

From the emancipatory gap between page and stage, the visible decrease and increase of “marginal notes” was transposed into the virtual concept of directorship, a shift that redrew the circular passage toward one final appearance: the reestablishment of stage-directions within the metatheatrical world of theory. This mid-twentieth-century slippage—the marked gap between page and stage now retrospectively reframed as a gap in theory by the very interpretive labour it had compelled—fatefully corresponded to the question of the “transcendental,” if, following Adorno, we define as transcendental “the inversion by means of which the subject experiences his radical limitation (the fact that he is confined to the limits of his world) as his constitutive power (the a priori network of categories structuring his perception of reality)” (quoted in Žižek 2012). The opposition between the intention of the author as a transcendental object of the “closed” text and the concept of directorship as a transcendental object of the “open” text came to be reinstated retroactively as an opposition between the subject and his categories. Understanding drama is rediscovered as a synthetic a priori knowledge of its elements, a transcendental apperception of form that conditions and determines the understanding of the empirical content of drama. One of the earliest resonances of this (Kantian) transcendental subject grappling with the historical phenomenon of stage-directions is Patrice Pavis’s ‘dilemma’ with regards to its textual and theatrical grounding now taken precisely as a “frame” for our interpretation of Drama:

Stage-directions form a ‘frame’ around a text, giving instructions for uttering the text in such a way that the dialogue will take on a meaning more or less ‘envisaged’ by the author... [they] are not the ultimate truth of the text, or a formal command to produce the text in such a manner, or even an indispensable shifter between text and performance. Their textual status is *uncertain*. Do they constitute an optional *extra-text*? a *metatext* that determines the dramatic text? or a *pretext* that suggests one solution before the director decides on another? The evaluation of their status cannot be divorced from history...” [my emphasis] (28).

Pavis’s uncertainty does more than problematize the textual vs. performative status of stage-directions; it installs a theoretical “frame” through which Drama itself is seen as such. What began with the printing press as a historical mechanism of transmission now appears as the precondition for theoretical interpretation: stage-directions become not simply marginal notes, but *the* margin, visible signs that reframe the dramatic text as a site of interpretive undecidability. What had once remained condensed but unresolved in the material relation between author and director now becomes a problem of ‘(re)presentation’, not the disappearance of intention, but its synthetic transformation into a metatheatrical *a priori*. And so in a homologous fashion appropriate for the page/stage gap’s slippage from empirical limits to their theoretical counterparts, the elements of

---

from the Beckett estate, and the controversies surrounding productions of *Endgame* in the 1980s where departures from Beckett’s directions prompted similar interventions.

historical experience, e.g. the printing press, acting masses, directors, elaborate effects, etc. have reached a new juncture in a frenzy of synthesizing knowledge of stage-directions.

Roman Ingarden, for example, follows his distinction between the main text [*Haupttext*] and the side text [*Nebentext*] with a conviction that stage-directions are “secondary” for the understanding of theatre. They are destined to disappear on stage into another medium: stage-directions or “side text” (319) cannot be a component of the stage play: “when the work is performed on stage the latter are totally eliminated” (377), and in their stead another medium of representation is utilized. Eli Rozik, re-evaluating Ingarden’s contribution in light of the semiotics of Theatre Studies, repudiates the verbal/non-verbal dichotomy that informs his interpretation. Ingarden’s stage-directions assume the role of a back door to the dramatic text, which then welcomes a self-sufficient non-verbal medium of representation into theatre where they disappear. The verbal/non-verbal dichotomy assumes, at its best, that “each medium operates according to its own rules,” as if referring to a self-contained logic of performance. Instead, Rozik situates stage-directions in the gap between text and performance as essentially undecidable. Despite their surplus signification, Rozik does not subordinate the text to performance but rather emphasizes that non-verbal components on stage actively participate in shaping the final meaning of verbal utterances: “the non-verbal components—words being equal—play a crucial role in determining the final meaning of verbal utterances. Viewing the words as having a definite meaning is a fallacy that betrays the literary approach to drama” (104). Stage-directions amount, for Rozik, to being an element of ‘plenitude’ - an extra-text - to the semiotic nature of theatre, rather than a mere ‘substitution’ from one logical consistency (page) to another (stage). In this sense, they can be “ignored or added to” insofar as they “have no relevance in detecting and defining the possible functions of language in the theatre” (104, my emphasis).

We return to a different projection of ‘secondary’ with Michael Issacharoff. Here, stage-directions are defined by the fictional distance they maintain - or fail to maintain - from dialogue; the latter is understood as the textually ‘local’ element from which stage-directions derive their textual status within the drama. They either reach a “maximum code mesh with dialogue,” as in typical stage-directions, or sever their “firm referential bond” with dialogue altogether, becoming autonomous ‘meta-texts’ existing primarily for readership rather than performance, as if “crying out for release from their normally subservient status” (61). Despite his ‘intra-textual’ perspective Issacharoff’s overarching distinction stems from his presupposition of stage-directions as “performance instructions”; “[they] belong to a different channel of communication, a second voice addressed to the director and actors, not the audience” (61), occupying a second communicative channel within drama’s “stereophonic” text. The first channel is the dialogue, intended to be spoken by actors who participate in that fiction.

Clearly, Issacharoff’s distinction reinforces the classic separation between the dramatic text as a written literary artifact and as a performance text, that is, between narrative (diegetic) elements and their embodied, mimetic enactment. This distinction reinforces rather than clears up ambiguity, because stage-directions’ tendency toward either position of the couple depends on their referential relationship to dialogue. Therefore, in line with this formula, they either maintain the bond with dialogue and somehow ‘withdraw’ from fiction in a “second” non-fictional authorial voice that runs “parallel” to dialogue, or they sever the bond altogether and assert themselves as autonomous textual elements with their ‘literariness’ emerging precisely through this detachment. In other

words, although stage-directions align with the constancy of the dramatic text as “the only constant element in what happens in the name of the theatre” (62), their theatrical function does not primarily arise from a fictional content. The dramatist’s authorial voice is absent from the dialogue but can become apparent in stage-directions detached from the same dialogue, asserting a literary autonomy. In both cases, the dramatist’s authorial voice is figured as absent from dialogue but recoverable in the side text, an extradiegetic presence that either recedes into function or emerges as literary ornament. This bifurcation reifies the page-stage divide, flattening its structural paradox into a binary of narrative and instruction.

Marvin Carlson is one of the few who countered Issacharoff’s position directly. Stage-directions, even in their very code-mesh with dialogue, could be read properly as part of the text’s diegesis. He writes in *Speaking in Tongues: Languages at Play in the Theatre*, that “[t]o assume...that the side text simply disappears or is replaced by nonwritten equivalents in production...is to take an overly simple view of its operations” (188). The “operations” in question refer to the space stage-directions share with any theatrical event as haunted by its alter-productions. This is what Carlson terms the “ghosting” proper for theatre, that which “presents the identical thing they [audience members] have encountered before, although now in a somewhat different context” (7). The “different context” is not simply a reterritorialization but the point where the theatrical event is always charged for the audience by different past performances of the same play-text while casting itself forward into its performances in the future. This is in no way restricted to performance qua performance but “everything in the theatre, the bodies, the materials utilized, the language, the space itself, is now and has always been haunted” (15). Daniel Ridealgh gives examples of the seemingly infinite “ghosts” in something like the Royal Shakespeare Company’s 2008 production of *Hamlet*, first performed at The Courtyard, Stratford-upon-Avon, starring David Tennant as the Prince of Denmark. The play was performed at Shakespeare’s birthplace and so, by means of space, the performance was haunted by the playwright. Tennant had gained fame through his earlier depiction of the Doctor in *Doctor Who*, the “ghost” he brought, by means of his body, to *his* Hamlet. Another is the “ghost” of the TV screen on which he was first seen now getting in the way of our vision of him through stage’s fourth wall.

Carlson’s predilection for articulating stage-directions or the “side text” as part of the dramatic text’s diegesis has everything to do with their submission to the “ghosting” mechanism, which begins not in performance, but in reading. Stage-directions’ main “ghost” is the stage, which gains, for the reader, a verbal dimension, a vanishing point where the stage simultaneously appears and disappears. Reading stage-directions for Carlson resigns from Issacharoff’s strictly “verbal” postulate by which stage-directions could reach a purely narrative (autonomous) dimension. Patricia A. Suchy observes that

Issacharoff’s analysis overlooks one key issue: The creators of the *mise en scène* are, at some point in the process, readers of the literary text. At least a trace of that experience enters into the performance, even though the performance itself is in no way confined to the impressions gathered from the initial reading(s) (76).

Carlson's concern thus shares in Suchy's "trace" without collapsing into equivalence. The authorial voice to directors, evident in the non-fictional character of stage-directions, is an effective displacement of reading drama. The directorial dimension in stage-directions first submits to the reader's 'theatre of the mind', a virtual space demarcated by drama's stereophonic text of dialogue and stage-directions on which the reader first reconstructs their *own* performance/s. What is at stake here is thus not an opposition between fictional and non-fictional voices in the dramatic text, but one fiction 'ghosting' another, the same that returns differently in the director as the non-fictional director *and* the director as a reader. The readerly spectre that the "creators of the *mise en scène*" bring onto stage is thus initially performative. This last stance is not of a 'verbal' nature and indeed has been emancipated sporadically in the many attempts of the editors of the dramatic text to tell us what else we can do as we read to give coordinates to such a 'private' performance. In this reading, drama proves capable of surviving the apparent dichotomy of page and stage if it is precisely through this dichotomy that Drama comes to be. Perhaps there is no better example of the dramatic traversal of this separation than Beckett's *Act Without Words I* which does away with dialogue entirely. Here, stage-directions assume the *role* of dialogue itself, proffering a textual condensation of the reader/director in a fictional dialogue-less "ghost". Carlson and Suchy thus predict, more radically than others, the fateful question of the instantiation of this Janus-faced passage between page and stage, one in which the stage becomes the site of both separation and identification, a structure retroactively conjured through the ghosting inherent in the dramatic event itself.

If the gap between page and stage draws its epistemology from the distance it posits between the two, it is due to the "ghost" of its return(s): the stereophonic text of Drama and the concept of directorship or ultimately theory *occupy* the same gap as dramatic substance. This betrays an inversion in place between the dramatic text and its categories of interpretation. The stage the dramatic text presupposes persists in a coincidence of presence and absence. Stage-directions are not dialogue, and dialogue is not stage-directions yet both appear as *text*. In appearance *qua* appearance this implies a *positive* reduction from the reader to the form of the dramatic text itself, where the "substantial" gap of stage on page, resisting categorization, coincides with the subject's virtual performance/s. From this perspective stage-directions, at their most basic, are the gap of stage which can only appear in the form of a *dramatic* text in contention with itself. Before they represent 'something', e.g. the author's "intention" or the reader's 'theatre of the mind', they present the *site* from which their translation one into another comes to be. Unless we deny stage-directions the agency of the gap they occupy and make appear on the grounds of the historical lapse between their entry into theory and drama, this gap of the stage must be recognized as constitutive of the dramatic story itself. The question is not whether Peter Shaffer's stage-direction "They cross the Andes" which instructs the crossing of a 4,000-strong army over the mountain range to the Incas (gaining the notorious status of the "impossible" stage-direction in Mark Lawson's terms) is "secondary," that directors are to draw on their ingenuity for an implementation different to others, or a "metatext" so meant to be read rather than performed. The question is how, in its consistency as a narrative, the text has restaged itself through the very gap it inscribes on the page as the site of its becoming performance, before becoming an 'actual' one." As we will see, this is not just a problem of space but also of time.

### 3. Performing the Ellipsis

The move from stage-directions as one positive determination of stage-performance, to stage-directions as the absence of performance, as text, thus dictates another move, from reflection on the question of their function to the question of their essence, that is, from the moments of their apparent determination to their atemporal dimension, existing for that determination itself. How is appearance both what essence posits as 'mere appearance', a reflection of its own self-mediation, *and* an alienated form in which the essence presupposes itself as some transcendent entity excluded from the movement of reflection as such? (Hegel 1969, 398–401). The stakes of this question involve the structural gap inherent to all phenomena which, in the case of stage-directions, emerges in the tension between the multiple reflections of their essence in a "discourse" on stage-directions and the internal difference that divides those reflections from one another. The historically reflective movement of stage-directions, from a textual element embedded in actual performance (i.e. "prepare to play") (Ingarden 319) to an element of the dramatic text as a "virtual-performance" or a "theatre of the mind", marks more than a shift in theatrical function. It indexes a deeper dialectical displacement in which what once appeared as immediate praxis is retroactively posited as semblance, *within the same text*. To articulate this textual position of stage-directions between essence and appearance/s we will then have to articulate the deeper instability at the heart of their performative function itself, an instability that, far from being incidental, signals a structural tension within the very logic of performative articulation.

This is an instability which resonates in J. L. Austin's speech-act theory, as described by Žižek, whose theoretical façade only managed to appear intact after it had indulged in various slippages towards the end of the text:

Austin's distinction of all verbs between performatives and constatives is not yet philosophy proper...[W]e enter the domain of philosophy with his 'unbalanced', 'excessive' hypothesis that every proposition, including a constative, already is a performative - that the performative, as one of the two moments of the Whole, simultaneously is the Whole (Žižek 185).

Speech-act theory is relevant here not because drama requires an additional theory of utterance, but because Austin's categories disclose the same instability that the dramatic page inscribes. Stage-directions occupy precisely the space where saying and doing are never identical but always mediated by their difference. Like the performative, they inhabit a retroactive space in which their force as instruction is secured only in fictionality. At the same time, they mark a constitutive ellipsis between saying and doing, lodged on the page between dialogue and enactment, irreducible to their subsequent realisations

This claim gathers what Austin's text was already showing: the initial division between performative and constative only holds by suppressing its exceptions. "I will give it back to you tomorrow" promises without using the verb "promise"; "There is a cat on the mat" is the constative mask of an erased "I affirm." As Lyons confirms, "It is natural to consider the possibility of deriving all sentences from underlying structures with an optionally deletable main clause containing a first-person

subject, a performative verb of saying and optionally an indirect-object expression referring to the addressee" (Lyons 736). Stage-directions function in this same mode of deletion: apparently removable marginalia (extra, meta, paratext) they nonetheless expose the text's very dependence on what they suspend. Ellipsis thus becomes central. The absent but binding "I affirm" names the structure by which the performative fails to coincide with itself. Saturation follows: the retroactive filling of that ellipsis by context, the way force appears only when situated as already binding: "[T]he 'illocutionary act' is the speech performance examined with reference to the context of the interlocution" (Felman 18). So too with stage-directions: "Exit" or "Pause" binds not because of intrinsic force but because the page situates them in a fictional scene that already holds them as binding. The illocutionary act is thereby saturated by interlocution, just as the direction is saturated by the stage it posits and withholds. This logic reaches its most visible form in perlocutionary acts. Austin himself notes:

It is characteristic of perlocutionary acts that the response achieved, or the sequel, can be achieved additionally or entirely by non-locutionary means: thus intimidation may be achieved by waving a stick or pointing. Even in the cases of convincing, persuading, getting to obey and getting to believe, we may achieve the response non-verbally (120).

What the "wave of a stick" is to intimidation, the stage-direction is to drama: an act achieved without the act itself, a mark that gestures beyond itself. The direction points, suspends, withholds; its force lies in the gap where saying does not produce doing, but makes doing appear as absent.

Austin's text itself acknowledges this logic most profoundly when it veers toward the juridical. Very early in his text, he entertains "contractual" (7) instead of "performative" after conceding that the law as a "statement of fact is pure fiction" (4). This condensation is the truth of the stage-direction: its force persists "contractually," as fiction that binds. Every illocution presupposes that another act has already taken place, and the dramatic page fixes that anteriority in appearance. The contractual cannot be fully saturated while still appearing as such. Stage-directions disclose why Austin's "saying is doing" cannot be sustained: their force resides neither in essence (an act transparently accomplished) nor in appearance (a statement regarding what occurs), but in the interval that binds and separates the two. "Exit" or "Aside" are legible only as such ruptures, where doing appears through its inscription as saying. It is this tension that opens directly onto Hegel's account of reflection, where essence survives only by splitting itself in appearance:

This is the decisive but usually overlooked lesson of Hegel's theory of reflection: we can speak of the difference, the fissure separating the essence from appearance, only in so far as the essence is itself split... that is, in so far as the essence presupposes itself as something alien, as its own Other. If the essence is not in itself split, if — in the movement of extreme alienation — it does not perceive itself as an alien Entity, then the very duality essence/appearance cannot establish itself (Žižek 93).

Stage-directions render this lesson visible: doing reappears in saying only as its own split. The act is not converted into language but inverted through it, sublated into appearance. The essence of doing

is reflected only in its emergence into text. The “aside” in “Hamlet [aside]: To be, or not to be...”, for example, makes this stark. The line is not a privileged window onto Hamlet’s interiority but the theatre’s own aside, the fissure between role and actor appearing *as if* it were self-address. *Hamlet* becomes a constative rationalisation of Hamlet only by subtracting the role from the actor he already is, scripted by vengeance. The direction italicises that subtraction, staging appearance for appearance, subjectification as will. “To be or not to be” is unsayable except as this performative masquerade. What is staged here is precisely the structure Hegel designates as reflection: essence appearing only through its division, the subject visible only in the rupture that dislocates it.

What Hegel names as reflection, stage-directions inscribe materially: the essence of doing only appears by splitting into the text that stages it. But this first lesson already carries a further consequence. If essence must appear in its own division, then appearance itself is marked by this fissure; it reflects not only what it shows but its own impossibility of coinciding with itself. Stage-directions do not just externalise absence; they embody this internal fracture of appearance:

In other words, the fissure between appearance and essence is internal to the appearance itself; it must be reflected in the very domain of appearance — this is what Hegel calls “determinate reflection.” The basic feature of Hegelian reflection is thus the structural, conceptual necessity of its redoubling. It is not only that the essence must appear, must articulate its inner truth in a multiplicity of determinations... the point is that it must appear for the appearance itself — as essence in its difference to appearance, in the form of a phenomenon which, paradoxically, gives body to the nullity of phenomena as such (Žižek 323).

We can speak of the essence of something only insofar as it alienates itself in its appearances. To put it differently: it is only because doing itself is split that it reappears in saying. The relation between essence and appearance is one of inversion (not conversion), whereby essence can appear only as a reflection of its own split. If we submit to this moment of reflection’s own repetitive gesture, then Austin’s “illocutionary” is not a positive determination of doing at the heart of saying, but the sublation of “doing” as such by its rupture into appearance. i.e. “constative vs performative”.

The essence of something is the gap - “the difference to appearance” - that it introduces into its own positive determinations, that is, its appearances. If we follow the logic of this discrepancy in determinate reflection as the self-relation of reflection, then stage-directions are no more a positive determination of “stage-performance” than they are the site of its dislocation: the unresolved coincidence - or split - between the dramatic text as written script and the dramatic text as staged performance. Their essence is this moment of appearing, the stage appearing on the page, marked by the difference by which they interrupt *and* bind the rest of the dramatic text. In the “domain of appearance,” that is, on the page, the drama’s (positive) text can appear as such only by retroactively traversing its constitutive ellipses. What is ‘ontologically’ foundational in the dramatic text is precisely this scenic drive to catch up with its representation, a pursuit structured by lack. Any attempt to editorially “positivize” this gesture, that is, to close the gap between page and stage, can only pretend to be an exception to a semblance that is already the rule.

If the claim that the textual appearances of stage-directions are historical traversals of stage-performance on the page (the part as part of the Whole) is the mirror-image of the equally valid (but

inverse) claim that these appearances are primordially ahistorical traces of stage-performance's essence on the same page (the part as the Whole), then philosophical prudence requires us to locate the misrecognition in theory where the second claim is mistaken for the first. It is precisely here that the gap or essence of the stage as such is repressed. Only by identifying this misrecognition can we see how the presumed objectivity or positivity of the dramatic text reappears as posited, that is, as constituted by the otherness of its own elements on the page. The movement of recognizing this theoretical misrecognition becomes a passage toward encountering the returns of the stage's essence on the page: a return in which 'ellipsis', suppressed in one discourse (e.g. virtual or actual performance), reemerges as a textual element in and for the other (i.e. the stage on the page).

## II. The Dialectic of Taxonomy: Stage-Directions and the Logic of Appearance

### 1. Reading Between Poem and Play

Current taxonomies of stage-directions offer systematic gatherings of the 'functions' they sustain for the realization of an actual and/or virtual performance. Named with regard to their use-value for this realization, stage-directions are set to traverse the gap between what John Webster views as the "play", i.e. the dramatic text as a document designed to be a working "tool" towards production, and the "poem": the dramatic text as a document intended to present a reading text (quoted in Hammond 1997). Evocative of the (dis)junctions between the reader of the play and the reader of the poem, different taxonomies of stage-directions offer different positionalities for the dramatic text with regard to the play/poem distinction, with this happening inside a historical continuum through which taxonomies may decrease, increase, or develop multiple subdivisions. The question of how stage-directions determine stage performance within the manifest terrain of the page demands that we limit our examples to those in which the dramatic text tests the limits of its own formal boundaries; where its taxonomic identity as "dramatic" emerges precisely through the strain placed upon such classifications.

Carlson introduced a brief typology of stage-directions comprised of five types: "attributive," introducing the person speaking; "structural," dividing the play into units of acts and scenes; "locational," those connected to announcements of new scenes/acts by indication of a necessary change in the representation of the stage; "character description," traditionally provided upon a character's entrance or their first appearance on stage (1991) and, finally, what he terms as "performative didascalia", stage-directions that are sporadically embedded in the dialogue text of the play but collectively have to do with the actual happenings on stage. They can be technical, "noting lighting changes, sounds, the movement of objects" or expressive of "the conduct of the actors on stage", and can range from one word, e.g. "exit", "kneels", to an entire pantomimed scene or even in some cases, such as Beckett's *Acts Without Words*, to an entire play. In Carlson's taxonomy, stage-directions are viewed as the 'expression' proper of the dramatic text, digesting the split between page and stage in a proper act of *invitation*: they invite the reader of the play and the reader of the poem to engender the synthetic potential of reading drama in their real *and* virtual performances. With regard to their appearance as such, they are where the dramatic text recognizes itself as play and as poem. So, a locational stage-direction, for example, can be read as such, that is, as a text appropriate for the reader of the poem, or translated (transformed) into auditory or visual channels for the reader of the play, or they can be transposed all the same by the director *verbatim* as a synthesis of both:

...a spectator in the theatre will see lighting representing the sun, an object representing a table, and hear a sound representing the accordion, but he or she will probably still read "The drawing-room in the Prozorov's House. Midday" and "The same. Eight o'clock in the evening" in the program, just as they were in the printed script (73-74).

By virtue of its totality as a play and poem, the dramatic text prescribes the 'mobility' of its stage-directions between the reader/s of both. The taxonomy thus implies that 'nothing' is lost for the dramatic text in what the foregoing dialectic of poem and play determines itself as Reading Drama - the dramatic text apprehended at once as poem and play, as literary inscription and the virtuality of performance- and what we understand to be the function of the stage-direction is mainly an articulation of the progressive and regressive dialectic each reader occupies along the play/poem continuum.<sup>4</sup> This seems for Carlson to be one basis for demystifying what Lina Micheli characterizes as a "paradox" in the appreciation of stage-directions: literary scholars show more interest in stage-directions as opposed to theatre practitioners, even though stage-directions are obviously the most theatrical element in a dramatic text. What seems at first to be a decision by theatre practitioners to 'ignore' a theatrical element such as stage-directions is the response proper to a dramatic text that 'shows' it can be displaced. It acknowledges in its stage-directions the textuality proper to its realization. The gap between page and stage is always already *occupied* by the readers of the dramatic text in the form of stage-directions.

## 2. Issacharoff's Intertextual Split

Perhaps this readerly gap between page and stage is the reason why Carlson discards the "autonomous" agency extrapolated in Issacharoff's alternative taxonomy. Unlike Carlson's taxonomy, where stage-directions render universal the particularities of the dramatic text as play and as poem, Issacharoff's render particular the dramatic text itself as split, by the very fact that it is a text between the two. The dramatic text's explicit invitation for a displacement proper by its reader/s is an implicit declaration of its own split as a text amongst others, i.e. between prefaces, theoretical pronouncements in the form of interviews in the media, or collections of essays. Issacharoff's taxonomy reactivates the gap between the reader of the play and the reader of the poem by locating stage-directions appearing 'autonomously' inside *and* outside of the dramatic 'text'. On the one hand, "autonomous" stage-directions occupy the 'interior' of the dramatic text; they are, as mentioned, "spurious stage-directions, not meant to guide stage presentation, or clarify nuances of the dialogue, or they explicitly contradict the dialogue" (22). Their 'local' autonomy with respect to dialogue is, however, already 'in dialogue' with stage-directions 'outside' of the dramatic text itself. In reading the dramatic text with a preface, for example, the latter being "*a text published with the playscript, addressed specifically to the reader, director and cast of a given play*" (80) we are set to encounter what he identifies as "extratextual" stage-directions, the second type of his taxonomy, which function as a "commentary on the sujet of a play, in contrast to its fabula", such as Racine's preface to *Bérénice* or Pierre Corneille's *Examen* (19). Not only are both types *external* to the fabula of the dramatic text, but their dialogic traversal as "inside" (autonomous) and "outside" (preface) cannot be interpolated as such on stage. The dramatic text is in constant deferral of itself between the play and the poem. His last differential type is the prototype for this

---

<sup>4</sup> The designation "Reading Drama" is used here to name a critical convergence rather than a single method or school. While later formalised as such by narratological accounts, its core intuitions emerge earlier across drama theory and semiotics, particularly in work that treats the dramatic text as simultaneously literary inscription and virtual performance. See, for example, Anne Ubersfeld's conception of the dramatic text as a theatrical machine (*Lire le théâtre*), Keir Elam's account of performance-oriented textual reading (*The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama*), Manfred Pfister's analysis of drama's double communicative situation (*The Theory and Analysis of Drama*).

indigestible excess, aptly named “unreadable” stage-directions which are “couched in technical terminology and intended solely for the stage manager and producer” (22). For Issacharoff, the dramatic text, at its most basic, is a ‘text’ which is destined to reappear as such amongst authorial commentaries, prefaces, forewords, etc. The readers of the play *and* the poem, that is, of the dramatic text *per se*, are also the readers of where it is *not*.

For Issacharoff, stage-directions are thus an appearance of the gap between the reader of the poem and the reader of the play, that is, an appearance of this *inscriptive* gap in the dramatic text as a text amongst others. Issacharoff’s taxonomy brings the dramatic text as one moment in the play/poem dialectic; its inconsistency reappears inside and outside of itself. This displacement of the dramatic text by itself ‘reflects’ the gap between its readers. Carlson’s ‘inclusive’ taxonomy thus places itself for Issacharoff under the generic arc of what he terms “normal” stage-directions, occupying the bottom of his hierarchy, insofar as they are “found in any play and in no way define their implied reader, who could be anybody” (23). The dramatic text’s manifest ‘intratextuality’ is the effect proper of the ‘intertextuality’ of its text. The inscriptive force of writing for the stage disseminates the gap between play and poem beyond the ‘expression’ of the dramatic text itself.

### 3. Hammond and the Speculative Whole

We arrive at what might be called the speculative moment of stage-directions as the prescriptive force *of* the dramatic text itself, that is, as inscriptive of its ‘singularity’ as a text against its parasitical ‘autonomies’ in Hammond’s identification of “the entire script of the play [as] no more than a series of stage-directions, the great majority of which tell the actors what gestures to make with their vocal cords. The words of the text [dialogue], that is, are stage-directions referring to the control of the voice.” (73). Hammond’s description of the dialogue as “stage-directions” relocates the dialectical moment between page and stage in the latter’s mediation of the former *as* a stage-direction: page is the possibility of stage and so page *is* stage at the level of its realization. It completes the passage of one ‘particular’ moment of stage-directions as part of the play to the universal *of* the dramatic text as a play and a poem. Hammond’s stage-directions might seem to have drawn a circular passage towards the ‘totality’ of the dramatic text as a stage-direction: stage-directions initially identified as an appearance (expression) of the totality of the dramatic text as a play and a poem (Carlson), then as an appearance (inscription) of the split of the dramatic text between the two (Issacharoff), are finally sublated as the appearance of the dramatic text *tout court* (as another expression).

What emerges from this tripartite movement is the classical structure of Hegel’s essence as it is opposed to appearance. Carlson’s taxonomy expresses the first moment of reflection, wherein appearance (stage-direction) articulates the internal necessity of essence (the dramatic text as a unity of poem and play). The appearance is not illusory but rather the mode through which essence posits itself, giving the dramatic text a mediating universality. Issacharoff’s intervention corresponds to the moment of external reflection, wherein the fissure between the dramatic text’s elements is revealed through their non-identity and dispersal, an alienation internal to appearance itself. His notion of autonomous and unreadable stage-directions underscores the movement of essence appearing not as itself but through a negativity that destabilizes univocal meaning: the dramatic text no longer appears as a unified whole, but as a structure mediated by its own outsides: para-texts, contradictions, and unreadabilities that interrupt its coherence. This is not an accidental fragmentation, but the very logic of external reflection, in which the dramatic text recognizes itself

only in its displacement across textual thresholds. Hammond's formulation enacts the speculative moment: he sublates the traditional opposition between dialogue and stage-directions by treating both as performative inscriptions, that is, instructions for the embodiment of dramatic action. This move does not erase their formal difference but rather reveals that difference to be internal to the dramatic text's operation as such. Stage-directions initially identified as an appearance (expression) of the dramatic text's totality (Carlson), then as an inscription of its split between inner and outer (Issacharoff), are finally sublated by Hammond as the speculative identity of the dramatic text itself: a structure whose unity consists in the performative contradiction between its parts. In Hegelian terms, this is the moment when the contradiction between essence and appearance no longer negates unity but constitutes it. The dramatic text becomes what it is only by way of this internal division, and thus, stage-direction reflects the dramatic text to itself as a totality structured by its very gaps.

The nuance in this triplicity is that the supplementary passage taken, dialogue as already stage-direction(s), has itself changed the qualifying traits of the destination in question. To heed Hegel's "lesson" seriously, the problem here is not of the dramatic text as a play and poem that is 'finally' traversed as such (as stage-directions), but of its appearance in appearance as "in" and "out" of dialogue in the dramatic text itself: it reintroduces (another "voice" of ) stage as a gap on the page between *itself and the other* (voiceless) stage-directions. This is not a resolution but a redoubling, appearance appearing as appearance in its difference from essence, where the dramatic text becomes, in its very fragmentation, the speculative identity of its form. This form of a negative repetition is exposed by Hammond's own taxonomy, which only *populates* that of Carlson, exposing a newly sublated dialectic between the 'in' and 'out' in terms of control of the vocal cords. It 'returns' in Hammond's "speech-prefixes" (equivalent to Carlson's directions of "attribution") (75), "structural divisions within the play" (equivalent to Carlson's "structural directions") (77) and what he terms as "formal directions" (equivalent to Carlson's "performative didascalia"), "which relate essentially to whatever the words leave out, to the control of all those muscles of the actor's body other than the mouth and tongue which are busy fulfilling the rest of the script's directions i.e. "delivering the lines" (74). (The other three types of directions are "directions to get on and off stage" (73), "directions involving properties and effects" (73-74) and "directions implicit in the dialogue" (75). The dramatic text, in its final sublation, does not cancel the gap but preserves it as its condition of possibility - appearing, once again, as the site where stage-direction reflects the dramatic text to itself. In Žižekian terms, this is not the closure of the dialectic but the emergence of a torsion within the synthesis itself, a point where the dramatic text appears only by failing to appear as one, staging its unity as the trace of its own internal division.

#### **4. Naming, Repetition, and the Resistance to Taxonomy**

If the taxonomies posited above reveal a basic tripartite sublation of the dramatic text along a path of 'negativity', i.e. stage-directions as the rupture (appearance) of the dramatic text between page and stage, then it is clear enough why their different determinations are born from this very lack of integration. Naming stage-directions for their functions on the stage, that is, as a matter of causality in the act of naming, is more and less than the taxonomical act of naming: less because it accounts for one relation between page and stage and more because it multiplies the account of its traversal. It articulates itself by transposing its 'one' relation as a problem for its 'multiple' determinations. In this sense, Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, for example, makes visible how naming stage-directions

exceeds taxonomy. The distinction proper of a realization of the dramatic text between “property and effects” (Hammond) and “locational directions” (Carlson) appears only as a gap in articulation in the play’s opening stage-directions, where the house and forestage are not simply named as properties but expanded into effects of sound and horizon: “A melody is heard, played upon a flute. It is small and fine, telling of grass and trees and the horizon. The curtain rises.” Here naming is already staging, and the taxonomy falters at the point where a single designation multiplies its determinations.

In the same vein is the distinction between Hammond’s “implicit in the dialogue” stage-directions and Carlson’s “character description” which loses much of its force most significantly in Elizabethan drama. J.L. Styan in *Shakespeare’s Stagecraft* reminds us of the moment when Romeo and Friar Laurence are waiting for Juliet and the friar says, “Here comes the lady. O, so light a foot / Will ne’er wear out the everlasting flint” (2.5.16-17) (53). In the friar’s words the “character description” assumes the role of an “implied” direction for the reader of the poem and the reader of the play alike. Also, Carlson’s own distinction between “structural” and “locational” will suffer in one-act or one-scene plays where there is no change of scenery and so the description expected thereof becomes at once locational and structural. Even “the fictional frame of the drama,” outside of which Issacharoff’s “extratextual” stage-directions are set to comment on the sujet of the play (as opposed to its fabula), is admittedly “like rules [,] made to be broken”. In the opening night of *Ubu roi* Alfred Jarry performed his foreword on stage, offering “a literal instance of “saying beforehand” (praefatio)... thereby discarding the regular non fictionality of the authorial channel”. By fictionalizing himself Jarry becomes no more than “a fictional character, framing the rest of the fictional world” (81).

The taxonomical *force* of stage-directions, exercised in the ‘function’ each posits for the realization of the dramatic text, and in the positionality the function assumes on the page, is thus the primordially functioning gap between page and stage which *allows* for such naming in their very appearance on the former. If there is a taxonomical ‘essence’ of stage that could be inferred from its institutional counterpart, it would be less in the act of naming by which the stage realizes itself as the object named than in the retroactive effect of ‘naming’ itself: what is “locational” or “structural” about stage-directions is the effect of the rupture of the dramatic text between page and stage that *must* be named (repressed) to transpose itself into a performance, actual or virtual. The taxonomical act does not capture a pre-existing essence but responds to a necessary gap in appearance that appears within appearance itself. There is a value of ‘equivalence’ in such taxonomic functions which does not point to an essential difference in the linguistic content of stage-direction categories, but rather to their shared participation in a logic that resists taxonomy altogether. Their essence lies in their capacity to undermine, through their very appearance, the stability of the taxonomic gesture that seeks to fix them in place. Their essence lies in their covert act of resistance to taxonomy itself. What appears as a functional designation - “stage-direction” - is itself a symptomatic (dis)location within the dramatic text, an effect of its immanent contradiction. Unless the essence of stage is understood as the appearing act of acquiring a text on page prior to any attempted taxonomy, the former’s appearance will continue to remain supplementary to the dramatic text, either reduced to a set of semantic games or slipping altogether into the machinery of narratology.

### III. Performative Fictions and the Fiction of Performance

#### 1. Austin's Exclusion and Searle's Recipe

In *The Logical Status of Fictional Discourse* (1974) Searle turns to stage-directions following Austin's ancillary observations of the "infelicitous" type of pragmatic contexts. Speech-act theory acknowledges that performative utterances are heir to certain kinds of ill, most evidently in fictional contexts such as in a novel or a play:

a performative utterance will, for example, be in a *peculiar way* hollow or void if said by an actor on the stage, or if introduced in a poem, or spoken in soliloquy...Language in such circumstances is in special ways — intelligibly — used not seriously, but in ways *parasitic* upon its normal use—ways which fall under the doctrine of the *etiolations* of language. All this we are *excluding* from consideration (Emphasis in original)" (22).

For Searle, Austin's linguistic framework struggles with the conditions responsible for excluding fictional utterance from the non-fictional. To Austin's general hypothesis of simultaneity wherein the performative act insists, implicitly or explicitly, in all utterances, Searle proposes an epistemological addendum: to what extent the 'revocation' of the sincerity principle by fictional utterance is simultaneously a *sincere* act of revocation. Nowhere else has the dramatic text *and* its prescriptive force of stage-directions been so compelling, something to which Searle, as we will see, gives considerable thought. Austin's gesture of excluding fiction from the "felicity" conditions of speech-act theory is first tested by Searle's closer inquiry into what he terms the "logical status" of fictional discourse. For Searle, the author cannot be held accountable for the truth of the text's assertive statements. Fiction suspends a priori the rules of "sincerity" immanent to real life utterances. Taking third-person narration as the standard type of fictional utterance, Searle reverts to the notion of "non-deceptive pretence" as a representative act of representation: "the author of a work of fiction pretends to perform a series of illocutionary acts, normally of the representative type" (325). In freeing itself from Austin's sincerity principle, fiction already distinguishes itself from the pathologies of lying, a distinction Austin's theory cannot properly sustain.<sup>5</sup>

This notion of "non-deceptive pretence" will remain the constant representative act of representation in Searle's types of fiction, each submitting to their own laws. First-person narratives and theatrical plays are "special cases" only with regards to their non-deceptive forms. In first-person fiction such as Arthur Conan Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes* stories the author is "not in fact pretending to make assertions, he is *pretending to be* John Watson" (TLS 328). As for drama, Searle seems to build a whole edifice upon what Austin only includes as a brief but revealing example: "We may put performative verbs in 'stage-directions' ('welcomes'), titles ('Warning!'), parentheses, and

---

<sup>5</sup> As Northrop Frye muses, "an autobiography coming into a library would be classified as non-fiction if the librarian believed the author, and as fiction if she thought he was lying. It is difficult to see what use such a distinction can be to a literary critic" (quoted in Ohmann 5).

so on" (86). In this passage, Austin notes how performatives appear in non-standard grammatical forms, not just in full declarative sentences, but also in abbreviated or embedded forms, such as stage-directions (or road signs. i.e. "STOP", headings, or editorial notes). This marginal but suggestive aside becomes, for Searle, the key to reevaluating the entire dramatic text as a kind of illocutionary act in its own right: "it is not so much the author who is doing the pretending but the characters in the actual performance" (32). Quoting the initial stage-direction of John Galsworthy's play *The Silver Box*, Searle then contrasts it with a passage from Iris Murdoch's *The Red and the Green* before working his way up to his famed "recipe" metaphor:

Murdoch...tells us a story; in order to do that, she pretends to make a series of assertions about people in Dublin in 1916. What we visualize when we read the passage is a man pottering about his garden thinking about horses. But when Galsworthy writes his play, he does not give us a series of pretended assertions about a play. He gives us a series of directions as to how things are actually to happen on stage when the play is performed. When we read the passage from Galsworthy we visualize a stage, the curtain rises, the stage is furnished like a dining room, and so on. That is, it seems to me the illocutionary force of the text of a play is like the illocutionary force of a recipe for baking a cake. It is a set of instructions for how to do something, namely how to perform the play. 328-29)

Searle's distinction comfortably articulates the dramatic text as having a 'family resemblance' to speech-act theory. One can note, almost instantly, how his expansion of Austin's sidenote to the totality of the dramatic text inflates the role of stage-directions in relation to the fictionality of its framing text. If we follow Searle's recipe to heart, the dramatic text does not include instructions on how to "visualize a stage, the curtain..." but instructions for "how to...perform a play". In his attempt to contest Austin's exclusion of fiction from serious considerations, the dramatic text's "virtual performance" is quietly displaced. The "recipe" metaphor might have the elegance of parsimony, but its implications are stranger than Searle allows. A recipe functions as a set of imperatives leading to a determinate result: the cake. But in the case of a dramatic text, the result is not pre-given. The performance is not merely the effect of instruction, but its retroactive cause. The dramatic text appears to guide performance, but only because performance is already assumed, already staged, within the fictionality of the text. In other words, the apparent priority of instruction masks the ontological priority of appearance: performance, or its virtual trace, is what allows the instructions to appear as such in the first place. This is not a merely chronological claim, but a structural one, the dramatic text simulates instruction by retroactively staging what it presupposes as given. One can give a recipe for something that was never done before and would still come to light. This is not the case with the dramatic text. There is no "outside" to the text from which instructions could be issued; the instruction is fictional too. The play tells us how to perform it only because it performs itself in the very act of telling.

## **2. Illocution, Pretence, and the Reflexive Subject**

While Searle's recipe metaphor may invite us to dismiss his account of the dramatic text too hastily, his theory of non-deceptive pretence, once re-articulated on its own terms, proves unexpectedly

illuminating for thinking through the ontological status of fictional discourse and, more particularly, stage-directions. Initially, Searle seems to sublimate Austin's sincerity principle by way of another 'contract' such that the speaker remains, in fiction, just as sincere. So long as language use is viewed holistically in its felicitous circulation amongst its interlocuters, the antithesis of fiction will remain that of actuality, not morality, precisely because there is no intention to deceive. What is traversed in fiction is the ethical itself, from sincerity presupposed to sincerity posited.

Searle's "true" world of fiction is one which he asks us to imagine as structured by "horizontal rules" and "vertical rules", conventions of language and reality, respectively, that intersect precisely where they exceed the speaker's semantic competence (p. 326). The fictional utterance remains linguistic insofar as it preserves its literal meaning and becomes extralinguistic insofar as it suspends the rules that would ordinarily commit that meaning to reality. As he puts it: "In the terminology of Speech Acts, the illocutionary act is pretended, but the utterance act is real... the author pretends to perform illocutionary acts by way of actually performing phonetic and phatic acts." (p. 327) The reversal at work here is that the locutionary act no longer merely abstracts constative content from the illocutionary act (e.g., "there is a world in such and such way"); rather, it becomes performative of fictional sincerity by abstracting from the general laws of language. This abstraction does not violate the semantic code, otherwise it would result in nonsense<sup>6</sup>, nor does it violate the contractual or truth-functional content, otherwise it would constitute lying. Instead, it operates within a liminal space: one that is semantically coherent yet ontologically suspended, allowing fiction to function as a simulation of performative acts without their real-world consequences.

Searle's extra-linguistic suspension happening in and out of language as fiction exposes a paradox which turns his "pretence hypothesis" into a marking procedure which makes way for the 'other' appearances of the interlocuters of fiction, e.g. Watson. If in first-person narration the author pretends to be Watson, then what is the 'truth-condition' binding Watson to the world to which he belongs?<sup>7</sup> Conan Doyle pretends to be Watson, who appears to 'assert' within a fictional world whose link to reality has been bracketed. Watson speaks with the form of sincerity, but the illocutionary force is simulated; neither Conan Doyle nor Watson occupies the world being described, yet both appear bound by its coherence. This is where Searle's suspension becomes problematic: fiction preserves the surface structure of speech acts while detaching them from the ontological commitments that define ordinary communication. The coherence of Watson's world is not generated by a speaker who occupies that world, but by the simulated constancy of the world itself, a constancy constructed by Conan Doyle's pretence, which functions not as deception, but as a recursive projection of sincerity.

---

<sup>6</sup> Searle's remark reproaches accounts conferring on the writer of fiction a distinctive repertoire of illocutionary acts such as telling a story or writing a novel; "...if the sentences in a work of fiction were used to perform some completely different speech acts from those determined by their literal meaning, they would have to have some other meaning... That view is at least *prima facie* an impossible view since if it were true it would be impossible for anyone to understand a work of fiction without learning a new set of meanings for all the words and other elements contained in the work of fiction, and since any sentence whatever can occur in a work of fiction, in order to have the ability to read any work of fiction, a speaker of the language would have to learn the language all over again, since every sentence in the language would have both a fictional and non-fictional meaning" (324)

<sup>7</sup> This is particularly problematic for modal semantics, as it fails to account for the systematic truth-conditions that fictional statements can exhibit across their possible worlds. It reduces fiction to a pragmatic anomaly rather than a structurally 'true' mode of discourse.

The dramatic text clarifies this logic further: what is the truth-condition binding Hamlet to the stage-direction "Hamlet dies"? Here, Hamlet, like Watson, becomes subject to a recursive logic of fiction, where the dramatist pretends to construct a self who in turn pretends to act freely within a world whose every gesture is already inscribed. Hamlet does not "die" in any ontological sense but performs death within a world that has already accounted for his absence. Searle's "pretence" thus offers a controlled way of naming this structural split - between the form of sincerity and its lack of referential uptake - but in grounding it in pretence, it ultimately avoids the deeper problem it exposes. In both prose and drama, the fiction does not seem to dissolve sincerity but multiplies its masks, generating the appearance of illocutionary commitment where none is required, precisely because the illusion of truth must still be maintained.<sup>8</sup> In both cases, the speech act is hollowed out *and* sustained simultaneously, not because it fails to refer, but because it structurally displaces the referent into a pre-scripted form.

It follows that confining pretence in drama exclusively to its *dramatis personae* appears as a strategic manoeuvre. "Pseudoperformance", Searle's preferred term, becomes, by his own admission, the "archetype" of his framework. At its face value, the prefix "pseudo-" and the root "-performance" elide the empty space (-) grafting each to its respective discourse, i.e. fictional vis-à-vis non-fictional utterances, which leads to his first conclusion: "an author of fiction pretends to perform illocutionary acts which he is not in fact performing" (325). It seems after all that fictional pretence is just a sincere act of repetition of the illocutionary where one illocutionary act is emptied by another. Emptied from its real-life discourse, the illocutionary overcomes this same emptiness in fiction. His first conclusion thus begs the question: is it not retroactively produced by the very distinction it draws between fiction and non-fiction? If pretence appears self-reflexive in fiction, i.e. pretence *in* fiction, then it must be the case that fiction remains as such only insofar as it distances itself from within *in line* with reality: Conan Doyle can pretend to be John Watson only insofar as he continues to be Conan Doyle *for us* in Watson's utterances, regardless of his pretences. This allows us to repeat Chris Hutchison's concern; if Searle's conception of the normal use of language is that of representing objective facts about the world (that may or may not align), to what extent is 'telling a story' *not* already a normal use of language giving statements about what the actual world could have been if it was in the form of a story? (1984)

Just as we may name a speech act of an individual in such a way as to indicate our recognition of that speech act - 'He asked me a question,' 'He made me a promise,' 'He insulted my wife,'- so we may do the same for narration- 'He told me a story.' Similarly, just as certain things are 'promisable' or 'askable' or 'insulting' because certain conditions for the making of promises or the asking of questions or the throwing of insults are fulfilled, so certain things may be 'tellable' (19)

---

<sup>8</sup> This structural suspension of illocutionary force applies equally to third-person narration, where the shift is not in kind but in perspective. In such cases, the author no longer pretends to speak as a character, but rather to assert descriptions about fictional individuals and events. The same paradox holds: the narrative voice appears to make truth-apt claims within a world that no one occupies, and to which no speaker is committed. The illusion of assertion is sustained - sentences take the form of ordinary declaratives -but no actual speaker stands behind them with illocutionary intent. The act is performed "as if" it were real, even though its referential link to the actual world remains suspended.

Hutchison's stylistic abstraction of Searle's "pretence hypothesis" (9), in a temporal gesture, "He told me a story", bespeaks its fragility by way of another intervention. This becomes clear in Searle's "second conclusion". "Pretend", Searle argues, is

an intentional verb: that is, it is one of those verbs which contain the concept of intention built into it. One cannot truly be said to have pretended to do something unless one intended to pretend to do it. So, our first conclusion leads immediately to our second conclusion: the identifying criterion for whether or not a text is a work of fiction must of necessity lie in the illocutionary intentions of the author. There is no textual property, syntactical or semantic, that will identify a text as a work of fiction (325).

But suppose a dramatist, say Ibsen, inserted at the outset of one of his plays a stage-direction reading "This is to be performed." If anything, this would only heighten the suspicion, particularly within Theatre Studies, that the drama is not as inherently performative as it appears to be. At best, it would make the dramatist seem oddly blunt or even cynical, as if pointing out something the audience already understands but prefers not to hear; at worst, it could cast doubt on the fictional nature of his other plays, unsettling the basic trust that allows a play to function as a believable world on stage. Why would Ibsen risk misfiring by simply rendering his intention explicit? If the dramatic text already operates, as Searle suggests, like a recipe for performance, then stating that fact outright should be redundant. Yet the act of making it explicit disrupts the illusion that sustains theatrical fiction.

The answer lies in the determinate negativity of saying. Žižek describes this procedure as "the reflexive movement which retroactively posits its own presuppositions" (258). When the dialectical subject speaks, presupposing an objective world in which to perform their utterance, the act itself converts this 'given' reality into something 'produced', a posited, virtual world that enables the utterance to take place. In this gesture, the appearance of a stable, pre-existing background is not a condition for speech, but its effect. The 'objective' world is constituted only retroactively, through the utterance itself. Essence does not precede appearance but arises through it, as the illusion of a prior ground fabricated by the subject's performative intervention. This empty space is not a neutral stage upon which the subject speaks, but a structural void the subject must fill with projected intention. To be believed, the subject must adopt the position of the other, speaking as if from the place of recognition. Intention thus becomes legible only by assuming that the intersubjective conditions for its reception are already in place. Speech is not merely expressive, but constitutive: it creates the very space in which it seems to be received. Žižek finds in 'apology' a good example:

Recall the paradox of the process of apologizing: if I hurt someone by making an unkind remark, the proper thing for me to do is to offer a sincere apology, and the proper thing for her to do is to say something like, "Thanks, I appreciate it, but I wasn't offended, I knew you didn't mean it, so you really owe me no apology!" The point, of course, is that despite this final result, one still has to go through the entire process of offering the apology: "you owe me no apology" can only be said after I have offered an apology, so that although, formally, "nothing happens;" and the offer of apology is proclaimed unnecessary, something is gained at the end of the process (perhaps, even, a friendship is saved) (42).

The constative dimension of language would suggest that the apology is unnecessary, no harm was truly done. But this apparent superfluity is only intelligible after the apology is made. The illocutionary force of the apology does not reside in the propositional content ("I'm sorry") but in the act of offering it, which constitutes the shared ethical space retroactively. This act functions as an empty gesture, one that only works if its necessity remains implicit, embedded in the speaker's assumption of the other's position. The same applies to the play text: a stage direction like "he enters" carries force only if the theatrical frame is already in place, but that frame is itself posited by the very act of instruction. Just as the apology creates the space of its own necessity, so too do stage-directions install the conditions of their own legibility retroactively. In both cases, the gesture does not follow context, it manufactures it. This reverses Searle's position: the apology is not simply a locutionary act with a deferred illocutionary layer; rather, the illocutionary emerges only through the performative gap that the utterance itself stages. If this implicit structure is made too explicit, if the speaker were to announce their intention too directly, or theatricalize their sincerity, the gesture collapses. The other can no longer occupy the role silently presupposed by the act, and the address fails. This, again, highlights a reversal of Searle's model: fiction does not pretend to perform illocutionary acts; rather, it reveals how all such acts rely on a constitutive absence that only speech itself can fill. The gesture succeeds not because it faithfully transmits intention, but because it retroactively posits the very conditions under which it could have mattered.

It should now be clearer why Searle's formula of 'pretence' ultimately slips back into the very structure of reality it aims to suspend. If there is such a thing as "pretence without pretence" in fiction, it is only because pretence is constitutive of reality itself. The subject's initial speech act does not presuppose a fully formed world but rather posits it retroactively. What appears as an objective reality is thus the effect of a formal conversion: reality is produced, not given, and the subject's act of speaking installs it as if it had always been there. This founding gesture functions as an imitation with no original, a performance that conceals its performative origin. It is, in this sense, a 'pretence' that *refuses* to appear as such. Crucially, this act is not grounded in the subject's semantic competence, which could be suspended or restored, but in the gap that opens between the act of saying (illocution) and the rules that make it intelligible (locution). What Searle designates as the vertical suspension of sincerity in fiction is in fact a structural feature of all utterance: the semantic 'in-itself' of the locutionary act only gains its illocutionary force 'for-itself' when situated in an intersubjective context that it itself helps to constitute. There is, in both fiction and nonfiction, play and poem, a "first act" that is neither simply linguistic nor entirely extra-linguistic, but rather the appearance of coherence grounded in a constitutive fissure.

### **3. Staging the Gap: The Recursive Fiction of Stage-directions**

The gap just mentioned, between illocution and locution, acts differently in fiction and non-fiction. Instead of dismissing Searle's intentional content as an external reflection of reality without effectivity - as something simply given - one should rather reflect on what now appears superfluous: how the 'pretence without pretence' of semantic laws, or of language use in general, reappears for Searle as if it were exclusive to fiction. The thread of this problematic leads naturally back to Searle's paradoxical "recipe" metaphor in the dramatic text and its ontological contingencies. By assigning "non-deceptive pretence" exclusively to actors - at the receiving end of the dramatist's "recipe" -

Searle implicitly excludes that recipe from the fiction in which it operates as a performative gesture. Now, Searle seems to *empty one fiction from within another*, enacting a structural split between the fiction that is enacted and the fiction that frames it. This recalls the instability between the virtual and actual subject of speech-acts: if stage-directions tell the actors what to do, “like instructions for baking a cake,” what is the effectivity proper to the encompassing fiction in which they are embedded, yet from which they are strangely detached?

Here we should make a final return to Searle’s inflation of Austin’s notion of “stage-direction” to encompass the whole of the dramatic text. What Searle fails to see is how his totalizing gesture is already blocked, caught between two instances of the same fiction (virtual performance): namely, the stage-directions and the rest of the dramatic dialogue. The crux lies in the dialectical movement embedded in Searle’s “recipe”: the attempt to reconcile the ontological divide between page and stage ends up revealing the gap of the latter as structural to the former. The stage is virtually more than it actually is, and this ‘more’ is already ahead of the stage-directions as either ‘fictional’ or ‘instructional’. This atemporal instant of the stage thus elicits a final question: on what grounds does Searle’s synthetic figure - stage-directions treated as a recipe - pretend to be only instructional?

The leap here is not only one of sublating stage, but also, in doing so, of releasing it - as actuality - from the multiple determinations it has acquired on the page as stage-directions. In Hegelese, the synonymy between *aufheben* (to sublimate) and *befreien* (to liberate) captures this immanent countermovement, where the ‘substance’ of the stage is liberated precisely through its mediated determinations<sup>9</sup>. This movement reflects the tension between appearance and essence, where essence only emerges through its own appearing, and in being sublated, appearance both negates and preserves itself as part of that emergence. The contractual “recipe” metaphor applied to stage-directions thus involves a misrecognition: it treats the stage as both the sum of what stage-directions determine, and at the same time, as nothing to do with that. This is the paradox of an emptying that occurs in the very act of sublation. The stage is stripped of its virtual density the moment it is formalized as in line with a recipe. Hence, stage-directions have appeared to Searle as “instructional” only through this emptying - through the subtraction of the fictional complexity they inhabit in the same dramatic text. That is, the reduction of stage-directions to a recipe misrepresents their role within virtual performance itself.

The problem with Searle thus seems ultimately to be less of a matter of interpretive misstep than one of constitutive violation. Is not an actor - implementing the dramatist’s “recipe” as Searle contends - confronting the stage audience with the gesture “I am acting,” as close to their stage as the unreliable narrator in Borges’s brief tale “The Wizard Postponed” (1933) is to the act of narration itself? In “The Self-Deconstruction of Convention” (1994), Jean-Pierre Dupuy observes how Borges’s tale tests the commensurability of a fictional contract with its own abrogation. What we initially take

---

<sup>9</sup> Žižek deepens the dialectical resonance of *Aufhebung* (sublation) and *Befreien* (liberation) by linking them to *Ablegen* -to discard, shed, or even excrete. In the preface to *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, he notes the synonymy between these verbs, suggesting that dialectical progress involves not just elevation but a kind of purging or mortification: the shedding of immediacy, the reduction of life’s richness to a “grey” conceptual skeleton. This gesture, akin to excretion, is not lamented but celebrated as the spiritual power of abstraction-where the subject liberates itself by discarding the fullness of empirical life in favor of essential determination.

to be the “real” outcome of Don Illan’s magical assistance - namely, the dean of Santiago’s steady ascent from bishop to pope - reveals itself to have been a staged illusion. At each level of promotion, the dean fails to repay Illan, until he suddenly finds himself back in the magician’s underground cell where they had first met, “so taken aback with shame that he did not know what to say” (88). The magic ‘trick’ exposes the *substance* of narration at the very point where that narration folds in on itself. What proves true about narration is not its content but the pretence inscribed in the narrator’s act of “writing... which collapses pretending to pretend and really pretending” (ibid.).

Yet this (in)digestion, this narrative reversal, can only appear as such through the emptying of one frame by another from within. This emptying is not a deletion, but a recursive overwrite: the frame that appears to dissolve the illusion does not cancel the fiction but condenses it. We discover the fictionality of the earlier frame only through the narrative operation of the later one, which exposes the initial illusion as structurally constitutive. Dupuy captures this movement in the narrator’s pseudo-confession “I lied,” which coincides with the dean’s moment of enlightenment: “It is when the storyteller gives us to understand that he has fooled us and thus pretends to tell us the truth (regarding his lie), that he in fact does fool us. And it is when he pretends to fool us, that he in fact tells us the truth” (ibid.). The constitutive “truth” of the story only emerges in relation to an earlier version posing as a ‘lie’. The realization that “what we took to be true was only fiction—and the fiction is the same in each case”, is only possible after the narrator’s reversal, that is, when “What we as readers took to be true on the inside of the encompassing fiction was only fiction” (ibid.). In this way, Borges’s recursive fiction achieves what Searle’s account cannot: it reveals that fiction’s truth does not lie in mimetic coherence, but in the formal dislocation that allows one frame to devour another.

Searle’s own emptying of “non-deceptive” stage-directions from the broader “non-deceptive” field of the dramatic text, calls for a corrective appropriate to fiction’s own structure: an act-before-act that recursively empties itself. What happens when the simultaneity of “non-deception” in Searle’s recipe collapses - or fails to collapse - on itself? In giving stage-directions, the dramatist appears to respond to the stage with this part of the dramatic text, when in fact he/she responds with that dramatic text of which the stage-directions are only a part. (This is, indeed, the crux of the dramatist-director dilemma: how far are stage-directions intrinsic to the dramatist’s intention?) What appears as stage direction lies within an encompassing stage-directions, such that what we take to be “true” of the former is also “true” of the latter. In this precise sense, the dramatist pretends to lie about one role of the dramatic text by exposing the role of the dramatic text *tout court*. For his part, he can say: “I am pretending,” and in that very pretence, he tells the ‘truth’. That is, he appears to mark the onset of theatricality through a distinct layer of instruction. He pretends to appeal to the stage through stage-directions alone, when in fact it is the entire dramatic fiction, of which those directions are a part, that already gestures toward performance. The apparent separation between stage-directions and dialogue is itself a *fictionalized* disavowal, one that installs the stage as if from without, while remaining entirely within the fiction of the play.

It is therefore true that the addressee of the dramatic text is the stage, but this relation has already been captured on the page as both a rule and its violation. The split between page and stage is not merely epistemological; it is inscribed within the logic of the stage itself, such that the stage is both recovered and negated through the gap opened by the dramatic text between its own constituents. *The empty space of the dramatic text qua appearance is “true” for the stage, despite the latter’s pretences.* This self-rupture of stage-directions, between stage-directions and the encompassing

stage-directions, constitutes the structure of the dramatic text's "lie" as its truth. The totality of the stage, within both stage-directions and their encompassing stage-directions, is also the fictional substance between the two. The "non-deceptive" here lies neither in the illocutionary force of a performative recipe, nor in the contractual logic of storytelling. Rather, it lies in the dramatist's act of re-reading the stage as their own text: only by pretending to lie about their role in the dramatic text is the actual role of the dramatic text disclosed.

Searle's "pretence hypothesis" is hardly final when it comes to the 'empty space' of the stage - a space that remains thoroughly constipated, by other forms of pretence from his successors, following the institutional proliferation of his "Logical Status" of fiction. Whether fiction is understood mimetically - "a literary work purportedly imitates (or reports) a series of speech acts, which in fact have no other existence" (Ohmann 14) - or as imitative of factual writing (as when novelists pretend to write autobiographies, memoirs, and the like) (Herrnstein-Smith 1978), or even as consisting of "pseudo-sentences," iconic rather than referential (Martínez-Bonati 78–79), the dramaturgical residue of Searle's 'recipe' has largely been sidelined. This bracketing of what still appears to be a 'recipe' may have been precisely what speech-act theories of fiction needed in order to render their performances presentable, locatable somewhere where the stage continues to disappear into the page. But not so for narratology. A 'recipe' would obstruct the narrative journey, especially if the dramatic text could be one. Perhaps, then, one might share Eugene O'Neill's seat for its insight:

I hardly ever go to the theatre... although I read all the plays I can get. I don't go to the theatre because I can always do a better production in my mind... Is not *Hamlet*, seen in the dream theater of the imagination as one reads, a greater play than *Hamlet* interpreted even by a perfect production? (quoted in Jahn 660)

#### **IV. Narrative Disjunctions: Stage-directions and the Parallax of Drama**

##### **1. From Implied Directions to Narrative Autonomy**

Stage-direction's access to narrative theory is not an easy one. Consideration of stage-directions has gradually been led to pose the question of whether drama admits of a narrative voice. Historically, the advent of what have started to circulate in Poetic Drama studies as "narrative stage-directions" only reflected the chronological development of the cultural field of drama existing in both of its forms, on page and on stage<sup>10</sup>. While the earliest treatment of stage-directions as ancillary - as not yet elevated to "the dignity of the verse" - coincided with the advent of the printing press, their gradual acquisition of something like a fictive status, as 'narrative', coincided with the evolution of stage business in modern times. In Elizabethan theatre, when theatrical space had not yet lent itself to complex scenic design, dramatists had fewer qualms about embedding stage-directions in the

---

<sup>10</sup> "The field of cultural production is a space of positions and position-takings, in which the position of each agent is defined by its relative position in the structure of the field, and by the volume and composition of the capital (economic, cultural, social, symbolic) they possess" (Bourdieu, 1993, pp. 30–34).

spoken lines, as “implied stage-directions.” The dramatic text stated the terms of its own staging, by means of which the dramatis personae projected an ‘imaginary’ *mise en scène* on a largely empty stage. In *The Old Wives Tale* we encounter sporadic implied stage-directions of this sort: “wee haue lost our way in the woodes,” “Vpon these chalkie cliffs of Albion,” or “Why dost thou gaze vpon these stately trees” (79). This ceased to be the case in modern drama. The development of stage business and the concomitant dissemination of the playscript beyond the dramatist’s direct control led the latter to rely ever more on the power of their literary expression(s). George Bernard Shaw traces this gradual displacement of Elizabethan “implied stage-directions” to the margins of the read playscript:

[L]iterary treatment is much more needed by modern plays than by Shakespear's [sic], because in his time the acting of plays was only imperfectly differentiated from the declamation of verses; and descriptive or narrative recitation did what is now done by scenery, furniture, and stage business. Anyone reading the mere dialogue of an Elizabethan play understands all but half a dozen unimportant lines of it without difficulty; whilst many modern plays, highly successful on the stage, are not merely unreadable but positively unintelligible without visible stage business (5).

In Shaw’s mapping, we can notice how the dissemination of theatre space into “scenery,” “furniture,” “stage business,” etc., from their ordinary spoken lines, could not but resuscitate a ‘visual’ appearance on the dramatic-page apparatus. What first appeared as a stage direction anchored narratively in dialogue (later projecting a *mise en scène* on an *actual* *mise en scène*, however simple) started to appear somewhere else - outside of dialogue - on the dramatic page. If this later appearance is contaminated by the literary - by the power of the dramatist’s literary expression vis-à-vis the newly acquired creative autonomy of modern stage business - it follows that we are not just talking about some ‘visual’ transmutation of stage-directions on the dramatic page, but also of the contingent ‘verbal’ exchange between this spatial shift in coordinates and the overall literariness of the dramatic text. The implication of this for the dramatic text exceeds what might appear as a topological instance of fictional/non-fictional forces - of the relationship between the ‘formally’ changing appearance of the dramatic text and the contended literary ‘power’ between the dramatist and his stage addressee. The spatiality at work between the visual and verbal on the page will come to address the larger question of ‘temporality’ in fiction, the modalities of which have been unevenly distributed between drama and epic at least since Aristotle: one set in a notional present, the other in the past; one presents, the other recounts.

## 2. Temporal Zones and the Story/Discourse Divide

The increasing urgency of the question of ‘time’ in fiction to the newly appearing modern narrative stage-directions might indeed have only just begun to take theoretical shape in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. With the structuralist distinction between story (*histoire*) and discourse (*discours*) in place, Patricia Suchy notices how Issacharoff’s “rupture” of the “referential bond” (discussed above) between dialogue and stage-directions - understood as constitutive of the latter’s

autonomous 'narrative' role - misrepresents the chronology of dramatic experience. Narrative stage-directions appear as "autonomous" not because of a 'readerly' rupture which they inflict upon such a "bond" at a specific moment in actual performance (as Issacharoff seems to argue), but by reason of an atemporal referentiality which they sustain toward such performance in the first place. Issacharoff's 'bond' dissolves if we must first read the fiction in which stage-directions appear precisely as narrative.

When Oscar Wilde, in *An Ideal Husband*, writes in a stage direction - about women he initially describes as being "of exquisite fragility" (5) - that "Watteau would have loved to paint them" (6), there is something of the 'total' theatrical gesture already present in this loose invocation of the French Rococo painter. It is a gesture capable of appearing with the actual performance from the very beginning. The loose referentiality of narrative stage-directions resists the possibility of being "reject[ed] outright by the director", if they must first read it (as per Suchy's notion of a readerly "trace"). When we read a dramatic text, the 'readerly' rupture of the "referential bond" between dialogue and didascalia is transposed into the a priori readerly relationship between the director and the stage-directions themselves. This is what leads Suchy to conclude that: "*The referential bond between didascalia and dialogue cannot be limited to the immediate zone in which they come into contact in the script*" (emphasis in original, 76). If narrative stage-directions seem to risk disappearing in the present sequence of an actual performance, it may be because they have already been *thickened* with the presentation thereof. The enactment is already thickened by the director's prior reading of the entire text, staged through a consciousness that has absorbed and anticipated the whole.

Suchy's dissolution of Issacharoff's "immediate zone" proves replete with narratological presuppositions. The primary premise is that plays, like novels, are essentially stories. Whether Wilde's "Watteau" appears more 'readerly' than other stage-directions is beside the point. The point is that if it can reach the stage, it is most probably because it can be read like any other stage direction, even if not so explicitly performed. Despite Issacharoff's and Suchy's shared recognition of the 'zone' between dialogue and stage-directions - which one represses and the other releases in relation to actual performance - for Suchy, stage-directions are ultimately as readable as the rest of the dramatic text. Narrative stage-directions, *alongside the rest of the text*, would seamlessly integrate with what John Brenkman reminds us is the classical convention of fictional storytelling, i.e., "invention and recounting" (90). When I read a story, not only do I know that what I read is fictive, an invention, but I also accept that the events of the story are recounted. I read about a past as if it existed. Storytelling is effectively a linguistic enactment of the temporal 'gap' that separates the past of the story events from the present of narration - or the past of the 'story' from the present of the 'discourse.'

Brenkman's pair of "invention and recounting" helpfully reiterates the temporality inherent in the structuralist story/discourse couple. In so simple a stage direction as "He enters," the gap between the past of the event and the present of its enunciation remains implicit, so long as recounting amounts to following the same temporal sequence as the invented (what will later be termed the narrative mode of "scene"). Conversely, narrative stage-directions render this gap explicit, suspending or compressing the temporality of the invented (what will later be termed "pause"). Both are the same as contents of the story but differ in their discursive forms. These temporal

operators constitute what Brenkman formulates as the inherent structure of “the writing-of-the-telling” in storytelling - that is, “exploit[ing] an intrinsic capacity of language to volatilize subject and temporality” (91) through the past/story, present/discourse relation. In this differential context of storytelling, Issacharoff’s “referential bond” between stage-directions and dialogue comfortably isolates the temporality of narrative agency from the temporality of actual performance. The question of whether the actual performance can exploit the same “intrinsic capacity of language” in the dramatic text remains open.

Where temporality is at stake, we seem here to be facing two ‘zones’ occupied as such by stage-directions and dialogue: their time-zone in storytelling - which is also the contested zone between Suchy and Issacharoff - and their primal zone of separation, that is, the empty space they instantiate on the page from which they accrue their formal distinctions. This compels a viewing of the relationship between stage-directions and the ‘story’ of the play from a *spatially coordinated* time-zone (from which Suchy’s and Issacharoff’s loose and bonded coordinates gain their interpretive power): stage-directions are simultaneously the same - in belonging to the past of the story and the present of its discourse - and different, with regard to the space they instantiate between the two. Only through a reduction of the latter zone to the former would narrative stage-directions prove ideal to further expedite Drama into narratology. The possibility that this expedition is close to complete appears rather prominently in “Narrative Voice and Agency in Drama” (2001), where Manfred Jahn precedes his conclusions with a challenge: is the following passage taken from a novel, or is it a narrative stage direction?

The room is as long as an open field. You could shoot a bow here. You could run a footrace. Indeed at the far end the two young ladies and the Germans, Ambassador and the brother of the Duke, are playing a game of shuttlecock. There are one dozen windows—outdoing by one the windows Queen Elizabeth set into the gallery at Hampton Court, and these more perfectly symmetrical and larger too. And four of these are bay windows, each with covered seats and cushions, facing four large fireplaces all aglow with the flames and colored smokes of scented woods, each a different composition upon the theme of fire (675).

### 3. Jahn’s Narrative Agent and the Dramatic Text

Jahn’s article mediates between Suchy’s abstraction of drama’s readerly locus from narrative stage-directions and his own expansion of Seymour Chatman’s inventory of “text types” - which he will later adjust to “genres” - in which drama finds its place as a mimetic narrative:

Plays and novels share the common features of a chronologic of events, a set of characters, and a setting. Therefore, at a fundamental level they are all stories. The fact that one kind of story is told (diegesis) and the other shown (mimesis) is of secondary importance. By ‘secondary’ I do not mean that the difference is inconsequential. It is just that it is lower in the hierarchy of text distinctions. (117)

Taking notice of how Chatman's standing "taxonomy" might suggest - wrongly - a privileging of the performed play as representative of Drama, Jahn furthers Chatman's conception by differentiating the readerly narrative of the playscript (which "must be accepted as [a] readable medium sui generis") from the mimetic narrative of the play as performed. But even if we decide, momentarily, to restrict Jahn's graphic addition of a blurred, dotted, double-headed arrow between the 'scripted' genres and the 'performed' ones to their proclaimed "special relationship" (675), his systematic application of Chatman's narratological framework to the dramatic text cannot help but betray a zone of contestation with the question of time beyond the text's apparent narratological bindings. Chatman's narratological premise rests on what he terms a "narrative statement":

The basic component of the form of the expression, independent of and more abstract than any particular manifestation — that is, the expression's substance, which varies from art to art. A certain posture in the ballet, a series of film shots, a whole paragraph in a novel, or only a single word — any of these might manifest a single narrative statement (146).

"Narrative statements" are segments of the story's discourse, the form of the expression of the story, regardless of the substance of such expression. Moreover, here as elsewhere, Chatman stresses that a "narrative statement" is not to be understood in a grammatical sense, but in a "broad discursive one" (309). What narratives import from natural language is whether the deep narrative predicate is in the mode of existence (is) or of action (does), as a "stasis" statement (typically predicated on verbs like 'be' or 'have') or a "process" statement (part of the representation of temporally sequenced story events). So "the cat is on the mat" is a stasis or declarative statement whose existent is "the cat," and "she/he exits, asks, commands" is a process statement whose event is exiting, enquiring, commanding, etc.<sup>11</sup> This discursive importation from natural language, Chatman insists, follows "the ordinary spatiotemporal laws of the universe" (309).

Jahn notices early enough how stage-directions must have emerged as a complication for Chatman's temporal distinction(s) - something which Gérard Genette encounters<sup>12</sup> - but he also notices how he is "quick to argue" that "there is no difference between a sentence in a novel like 'John left the room' and the playwright's instruction to an actor to exit, stage left" (118). While "instruction" here seems to resonate with Searle's "recipe", what really matters for Chatman is the linguistic 'process' statement delivering the act of exiting itself, that is, "Exit". The playwright's instruction is *not* a "process" statement for the story even if a mode of 'action' can be inferred from it. And it is this strange 'timelessness' of the playwright's 'instruction' traversing story and discourse which opens for Jahn the intermission necessary to elaborate on Drama's narrative appeal for Chatman without

---

<sup>11</sup> Stasis and process statements together accrue for Chatman the story-dimension of a narrative. In his graphic illustration of the relationship between story and discourse, process statements "index" existents and stasis statements "project" events (310).

<sup>12</sup> Genette argues that a stage-direction such as "Hernani removes his coat..." simultaneously describes the character's behaviour and tells the performer what to do...oscillat[ing] between description on the one hand and prescription, or direction, on the other" (32). Jahn argues, however, that it is unclear if Genette conceives of a "multifunctional text" or an "oscillating authorial intention" (667). The underlying method seems to protect the assumption that Drama is non-narrative. "Hernani removes his coat..." is not descriptive such that, as per narratological discourse, "it constitutes a narrative pause during which story time stops...but a process statement, an element that is part of the representation of temporally sequenced story events" (668).

the risk of collapsing from the narrative (mimetic) quality of its 'staging' to the 'instructive' quality of its text. To do this Jahn finally resorts to Chatman's "broad" conception of the narrator, so the question of the 'deep story-narratological' structure equating novels and dramas as "stories" is replaced with the, perhaps, more difficult question of how the dramatic text admits, ultimately, of a narrative 'voice'.

Appending a widespread critique of "narrator-less" models of fiction Chatman's concept of narrative agency abandons the standard linguistic/textual approach in which narrators are recognized as "overt" speakers only, who purport to present their voice as such, excluding them from performance genres and special kinds of epic narratives. With Chatman the narrator indeed need not speak *at all*. They are also "covert", who do not seek to respond to the question "who speaks?" betraying their presence in the first-person pronoun for example, as a 'demonstrator' or 'shower' who manages the exposition, who decides how to implicitly structure the duality of what is to be said and what is to be left out. This allows Jahn to posit a "cinematic narrator as a structural element of all films, and, by analogy, ...similarly constituted narrative "agents" in all of the other performance genres, including drama" (670). The condition proper of "narrative statements" is not the absent or present 'grammatical' correlates of the narrator but "their degrees of audibility":

It is less important to categorize types of narrators than to identify the features that mark their degrees of audibility. A quantitative effect applies: the more identifying features, the stronger our sense of a narrator's presence. The "non" - or minimally narrated story is simply one in which no or very few such features occur (Chatman 197).

The narrator's "degrees of audibility" seem for Jahn to respond to Chatman's conception of Drama with regards to its dual existence as an actual performance and a dramatic text. One such 'narrator' of the former is Tom, in *The Glass Menagerie*, who is "overt" when he directly documents his memories, addressing the audience directly, providing a more detached explanation of what is happening onstage, that is, presenting himself as a narrator figure at the discourse-level of fictional mediation. But he becomes a "covert" narrator *with regards to the same discourse* once his present figure withdraws all together from sight as the story continues. Effectively, then, we are talking about the same narrative agent, that is Tom, but with the foreclosed agency of 'narration' appearing 'covertly' in his control of selection, arrangement, and presentation on one hand *and* 'overtly' with their direct or indirect speech on the other. It follows that an absolute drama might indeed seem to appear without an "overt" narrator, but, like narrative epics, it is not without a "covert" one, that is, it might appear without a present-figure like the narrator Tom, but not without the present-function of the narrator Tom.

It must be to Chatman's satisfaction, then, that Tom here appears to re-volatilize just as efficiently onstage Brenkman's "temporality and subjectivity," characteristic of the "writing of telling." His overt and covert appearance only follows a virtual delay existing between the story and its discourse, that is, between the appearance of his covert quality, as a demonstrator in the background when he is absent, and the appearance of his overt quality, as an actual speaker, when he is present. His movement between these two modes of narratorial presentation follows narrative's doubly temporal logic: the external duration of the presentation of events and the

internal duration of the events constituting the plot. Jahn's next challenge is whether to recast this narratorial binary onto the dramatic text, with the potential result of stage-directions acquiring, along with that text, a new status in "discourse narratology...the discipline that theorizes narrative acts and narrative situations, modes of presentation, and the functions of narratorial 'voice'" (quoted in Jahn 670).

The pressure of Chatman's model might indeed force us, like Jahn, "to assume that the enunciating subject of the stage-directions is not (or at least not initially) the playwright but a narrator" (672). While the parenthetical intervention here promises, ironically, a form of pretence inherent to narration's question of temporality - and ultimately to the overarching question of "temporality and subjectivity" in drama itself, which we will tackle in the next few pages - it is interesting to see how Jahn's pragmatic expansion of Chatman's narratological model could not free the dramatic text from its instructive double without submitting to a retroactive dissemination of a narrator beyond any fictional presentation of one, e.g. Tom. The prescriptive pressure of the dramatic text gives Jahn no other option but to posit a narratorial correlative to the playscript, that is, to introduce "a separate narrative agent slot" that has "no bodily presence in the performance" (675). Incidentally, Jahn all but makes good use here of Chatman's concept of textual "service," by means of which "genre-typical modes of presentation can operate at each other's service" (quoted in Jahn 673). Bearing on a similar role of Gower in *Pericles* to Tom in *The Glass*, Jahn posits that the subject of the stage-directions is, "in the case of *Pericles*, "another narrator" (emphasis in original, 672). And while this other "narrator" might seem to announce a form of divisibility - an extra "degree of audibility" in a narrative - ultimately it repeats the gesture of retroactively positing the presupposition that all narratives presume a teller:

a first-degree narrative agency which, in a performance, may either take the totally unmetaphorical shape of a vocally and bodily present narrator figure (a scenario that is unavailable in written epic narrative), or be a disembodied "voice" in a printed text, or remain an anonymous and impersonal narrative function in charge of selection, arrangement, and focalization (674).

An initial observation is necessary. Despite appearances, Jahn's narratological ambition for the dramatic text repeats something of Issacharoff's separatory procedure, that is, distinguishing narrative stage-directions from the temporality of actual performance. On stage, the "narrative agent slot" (the "another narrator" of stage-directions) disappears. And so, bearing on the retroactive presupposition of a "teller" of the dramatic text as such, it remains unclear why the withdrawal of stage-directions as stage-directions from actual performance is not, by the same gesture, a covert code-exchange between page and stage, enacted by the same narrator. With this other narrator handy on the page, stage-directions no longer succumb, for Jahn, to the subordinate connotations of a secondary text or, for that matter, a "recipe." He concludes with stage-directions acquiring the status of a controlling "frame," with the full cinematic weight of the term. And it is precisely at this point that one is left to wonder: at what price does this "frame" become covertly but homogeneously narratological - over and against the other covertness of the dramatic text, that is, the ontologically exclusive but covert appearance of stage in the dramatic page apparatus? In other words, at what narratorial level is the covert contamination of stage in the dramatic text

excluded from the dually temporal logic of a narrative? This is a limitation which Jahn must face at the end of his analysis:

[M]any people will maintain (and not without cause) that stage-directions issue from the playwright rather than from a fictional speaker... we must account for the fact that readers, theater practitioners, and spectators will often either leave this [narrative agent] slot uninstantiated or else instantiate it with the person of the author (675).

Jahn's conclusion seems appropriately sensitive to the very opening it leaves behind, namely, what his narratorial "frame" of stage-directions ultimately overlooks: the strictly performative frame that the dramatic text, as text, posits for the reader. This is not merely fictional, in the sense that the dramatic text - or "drama as literature" - can be reduced to the internal structure of just any story. There is an existential appeal in what Margaret Jane Kidnie identifies as the playscript's secondary performance, namely, that readers "still need to be trained to engage with [dramatic] scripts not as fiction but specifically as drama — as dialogue existing in space and time" (466). This reframing allows us to reconsider not only the transformation of the reader of a dramatic story into an "individual spectator," but, more importantly, the temporal logic that such a private performance may graft onto the empty space *between* dialogue and stage-directions.

What this suggests is not that the dramatic text cannot be narrativized, but that its narrative logic is always shaped by the structural features of the playscript itself - its spatial disjunction and dual temporality. Rather than existing prior to the drama and applying to it externally, narratology in this context finds itself implicated by the very scene it attempts to describe. The dramatic page discloses a temporal frame that both precedes and exceeds narrative's own structural distinctions - between story and discourse, mimesis and diegesis - such that narration appears less as a totalizing frame than as a recursive gesture caught within a broader performative logic. This is where the critical stakes of this section lie: not in rejecting narratology, but in showing how drama exposes its internal limits. The stage-directions of the playscript do not simply deliver content to be performed or narrated; they materialize a disjunction between saying and showing that cannot be resolved within narrative categories alone. The challenge is not whether drama can be absorbed into narratological models, but whether those models can account for the recursive temporal logic by which drama stages the very conditions of narrative *framing*.

#### **4. Narration as Recursive Performative Logic**

That Jahn's ambitious notion of "frame" remains operative until it displaces the narratorial mark it initially inscribed into the dramatic text compels us, first of all, to reframe the question of appearance in storytelling through a second, contingent frame. If the narrators within a story constitute a deferred articulation of the first narrator - commonly designated as the author - then in what temporal sense does a part of that originating enunciation remain indestructible within the story, in the very act of storytelling? By pressing Jahn's narratorial "frame" to its limits within narrative discourse, it is the frame between dialogue and stage-directions - their spatial and temporal disjunction - that emerges as the more fundamental structure, one whose interpretive power begins to come into view precisely where Jahn's concept recedes. The illusive proximity of the

two frames begins to unravel the credibility of Jahn's dilemma and so admits some truth to his "(at least not initially)," for when we speak of "another narrator" on the page in relation to a narrator on the stage, we are effectively referring to a shared semblance anchored in the spatial coordinates of the dramatic apparatus itself. However named - narrator, implied author, speaker - their enunciative position remains anchored in the structural vantage of stage, which the dramatic text cannot displace without collapsing the very fiction Jahn's "narrative agent" was meant to sustain. This implies a temporal qualification: the 'atemporal' volatility of subjectivity and temporality at work in the story/discourse relation can only appear as a parallax - a non-synthesizable shift - between 'others' of the same story, most clearly formalized in the semi-canonical triplicity of Wayne Booth: i.e., the author, implied author, and narrator. This parallax slot is most apparent when Chatman endeavours to draw a line:

The Implied Author is not the narrator, but rather the principle that invented the narrator... Unlike the narrator, the implied author can tell us nothing. He, or better it, has no voice, no direct means of communicating. It instructs us silently, through the design of the whole, with all the voices, by all the means it has chosen to let us learn...

Chatman's definition of the "implied author" followed Booth's notion of the author's "second self," whose "picture" might differ with each of the author's texts. The implied author of *Jonathan Wild*, who "is by implication very much concerned with public affairs," differs from the implied author "who greets us on page one of *Amelia*," conveying instead an "air of sententious solemnity" (72). Henry Fielding created two clearly different implied authors.

It is tempting here to conclude that in storytelling there is a "narrative slot" held by another narrator, a minimal act of (cinematic) focalization from which the story is volatilized by this constitutive iterability. For each narrator there is the excessive "second self" or simulacrum of the author, a specular ghost overriding the first, slipping from the real self of the author through their implied counterpart to the fictional self of the narrator, and so on. Narrative discourse becomes a rigorous but contingent spatialization of story time, a covert spatialization that Brenkman ultimately formulates as an "imaginary space [which] will be theorized via the narrator/narratee relation or the distinction of narrator and implied author and projected as a valid account of all narrational practices" (91). This imaginary spatialization - of cutting through narrative time by corporate focalization - thus reaches its apogee when the narrative content emerges from a second narrator as a "close-up" by a first narrator. Brenkman's own example is instructive: in *The Great Gatsby*, what appears as a first-person narration overriding Fitzgerald's third-person counterpart is in fact a focalization by the latter. Nick's "passionless attachments and drift toward disaffection" displays the "story's return to itself." His inaction in the story makes way for Fitzgerald's third-person exercise: "it makes [Nick] the only character who knows everyone's relation to everyone else." Narrative time is given space, temporalized, by its framing discourse or *énonciation*, through which the story, or *énoncé*, "loops" overtly/covertly back into itself (97). But whether such volatility belongs to narrative time alone, and not to a broader performative logic irreducible to narratorial framing, remains unresolved, a tension that becomes more acute in what follows.

## 5. Imaginary Spatialization and Narrative Volatility

Despite Brenkman's seamless focalization, there is a missing atemporal dimension in the relation between contingent discourse and story in his "imaginary" spatialization - an excessive 'direction' ("narrative slot") in the act of narration, betrayed by Brenkman's own translation. This passage of "focalization" throughout the narrative content of the story is opened by the parallax inherent in story discourse, that is, by a dissonance in the narrator's vantage point, i.e. "the narrator/narratee relation" and "the *distinction* of narrator and implied author" (ibid). What appears as "excessive" for one narrator (Nick), a "second self" (Fitzgerald), is a subtraction from narration itself, from the narrative content arising from this very act of "focalization." In Brenkman's example, the narrative frame established by the implied author operates through a first-person narration that performs the function of third-person omniscience: Nick's "passionless" detachment and "drift toward disaffection" position him less as an expressive subject than as a passive relay of distributed focalization. He is not only a focalizing agent, but also a symptomatic (melancholic) figure whose narrative function is overdetermined by the very absence of personal investment. What appears as Nick's "method of narration" thus slips into a projected "point of view" - a perspectival construct retroactively framed by the implied author. Fitzgerald's narrative frame captures Nick's *frame-which-lacks*, presenting his narration as first-person only after its structural function has been foreclosed. That frame - Nick's own position - emerges only to cover a constitutive gap, reframed symptomatically as "passionless." What is 'distinctive' in one shift of focus is also a relation to the first, and this minimal - but atemporal - subtraction constitutes a notion in its own right: the receptive end of the "narratee" emerges from a missing frame in the story's temporal unfolding. So, Nick's "first-person narration" only emerges by the parallax enacted by Fitzgerald's "implied author," and through this empty frame, Nick's saying everything amounts to saying nothing<sup>13</sup>.

Brenkman's formulation thus discloses the implicit but constitutive "missed encounter" in the volatility between subjectivity and temporality characteristic of narration: an empty frame between the author and the narrator appearing retroactively as "methods of narration" which conclude at the same time. A "passionless" Nick can only be captured by this very atemporal dilation posing as narrative volatility. This is a kind of "narrative stage-direction" for which Jahn has no picture, but whose parallax pressure - the author/narrator dilemma - nonetheless informs his repressive economy. The author, the first frame, is banished for "another narrator" on the page, who in turn is banished to the stage and into disappearance. So, by drawing on Jahn's borrowed, genre-induced "service" model from Chatman, one might ask: why can't both narrators be at each other's service too? Jahn's model fails to grasp that the stage narrator is already a parallax inflection of the narrator on the page. Contrary to Brenkman's "imaginary spatialization," the narrative does not

---

<sup>13</sup> Chatman touches upon a narrative consequence of such a 'covert', but common, misrecognition: "a recent article misreads "Eveline" by confusing character's point of view and narrator's voice (Clive Hart, "Eveline," in *James Joyce's Dubliners: Critical Essays*, London, 1969, p. 42). The author argues that Eveline is slow and incapable of love which may be true but supports his argument with questionable evidence: "She overdramatizes her association with Frank, calls it an 'affair' and him her 'lover'; she thinks of herself in pulp-literature terms as 'unspeakably' weary. But most obvious of all is the strong note of falsity in the language of the passage in which she reasserts her choice to leave: 'As she mused, the pitiful vision of her mother's life laid its spell ' Dublin has so paralysed Eveline's emotions that she is unable to love, can think of herself and her situation only by means of a series of tawdry cliches.'" Surely the objectionable words are not Eveline's but the narrator's. It is he who is parodying pulp-literature sentimentality in tawdry cliches... Eveline may indeed feel maudlin sentiments, but "mused," "pitiful vision," "very quick of her being" are not in her vocabulary" (223).

simply return to itself but does so through a parallaxic disjunction that disrupts any seamless loop between *énoncé* and *énonciation*. Atemporal volatility becomes both the condition and the failure of narrative self-coincidence.

## 6. Stretched Temporality and Slowed Scenes

If the missed encounter formalized in the parallax between narrator, implied author and character marks a constitutive disjunction within narrative temporality, then its implications begin to materialize more sharply when narrative attention becomes stretched across conflicting temporal speeds. Before the dramatic page can fully register this disjunction in spatial or visual form, its narrative logic first appears - as if in rehearsal - within certain moments of prose fiction, where focalization falters or loops in excess of its projected scene. These moments do not merely delay plot; they structure another temporality altogether, one that arises not from what is told, but from the impossibility of fully aligning perspective with expression. It is in this interval that the structural conditions for the dramatic *inscription* will begin to take shape.

In her rereading of Ian McEwan's narratorial handling of personal crises, particularly in his early twenty-first-century works, Courtney observes how characters' thoughts are rendered in full during moments in which it is "impossible [for them] to accurately and fully portray at 'regular' speed" (184). Tracing McEwan's development of the "slowed scene" from his early narrative about the contentious nature of time itself in *The Child in Time* through *Enduring Love*, and ultimately to *Atonement*, Courtney explains how the fountain scene in the latter displays sexual frustration misinterpreted as general frustration exploding in a "stretch" of a narrative time happening in between an already running dialogic exchange. Between Cecilia's "I'd rather read Fielding any day" and Robbie's "I know what you mean...",

She felt she had said something stupid. Robbie was looking away across the park and the cows toward the oak wood that lined the river valley, the wood she had run through that morning. He might be thinking she was talking to him in code, suggestively conveying her taste for the full-blooded and sensual. That was a mistake, of course, and she was discomfited and had no idea how to put him right. She liked his eyes, she thought, the unblended mix of orange and green, made even more granular in sunlight. And she liked the fact that he was so tall. It was an interesting combination in a man, intelligence and sheer bulk. Cecilia had taken the cigarette and he was lighting it for her (189).

In "the course of one short paragraph", Cecilia was 'frozen' in discourse time as the story-time continues. The misinterpreted frustration informs a dilation, not as a "scene" where the present of discourse follows the present of the story, nor as a "pause" where one present is at halt for another, but as a "slowed scene [which] fits squarely between [the two]"; it does not pause story time for 'background information' nor does it abstract from story time action markers or truncated, disjointed stream-of-consciousness to keep speed. On the contrary, the "slowed scene" delivers "distended moments" of subjective transformation in the form of "detailed, solitary introspection...planted [...]mid scene" (185).

The temporal extent of Courtney's "slowed scene" effectively distends Chatman's own notion of stretch, with which she "agree[s] wholeheartedly... as mental processes expanding the duration of narrative time." The "slowed scene" captures the immanent stretch of a character's mental processes, or the condensation thereof, between the present speed of focus and the memory (another speed) of self. This atemporal disjuncture "stretches" across the time of comprehension (a lag, a deferral, a lack of focus) and the urgency of its discharge into an objective temporal instant (regaining focus). The former lags behind, while the latter precipitates an atemporal urgency appearing simultaneously with it in the same narrative instant<sup>14</sup>. One's blindness to a full view of their story surfaces as the very frames of visibility, as fiction structuring what one sees. At these "salient moments" (184), the person's eyes are directed by this lack of focus, suspended between what is (stasis) and what happens (process). There is a "pause", albeit a disjointed one of becoming, where the subject, in their present moment, as something, is simultaneously stretched in their mental life as something else. In line with Jahn's limitation, that is, the author/narrator of stage-directions in the *play-script*, one is tempted to ask: if the act of narration is a matter of surplus focalization, then at what point does Hamlet, in Shakespeare's own text, stretch beyond the frame of Shakespeare's authorial focus? That is, at what point does this same *Hamlet*, through a disjunction in narrative temporality, give way to another *Hamlet*, not as reinterpretation, but as a parallax effect that finds structural expression in Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*?<sup>15</sup>

## 7. Parallax and Narrative Blindness in Drama

The return to Chatman's deeper narratological logic thus allows us to revisit the limitations of Jahn's "narrative agent slot." Rather than treating the playscript as a discrete narrative voice that disappears on stage, we might instead begin to see it as a parallax inscription of narrative blindness itself, a site where temporal and subjective disjunctions register not through a single narrator, but through the missed encounter between the narrating voice of the page and the dislocated, non-narratorial vantage of the stage. Contrary to Jahn's self-serving cinematic connotations traversing the now developed "genres" inaugurated by Chatman, the latter indeed evokes the dramatic in every narrative when he traces in narration's "point of view" an immanent frame of "blindness." Chatman distinguishes three types of narrative perspective: the *literal*,

---

<sup>14</sup> Courtney's faith in the "slowed scene" might be complicated productively by something like Pavel Florensky's "dream": a partner knocks on the door of a sleeping individual. The sleeper may then experience a vivid and elaborate dream sequence, featuring, perhaps, police pursuits, climbing through windows, and a dramatic house raid, all of which ultimately concluding with the auditory stimulus of the knock itself. The events which must precede the house raid, must be constructed after the door knocks that simulated the pursuit itself, but they are "reconstructed" as coming before. Florensky writes "In this new experience of time, the dreamer's time, compared to time in the visible world, runs at infinite speed" (11)

<sup>15</sup> This is perhaps why Berkman's "volatility" is not extended to the further distinction between "real author" and "real reader". Žižek reminds us of Jorge Luis Borges's formulation with regards to the relationship between Kafka and his precursors, from Chinese authors to Robert Browning: "Kafka's idiosyncrasy, in greater or lesser degree, is present in each of these writings, but if Kafka had not written we would not perceive it; that is to say, it would not exist ... each writer creates his precursors. His work modifies our conception of the past, as it will modify the future" (146). In temporal terms, Kafka's idiosyncrasy stretched another timeline from that of the story he tells, the "point" at which focalization realizes its space in the space it focalizes, an author's 'tic' (or Kafka's particular "knock") by which they have released their 'true' narrative.

grounded in perceptual sight (“through someone’s eyes”); the *figurative*, shaped by conceptual worldview (“through someone’s ideology”); and the *transferred*, located not in what the character sees or understands, but in their structural positioning - their “interest-vantage.” It is this third point of view that most fully discloses the dramatological problem of blindness, “of not seeing”, not in the literal sense of “He did not see” but in saying “Though he didn’t realize it at the time, the divorce was a disaster from John’s point of view” (152).

Chatman’s tripartite distribution of “views” implicitly opens onto a fourth, atemporal dimension, a logic of “not-seeing” which, as much as it marks the subject’s inability to perceive their own dislodgment, also locates this blindness from the vantage of perspective itself. Here, point of view is not merely perceptual or ideological; it is structured by the narrative’s displacement of what can be seen *at the right time*. This distinction carries implications that exceed rhetorical nuance. The ‘literal’ and ‘figurative’ perspectives are retroactively “stretched” through the displacement enacted by the ‘vantage’ point of view. The apparent passivity conferred on the subject in this third view marks a disjunction between their perceptual and conceptual selves - what they see and what they believe - producing a narrative tension that only appears in retrospect. The subject cannot fully frame their worldview as immediately visible; rather, they are constituted by the missed encounter between their literal perception and their figurative understanding. The lack of focus is what initiates an ‘active’ atemporality of blindness within a ‘passive’ temporality of seeing: ‘John did not know that he knew his divorce was a disaster.’ And it is this structurally confusing yet narratively essential inclusion of a “passive state” that leads Chatman to his more radical, if fragile, wager: “[t]he perspective and the expression need not be lodged in the same person” (153).

If anything, the rigidity of Chatman’s spatialization betrays not only its retroactive (temporal) foundation, but also its inadvertent revelation of what the narrative voice cannot directly tell. Perspective and expression may not be “lodged” in the same person, not because that person lacks access to the proper angle of “focalization,” but because the narrative interest is not aligned with the person as such, it is aligned with the story itself, “even if [the person] is unconscious of that interest” (183). This dislodgment between perspective and expression within the same figure gestures toward a *staging of direction*, where every performance exists in the fold of another - virtual - performance, which only retroactively appears as the same. Here, the roles reverse: story-time withdraws into the atemporality of its own construction. The subject, far from mastering their perspective, becomes the site of an anterior logic that demands to be expressed. More than a taxonomic claim Chatman’s assertion names a formal dislocation between voice and position, between narrative interest and narrative embodiment.

## 8. The Atemporal Pressure of Signification

What Chatman leaves structurally open finds a more radical formulation in Jonathan Culler’s narratological analysis of *Oedipus Tyrannus* in *The Pursuit of Signs* (1981). While only implicitly concerned with dramatic form, Culler’s oft-misunderstood account intensifies the problem of narrative disjunction by shifting from focalization to the discursive conditions under which meaning imposes itself retroactively upon the subject. Culler challenges the narrative primacy of *fabula* (story) over *sujet* (discourse). Events, he maintains, may be the effects, not the causes of the discourse. In his rereading, the evidence against Oedipus remains ambiguous. The eyewitness to

Laius's murder reports that the king was attacked by a group of men, not one. The possibility of Oedipus's innocence persists. Yet:

Once we are well into the play, we know that Oedipus must be found guilty, otherwise the play will not work at all; and the logic to which we are responding is not simply an aesthetic logic that affects readers of literary works. Oedipus, too, feels the force of this logic... The convergence of discursive forces makes it essential that he become the murderer of Laius, and he yields to this force of meaning... Here meaning is not the effect of a prior event but its cause (212-213).

Oedipus does not encounter "the story" in any traditional sense. What he encounters - without ever becoming conscious of it - is the atemporal pressure of signification itself, the discursive demand that calls forth his guilt as a retroactive necessity. This marks a decisive shift in how we understand subjective temporality in narrative: not as the unfolding of an event, but as the subject's capture by an interest external to themselves. Oedipus yields, not because he knows, but because his narrative position demands that he becomes what the discourse needs him to be. From Culler, we can abstract a version of Chatman's 'truth in fiction' that resists Jahn's narrator-centred allegories. The parallax in narrative dislodgment - its refusal to settle perspective and expression into a single subjective frame - allows us to see Berkman's "volatility" anew: perspective and expression *can be dislodged* within the same person. Temporality does not yield to space by way of focalized viewpoint, but by a subtractive vantage, which opens time as a condition of subjectivity itself. Whether we take Chatman's marginal allusion to the "unconscious" as a step into psychoanalysis is less important than the movement it names: the persona is blind, and yet it moves.

## 9. Stage-directions and the Parallax Narrative

It should be clearer now why stage-directions introduce a complication to narrative studies which cannot be dismissed. The pressing question is no longer simply whether there is "another narrator" on the page who disappears on stage, but whether what reappears is not the same narrative returning, but a second, contingent narrative, one disclosed only through the missed frame of the first. If narrative statements account in their emergence for the a-temporally dislodged 'point' between perspective and expression, then stage-directions stretch that same point into the spatial disjunction between page and stage, through a vantage irreducible to either narration or performance. If Hammond's claim that the entire dramatic text is a form of stage-direction holds, then we must ask: what does the atemporal stretch between dialogue and stage-directions actually mean for the text's narrative time? Any viable answer must reckon with the fact that the force of this dislodgment cannot be exhausted by stage-directions as a contingent "scene" embedded within the story. This contingency is also what defines the vantage of stage itself, by which the story is equally, if not more covertly, stretched into a different temporal zone. It is one thing to say that in "Here comes the lady. O, so light a foot" a stage-direction appears as a "scene" temporally embedded "mid-speech", it is quite another to say that this dialogic 'mid-appearance' is primordially an atemporal 'mid-appearance' of the dramatic text itself between dialogue and stage-directions as another scene of narration.

This parallax view of the becoming of stage, its emergence not as a pre-given space but as a textual function, is thus itself a stage-direction: a site of disjunction where stasis and process statements intersect in the formal gaps on the page that bind the story's temporal texture. In this sense, what Jahn names "another narrator" in the dramatic text - his point of surplus focalization - is already the inverse of another, subtractive point: stage as the atemporal disjunction that precedes its own expression. The dramatic page inserts a frame, but not as an additional layer, rather as an ontological fold in which stage subtracts expression from itself. Here, narrative time is not merely sequenced (as "scene"), paused (as descriptive narration), or even stretched (as in cognitive tempo), but is dislodged into an alternate register, one that precedes, rather than follows, the logic of narration. The dramatic page materializes this disjunction as stage-time, not as performance time, but as the *same* instant in which the play becomes an alternative staging of its own text. Much like Oedipus is compelled by what Culler calls the "demands of signification," the playscript too issues its own demands, not as an aesthetic logic of recognition, but as a formal constraint of spatial composition. The page's very layout stages the pressure of meaning in its utterances. It is a moment of narrative volatility in which time slows toward another temporality of itself, one that stages, without synchronizing, the paralogical tension between two structurally disjoined narrative functions, whose spacing yields a third, un-synthesized register of time.

What emerges, finally, is not simply the recursive temporality of the dramatic page, but a deeper reorganization of narrativity itself. The visual gaps between dialogue and stage-directions do not merely prepare the play for performance, nor do they function only as silent 'framing' para-texts; rather, they become the site through which dramatic elements, characters, actions, utterances, and their embedded directives, initiate a narrative logic of their own. These actants are not propelled toward an Aristotelian arc of rising and falling action; they are re-anchored in being by the very foreclosure of that teleological unfolding. In staging themselves within the page's spatial disjunctions, they generate a counter-narrativity that reterritorializes classical dramatic exposition. Crucially, this is not the virtual performance *of* events, but the event *of* virtual performance itself, an immanent staging of staging. The dramatic text becomes a site where performativity is not deferred toward realization but recursively inscribed as structure. What unfolds is an elevation of the reader's imaginative role: the "theatre of the mind" is no longer a passive supplement to performance, but the very stage on which this counter-narrative is enacted. The dramatic text thus stages not the event of performance, but the becoming-event of narrative itself, produced through the formal impossibility of synchronizing saying and showing.

## **V. Conclusion: The Dramatic Frame and Temporal Dislocation**

Perhaps we can now return to Jahn's challenge and reconsider it not as an open question about ambiguity between genres, but as a problem that only emerges retroactively - once the quoted passage is abstracted from its framing text. It is this framing, in fact, that determines the temporal logic at stake. When situated in a novel, Jahn's descriptive passage folds seamlessly into the discourse of an omniscient narrator, where story-time and discourse-time may converge without friction. But in a playscript, the same passage acquires another valence: it is stretched by the

dramatic frame that houses it, a frame that cannot be reduced to narrative content or absorbed into the logic of performability. This dramatic frame is not simply a container for action; it introduces a recursive temporal logic in which page and stage, discourse and story, literal and figurative viewpoints, are continually dislocated. The playscript thus imposes its own demands of signification, not by stabilizing perspective or agency, but by displacing them. Jahn's "narrative agent slot" can name this structure only by misrecognizing it; the dramatic text, in its visual and material form, does not just accommodate narrative, it restages it, elsewhere, and in another time.

What has unfolded across this chapter is thus not a linear accumulation of concepts, but a recursive series of confrontations with the very grounds upon which the dramatic text insists on its legibility. We began with the seemingly innocent function of stage-directions, as marginal supplements, narrative accessories, or theatrical scaffolding, and traced their slow historical sedimentation into an ontological and semiotic problem. The genealogical arc that began with Corneille's proto-transcendental grammar passed through the structural pressures of directorial modernism and culminated in the theoretical ghosting(s) of post-dramatic criticism. Yet this trajectory was not simply historical. It was already fractured from within: the very form of the stage direction revealed itself as neither fully literary nor fully performative, neither wholly instructional nor entirely mimetic. Instead, it operated in a doubled register, displacing the referentiality it seemed to guarantee.

Taxonomical accounts, whether typological, grammatical, or narratological, attempted to stabilize this split by classifying the visible and the sayable, partitioning the text according to functions that always risked collapsing under their own excess. The very attempt to name what stage-directions are produced displacements that could not be assimilated back into the classificatory grid. Each gesture of naming was haunted by the residue of what it could not name, by the textual stains that pointed to a surplus, a distortion, a missed encounter between the page and the stage. It is here that the dialectic began to turn: every attempt to reduce the stage direction to an object of function or form produced a subject that evaded the reduction. The gap between stage and page, between instruction and fiction, refused closure not because of ambiguity or imprecision, but because of a deeper, constitutive division embedded in the dramatic text itself.

This division was nowhere more evident than in the critical moment where speech-act theory attempted to anchor the performative dimension of the dramatic text through the metaphor of the recipe. What appeared at first as an elegant reconciliation - treating the play as a set of instructions to be executed - soon revealed a recursive loop wherein the instructions themselves belonged to the fiction they purported to precede. The performance did not emerge from the recipe; rather, the recipe was already caught within a performance that simulated its own conditions. Pretence, sincerity, and intention - concepts inherited from Austin and radicalized by Searle - became unstable not because they lacked clarity, but because they exposed a fundamental torsion in the very notion of fictional discourse. The speaker is always belated, always arriving into a structure whose rules are not only suspended, but produced retroactively through the act of enunciation. There is no outside to this recursive fiction; what pretends to instruct always already performs.

And so, what emerges from this inquiry is not a new theory of the stage direction, but a transformed terrain in which its problems must be rethought. The stage direction is not merely the interface between the visible and the textual, the mimetic and the indexical. It is the site at which these distinctions unravel. It is the trace of a subjectivity that does not coincide with itself, the symptom of

a visual field that can never fully appear, the hinge between spatial construction and its deconstruction, the operator through which time is not simply narrated but partitioned. It stages the very impossibility of staging.

What follows, then, is not an application of these insights to particular texts, but their testing - each encounter probing a different extremity of the structural impasse elaborated here. Where visibility fractures into absence, where construction undoes itself through its own materiality, where the now collapses into temporal fragmentation - each site of theatrical writing will be taken not as an instance, but as a zone of contradiction in which the logic of the dramatic page encounters its own limits. In this sense, the following chapters do not depart from this one. They spiral outward, each from a different facet of the same gap.

Chapter Two:  
Lacan's Artefact in the Surviving Elizabethan Stage-directions:  
The Dramatist and the Gaze of the Empty Space

## I. Contentious Directions and the Question of Convention

### 1. A Missing Stage: What Did They See?

"When watching the first performances of *Twelfth Night* or *Hamlet*, what did an Elizabethan playgoer actually see?" (1). With this seemingly straightforward question Allan C. Dessen in "Stage-directions and the Theatre Historian" (2018) directly addresses a gap in knowledge affecting any theatre historian trying to investigate what was happening on the Elizabethan stage. The dearth of external records, eyewitness accounts or drawings commensurate with Elizabethan theatrical practice seems ironic when we consider that the period witnessed the emergence of more than 1600 works, annotated by David Stevens as landmarks of the history of the Elizabethan theatre (with "Elizabethan" used as a conventional rather than objective appellation sometimes covering Jacobean and Caroline drama). Dessen wistfully states that "one would expect the plots, dialogue, and stage-directions of the five to six hundred extant plays to convey clearly what the original playgoers would have seen", but, for him "unfortunately, such is not the case. Rather, most readers do not realize how little evidence has actually survived about the staging of plays in this period" (27). Surviving stage-directions have emerged as one form of evidence available for the reconstruction of Elizabethan drama in addition to dialogue but our dependence on them still only places us within the realm of what original productions could or might have been.

### 2. Signals in Conflict: Permissive, Elliptical, Contradictory

One of the biggest problems stage-directions offer in this regard is that, as Dessen tells us, although recent scholarship has demonstrated that a high percentage of them are authorial in origin, they are rife with ambiguities or inconsistencies in the form of "permissive", "elliptical", or even "contradictory" signals. Permissive signals appear in collective nouns: army, followers, attendants, etc. such as in *Cymbeline*: "the Roman Army at one door, and the Britain Army at another" (qtd. in Dessen 2018 p.3), or modifiers: certain, diverse, etc. such as in *Coriolanus*: "certain Romans with spoils" and "diverse Spirits in shape of Dogs and Hounds" (ibid. 3). Others include "prepare", used in such a way as to indicate an imminent onstage action, such as "prepare to play" in the Folio version of *Hamlet*, or "A banquet prepared" (ibid. 3) as in *Macbeth*. Others include "or" used extensively and indiscriminately, so to speak, with reference to personae, props, costumes and actions such as in "three or four with tapers" or "two or three other" (ibid. 4). Elliptical stage-directions include instances wherein temporally sequenced events are prompted without any accompanying indication of the personnel: "The organs play" (ibid. 4) or "Enter four torches" (ibid. 4). Contradictory stage-

directions include instances wherein “in” and “out” as signals of entering or exiting the stage are synonymous. In Shakespeare’s *Henry VI*, “Bedford brought in sick in a chair” before he “dies and is carried in by two in his chair” (ibid. 7). Or when in the Folio version of Shakespeare’s *Henry VI* “enter Warwick, Somerset, and the rest, bringing the King out in his gown” but later “They lead him out forcibly” (ibid. 7)<sup>16</sup>.

### 3. From Irregularity to Discourse: A Lacanian Frame

The extent, amongst multiple dramatists, of contentious Elizabethan stage-directions begs the question of why this might have been the case, a question which seems parasitic on a more specific enquiry about the ‘conventions’ responsible for their advent as characteristically Elizabethan. In this chapter, this historical contiguity will be tested against Jacques Lacan’s theory of “discourse”, which offers a framework for understanding how such textual irregularities may reflect more than technical inconsistencies. Rather than treating these directions as mere anomalies of theatrical practice, I will argue that their ‘contentious’ qualities may be symptomatic of deeper structural tensions within language and subjectivity. Lacan’s famous dictum, “the unconscious is the discourse of the Other,” encapsulates the subject’s perpetual oscillation between language as speech (*énoncé*) and language as the structural bedrock of conventions (*énonciation*) beyond conscious control. The linguistic nature of the unconscious designates its a priori trans-individuality, an Other, in Lacan’s terms, which manifests in speech as gaps (*lacunae*) in signification. And these gaps are constituted in the path of vision (*la voie de la vision*), which the subject compulsively attempts, and fails, to control. Lacan names this failure of discursivity the “gaze of the Other,” the site of the subject’s dislocation in the visual field, and simultaneously, the point from which the subject is seen and misrecognized. It is at this illusive site for vision that the Elizabethan dramatist will be situated in what follows, where the surviving stage-directions as *énoncés* encounter their obverse as *énonciations*, the traces of a subject desiring, without avail, to see itself.

## II. Halfway Stages and the Unconscious of Convention

### 1. Conventions Beyond Consciousness

Perhaps one helpful way to get closer to conceptualizing the unconscious in the light of the trans-individual appeal of ‘convention’ first as an elusive, and second as a conditioning, element is Raymond Williams’s discussion of the term with special reference to theatrical space. For Williams, a

---

<sup>16</sup> I have drawn my examples primarily from Dessen for convenience. For similar conclusions check Edward Isser’s “Exeunt Omnes and *The Tempest*: Permissive, Implied and Missing Stage-directions” (2007). In *The Taming of the Shrew*, the direction “Enter a Lord from hunting, with Huntsmen and Servants” leaves the number and identity of characters open to interpretation, as does “Enter two or three Nymphs” in *The Faithful Shepherdess* (pp. 2–3). Also highlighted are cues such as “The trumpets sound” in *Henry V* and “A shout within” in *Julius Caesar*, both of which omit any indication of who performs the action or where it originates (p. 4). Finally, Isser points to a contradictory moment in *King Lear*, where Cordelia is already in Lear’s arms when the direction reads “Enter Lear with Cordelia in his arms,” creating confusion about the timing of her entrance and death (p. 6).

“convention is simply the terms upon which author, performers and audience agree to meet, so that the performance may be carried on”. This kind of consent “must usually precede the performance, so that what is to be done may be accepted without damaging friction”. But such agreement, he notes, “is by no means always a formal or definite process” but rather “is largely customary, and often indeed it is virtually unconscious” (12). What Williams seems to suggest is that to the extent that it is ‘agreed to be met’, a convention does not lend itself to *conscious* manifestations. The author, performers and audience do not know *how much* they know<sup>17</sup>: they are attuned to a set of conventions which they do not recognize *as* conventions and so the set acts as a symbolic pact with which they become (unconsciously) familiar with one other<sup>18</sup>. In something like the contentious Elizabethan stage-directions, what actually appears is first and foremost the “unknown known” of what had been followed as a convention. This appearance is already the structure of the unconscious, what is “structured like a language” (414), where meaning arises not from conscious agreement but from the subject’s relation to the Other that conditions speech itself.

One preliminary question thus proves necessary: what could the unconsciously agreed-upon conventions of Elizabethan play-production possibly have been to the extent that there *are* contentious stage-directions? Dessen has for us what seems to lead to an answer: “In reading [Elizabethan] playscripts today we enter into the middle of a conversation - a discourse in a language we only partly understand - between a playwright and his player-colleagues, a halfway stage that was completed in a performance now lost to us” (11). With special reference to Shakespeare, Gary Taylor also writes:

The written text of any manuscript thus depended on an unwritten para-text which always accompanied it: an invisible life- support system of stage-directions, which either Shakespeare could expect his first readers to supply or which those first readers could expect Shakespeare himself to supply orally (6).<sup>19</sup>

## 2. Drama Without Literature

---

<sup>17</sup> In 2003 Donald Rumsfeld offered what Žižek believes is an “amateur philosophizing about the relationship between the known and the unknown” which goes as follows: “There are known knowns. These are things we know that we know. There are known unknowns. That is to say, there are things that we know we don't know. But there are also unknown unknowns. There are things we don't know we don't know.” But Žižek highlights a crucial “fourth term” that Rumsfeld forgets: the “unknown knowns, things we don't know that we know - which is precisely the Freudian unconscious, the “knowledge which does not know itself”, as Lacan used to say” (Žižek 2004).

<sup>18</sup> Dessen gives another example, from cinema, of the unconscious’s appeal to conventions as a trans-individual alterity: “Consider the many cinematic conventions to which we give such unthinking consent. To audiences today, cinema often represents the epitome of realism, yet if we can, for a moment, examine our own assumptions, what is ‘real’ about sitting in a darkened auditorium, watching figures larger than life (especially in ‘close-ups’) projected on to a flat screen and seen through camera angles that often do not correspond to our normal viewing range, while listening to voices, not from the lips of the speakers, that boom around us in stereophonic sound accompanied by music from a full orchestra?” (2).

<sup>19</sup> The readers Taylor has in mind, as Antony Hammond tells us, “are the members of Shakespeare's company, who were required to read the work for professional reasons, so that the play could be performed” (85).

Dessen's "half-way stage" or Taylor's "unwritten para-text" implies an acknowledgment of a larger discourse which places the lost conversation in question in a more significant connection to the *status* of the dramatic texts at the time than with what the surviving contentious stage-directions can tell us about original performances. William Long reminds us that the process of writing Elizabethan dramatic texts involved working conventions between the dramatist and theatre personnel unlike those we are accustomed to today (1985). One general convention is that Elizabethan dramas were, more radically than in modern times, less concerned about readership than the actual performances. More radically in the sense that the 'reader' was not considered as fundamentally a part of the dramatic experience for whom the texts of the plays were produced and reproduced. In his "Play-Publishing in Elizabethan Times", H. Robinson Shipherd composes a survey of some of the essential aspects of the Elizabethan publishing tradition with the main aim to demonstrate the prevalence of something unique in the Elizabethan age, that is, a "general disinclination, on the part of the [Elizabethan] author to publish" (579). Because there was no such thing as an author's copyright, Shipherd claims, dramatists dreaded the idea of passing their work to publishers or stationers, for had it "left his hands to go into a printing office it left not only his possession but his control and belonged to the printer" (580). Equally important is Shipherd's display of how the "general disinclination" in question was merely an effect of something more extraordinary, that is, a "general disregard of plays as literature" (582). This view was "common and prevalent, and it was "not confined to any class or group" (583). He quotes publishers and playwrights reflecting on this historical reluctance to view plays as literature, such as the case in Heywood's *The English Traveller* (1633), where he concedes that "True it is, that my Playes are not exposed vnto the world in Volumes, to beare the title of Workes, (as others)" (579).

The general disavowal of plays as literature in Elizabethan times provides a solid ground for what is considered today as a plausible and needed corrective to the standard view of the relationship between the dramatist and his player-colleagues. The standard view is best provided in Gerald Eades Bentley's words: "The dramatist sold his manuscript to the acting company for which it had been prepared; after that it was no more his than the cloak that he might have sold to the actors at the same time" (82). This view has received ardent criticism thanks to the appearance of counter-evidence over time. In his study of the 1602-03 period in Henslow's records, Neil Carlson concludes that "dramatists appear to have formed loose partnerships or syndicates" so that

the impression one is left with is of the playwright as a relatively independent agent who seems to have had considerable control over his own methods of work and to have used that freedom to market his skills alone, or in association with others, to his greatest advantage (22-3).

A recent study by Grace Ioppolo (2006) has also examined the standard view with more scepticism, based on what she extracted in her readings of the Henslow records, Allen papers, surviving playscripts and other documents such as the late 1630s dispute between playwright Richard Brome and Salisbury. In her words:

the dramatists could...take an extraordinary, and hands-on, role in the staging of their plays, even in purchasing costumes...[they] did not simply hand over a completed manuscript, and their

authority, at the playhouse door and disappear with no further contact with the company, its actors, and the play itself (3).

“Acting companies”, she continues, “frequently sought the advice of authors when casting actors in their plays and continued to turn to authors for other support during readings and rehearsals” (28-9). Playwrights such as Daborne, Dekker, and Jonson, “even if not exclusively attached to a particular company, appear to have had nearly continuous contact with the companies for which they worked”. There is “overwhelming evidence provided by the Henslowe and Alleyn archive [which] suggests that authors were not forced to surrender all authority in their plays once the manuscripts were presented” (ibid.). Perhaps the closest articulation of the discourse of the Elizabethan stage-production is in the testimony of Johannes Rhenanus, a German mentioned by Michael Hattaway to have been in England himself in 1611 and who in 1613 published a German adaptation of Tomkis’s *Lingua* (1607):

So far as the actors are concerned they, as I have noticed in England, are daily instructed as it were in a school, so that even the most eminent actors have to allow themselves to be taught their places by the dramatists, and this gives life and ornament to a well written play, so that it is no wonder that the English players (I speak of skilled ones) surpass others and have advantage over them (Rhenanus, 1613, as quoted in Hart, 1941, p. 179; see also Hattaway, 1982).

The impression we are left with following the age’s disregard of drama as literature and the virtual absence of the figure of the director is that the Elizabethan dramatist is identified more with the production of theatre than with those who would otherwise act as their intermediaries. To return to what Dessen calls a “half-way stage”, permissive, contradictory, or elliptical signals are both what is left of a “conversation” into which we enter rather abruptly or which we eavesdrop upon, and, *because* of the same conversation, the result of the Elizabethan dramatist’s assumption that his player-colleagues were supposed to know what to do. This latter assumption has given way to a common accusation that Elizabethan dramatists are “careless” with their stage-directions. In a revealing comment by G.F Reynolds about Dekker’s *The Whore of Babylon*, the play which was given, he informs us, at the Fortune “but was printed without regard to the acted version”, he shows that the text contains “certain curious traits; though it is very careless, with entrances and exits left in the greatest confusion, somewhat unusual directions are given with minuteness”. What is being revealed here is that, he continues, “it is not unlikely that this represents fairly well the typical Elizabethan author’s manuscript, except that where the author was a member of the company these unusual directions might have been communicated by a word of mouth” (52).

What we take from Reynolds’s words is that the principle of “carelessness” seems to have gone beyond the editorial tradition back towards the first of things, that is, the author’s “manuscript”. And this sentiment is reminiscent of the many times historians and editors have parted company in their attempts to reconstruct surviving stage-directions from Shakespeare, somewhere where “carelessness” is openly reiterated. E. A. J. Honigmann complains about what he sees as Shakespeare’s “carelessness” with his stage-directions: “He often omitted them, or left them incomplete, or inserted them in approximately but not precisely the correct place” (187). The half-

way stage appears to us only as a “halfway stage” precisely due to the Elizabethan dramatists’ negligence in elaborating on what their player-colleagues *already* know.

### 3. From Carelessness to the Gaze

It is thus true, as historians of Elizabethan drama insist, that we may never rebuild the Elizabethan stage insofar as we remain eavesdroppers on some elusive “conversation” between the dramatist and his player-colleague(s). Contentious stage-directions are, in this sense, just remains and the problem will remain strictly historical, that is, with regard to a once existing object now lost to us. Yet the very fact that these directions tell us so little about performance points instead to the conventions that shaped their appearance: conventions that relegated stage-directions to a secondary or even unfavourable status in the written text, while continuing to operate through a consensual familiarity among dramatists and players, a shared understanding that needed no further elaboration. i.e. ‘this is what a dramatic page looks like’, ‘this is what play-production is like’.

So far, we seem to be talking about ‘loss’ and ‘survival’ in relation to the stage-directions in question. The loss is of the Elizabethan historical object, that is, of the age’s original stage productions as seen by Elizabethan playgoers. The survival aspect relates to the conventions of the age *as* contentions in language. This latter appearance thus encompasses a movement of signification between what is consciously and unconsciously followed, that is, between speech and the gaps by which and into which it is reproduced. What this means is that permissive, elliptical or contradictory stage-directions *do not, on their own, mean anything at all*. For their integration as expressions of the conventions unconsciously or customarily followed, we will have to rediscover their latent signification by associations which help fill the gaps between the signifiers of the conscious discourse: in other words, by integrating the discourse of the Other within the discourse of the subject. Elizabethan conventions cannot be regarded as a simple addition to an already manifest text nor as an added dimension of symbolic enrichment. The unconscious is always present in the manifest, but it *exists* there as “conscious absence” (334), to borrow Anthony G. Wilden’s term, as the latent that waits to be given its place by interpretation. As Leclaire and Laplanche have summed it up in their critique of Georges Politzer<sup>20</sup>:

(a) The unconscious is not co-extensive with the manifest as its signification: it is to be interpolated into the lacunae of the manifest text [Cf. Freud, Standard Edition, XIV, 167.]; (b) The unconscious is in relation with the manifest, not as the *sens* to the *lettre*, but at a same level of reality. This is what authorizes us to conceive of a dynamic relationship between the manifest text and what is absent from it and must be interpolated into it: it is a fragment of the discourse which must once again find its place within the discourse (quoted in Wilden, 1977, p. 34).

---

<sup>20</sup> For Politzer the unconscious was a first-person drama, a “personal dialectic” (69) which he believed does away with Freud’s impersonal characterization of the unconscious in terms of forces or psychological agencies. For him the unconscious was a different way of expressing a conscious experience without ‘disguise’ and so its interpretation demanded the uncovering of these ‘intimate’ rather than conventional significations: “Since it is the individual signification of the terms of the story that interests us, we need to approach the dream as a text to decipher” (66).

Contentious stage-directions are mainly “representations” (*Wortvorstellungen*) of the conditions of some discourse that is “absent from it” and yet which must be “interpolated” into their manifest text as such. As language for “other people”, for the purpose of implementing the text’s *mise en scène*, they signify an Other (A) which does not only account for the dramatist’s mirror-doubles on which they project their egoistic identification, but also for the conventions organized in their unconscious under the category of law (Law). To relocate the ‘place’ of this “conscious absent” law in “*Wortvorstellungen*” we thus need to get closer, not to the historically lost Elizabethan stage it is impossible to see, but to the ahistorical lost object of the “gaze”; the gap conducive of signification as such, and which, along the path of vision, “slips, passes, is transmitted”, as Lacan tells us in his Seminar XI, “from stage to stage, and is always to some degree eluded in it...” (73).

In the pages that follow, permissive, elliptical, or contradictory stage-directions on the page will only occupy a later stage of the gaze of the Elizabethan Other in its slippage from stage to page. In terms most appropriate for theatre, the “gaze” will be articulated with reference to Peter Brook’s “empty space,” that which both permeates any theatrical experience and demands that it must be filled for theatre to arise. What remains to be seen is how this empty space, as gaze, threads its way through the text itself: how the dramatist’s slips and stains, first glimpsed in these contentious directions, might erupt in fabula as intrusions of the page into story, moments where stage-writing no longer hides in the margins but cuts into the action itself. This trajectory will culminate in Shakespeare’s most infamous direction, “Exit, pursued by a bear,” where the gaze no longer lingers at the threshold but enters fabula itself. To situate these intrusions more precisely, it is useful to recall the terms of communication theory. From the perspective of Shannon and Weaver’s model (1949), Dessen and other commentators see the dramatist as the “sender” and players as “receivers,” and it is our limited view of the “channel” or medium of the “message” between them that leads to difficulties. We will instead attempt to direct our enquiry back to the “sender” as a source, that is, not just about the dramatist as a speaker or orator - in Aristotelian terms - who “operates on the message in some way to produce a signal suitable for transmission” (Shannon & Weaver 55) to a “receiver,” but also as an unconscious ‘discourse’ which conditions the formation of their “message” as it is produced. I aim to move backwards (or forwards) from problems of “medium” (a term that denies the discourse of the unconscious from having an import in interpretation) to tensions in “message.”

### **III. Carelessness and the Subject Supposed to Know**

#### **1. From Ego-Psychology to Lacan’s Other**

It will be helpful at first to demonstrate why the accusation that the Elizabethan dramatists are ‘careless’ does not constitute a tenable position for our study. “Carelessness,” as a concept, is deployed in such a way as to echo the assumptions of ego psychology, particularly the branch formulated by Heinz Hartmann, where the ego is said to possess apparatuses enabling it to adapt both to internal drives and to external reality. Within this framework, “carelessness” is interpreted as a failure of adaptive functioning, a deviation from the ego’s supposed capacity to integrate and regulate experience effectively. This view reflects a broader rhetoric of mastery, where the subject is

presumed to maintain or aspire to a stable, rational orientation toward the world and other subjects.

Lacan's framework unsettles this picture. For him, the subject is not grounded in mastery but caught in dependence upon language, which precedes and exceeds it. As he insists in Seminar III, "the Other must first of all be considered a locus, the locus in which speech is constituted" (274). The Big Other, understood as language itself, functions not as a reservoir of possible meanings simply awaiting expression, but as the structural condition that enables and constrains meaning between subjects. From this perspective, the dramatist's apparent "carelessness" cannot be reduced to a psychological lapse. The ego, in Lacan's account, is not a unified source of expression but a formation constituted through imaginary identifications, "absolutely impossible to distinguish from the imaginary captures that constitute it from head to toe" (312). What appears as omission, inconsistency, or negligence in the dramatist's stage-directions is therefore less an individual failure than a structural effect of language speaking through the subject. This also explains why accusations of "carelessness" recur in accounts of Elizabethan drama. What is named as negligence is, in fact, a symptom of the subject's division in discourse, where speech is never fully mastered but always produced under the determination of the Other. As Lacan remarks in *My Teaching*, the subject is "produced [*fait*], cornered even [*fait comme un rat*], by discourse" (36). "Carelessness" is thus not external to the subject but the very form in which their dependency on the Other becomes legible.

## 2. Carelessness and Transference

It is at this point that the notion of "carelessness" can be more precisely relocated within Lacan's construction of the "subject supposed to know" (*sujet supposé savoir*) (232), where lapses and digressions in speech function not as errors but as the very medium through which the unconscious speaks. In his *Seminar XI*, Lacan remarks on what should be happening in the consulting room between the analyst and analysand for "transference" to be established. In the analytic setting, transference is established between the analyst and analysand not by virtue of the analyst 'possessing' some knowledge for the analysand but by the latter only *supposing* that the analyst possesses such knowledge. This supposition is structurally enacted through the analysand's participation in "free association", a "careless" choice of words whose digressions, lapses, or discontinuities become "the very field in which censorship is exercised" (131)<sup>21</sup>. The analysand projects onto the analyst the "subject who knows", thereby installing the analyst in the position of the Other as the locus of signification. Lacan captures this dynamic precisely: "As soon as the subject who is supposed to know exists somewhere, there is transference" (*Seminar XI*, p. 232). In supposing the mastery of the analyst, the analysand faces their *own* censorship, the frame from which they are seen, without knowing what is seen, by *their* Other. Because the analyst does not occupy the position of an actual knowledge, he sustains the void of non-knowledge, a frame through which the analysand's unconscious speaks, however "careless" it is supposed to be. Transference thus emerges

---

<sup>21</sup> A technique of "careless" talk was central to Freud's analytic process. Freud described free association as the "fundamental technical rule of analysis," instructing patients to say whatever comes to mind without censorship, regardless of how "disagreeable," "irrelevant," or "nonsensical" it may seem (109–120). This unfiltered speech is where repression and censorship manifest.

not from what is said, but from the analysand's belief that what is said must mean something, regardless of form.

Now this structural misrecognition between the subject and the Other as "supposed to know" is on full display, interestingly, in one of Lacan's direct references to the experience of theatre:

And what is a Chorus? You will be told that it's you yourselves. Or perhaps that it isn't you. But that's not the point. Means are involved here, emotional means. In my view, the Chorus is people who are moved. Therefore, look closely before telling yourself that emotions are engaged in this purification. They are engaged, along with others, when at the end they have to be pacified by some artifice or other. But that doesn't mean to say that they are directly engaged. On the one hand, they no doubt are, and you are there in the form of a material to be made use of; on the other hand, that material is also completely *indifferent*. When you go to the theatre in the evening, you are preoccupied by the affairs of the day, by the pen that you lost, by the check that you will have to sign the next day. You shouldn't give yourselves too much credit. Your emotions are taken charge of by the healthy order displayed on the stage. The Chorus takes care of them. The emotional commentary is done for you (my emphasis) (247).

Here, the spectator, like the analysand, is suspended between two incompatible registers: the immediacy of what is "seen" and the persistence of what is unspoken, unseen, or displaced. The show, like the analytic discourse, is "supposed to know" how to manage the subject's affect, to speak to what is most intimate precisely by relieving them of their everyday preoccupations. In Lacan's terms, the spectator is "a material to be made use of," designating the bounds of the Other as the "other scene" (*l'autre scène*) happening at the same level of reality: at once catering for their 'enjoyment' ("emotional commentary") while displacing the "pen you lost" or "the check you will have to sign tomorrow." These displacements do not erase the thoughts themselves; they continue to operate alongside the staged emotions, as Freud describes when he observes that "[t]houghts which are mutually contradictory make no attempt to do away with each other but persist side by side. They often combine to form condensations, just as though there were no contradiction between them" (596). The performance as the 'other' that is present for me is primordially the Other of *me* as present and absent, the contingent Other of me as the "truth" of my "indifference". In the performance I am shown as divided and yet it works (*ça marche quand même*).<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> Žižek compares this function of the Chorus to the phenomenon of canned laughter on television: "Even if, after a hard day's work, we are too weary to laugh, so that we just stare passively at the screen, we nonetheless feel relieved after the show - the other has laughed for us. So even if we do not laugh, but simply watch the show, we still feel the show was funny, because the laughter is already there" (The Sublime Object of Ideology, 1989, p. 35). Žižek's point is that enjoyment can be radically externalized: we can literally laugh or cry through another.

### 3. From Supposed Knowledge to the Gaze

When Dessen tells us that the Elizabethan dramatist's player-colleagues were 'supposed to know what to do', it is thus imperative to consider such supposition as equally indicative of the dramatist's Other as *the* locus of his contentious stage-directions. The accusation of "carelessness" against Elizabethan dramatists, then, should not be read as evidence of individual negligence but as a structural feature of their position in language. What critics call lapses or inconsistencies emerge because the dramatist, like the analysand, is caught in a discourse where meaning is always assumed to be there, even when it is not explicitly given. Lacan's comments on the Chorus help clarify this point: just as the Chorus "takes care" of the spectator's emotions, so too the dramatist's player-colleagues were "supposed to know" how to supply what the text complicates or leaves unsaid. What appears to us as "carelessness" is, in this sense, a sign of the dramatist's reliance on a shared economy of understanding, one in which gaps and omissions are not accidents but part of the very structure of communication. It is from here that the next step of the argument follows. To describe these gaps as "carelessness" is to stop short of grasping their structural role. What is at stake is not simply omission, but the dramatist's passage between two registers: the Imaginary, tied to the specular relation of performance, and the Symbolic, tied to the chain of signification on the page. These registers are not opposed in a simple binary; each is sustained through the Other as their common denominator, the locus in which both images and signifiers take shape. As we will see in what follows, this movement between Imaginary and Symbolic can be traced through Lacan's notion of the gaze: the point at which identification falters and signification slips, where the dramatist's "halfway stage" opens into the directions that have come down to us as problematic.

## IV. Stage-directions and the Mirror of Performance

### 1. Misrecognition and the Theatre of the Imaginary

The Imaginary, in Lacan's topology of the psyche, is not merely the domain of images but the structural register in which the ego is constituted through a misrecognition (*méconnaissance*), a process inaugurated in what Lacan formulates as the "mirror stage". Far from being analogical, the "mirror stage" is a 'stage' in the strictest sense: a staged scene of alienation and identification, where the subject is both actor and spectator of its own becoming. In "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function" (1949) Lacan calls it "the rootstock of secondary identifications" (76) a foundational *mise en scène* in which the infant, supported by an external agent or prosthetic device (e.g., the *trotte-bébé*), jubilantly assumes an image of bodily unity that is not yet its own. The jubilation is structurally deceptive, hence the "mirror stage" is also a "drama": it masks a (Real) discordance between the infant's fragmented sensorimotor experience and the gestalt of the mirror image or the imago as a totalized fiction of coherence. Lacan insists that "it suffices to understand the mirror stage in this context as identification...the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image" (ibid.). This assumption is not a passive reflection but an active dramatic capture, a scene in which the subject is constituted through a specular alienation. It is thus a theatre of the Imaginary, where the ego is born as an externalized image, a misrecognized unity that sutures the subject through the mediation of the Other. The result is the experience of the body-in-pieces (*corps morcelé*), repressed beneath the surface of the imago, which only retroactively

organizes the body as a coherent whole. This retroactive organization by “mirror” bespeaks a temporal paradox in the logic of a future anteriority (*futur antérieur*), “a retroversion effect by which the subject becomes at each stage what he was before and announces himself - he will have been - only in the future perfect tense” (300). The mirror stage is therefore also a drama of ‘anticipatory retrospection’, where the subject is caught in a temporal loop: ‘what it is’ only *becomes* by having misrecognized itself in ‘what it is not’. As “stage”, the “mirror” captures the infant’s first (present) spectator, and as “drama” it captures his identification with what they are not (yet).

At another level, Lacan, in a subtle comment, places this discrepancy between the infant’s “motor impotence” (drama) and his “imago” (stage) at the crossroads of a primordial act of “animation”:

For the total form of his body, by which the subject anticipates the maturation of his power in mirage, is given to him only as a gestalt, that is, in an exteriority in which, to be sure, this form is more constitutive than constituted, but in which, above all, it appears to him as the contour of his stature that freezes it and in a symmetry that reverses it, in opposition to the turbulent movements with which the subject feels he *animates* it (my emphasis) (76).

The placement of ‘animation’ at the end of Lacan’s locution exposes its “quilting” (*point de capiton*) rearrangement of what precedes it. Indeed, it exposes “animation” as the paradoxical motor of (mis)recognition. The child’s total form, offered as a Gestalt, arrives as an exterior image, a specular contour that both “freezes” and “reverses” the lived experience of their body. What the child perceives is not a body possessed, but a body in symmetry, set against the “turbulent movements” by which the subject feels they animate what is otherwise stiffened by the image. This is a constitutive dialectic: the mirage of unity appears only through the fragmentation it conceals, the body in pieces, and is animated by that which is concealed and yet structures the final drama. In this way the infant does *not* actually see their body except as a performance already in place. They *direct* the very fragmentation they seek to overcome, that is, their own drama. The “ideal-I” is animated as a drama: a misrecognized performance staged through identification with a specular other. The image, far from being a reflection, becomes a projection animated by a lack that is the infant outside of the same image. The subject becomes the dramatist of their own incompleteness as a barred subject § .

## 2. The Gaze as Non-Specular Split

Lacan’s name for this “animating” absence is the “gaze”, at the crossroads of the specular and the non-specular, the presence and absence of the ‘animator’ between their “body in pieces” and the “imago” constituted as such in the mirror. In the section “Of the Gaze as objet Petit a”, Lacan maintains that the gaze is the “objet petit a” of perception, an imagined gaze of the Other that is “presented to us only in the form of a strange contingency, symbolic of what we find on the horizon, as the thrust of our experience, namely, the lack that constitutes castration anxiety” (83-84). The gaze amounts to being a “strange contingency” by virtue of its being nothing other than the lack of integration between the specular and the non-specular, a visual foreclosure that defines the very perplexing status it has acquired. In Lacan’s algebraic symbol  $i(a)$ , i.e. the ideal ego, the gaze is the

non-specular 'a' at the heart of the specular *moi* (i), together standing for the "alienating image" with which the infant as an animator identifies with the animated. The "a" is not exhaustively Imaginary qua imago-Gestalt but has at its heart something that is non-specular, something Real at the centre of each image as its support. Now, the question is what this means with regard to the "mirror-stage as a drama" and of its being, precisely, the "gaze of the Other"?

The gaze permeates the primal scene of mirroring, the "mirror stage", only as a frame (*bâti, cadre*) in the sense that the child's enchantment by the image leaves him *blind* to the surrounding 'framing' functions by its supporting big Others or what is responsible for constituting this visually mediated experience as what it appears to be. In the Other, which supports their image, is his split self, the anxiety-inducing pre-maturational helplessness [Freud's *Hilflosigkeit* (1926)] as the gaze between the imago and the body in pieces, the stain of the latter in the former acting as the condition of possibility for the non-metaphorical mirroring fixated upon the spectacle of the self-image. In relation to the animated image, i.e. the infant's ideal performance, stands an off-stage contingency of the anamorphic gaze of the Other as the same *performance in pieces*. At the very nucleus of the recognized "me" resides a misrecognized "not-me", something "in me more than myself". The "gaze of the Other" represents the subject as ex-centric in this sense insofar as it is "something strange to me, although it is at the heart of me" (71). It is present and absent, that is, "specular and non-specular insofar as it is in everything that the ego [unconsciously] neglects, scotomizes, misconstrues in the stations that make it react to reality, everything that it ignores, exhausts and binds in the signification that it receives from language" (22). In "seeing myself seeing myself" there is the gaze of the Other which is the Möbius-type twist within the surface of the mirror, that is, between the little other of the Imaginary ego that is frustrating in its detachment from me and the non-specular forces that give those images a stage, a mirror.

Having reiterated, in basic terms, the mirror-stage as a drama of animation, to what extent are the conventions of the Elizabethan play-production stage a "mirror stage" or an Imaginary Other? In other words, where may we locate the "gaze of the Other" of the Elizabethan play-production stage whose 'slippage' (the dynamic of which I will explain) reaches the page in the form of contentious stage-directions?

## V. Ostension, Empty Space, and the Gaze

### 1. The Dramatist's Ostensive Model

The repudiation of both the 'standard' view of the relationship between the dramatist and player-colleagues and of the dramatic texts as "literature" makes way for an Imaginary discourse that puts Elizabethan drama in a different position, practically and interpretively, than its modern counterpart. It is precisely in the coordinates of the "mirror stage's" animated (constitutive) image where we may locate the 'Ideal I' or the ego of the Elizabethan dramatist as an *animator* in an Imaginary register. Umberto Eco in his *A Theory of Semiotics* (1976) locates this Imaginary perception of animating in the ostensive token gesture of theatre. The Imaginary discourse of the Elizabethan dramatist giving

directions, instructions, suggestions to his player-colleagues/production companies can be summed up in what he postulates as the act of ostension, the specular form of stage-directions as given by the Elizabethan-dramatist to others:

You ask me, 'How should I be dressed for the party this evening?' If I answer by showing my tie framed by my jacket and say, "Like this, more or less," I am signifying by ostension. My tie does not mean my actual tie but your possible tie ...With this simple gesture I am doing something that is theatre at its best, since I not only tell you something, but I am offering to you a model... I am not only picturing a given behaviour, I am in fact eliciting a behaviour, emphasizing a duty, *mirroring* your future [my emphasis] (103).

Ostension, after all, is an act of demonstrating in the "present" an item from the repository of the "past" so as to anticipate the "future" with reference to the components of that past. As a *specular* stage-direction ostension is qualified here as a "secondary identification" to the "mirror stage": the dramatist's projection of his ideal (performance) *at once* covers their real split precisely as a *dramatist* and makes way for their "dramatic" Gestalt, i.e. *dramatis personae, mise en scène...etc.* The image (of the act of ostension) must repress the dramatist's primordial split from his Imaginary for the latter to arise as play. The "gaze" is there but as the obverse of the dramatist's 'ostension'. Not so much as a stage-direction to act in such and such way, as the split between drama's body-in-pieces and the dramatist's integrated body. The "gaze" functions here less as a directive image than as a stain within the dramatist's "stage": fragments or pieces that do not cohere on their own, yet which are retroactively arranged into a gestalt. It is this retrospective organization that produces the illusion of integration and plenitude between the dramatist and his projected performance.

## 2. Brook and the Blind Spot of Theatre

This gaze as the dramatist's 'animative power', 'gazing', so to speak, from their "bits and pieces", is what is at stake in Peter Brook's lecture "Does Nothing Come from Nothing?" (1994) where the affinities between the gaze of the Other in the drama of the mirror-stage and the actual platform of drama per se are even more apparent. Working towards a phenomenological view of theatre as a strictly *visual* experience Brook introduces his notion of "empty space" as "[A]ny space in which theatre takes place... I can take any empty space and call it a bare stage. A man walks across this empty space whilst someone else is watching him, and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged" (11). Brook's observation can be divided into two halves as concerns, first, the relationship between stage and emptiness, and of that relationship as the Imaginary apparatus informing any act of "watching" someone by another. Taking "an empty space and call[ing] it a bare stage" speaks, first of all, of the existence of an empty space for theatre *not* as an a priori matter of seeing but of its existence only when it is "seen" (becoming stage) as such. There is a missed

encounter between seeing empty space as distinct from the stage it *presents* and seeing that same stage as distinct from the empty space it *represents*. The empty space is only empty when no one is watching! This impossibility of resolving the structural blindness between presentation and representation accounts for empty space's 'ek-sistence' in theatre as both inassimilable and a 'driving element': "Emptiness in the theatre allows the imagination to fill the gaps" (32). The crux of any theatrical experience is in the empty space as an invisibility at the heart of the visible, the gaze of the former existing in the latter as repressed, "a bare stage". Any "empty space" is a "bare stage" precisely insofar as in its *becoming* as theatre it theatricalizes an Other as a supplement to the manifest system.

And this missed encounter on stage is all that is at work between 'seeing' and 'being seen'. Here we move to Brook's second concern. The man who walks "across this empty space while someone else is watching him" misses the position of watching *himself* from the other's point of view. From an empty (atemporal) 'direction' appears a 'stage' of *being* (with others): "You never look at me from the place at which I see you" (Lacan 103). There is an empty space for 'being watched' that is *captured* by whoever is performing the act of "watching". In presenting himself as a seeing subject, the "man who walks" is misrecognised as seen (as an object) by the other. In other words, the subject cannot see themselves from the outside of their image and s/he *is* this failure that "gazes" back at him/her. There is an emptiness in me that I must repress to sustain the illusion that I am my own image. In fact, I am only putting up a performance. Theatre, in this sense, offers for Brook "a taste of something that can't be explained and can't be defined, but which can be experienced as a concrete reality" (4). The at once inexplicable but "experienced" is the blind spot on any stage, including the "mirror's": *the gaze as a "stage direction"* for the creation of phantasmatic scenes which cover the 'bareness' of the stage as such. This is what differentiates, for Brook, theatre from cinema: "In the theatre, the imagination fills the space, whereas the cinema screen represents the whole, demanding that everything in the frame be linked in a logically coherent manner" (32). What supports the *mise en scène*, that is, the *seen*, is its punctiform object of 'emptiness' which itself needs a screen to appear as such.

Brook gives us an anecdote which offers a taste of the gaze at work in rehearsals, somewhere where the co-existence of the gaze with the stage's scenic images, as the empty space of 'being watched', or of the fear of empty space precisely *as* theatre, can be discerned in an uncanny emergence of "stage-direction":

When I first began to work in the theatre, I worked with a very young Alec Guinness. Alec Guinness, who had already done a lot of work, said to me, "I must warn you, if you interrupt me while I am rehearsing something emotional, if in the middle of a scene you just interrupt me because you just want to tell me something, I'll yell at you". "But", he said, "don't take this as showing any bad faith, any bad intentions on my part. I can't bear to lose the thread, the unity of my character, so I will shout so as to stay within what I am doing" (33).

For Guinness's performance, Brook would have stood as, at once, the other on stage, a director, and the Other as the blind spot to Guinness's character. For the "unity" of Guinness's character to

function it must repress from its image the “gaze” of the stage-direction in its human (seeing) form, i.e. Brook. As soon as Brook might interfere as *not*-performance, that is, as an empty ‘piece’ of Guinness’s performance then its “unity” would have been shattered from “within” and Guinness will “yell at you”, or, more precisely, *it* will yell at you, for the I in this “other scene” is the performance of a failure now yelling back at a moment of Imaginary dissolution. This encounter with the gaze as a “stage-direction”, and as the Imaginary Other of the Elizabethan dramatist in particular, is where our attention will now turn.

## VI. Slippage of the Gaze and the Bar of the Signifier

### 1. From Eye to Gaze, from Signifier to Signified

The gaze’s slippage from one chain of signification to another hinges first of all, on Lacan’s implementation of a primordial antimony between the “imagined gaze of the Other” and the eye as an “organ”. Lacan’s contention that the gaze is “the gaze of the Other” assumes that consciousness is pre-scribed by the “pre-existence to the seen of a given-to-be-seen” (74). What I see is ostensive of my own (Symbolic) presuppositions, and the result is a stain of the gaze in the eye or “that form of vision that is satisfied with itself in imagining itself as consciousness” (83). The eye is on the side of consciousness ‘giving directions’, and the gaze condenses those directions in the Other’s direction. Put differently, my “eye” is in a *symbolic* relationship with my “existence”: “In my existence I am looked at from all sides” (83).

The split between the ego identification(s) in the mirror and the support (from the Other) to which it is blind, is the stage of the subsumption of perception (what is seen) in language (what pre-exists the seen). This is what qualifies the mirror stage as the primordial *apparatus* of the dialectical relationship between the signifier and the signified. The excluded support of the Other in the mirror stage is a signifier to the extent that it is the *support of signification*: “the notion of structure and that of signifier appear inseparable” (2006, p. 418)<sup>23</sup>. On the other hand, the projection of the misrecognized images as oneself belongs to the field of the “signified” as an “effect of signification” (450). The inter-subjective drama of the mirror stage involves an intra-subjective symbolic Other (A) and this accounts for both the lack of identification with the signifier, the support of signification as an image, and the animation of images in the void engendered by the sundering of that signifier. The rudimentary sedimentation of the subject is constituted by the split the signifier instils to cover up a lack in knowledge, that is, precisely insofar as it is its support. It follows that the relationship between the signifier and the signified, that is, between the support and the image is ‘effectively’ slippery, insofar as the subject who speaks:

is nothing other than what slides in a chain of signifiers, whether he knows which signifier he is the effect of or not. That effect – the subject – is the intermediary effect between what

---

<sup>23</sup> Lacan also uses the expression “imaginary matrix” which implies an Imaginary that is structured by the Symbolic (*Écrits* 221)

characterises a signifier and another signifier, namely, the fact that each of them, each of them is an element. We know of no other basis by which the One may have been introduced into the world if not by the signifier as such, that is, the signifier insofar as we learn to separate it from its meaning effects (1998, p.49-50).

It is in this sense that not only, for Lacan, does "the signifier [not] answer to the function of representing the signified", but it cannot answer, for Lacan, to "any signification whatsoever" (2006, p. 416). No signifier will ever come to furnish the last word of sense and the result is that the signifier on its own is "stupid". In Lacan's famous algorithm  $S/s$ , the gaze belongs to the bar between the signifier and the signified, as that which "resists signification", because the signified relates to the signifier only as an image which the bar *itself* presents. The bar is to the signifier what the gaze is to consciousness, a screen which renders the dialogue with the lack possible insofar as it is repressed, a signified.

## 2. The Return of the Repressed

Freud in "The Unconscious" (1915) put the problem of the relationship of "presentation" between the conscious and the unconscious in the dialectic between word-presentation and thing-presentation, the formative predecessors of Lacan's signifier and signified, respectively:

What we have permissibly called the conscious presentation [*Vorstellung*] of the object can now be split up into the presentation of the word and the presentation of the thing...We now seem to know all at once what the difference is between a conscious and an unconscious presentation...the conscious presentation comprises the presentation of the thing plus the presentation of the word belonging to it, while the unconscious presentation is the presentation of the thing alone...Now, too, we are in a position to state precisely what it is that repression denies to the rejected presentation in the transference neuroses: What it denies to the presentation is translation into words which shall remain attached to the object (201).

The split between the presentation of the word and the presentation of thing is what gives way for the return of the repressed; repression is the denial of the translation into words of the presentation of the thing which allows for the emergence of an object of consciousness [*Vorstellung*]. In other words, the repressed is the thing without words: "A presentation which is not put into words, or a psychical act which is not hypercatheted, remains thereafter in the Ucs. in a state of repression" (201). The return of the repressed comprises, however, the presentation of the thing in words, which is understood in these terms as an "absent presence" that can be understood *only* retrospectively when reattached to its symbolic chain. Freud's distinction is again a crucial one: "Even in the unconscious ... an instinct cannot be represented otherwise than by an idea [*Vorstellung*]. If the instinct did not attach itself to an idea or manifest itself as an affective state, *we could know nothing about it.*" (my emphasis 181.) Without a word-presentation, a signifier, attached to thing-presentation or the signified, the latter cannot appear as 'sens' at all. The return of the repressed through the split between presentation of the word and presentation of the thing, that is,

between the signifier and signified demands that it be reattached to signifiers so that the gaze can be (re)presented in *its* Other form. What we will thus undertake now is the reattachment of the gaze of the stage to 'words', that is, its slippage from the stage will be re-anchored as such in line with the contentious Elizabethan stage-directions.

## VII. Stage-directions as Stains: The Möbius Logic of the Gaze

### 1. The Stain of In/Out

Elizabethan stage-directions are not simply pragmatic notations but inscriptions that disclose the dramatist's divided position between page and stage. Their logic is nowhere more visible than in the apparent instability of the most basic oppositions: "in" and "out." Already here, the stage reveals itself as a Möbius surface, where ingress and egress collapse into one another, undoing the security of spatial coordinates. In *The Iron Age* - "They march softly in [off the stage] at one door, and presently in [onto the stage] at another" (379)- the word "in" is made to signify both entry and exit, collapsing its opposition with "out." Similarly, in *King Lear*, the Quarto's "The bodies of Goneril and Regan are brought in" is contradicted by the Folio's "Goneril and Regan's bodies brought out" (quoted in Dessen, 7), rendering "in" and "out" interchangeable. What appears a minor textual inconsistency marks a deeper topological condition: the gaze, inscribed in the stage's empty space, folds the inside onto the outside so that "seeing" and "being seen" become indiscernible. In Lacan's terms, the dramatist's gaze returns here as the Möbius logic of stage-directions themselves: to "see" the bodies brought in is at the same time to be "seen" as bringing them out, a torsion in language that testifies to the dramatist's divided presence in his own signifiers.

It is precisely this Möbius topology that sustains the other contentious modalities of stage-directions - permissive, elliptical, and contradictory. They are not accidental variations but structural derivatives of the same fold: the dramatist's eye seeking to command bodies and the dramatist's gaze returning as lack. The dialectic between perception and language, between thing-presentation and word-presentation, signifier and signified, appears here in its rudimentary form: stage-directions "freely associating" page and stage, at once ostensive and elusive. To say "Enter two or three setting three or four chairs" or "Exit corse" is to stitch theatrical action into language while letting that stitch unravel at the same time, the text bearing the trace of its own insufficiency. In this way, each form of stage-direction is not merely a technical notation but a signifier of the dramatist's split position, a stain where the subject is caught between ostension and ellipsis, plenitude and lack.

### 2. Stains of Permission and Ellipsis

In permissive stage-directions such as "Enter two or three setting three or four Chairs, and four or five stools" (Field, 5.2.0), "as from hunting" (Heywood, 4:171), "certain Romans with spoils" and "certain Volsces come in the aid of Aufidius" (*Coriolanus* 1.5.0; 1.8.13), "diverse Spirits in shape of Dogs and Hounds" (*Macbeth* 4.1.254), "or," "as," "diverse," and "certain" are, at one level, straightforward tokens in a conscious discourse addressed to those who are supposed to know. At another level, however, each of these small words exposes the dramatist's split position at the bar

(S/s): instead of being quilted by a *point de capiton*, they open a *glissement* in which signification slides without fixation. In precisely this sense they function as the gaze -not as images but as sites that resist signification- and thereby reveal the subject in the signifier. Here "a signifier represents the subject for another signifier": the dramatist is represented by "or," "as," "diverse," "certain" -he becomes that minimal signifier- while those same words remain the support of signification for others, delegated to supply the quilting point through practice and consensual familiarity. What appears as an alternative or a modifier is the signifier of the subject's division: a residue of thing-presentation seeking (and deferring) word-presentation, a metonymic (desire) that promises ostension ("Like this!") at the same time it postpones that decision indefinitely to the shared economy of the company.

The same mechanism of the gaze as a signifier of lack applies with equal force to elliptical stage-directions such as "The organs play" (Middleton 2.1.151), "Enter four torches" (Heywood 1:234), "Exit corse" (*Shakespeare* 1.2.226). The difference from the permissive case is in the mode of inscription. While permissive directions install a *glissement* of alternatives that await fixation by a *point de capiton* supplied through practice, elliptical directions register the lack differently: they return the empty space of stage in the form of ellipsis itself, a lacuna in the text. What is striking in these cases is how the stage-direction gestures toward an action without providing its agent. "The organs play" withholds the organist; "Enter four torches" gives us the props without the bearers; "Exit corse" demands a corpse's removal but effaces the carriers. Each direction presupposes an act and withdraws the doer. The dramatist disappears into these crevices, not absent, but inscribed as a signifier of lack: the ellipsis marks his position as both effaced agent and structural support, the place from which others are supposed to know how to complete what is left unsaid.

Elliptical stage-directions are therefore not neutral omissions but the dramatist's presence as stain within the chain of signification, the textual trace of what is required for the stage yet displaced onto the shared economy of rehearsal and convention. At the same time, such ellipses recall the dramatist's earlier corporeality in rehearsal - the moment of ostension, "Like this!" - but only in its negative form. What once appeared as an animating presence ("showing" the gesture or movement to the actors) now returns as a paralytic absence, a textual instruction that gestures while effacing the body that would have borne it. The bearers of torches, the carriers of a corpse, the organist at the keys are elided, so that what remains is only the movement without its agent, a gesture without corporeal support. In this sense the elliptical stage-direction is the dramatist's own body returning as the gaze caught between ostension and ellipsis, between the Imaginary plenitude of "Like this!" and the Symbolic lack of its transcription. As with "permissive" stage-directions, in the "elliptical" stage-directions the empty space of stage returns on the page not as image but as signifier, "stupid" in its materiality, demanding supplementation. The "or," no less than the "ellipsis," is where a signifier represents the subject for another signifier: the dramatist himself becomes this minimal remainder, whether as the disjunctive particle of alternatives or as the blank space of omission.

### 3. The Grammar of Staging

Dessen also exposes a 'grammar of staging' which underscores this Möbius economy. He notices how Elizabethan dramatic lexicon provides no equivalents for the geometric vocabulary of modern theatre; no "onstage," "offstage," "stage right," "stage left." The terms that survive instead are "aloof, apart, aside, retire, withdraw" (6), gestures of proximity and removal, not coordinates of extension. Here the Elizabethan dramatist is not situated outside but within the kinetic grammar of stage praxis. Bodies are not inscribed through spatial extension but through a syntax of torsion, linguistic folds that twist around absence in their projection of presence. In the absence of a

geometric stage vocabulary, the dramatist's "enunciation" emerges not as a vectorial placement of bodies but as a series of inflected dislocations -aloof, aside, retire, withdraw- each term a syntactic curvature that marks the dramatist's unconscious position vis-à-vis the stage he cannot occupy as image. They are the dramatist's own enunciative stain, the linguistic articulation of a body returning as a gap in geometry.

Dessen's observation that "in some instances the verb being used (bring, draw, lead, set, thrust) appears to be more important than the adverb that supposedly provides the direction" (7) strikes at the heart of this grammar. The adverb is meant to secure the extension of movement, to anchor gesture in geometry: in, out, forth. Yet here the adverb falters, subordinated to the verb and its guarantee dissolved. In Lacanian terms, the adverb fails as a statement of place. It aspires to provide the co-ordinates of the eye, to situate bodies within a visible field, but collapses under the pressure of its own instability. Where the adverb collapses, the verb rises in its place, as fragments of animation detached from the geometrical field. "Bring, draw, thrust, lead" are thus torsional signifiers, cutting into empty space, inscribing motion which twists around absence.

Elizabethan stage-directions are saturated with what may be theorized as divergent positionalities of the gaze as it emanates from the stage's constitutively empty space, positionalities that have reached us veiled in the colloquial registers of permissiveness, ellipsis, contradiction, or even fictionalization. Each instance may be read as a symptomatic return of the gaze from the void of the stage, refracted through multiple imagined loci, and thus as a trace of the dramatist's own (dis)placement within a latent dialogic economy with his Other. These directions -"in manner of a Consistory" (Dessen 2), "Enter the Duke, Judges, Raymond, with others, the form of a Court" (ibid. 2), "Enter Bassanio, Antonio, Gratiano, and their followers" (ibid. 3), "with as many Jewels robes and Gold as he can carry" (ibid. 3), "The Ghosts use several gestures" (ibid. 3), "A Spirit (over the door) does some action to the dishes as they enter" (ibid. 3), "Prepare to play" (ibid. 3), "Prepares for death" (ibid. 4), "Exit corse" (ibid. 4), "Enter Buckingham from his Arraignment, Tipstaves before him, the Ax with the edge towards him, Halberds on each side" (ibid. 4), "Enter four torches" (ibid. 4), "as in his Chamber in a morning, half ready" (ibid. 5), "half unready, as newly started from their Beds" (ibid. 5), "stand unseen" (ibid. 6), "walks aside full of strange gestures" (ibid. 6), "Parolles and Lafew stay behind, commenting of this wedding" (ibid. 8) -each inscribes a moment in which the gaze, no longer anchored in an ocular regime, reconfigures the spatial and symbolic coordinates of the Elizabethan dramatist's theatre in text. The resulting textual phenomena, gestural, spectral, excessive, or contradictory, are not aberrations but formal expressions of the gaze's Möbius logic: a topological fold that renders the inside indistinguishable from the outside, and thus mirrors the gaze's own ontological interval between seeing and being seen.

## VIII. Anamorphic Stains: Stage-directions and the Gaze

### 1. The Dramatist as Punctiform Object

Upon a second look, that is, in Imaginary terms, the signifiers of the gaze above indeed expose an enunciation of someone who is *incapable of seeing properly*. They occupy, as enunciations of the

Other, the structural blindness of not seeing oneself from the position of the empty space of theatre. Again, “Diverse Spirits in shape of Dogs and Hounds,” “Enter two or three setting three or four Chairs, and four or five stools,” “as from hunting,” or “They march softly in [off the stage] at one door, and presently in [onto the stage] at another” can be interpolated at the same level of their permissiveness, ellipsis, or contradictions as an unconscious discourse of the Elizabethan dramatist encountering his body in “pieces.” The missed encounter between empty space and stage as a visual experience returns to us on the page as a problem in seeing. In other words, the eye of consciousness giving stage-directions to others encounters at the same level of reality the gaze of the Other, an emptiness which no sooner it “appears,” as Lacan tells us, “[than] the subject tries to adapt himself to it, he becomes that punctiform object, that point of vanishing being with which the subject confuses his own failure” (*Seminar XI*, 83). Destined, as signs, for the supposed-to-know from the eye of consciousness, Elizabethan contentious stage-directions are dismissive, as signifiers, of the dramatist from his own imago in the form of a non-specular Other from which he seeks support. They are adaptive to the appearance of the gaze of the empty space only to the extent that they become signifiers of the dramatist’s animative lack.

With special reference to the primordial act of “animation” in the mirror stage, consciously animating the other via permissive, elliptical, or contradictory stage-directions comes at the expense of being “effaced” by the Other, that is, becoming a punctiform object. Effacing would qualify here as the inverted ladder of animating insofar as the latter happens in and through the split of the Other. What appears to others as animating is, from the point of view of the gaze of the Other, a latent form of effacing where animation - that is, giving directions - becomes the inverted mirror of castration, “a moment of cutting [that] is haunted by the form of a bloody scrap: the pound of flesh that life pays in order to turn it into the signifier of signifiers, which it is impossible to restore, as such, to the imaginary body...” (*Écrits*, 629–30). “Diverse,” “certain,” “or,” “in/out,” “as,” “as if” are the gaze to the extent that the latter’s “function [is] of masking the lack” of an imaginary plenitude with the m(O)ther. Before they mean something for others, they represent a lack, which as Lacan tells us, ultimately “presents itself to the extent that it becomes word” (*Seminar XI*, 55), a signifier. This is the reason the unconscious which “shows” for Lacan the “sliding away” of the subject in dreams as “the absence of horizon” and in which there is the “emergence, of contrast, of stain,” is “structured like language.” Signifiers are no more than stains with regards to their very “materiality” in signification: they force open a gaze into being, and we blindly follow, for we are signifiers, and so our position is that of a dream, “of someone who does not see” (*Seminar XI*, 84) or does not see what they want to see.

## 2. Holbein’s Ambassadors and the Anamorphic I

Insofar as the gaze is the signifier of lack in both the Symbolic register (signifier as support) and the Imaginary register (signifier as stain), it thus seems imperative to revert to the notion of the *mise en scène*, the conscious object of stage-directions, in a way that would transpose the contentions in question as not so much a “problem of vision” as a visual experience. In other words, in what ways we can imagine the empty space of the stage as featuring itself as visual in line with the contentious stage-directions it supports- that is, as consciously contentious. On the level of the Other, that is, as enunciations, the contentious stage-directions would give rise to something like *The Ambassadors*, Hans Holbein’s 1533 painting which Lacan mentions briefly at the centre of his seminars on vision. As Lacan explains, Holbein’s painting acts as an allegory of vanity, flattering the viewer by presenting a

picture that seems, at first, to celebrate human knowledge, before it humiliates the viewer by revealing that what appears in the foreground as an indistinct mass is a staring death's-head that can only be seen when glimpsed at from the side (1978).



Fig. 1

This anamorphic painting dramatizes, for Lacan, the constitution of subjectivity along the path of vision: elements within the optical field must be repressed if clear vision is to be enabled, just as repression is foundational to the subject's entry into the order of language. What Lacan indicates is that this "indistinct mass" is a signifier not to the extent that it hides something, but that it hides nothing. It is a gaze insofar as it is an obstacle to logic, a *caput mortuum* (43), as Lacan puts it, that appears to perception as anamorphic. Before the painting, the viewer sees their own failure, the gaze of their bits and pieces in an intrusive form. And so, the contentious stage-directions are, from the place of the Other, an anamorphic display of the body as populating the projections he gives for the supposed-to-know. This anamorphic "I" of the dramatist's unconscious thus emerges as eloquently in "The organs play, and covered dishes march over the stage" (quoted in Dessen 7), 'raving and staring as if he were mad' (ibid.), or in the recurrent motifs of being 'unready' (ibid.), 'all unready' (ibid.), 'not full ready' (ibid.), 'behind the post' (ibid.), or 'stand unseen' (ibid.)."

In each instance, there is the Elizabethan dramatist's unconscious gaze on himself as if standing face to face with his ostensibly split self, inside and outside the stage to which he gives rise: anamorphically structured into the pieces of his *mise en scène*. And this parallax of two irreconcilably but structurally formulated paths of vision - that is, the anamorphic "I" as contingent to the *moi* of consciousness - is reminiscent of the structure Lacan articulates as one example of the *performances* of the gaze in and out of the infant's mirror. For one element of the infant's bodily movements in the mirror-stage is when they attempt to "propose to the recognition of the Other," that is, to their mother as support, the image of jubilation they identify with in the mirror. But with

the infant's inability to "turn his head" to the Other "behind him," what is seen in the mirror as complete becomes momentarily rather anxiety-provoking:

The infant is not able to turn his head, in accordance with this movement which I described to you as familiar toward this Other, this witness, this adult who is there behind him, to communicate his smile to her, the manifestation of his jubilation about something which makes him communicate with the specular image, that another relationship is established of which he is too captive for this movement to be possible; here the purely dual relationship dispossesses... the subject of this relationship to the big Other (76).

As enunciations, "all unready," "not fully ready," "behind the post," or playing the "organs" seem to exhibit a visual gravitation to the Other from the position where the dramatist cannot see themselves the way they desire to be seen. Here the difficulty in seeing oneself is redelivered in signifiers of not seeing completely what one had proposed as complete for the recognition of the Other. A visual anxiety at an image partly dispossessed from the point of view of the Other in the very act of seeing. There is a "turn of his head" that is contingently inscribed by an opposite direction to where the head wants to turn.

### 3. Modern Stagings and Misrecognition

This dynamic of fragments glimpsed askew, never seen as complete -the *caput mortuum* - has made its way out of the page and onto the modern stage in the 2009 Australian productions of *Richard III* by Siren Theatre Co. and the Sydney Theatre Company. Caitlin Mary West notes that Richard was presented with 'little-to-no physical resemblance to the character described in the dialogue' (2021, p. 71), thereby severing the orthodox link between Richard's physical deformity and his moral deviance. The choice was ethical: a deliberate refusal to reproduce early modern dramaturgical logics that equated bodily difference with inner corruption. Shakespeare's original text, which describes Richard as having a "hump, withered arm, and limp" (quoted in West, 73), participates in a cultural discourse that stigmatizes disability as both symptom and cause of villainy. By splitting Shakespeare's visual coding, the productions enacted a critical intervention into the politics of representation, or virtually into the dramatist's "half-way" conversation: they "drew out new meaning by entirely closing off any direct link between Richard's physical appearance and his behaviour" (74).

For all their conscientious aims, these productions nevertheless all but foreclosed the return of the dramatist's fragments, refusing them the oblique visibility through which they had once marked the split of his gaze and the resonance of his epoch. What was staged as ethical rupture became a regression: a refusal to let Shakespeare's "bits and pieces" of representation return anamorphically, precisely as stains. In Elizabethan terms, Richard's deformity was not an "error" but a signifier anchored in the cultural Imaginary of its time. To suppress it altogether is to deny the historical split in Shakespeare's own gaze, the gap between page and stage where his figures emerge as *half-painting, half-prop*. Shakespeare was, in this sense, closer to a painter than to any modern dramatist, his characters are rendered with the same obliquity as Holbein's skull, visible only when glanced askew, as stains that mark the gaze of their own time:

What determines me, at the most profound level, in the visible, is the gaze that is outside. It is through the gaze that I enter the light and it is from the gaze that I receive its effects. The gaze I encounter [...] is not a seen gaze, but a gaze imagined by me in the field of the Other. This is what painting is all about (*Lacan 84*).

The “empty space” of the stage, in this sense, is more painting than theatre: a space where the dramatist’s own fragments re-emerge as anamorphic stains, not to be effaced but to be restaged. By eliminating deformity, the 2009 productions refused precisely this oblique glance, substituting a moralized clarity for the anamorphic failure that is constitutive of Shakespeare’s (Elizabethan) text. And it is this refusal that makes their gesture repressive: they foreclosed the possibility of raising Shakespeare’s fragments to the dignity of the Thing. What we confront is a retroactively constituted problem, a fragment of Shakespeare’s practice that “catches itself slipping” when viewed askew from the future’s ethical position. That slip is precisely the gap between page and stage, the dramatist’s image animated for the Other and, at the same time, effaced by the “empty space” that looks back.

## IX. Stage and Direction

The return of the repressed ‘empty space’ through the contentious Elizabethan stage-directions expose a shorter circuit through the Elizabethan dramatist’s eye of consciousness. Indeed, they expose a ‘stage’ and a ‘direction’. The “stage” can be understood as the platform of the Elizabethan dramatist’s imaginary jubilation, *the* animator of the *mise en scène* through anticipation in a series of identifications from stage to page. The “direction”, however, is a desire “to be seen”, a retroactive and passive determination by the drive “to see”. Since Lacan’s version of meaning (*sens*) and its making is of conscious and unconscious systems in various stages of disunity, we can thus formalize this ‘stage’ and that ‘direction’ in line with his known notation S/s:

S Stage-directions on Page (Law of page/Symbolic)

ex: “half unready, as newly started from their Beds”

“walks aside full of strange gestures”

---

s Stage-directions on Stage (Ostensive/ Imaginary)

“Like this!”

Here, the law of the page (S) slides over the law of the stage (s), the latter a signified that must be repressed for stage-directions to appear. However, as in the following formula, the law of the stage

is itself a signifier (S') that in turn slides over the "empty space" of the stage that again must be repressed for the mise en scène:

S' Stage-directions on Stage (Ostensive/Imaginary)

s Stage's Empty Space

The signifier S transforms the signifier S' as its signified, the latter a metaphor as anchored in a different chain of signification. i.e. the stage. The law of the stage is, however, also a signifier that has transformed the stage's empty space as lack that resists signification. Put together they should look as follows:

$$\begin{array}{ccc}
 \text{S Stage-directions on Page} & & \text{S' Stage-directions on Stage} \\
 \text{-----} & \times & \text{-----} \\
 \text{S' Stage-directions on Stage} & & \text{s Empty Space}
 \end{array}$$

(x = metaphor + metonymy)

=

S Stage-directions on Page

-----

s Empty Space

-----

S' Stage-directions on Stage

i.e. "half unready, as newly started from their Beds", "walks aside full of strange gestures" ...etc

At each stage the gaze belongs to the 'bar' as the non-specular stain that slips through the empty space in all chains of signification: the 'resistance of signification that is constituted' (Lacan 181). This is one way of saying that it registers the slippage of the empty space through the unconscious splits of the dramatist from chain to chain. The horizontal movement of the signifiers in the stage-directions ("Like this!" or written) accounts for Lacan's desire as metonymy: 'desire is a metonymy' (Écrits, 175, emphasis in original). Lacan presents metonymy as the diachronic movement from one signifier to another. It concerns the ways in which signifiers can be linked in a single signifying chain, such as writing stage-directions for the stage. It qualifies as desire in its continual deferral since

desire is always “desire for something else” (ibid. 167). This movement depends, however, on the substitution of one signifier from one chain (stage) for another (page) or what Lacan identifies as a metaphor (ibid. 164). This substitution creates a surplus (x) between chains (- - -), a foreclosed chain returning as desire, allowing for an Imaginary passage of the signifier into the signified ‘over the bar’ towards signification. The lack of integration between what is desired (by metonymy) and what is found in desiring (by substitution) is the gaze as the imagined bar of resistance. It is the functioning vertical substitution of the ego in pieces (Symbolic/Retroactive/Organ) which is the object cause of metonymy that moves the ego horizontally from piece to piece (Symbolic/Anticipatory/Subject).

This notation thus shows the dramatist (eye) as an unconscious collage of pieces. Animating the other comes at the expense of being ‘effaced’ by the Other. Effacing would qualify here as the inversion of animating insofar as the split is in *and* out. What appears as animating is the Other form of effacing insofar as animation, that is, giving or writing directions, belongs to the Symbolic order as castration, “a moment of cutting [that] is haunted by the form of a bloody scrap: the pound of flesh that life pays in order to turn it into the signifier of signifiers, which it is impossible to restore, as such, to the imaginary body...” (ibid. 629-630). “Diverse”, “Certain”, “or”, “in/out”, “as”, “as if” are the gaze to the extent that the latter’s “function [is] of masking the lack” of an imaginary plenitude with the m(O)ther. Before they mean something, they represent a lack, which as Lacan tells us, ultimately “presents itself to the extent that it becomes word” (55), a signifier.

And it is precisely here, where the horizon of Lacan’s “sublimation” begins to come into view. As *mise en scène*, Holbein’s indistinct *skull* stages the stain that contentious stage-directions and fractured bodies already inscribe in the visual field. Sublimation names the gesture of allowing the gaze to appear, not as a mere obstacle or a gap to be filled, but as the site where lack itself takes on form, the “skull”: “it is a matter of taking a certain stance with respect to the problematic of the Other” (434). What resists signification is given contour, not to resolve absence but to sustain it in visibility. The dramatist’s slips and stains are not failures to be erased but cues that can be staged, like Holbein’s skull, as signs of the Real within representation. The modern stage may repress these fragments, as in *Richard III*, but it is Shakespeare’s texts that never ceased to demand their return. It is precisely this demand, this capacity to let the gaze reappear as formation (skull) that prepares the ground for Shakespeare’s *The Winter’s Tale* and Elizabethan drama’s arguably most notorious stage-direction -“Exit pursued by a bear!”- where Shakespeare will push beyond the regression of future effacement toward a staging of lack itself, the moment when the play as a whole communicates with dreams.

## **X. Exist pursued by Shakes-bear: The Gaze, the Coast of Bohemia, and the Thing**

### **1. From Apparatus to Fabula**

In concluding the first part of this study, we might have noticed that the clearest of its limitations concerns the lack of identification of what could possibly be responsible for the advent of our contentions in a specific text. It only gives a Lacanian framework for identifying these contentions as

a result of some Elizabethan unconscious conversant with a specific theatre in a specific age, that is, with less regard to potential inter-textual or extra-textual events helping these contentions to come to the surface. Our observations above were not characteristic of a dramatic or historical document per se in which we could assign part of the motives leading to these contentions to either some implicit conversation happening between the dramatist and his text, or to some historical incident specific to his stage career. The study was concerned with some psychic “apparatus” arguably affecting the Elizabethan dramatist in his “writing” for the stage. The Elizabethan dramatist, in this sense, was considered not merely as an historical subject grounded in the contingencies of theatrical circumstance, but as one caught in a structure that is itself ‘structured like a language’. What was traced, therefore, was less the psychology of a writer or the material history of a theatre than the itinerary of an unconscious inscribed into the very act of writing for the stage, where signifiers of presence and absence (“in,” “out,” “withdraw,” “retire”) testified to a body lost and dispersed across directions, commands, and marks of staging.

## 2. Topology, Not Biography

The psychoanalytic subject is the producer and product of the relation between the Real and the Symbolic, the subjective effects of which the gaze is the main one. Each only comes into being through the cut of the other and what emerges in/as the subject are effects of this cut which can't be reduced to biography or history alone but which take shape in the act of writing texts themselves. Hence the subject is not to be mapped topographically (as a position) nor temporally (as a moment of fading), nor even semiologically (as a linguistic differential). Rather, the subject, defined by its relation to the gaze, is to be mapped topologically, its structure conceived in terms of non-Euclidean space. Governed by the extreme remoteness and proximity of the Real, a “neighbour” in Freudian terms discernible only via the Symbolic, the subject is topologically mapped in that his desire is not so much a question of “blurring the boundaries” between an inner and outer as it is of revealing how the Real, the outside, that is, an alien alterity, already inhabits the subject's most intimate inwardness. Psychoanalysis does not see through “barriers” as some space existing between the inside and the outside of the subject but reformulates their relationship in the projections engendered back and forth, consciously and unconsciously, from language to what is “structured like a language.” The “unconscious is outside” as is the subject, ex-centric. That is why topology for Lacan is not metaphor but structure itself. It does not provide a “physical” but a “psychical locality” governed, so to speak, by continuities of representations, that is, of the Symbolic continuity traversing inside–out. This forbids any imaginary capture in which “perception eclipses structure” (Seminar XI 154) from one representation to another, for the sake of a topology where “there is no occultation of the symbolic,” (ibid. 203–204) only an “extimate” relationship experienced by the subject in his relationship with the Other. The subject can thus traverse their screen without making a ‘mythical leap’ from the inside to the outside, while nonetheless encountering different topographical properties along the way.

In our context, it follows that the Symbolic which de facto traverses as it is traversed by the continuous transformations from staging to the writing for Elizabethan theatre allows such writing to continue transformations affected by the text to which it relates. The dramatist, topologically mapped, allows for a space that is not anatomical or dimensional in the Euclidean sense. Rather, he allows for a neighbourhood where certain properties of figures in space, that is, of the conscious and the unconscious constituting the ego as a surface, thus participating in both the outside and the

inside of the psychical system, are preserved under continuous deformations. What distinguishes one space from the other, one representation from the other, is not so much a result of “perception” per se as the function of symbolic cuts (*coupures*), which for Lacan are what distinguish discontinuous transformation from continuous deformation. It is these cuts, the sudden intrusion of a stage-direction, the irruption of a stain, the interruption of sense by what cannot be symbolized, that mark the subject in both its writing and its being.

Whereas the earlier parts of this study traced this logic in the general functioning of Elizabethan stage-directions, in their signs of entry and exit, in the dramatist’s own loss of bodily plenitude into marks of presence and absence, it remains for us to follow this itinerary into the texture of a single dramatic text, in which these unconscious operations can be seen at work not only in the margins of the page but in the narrative itself. Thus, in the following pages I argue that this psychical apparatus can be caught functioning in Shakespeare’s *The Winter’s Tale*. In the play’s text there is an unconscious handling by the Elizabethan dramatist in such way that his experience of the gaze with regards to stage-directions is preserved, yet in a different deformation, within the narrative of the play itself. The gaze characteristic of the dramatist’s architectonics of presence and absence on page and stage is dramatized again, now within the very Symbolic tissue of the play’s discourse. To this end, I aim to demonstrate that *The Winter’s Tale* not only dramatizes, in familiar psychoanalytic figures, the gaze of the dramatist’s presence and absence, but also posits a structure, implicitly conferred to us as a shift from the natural to the supernatural, that allows for the gaze to reach “sublimation” in the notorious stage direction: “Exit, pursued by a bear.”

### 3. Two ‘Blemishes’ as Portals

The two most notorious “problems” of *The Winter’s Tale*, Leontes’ “unmotivated jealousy” and the “casual disposal” of Antigonus by a bear, have long been read as blemishes of craft. The critical consensus, running across centuries of commentary, has regarded both as failures of technique, evidence of Shakespeare’s negligence, senility, or at best survivals of a naïve dramaturgy content with crude devices. Critical discussion of Leontes’ “suspicion” has been almost uniform in its denial of psychological coherence. Norman Holland could write that Shakespeare “doesn’t even bother to motivate Leontes’ jealousy” (284); Frank Kermode that “Shakespeare removes Leontes’ motives for jealousy” (30); G. Wilson Knight, invoking theological inspiration, argues that “his evil is self-born and unmotivated” (84). A.D. Nuttall, even while entertaining Freudian resonances, refused a psychoanalytic reading of Leontes’ delusions, preferring instead to describe the play’s “madness” as a sort of textual excess immune to psychology (1966). For J. H. P. Pafford, editor of the Arden edition, “causes of the jealousy are no concern of ours” (lxxii). These judgments relegate Leontes’ passion to the realm of the perfunctory, framing it as a refusal of motivation and a collapse of signification itself.

The bear has fared no better. Dr. Simon Forman’s eyewitness account of the Globe performance in May 1611 makes no mention of it, and for generations the stage-direction “Exit, pursued by a bear” has been treated as a theatrical anomaly. For Quiller-Couch and Dover Wilson, it was a stunt designed “to make a popular hit” (quoted in Biggins 1), perhaps even by dragging a live bear from the Bankside pits. Others doubted the possibility of training such an animal to pursue without harm, especially in light of the notorious ferocity of James I’s bear-baiting spectacles, and a rival consensus proposed an actor in a bear-skin. G. B. Harrison remarked that “a bear rampant is of all beasts the most easily personated by a man” (ibid. 4), and critics noted Shakespeare’s choice of the bear - the most humanoid of animals - over snake or lion, as if already courting the doubleness of human and

beast. Yet the effect has often been judged “crude,” “creaking,” a conscious return to naïve technique. For Walter Raleigh, Antigonus is dispatched “in the most unprincipled and reckless manner” (137–138), a mere functionary removed for convenience. In this register, the bear has stood less as a dramatic problem than as a sign of dramaturgical naivety, Shakespeare’s willingness to dispose of Antigonus without finesse.

Critics like Nevill Coghill sensed this uncanniness of *The Winter’s Tale*, remarking that the

stage-craft in this play is as novel, subtle and revolutionary as it had been a few years before [in] *Antony and Cleopatra*, but in an entirely different way: just as he had then found the technical path to an actual and life-sized world - to the drums and trappings of the Roman empire - so in *The Winter’s Tale* he hit upon a means of entry into the fabulous world of life standing (as Hermione says) in the level of dreams” (35).

Coghill’s observation is a way of accounting for the play’s notorious discontinuities - the jealousy that erupts without cause, the bear that arrives without preparation - yet his phrase does more than rationalize Shakespeare’s dramaturgy. It insinuates a play that inhabits a world where waking and dreaming, reason and the unconscious, are folded into each other. In other words, Coghill might have already gestured, however obliquely, toward the very terrain that psychoanalysis marks as its own, in which language itself is permeated by the dream-work.

#### 4. Metaphor and the Dramatist’s Unconscious

The psychoanalytic tradition of explaining Leontes’ “jealousy,” has been busy taking the intra-textual route commensurate with Murray M. Schwartz’s claim that critics who deny any significant motivation in the representation of Leontes’ jealousy “refuse to take Shakespeare’s metaphors seriously as significant” (250). The implications of the “metaphors” suggested by Schwartz in his Lacanian reading of Leontes’s jealousy speak of Shakespeare’s “over-determined language” in *The Winter’s Tale* in such a way that, in Lacan’s terminology, Leontes’ language might “signify” or represent unconscious traumas decipherable by “stylistic forms” of choice. But, as Schwartz continues to suggest, “in psychoanalytic terms, we can say that the literary creation is always an attempt to synthesize private and unconscious motives with public forms of comprehending the meanings of experience” (251). Following this logic, Leontes’s language is just as much his as Shakespeare’s; we might encounter some of the “private” experience of the Elizabethan dramatist as included all the same within *The Winter’s Tale*’s symbolic discourse.

If Schwartz’s identification of Leontes’ “metaphors” qua the “overdetermined language” of Shakespeare in *The Winter’s Tale* could relate to anything with regard to the Elizabethan dramatist’s experience in question, it would do so in the way metaphor, according to Lacan, is the functioning “substitution” in all forms of representation. It is rooted, as it were, in the “primal repression” responsible for the economy of conscious and unconscious systems in various stages of disunity amounting to our treatment of reality itself as a text. *The Winter’s Tale* in admitting the unconscious specific to the dramatic reality of the language of Leontes, admits no less of the unconscious specific to Elizabethan reality via the language of Shakespeare; the text is a metaphor of the functioning unconscious of the protagonist in the first case, and of the dramatist in the second.

## 5. Tragicomedy Reconsidered: From Link to Logic

On the other hand, a consensus has been reached about the “bear” as a vision produced by *The Winter’s Tale’s* inclusion of two worlds, i.e. tragedy and comedy. Shakespeare’s acknowledged source, Robert Greene’s 1588 prose romance *Pandosto*, had already provided the structural frame: a jealous king who falsely accuses his queen and abandons his daughter. Yet where Greene’s version presses toward fatality and closure, Shakespeare transforms the inherited material, altering the ending and infusing the tragic narrative with a redemptive turn that stresses forgiveness and renewal. Within this transformation the “bear” becomes decisive. In the name of economy, structural this time, getting rid of Antigonus using a “bear” is less a sort of a “casual disposal,” as S. L. Bethell claims, than a necessary antithesis bringing about a finely-shaded crosshatching of tragedy and comedy, such that “this bear, this unique and perfect link between the two halves of the play, slips into place and hold.” (358). The bear, for E.M.W. Tillyard, is a violent example of a dramatic transition from one plane of reality to another: from the melodramatically remote world of Antigonus, exemplified in his soliloquy right before the attack, to the earthly comic world of the old shepherd inaugurated by the latter’s speech. The bear functions as a structural device that bridges the play’s tonal and narrative divide, marking the transition between its tragic and comic realms (1944).

What remains as the classical position pertaining to *The Winter’s Tale’s* synthesis of tragedy and comedy is that Shakespeare’s “bear” would not only just mark a tour de force of textual crossbreeding whose humour lies in the laconic wording of its stage direction, but it also provides a conceptual justification to narratives of symbolism and moral integrity. Knight would insist that “we must take the bear seriously,” but only insofar as it suggests “man’s insecurity in face of untamed nature; indeed, mortality in general” (106). Here the bear is not merely a catalyst for the transformation of tragedy into comedy, but a symbol commensurate with Coghill’s remarks that “it symbolizes the revenge of Nature on the servant of a corrupted court” (quoted in Biggins 8), the servant being Antigonus and the court Leontes’. Andrew Gurr would also go so far as to find the “bear” a symbol of “nature” itself, but which communicates as a theatrical device, as a double-take, with Hermione’s coming-to-life statue, thus setting up teasing interactions sufficient to complicate the ostensible opposition between two contraries, nature and art (1983). The “bear” has also found itself caught up in a net of wordplay so that Camillo’s transporting Polixenes out of Leontes’s court and Florizel’s carrying Perdita away from her homeland amount, in Maurice Hunt’s terms, “to redemptive ‘bearing[s] hence’ that invite comparison with the fatal, literal ‘bearing hence’ of Antigonus” (123-140). Re-assessment of Shakespeare’s unconscious integrating of his age in *The Winter’s Tale* thus takes us from simply identifying unconscious experiences limited to Leontes’s language to the text itself as the language of Shakespeare, and from simply assessing the “bear” in interpretive terms, whether as a theatrical “hit” or a textual “symbol,” back to its *genus differentia* of something connoting the crossbreed of a “live” bear and a manimal, a figure marked by the gaze and the empty space it opens.

## 6. Boys Eternal, Letters Across a Vast

Before Leontes’s jealousy ruptures the intricate web of playfulness and formality characterising his courtly dialogue with Polixenes early in the play, Camillo’s speech in the opening scene marks the “imaginary” and “symbolic” interconnectedness which characterised Leontes and Polixenes’s early

childhood and the subsequent correspondences inaugurated when they become kings. The first descriptions of Leontes and Polixenes come in Camillo's speech, and the more we read the text, the more his speech becomes a metaphor of the whole:

They were trained together in their childhoods; and  
there rooted betwixt them then such an affection,  
which cannot choose but branch now. Since their  
more mature dignities and royal necessities made  
separation of their society, their encounters,  
though not personal, have been royally attorneyed  
with interchange of gifts, letters, loving  
embassies; that they have seemed to be together,  
though absent, shook hands, as over a vast, and  
embraced, as it were, from the ends of opposed  
winds. The heavens continue their loves (7).

In the beginning of Camillo's text, we are shown the Imaginary and Symbolic dynamics which underwrite so extensive a denial of difference that young Leontes sees Polixenes as his "double." There is no differentiation of one king from the other; they were not merely friends, but, as Polixenes would later insist to Hermione, "we were, fair queen, two lads that thought there was no more behind, / But such a day to-morrow as to-day, / And to be boy eternal" (15). Leontes's relation to himself is mediated through a totalising image which comes from without; "boy eternal" is the mirror-stage's promise of completion, a future anterior in which Leontes anticipates his maturation in his reflection. After they have come of age and the Imaginary orchestration of their presence yields to the Symbolic of their absence, the interchange of "gifts, letters, loving embassies" becomes itself the medium of denial: "though absent; shook hands" (9). In the face of separation and distance, the Imaginary is resurrected in the Symbolic, as if tokens of exchange could sustain the fantasy of continuity between "then" (Imaginary) and "now" (Symbolic). Symbolic action here serves to counteract the divisive necessities of rule - "mature dignities and royal necessities" (9) - so that Camillo's speech continues to deny any decisive difference between the two kings. The denial of difference (spatial) and denial of change (temporal) collude toward the archaic paradox in which two equals one: Camillo's "branch" secures unity only as a splitting that refuses to avow itself as such.

It is this structure - substitution in place of presence, iteration in place of immediacy - that binds, uncannily at first, Leontes's gifts and embassies to Shakespeare's stage-directions. Both occupy the guise of continuity precisely through separation: the letter in lieu of the handclasp, the stage-direction in lieu of the body. Each works as a contingent inscription that gestures toward presence while at the same time exposing its impossibility. And it is precisely at this point that the dramaturgical hinge gives way, and the text itself begins to stage rather than merely intimate the shift from Imaginary duality to Symbolic rupture: Leontes's paradoxical invitation and Hermione's successful interception, the very scene critics overlook? when they complain that Shakespeare "doesn't even bother to motivate Leontes' jealousy." Pressed by Polixenes's resolve to go - "Affairs do even drag me homeward" (11) - Leontes pleads, then falters, and in that moment of faltering performs the abdication that structures his collapse: "Tongue-tied, our queen? speak you" (ibid). Hermione takes up the charge in a rhetoric that is at once playful and exacting. First, she corrects Leontes's address, "You, sir, charge him too coldly. Tell him, you are sure all in Bohemia's well; / This satisfaction the by-gone day proclaim'd: say this to him" (13), and then she turns the screws of hospitality into a dialectic whose alternatives already threaten the king's Symbolic prerogative: "My prisoner? or my guest?" When Polixenes pleads scruple, "Your prisoner should import offending"

(15), Hermione refines the role she means to occupy: "Not your gaoler then, but your kind hostess" (ibid). The pressure is intensified by the oath she toys with and overturns:

Verily?  
You put me off with limber vows. But I,  
Though you would seek t' unsphere the stars with  
oaths,  
Should yet say "Sir, no going." Verily,  
You shall not go. A lady's "verily" is  
As potent as a lord's. Will you go yet?  
Force me to keep you as a prisoner,  
Not like a guest, so you shall pay your fees  
When you depart and save your thanks. How say you?  
My prisoner or my guest? By your dread "verily,"  
One of them you shall be (13).

## 7. 'Verily' → 'Verier': When the Letter Arrives

The performative centre of the above exchange is doubled in a way that concerns us: Hermione's "verily" (truth-claim) will be folded, moments later, into "verier" in the teasing recollection, "Was not my lord the verier wag o' the two?" (15). The aural slide from *verily* to *verier* (*verax*: truthful) retroactively reopens the question of potency as truth-function; *verily* (assertion) becomes *verier* (degree), and the degree rebounds upon Leontes's capacity to act - *verier* as in "the truer" - thus pressing at once the Imaginary bond ("wag o' the two") and the Symbolic office (king who cannot win where the queen does). Polixenes, for his part, advertised the very duality the scene undoes: "There is no tongue that moves, none, none i' th' world, so soon as yours could win me: so it should now" (11), and yet it is precisely her tongue that wins him now, so that she can announce without triumph and without delay: "He'll stay, my lord" (17). Nothing in this sequence is "arbitrary." What appears as the mere chance of Hermione's success - the fact that her persuasion works - is not simply contingent in the ordinary sense. It is the very point where contingency and necessity meet. The slip from *verily* to *verier* is not an accident of language but the signifier doing its work: it exposes the Real of Leontes's impotence by converting assertion into degree, truth-claim into comparative lack. In this way, the scene shows how the letter always arrives at its destination. The structure of the exchange was already waiting for such a contingent element, and when it occurs, it gives body to the impossibility that grounds the entire conversation.

From here, the argument unfolds with greater rigour: Hermione's "success" becomes irreducible to a charm that could in fairness have been Leontes's; rather, it occupies the structural position of what ruptures the Imaginary/Symbolic continuity Camillo hymned. She speaks where he has failed; her "verily" is the truth-value that rebounds into "verier" and thus into a measure of potency that - by the very grammar of the exchange - makes Leontes "prisoner" to precisely that double whom the scene had insisted remained his "guest." The playful alternatives - prisoner/guest - are not trivial wit but the staging of a cut in the Symbolic: hospitality collapses into captivity at the level of enunciation, not of semantics; the sovereign who invites his queen to speak becomes beholden to the speech that exposes him as already bound. This is why what follows is not "jealousy" in the narrow dramatic sense (triangular: subject-beloved-rival) but envy in the psychoanalytic sense (binary: subject-rival). The pivot is scopic. Leontes does not fear the "loss" of Hermione so much as

he sustains the “sight” of Polixenes as measure of potency, a gaze that returns him to the *corps morcelé* before his mirror.

## 8. From Jealousy to Invidia (*videre*)

St. Augustine, in the *Confessions*, had already articulated the scopic roots of envy in the figure of the infant at the breast: the child is not jealous because it wants milk, but because it sees the mother’s gaze turned elsewhere. “It is not the breast itself that is envied, but the other’s being suckled” (Book I, ch. 7). What Augustine intuits, Lacan later formalizes: *invidia* derives from *videre*; envy is bound to vision (*Seminar XI*, 1964). The infant’s passion is not for the object but for the gaze that confers presence on the rival. This is why what follows in *The Winter’s Tale* is not jealousy in the dramatic sense but envy in the psychoanalytic sense. Leontes does not covet Hermione as an object; what unsettles him is the sight of Polixenes bearing the mother’s gaze. In the very moment when Hermione makes the contingent remark—“He’ll stay, my lord”—the Imaginary promise of “boy eternal” is retroactively unmasked as misrecognition: not two as one, but one rediscovered as split. The “gifts,” “letters” and “embassies” are reframed as signifiers of absence, evidence of distance and temporal dissonance. What Camillo had boasted as a “branch” now appears as what it always was, a suture that must split in order to secure its fiction. Augustine’s anecdote thus anticipates precisely what Lacan calls the scopic drive: desire structured by the circuit of seeing and being seen, where the gaze of the Other exposes the subject to the lack that organizes it.

This is why the passage’s micro-poetics matter. “My prisoner? or my guest?” refracts the Symbolic in the idiom of hospitality, but prisoner/guest in Hermione’s mouth is the contour of the Real cutting through the king’s office; the joke binds grammar to sovereignty and undoes both. “Verily ... verily ... verily” doubles as oath and as etymological “truth,” only to resurface as “verier”: the degree of truth turned into a comparison of boyhood potency in Polixenes’s recollection: “two lads,” “boy eternal.” In other words, the contingent signifier arrives as the letter the structure awaited: a woman’s “verily” that produces a “verier” and thus a verdict on Leontes’s capacity to act within the Symbolic. From a psychoanalytic vantage, the suddenness of the king’s collapse is not arbitrariness but structural necessity: the contingency is the Real, the little-bit-of-real that embodies the internal limit of the Symbolic order and, by irruption, dislocates the Imaginary. Hence the shift from the “double” to the rival: a two-term axis along which envy travels, not because Leontes “wants” Hermione in the sense of possession, but because he cannot endure the sight of Polixenes as the locus where truth (*verily/verier*) and power (prisoner/guest) coincide in and out of him.

And once this scopic cut is made, the itinerary of Leontes’ subjectivity unfolds with consistency: Hermione’s contingent words mark the rupture, the Imaginary promise collapses into envy, and the gaze re-emerges as stain, reorganising his symbolic world. The stain proliferates: Hermione’s pregnancy becomes the phallic ghost, the *objet a* Leontes cannot situate. But its first and decisive movement is here, in the spoken scene critics prefer to paraphrase, and which we have now restored: Leontes’s “Tongue-tied, our queen? speak you,” Hermione’s precise rhetorical escalations—“You, sir, charge him too coldly ... My prisoner? or my guest? ... Verily! ... a lady’s ‘verily’ is as potent as a lord’s”—Polixenes’s boyhood recollection—“two lads ... boy eternal”—and the contingent, fatal seal: “He’ll stay, my lord.” This is the hinge where the Imaginary unity retroactively shows its seams, where the Symbolic office is exposed as dependent on an Other’s enunciation, and

where the gaze enters to organise the subsequent cascade of stains.

## 9. Caput Mortuum: Names, Noses, and the Smutch

Now, as with Shakespeare qua Elizabethan dramatist whose Other gaze is responsible for an unconscious discourse capable of triggering “contentions” in his stage-directions, Leontes’ gaze, exemplified in his infant daughter, becomes just as capable of triggering corresponding contentions in his language with others. Leontes’s gaze becomes the leftover which organizes the imaginary scenario of the fantasy appearing in the language otherwise as enigmatic meaning, that is, elliptical, permissive or even contradictory, a meaning which does not conform to social expectations of a familiar story or typical family drama. A language that lets us glimpse in a moment of crossing the Real in the gaze hidden behind what the fantasy would ordinarily cover over. What we expect from the language of Leontes is thus a variety of *caput mortuum*, obstacles to logic, admitting of the gaze as inapprehensible. Any understanding of the gaze is therefore as partial as the imagined mastery of the viewer standing before Holbein’s *Ambassadors* painting.

This anamorphic status of the gaze is best exemplified early enough in Leontes’s exchange with his son shortly after Hermione’s success. He first goes so far as to ask Mamillius why he has “smutch’d thy nose”: “What, hast smutch’d thy nose?” (1.2.123). This is followed by a litany of names, an invariable play of signifiers in which he wonders how his son might be called “neat” and yet is addressed as steer, heifer, calf:

And yet the steer, the heifer, and the calf  
Are all call’d neat.—Still virginalling  
Upon his palm!—How now, you wanton calf!  
Art thou my calf? (19).

A few lines later he insists on resemblance: “Thou want’st a rough pash and the shoots that I have, To be full like me” (ibid.). And then, abruptly, the contradiction: “sweet villain” (21). Here Leontes’ words expose less an act of vision than a functioning of the gaze in which the psychic repression necessary for the signification of his optical field is put against a special kind of *memento mori*. The gaze, in Lacan’s formulation, is “pulsatile, dazzling, spread out” (85) an object that manifests precisely as distortion, as a smear across the field of sight. Mamillius’ “smutch’d” nose qualifies as precisely such a stain. It is not an empirical smudge but the anamorphic blur that functions like the skull in Holbein’s painting: legible only when seen awry, retroactively re-inscribing the scene of mastery with a death’s head. The nose had always been the same, but in the gaze it becomes smudged, an index of the Real inscribed in the visual field.

Moreover, Leontes’s invariable playfulness with names -“steer,” “heifer,” “calf”- exemplifies the collapse of subject--object distinctions under the spell of the gaze. Leontes himself becomes a punctiform entity, a vanishing locus of being, the site where the subject misrecognizes his own lack. In other words, Leontes’ alternatives admit of the invariability of “things” in the world when gazed at by the Real. It matters little now whether “Art thou my calf?” is any better than “Art thou my steer, heifer...”; all are equally “neat” and equally not. This subject/object indistinction thus reaches its most disquieting moment in “Thou want’st a rough pash and the shoots that I have.” Here the scopic register shades into the animal. The boy is imagined as a calf without horns, marked by a lack that immediately rebounds onto Leontes: the son’s natural deficiency becomes the father’s symbolic

one. The pun on “shoots” - explicitly a cuckold’s horns - turns the gaze toward the Symbolic, where the eye’s demand (does Hermione cuckold me?) mutates into desire’s impossible object. Leontes projects envy: the eye with its “power of annihilation,” demanding the impossible, dissolving culture into nature. Lacan’s etymological link resurfaces: *invidia* from *videre*. Envy is vision turned voracious.

The itinerary of the gaze thus makes itself visible in Leontes’ words: what the eye sees (the boy’s body, the queen’s pregnancy) is at odds with what the gaze reveals (the lack constitutive of subjectivity itself). This is why his monologue on “Affection” speaks so forcefully of the Symbolic order’s collapse:

Affection! thy intention stabs the centre.  
Thou dost make possible things not so held,  
Communicatest with dreams (how can this be?)  
With what’s unreal thou coactive art,  
And fellow’st nothing. Then ’tis very credent  
Thou mayst co-join with something; and thou dost,  
And that beyond commission; and I find it,  
And that to the infection of my brains  
And hard’ning of my brows (21).

Here the very possibility of distinguishing waking from dreaming collapses. “Communicatest with dreams” becomes the pivot: Leontes’ language betrays the contamination of his royal discourse by the unconscious, the intrusion of oneiric logic into waking speech. It is at this moment that Montaigne, whose essays, as well established, Shakespeare knew, shadows the text. Montaigne treats the muddled differences between dreaming and waking in “Of the lame or Cripple” (1603), relating the story of a man who dreamed he was a packhorse and awoke to find himself living as one. The dream does not merely signify but acts; it crosses into waking life. Leontes’ “communicatest with dreams” thus resonates not only as a confession of delirium but as a testimony to the text’s own structure: the Symbolic admits the Real through dream, and the waking word becomes porous to unconscious fantasy.

And crucially “communication” here must be read in its double valence. Not only in the modern sense of exchanging information, but in its etymological root: *communicare*, to make common, to share, to become one with. Hence its liturgical and occult resonances: those who partake of Communion “communicate” with Christ’s body; witches were accused of “communicating with spirits,” not in speech but in becoming one with them. Leontes’ reality is insinuated to have become precisely such a communion, a collapse of waking and dreaming, conscious and unconscious, self and Other. And Hermione hears it exactly: “You speak a language that I understand not. My life stands in the level of your dreams” (93). Her testimony is the mirror of the psychoanalytic: Leontes’ subjectivity has become unintelligible, because his speech is not exchange but possession, a communication in the older sense, in which the subject is dissolved in his dream. Thus, when Leontes retorts that “your actions are my dreams ... I but dream’d it” (ibid.), we glimpse the pathology of the gaze itself: the wish-fulfilment that fails at the level of dream-interpretation. His language testifies to the Real disguised as fantasy. “Your actions are my dreams” is not a mere confusion but the symptom of a deeper split: the unconscious structured like a language, resisting any Symbolic translation, producing instead the enigmatic surplus of the gaze itself.

## 10. When the Play Begins to Dream

At the point where Leontes' speech begins to enact the very procedure it names - "communicatest with dreams"- the analogy we have been tracing, between Leontes's scopic/linguistic symptoms and the Elizabethan dramatist's divided self across stage and page, ceases to be merely analogical and declares itself structural. *The Winter's Tale* reaches a threshold where character and text converge: Leontes' scopic and linguistic symptoms become indistinguishable from the structural logic of the play itself. We come to realize that "communicatest with dreams" cannot be assigned exclusively to Leontes's ongoing self-reflexivity, admitting of the linguistic and visual symptoms restricted to his trauma with regards to others. What had seemed a heuristic parallel (the king's stains and substitutions mirroring the playwright's *in/out, withdraw/retire*) is retroactively verified, *après-coup*, as the operative logic of the work itself once the "text" begins to behave as Leontes's psyche behaves: it shifts from the logistics of waking to that of dreaming and contrariwise, letting the gaze inscribe itself where reality had appeared to reign. In other words, the play itself "communicates with dreams," and this conversion of a character's symptom into a textual motor marks the decisive passage from resemblance to homology, from illustrative likeness to determining structure. From this point, the dramaturgical economy is governed by the very topology we ascribed to the subject: the extimate fold, or "empty space" in which outside returns as inside; the gaze not as figure within discourse only, but as the hinge that convulses the discourse, geography bending, causality slipping, stage-direction hardening into fate.

The first and clearest instance of this structural turn is prompted by Leontes's unique imperative, his lone *direction*, that the infant be taken to "some remote and desert place" (81). With that utterance the mirror relation between king and dramatist tightens into identity: a sovereign issues a command whose force is indistinguishable from a playwright's scenic cue, where the diegesis itself begins to dream. Antigonus's vision follows "so like a waking, that I thought I was awake" (107) and the dream does what waking had not: it generates new signifiers and installs coordinates of its own, as though narrative procedure itself had crossed into dream-work rather than daylight plotting. This is the moment when Leontes's scopic economy (stain, misrecognition, envy) and the playwright's split body (stage/page) converge topologically: the play dreams its way into staging lack, and what had been a character's pathology becomes the law of the work's very construction:

Come, poor babe: I have heard, but not believed, the spirits o' the dead  
May walk again: if such thing be, thy mother  
Appear'd to me last night, for ne'er was dream  
So like a waking. To me comes a creature,  
Sometimes her head on one side, some another;  
I never saw a vessel of like sorrow,  
So fill'd and so becoming: in pure white robes,  
Like very sanctity, she did approach  
My cabin where I lay; thrice bow'd before me,  
And gasping to begin some speech, her eyes  
Became two spouts: the fury spent, anon  
Did this break from her: 'Good Antigonus,  
Since fate, against thy better disposition,  
Hath made thy person for the thrower-out  
Of my poor babe, according to thine oath,  
Places remote enough are in Bohemia,

There weep and leave it crying; and, for the babe  
Is counted lost for ever, Perdita,  
I prithee, call't (107).

The equivocation is stark: “so like a waking, that I thought I was awake.” For Antigonus, the dream issues commands indistinguishable from waking orders; for us, it produces elements nowhere else given in the play. The infant is named *Perdita* - the “lost one,” at once daughter and *lost object* - her place of abandonment fixed as the coast of Bohemia which does not exist in reality, and her fate sealed by the advent of the pursuing “bear”. This improbable triad - name, shore, beast - is the dream’s surplus, what waking reason could not generate. Already in Shakespeare’s own time the incongruity provoked ridicule. Ben Jonson mocked the presence of both a seacoast and a desert in Bohemia, since the landlocked kingdom - corresponding to what is now the western Czech Republic - possessed neither. The paradox deepens, however, once we recall that Shakespeare was not inventing this geography *ex nihilo*. His reliance on Greene’s *Pandosto* is decisive here: Greene had already imagined a Bohemian shore, and Shakespeare, despite reversing the roles of Sicilia and Bohemia and inverting the paths of characters and events, nevertheless retained this coast. He preserved it and so preserved what Jonson called the “mistake” within the very spatiotemporal continuum of the play.

That persistence is crucial. For it tells us that what might appear a slip of “carelessness” - or Shakespeare’s alleged ignorance of European geography - is in fact a deliberate inscription of impossibility into the very co-ordinates of the drama. If *Pandosto* could accommodate the error without disturbance, with Shakespeare it becomes constitutive. The coast of Bohemia functions as a symptom in the strict psychoanalytic sense: it is the irruption of the Real, the point where dream contaminates waking, where dramatic space convulses into topological contiguity. A landlocked kingdom with a shore is neither a naturalistic setting nor an idle blunder, but an “empty space”: what lies outside the possible world of geography is folded back inside the possible world of the play. Shakespeare’s retention of the error is precisely what allows it to mark the play’s unconscious, the very terrain on which the “bear” will appear.

What Antigonus recounts then is precisely what Montaigne had described: the crossing of dream into effect. Dreams here do not merely symbolize or reflect but act; they inscribe themselves by stretching the spacetime coordinates of the narrative. Montaigne’s suggestion that “dreams may sometimes be thus incorporated into effects” becomes literalized. The name, the place, the bear, all arrive through a dream that is indistinguishable from waking, as part of the fabula. The question of whether Antigonus obeys Leontes’ command or his dream becomes undecidable. As Lauren Robertson asks, “Had Antigonus already planned to leave Perdita in Bohemia, or did he make the trip in order to obey his dream vision? Would the carrying out of such orders even be possible, given that Antigonus says that his dream occurred only the night before? How long is the journey from Sicilia to Bohemia’s non-existent shores?” [261] The epistemological coordinates of waking, command, obedience, and temporality collapse in their very coincidence; the dream destabilizes not only Antigonus’ perception but the structure of the play itself. In this moment, the play’s unconscious speaks. What appears as Antigonus’s slippage into the supernatural is a textual “parallax” by which the story is re-introduced. Antigonus’ dream provides what waking reality withholds.

It is at this point that *The Winter's Tale* reveals its own unconscious. Leontes' "communicate with dreams" no longer remains within his subjective experience but speaks through the play's very form. The drama itself communicates with dreams. We move from a dramatization of structure (Leontes' fantasy embodied in speech) to a structuralization of drama (the play itself operating by the logic of the unconscious). What begins as a subjective symptom becomes the principle of textual construction. Coghill's remark that the play seems given to us "on the level of dreams" is thus not metaphor but structural verdict: Shakespeare's text dramatizes itself as dream, where waking and dreaming dissolve for appearance, where commands blur into visions, where information is produced by the unconscious itself. The implications are decisive. On one hand, Antigonus's dream functions as the continuation of Leontes' misrecognition: the unconscious is taken as evidence, fantasy is mistaken for reality. On the other hand, the text exceeds its characters: Antigonus' dream does not simply dramatize his subjectivity but reorganizes the very world of the play. The impossible coast of Bohemia, unmoored from real geography, becomes the locus of this unconscious: a topological space, not a Euclidean one, where the inside and outside collapse, where the unconscious makes itself extimate. The coast is "impossible" not because Shakespeare erred, but because his play rearticulates a space that is topological rather than geographical. In Lacan's terms, the unconscious is outside, but it is an outside already at the heart of the inside: extimacy inscribed in dramatic form.

Perdita, explicitly Leontes' *objet a* with Polixenes, becomes implicitly Shakespeare's own *objet a* with his double (page/stage). In the text's shift to Antigonus' dream, the two itineraries converge: the protagonist's trauma and the dramatist's apparatus meet at the site of the dream. The command to abandon the child, which can be read as the play's only true "direction," becomes also the play's admission of its unconscious: the dramatist's command to himself, to his text, to restage the object that at once sustains and threatens it. To Leontes, Perdita's banishment entails his annihilation. The oracle confirms Hermione's innocence but declares he shall be "without an heir" until the lost child is found (97). To Shakespeare, the command marks the eruption of dream into form: Perdita is given a name, a place, and a destiny that belong not to waking geography but to the unconscious. The shift is from dramatization (Leontes' subjective collapse) to structuralization (the text's own unconscious logic). At this cut, protagonist and dramatist meet in their relation to their gaze. Both confront the same point at which fantasy cannot be sustained, where the Real intrudes in the form of an impossible coast and a devouring bear.

## 11. Shakes-bear: The Cut that Moves the Play

It is upon this inexistent Bohemian "shore" that Shakespeare's "bear" appears. Questions such as, "was it a live bear dragged from the Bankside pit, a theatrical stunt designed to delight the pit and shock the gallery?" or "was it an actor in costume, parodying ferocity while straddling the line between animal and man?" treat the bear as merely a theatrical device or zoological curiosity and in so doing miss its structural force almost entirely. The "bear" does not enter as appendage but as an eruption of "empty space" into the fabula of the play. Its liminal coordinates *are* the point: both animal and actor, both ferocious and costumed, both present and absent. The "bear" coincides with the extimacy of the coast of Bohemia, at once inside and outside. The direction "Exit, pursued by a bear" becomes less an instruction or a narrative content of transformation than an enunciation of lack, a real stain reinscribed into the frame of representation as such. Such readings as have seen the bear as tragicomic hinge, as symbol of mortality, as allegory of nature, or as wordplay of 'bearing', however illuminating, remain within the Symbolic economy. Shakespeare's text insinuates

something different. The bear is not a symbol but a gaze, it is not what it means, but what it marks: an impossible sight inscribed at the heart of the text itself. To grasp this shift is already to approach the register of sublimation: the object no longer signifies by representing something else, but by taking on the dignity of what resists representation altogether. The bear is an object raised to dignity, not as allegory but as sublimation. Lacan defined sublimation as “the raising of an object to the dignity of the Thing” (112). The bear is precisely such an object: emptied of zoological content, of theatrical naturalism, it functions as edge, as contour of the void in appearance qua appearance. By pursuing Antigonus across a coast that should not exist, the bear raises absence itself to the level of *animation*. What Antigonus encounters is not simply beast but symptom. In stage-directions Shakespeare’s split subjectivity had already returned in pieces: in, out, withdraw, retire. Here that dispersion of signifier/s condenses into a single image, an animal that is neither natural nor symbolic but extimate, giving body to the dramatist’s own lack. If Leontes’ envy annihilates him, Shakespeare sublimates. The dramatist’s unconscious is resolved not in collapse but in inscription. “Exit, pursued by a bear” is thus not dramaturgical failure but unconscious inscription, not creaking machinery but the inscription of emptiness given flesh.

The consequence is decisive for the play’s structure. For Charles Hieatt, *The Winter’s Tale* is “a genuine diptych,” (238) halved by Time’s central chorus. For Northrop Frye, its structure unfolds as “parallel and contrasting actions, one dealing with age, winter, and the jealousy of Leontes, the other with youth, summer, and the love of Florizel” (241). The bear is the hinge of this diptych, the cut that separates winter from summer, tragedy from comedy, death from rebirth. Its pursuit drives Antigonus into absence but also propels the play itself into its second half that “stretches” its source: the rustic, the comic, the restorative. The unconscious cut becomes structural hinge. What appears as rupture is the very mechanism of transition. Thus, the notorious stage-direction sublimates the dramatist’s Other gaze. If on the page the dramatist’s body was already a remainder, scattered into *in/out, aloof/withdraw*, here that remainder walks: *Shakes-bear*, the dramatist’s body-loss returned as Thing. It chases not only Antigonus but Shakespeare’s own text into its second act, into comedy, into restoration. Where Leontes collapses, Shakespeare sublimates; where Leontes is shattered by envy, Shakespeare sublimates it into spectacle. The bear becomes both absence and passage, both pursuit and propulsion in a *parallactic* relationship between the subject and themselves, Shakespeare and Leontes. It is the dramatist’s unconscious given form: the symptom staged, the lack made Thing, the Real inscribed into comedy.

What becomes clear, once the coast of Bohemia and the bear are read together with Leontes’ crisis, is that *The Winter’s Tale* itself “communicates with dreams”: Leontes’ line; “With what’s unreal thou coactive art, / And fellow’st nothing” (21) names not only his own collapse but the very logic of the play, where waking rationality (Sicilia, its kings and courts) convulses into dreamlike impossibility (a shore in a landlocked kingdom, a beast both real and staged, a child both lost and found). The gaze underwrites this convulsion, puncturing Imaginary coherence and exposing subjectivity as already split. Perdita condenses this split into a name, an infant whose existence oscillates between presence and absence, symbol and stain; Antigonus’ dream folds waking into dreaming, producing new information - her name, her shore - that no waking logic can support; and the bear, emerging precisely there, raises lack itself to the dignity of the Thing. Each of these “problems” is governed by the gaze: Perdita as remainder of Imaginary misrecognition, Antigonus’ dream as command of the Real, the “bear” as the unconscious remainder embodied as pursuit. The coast, the bear, and Leontes’ jealousy are thus not blemishes but extimate sites where the Symbolic tears and the Real insists, Imaginary stains legible only awry, like Holbein’s skull. To call them incoherences, as critics often do, is to miss that the collapse of Imaginary consistency is itself the structure: the Real writes

itself not through continuity but through puncture, contingency as the letter that always arrives at its destination. For Shakespeare, approaching the close of his career, this inscription of lack becomes a mode of sublimation: absence staged as statue, as Perdita, as coast, as bear, each a figure through which the dramatist traverses his own fantasy by inscribing loss rather than disavowing it. Leontes falters before the gaze, undone by envy and impotence, while Shakespeare sublimates, folding impossibility into form, transfiguring collapse into restoration. The dramatist's unconscious is inscribed in his text as surely as the protagonist's unconscious is inscribed in his speech. Where Leontes "exits" Shakespeare "enters" and contrawise, both are structured like a language, both punctured by the Real, both organized by the gaze.

## **XII. Conclusion: The Stain of Authorship and the Authorial Split**

What the preceding pages have traced is the logic of a fissure, the inaugural fissure of this thesis, which I have called the authorial split. Elizabethan stage-directions inscribe, in their very forms, the dramatist's divided presence between page and stage, exposing authorship not as unity but as torsion, a Möbius fold in which voice and gaze, ostension and ellipsis, animation and effacement continually turn into one another. Their apparent inconsistencies—whether permissive, elliptical, contradictory, or exhibitory—do not testify to error or negligence but to this constitutive split: the dramatist's gaze returning as lack within his own signifiers. To read Elizabethan stage-directions closely is thus to encounter the dramatist as both present and absent, as agent and effaced residue, as one who commands bodies yet simultaneously yields them to others. The figure of authorship that emerges is not sovereign but extimate, not a centered voice but a stain that persists in the very space where mastery falters. This split is not an accident of Elizabethan practice, a mere by-product of sloppy transmission or uneven convention, but the structural condition of the form itself: the dramatist's body returns in writing only as divided, only as displaced in the directions that bear his name yet elude his control. The authorial split is therefore not one fissure among others but the first, the ground upon which the subsequent architecture of this thesis builds.

Seen in this light, the opposition rehearsed so often in Theatre Studies, which privileges performance as the true locus of dramatic meaning, proves radically inadequate. The familiar claim that the play only "comes to life" on stage is itself symptomatic of the very blindness that Elizabethan stage-directions expose. For these directions already stage their own life in writing: they do not wait passively for realization by actors or directors, nor do they yield a stable blueprint awaiting execution; they inscribe in advance the fracture of performance. To privilege the stage as the site of presence is to ignore the way the page already operates as a stage, not because it reproduces theatrical action but because it bears the dramatist's unconscious in the form of stains, ellipses, and gaps. In words such as "diverse," "certain," "as if," or "of no importance," we see the text perform its own *mise en scène*, not as a coherent set of instructions but as the dramatist's failure to coincide with his own image. The empty space, as Brook defined it, is not simply a material stage awaiting embodiment, but a site already inscribed by the dramatist's lack, a space marked in advance by the directions that name but cannot contain it. Theatre Studies, in privileging performance, overlooks that this instability is not added by staging but carried within writing itself. The Elizabethan page is the first stage, because it inscribes the impossibility of presence before performance begins.

For this reason, Elizabethan stage-directions resist all attempts at taxonomy. Efforts to stabilize their functions—to sort them into pragmatic, narrative, structural, or exhibitory categories—always falter at the very point of classification, because the directions themselves refuse to settle into the roles ascribed to them. The faltering of “in” and “out” shows that the grammar of staging cannot stabilize entrances and exits without exposing the instability of their categories. The insertion of “words...of no importance” shows that exhibitory directions do not secure performance but deny it, turning the actor’s autonomy into lack. Hammond’s “third kind” and Dessen’s “grammar of staging” both expose the insufficiency of taxonomic frames: the dramatist’s voice never resolves into theatrical clarity but continually reveals its own lack. What taxonomy seeks to capture is always displaced by the materiality of the signifier, which slides, contradicts, or effaces its own ostension. The very attempt to catalogue stage-directions discloses their covert resistance to taxonomy, their refusal to be fully named. They are inscriptions of incompleteness, not functions to be sorted.

The exemplary case, Shakespeare’s “Exit, pursued by a bear”, dramatizes this resistance with singular force. It is not a theatrical stunt or a symbolic allegory, but the moment where tragedy and comedy hinge upon the dramatist’s dream of pursuit, Antigonus’s vision and Perdita’s naming. The bear does not instruct so much as it inscribes, staging disappearance, remainder, and sublimation: a Thing raised from absence into presence, the dramatist’s own body-loss condensed into an image of pursuit. This direction epitomizes the authorial split, for it stages authorship precisely at the point where it effaces itself, leaving behind not a body but a trace. And it is here that the limits of Theatre Studies are most apparent: no performance of the bear could ever exhaust or stabilize its function, for its meaning lies not in its realization but in the stain it leaves on the page. The bear is the dramatist’s unconscious made visible, a direction whose absurdity reveals the impossibility of reducing stage-directions to instruction.

Other directions confirm this point. The permissive markers “diverse” or “certain” expose the dramatist’s own uncertainty, displacing specification into the vagueness of plurality. The elliptical formula “Exit corse” stages absence rather than presence, marking death not by dramatization but by evacuation. The Möbius inversions of “in” and “out” turn grammar against itself, exposing the instability of staging at the level of syntax. Heywood’s exhibitory “words...of no importance” deny the actor even the autonomy of speech, staging the dramatist’s intrusion not as mastery but as breach, an exhibition of lack. Taken together, these directions reveal that Elizabethan drama does not need performance to become unstable; it carries instability already, written into its margins, voiced in its ellipses, inscribed in its stains.

The consequence is that Elizabethan stage-directions cannot be reduced either to authorial intention, theatrical utility, or systematic classification. They mark instead the site where these categories collapse into one another, where the dramatist’s subjectivity is exposed as split, and where theatre reflects its own unconscious. The authorial split thus names more than a theoretical construct; it identifies the point at which drama discloses its constitutive incompleteness. The Elizabethan page is not ancillary to performance but the place where performance first encounters its impossibility: where the dramatist’s gaze emerges as stain, where writing exhibits its own lack, and where drama appears as the unstable hinge between text and theatre. This is why stage-

directions matter, not as marginal glosses but as central inscriptions of dramatic form. They embody the paradox of authorship, resist the reduction of text to performance, and expose the limits of taxonomy. They are where the dramatist dreams and falters, where the stage reflects back its own absence, and where theatre reveals its essence in the very appearance of its gap.

To call this the first split of the thesis is to emphasize its architectural role. The authorial split does not exhaust the fissures of drama but inaugurates them, setting the ground for the subsequent inquiry into the referential split and the spectatorial split. Where the referential split will show how stage-directions corrupt their own referent, and where the spectatorial split will disclose the fracture of reading and viewing, the authorial split reveals the fracture at the level of enunciation itself: the dramatist caught in the torsion of his own directions, the authorial gaze returned as lack. Each subsequent split extends this trajectory, but none displaces the inaugural truth: that drama begins with a divided authorship, with writing that stains itself with absence, with directions that both show and undo the figure of the dramatist. The Elizabethan stage-directions, in their stains and torsions, reveal the paradox of authorship as the paradox of theatre itself. To read them is to see not merely the dramatist's hand but its faltering, its splitting, its failure to coincide with itself. They testify that drama is not a seamless transmission from author to stage, nor a stable artefact awaiting interpretation, nor a system that can be contained in taxonomic grids. It is a form that exists only in its own incompleteness, an artefact that inscribes its lack as its essence. The authorial split is not a failure to be overcome but the very ground of dramatic form.

Chapter Three:  
Shaw, the Architect:  
The Derridean artefact in *Heartbreak House*

**I. Architecture as Inscription: Shaw and the Stage of War**

**1. Domestic Space and Modernism**

In one of his discussions with Roger Fry, the founder of the Omega Workshops, about his purchase of a marquetry tray, George Bernard Shaw, the patron of the Omega at the time, complained that “I looked in at the Workshops one day and even went the length of buying intarsia which struck me as cheap”. The quality of the workmanship of the mahogany tray was not what Shaw had expected and by invoking the Italian masters of the art of wood inlaying he expressed his “regret...that the artificer, not having had the opportunity of being apprenticed to the people who did the intarsia work at Bergamo cathedral, does not know all the secrets of the trade”. Eventually, he extended this complaint to the vicissitudes of the wood of which the tray was made: “His beautiful surfaces are beginning to burst up as if a traction engine has gone over them... It might be as well to let the hopeful reviewer of the lost art see what happens when his slices of wood begin to blister and curl up”. (qtd in Spalding 177).

Shaw’s sustained fascination with domestic architectural space has been underestimated when considering his stylistic and technical contributions to modern British drama. As both a patron of the Omega Workshops, the influential Bloomsbury interior design enterprise, and a regular commentator on architectural design, Shaw seems to have explored the thematic potentials of domestic space throughout his dramatic writing. This was by no means a rare interest for a writer of his time and place. Significant links between architecture and the goals of the modernist project have led Victoria Rosner to argue that domestic architecture is “a generative site for literary modernism”. “Modernist spatial poetics”, she continues, “are attuned to architectural dynamics of privacy and exposure, spatial hierarchies demarcating class, the locations and routines surrounding body care, and gendering of space” (2). Sarah Blair similarly gestures toward the centrality of architectural design to the forms and figurations of modernist literary thinking: “[M]odernism is among other things a determined response to the specific spaces in which it takes shape, advertises its cultural value, and contests for social power” (814). The Omega workshop had displayed the ideals of the modernist project in the way it promised consumers a 'total' house where residents and interior fittings and fixtures communicate one coherent vision reminiscent of the general quest of modern architecture for a 'total work', or what Mari Hvattum describes as modern architecture's “dream of organic totality”. This is a totality which, as Hvattum expresses, “does not necessarily involve any likeness to the forms of nature. It evokes rather a principle of form itself, referring to an autonomous ‘unfolding from within’” (1).

This 'dream' is best articulated by the Bauhaus school, according to which the fixtures and fittings of a house became as important to the overall effect as the structure itself, combining the 'sister arts' of architecture (furniture, carpentry, fabric design, ceramics) into a coherent vision of domestic design, with everything from subject to object placed to communicate this vision. The subject was set to become more an inmate than a resident, someone who lacks creative control over their environment and is unable to escape the artistic vision within which they have been placed. The famous Bauhaus school emblem, designed by Oskar Schlemmer and adopted in 1921, depicts a house which resembles a human head, with a window, a window frame, a door and a knob, replaced with an eye, an eyebrow, a chin and a lip, respectively.

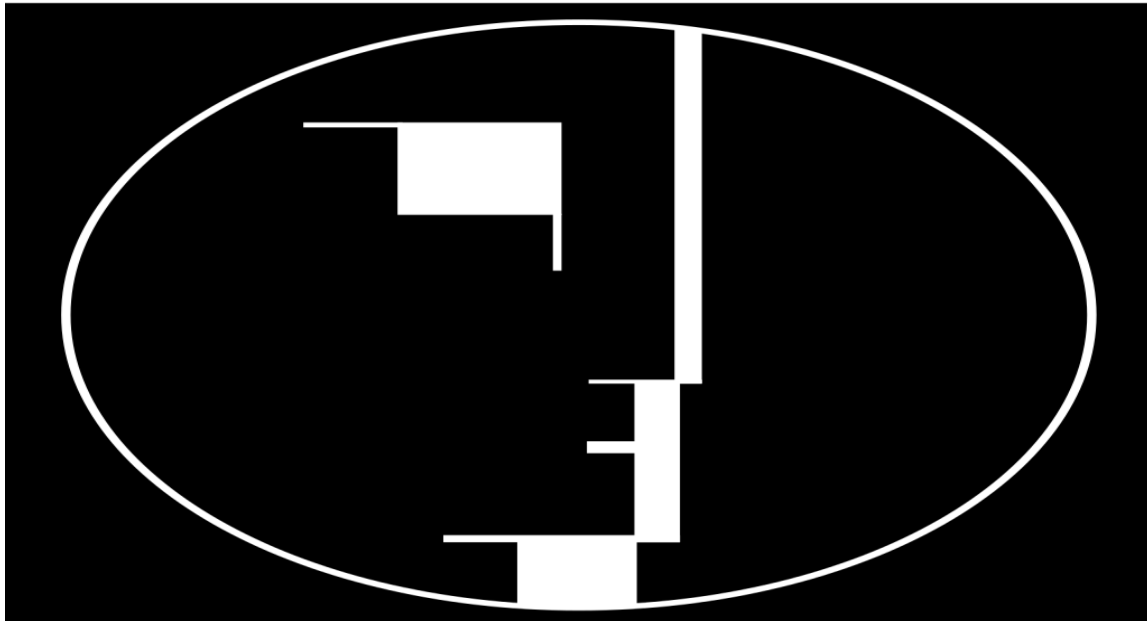


Fig 2. The Bauhaus emblem, designed by Oskar Schlemmer, was adopted in 1922.

## **2. Heartbreak House at War**

*Heartbreak House* (1919), arguably Shaw's most architecturally animated work, was begun in 1913–14 and written intermittently during the years of the First World War, only reaching completion in 1917 before being published and staged in 1919. It thus emerged amid the grim anticipation of what would become the deadliest war of its time, a war whose first shot was fired before the text was even complete. The play was thus supervened by a state of war, "The enormity of [which]," as Shaw reminds us in his preface, "was quite beyond most of us" (17). Captain Shotover's nautical-themed home, constructed to resemble a merchant ship complete with relics and a sailing crew's retinue, stands as a symbol of "cultured, leisured Europe before war" (5). A space where, Shaw believed, "power and culture were in separate compartments" (5). The house's seemingly pretentious architecture - foregrounded in the opening stage direction that spans sixty-two lines, seven paragraphs, or a page and a half - is not merely decorative. It is reconfigured through a cast of cultural élites, upper-class intellectuals, and artists who, as Robert W. Corrigan elaborates, "rapidly lose whatever veneer of virtue they might have had and stand revealed as vain, insipid, blind, and vapid, men and women" (3).

Act One centres on Ellie Dunn's disillusionment with her romantic lover, Hector Hushabye, who had deceived her about his identity and exploits. This disenchantment is mirrored by the other denizens of the house, all of whom are constantly frustrated in their sentimental and spiritual aspirations while being forced to adjust to the house's inexorable reality. The second act revels in portraying their gradual cohabitation with the house's ambiguous environment, a mixture of the evasively artificial and the genuinely real. Mangan, the capitalist whom Ellie had initially agreed to marry on the rebound from Hector, is now revealed to be on the brink of bankruptcy. Disillusionment and corruption culminate in the third act with an enemy bombing raid. A bomb falls just outside the house, but its impact is exacerbated by Captain Shotover's hidden cache of dynamite, kept for his obsessive experiments. The captain's ship-of-state posits its architectural eccentricity as a metonym for the high-minded sophistry of its tenants. It externalizes architectural space as a narrative. In this chapter, I will argue that *Heartbreak* puts on display a deconstructive economy between literature and architecture as a form of writing. Drawing on Derrida's articulation, or rather 'violation' of "space" in both conceptual and material terms, the play's stage-directions, and the opening stage direction in particular will emerge as catalytic figures in the verbal and visual (dis)play of the text as both literature and architecture.

## **II. Construction, Ruin, and the Spirit of the Tower**

### **1. Materials and Ruins**

Shaw's contentious relationship with space can be traced in his foreword to the catalogue of the inaugural Modern Architectural Research Society (MARS) exhibition in London, "New Architecture: An Exhibition of the Elements of Modern Architecture", later published under the title "On Architecture" (1938). In this foreword, Shaw criticizes what he calls 'impressive architecture' whose builders "relied on magnitude and apparent impossibility for the effect of their work". "Impressive architecture" seemed, for Shaw, to impose some sort of "religion" by its extreme fixation on "races, gardens and squares" and "the façades"; "In impressive architecture it is the outside that matters most" (8). Examples he gives of "impressive architecture" are the Jupiter and Baalbek temples. With reference to the latter, Shaw states that "To the classical Baalbekian list of building materials, stone and bricks and mortar, it [MARS] adds concrete with a steel skeleton, glass, and steel without any concrete". Mars for Shaw had "no religion to impose" in that its object was not "an advertisement of wealth and respectability" but to "consider the health and convenience not only of the inmates but of their neighbours and of the whole town, as far as it is allowed to have its own way..." (8). Shaw's prizing of what was an upcoming architectural enterprise for the city of London exhibits a subtle resistance; his idea of construction is not aesthetically reduced to its end product, the result, be it a temple, a residential building, or a house, but is essentially informed by the building materials, i.e. the "stone and bricks and mortar" and "steel skeleton, glass, and steel" of which it is composed. Shaw's argument gives precedence to the parts of the whole in which they coalesce and so he "must not say that in using these materials for utilitarian ends it is indifferent to the aspect of the result" (8).

It is precisely these constituent parts which we find earlier in his article to be concerned with 'destruction' all the same, which for Shaw is not synonymous with either an end or the annihilation of construction. In referring to the attempted "demolition and desecration" of Jupiter's temple, he argues that perpetrators either "could not go quite through with it or it may be that the destroyers deliberately calculated that a visible wreck and ruin of Jupiter's famous temple would show how Allah had dealt with him better than an annihilation that could show nothing" (7). Like "building materials" which intimate the construction that will be, "wreck and ruin" expose from within the construction that was; both pre-construction (grains) and post-construction (remains) are stages which can't be reduced to the idea of structure, whether a priori or posteriori, as grains or remains. War has in every structure the parts it will expose, an 'already there', that is, an "artistic *instinct*" (my emphasis) which for Shaw "Indeed...is at the very root of the matter even if the more fanatical Martians do produce buildings that are staggeringly unlike Adelphi Terrace and Fitzroy Square" (8).

## 2. The Tower's Return

Shaw's observations on "building materials" betray an interest in the elemental traces that precede and exceed the finality of architectural form. These materials are not merely pre- or post-structural but essentially semiotic as parts of what structure could be or will have been in the process of its becoming a *piece of* architecture. Here, a metaphor begins to take shape—not simply from the opposition of construction and destruction, but from their repetition within the very scaffolding of a structure, a process that reflects and reiterates the concept of structure itself. The construction carries within itself a kind of stage-direction toward its own destruction, a built-in cue or orientation that unfolds in proportion to its status as an architectural work. A spirit (Geist) of metaphor edges its way in here through Jacques Derrida's fleeting remark on the "tower", a figure haunted, of course, by the biblical Tower of Babel and its legacy of ruin: "The structure of the tower is such that its construction returns, stone by stone, to its destruction" (200). Derrida's quick coupling of construction and destruction in the same utterance is not incidental: it condenses his broader critique of the architectural metaphor that has long underpinned the subordination of aesthetics to philosophy, and of architecture to the other arts, especially poetry. How does each stone in the tower, like each sign, carry within it the trace of both its continuity and its erasure? Read in this way, the tower's logic prefigures the condition of drama's *parergon* par excellence - the stage-direction - whose very function is to script a future enactment that will simultaneously affirm and efface its presence.

## III. The Parergonal Frame: Kant and Derrida on Ornament

### 1. Autonomy and Economy

This material deferral between construction and destruction finds its most incisive articulation in Derrida's appointment with Kant, above all in *The Truth in Painting* (1978), where the figure of the *parergon* - the liminal supplement neither intrinsic nor extrinsic to the work - is subjected to rigorous interrogation. Relatedly, in the essay "Economimesis" (collected in *Margins of Philosophy*), Derrida

explores how Kant's *Critique of Judgment* stages the ideal of aesthetic autonomy against the backdrop of a logic of consumption, revealing the latent economy embedded in the very gesture of disinterested judgment. "Free art" (*freie Kunst*) is opposed to contract work (*Lohnarbeit*); it is "free" from the economic domain governed by exchange and utility. This freedom is predicated on the exclusion of the economic from the aesthetic, an exclusion which displaces the regime of representation as the organized substitution of signs for things. Kant privileges expression over representation, positing free art as that which detaches itself from the economy of consumption. Within his hierarchy of the arts, poetry, as closest to speech, is elevated to the top of the aesthetic "tower", while architecture is relegated to its lowest tier, tethered, as it were, to the contractual economy of use. Architecture, for Kant, is thus subordinated to function: "In architecture the chief point is a certain use of the artistic object to which, as the condition, the aesthetic ideas are limited... adaptation of the product to a particular use is the essential element in a work of architecture" (175).

Derrida uncovers the subversive architectural within the aesthetic by reconfiguring the Kantian status of architecture. Free art's ostensible detachment from material representation masks its participation in a "divine economy." In this schema, the fine artist imitates God by transcending the world of products for the sake of pure productivity. This transcendence is itself a form of exchangeability, an equivalence that appears to rest on a "trace" inscribed in nature -what Kant variously names "regular agreement," "accordance," or "compact." Here the "trace" does not provide a literal ground but a cipher or mark through which nature seems to authorize the artist's expression, even as this authorization is deferred and unstable. The artist's expressive language is thus mediated by this trace, a shifting sign through which nature speaks figuratively in its determined forms. It slips (*glissement*) from nature to the artist, and from the artist to the architect, rendering both equally imitative, equally divine. It follows that consumption is always undertaken under the guise of detachment. As Derrida notes in "Economimesis," Kant's exclusion of bodily consumption is not a negation but an idealizing sublimation: "it passes through a certain mouth... assimilates everything to itself by idealizing it within interiority... refusing to touch it, to digest it naturally, but digests it ideally, consumes what it does not consume and vice versa" (Derrida 258). The divine economy is not a transcendence of material economy but its idealized mirror.

## 2. The Logic of Ornament

Derrida thus marks the persistent disturbance introduced by the *parergon*, the ornament, from the beginning of Kant's *Critique*. Neither simply inside nor outside the work (*ergon*), the ornament destabilizes the metaphysical boundary that has structured philosophical aesthetics from Plato to Heidegger. For Kant, the ornament is "only an adjunct, and not an intrinsic constituent" (73). It is detachable, supplementary, and subservient, admitted into the work only insofar as it conforms to design. The *Critique* insists on reiterating the form/matter distinction that undergirds the metaphysical tradition, rendering aesthetics subordinate to metaphysics. Yet his own examples of ornament, the frame on a painting, the drapery on a statue, the colonnade on a palace, betray this logic. Each is indispensable: the frame preserves the painting, the drapery historicizes the statue, the

colonnade socializes the palace. These ornaments fill a structural lack, a constitutive gap, within the work. They are that which the work appears to exclude, yet by which it is supported.

This logic of ornamentation thus renders the detachment of art from philosophy no more than a Kantian fantasy. Architectural discourse remains bound to philosophy by the same aporia. Kant indeed organizes philosophy architecturally before architecture is even thematized in his aesthetics. Derrida writes:

Kant proposes a metaphor borrowed from art, which has not yet been discussed, from the technique of architecture, from the architectonic: the pure philosopher, the metaphysician, will have to proceed like a good architect... He must first secure the ground, the foundation, the fundamentals... the architect of reason excavates, sounds, prepares the terrain, in search of a solid foundation... Here philosophy... represents itself as part of its part, as an art of Architecture. It re-presents itself, detaches itself, dispatches an emissary... to bind the whole... [Metaphysics] represents its own desire... the desire of reason as desire for a grounded structure. Edifying desire would be produced as the art of philosophising (57).

Derrida's ornament does not mark a fall from metaphysics into aesthetics but locates the corruption in the architectonics of metaphysics itself. To step "outside" philosophy is to remain within it. As Derrida cautions in the essay "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" in *Writing and Difference* (1978): "The step 'outside philosophy' is much more difficult to conceive than is generally imagined by those who think they made it; and who in general are swallowed up in metaphysics in the entire body of that discourse which they claim to have disengaged from it" (280).

#### **IV. *Glas* and the Unvoiced Dialogue: Derrida on Stage-Directions**

##### **1. A Theatre of Margins**

At this point Derrida's *parergon* seems close to the bifurcating columns of his *Glas*, and both texts can be read as bearing a relation to stage-directions in drama. *Glas* stages a textual theatre where the margins, footnotes, and typographic disjunctions function as a kind of philosophical stage-direction, seen but not spoken, to engage Hegel and Genet in dialogue with each other. A typographically fractured text, *Glas* enacts a deconstruction of philosophical authority by foregrounding the figure of the parergon, that is, the marginal, the visual, and the supplementary; elements 'naturally' excluded from the centre of discourse. The parergon, neither intrinsic nor extrinsic to the work, becomes the very condition of its possibility. *Glas* itself becomes a liminal frame, staging the impossibility of dialogue through the very possibility of silence. Hegel and Genet are set side by side without mutual recognition, their encounter occurring only in the spacing of the text. Stage-directions in drama operate in precisely this parergonal register, enabling a dialogue without voice, filling the structural void between text and performance.

## 2. The Last Fortress of Metaphysics

Unlike Shaw's enthusiasm for the London MARS exhibition, Derrida was notoriously reluctant to attend the 1988 Deconstructivist Architecture exhibition at MoMA, curated by Philip Johnson and Mark Wigley, a reluctance which converges with his dictum about architecture as "the last fortress of metaphysics" (1). Like Shaw's reluctance to reduce architectural matter to form, Derrida was reluctant to flatten "deconstruction" itself into form, resisting its seamless appropriation by architecture into a monotheistic style or aesthetic label. In *The Architecture of Deconstruction: Derrida's Haunt*, Wigley notes how *Of Grammatology*, perhaps Derrida's most widely read work, is punctuated by the question of space, even though it never appears to be its central issue. This fact is bound up with the very logic of subordination that Derrida seeks to deconstruct. Tradition's privileging of speech over writing is a hierarchy that, as Wigley observes, "depends for it to function on the demotion of space" (67). Writing as something merely "in space," a "space of inscription," or a "spatial distribution of signs" which interrupts or thwarts the self-presence of speech promulgates the illusion that space is something which writing merely occupies. Writing, then, is not a contingent accident that befalls an already constituted space; rather, it is the inscriptive force that produces space as such:

the possibility of inscriptions in general, which could be called the possibility of the book, is the condition of writing: not the book as the content of an empirical signifier or as a given structure of meaning, but the book that produces the space and the time in which the signifier takes place" (15)

## 3. Archive and the Haunted House

We need now to negotiate between the architecture of the stage and the architecture of the page. As Wigley observes, Derrida's most persistent engagements with space materialize not in built form but in writing, where the spacing of inscription itself stages a haunted architecture. In *Archive Fever*, Derrida recalls the Greek *arkhē*, the word that binds archive and architecture, origin and command. The archive is not a neutral repository but a haunted structure, governed by the law of the house (*arkheion*). What Freud cannot consciously avow appears only through a frame, a *parergon*, that he does not set himself but that is imposed by the inheritor of his papers, his daughter. The fact that transmission here passes through a woman is not incidental: in Derrida's lexicon, the feminine often figures the supplementary fold, the *hymen* that both joins and separates, that adorns even as it unsettles the closure of the house. Like Freud confronted with a frame not his own, Shaw the dramatist converges with his Captain: each is an architect haunted by his own *arkhē*, possessed by the *oikos* he seeks to stage.<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> On Derrida's figuration of the feminine as *hymen*, see *Dissemination* (trans. Johnson, 1981), esp. "The Double Session." For Derrida, the *hymen* names a paradoxical fold that is neither purely inside nor outside,

## V. Dramatic Artefacts: Johnson, Derrida, and the Material Page

### 1. Johnson's Architectural Reading

Architecture understood as a form of inscription in the conceptual and spatial sense, that is, as an effect of 'spacing', disavows any attempt to spatialise *Heartbreak* as a synthesis of its architectural and literary abode. One such attempt is Allan Johnson's essay, "Architectural Space and the Failures of 'Complete' Houses in *Heartbreak House*" (2016). Johnson argues that Shaw's response to war amounts to a rhetoric of testing the limits of the modern project by assuming its futility and displacement. He writes that "for Shaw, the mending was not to be found in completeness but in dissections, and the traditional image of an ark that transports humankind to salvation is first mocked and then destroyed with alarming literalness" (205). Through *Heartbreak*, literature is exteriorised as a space of writing in the traditional sense of commenting from a safe place on the ideals of the modern project. The 'mocking' and 'destroying' pass through an architectural metaphor, where in fact it is the figure of the building, the construction of the sign, that gives way to the conceptual system it makes appear. This can be claimed to be Johnson's first displacement.

### 2. Stage-directions as Inscription

The second displacement arises in Johnson's reliance on the play's opening stage direction without recognising its specific function. What he treats as a decorative description or metaphor of "bizarre" architecture is in fact a visual representative of the page of the drama which contributes, as inscription, to the architectonics of the blank spaces of the dramatic text as exclusively (ontologically) dramatic. By reading the opening stage direction as a mere adjunct to the play's modernist critique, Johnson exteriorises what is in fact interior to drama's spacing. In his account, the architectural figures operate as metaphors for cultural collapse, but their dramatic mode of appearance - stage-directions inscribed on the page as both visual and verbal artefacts - is left underdeveloped. Such attempts indeed refuse to follow the text's own passage through externality, death, or the "spacing" which it cannot suspend. Spacing as both spatial intervals between signifiers and the effect of their substitution suspends in their *becoming* the dramatic elements, i.e. stage, location, prop, actor, in the interval between their being literary (ship, England, figurehead, Ellie) and their being architectural (residency, physicality, functionality, habitability). This temporal tension cannot be formless any more than it can be reduced to 'one' form. Their exteriorisation of their own space leaves its trace as a moment of their transformation, a visual suspension captured on the page as such, where their architectonics appear in the spatial inscription of writing between stage-

---

neither presence nor absence: it joins as it separates, ornaments as it unsettles. It is in this sense that the feminine appears as the figure of supplementarity within metaphysical discourse, an undecidable seam that both sustains and destabilizes the closure of the house.

directions and dialogue.

In their appeal to the *mise en scène*, the stage-directions of *Heartbreak* do not simply exhibit, or give instruction to exhibit, the “bizarre” (206) construction of the house’s architecture. Rather, their appeal to architecture and *as* architecture are productive and reproductive; they produce their text, visually and verbally, in so far as their objects do not stop emerging, as dramatic artefacts, from the empty space between literature and architecture. Architecture and its 'sister arts' have their in-laws in drama. What is provocative in *Heartbreak* is therefore more than the way it depicts space, the role of its spatial figures in writing, or the spatiality of writing. Rather, it is the spacing by which it is made and on which it is grounded between the architecture that literature traditionally borrows as metaphor or figure, and the literature that architecture traditionally carries as its conceptual or narrative justification.

### 3. Assimilation and Wreckage

What, then, is at stake in this excess of architecture that *Heartbreak House* inscribes? Shaw considered the play his greatest achievement (a view echoed by E. Strauss in 1942 and Blanche Patch in 1950), yet its significance lies not simply in anticipating war through an “uncomfortable” or “bizarre” architecture, but in living through the “wrecks and ruins” that such architecture already presupposes. Shaw’s version of war demands an articulation of the parasitical 'empty space' in every structure, the degenerative ground of its parts as the spacing of its becoming. The attack of modern warfare at the end of *Heartbreak* is *not* the most radical scene of war in the text, nor is its overwhelmingly architectural eccentricity the most figurative. The real undercurrent of war in *Heartbreak* lies in the spacing of its ‘dramatic artefacts’ as the architectural/dramatic parts from which and into which the ship assimilates its own wreckage. This, I believe, conforms more precisely to Shaw’s apocalyptic and eschatological vision of a state ship that drifts apart due to the space it attempts to occupy. It is, as Ellie Dunn claims, an “agonizing house,” a “house without foundations” (85). Absence is a condition of *Heartbreak*’s existence, not an anticipatory or a reductive model. The opening stage direction’s exposure of the ship demands an equal exposure of its residents in a dissemination of the material into the social, the physical into the abstract, death into life apropos a textual architecture of war. When Shaw claims towards the end of his foreword that “you cannot destroy a religion until you have destroyed *or* assimilated what it has built [my emphasis]” (7), “or” seems to be less about offering alternatives than introducing a synonymy. The “assimilation” of what a religion has built *is* a way of destroying it, without *actually* destroying it<sup>25</sup>. Perhaps this is Shaw’s key alternative that must be considered when assessing the text’s take on architecture: deconstruction is more radical by assimilation of structures than by figurative or literal destruction of them. The question then is how *Heartbreak*’s stage-directions assimilate *and* deconstruct architecture as literature? How does the play of signifiers between literature and architecture in *Heartbreak House*’s stage-directions come to represent the Derridean artefact as a narrative?

---

<sup>25</sup> The term “deconstruction” itself derives directly from Heidegger’s *Destruktion* and *Abbau*. For Derrida, *Destruktion* means “not a destruction but precisely a destructuring that dismantles the structural layers in the system” and *Abbau* means “to take apart an edifice in order to see how it is constituted or deconstituted” (qtd. In Wigley (41-42)).

## VI. Frames of Passage: Windows and Doors

### 1. The Window as Frame

In the opening stage direction of *Heartbreak House*, we encounter the following line:

The hilly country in the middle of the north edge of Sussex, looking very pleasant on a fine evening at the end of September, is seen through the windows of a room which has been built so as to resemble the after part of an old-fashioned high-pooed ship with a stern gallery (18).

In this stage direction we do not simply delve into a Shavian narrative characteristic of his naturalistic sentiment to experiment with his characters' environment so that a 'room' is made to resemble a 'ship'. No sooner are we offered an open view of the ship's habitat than we realise that we are being pulled back to see that view through a frame: a textual configuration that resists, in writing, the normalising effect of the *mise en scène* to present the window and the outer view as homogeneous objects of seeing. The frame of the window as a textual trace of the interplay between the inside and outside object of focus introduces the architectonic coordinates of our first encounter with Captain Shotover, the builder of the ship. Ellie, the guest who had no one to receive her and who (upon the entrance of Lady Guinness) remained temporarily unnoticed, tells us that someone has "looked in at the window [while exclaiming] "Nurse, there is a young and attractive female waiting in the poop. Go and see what she wants" (19). Here, the 'window' does not just posit an opportunity for Shaw to "rhapsodise over scenery", to use Kevin Jackson's words, but a frame through which the builder is not only first exposed to us in absentia, that is, through the 'words' of someone else, but whose first advent in the text as partially inside and partially outside bypasses the typical dramatic game of onstage/offstage, enter/exit. The compromised entrance of the builder into the text establishes a place of displacement that binds architectural space to the aesthetics of stage praxis. From the start, the real 'frame' of text emerges as the spacing of the architectural into the linguistic, exteriorising one another: there is the body of the builder spatially in and out, and there is the body of the text that gives this 'in and out' a narrative, a text within text. The 'window' does not present a linguistic marker of a spatial 'frame' through which the inside and outside are given coordinates as reality. It has no 'real' value, except as a signifier of the absence of 'focus' itself.

### 2. The Door as Interruption

The dissemination of *Heartbreak's* first window as a frame of architectural/linguistic spacing has the same effect on another frame, this time in the figure of doors through which access to the inside and outside is always delivered to us with a sense of discomfort, restriction, and confinement. The stage direction offers us "a row of lockers... [which] provides an unupholstered window seat" but the latter is "interrupted by twin glass doors". There is "Another door [that] *strains* the illusion a little by being apparently in the ship's port side of the ship, but still leading not to the open sea, but to the entrance hall of the house". "Between the bench and the windows, is a *narrow* doorway with a half

door [my emphasis]" (18). In all instances, the door is not allowed fully to present its common function of demarcating social spaces and flows without representing a focal tension between what it opens to or what it closes upon. The door either 'interrupts' or 'strains', has a 'narrow doorway' or is itself a 'half door'. These architectural/linguistic articulations of the door in the form of signifiers of discomfort and restraint represent the builder's conscious or unconscious moves to discomfort and restrain his guests. Not recognizing Lady Utterword, his daughter, he would "halt[...] at the door" while telling her to sleep in Ariadne's old room before "shutting the door sharply behind him" (25). When Ellie follows him, hoping to stop him from finding her a room - this just after he has wrongly, perhaps even wilfully, taken her for the daughter of a sailor who once robbed him - their exchange breaks off in mid-utterance. Ellie can only begin, "Oh, please..." before the stage direction cuts her short: "[He goes out]" (23). In the heat of emotion, he "disappears into the pantry" (20) (37) twice, or "vanishes through the half door" (22). "At the same moment" Randal sets out to kiss Mrs. Hushabye, unaware that she is his sister-in-law, "the captain appears in the doorway" (37). Architectural signifiers of 'interruption' or 'straining' relevant to the door in spatial terms are realised as a social conundrum by their builder who 'halts', 'shut[s] the door sharply', etc. on his guests. In this way, the spacing of architecture into literature - doors that interrupt, strain, or remain half-open - becomes the medium through which the builder himself performs, placing at stake not only his own presence but the relations of those who must endure it.

### 3. Simmel's Mobility and Hospitality

In fact, the implication of the captain's social use and abuse of doors can be articulated more rigorously with regards to the architectural appeal of their 'mobility', a mobility which George Simmel in 'Bridge and Door' (1909) argues, creates limits or limitedness where there is actually none, whilst leaving "the possibility at any moment of stepping out of this limitation into freedom" (10). In his thinkpiece, Simmel displays a series of observations relating to the bridge and door as aesthetic and material presences in the social world, each performing particular social roles. This relates for him to the essence of the "human being" as a 'connecting creature' and a 'bordering creature' (10). For him, bridges and doors are part of the individual's social presence. But while the "bridge" maximizes the "will to connection" in the way it "symbolizes the extension of our volitional sphere over space" (6), the door, for Simmel, "represents in a more decisive manner how separating and connecting are only two sides of precisely the same act" (7) The promise of the door for Simmel, perhaps obviously, is "the possibility of a permanent interchange" (7). Abruptly vanishing or appearing through the doors of his family house thus speaks of the Captain relegating the question of social connectedness and separation more to the mobility of the doors than to their being a threshold on whose sides these coordinates can be antithetically retrieved. When stopping at the door while speaking, leaving it in the middle of conversations or appearing abruptly in the doorway, 'separation' and 'connection' arise as 'two sides of the same act', but only in the sense that interruption, conceived verbally and spatially, is partially connecting and partially separating: the interrupted or interrupting Captain appears as the very form over which connectedness and separateness space each other out. In connecting and separating at once, the builder becomes the very hinge of exteriorisation at every door: an empty space that the door can neither fully open onto nor fully close upon. As in Derrida's version of "hospitality", where "make yourself at home" is contaminated with a radical "but", that is, "remember, that is not true, this is not your home but mine, and you are expected to respect my property"(111), so is the door when opened or closed; it

gives the impression that you are separated or connected, 'but remember', it is always susceptible to an 'interruptive' closure or disclosure depending on the conditions of the house. And, for the old Captain, it seems that a closed door is enough justification that it must open and vice versa, something that is explicated more accurately in the way he describes himself to Ellie later in the text: "I can't think so long and continuously. I am too old. I must go in and out" (71).

## VII. Page Player: Tools, Text, and Mise-en-abîme

### 1. Bricoleurs of Inscription

The second paragraph of the opening stage direction is as follows:

Against the starboard wall is a carpenter's bench. The vice has a board in its jaws; and the floor is littered with shavings, overflowing from a waste-paper basket. A couple of planes and a centre bit...On the starboard side, but close to the middle, is a plain oak drawing-table with drawing-board, T-square, straightedges, set squares, mathematical instruments, saucers of water colour, a tumbler of discoloured water, Indian ink, pencils, and brushes on it. The drawing board is set so that the draughtsman's chair has the window on its left hand. On the floor at the end of the table, on its right, is a ship's fire bucket. On the port side of the room, near the bookshelves, is a sofa with its back to the windows. It is a sturdy mahogany article, oddly upholstered in sailcloth, including the bolster, with a couple of blankets hanging over the back. Between the sofa and the drawing table is a big wicker chair, with broad arms and a low sloping back, with its back to the light. A small but strong teak table, with a round top and gate legs, is positioned against the port wall between the door and the bookcase (18).

What we witness here is like some sort of authorial monologue which, upon closer inspection, does not appear to display only a bizarrely detailed scene of the Captain's inner fittings for his ship. The stage direction also includes the 'tools' by which they have been produced. This paragraph is an example of how the 'dramatic artefact' functions along the inscriptive path of writing, verbally and visually. Verbally, the tools used to build the ship - "vice," "drawing-board," "T-square," and so forth - are included in the stage direction as the textual, catachrestic 'tools' (a kind of recipe) of constructing the *mise en scène* itself. They are "catachrestic" insofar as the same words name both practical instruments of carpentry and the figurative instruments by which the text builds its own scene. Stage-directions are first and foremost the 'tools' from which the practicalities and potentialities of stage practice are derived. The Captain's tools are realised as "tools" in Shaw's stage direction. In other words, the tools are for the Captain what the stage direction is for Shaw, marking the distance between the props and the words in the opposition between architecture and literature. The stage direction in question therefore does not merely represent or describe a space and its contents but gives expression to its own role as a 'stage direction' and so becomes another Shavian window, albeit a more effaced one, in the form of a representation of representation, a textual *mise-en-abîme* which in consisting of a double articulation, comprises the place where two vectors, the architectural and the dramatic, encounter each other. The ship and the *mise en scène*

become at once a singularity and difference, that is, a difference between Shaw's stage direction and Shotover's "T-square, straightedges, set squares...etc".

## 2. The Playful Apparatus

Visually, the stage direction does not limit its 'representation of representation' to a verbal expression of its own role, it also contaminates that expression with a performance. Together with dialogue, the stage-directions present a visual apparatus on the page that caters for the stage's concern for what is said. This manifests an element of what Kidnie identifies as the dramatic page's "virtual performance" by means of which "readers construct meaning, not just by reading a [drama] page, but by *looking at a page*" (169). The visual apparatus of drama is, above all, a display of the exteriorisation of the stage from the page, with an inscriptive force of 'spacing' that looks different from other types of texts. Therefore, the inclusion of architectural tools in the above stage direction as a text does not stop at the level of giving verbal expression to its role as a stage direction. In its economy as a stage direction through the page's 'system of places and values', it imitates the textual orientation of the Captain's tools among the ship's tenants: it supports the visual apparatus of the dramatic text the same way the Captain's tools support the ship of the tenants at the same time as they are part of the narrative world of the text. Caught on a middle platform between page and stage, the stage-direction acts on the former like a *persona*; on the latter, as an actant who mediates between performance and text, speech and writing. It verbally *represents* and visually *imitates* the tools it includes.

## 3. The Organic Undone

This means that what we end up with is not the kind of stage direction which Johnson interprets as an architectural "overestimation" or "complication" (204) which parodies modernism's quest for spatial unity or "organic totality." Rather, the stage direction in question parodies the very notion of 'organic totality' itself. At face value, it seems to follow Hvattum's elaboration of the organic, which he clarifies as something that "carries the reason for its own expression within itself" (497). The above stage-direction as the 'textual-tool' of construction 'carries within itself' the Captain's tools for the construction of the ship it (re)constructs. The captain's tools appear verbally in the stage-direction which in turn appears visually as the tools offered by the dramatic-text. This assumed totality is, however, just a form of representation, a series of exteriorizations, which depends, for it to function, on this perpetual play between the verbal and the visual, the literary and the architectural. The "organic form" the stage in question presents is one that is "under erasure" (*sous rature*), a term deployed by Derrida to signify the potential impossibility of a univocity of meaning ever being attached to a word or term in the first place. It signifies that a signifier is both inadequate and necessary. The stage direction in question renders inadequate the organic logic it *sustains* between the literary and the architectural. Organicity is undermined by the very "play" of its differences, the deferred spaces between the verbal and the visual which must appear as such for an actual performance to take place.

## VIII. Shavings and the Question of Writing

### 1. Excess and Voice

The expressive verbal and visual spacing between the architectural and the literary extends to include the 'shavings' from this abrasion of frontiers. For 'Against the starboard wall is a carpenter's bench. The vice has a board in its jaws; and the floor is littered with shavings...' (18). Up to this point in the sentence, the "bench" and the "vice" seem to exist unproblematically in the univocality of an origin and the promise of stability, whereas "shavings" are implied as no more than a waste product from the upright figures those tools have produced and stabilised. In being cut out, shavings are excesses from the products we identify as everyday objects, i.e. the "mahogany" sofa, the "wicker chair" and "the teak table". The appeal to stability and uprightness is here reconfigured by the figure of "shavings," cast as mere litter, placed literally at the bottom, beneath the privileges of domestic space. On one level, the 'scenic' articulation of space in the form of a presence of structure, and the absence thereof in 'shavings', gestures to a quasi-historical and structural prejudice for woodwork and speech regarding 'shavings' and 'writing', respectively. The human voice, as Christopher Norris elaborates on Derrida's critiques of Rousseau and Saussure's treatment of speech,

becomes a metaphor of truth..., a source of self-present "living" speech as opposed to the secondary, lifeless emanations of writing. In speaking one is able to experience (supposedly) an intimate link between sound and sense, an inward and immediate realization of meaning which yields itself up without reserve to perfect, transparent understanding. Writing on the contrary destroys this ideal of pure self-presence. It obtrudes an alien, depersonalized medium, a deceiving shadow which falls between intent and meaning, between utterance and understanding. It occupies a promiscuous public realm where authority is sacrificed to the vagaries and whims of textual "dissemination." Writing in short is a threat to the deeply traditional view that associates truth with self-presence and the "natural" language wherein it finds expression (28).

The metaphysical authorising of "speech" over "writing" has historically rendered the latter as a form of "shavings", if by this formula we suppose that the Shavian stage direction in question seems, at least at first, to have paraphrased the traditional order by *pointing* to the shavings down on the "floor" as litter at this *stage* of the dramatic text. They are the excessive wood the woodwork had to exteriorise for the furniture of the set to become upright and complete. But this exteriorisation is not a simple, self-evident cut that produces bracketed-out voids of wood, as if it were a pre-spatial strike destined to yield furniture. It remains an inscription, a form of writing in the sense of producing spaces *for* furniture that are defined not only by their differences but also in their

belonging to some 'other' matter as their excess. Indeed, the material support of spacing in general and that of wood in particular is not entirely new. Bill Brown draws our attention, for example, to how "the thingness of the table resides in the remarkable patina of the bird's-eye maple (the thing thus emerging from the physical register)" in the sense that "the isolation of that property undoes the integrity of the object; it disaggregates what Hegel calls the "community (Gemeinschaft)" of the "objective entity" (23). The integrity of the table as a piece of furniture is conditioned by the bird's-eye maple whose integrity lies somewhere else, say a tree, but which it includes as its *own* exterior for keeping on its upright position as a table: "the solid object has given itself over to the role of medium, the access it gives to what transcends it" (23). The tree, the table, the bird's eye maple and the 'shavings' can only hold their integrities for furniture by exteriorizing one another: there will always be an excess from the carpenter's cut. The "shaving" is for a table what a "table" is for some tree and so the "carpenter's bench" is heterogenous by nature. It is as much a shaving from something else as the objects and the "shavings" it has produced.

## 2. Overflowing Matter

Shaw's acknowledgement of the spacing between destruction and assimilation as architecture, therefore, stands as a quasi-architectural support to another space in which the shavings, as much as they belong to the floor, are seen as "overflowing from a waste paper basket" (18). In a spatially articulated twist, the shavings first configured as litter on the floor are reconfigured as "overflowing" from a "waste-paper basket" so that their spatial coordinates shift from being "bottom" and "inside" towards "top" and "outside". From a basket tagged as a potential destination of "paper" and so of texts or letters, that is, writing, "overflow" the shavings with what seems a Derridean promise: they are not a trace of the absence of some structure, but 'another' structure, *within* the 'same' structure, which exposes the "vagaries and whims" of the products architecture or furniture offer for the integrity and stability of domestic space, that is, their fragilities, imperfections, potentialities, impurities, etc. "Shavings" are themselves products, but as precedents in the woodwork from which they were cut, and so as writing, they lay bare what architecture and its sister arts exteriorise, hide or digest in the stability of their build and the transparency of their usages. In *Heartbreak*, writing and shavings belong in the same basket.

And so in writing, this seemingly technical articulation of "shavings" is reproduced in writing as a question of space. The stage direction places "shavings" beside the "carpenter's bench" but prior to the geometric tools, "T-square, straightedges, set squares, mathematical instruments" and "saucers of water colour, a tumbler of discoloured water, Indian ink, pencils, and brushes on it" before we are eventually introduced to the house articles such as the "mahogany" sofa, the "wicker chair" and the "table of teak" (18). The shavings and the bench on which geometric tools and pencils allude to the act of writing are visually and textually prioritised in the very demonstration of the stages of carpentry by the stage direction. It places on the same level of creation, as two sides of the same coin, the architectural origin of the house and its excess/es, the spacing in every act of structuring as the impossibility of organicity, whether as a dream qua the modernist's materialist dream or as a Hegelian ideal that allegedly precedes the linguistic disappearance of matter.

### 3. Textual Shavings

Indeed, these verbal and visual spacing/s seem to project in a deconstructive critique the systematic failure of what seems to have grown into a polemical derogation of stage-directions in general as “shavings”. The common appellation of stage-directions as 'extra-textual' or 'intra-textual' fails to listen to the discrepancy in its method, a failure that seems to hinge as much visually as verbally on the minimal sign as on the hyphen itself. The 'hyphen' as a representative of the ornamental status of the stage-directions with respect to the text to which it belongs is also representative of the spacing in the construction of this text that has led to the attachment of the stage-directions as an ornament. On the one hand, stage-directions are in a way *verbal* “shavings” in the sense that they cannot be integrated on stage as words and yet, as words, they give way for the space without which the stage as such cannot be realized. On the other hand, their visuality on the page is not directly relevant to the drama’s narrative, not part of the 'fabula' of the text. So, in claiming that the opening stage direction has given expression of itself verbally and visually as an authorial tool through its inclusion of the Captain's tools of production, we have measured the space between Shaw’s construction of the *mise en scène* and the Captain’s construction of his ship, the former through his opening stage direction, the latter through his 'carpenter's bench', 'mathematical instrument', 'brushes', etc. But also, in claiming that this dual expression has proffered the Captain's tools’ shavings as a supplement to the woodwork produced, we are thus looking for a fourth term, that is, the “textual shavings” or what the stage direction helps verbally and visually to “overflow” as overdetermining the manifest text. In other words, how does the Captain's 'waste-paper basket' from which the shavings of the only types of wood available in and out of the opening stage-direction, i.e. mahogany, wicker and teak, come to represent the text itself as a ‘basket’ from which these shavings overflow as another text?

### IX. Littering

The first move of the opening stage direction is an act of littering or spillage, the 'overflow' of an acentric structure as a verbal and visual spacing between its representation of the house’s articles and the import of that representation in those same articles throughout the rest of the text. At first sight, there is what seems to be the common practice of the opening stage-directions to include the full aspects of any dramatic construct in advance for readers to fill in the anaphoric or elliptical gaps later in the text. This is aesthetically economical for the writer and the readers alike. In other words, there is the unity of the signifiers of the articles with the signifiers of the type of wood from which they are made, i.e. “near the bookshelves, is a sofa with its back to the windows. It is a sturdy “mahogany article “, “A small but stout table of teak”, and “Between the sofa and the drawing-table is a big wicker chair...” (18). However, the verbal exchange, and so the visual repercussions of this exchange as a form of inscription, between the signifiers of the house articles and their type of wood inside and outside the stage direction, is denied any sort of systematicity for any apparent aesthetic or practical reason. So, in contrast to the mahogany sofa, for example, which is circulated outside of the opening stage direction with the anaphoric 'sofa' so that the repetition of the signifier “mahogany” is supposedly unnecessary, Captain Shotover [sits down in the big wicker chair] while Lady Utterword [throws herself sulkily into the big chair], so that the signifier “wicker” in the former is accentuated. In the second act, “wicker” is pronounced two times after the act’s initial stage

direction; Mangan moves “between the table and the wicker chair”, which again denies any assumption of a tidy correspondence between elaborately explicating dramatic constructs and introducing new acts or scenes. So, what we are talking about here is the house’s articles that have not left the opening stage direction without the signifiers of their type of the wood appearing intrusively at different stages throughout the rest of the text. These are our first “shavings” as spillage, the “overflow” that covers, reconfigures, or paves the way for an underlying spacing between the house articles of use for its tenants and the wood of which they are made as the real undercurrent of a ship seemingly fixed in place. In following these stages where each type of wood is given an inscriptive force on the page, verbally and visually, we will be following the *absences* represented by the building materials in every supposedly ideal structure, extracting, via the Captain’s carpentry, a fabula of matter as an architectural “heartbreak” in the house. In other words, there is the “big wicker chair” in which the Captain, as the stage direction tells us, “sits down”. But this is also “wicker”, a signifier of the building material that parasitises the chair being used.

## X. Mahogany and Heidegger: The Ontology of Spacing

### 1. Iterability in Mahogany

In contrast to the rest of the ship’s articles, the ‘mahogany sofa’ is the only article whose signifiers, “mahogany” and “sofa”, are split in such a way that the qualifying adjective is mentioned only once in the opening stage direction and it is referred to only as a “sofa” throughout the rest of the text. In verbal terms, this is just one example of anaphora that demonstrates Derrida’s notion of iterability as that which makes writing a system of marks subject to unlimited combinations, substitutions, and recombinations. Iterability is a repetition which marks an alteration in which the same is still the same but no longer identical with itself. It registers a relation to the other, to another context<sup>26</sup> (Derrida 1973). The spacing of the sign “mahogany” from the “sofa” relies on the absent presence of the signifier “mahogany” every time “sofa” is reiterated, repeating it with a difference. However, this ‘spacing’ of the signifiers of the same article connects here to a supplementary etymological detail of the signifier ‘mahogany’ itself. Again, in contrast to *Heartbreak’s* other articles (and possibly any other word in the whole text), “the etymology of mahogany”, as the etymologist Kemp Malone concludes in his “On defining mahogany” (1940), “has never been determined, and probably never will be, for want of evidence” (317). Mahogany’s etymological mystery does not deny it the iterability responsible for its arrival to us as a signifier of a type of wood; in fact it emphasises iterability as the origin of any word or concept. No etymological root or origin is ever perfectly punctual with the emergence of the thing it represents. The mystery of the sofa as the only article in *Heartbreak* that is susceptible to anaphoric use finds a precursor in the mystery of the etymological root of the “mahogany” of which it is made.

This distinctive verbal configuration of the “mahogany” and “sofa” as signifiers has a no less distinctive visual appeal with respect to its place in and out of the opening stage direction, respectively. Looking at the text’s page/s, the visual spacing of ‘mahogany’ from ‘sofa’ between the opening stage direction and the rest of the text further imitates the verbal spacing “mahogany”

---

<sup>26</sup> Derrida, “Signature Event Context” 1973

suffers with respect to its disputed etymological root. Visually, the sofa is to mahogany what, verbally, the latter is to its etymological root: one hidden, by anaphora, within the borders of the opening stage direction, one outside the genealogy of speech as missing from the history of the word. The apparent approach to synonymy here between the 'missing' and the 'hidden' is thus pertinent, for the most part, to the parergon the stage direction implements on the dramatic page as a cutting and connecting border. Derrida has argued that spacing is "not the simple negativity of a lacuna but rather the emergence of the mark"<sup>27</sup> (10). The distance between the opening stage direction and the rest of the text is therefore a 'mark', and not a lacuna: "spacing is not accident". On the contrary, it "insinuates into presence an interval", the effect of substitution as the sense that the inscriptive force of writing always stands in for something detached from it but which it has to include within itself to appear as what it appears to be. In other words, the mark is not meaningless in itself; it becomes so only if one treats it as pointing back to an absent origin, rather than recognising it as the very expression of spacing that makes meaning possible.

## 2. Sofa of Estrangement

The verbal and visual spacings inherent in mahogany / sofa as signifiers gain in *Heartbreak* a performance among the house's inhabitants, as inhabitants, through an architectural attribute only enjoyed by the sofa in the house: it is the only item that accommodates a seating for two. In the text the sofa is not an architectural space for community and familiarisation but an architectural trace of isolation and estrangement. It accommodates or promises to accommodate a company of two but, in so doing, exposes by this very initiation of proximity the weak spots in the *family* structure of the house. It gives a mark to the social "space" already existing between the seated. Frustrated that the Captain, her father, cannot recognise her, Lady Utterword finds herself "sitting down with a flounce on the sofa" (21), a 'flounce' that underlines her disbelief. But no sooner does the Captain emerge from the pantry with a tray of Chinese lacquer for Ellie, than he refers to Lady Utterword as being just "another lady", avoids sitting with her side by side, and continues fetching her another cup of tea. Lady Utterword ends up "[rising from the sofa, suffused with emotion] before saying "Papa! Don't you know me? I'm your daughter" (22). Here, our first social encounter with the "sofa" is marked with a "flounce" and a suffusion introducing the emotional conundrum of the house whose coordinates are now identified verbally: "Oh, this house, this house! I come back to it after twenty-three years; and it is just the same: the luggage lying on the steps, the servants spoilt and impossible, nobody at home to receive anybody" (22). Directly after, any assumption that Lady Utterword's remark refers only to a passing disagreement in social space is dissipated, for when her frustration at not being recognised by the Captain spills over, she insists that "what is worse" in the house is "the same disorder in ideas, in talk, in feeling" (22). The disorder she names is therefore more radical than it first appears: its extent involves at once the conceptual and the emotive, and it is indeed even harder to differentiate one from the other. For now the Captain seems to have only needed her "rising from the sofa" so that he can finally "sit[...] down on the sofa" (22), still disregarding her concerns, while claiming, wrongly, that Ellie is the daughter of the villainous sailor who robbed him.

The spatial use and abuse of the sofa reaches another level with Mrs. Hushabye, one of the mythical

---

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

progenies of the Captain who invited Ellie - without receiving her - with the sole intention of dissuading her from marrying Mangan, the text's "Napoleon of industry" (26). Succinctly setting the scene for Ellie by first calling her "my pettikins", something that will become more like a refrain every time they speak, and then telling her that "the man's coming here today with your father to begin persecuting you; and everybody will see the state of the case in ten minutes!" (24), Hushabye embarks on a series of bodily movements that make the architectural space of the sofa uncomfortable. She endears Ellie with a kiss before "she deposits Ellie on the sofa" (23), "snatches at Ellie's waist" and "makes her sit down on the sofa beside her" (26), "catching her dress" (31) or "catching her sitting down with her on the sofa" (32), "scolding down at her", each act performed for the sake of trashing the image of the man who flaunts a prosperity ultimately revealed as non-existent. When "Ellie's eyes show that she is not arguing, but in a daydream. Mrs Hushabye, watching her inquisitively, goes deliberately back to the sofa and resumes her seat beside her" (29). This resumption of the act of sitting is committed this time with the main purpose of effacing the romantic ideals Ellie had been accruing from *Othello*. Ellie will be asked, rather contemptuously, if she has "noticed that some of those stories that Othello told Desdemona couldn't have happened?" (29). In each instance, the sofa's detachment from "mahogany", as signifiers, in and out of the opening stage direction, is reconfigured in a more blatant detachment between the mahogany sofa's actual users.

The only moment in the text where the social and spatial capacity of the sofa seems to have been put in place is when Ellie and the Captain sit "side by side" (70). The only "side by side" in the text happens as the culmination of a series of passive-aggressive plays and displays between the first guest to the house and its builder, the reader of *Othello* and the carpenter. Before she "[draws him to the sofa]" Ellie claims that his game of going "in and out" has been exposed: "Now I have found you out. You pretend to be busy, and think of fine things to say, and run in and out to surprise people by saying them and get away before they can answer you" (70). Her retort was preceded by a series of bodily grapples with the Captain as he was cornered in the room: "[running after him and seizing him by the sleeve]" and "[again seizing his arm]", and before she openly tells him that he is "the only person in the house I can say what I like to". The verbal and spatial mayhem only seems to subside when "they sit side by side on the sofa" and Ellie "leans affectionately against him with her head on his shoulder and her eyes half closed" (70).

Ellie's exposure of the Captain's inventive evasion of the house's residents until the moment her eyes go "half closed" speaks of an underlying economy between the Captain's use of architectural space and her social status in the house. Ellie first appears to us in the opening stage direction lonely and unreceived, with "[o]ne hand" that "props her chin: the other hangs down with a volume of the Temple Shakespeare" (18). A hopeless romantic, her arrival to the house has taken place in a happy daze, which we soon discover is the consequence of her thrilling meetings with a mysteriously romantic gentleman who calls himself "Marcus Darnley", but who turns out to be Hector. For Ellie, the captain's "in and out" mirrors her own social and symbolic status in the house, as a guest, a stranger, partially alone, or partially with Shakespeare. More than being a subjective borrowing of a romance that remains alien to the house residents, who are "so sufficient to themselves that they are only happy when they are stripped of everything, even of hope" (72), her involvement with *Othello* promises a social reconfiguration of the Captain and his ship by introducing a Captain and a ship from *another text*. Her stabilization of the Captain's movement in space on the sofa speaks of a textual arrestation of a *potential Othello* on *Heartbreak's* ship, and now she can further her romantic

exaltation by impersonating Desdemona who is ready to fall asleep. Interestingly, this spacing between the architectural and the social seems to be most evident in how the opening stage direction identifies the version of the *Othello* she reads as a “Temple Shakespeare”. “Temple” manifestly refers to an edition of Shakespeare, but architecturally refers to a place of believers and a sense of community that contrasts with *Heartbreak’s* mad and maddening ship/house. Ellie’s Shakespearean *Othello* and “Temple Shakespeare” project onto the Captain and his ship another Captain and another sea.

### 3. The Vessel and the Wheel

With the Captain “yielding” to Ellie’s grabs and with her eyes “half-closed”, there is no *real* resolution on the sofa between the social and the spatial in Ellie at last finding her perfect match and the Captain finally stabilized in place. Instead, we find the dispersal of reality into fiction, even into philosophy, where Desdemona’s sleep is perpetuated without death through Ellie now “[dreamily]” (70) prompting the Captain to speak for himself, and an Othello whose “[yielding]” is the ‘yielding’ of a worldview that directly equates the individual to a vessel:

A man's interest in the world is only the overflow from his interest in himself. When you are a child your vessel is not yet full; so you care for nothing but your own affairs. When you grow up, your vessel overflows; and you are a politician, a philosopher, or an explorer and adventurer. In old age the vessel dries up: there is no overflow: you are a child again (70).

In the words of the Captain, individuals are destined to have their interest “overflow” from themselves to the world if they want to keep their narcissism dormant for the sake of social, political, philosophical adventures. Growing up is marked by an exchange of interests from one’s own affairs to the affairs of others. Overflowing becomes at once translatable, by social means, to a deliberate givenness to others: the watershed of traversing precocious narcissism towards becoming a subject. Interest never exactly matches the capacity of the vessel by which it is held. You are either a man or a child, giving or yet to give. The Captain sounds Heideggerian here with his analogy, especially in the way it reminds us of Heidegger’s controversial assessment of the “jug”, which he sometimes calls “vessel” (*Gefäß*), in his 1950 lecture “The Thing” (“*Das Ding*”). To know what a jug is, it would seem enough to know that it was made: made by a potter, made with clay, made for the purpose of containing, made in the form of a jug. However, Heidegger calls attention to “the emptiness, the void” of the jug. “The empty space, this nothing of the jug, is what the jug is as the holding vessel” (167). For Heidegger, “the vessel’s thingness does not lie at all in the material of which it consists, but in the void that holds.” In creating the jug, the potter “shapes the void. For it, in it, and out of it” but this void is saturated with ‘givenness’ in so far as “to pour from the jug”, Heidegger continues, “is to give.” The jug is not simply a thing but the thing par excellence, something moulded by a potter who shapes not only the clay, says Heidegger, but “the void” that will contain what is poured into and out of it. For both the Captain and Heidegger, what is at stake is less about the potter, the content of the vessel or the material of its making than about the nature of the holding void which the vessel gathers in its givenness to the world: “The holding of the vessel occurs in the giving of the outpouring...the poured gift” (172)

Perhaps this is the Captain's predicament, approximating the 'givenness' of adults to others to the 'gift' of the 'vessel' when it overflows. Rendering secondary the potter that makes the jug, the material of which it is made and its contents, engineers a conceptual opening from which the jug's void proceeds as the sole guarantor of givenness. If a child is like a vessel whose advent into adulthood is marked by a flow (of interest) to others, they are more so as a product of those same others; their genetic makeup, symbolic and moral laws, etc. The void that gifts is already gifted by what precedes its act of gifting. The inside and outside of the vessel are only nascent from the space the "vessel" has itself created against the Fourfold (earth, sky, mortals, divinities) it purports to gather. The vessel's ontological disclosure is always a retroactive closure, covering over what cannot be fully "gathered"; its materiality itself, which interrupts or delays the very act of pouring. The Captain's "politician,... philosopher....explorer and adventurer" as the gift of man's overflowing vessel are themselves the producers of these vessels draining the same void they produce. Derrida in *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason* (2005) exhibits such material compromise by recalling the image of the potter at the wheel. The clay is what turns on the wheel, raised into form through the potter's shaping gestures, yet this formation never occurs without resistance: each turn is mediated by the rotation itself, by the recalcitrance of matter. Derrida writes:

Ah, the wheel [*le tour*]! Let me confide in you... how much I love this image of the potter, his art, the turns of someone who, on his wheel, makes a piece of pottery rise up like a tower by sculpting it... without subjecting himself... to the automatic, rotating movement... putting his or her entire body... to work on the machine... as sculptor or architect... poet and musician... rhetorician and political orator, perhaps even a philosopher (19).

Derrida's image discloses that the "tower" which rises from the wheel is never simply imposed by design but emerges through a negotiated compromise with matter, each turn haunted by the risk of collapse. The potter gathers form from resistance, just as the vessel gathers void by holding what always exceeds it. The wheel here figures what Derrida elsewhere calls *le tour*: a turn, a rotation, a tower, but also the detour through which any construction returns to its own undoing.

The Captain's complaint is less categorical than existential. Like Pandora's opening of the vessel that has brought upon mortals "countless plagues", the Captain's daughters have found in his gift the gathering of rudimentary familial values that do not fit with their own: countless bad fits characteristic of the clash between generations. With what sounds like a reflection on what might have been gone missing in his giving, the Captain "[gloomily]" expresses how "Youth! beauty! novelty! [...]are badly wanted in this house. I am excessively old. Hesione is only moderately young. Her children are not youthful" (41). No sooner does he finish, however, than Lady Utterword retorts, from the 'void' that she *is*: "How can children be expected to be youthful in this house? Almost before we could speak we were filled with notions that might have been all very well for pagan philosophers of fifty, but were certainly quite unfit for respectable people of any age" (41).

## **XI. Wicker and Austin: The Scene of the Speech Act**

## 1. The Woven Chair

The “wicker chair” is the second article in the text where the act of spacing between the architectural and the textual emerges in the materiality of the article itself. In other words, it is a spacing whose economy lies in the relationship between ‘wicker’ as a furnishing material and the spaces the signifier “wicker” occupies throughout the text. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED), “wicker” is “pliable twigs, typically of willow, plaited or woven to make items such as furniture and baskets”. As a technique to make products ‘woven’ from any one of a variety of flexible plant materials, ‘wicker’ is a generic name for the materials used in this manufacture and a term for the products so produced. The keyword here is “woven”, which in Derrida’s writings occupies the very term “text”, from Latin *textus*, “that which is woven”, from *texere*, “to weave”. Derrida writes:

The Latin word *textus*...is far from signifying a simple concatenation of linguistic elements. *Textus* designates at once a tissue, a web, a woven fabric...Writing (*écriture*) itself is a tissue, a fabric. It is an interplay of traces, a complex structure in which meanings are symmetrically inscribed in one another. (24)

By explicating how asking for the “truth” of the text is mainly bound up with a rhetorical distinction between the empirical (the text) and the transcendental (its meaning or truth), Derrida makes way for a writing which destabilizes a concept like ‘text’ in a way that provokes questions about borders, frontiers, edges, etc. At one level, the text is on the outside; the truth of things is hidden away on the inside. However, according to the same logic, the truth of things only remains hidden inside because it is essentially outside the text - *il n’y a pas de hors-texte* - since the very opposition of inside and outside is nothing other than an effect of textual spacing. There is no ‘master thread’ that secures the weave from both inside and outside as such. It follows that the text is ‘woven’ from the same system of meanings / concepts which we inhabit and which allows us to think what we do. Derrida’s problematic of reading texts “woven” into other texts is just *the* problem of reading.

Visually, the ‘wicker chair’, as a piece of furniture, displays the ‘weaving’ characteristic of any production of meaning at the level of its substance, that is, as a void that is given its borders or frontiers by the weaving process itself, as a textile. It performs the trace of its erasure: it’s the form of its becoming and so, to the extent of its being a “chair”, it is, like a book, definable in terms of its user, that is, a piece of furniture and a type of a seat, but to the extent of its being “wicker”, it is like text or a textile, woven from other existing materials as well as being reproducible in other things. The “weaving” is for the chair what the “text” is for the book; it speaks of a ‘structural impression’ that at once suggests the singularity of a chair in contrast to other objects but shows in the manner of its making its belonging to something else. It shows what Derrida means by “the movement according to which language, or any code, any system of referral in general is constituted ‘historically’ as a weave of differences” (12), or in our case, a *différance* entwined in the form of a “chair”.

## 2. Errant Weavings

Beyond the opening stage direction, “wicker” is attached to the “chair”, as a signifier, where the text gradually initiates and terminates, verbally and spatially, the intimate relationship between Ellie and the Captain that will ultimately amount to marriage, and the ambivalent engagement between Ellie and Mangan that will end with a separation. Engagement and marriage signal the entrance of two parties in wedlock, in an act of binding (‘engagement’ from Old French *engagier* “to bind” by promise or oath) and so assumes a move that is typical of weaving as engaging or binding frontiers. The first dialogic display between the Captain and Ellie occurs when “[He sits down in the big wicker chair]” while asking her “will you favour me with your name?” (20). Ellie replies that her name is “Ellie Dunn”, a name which the Captain will instantly and insistently attach to Billy Dunn, the play’s notorious but absent pirate, so that, disregarding Ellie’s indignant “no”, he will carry on asking if “he [has] attained the seventh degree of concentration?” (20). It is not clear in the text when the Captain finally realises the true identity of Ellie’s father, but the misrecognition sews a thread of intimacy throughout the rest of the text that has no real support but the mistaken identity itself. What will be attached to the misrecognition made by the Captain from the “wicker chair” is the first moment of intimacy towards Ellie: he “wrathfully” rises from the “wicker” chair - in indignation at the tea Nurse Guinness offers to Ellie - so that he could give her “some of my tea”. The Captain’s seat in, and rise from, the “wicker” chair attaches erratic social resonances to the commonly expected spatial use of the act of seating. His ‘sitting down’ stages misrecognition, while his ‘rising up’ anticipates intimacy.

Later in the text, the same attachment of the signifiers “wicker” and “chair” occurs during Ellie and Mangan’s exchange about their engagement. With them “weaving” happens at the level of both their verbal exchanges and bodily gestures. At first, Ellie identifies her relationship with Mangan for the first time as an “engagement”, something which Mangan meets with a surprise since it “is the first time you’ve used the word; and I didn’t quite know where we stood: that’s all” (47). However, when [He sits down in the wicker chair; and resigns himself to allow her to lead the conversation]” while exclaiming “You were saying—?”, Ellie forgets what she was talking about: “Was I? I forget”, and delves instead into seemingly irrelevant enquiries about whether he “like[s] this part of the country? I heard you ask Mr Hushabye at dinner whether there are any nice houses to let down here” (47). Ellie’s act of “resigning” to the chair marks a spatial coordinate from which she might be expected to lead the conversation. Yet what follows instead unsettles this expectation. Her verbal lead now ‘resigns’ from the topic of engagement altogether. The verbal and spatial interplay between Ellie’s reply and Mangan’s gesture sets in motion an act of disengagement whose loose ends will now extend to include a series of queries that mimic the movement of writing as “weaving”: “you mean to hold me to it?”, “do you wish to back out of it” (49). When Mangan declines the latter suggestion: “Oh, no. Not exactly back out of it”, Ellie would end her query with the illocutionary, “well?” that he “has nothing to say” (49). What Mangan will do next is “drop [...] into the wicker chair...[lean] over towards her on his right elbow and [speak] in a low steady voice...Suppose I told you I was in love with another woman”, something to which Ellie “[echoing him]” says “Suppose I told you I was in love with another man!” (49). Mangan’s resignation and his leaning “towards” Ellie spatially mark his deviation from the engagement supposedly ‘binding’ them together as one, and so the “weaving” and unweaving trajectory of their engagement keeps on pushing and pulling the notion of what their engagement actually is. Their engagement, insofar as it

binds, is displaced in both directions by their very exchanges, which struggle to articulate the very fabric of it.

Only retrospectively, towards the end of the text, does a *pattern* emerge, with the marriage of Ellie and the Captain, and the disengagement of Ellie and Mangan. Ellie came to the ship as a stranger, a victim of mistaken identity, but later subdued Mangan, the Captain of industry, with hypnotism, then ventured to marry him while he was asleep. Mangan, on the other hand, had arrived at the ship supposedly engaged with Ellie before they started to drift apart. From Ellie's mistaken identity is woven a marriage with the Captain based on misrecognition and from an already ambivalent engagement is woven a separation from? another woman. From the loose end of misrecognition is woven a marriage that is incomplete, and from an already incomplete engagement there is the loose end of a detachment that belongs to somebody else. The "wicker chair" thus takes its place among the most intimate and most expansive of objects in *Heartbreak*, acting both as a metaphor of its residents' relationships, perpetually caught under erasure, and as a metonym of their entities as 'dramatic artefacts' where the textual and the architectural, the social and the spatial coalesce in and as representation as such.

### **3. The Hinge of Silence**

From Austin's perspective, Ellie and Mangan's exchange does not turn on whether the engagement is "true" or "false" but on whether their words bind, whether they count as doing something. Yet what their back-and-forth makes visible is precisely how unstable that binding is. Every hesitation, every hedged refusal, every silence inscribed on the page places strain on the notion of felicity itself, showing it to be less a condition that pre-exists the speech act than an undecidable effect of its staging. The question, then, is not whether some external felicity condition is satisfied, but how the text itself writes and re-writes the conditions of binding as it unfolds? Dialogue and stage direction are inseparable here: Ellie's "well?" is not simply a prompt but an illocutionary pressure point; Mangan's inability to answer is not simply a pause but an explicit stage direction, the textual mark of silence. The performative force of the exchange lies in this interval between utterance and its notation, between what is said and what is staged as not-saying. It is in this interval that Austin's categories begin to slide, for felicity becomes less an evaluative measure than a structural exposure of language to failure, hesitation, and supplementarity. And it is the wicker chair, at once prop and signifier, that grounds this play of binding and unbinding. From this seat, Ellie presses, Mangan evades, and the drama inscribes the precariousness of speech acts themselves: a piece of furniture that becomes a hinge, a dramatic artefact that supports, unsettles, and finally exposes the performative scene to which it gives form.

## **XII. Teak and Nietzsche: Style, Resistance, and the Feminine**

### **1. The Table and the Parentheses**

The third article in our inventory is the “table of teak” which the opening stage direction tells us “is the only article in the room that suggests (not at all convincingly) a woman's hand in the furnishing” (18). Unlike the rest of the house items, the “table of teak” is predicated, with a degree of equivocation, on the figure of a woman. More significant is how the woman’s inhabiting of architectural space attenuates the structure erected by man, the carpenter. The penchant for dissimulating a phallic structure through the woman and the stylization of that dissimulation between parentheses produce the elusive pattern that Derrida identifies in Nietzsche’s works in which the question of truth and woman, and of truth as woman, exerts pressure on the question of style. “The Question of Style” was in fact the original title of the essay which Derrida changed to *Spurs: Nietzsche’s Styles* (*Éperons: Les Styles de Nietzsche*). In *Spurs*, this very question of style is displaced in favour of the subject of woman, and yet, as Derrida remarks early in the text, “one might wonder whether that doesn’t really amount to the same thing—or is it to the other” (37). For Derrida, style is above all a question because talking about its relative illumination or obstruction of content assumes that a clear distinction between style and content or form and matter is possible. When we assess the quality of the style of a piece of philosophical writing, we should not be under the illusion that it is comparable to a hypothetical version without style, but to a style which has been taken as conventional or banal. The real opposite to the matter of thought that lies at the centre of the logocentric tradition is not stylization, but a conventional style through which matter and content exteriorize one another as if opposites. This is one reason why Derrida thinks stylists like Nietzsche have always been suspect in the world of philosophy, in the way they are seen to wield a dangerous instrument that might disrupt or deface the matter of philosophy:

In the question of style there is always the weight or *examen* of some pointed object. At times this object might be only a quill or a stylus. But it could just as easily be a stiletto, or even a rapier. Such objects might be used in a vicious attack against what philosophy appeals to in the name of matter or matrix, an attack whose thrust could not but leave its mark, could not but inscribe there some imprint or form. But they might also be used as protection against the threat of such an attack, in order to keep it at a distance, to repel it ... (37)

## 2. Forgotten Umbrellas, Shattered Meanings

In *Spurs*, Derrida shows how the extravagance and incommensurability of the fragmentary texture of Nietzsche’s writing is its style and therefore we should abandon any prejudice to which we might be attached about its secondary status. He demonstrates, for example, how the sentence “I forgot my umbrella” which appears in quotation marks in Nietzsche’s *Nachlass*, is undecidable in meaning, frustrating all hermeneutic attempts, and yet, on a much more general level, it is the exemplary instance of Nietzsche’s writing as such, whether published or unpublished. In fact, some of Derrida’s most illuminating comments have to do with Nietzsche’s fragmenting use of the dash or his bracketing use of quotation marks, where Nietzsche seems, for Derrida, to harness a style that seems already to be outside the philosophical tradition. This exteriority aligns with what Nietzsche calls *der grosse Stil* - the grand style that traverses his aesthetics - and with what Heidegger later names Nietzsche’s “aesthetic ontology,” his first philosophy. In reading Heidegger reading Nietzsche, Derrida documents the deafening silence of Heidegger on Nietzsche’s evocation of masculine power in *der grosse Stil*. He alludes to the chapter on *der grosse Stil* in Heidegger’s *Nietzsche* which

explicates a Nietzschean fragment beginning "Our aesthetics heretofore has been a woman's aesthetics..." The old aesthetics for Nietzsche, as Heidegger would have it, has been 'vaginal', something passive and receptive which must be replaced by a 'grand' producer: "production, just as much for Nietzsche as for all of tradition, is masculine, and a productive mother is a masculine mother" (77).

In *Spurs*, Derrida shows how Nietzsche's apparently high valuation of *der grosse Stil* evident in his ostensibly imposing and masculine text is undercut by his various accounts of woman. In Derrida's text, the issues of gender and truth are intertwined on a terrain where philosophy and psychoanalysis overlap. Derrida identifies three positions that Nietzsche takes regarding woman; each position takes a particular place regarding truth. In the first position, the woman functions as the power of falsehood, as one who misleads and is placed in opposition to truth. Like a false clue, a sort of trickery, she maintains the pretence of the phallus, which she, in fact, does not have. In the second position, the woman functions as a Christian truth. Positioned as such by the dogmatic philosopher who is a "seducer without experience" (54) she is believed to be the locus of a privileged and religious truth. She still functions, for Nietzsche, as the lie, but as such she is a lie which is believed to be true only by the dogmatic philosopher, who understands nothing about women: "this truth which is woman, the philosopher who believes, credulous and dogmatic, in truth just as he believes in woman, has understood nothing" (52). She is the phantasmagorical phallus for someone else. However, in the third position, the woman is affirmed as that which operates beyond the system of oppositions (truth/falsity); she is affirmed as art, Dionysiac. Not as the misleading promise of a false value, but as one who creates value, who enables value. Whereas in the first position, the woman is condemned as the one who does not have the phallus (Nietzsche is supposedly a possessor), and in the second position she is condemned to be the phallus for others, the third position falls neither within nor between the first two positions. One could read the first two positions Nietzsche takes toward woman as the two authorised positions on woman available in the phallogocentric economy: having or not having truth/phallus. The third woman, Derrida claims, plays at castration *in* phallic terms. She pretends to have it and pretends not to have it. Castration does not take place to her, and "she" "knows" it (53). It is in this sense that the woman of Derrida is writing, in that she is the mark of castration that sets the economy of truth and the sexuality of phallogocentrism in motion, which is one way of saying that she withdraws from the attempt of this economy to 'fix' her as a mark of the presence of the phallus or a mark of its lack. She is the man's *concern* as the resistance of the object of desire to mastery by the man who desires:

The feminine distance abstracts truth from itself in a suspension of the relation with castration. This relation is suspended much as one might tauten or stitch a canvas, or a relation, which nevertheless remains suspended---in indecision...That is the masculine concern, the concern of the male who has never come of age, who is never sufficiently sceptical or dissimulating...Woman...no more believes in castration's exact opposite, anti-castration, than she does in castration itself. (59-60)

### 3. Woman's Veils and Sails

Interestingly, the woman's play between castration and anti-castration, simulating it while keeping it at bay, is metaphorically conceived in *Spurs* in the way it opens and closes in a seascape figured in masculine and feminine tropes. The signifiers *Le voile/la voile* (hymen/veil/sail) give off resonances that are most immediately associated with the feminine. *L'éperon* (spur) gives off resonances of the masculine. Derrida uses these feminine and masculine resonances to reverse this gender pattern. So, while 'veil' is associated with woman, it is gendered as masculine (*le voile*). 'Voile', however, means *sail* when coupled with the feminine pronoun (*la voile*). Derrida notices how Nietzsche sometimes figures truth as a woman who is withdrawn behind a veil and how sometimes she is like a sailing ship gliding calmly across the sea. The metaphorical economy of *Spurs* involves textual interactions between veils, sails, and hymens that traverse the terrain of Nietzsche's woman and eventually Nietzsche's own style. It shows, figuratively this time, that the articulation of truth in metaphysics works by means of a desire that is *not* gender-neutral: "All the emblems, all the shafts and allurements that Nietzsche found in woman, her seductive distance, her captivating accessibility, the ever veiled promise of her provocative transcendence...these all belong properly to a history of truth by way of the history of an error" (89). As we arrive at the 'teak table' that is set "(not at all convincingly)" by the woman's hands in the Captain's ship, the question is what, in the 'shaving' of 'teak', testifies to the elusive figure of the woman as a dissimulator of this phallic structure to the extent that it is unconvincing? To answer this we shall take a detour to carpentry, through the Captain's workshop, to examine the scaffolding of the ship's phallic figure as it *produces* the "table of teak" for the "woman" in question.

#### 4. Resistance in the Grain

The Wood Database defines "teak [as] the gold standard for decay resistance" since "its heartwood is rated as very durable". The "only caveat", however, is that it "has a pronounced blunting effect on cutting edges" (Meier, n.d.). In Meier's words, "teak" is made susceptible to the anthropocentric tendency to create oppositions relevant to our use of it, so that its 'resistance' to decay has the unfortunate counterpart in 'blunting' cutting edges. "Resistance" and "blunting" are not intrinsic realities but signifiers - "reality-effects," as Derrida might suggest - produced through the iterable structure of language. These are not properties of teak itself, but traces: articulations of what teak is presumed to be. In this sense, teak becomes a material metaphor, a site of inscription where metaphysical oppositions - durability and decay, utility and resistance - are written and rewritten. These inscriptions are not stable; they are subject to the same dissemination and disintegration that marks all language. As Derrida writes, "the trace is not a presence but a simulacrum of a presence that dislocates, displaces, and refers beyond itself" (156). The survival of teak's meaning in language - its durability as a concept - is thus not a reflection of its material essence but of its textual circulation. Teak's "resistance" and "blunting" are not traces of matter but a matter of traces, effects of textual repetition across discourses of craftsmanship, durability, and utility. They are "whole fragments," neither totalities nor detached parts, but iterable signs.

"Resistant" but "blunting". In what way are these architecturally good but bad traits of "teak" appropriated in *Heartbreak* as representative of the woman, a model on which is projected the feminisation of what is alleged to be man's *own* trade? In other words, how does the opening stage direction permit the signifier "teak" to represent women as "writing"? The answer cannot rest on

isolating one trait as good or bad, or on simply inverting one into the other. Taken on its own, 'resistance' would fix truth in a diametrical opposition - castration against anti-castration - as if there were a stable position to resist. Taken on its own, 'blunting' would reduce teak to the mere mark of contact, without registering the effect of that contact on the wood itself. The point, rather, is resistance by blunting, blunting by resistance: the play of the "extra," the "no place," the "(not at all convincingly)" inscribed in the phallogocentric structure of the Carpenter's house.

"([N]ot at all convincingly)" enters the opening stage direction as arguably the only stylistic shaving of the text, its placement between parentheses—as Shaw's own reflection on the acquired space of the table—and the implication of this stylistic exteriorisation recalls Derrida's three women in a figurative economy that caters to the reality-effects of teak. It acts here, in the opening stage direction, like Nietzsche's "I forgot my umbrella," the alienated and alienating note that Derrida treats with such seriousness. In the first strand, "I forgot my umbrella" seems to have been cut from Nietzsche's text, a fragment belonging to another context: both an articulation of meaning and a deferral of meaning, promising a truth "behind the veil," not because there is a hidden value but because "it can always lack and simulate a truth hidden among its folds" (132). Like teak, it resists what would consume it, yet that resistance itself leaves a remainder, a shaving that parasitises as much as it preserves. In the second strand, the phrase figures Derrida's second woman, the one who seems to hold a self-evident truth: "everyone knows what 'I forgot my umbrella' means." It gives itself as a mark of presence, an attribute, just as teak leaves its blunting trace on the cutting tool as the mark of its wood. Yet in evading articulation, the phrase also figures the third woman, the one who defers articulation itself: it signifies only as an exteriorisation, cut out of the space in which it appears, barring access to full meaning by giving meaning only as out of place. It is the woman who gives herself only in holding herself back: "And it is a matter of reading this unedited piece, that for which it gives itself as it slips away, as a woman or as a writing" (126). And back to teak: "resistance" and "blunting" give themselves as attributes of the wood, but in doing so they also escape into other chains of signification. Teak, too, gives itself and slips away in the very signifiers it sets in motion within the world of carpentry.

Now, this tripartite strand concerning woman is not altogether different from the *stylistic* status of the "(not at all convincingly)" as it appears precisely in the form of a stage-direction within a stage direction. At one level, it resists the generally adopted theatrical predisposition of stage-directions that is otherwise followed, rather meticulously, by Shaw in what surrounds it, i.e. the rest of the opening stage direction. It seems cut out of another context, as a judgment embedded in description; the brackets mark this act of transplanting. On another level, the parentheses are also the mark of their connection—the structural impression of narrative pressing upon the theatrical, a blunting of immediate stage-direction by its reflective textual frame. Finally, "(not at all convincingly)" defers the articulation of meaning, by giving itself as an outside judgment emerging on the inside of the sentence, that is, as disconnecting and connecting itself, as a mark of difference that puts its textual surroundings in motion as theatrical.

#### 4. Wooden Faces, Catachrestic Ties

This "(not at all convincingly)" as *third* woman, as writing, that is, as a 'spur' that complicates the

phallogocentric style, spreads in the text in line with its gathering of its women and its “teak”. The first “teak table” outside of the opening stage direction occurs midway through the Captain’s complaint to Ellie about his two daughters:

I, madam, have two daughters. One of them is Hesione Hushabye, who invited you here. I keep this house: she upsets it. I desire to attain the seventh degree of concentration: she invites visitors and leaves me to entertain them. [Nurse Guinness returns with the tea tray, which she places on the teak table]. I have a second daughter who is, thank God, in a remote part of the Empire with her numskull of a husband. As a child, she thought the figurehead of my ship, the Dauntless, the most beautiful thing on earth. He resembled it. He had the same expression: wooden, yet enterprising. She married him and will never set foot in this house again.

The Captain’s first daughter, Mrs. Hushabye, will have her share of 'teak' later in the text, so I will start here with his second. In the Captain’s words, it does not seem that his second daughter, Lady Utterword, had married a man whose resemblance to the figurehead of the ship was merely accidental. Rather, her admiration of what she thought was “the most beautiful thing on earth” (20) suggests a marriage that was, for the most part, dependent on this very similarity. The key word here is 'wooden', the signifier that the Captain manifestly uses to mark the resemblance. On the one hand, 'wooden' is a metaphor for a face that lacks natural expression, emotion or movement. On the other hand, it is also a catachresis, a figure of speech that defines the crossing of categorical boundaries because no proper equivalent exists. Max Black in “Metaphor” (1954 - 1955) calls it a “remedy to [a] gap in the vocabulary”, such as when “Mathematicians spoke of the “leg” of an angle because there was no brief literal expression for a bounding line” or when “we say “cherry lips”, because there is no form of words half as convenient for saying quickly what the lips are like” (280). 'Wooden' is catachrestic here in being a convenient short-hand means of expression that crosses, linguistically, the categorical gap between a facial expression and wood. In his critique of metaphysics as metaphors, Derrida gives priority to 'catachresis', that is, with respect to the ambiguity in 'both/and' and 'neither/nor' it engenders, demonstrating the original incompleteness in the system of meaning. Derrida glosses on what is at stake in 'catachresis' in a footnote:

What interests us here is then this production of a proper meaning, a new sort of proper meaning [i.e., one that is not in fact proper in any usual sense] through the violence of a catachresis the intermediary status of which tends to escape from the opposition of the primitive and the figured, occupying the “middle” between them. When the middle of an opposition is not the passage of a mediation, there is every chance that the opposition is not pertinent. The consequence is without measure (58).

The remedy the Captain’s signifier, “wooden”, confers on the categorical gap between the husband’s facial expression and Dauntless ironically signifies the familial rupture brought about by her marriage’s occupation of a “middle” that crosses the categorical boundaries between the architectural and the social, the material and the abstract. In a house erected “for my daughters... that men might come for their choosing” (46), its figurehead becomes conducive to her own choice of man. The figurehead becomes a space, in the Carpenter’s ship, where the social and the material overlap: it is not so human that it can be wed and yet not so inhuman that it detaches itself from the

social equations of attachment. From *within* the Captain's phallic structure Lady Utterword has provoked another as her way out, "stitch[ing] a canvas, or a relation" to castration that here "remains suspended" against a master who believed he had established in his house a grandiosity that would be appealing to the dandiest of suitors. Lady Utterword's marriage is not simply a form of domestic "resistance" against the father's "decaying" ideal, nor about a "blunting" thereof that has left her without his mark. It is about resistance that gains its meaning only in a "blunt" taste for the carpenter, which conflates, without resolution, the architectural and social margins the father had set in the house.

## 5. Swordstick Reveries

The other two pronouncements on the "teak table" occur where "resistance" and "blunting" come to directly represent the behavioural changes inflicted by Mrs. Hushabye on her husband, Mr. Hector. Mr. Hector's first entrance into the text is marked by a stage direction that conveys a sense of grandiosity and power: "A very handsome man of fifty, mousquetaire moustaches, wearing a rather dandified curly brimmed hat, and carrying an elaborate walking-stick, comes into the room from the hall, and stops short at sight of the women on the sofa" (32). What Hector is seeing here is his wife and Ellie, her friend, the girl he was exploiting under a false identity. As soon as he catches sight of her, however, he becomes rather agitated: "[with a mixture of confusion and effrontery, depositing his hat and stick on the teak table]" (32). Hector's "confusion and effrontery" are not the result of his violation of the marriage contract, a felicity condition that is now pending exposure with or without guilt, but relates to Mrs. Hushabye's actual bringing to the house of the woman he thought he had successfully manipulated by his false Don Juanism. In fact, Mrs. Hushabye intentionally brings women into the house for the main purpose of helping Hector to win their affection, and every time he fails: "I have invited all sorts of pretty women to the house on the chance of giving you another turn. But it has never come off" (42). Somewhere else she will set him up with her own sister, asking him openly to "kiss her like a good brother-in-law" before "[She leaves them to themselves]" (38). When Lady Utterword admits that she is "quite a good player myself" he retorts with an unprecedented honesty that he is "deliberately playing the fool, out of sheer worthlessness" (41). Increasingly in the text, Lady Utterword becomes Hector's mirror in which he sees his own feminisation, a naturally unwelcome return of the woman's *différance* on which his phallocentrism depends as his repression from within.

On the "teak table" we thus encounter a display of Hector's shattered grandiosity, of the deposition of his *own* image in pieces. It becomes the "frame" on which to see one of the text's scenes of 'writing', a middle ground on which what belongs to Hector is projected as representatives of the lack in Hector himself. Now, when Hector is sent off in a tone more appropriate for children than adults, "Be off, Hector... Quick, quick. Get out" (32), his attempts to 'speak' end with an interrupted "I..." but he eventually "[goes out, taking his hat with him but leaving the stick on the table]" (32). Like Hector's 'I' deprived of speech, the "stick" has discarded its bearer right *on the table*. And, alas, its detachment finally from the "teak table" later in the play will not render Hector complete, for he will retrieve his power over women only in "day-dream":

Suddenly he snatches his walking stick from the teak table, and draws it; for it is a swordstick. He fights a desperate duel with an imaginary antagonist, and after many vicissitudes runs him

through the body up to the hilt. He sheathes his sword and throws it on the sofa, falling into another reverie as he does so. He looks straight into the eyes of an imaginary woman; seizes her by the arms; and says in a deep and thrilling tone, "Do you love me!" (42)

In Hector's duelling episode, we witness a 'man' acting out his own displacement, when his phallogocentric repression of women returns to him as an externalised man from within. Without a woman around for his gaze, via the phantom of an imaginary male, he performs the death of the phallic metaphor. Wavering between the real and the unreal, a Shavian Hector and Ovid's, his "desperate duel" is with his *own* image for the sake of a woman that does not exist. The essence of women is found here in both Hector's day and dream, to test *and* stabilize man's law, place, and needs from its position as inside *and* outside. Hector's enunciation of "love" is hedged in an articulation that sounds like a question but without its mark, between man's knowledge of what he wants and his not knowing how to ask for it. His desire to see himself again and again, is his desire to see himself desired, a desire which no woman can fulfil in his demand for love as such. The surfacing of the "imaginary woman" is the resurfacing of this displacement in knowledge, a culmination of both man's representation of his own failings and a warning against going as far as her ship goes.

### **XIII. Conclusion: The Dramatic Artefact and the Referential Split**

Our analysis of *Heartbreak House* has unfolded the second fissure within the larger architecture of this thesis: the referential split. If the first stage, through Lacan and Elizabethan Drama, disclosed an authorial split, particularly between gaze and voice, then the present chapter has pressed that instability into the register of reference itself. Stage-directions, always caught between articulation on the page and execution on the stage, refuse the stability of either pole. Their apparent duality - expression and function - collapses into a recursive corruption of their own ground. The stage that they presuppose as referent is continually displaced, narrated, or undone by the very directions that would seem to secure it. The implications of this are felt most sharply when placed against the coordinates of Reading Drama. That critical formation rests on the figure of an ideal recipient, one who reads with an eye to performance and views performance with the memory of the text, absorbing stage-directions into a category of "secondary text." The analysis of Shaw's house exposes the fragility of that framework. Stage-directions cannot be domesticated as secondary, nor confined to a virtual performance held in imagination. They are artefacts that disturb the very economy between reading and performing that Reading Drama presupposes. In *Heartbreak House*, the directions neither supplement dialogue nor offer neutral cues; they produce the fracture that renders page and stage undecidable, always interrupting, always corrupting, always narrating their own impossibility.

It is in this sense that the play's architectural texture becomes central. Shaw's house is not merely a stage setting but an inscriptional system in which furniture, fittings, and fixtures emerge as figures of spacing. The mahogany sofa dramatizes estrangement: its name split between stage direction and dialogue, its etymology suspended in mystery, its promise of social intimacy continually thwarted.

The wicker chair stages weaving and unweaving: the Captain's misrecognition of Ellie, Mangan's faltering engagement, the illocutionary pressure of a silence that cannot bind. The teak table stands as equivocation: "not at all convincingly" marked by a woman's hand, it bears the iterable signs of resistance and blunting, material metaphors that expose the instability of gendered style. In each case, the artefact is not reducible to prop or decoration. It is an act of writing that makes visible the parergonal condition of the play. Stage-directions in *Heartbreak House* thus emerge as dramatic artefacts, structures that are neither margins nor supplements but conditions. They are the house's first inhabitant and its last trace. They are shavings and overflows, tools and vessels, hinges and frames. They articulate a grammatology of the domestic in which architecture and writing inscribe one another. To read a stage direction is not to grasp an immediate instruction but to encounter a stratified temporality, where the present is marked by delay, by recurrence, by *différance*. The Captain's ceaseless movements in and out, the doors that interrupt, the windows that frame, the sofa that seats estrangement, the table that records dislocation: each is less a description than a temporal cut, an inscription that holds presence in suspension.

Such artefacts underwrite the referential split. They display that stage-directions do not merely falter in their referential task but generate an entire economy of spacing from that failure. Their corruption of the stage they name is not accidental but structural, and it is through this corruption that they return as narrative. They tell the story of their own instability, populating themselves with traces of what they cannot contain. What Reading Drama calls "secondary text" is in fact primary evidence of the fissure at the heart of drama, where expression and function, page and stage, cannot be reconciled. To locate the referential split in Shaw is thus to show how architecture itself becomes writing. The house in *Heartbreak* is not an inert backdrop but an archive of inscriptions, a grammatology in which objects signify by absence as much as by presence. The sofa estranges, the chair mis-binds, the table equivocates. These are not symbols of the play's content but the conditions of its spacing. They disclose an economy in which furniture, structure, and gesture are textual artefacts, writing their own delay and erasure. The broader trajectory of the thesis thus becomes visible here. The referential split follows the authorial split, extending the analytic frame from voice and gaze to expression and referent. Both stages confirm that stage-directions cannot be assimilated to transparency. They are not neutral guides but structural disturbances, artefacts that dramatize the impossibility of presence. Each split opens onto the next: subjectivity fractured in enunciation, reference fractured in inscription.

And yet this is not a closure. The referential split does not terminate the inquiry but gestures forward. For if stage-directions corrupt their referent, they also fracture the time in which that referent might appear. They offer not the endurance of presence but its segmentation into slices, intervals, suspensions. They show us a temporality that is not continuous but recursive, not whole but stratified. The question that emerges is no longer only what stage-directions refer to, but how they inscribe time: how they cut, delay, or fragment the very presence they promise. It is here that the line of inquiry turns toward its next site. *Heartbreak House* has exposed the parergonal condition of stage-directions, their artefactual corruption of reference, their status as inscriptions of architecture and writing. The next stage will press this further, asking what happens when these inscriptions are understood not only as referential fractures but as temporal cuts. How does drama persist when its very directions mark presence only in fragments? What becomes of the subject when it is dispersed across these slices? What kind of world is staged when its artefacts are operators of spacing rather than markers of continuity? These questions are already latent in Shaw's house, in its shavings and overflows, its doors and windows, its sofas and tables. They are questions

that belong to the temporality of stage-directions themselves: artefacts that exist only by spacing what they cannot secure, that persist only by erasing what they name. The referential split, as the second fissure of this thesis, has traced how stage-directions undo their own ground. The next will trace how they undo time itself.

Chapter Four:  
Perduring Godet... Godot... Godin!  
David Lewis's Four-Dimensional Artefact in *Waiting for Godot*

### I. Repetition and Grey Time

I will talk about time in *Waiting for Godot*. This might sound tedious and even pernicious in view of the massive output of critical scholarship that has flourished sporadically around a play that is self-admittedly about "waiting". "There is something misleading about this printed text", Hugh Kenner warns, in the way the "play's world contains more than Vladimir and Estragon" (26). It contains Godot, the referred-to entity outside of the 'present' of all that is said and done in the hope that he comes. He does not. The play becomes all about "waiting", runs as "waiting"; "waiting" becomes *the* inevitable. As Kenner continues: "The play constructs about its two actors the conditions and the quality of waiting, so much so that no one blames the dramatist's perverse whim for the withholding of Godot and the disappointments of their expectations" (29). And the "withholding of Godot" prevails as a de facto kind of world where there seems to be "Nothing to be done" (6), or so goes the play's first utterance. *Godot's* world is one which does not seem to generate conflict, at least in line with the basic tenets of Drama as we know it, concerning any play's action and the revelation of character. Pure action seems to have been rejected by a dramatist making a bold experiment of 'inaction' that is brought into focus by two tramps engaging in trivialities on an almost naked stage, while waiting for a Godot who will never come. Midway, Pozzo and Lucky arrive, the former dragging the latter with a rope tied around his neck and then leave without helping expose any potential for an end. In the first act Lucky gives a long, albeit fragmented speech; in the second act he is dumb. At the end of both acts a Boy arrives to deliver the same message, that Godot will not arrive tonight "but surely tomorrow" (36). There is paradoxically no time to kill insofar as waiting has no end. Existence is repeatedly exhausting and exhaustively repetitive. Repetition becomes the structure of the absurd, the Sisyphean trademark of the lack of temporal progress for which Esslin in 1961 launched Beckett as his flagship figure, a reading that will haunt *Godot* for most of its critical life.

As late as 1971, that is, eighteen years after the play's première, David Hesla in *The Shape of Chaos* openly admitted that Beckett was stuck in the "domain of the absurd", indebted, as it were, to his *Waiting*. This permeates his take on Beckett's *Watt* where he claims that "Beckett must and will conduct the art of narrative fiction on premises which will not permit him to escape from the asceticism imposed by the irrationality of existence" (84). The theoretical repercussions of Beckett's so-called absurdism have consistently traced the contours of an ontological crisis, mirroring the text's apparent dramatization of existential inertia and the futility of meaning. The maze of time in *Godot* where no change seems radical has placed the play under the spotlight of what Vivien Mercier

famously articulated as “a theoretical impossibility”, in that it is “a play in which nothing happens, that yet keeps audiences glued to their seats. What’s more, since the second act is a subtly different reprise of the first, he has written a play in which nothing happens, twice” (1956). Mercier’s repetitive ‘nothingness’ has proved to be a precursor to a variety of critical lamentations that couldn’t get beyond the fact that a play closes, or so it seems, on the same note of timelessness with which it opens. Convinced that Beckett offers no resolution to the existential predicament he stages, G.E. Wellwarth denounces him as a “prophet of negativism and sterility”, one who extends no hope to humanity but instead renders a vision of unrelenting darkness” (33). Elsewhere, David Galloway, complains about Beckett’s “perverse whim” of withholding Godot, claiming that “the patient hopefulness (of the two tramps) demonstrates the absurdity of hope itself, and likewise the absurdity of reason” (127).

Numerous critics have been successful in toppling what Andreas L. Yates calls the “figuration of negation” (438), with a spectrum of positive dispositions. Probably the most prominent saviour to date is Alain Badiou, whose concepts of “event” and “truth” help demystify obsessions about categorizing *Godot* as canonical of the absurd through a discursive questioning of its temporality. For Badiou, *Godot* is not a dramatization of existential futility but a rigorous philosophical meditation on suspended time. In *On Beckett*, *Godot* is isolated as a paradigmatic instantiation of what he terms “grey time”, a saturated temporality in which the coordinates of causality and teleological orientations are radically withdrawn. This is not a temporality governed by diachronic unfolding or historical articulation, but one amplified by the inertia of pure duration, “not a dramatization of despair, but a rigorous philosophical meditation on time suspended” (*On Beckett*, 1). In this framework, time is not experienced as a linear progression but as a dense, static field, “a temporality without becoming,” where movement is evacuated and the subject is caught in a recursive stasis. This durational fold, Badiou writes, is “unbearable but also inevitable” (15). Temporality does not emerge as a vector but a density: a static field in which movement is evacuated and becoming as such is arrested. What unfolds is not the passage of time but a site of radical indeterminacy.

This temporal impasse thus constitutes for Badiou *Godot*’s ontological precondition for what he calls the event, a rupture in the temporal order that opens the space for truth. In *Godot*, the event does not occur, but its absence is not a void; it is a charged suspension, a clearing. This act of clearing is *Godot*’s “ascetic method” which strips time of its conventional markers, leaving only the bare *form* of duration. As Badiou writes, it “is an art of subtraction, of the minimal, of the essential. It is an art that prepares the space for the event by clearing away the noise of the world” (*On Beckett*, 15). And this subtraction is nothing but temporal. Time in *Godot* is not something that passes but something that is endured. It is a temporality of exposure, where the subject is suspended in a state of radical openness to what might come: the shift from the “programme of the One” to the “pregnant theme of the Two” begins here, where the ontological question “What is being?” gives way to the temporal one: “Does something happen?” (15). Barbra Wills ties this shift to a fidelity to the void: “Rigorous negativity [and] resistance to what is... emerge as the conditions of possibility for something profoundly ethical to occur, something indeed hovering on the edge of the miraculous” (116). The ethical force of *Godot*, then, might lie precisely in its refusal to dissolve in time, in its commitment to a temporality that does not culminate but persists.

From Mercier and Badiou two critical lines evolve which attempt to make sense of *Godot's* apparently endless and nonsensical "waiting". Either there is "nothing" that happens "twice", which eventually admits of the absurd, or there is the event of "non-eventfulness", a "rupture", that precedes some truth procedure, as inherently ethical. A price seems to be paid on both sides. Accounts of "Nothing" or "non-eventfulness", negatively or positively articulated as such, have in their endeavours to touch on the limitations and potentialities of "waiting" in *Godot* steered away, however implicitly, from any talk about the text's potential stance on *the ontology of time itself*. Badiou, in particular, seems to have made a bold move towards that direction, particularly in his interrogation of "the event" in the latter phase of Beckett's dramaturgy. As Badiou complains: "the immense success of *Waiting for Godot*...has served to hide this initial impetus" (56). This is made more clear when 'the event' is itself shown to be saturated with a problem in relation to 'seeing'. With regard to Beckett's *Ill Seen Ill Said*, Badiou asks "what does 'ill seen ill said' mean?". On one hand, "the event cannot but be 'ill seen', since it precisely constitutes an exception to the ordinary laws of visibility. The 'well seen' takes us back...to the grey-black of being". On the other hand, "the event is also 'ill said', since well saying is nothing other than the reiteration of established significations". Badiou then concludes:

'Ill seen ill said' designates the possible agreement between that which as pure emergence [*surgissement*], is in exception of the law of the visible (or of presentation) and that which, by poetically inventing a new name for this emergence, is in exception of the laws of saying (or of representation) (58).

In this framework of 'the event' Badiou makes "intermittent visibility" coincide, as a rhythm of appearing and disappearing, with the emergence of a 'new name'. In this intermission in the flow of time 'truth' rises as 'poetic' from this dual rupture in seeing and saying. The relationship between temporality and perception is reconfigured through a rupture where truth emerges as 'poetic', not by virtue of its being well said or well seen but by its resistance to the habitual structures of what is seen and said as such. By its *coexistence* with what is not. In *Ill Seen Ill Said* the old woman, the landscape, and the narrator's gaze all participate in this rhythm of appearance and disappearance: "Everything depends on the harmony between an event and the poetic emergence of its name" (58).

Despite Badiou's invocation of a "possible agreement", my own interest is not so much in expediting the poetic emergence of a name for the event as it is to traverse a temporal continuum from which perception itself 'emerges' as incomplete. The question, then, is whether perception is intrinsically tethered to temporality, whether it can arise only as discrete moments of emergence that, though discontinuous, *are no less ontologically real*. If this is the case then what is perceived is not a unified presence across time, whether ill or well said, but a series of temporal instances, each bearing its own ontological weight. To return to *Godot*, what if what we experience as "grey time" is not a void *for* an event, but a void for perception that does not unfold but accumulates as *the* event? What if the text is not a condition for an event, but - through its stage-directions - is exposed as a perceptual field through which temporality is encountered as instantiated?

Such questions - about whether time in *Godot* accumulates not through events but through fragmented modes of appearance, and whether stage-directions instantiate rather than merely

frame perception - invite a conceptual realignment. For all their philosophical force, accounts like Badiou's leave unresolved the ontological mechanism by which perception, temporality, and textual form interact. The text appears to suspend time, but what is suspended is not only becoming or narrative, but the very conditions through which time can be seen to appear at all. At stake, is not simply whether *Godot* dramatizes waiting or eventlessness, but how the play's form structures the appearance of time as fragmented, recursive, or disjunctive. Here one observation proves crucial: these readings presuppose an unexamined interchangeability between text and performance, treating *Godot's* world as if it unfolds identically in both, thereby sidestepping the question of how the dramatic page in general, as a domain of appearance, and stage-directions in particular, as formal textual operators, might contribute to the ontological scaffolding of the play itself. These tensions call for a framework in which fictional time is not merely symbolic or thematic but structurally produced, where temporal appearance is bound to the specific modalities through which a fictional world is accessed. It is in response to this formal impasse that David Lewis's modal realism, with its theory of fictional truth and world-access, becomes indispensable, offering a vocabulary for how such a world might appear as temporally extended without relying on narrative continuity or theatrical presence.

## II. Lewis and the Question of Access

### 1. Modal Truths

Our turn to Lewis is motivated by two entwined concerns: his rigorous modal account of fictional truth and the ambivalent status of stage-directions within such a framework. What begins as a metaphysical inquiry into how fictional worlds are accessed must also confront the question of how certain textual structures, particularly stage-directions, elude or complicate the ontological criteria by which such worlds are made intelligible. Lewis's philosophical inquiry into the nature of fictional truth arises from a deeper and more sustained investigation into the logic and ontology of modal discourse: how it is possible to speak coherently about what is not actual, what might have been, what must be, or what could not be. Modal discourse attempts to understand how we make meaningful statements about alternatives to the world as it is. as performatives probing beyond marginal or literary curiosity, modal claims are resolidified as a central feature of rational thought. His aim is to clarify the metaphysical and semantic foundations of statements such as "Napoleon could have won at Waterloo" or "If the match had been struck, it would have lit." These are not just rhetorical flourishes; they appear to require genuine "truth-conditions." Lewis famously abstracts this modal frame in *On the Plurality of Worlds*: "When we speak of possibilities and necessities, we seem to be quantifying over ways things could have been. We call them 'possible worlds'" (*OPW*, p. 2). Lewis's project is thus not speculative metaphysics but a systematic attempt to ground modal statements in a rigorous semantic and ontological framework. In *Counterfactuals* (1973), he proposes a truth-conditional semantics for subjunctive conditionals: a counterfactual such as "If Nixon had pushed the button, there would have been a nuclear war" is true if and only if the consequent is the case (that is, follows as true) in the closest possible worlds where the antecedent is true. These worlds are not metaphorical constructs but ordered structures, evaluated by criteria such as similarity of laws and background conditions with respect to actuality. "Closeness" here does

not signify spatial or temporal distance but a relation of comparative similarity: the closest worlds are those that depart minimally from the actual world while still satisfying the antecedent. Lewis's move is thus to embed modal discourse in a robust logical architecture that avoids the vagueness of intuitive modal notions.

## 2. Worlds and Gaps

Lewis's semantic architecture, however, raises the ontological stakes. If the truth of modal statements is grounded in possible worlds, what exactly are these worlds? Are they mental models, abstract sets of sentences, or some other kind of representation? Lewis rejects such "ersatz" approaches, as he calls them, as insufficient. If possible worlds are merely descriptions, then they presuppose the very modal notions they are meant to explain: "Descriptions of ways things could have been must themselves be modal, and so cannot reduce modality to something else" (*OPW*, p. 135). To escape this circularity, Lewis adopts modal realism, the thesis that possible worlds are real, concrete totalities, spatiotemporally unified and causally closed. They are just like the actual world in kind, differing only in content. As he clarifies: "The indexical 'actual'... does not mark any difference in kind. Other worlds are the same sort of thing as ours" (*OPW*, p. 92). This commitment to realism is not metaphysical extravagance for its own sake. Lewis appeals to the Quinean principle of ontological commitment: we are justified in believing in the existence of whatever entities are posited by our best and most coherent theories, "to be is to be the value of a bound variable." The commitment to possible worlds, he argues, pays off in explanatory power: "I believe in the reality of possible worlds because the benefits of doing so outweigh the costs" (*OPW*, p. 4).

Lewis's theory of fiction emerges not as a detour from his commitment to modal realism, but as a natural extension of it, an application of modal semantics to a long-standing philosophical problem in aesthetics and language: how can we meaningfully talk about things that do not exist? Lewis approaches this problem not by positing a special domain of fictional objects, nor by invoking pragmatic or speech-act theories, but by turning to the bricolage already furnished by his modal logic and possible world semantics. His move into fiction is prompted by his recognition that fictional statements resemble modal statements in form and function: they are not straightforwardly about the actual world, yet are treated as truth-apt. Just as counterfactuals like "If Caesar were alive today, he would use the internet" are evaluated by appealing to non-actual scenarios, so too are fictional statements. So why not treat fictions as selecting their own possible worlds, much as counterfactuals do? In "Truth in Fiction" (1978), Lewis reframes fictional statements, such as "Sherlock Holmes lived on Baker Street", not as metaphorical utterances or acts of psychological pretence, but as modal claims. Fictions, like counterfactuals, select a set of possible worlds in which their propositions are taken as fact. A sentence of the form "*In fiction F, p is true*" **if and only if** *p* is true at all those possible worlds where *F* is told as known fact. These are not metaphorical or analogical worlds; they are genuine candidates from within the modal universe. The fiction operator behaves like a modal operator, shifting the world of evaluation. Fiction, then, is a constrained mode of world-selection, not an ontological anomaly.

### 3. The Absent Access

This logic, however, also requires Lewis to allow for a necessary flexibility: fictional texts leave matters incomplete, inconsistent, or ambiguous. This does not undermine their function as world-selecting operators. Instead, it entails that a single fiction corresponds not to one unique possible world, but to a class of admissible worlds: “We should not think of a fiction as determining a single world. Rather, it determines a class of possible worlds” (266). Fictional truth is therefore evaluated relative to one such world treated as actual under the relevant interpretive constraints. In this way, truth in fiction becomes a matter of selection across a range of compatible realizations, each preserving the fiction’s core logic under differing conditions of elaboration. This indeterminacy is not a defect but a functional feature of fictional discourse. Yet all this brings us to a notable absence, one that becomes especially pressing in the case of dramatic texts. While Lewis offers a rigorous account of truth in fiction, he leaves underexamined the question of how readers of a fictional text actually access the selected world(s) of that fiction. If Lewis’s modal realism offers a coherent account of how fictional truth operates across possible worlds, it nonetheless leaves open a deeper structural question, one that he himself acknowledges but does not resolve.

## III. From Lewisian Worlds to Žižekian Cuts

### 1. Pretending to Pretend

In a pivotal moment in “Truth”, cited by Žižek, Lewis reflects on the problem of fictional iteration with an open question, particularly in works like *Don Quixote*, where characters engage with fiction within fiction. He asks: “Why does this iteration of fiction not collapse into itself? How do we distinguish pretending [that fiction is true] from pretending to pretend?” (46). This dilemma marks the threshold where a fiction’s truth is no longer reducible to its propositional content or to the mechanics of world-selection but instead depends on the symbolic structure that renders such selection intelligible in the first place. And if we recall, this impasse is not unique to Lewis. A similar moment arises in Austin’s own inquiry into “speech acts” when the distinction between constative and performative utterances begins to collapse, only for him to retroactively saturate the “ellipsis” between them with the illocutionary, a move which instantiated the radicalization of the problem it evokes as philosophically “proper.” Lewis’s dilemma performs the same function in the domain of fiction: the distinction between pretending and pretending to pretend cannot be stabilized by content alone. It points instead to an underlying symbolic function that exceeds the ontology of possible worlds.

And Žižek seizes on this hesitation, not to refute Lewis’s theory of possible worlds, but to expose its dependency on a logic it cannot fully articulate: the logic of the signifier. The issue, as Žižek reframes it, is not that Lewis’s modal structure is defective, but that it still lacks an account of how fictional discourse is constituted through symbolic iteration. Put succinctly:

Lewis's question is thus ultimately a question about the "truthful lie" of the symbolic order itself: how is it that the symbolic does not "fall into the real"? How is it that it cannot be reduced to simple signs, to an inner-worldly relation between signs and what they designate, as is the case with smoke signifying fire? (46)

What Lewis frames as a metaphysical dilemma, how we distinguish between levels of fictional pretending, Žižek reinterprets as a question internal to the symbolic order itself. The "truthful lie" of fiction does not demand that we inhabit a coherent possible world, but that we participate in a structure of appearance governed by its signifying cuts, formal atemporalities that let meaning emerge *as if* complete.

## 2. Truthful Lies

Nowhere is this tension more apparent than with the dramatic text, the textual form that Lewis's narrative-oriented framework leaves entirely unaddressed. And perhaps for a good reason. The dramatic text interjects representation with another representation: representing a possible world of fiction by representing the same world as direction and voice. Stage-directions represent stage-time at the same instant they represent page-time, yet both times do not collapse into each other. Unlike narrative fiction, where descriptive and dialogic elements share a continuous textual space, stage-directions - as 'text' - "stretch" from dialogue - as another 'text' - another temporality putting in motion a textual dialectic between meaning and sense. It is only in their violation of their inner-worldly relation to the stage on the page that their role of "access" into the fictional world is exposed. The typographically distinct stage-directions frame the reader's 'theatre of the mind', as a 'true' feature of the dramatic text even as they 'lie' about their role. As formal mediators of appearance, they mark another time precisely through their separation from dialogue, *displaying* their own resistance to entering the world they bring into view. This ontological ambiguity, belonging neither wholly within the world of the play nor simply outside it, renders them *philosophically* significant, particularly for Lewis's interpretation of narratives.

Moreover, this structural bifurcation takes on particular force in *Godot*, where the play's recursive architecture and apparent temporal fragmentation foreground what appears as a volitional asymmetry between what is *said* and what is *seen*, that is, between dialogue and stage-directions (e.g., "let's go... they do not move"). When read through the lens of existential absurdity, the textual (dis)placement of action between these two registers, does not, in itself, carry interpretive weight for the framed action. In short, if fictional truth is world-relative, and access to those worlds is governed by what the text selects, then elements like stage-directions pose a challenge not through their content but through their function. Now this introduces a complication to Lewis's "fiction". This is not to suggest that *Godot* is inherently recursive or inconsistent. On the contrary, we propose that what happens in its world is internally stable, logically coherent, and complete from the perspective of its world-inhabitants, and thus fully admissible as a Lewisian possible world. What renders it strange or recursive is how it appears to us, a consequence of our access being mediated by the timeless, textual vectors of the stage-directions themselves.

### 3. Cuts of Appearance

This shift in emphasis, from the ontology of fictional worlds to the structure of their appearance, thus reframes the dramatic form of *Godot*. There is a performance that stage-directions instantiate on the page that must have an interpretive import. Rather than presupposing a metaphysical strangeness in the world the play constructs, we may see its disjunctions and recursions as arising from the signifying cuts through which it is accessed. Stage-directions, before they accompany fiction, operate as signifying cuts, *visible* vectors of access that frame *Godot's* time without being absorbed into the diegetic continuity of its world. They are not metaphysical components of the play's universe, but structural operators conditioning how that world appears as a text. The question that now emerges is not simply about how *Godot* might be made to fit a Lewisian model of fictional truth, but how its form exposes the insufficiency of that model without rejecting its logic. Žižek's critique lets us glimpse the internal limit of Lewis's theory, the lacuna it opens but leaves unnamed. In what follows, we reframe *Godot* as a fictional world that is internally stable and fully admissible yet rendered strange through the structural work of its stage-directions, functioning less as theatrical notation than as sites of temporal inscription. This strangeness does not belong to the ontology of the world itself, but to the logic of its access, that is, to the signifier. Our reading thus adds an axis to *Godot*: not explaining *what* happens in these worlds, but *what happens as we access* them. Stage-directions, we contend, are not fictional truths in themselves but operators that orient the selection and appearance of fictional truth. In this way, our approach does not transgress the bounds of Lewis's system; it supplements it from the outside, marking a structural lacuna about how fictional truths are accessed that Lewis leaves open. Žižek's critique renders this lacuna visible; our treatment of *Godot* fills it with formal consequences.

To this aim, in the ensuing sections I will take up the Lewisian account of persistence, specifically, the distinction between endurantism and perdurantism. My motivation is simple: *Godot* is not simply unfolding in time; it is, crucially, about time. For Lewis, the distinction between endurantism and perdurantism concerns the mode by which an entity persists through time. An enduring object is wholly present at every moment of its existence; it is the same "self" at  $t_1$  as it is at  $t_2$ . A perduring object, by contrast, persists by having different temporal parts at different times: its identity is distributed across a sequence of time-slices, much like frames of a film. I will treat *Godot's* two acts not as successive phases in a single continuous narrative arc, but as discrete modal selectors of appearance, each carving out a temporal slice of the same possible world. Within this framework, *Godot* appears *as if* it perdures. I will argue that canonical readings of *Godot* tend to treat its world as if enduring, a view anchored in the assumption that the play's text and its performance are ontologically exchangeable. While such readings accommodate a multitude of admissible Beckettian possible worlds about time, my concern is with one possible world in particular, one in which the play's structure interjects directly into the ontology of time itself.

Before proceeding, a potential objection must be addressed: is it a category mistake to apply a Lewisian account of persistence, developed for concrete entities across actual and possible worlds, to a fictional entity like *Godot*? Only if we assume that Lewis's system excludes fictional worlds from ontological legitimacy, which it does not. As we have seen, Lewis explicitly allows that a fictional text may select a class of possible worlds, each admissible so long as the internal logic of the fiction is

preserved. Our reading accepts this framework in full: we treat *Godot* as corresponding to a coherent class of Lewisian possible worlds, internally stable and metaphysically complete, just like ours. From a Lewisian perspective, our reading is legitimate because the world of *Godot* is internally coherent and consistent with the fictional truths established by the text. Lewis allows for multiple admissible possible worlds selected by a fiction; we are simply choosing one in which the appearance of recursive stasis coincides with the play's formal logic. Stage-directions function as Lewis's unnamed extra-textual diegetic vectors, structural features that frame how the world appears without belonging to its diegesis. From a Žižekian perspective, our reading is legitimate because it refuses to treat possible worlds as transparent representational objects, instead foregrounding the cut: the structural disjunction between world and appearance.

As we will see the "strangeness" of *Godot* will emerge as a symptom of access, a *parallax* between what is and how it is seen. Lewis's own modal openness (fiction determines a class of possible worlds) is thus read not as subjective license but as a necessity of signification: the act of selection is always mediated by form. This form in *Godot* lies not just in the division between acts, like chapters in a novel, but more essentially in the page's own interstices, in the space between dialogue and stage-directions, where the cut operates internally to each act as such. The play's porous appearance, its refusal of development, its recursive surface, and its atemporal repetitions prompt our treatment of its stage-directions as signifying cuts. We read *Godot* not as a play about incompleteness, but as one whose completeness is only ever glimpsed through disjunctive apertures, through what remains unsituated in the world yet structures our access to it.

#### **IV. From Repetition to Slice**

##### **1. Time as Intuition**

At this point in the text, it should not appear that readings of 'repetition' and 'event' with regards to *Godot* have failed to treat the question of its temporality as sufficiently problematic to warrant an interpretive fiat about the relation between how the characters experience time and how their persistence is structured for us. The issue is more subtle. What we find is a stance grounded in what might be called the phenomenal character of intuition: an acceptance, without hesitation, of Lewis's definition that "something persists if it exists at more than one time" (202). For Lewis, being in time already entails a kind of repetition, since persistence itself is temporal. But how this persistence in *Godot's* world relates to its dramatic text is a question Lewis's framework leaves open, and here lies the problem. In treating *Godot's* text and performance interchangeably, most readings bypass the analytic implications of the dramatic text's own mediation of persistence, particularly the disjunction between dialogue and stage-directions. If Lewis's definition feels like common-sense ground for how *Godot's* world-inhabitants persist, it is likely because we rely more on intuition than on the more difficult step of moving from an interpretation of their temporal experience to an interrogation of how that experience is constituted for us, that is, by the play's formal logic, in the very cuts, distances, and disjunctions by which it appears.

In Mercier's "nothing," regardless of how many times it occurs in *Godot*, and in Badiou's "non-eventfulness," regardless of the rupture it incarnates, each subliminal property is conceived as if it were wholly present wherever and whenever it exists. Vladimir and Estragon remain numerically identical to themselves in each act; the same applies to Pozzo, Lucky, and the Boy. Even the tree endures wholly from act to act, despite, to our dismay, having sprouted "four or five" leaves overnight. The "nothing" happens in its entirety, and the non-eventful "event" is a complete event: the *Godot* we witness or read. In such readings, change is not treated as an effect of how we access the text, but as a function of its persistence across temporal coordinates. Time becomes the axis along which properties are instantiated in full at each moment. The relationship between space and time is thus conceived as that between a three-dimensional spatial continuum and a distinct, one-dimensional temporal continuum, ontologically separate yet coexisting on a fixed, absolute stage upon which all phenomena unfold. Space and time, though simultaneous, remain distinct. In this schema, *Godot's* possible world is Newtonian: a theatre of absolute extension, where entities persist wholly from one temporal slice to the next, and where change is merely the difference between complete states across time, not a function of the formal cuts through which the world itself is disclosed. These readings thus cohere with the metaphysical account of endurantism. On this view, things endure by being extended in space but not in time; change is understood as relative to time, which itself is treated as an *absolute*. Properties are conceived as two-place relations between objects and times: I instantiate the property of being bent relative to  $t_1$  and the property of being straight relative to  $t_2$ ; because I am bent at  $t_1$  and straight at  $t_2$ , I undergo change. In this schema, persisting entities are three-dimensional individuals wholly present at every moment of their existence. Endurantism, also called the 'relations-to-times' view and often tied to the broader doctrine of presentism, holds that only the present moment is real: we do not exist *across* time, we move *through* it.

## 2. The Endurant Illusion

These readings constitute the prevailing, if often implicit, modal framework through which *Godot* has been approached: one grounded in treating its world of properties as if *enduring*, that is, as "wholly present" wherever and whenever they exist, on page and stage. An enduring *Godot* shares more with the conventions of traditional drama than we might first concede. When we describe a drama as a "slice" of life, however radically it may fracture, defer, or dislocate narrative sequence, we are more often invoking a metaphor than making a literal ontological claim about a drama whose start differs, defers, leads, or precedes its end. The assumption persists that the dramatic world unfolds as a continuum, its properties complete and intact from one present act, gesture, or utterance to the next. Within this paradigm, there is no essential difference between asserting that Pozzo endures with full eyesight in Act I and is blind in Act II, and claiming that Leontes in *The Winter's Tale* endures from jealousy of his childhood friend Polixenes to fury sufficient to send Perdita, his daughter, hastily and unfairly to the shores of Bohemia. In both cases, characters are framed as wholly present, three-dimensional individuals at each moment of their dramatic existence, acting, reacting, affecting, and being affected by virtue of their persistence. The dramatic text indexes enduring objects, which appear as if complete regardless of their textual frame, not temporally extended, but temporally situated, wholly instantiated at each moment.

But this is not the only observation to be made from Lewis's disambiguation of our intuitive account of time when applied to readings of *Godot*. That its world-properties appear as enduring by an intuited act of interpretation is, at most, sufficient motivation to raise concerns that might initially seem tautological, if not absurd. For if *Godot's* properties are interpreted as "wholly present" three-dimensional entities at every moment of their existence, then their change, or lack of change, will remain continuously susceptible to critiques that presuppose precisely this 'enduring' mode as a precondition for the validity of their conceptions, temporal or otherwise. In such a framework, interpretations of the relationship between time and space, and of its implications for the framed persistence of *Godot's* properties, will be drawn, gradually, if not systematically, into this same reductive line of intuition.

At the apex of this hierarchy lies the doctrine of absurdity, and with it the ethical axiom of *Godot* as a classic emblem of life's inherent meaninglessness, if not necessarily inducing "tears of despair" so much as "the laughter of liberation" (23). Further down, Vladimir's and Estragon's numbed dialogues and inertia are subsumed under broader generic frameworks, whether psychoanalytic or pragmatic: the former demands a symptom *presently* captured or acted out; the latter requires a context in which present utterances are retrospectively framed as performances within an enduring discourse. Likewise, the overnight sprouting of leaves, Pozzo's sudden blindness, and Lucky's muteness are absorbed either into an aestheticist credo - "art for art's sake" - or, more circularly, into a symbolic addendum to the bizarre condition of "waiting." Moreover, framing *Godot* as if it endures has serious repercussions for the problem of its structure. It is true that in both acts the characters are the same, the patterns of 'entrances' and 'exits' repeat, and the speech prefix "Boy" recurs verbatim, even though the "Boy" insists, to Vladimir's dismay, that he is not the same person. But it is one thing to say that there is repetition and nothing happens; it is another to say that the structure of that "nothing" is repetition. Repetitive events and repetitive structures of such events may serve quite different purposes. Unless there is good reason to claim that what happens (*fabula*) is an effect of how what happens is organized (*sujet*), prudence demands that the hard-earned narratological distinction between the two be preserved.

### 3. Absurdity Reframed

To distance *Godot* from the intuitive account of persistence in time, i.e., endurantism, is not to suggest that the play can by any means be severed from the interpretive conundrums it has so forcefully and rightfully attracted in its spatiotemporal location in history. *Godot* continues to register something of the absurdity that haunts the Enlightenment project and the historical limits it has come to reveal. The claim, rather, is that *Godot's* text resists codification as an absolute doctrine of absurdity (or its negation, 'non-absurdity'), which would sidestep the ontological stakes of its appearance. The absurdity that may be found in *Godot*, by analogy to human experience, lies less in an unconditional façade of "truth" than in the structural conditions of appearance that shape our access to its world. Here, the historical and the phenomenal in the text may stand on equal footing with the problem of absurdity itself. What *Godot* seems to demand is a counterintuitive move: an account of persistence and change in which absurdity becomes not merely a thematic verdict but a reflection of the absurdity dictated by its textual framing, as a formally inscribed truth. Such an

account would respect the play's framing of its world-time, drawing it into philosophical proximity with the challenge posed by special relativity to absolute simultaneity and observer-independent time<sup>28</sup>. My analogue for this approach is thus Beckett's own refreshingly brief response to speculation about the interpretive puzzles that have shadowed the play since its 1953 premiere at the Théâtre de Babylone, Paris: "Why people have to complicate a thing so simple I can't make out" (quoted in Knowlson, 416). *Godot's* text indeed contains the clues to such a simple order, not in the disguised existentialism of Sartre or Camus, but in the incredulous stares of its stage-directions, those semiotic cuts Beckett never treated lightly.

## V. Perdurantism and the Signifying Cut

### 1. Space-Worms

Since the 1980s, endurantism has faced its most systematic counterpoint in the form of perdurantism, a position initiated by Lewis's influential critique of the former in what is colloquially known as the Argument from Temporary Intrinsic (ATI) (1986). For Lewis, the endurantist claim that change is merely "relative to time" amounts to a *reductio ad absurdum*: when an object undergoes change, this concerns the object itself, not its relation to something external. There is, strictly speaking, no "outside" to the thing that persists from one time to another. In this framework, time holds no ontologically privileged status over space but is analogous to it in one decisive respect, that is, its divisibility into parts. Hence perdurantism: "Something perdures if it persists by having different temporal parts" (202). In other words, objects are extended in time as well as in space. Just as one has spatial parts - head, feet, nose - so one has temporal parts: you-yesterday, you-today, you-tomorrow. Where endurantism construes persistence as the repeated "wholeness" of an object across moments, perdurantism construes it as the sequence of distinct temporal parts whose sum constitutes the object's four-dimensional extension.

To reuse the familiar bent/straight example: instead of being bent at  $t_1$  and straight at  $t_2$  (as per the endurantist), the perdurantist holds that one of my temporal parts instantiates being bent and another instantiates being straight (Eddon 2010). Change occurs whenever one temporal part has a property that another lacks. In contrast to endurantism, where change is relative to time, along which things persist by being "wholly present" from one moment to another, perdurantism holds that things persist by having temporal parts located at different times of their existence. For the perduring object, present, past, and future are all equally real so long as it persists; all of its temporal parts coexist as locations within a four-dimensional manifold. Being occupies time: the real location of things is not *space* but *spacetime*. Endurantism, in effect, imagines persistence as occurring *within* space, entities remain intact while time passes around them, whereas perdurantism reconceives persistence as itself a spatiotemporal phenomenon, extended across and articulated by temporal parts. In this sense, persisting things are four-dimensional — they perdure as spacetime. As Mark

---

<sup>28</sup> That is not to claim physical equivalence, but to mark how stage-directions structure temporal access externally to the diegesis, much as relativistic frames govern temporal ordering in physics.

Heller elaborates:

A physical object is not an enduring spatial hunk of matter, but is, rather, a spatiotemporal hunk of matter. Instead of thinking of matter as filling up regions of space, we should think of matter as filling up regions of spacetime. A physical object is the material content of a region of spacetime. (3)

The persisting entity is a “material content of a region of spacetime,” and so perdurantism speaks of presence as an extension in temporal parts. “Now” relates to every part a perduring object occupies as the location of its existence for the observer. Because perdurance depends almost entirely on the notion of extension, the object “extended” is not stabilized by the linguistic segmentation of its sum but is both enabled and unsettled by it, its temporality opens onto another, illusory temporality that such segmentation leaves suspended. As Antony Eagle explains, the “continuant object occupies many regions...but is contained only in temporally extended regions; the locations of a perduring object are thus temporally extended” (57). The “now” is not a privileged ontological anchor but one coordinate among others in the continuum of a perduring entity’s existence. In this framework, identity is not intrinsic across time but constructed through the semantic stitching of temporal parts. Lynne Rudder Baker writes:

The temporal parts that I label ‘this-microphone-at- $t_2$ ’ and ‘this-microphone-at- $t_4$ ’ are parts of a single 4D entity solely because of how we choose to use the word ‘microphone’. Whether or not a particular sum of temporal parts is a microphone or a person or any other ordinary object depends on our semantic decisions (4).

The implication, then, is that persistence is not a given but a product of interpretive play; the object is not simply there but is constituted through the differential relations among its parts, mediated by the shifting terms we use to frame it. This is Perdurantism’s mereology, where a whole is a whole only with regard to the combination and recombination of its temporal parts. The whole is not indexed any more by one temporal part than by another. Perdurance goes by the name of “worm-theory” for this reason: any “object is spatially and temporally extended - a ‘worm’ - with parts in each time and place where and when the object exists...” (6). Just as spatial parts are smaller than the whole object in spatial dimensions, temporal parts are smaller than the whole object in the temporal dimension. They are shorter-lived. A ‘spacetime worm’ thus speaks of the extension of a whole in spacetime as the sum or set of its parts.

## 2. The Signifier’s Cut

Despite perdurantism’s semantic flexibility a question remains: what renders some temporal parts more susceptible than others to articulation? In other words, what make some more susceptible to “access”. Here the signifier operates as a signifying cut, dividing the continuum according to which some moments are sutured into an articulated sequence while others are left to recede into the unmarked background. This cut is not merely a separation but the very condition of appearance: it makes appear, as if self-evident, the difference between what is presented and what is absent,

allowing us to see what we take to be there as though it were always already given. It persists *between* 'this-microphone-at-t1' and 'this-microphone-at-t2' which the couple attempts to repress at the same time they circulate around the "microphone" they temporalize. The structure of the perduring object is thus the whole sum of its three-dimensional parts along the time of its existence, a sum that while it can be demarcated cannot be embraced minutely or thoroughly within a single frame. Spatially speaking, you cannot touch the whole person, only a part of them such as their hand, head, or foot. Perdurantism adds another register in which you can only ever directly touch a part of a person:

Even if you could somehow touch all of the person's spatial parts at once, you would still fail to touch the whole person, for not the whole person is then to be touched. To touch all of the person you must hold him in an interpenetrating total embrace from his birth until his death; only thus would you have access to all his past and future temporal parts (Sider 3).


The segmentation of a perduring object into temporal parts is thus not merely descriptive but an ontological procedure arising from their parthood as such. These boundaries are not given in nature; they emerge only through the inscriptive cut of the signifier, an operation that does not simply register a part already there but produces it as such. Only retroactively, through this cut, does a "part" appear as a part at all. This is what allows us to speak in terms of cuts or slices: temporal parts are not inert divisions but edges cast, so to speak, across the four-dimensional whole, projecting frames whose very incompleteness gestures beyond themselves. Temporal parts are sometimes called "time-slices" for this reason, the cutting "fission" and the whole before cutting "pre-fission." As Sider explains:




My spatial parts extend through time like I do. We call them spatial parts because they are smaller than I, spatially speaking; they are "cut out of me" along a spatial dimension. Reverse time and space in this description and we obtain a description of my temporal parts, which extend through space like I do but smaller than I, temporally speaking; they are what you get by slicing me up along a temporal dimension (2).

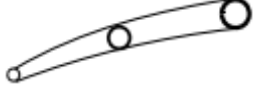



For Perdurantism, the observational and the structural with regards to spacetime entities *coincide* as the very act of 'slicing' or 'cutting' their continuants. In the following figure, borrowed from Sider's "Temporal Parts" (2008), we can frame some of the temporal parts of a whole person



. The reason the person extends from left to right is because he lasts over time. At neither temporal part is the person wholly present for the observer nor is one temporal part ontologically superior to the other. We can pick a temporal part (or two, or three...etc) or a "time-slice" of the person and talk about it in its partiality without claiming that this is what is *only* there to observe of them entirely. The presence and absence of temporal parts depend on our frame of reference along a mereological sum of the observed *and* the unobserved. Thus, as Sider elaborates,

"the early temporal part  looks, feels, and smells like a baby, but it lasts only for an instant. If you watch the baby for a while, you will first be looking at one temporal part, then another much like it, then another much like the last one, and so on". Temporal parts have spatial parts, and spatial parts

have temporal parts. We may similarly observe the baby temporal part  and, say, the old man temporal part  on both ends in such a way that the middleman  is hidden from our frame of reference. Consider another figure from Sider where he talks this time about the spatiotemporal

part of the head: . As Sider elaborates, "This representation of the head extends from left to right because heads, like persons, last over time. The head - a spatial part of the person - thus has temporal parts: ,  and ". Just as one may examine a spatial object at varying levels of granularity, from this molecule to that body, so too can one examine temporal parts at a microscopic resolution or through macroscopic synthesis. As Sider observes, "there is no unique way of carving up the world into its temporal parts" (*Four-Dimensionalism*, p. 1). The signifying cut is thus an epistemic-ontological condensation: it both compresses and expands diachrony, making possible the atomism of the instant and the semblance of a continuous life.

In *Godot*, this is the logic by which the space between stage-directions and dialogue works, constituting the visible slice while leaving the remainder suspended in the unmarked continuum. Looking at the dramatic page, first, the distinction between endurantism and perdurantism finds its precise resonance: the visual gap between dialogue and stage-directions is not simply a pause in the spatial layout of the page, but a segmentation that already folds time into the act of reading. Stage-directions initiate this gap, and in doing so, they inscribe an a-temporal "cut" of access whose function is to distribute the play's world across discontinuous yet coexisting moments. Moreover, this cut, which holds the scene open across non-contiguous instants does not halt the world of *Godot* as it appears in the usual, sequential reading of dialogue and stage-directions, but lets it persist elsewhere, in the spatial and temporal interval between them. The dramatic text is not frozen, but continuant. And finally, stage-directions enact this impossibility of total embrace: they function as signifying cuts that give access only to certain temporal parts of the world, never to the whole continuum. The gap they inscribe between themselves and dialogue is not a mere absence of text but a signifier that makes some parts appear, sutured into a sequence, while others hide in the unmarked background. What we "see" of *Godot's* world is therefore already mediated by this cut, which grants access only through partial frames, never through a continuous, unbroken presence.

Act I and Act II function as such temporal slices of the perduring sum, each inheriting the intrinsics of the same possible world, its inhabitants, their bodies, and the objects they handle. But these inhabitants are never given whole. The cut determines what appears and what is recessed: externally, they are partial because the play's structure withholds continuity; internally, they are partial relative to the spatial adjacency of their other parts, feet revealed here, hats adjusted there, stumbles and silences interrupting posture through intra-act stage-directions. The signifier, in marking these moments, produces the very distinction between what is sutured into sequence and what remains in the unmarked background. Estragon is sliced between acts no less than he is sliced within them. And the same signifying cut extends to *Godot's* dialogue. What is revealed there is not a mental state per se, but its appearance under the signifier: a partial surfacing, a linguistic residue that presents itself as if it were a property of a persisting subject. This expansion to dialogue is thus an expansion to semblances of mental states. Hesitation, shame, anxiety, these appear not as intrinsic qualities of a unified self, but as cuts that emerge at the intersection of a name, a speech prefix, and the segmented layout of the dramatic page. The signifier here tethers a fragment to a

named figure (“Estragon:”) while at the same time marking it as a discrete slice, a partial event of voice. What persists is not Estragon’s psyche, but a sequence of utterances whose segmentation structures the illusion of endurance. The “larger dialogue” to which these fragments seem to belong is not a concealed whole awaiting restoration, but an effect generated by the very cuts that interrupt it, a fiction of continuity staged by the signifier’s partitioning of appearance.

This dual partiality, of body and voice, of act and utterance, is thus not a flaw in representation but a structural condition of access. It constitutes a kind of Möbius strip, where the inside folds into the outside and the signifying cut becomes the very form of continuity. What appears disjunctive is, in fact, internally continuous; what seems to return is never quite the same. The acts, their characters, and their utterances do not endure in a classical sense but recur as altered repetitions across a surface that promises an underside it can never show, because that ‘underside’ is not hidden, but produced by the cut itself, by the signifier’s division of appearance into marked and unmarked zones. The result is a mode of observation entangled in its own dislocation: always tracing, never arriving; always perceiving a whole whose coherence is an effect of the very slices that deny it.

### 3. *Slicing the Continuum*

The implication of a perduring *Godot* is a productive, if uneven, reorientation of its persistence, one through which its so-called “absurd” properties are redistributed across the intervals of its own segmentation. When we speak of the “edges” across which the whole is structurally disseminated, between what is observed and what is withheld, we are already within the logic of the signifying cut: the text’s internal dissociations are framed and made legible by its external breaks. The opening and closing stage-directions function as such cuts. Act I begins with “A country road. A tree” (5); Act II with “Next day. Same time. Same place...The tree has four or five leaves” (52). This growth is not evidence of an internally witnessed seasonal cycle, but an artefact of the cut itself: a shift in the coordinates of access that makes a difference appear, whether it is received by the reader as absurd, hopeful, or otherwise. The leaves mark not the passage of time within the world, but the re-entry into it at another temporal slice. A perdurantist reading thus sharpens this point. If time shares with space a part-whole structure, that is, if we are dealing with spacetime, then the tree has one temporal part without leaves and another with “four or five leaves,” each a segment of a larger whole that also includes unobserved parts in which the growth occurs. What appears as an abrupt transformation is, in this view, an effect of the cut: the mereological relation between what is shown and what is withheld. Between the observed slice of the leafless tree and the observed slice of the leafy tree lie numerous unmarked temporal segments through which the tree perdures from one state to the other. The growth in Act II is therefore not anchored to “next day” as a literal twenty-four-hour interval but as a chronological slice, an index of succession rather than the consecutive. “Next day” is not synonymous with ‘tomorrow’. It functions as a stage direction for framing: a shift in the perceptual coordinates of access, not a quantifiable measure of duration.

This perdurantist account of the “leaves” extracts a semblance of ‘truth’ from the encompassing dialogue. To Vladimir’s “But yesterday evening it was all black and bare. And now it's covered with leaves,” Estragon’s “It must be spring” appears as a retort that dismantles an impression that time

has passed too quickly. "It must be spring" (96) is not a miraculous acceleration of time, but a seasonal shift whose temporal continuum is retroactively produced by the cutting access. What first appears as a lament is not about time itself, but about a perception of its passage, an anxiety rooted in the disjunction between subjective awareness and objective duration. For Vladimir, it is truly "absurd" how time goes so quickly. But the tree, now bearing leaves, is not fixed for time but a continuant object across the series of its temporal parts which its slicing on the page, "A tree...", "The tree has four or five leaves", has disseminated: leafless at  $t_1$ , budding at  $t_2$ , and so on. The thematic absurdity of time is here reframed from the fictional world's ontology to the limitations to our accessing a full temporal unfolding. On the page, "*Another of your nightmares!*" (96) functions less as a narrative cue than as a bifurcated voicing of the cut itself, at once Estragon's partial utterance *within* the fiction and a warning *to the witness* that what passes for temporal truth here is only ever the disturbed remainder of a slice.

#### 4. Stillness as Slice

By looking at the closing stage-directions of each act, "they do not move" (78) (154), we find that the apparent no-change or repetition of no-action does not primarily describe a volitional decision on the part of Vladimir and Estragon to remain still but instead marks the edges of our perceptual access. It is the semblance produced by a slice of spatiotemporal access, a narrowing of what the world encompasses to be seen in an instant. "They do not move" is no more than the structural imperative of the cut, passing through a whole along which Vladimir and Estragon could have moved in ways the fictional world withholds. It is a temporal cross-section, akin to a photographic shot, that does not frame a lack of motion in the moving entities themselves, but freezes one particular temporal juncture, a fragment of duration extracted from the continuum. The apparent contrast between "let's go" and "they do not move" thus arises not from a contradiction in the fictional world, but from the relation between volitional utterance and the observational limit imposed by the signifying cut: a structural relativity internal to *Godot's* mereology, between what is seen of its parts and what belongs to the continuity of its whole. The temptation is to imagine that, were each slice recomposed into a continuum, we might locate the hidden "exit" or *exeunt* of Vladimir and Estragon, but where? Yet this is precisely what the cut disallows, producing a page-bound semblance in which disappearance never formally occurs but remains virtually inscribed, such that the reopening after each act turns "*Same time. Same place*" (78) into the pre-stitched appearance of return, not the trace of a journey.

#### 5. Everything Happens, Twice!

The result of this preliminary observation proves useful in clarifying how seemingly contradictory phenomena at the edges of *Godot* may be reassembled. We are dealing here with two extremes: on one end, the counterintuitive growth of leaves from none to "four or five"; on the other, the apparent volitional stasis of Vladimir and Estragon at the close of both Act I and Act II. Both phenomena can be understood as effects of temporal slicing, a structural relativity between what is *shown* and what is *withheld*, framed by the cut. Through such cuts, the page presents a semblance:

not a barren abstraction, but a *charged appearance* in which bodies speak, respond, and persist only as partial presences - dialogue, gestures, silences - that show themselves differently than they would were the world apprehended as enduring. Within each slice, we encounter not fragments of a hidden whole but the only *mode of presence* accessible to us, whose partiality is constitutive of its meaning. In this light, "Act I" and "Act II" function not merely as narrative divisions but as discrete windows of access, cross-sections within a broader continuum whose full temporality remains inaccessible, even as their juxtaposition yields the semblance of progression on the page. Thus, the oft-cited claim that "nothing happens twice" gives way to a different formulation: "everything happens, of which we observe only two slices." What *Godot* presents is not a "non-eventful event," but a semblance of presence, whose perceived world-coherence is a retroactive interpretation of the very segmented display that structures its form.

Moving inward from the edges of *Godot's* slices to what is *seen* and *said* within them, we arrive at a zone where the spacing of the dramatic page itself carves the somatic and the mental into charged appearances. What seems to be the presence of body and thought now takes shape only in the intervals between dialogue and direction, the signifying cut that stages both as partial and provisional. This shift from external segmentation to internal figuration gives onto a metaphysical terrain no longer structured by enduring wholes, but by temporal parts that appear only through the very spacing that divides them. In such a configuration, *body* and *mentality* no longer signify continuous bearers across time but unfold as sequences of sliced semblances, each exceeding and slipping beyond any single moment of view. *With this in mind, how might we re-read the bodies and minds of Godot as they surface, not as stable identities, but as staged exposures to the cut?*

## VI. Somatic Semblance: Estragon/Vladimir as a Plessnerian Hinge

### 1. Cut Bodies

To grasp what *Godot* withholds and stages through its cuts, we must first recall how objects are ordinarily said to *persist*. Somatic accounts of persistence, often expressed in stage theory, hold that objects endure by being composed of distinct temporal parts, each representing the object at a specific moment. In this view, an enduring person is not a single, wholly present entity but a series of person-stages, each temporally indexed, giving rise to the familiar problem of temporary intrinsics: how can an object possess incompatible properties at different times without contradiction?

Consider the example of a statue made of clay: the clay perdures, but the statue has one shape at  $t_1$  and a different shape at  $t_2$ . The contradiction emerges only if we assume the statue is wholly present at each moment; for four-dimensionalism, the statue and the clay are different temporal parts of the same spacetime whole. As Hales and Johnson put it, "When we see an object here and now, we are seeing the parts of it that are now — but there are other parts of it at other times that we might have encountered or might yet encounter." In *Godot*, the signifying cut operates precisely in the ambiguous space between clay and statue, a formal incision through which neither the continuous substratum (*clay*) nor the completed figure (*statue*) is directly disclosed, but only a cross-section that must stand for both. This is both the limit and the opening of the perdurantist frame: the cut reveals

only by withholding, producing an access in which Vladimir and Estragon appear not as metaphysical constants but as semantic constructions stretched between slices, their identity suspended across absent and present parts. As Maureen Donnelly reminds us, “Perdurantists tend to claim that persisting objects are four-dimensional... and that objects stand in atemporal parthood relations”: what *Godot* stages is precisely this, not brute endurance but a mode of visibility in which bodies are suspended between material continuity and momentary form. Buonomo’s claim that “There is no unique right answer to the persistence question, for the connection between parts at different times depends on the relation we may want to consider” (17) can thus be reread as indirectly intimating the very cut that structures *Godot*: precisely because each relation is forged only after a slice has already divided the continuum, every answer to persistence is necessarily *partial*, conditioned by what the cut first allows to appear.

In *Godot*, somatic parthood structures every appearance of the body, yet it becomes most visible at moments when stage-directions register an instantaneous disturbance in bodily movement, e.g. “almost falls,” “limps,” “tottering,” “Staggering”, disturbances which expose the limits of what the cut allows us to see. In these moments, the stage direction does not reveal a completed physical state but captures a *slice* extracted from a broader movement that remains withheld: the body might simply be walking, pausing, or adjusting, but what reaches the page is already transformed into a sign of imbalance. It is precisely in these provisional markings, “lose[...] his balance, almost falls” (21), “imitates Lucky, almost falls” (54), “limps to his place” (70), “no longer supported, almost falls” (80), that bodily semblance comes into view. Each instance is not the description of an action but a *cross-section*, a textual apparition through which we infer instability as if it were unfolding. The “body” here is not continuous but a *semantic semblance* assembled from cut-bound presents, gesturing toward a fall that never occurs or a limp that is never fully embodied. In this way, Beckett produces the illusion of somatic continuity not by showing bodies in motion, but by letting discrete slices, like filmic frames, stand in for a movement whose connective tissue is withheld. The question is, what do characters such as Estragon actually “do,” when their actions are momentary textual exposures?

## **2. Estragon Falling**

The first appearance of the stage-direction “almost falls” already reveals the logic of somatic semblance. Estragon’s anxious question “We’re not tied?” is followed not by an exposition, but by a rigid stillness: “They listen, grotesquely rigid” (21). One might imagine bodies tensing, breaths shortening, glances exchanged, but none of these are exposed. Instead, the frame holds until it is pierced by a disturbance: “Estragon loses his balance, almost falls” (21). The stage-direction does not describe a fall, nor even motion in any full sense; it marks the point at which the signifying cut allows a body to appear only through a suspension between movement and stillness. What we see is not the cause of imbalance, nor the result of a fall, but only a suspended trace, Estragon slipping, Vladimir “totter[ing]” (21) in response, out of which we retroactively hallucinate a scene: two bodies thrown together in fear, clutching one another, an entire relational situation conjured out of a gap. Yet it is precisely this “almost”, as a resemblance of motion without motion, that defines semblance: not the depiction of a whole that persists, but an intensity forced into appearance by what has been withheld on either side of the cut. What follows, the relief, the naming of *Godot*, the hasty

explanations “At his horse” (22), and Estragon’s eventual turn to appetite “I am hungry” (22) is not a return to normality, but the reabsorption of that semblance back into the page where fear, contact, meaning, and hunger are generated only as partial exposures in an order the body is never allowed fully to inhabit.

Later, we encounter another semblance in which Estragon’s body appears only long enough to simulate intimacy. His emphatic command; “Don’t touch me! Don’t question me! Don’t speak to me! Stay with me!” (79) registers a conflicted demand for both distance and attachment, momentarily echoed by Vladimir’s response, “Did I ever leave you?” (80). Yet what unfolds is neither continuity nor reconciliation, but a forced appearance of closeness staged entirely within the cut. When Vladimir insists, “Look at me,” Estragon initially resists before finally raising his head; they “*look long at each other*” and slip into an embrace, “clapping each other on the back,” (80) as if mutual support had taken somatic form. But this coherence disintegrates almost as soon as it appears: “End of the embrace. Estragon, no longer supported, almost falls” (80). The very direction that appears to confirm a genuine bodily connection reveals it instead as a temporary slice of semblance: once the embrace is no longer shown, Estragon immediately starts to flicker, the support having belonged solely to that brief slice of appearance. What passes for his “relationship” to Vladimir is not a continuous dramatic fact but a succession of such slices, momentary exposures of attachment followed by disturbances that mark their limit. The semblance of persistence is generated by what appears long enough to be misread as stable, only to collapse again into movement we are never permitted to follow into duration.

Another of Estragon’s somatic semblances emerges when Vladimir demands visual proof of bodily integrity: “Show me your leg” (98). The order produces no revelation of a stable body, only further disturbances. Estragon first complies, hesitantly offering “Which?” to which Vladimir answers “Both” (98), but the stage-direction that follows does not present the leg as a still object of inspection. Instead of “pulling up” his trousers “Estragon gives a leg to Vladimir” then “staggers” and when Vladimir takes hold, “They stagger” together (98). Rather than confirming somatic continuity through inspection, the illusion of continuity relies on a semblance marked by oppositions: Estragon’s “Which?” and the offering of a single leg stand at odds with Vladimir’s demand for “both” legs and the instruction to “pull up your trousers,” staging a body that refuses conformity to the naturalising logic of sight. The trousers are pulled up, the leg is shown and dropped at which point Estragon, again “almost falls.” There is no sustained visual evidence of bodily persistence here, only a cut-bound flicker through which the leg appears for an instant and vanishes again into virtual imbalance. As with each repetition of “almost falls,” the body comes into view only long enough to be misread as having duration, before collapsing once more into a semantic slip that interrupts any attempt at confirmation. Semblance, once again, is generated not by what the dramatic body *is*, but by what the cut briefly *lets us see* of it, a leg made visible only at the threshold where looking ends and instability returns.

These examples, taken together, display that Estragon’s somatic semblances do not reveal a body breaking down, but a body whose ordinary, unseen movements become momentarily captured by the signifying cut in such a way that they appear as if on the brink of imbalance. The repeated “almost falls” marks not a state of continuous fragility, but the moment in which the cut transforms an otherwise indeterminate movement into the semblance of a fall. Crucially, whenever Vladimir himself seems to waver, he “totters,” “staggers,” this occurs precisely when he appears huddled

with Estragon: clutching him, embracing him, or holding his leg. What flickers into view, then, is not each character's body as an enduring form, but the temporary semblance of somatic relation produced by the cut, which slices into a motion that is occurring but re-presents it in a form of attachment or support. The body's realism in *Godot* thus lies not in what the text allows us to witness moving through time, but in how the moment of appearance itself generates the illusion of contact and persistence, only to withdraw it again as the slice closes.

### 3. Vladimir Laughing

Unlike Estragon, whose bodily semblance flashes up only in the brief linguistic capture of what might have been some other action, Vladimir often appears to persist across multiple slices: his joints are not sharply carved, his movements flow forward, accumulating in fractures. He "paces to and fro, halts, broods, resumes his pacing," promises "I'll carry you" (42) or "takes Estragon by the arm" (76) and even "does a few dance steps" (44). Where the cut does not pass directly through his body, he seems to move in a continuity that resembles persistence. It is precisely this near-continuity that renders the face all the more conspicuous as the site where the slice violently returns. To Estragon's "Our being born?", Vladimir "breaks into a hearty laugh which he immediately stifles, hand to pubis, face contorted" (5). Crucially, the stage direction does not record a sequence, laughing *then* suppressing, but compresses both "immediately" into a single instant, leaving no duration in which a laugh can unfold. Laughter here appears only in its interruption, visible solely at the point of being cut off; it is not suppression that ends the laugh but the cut that brings it into view, already as a linguistic residue: "hand to pubis", "face contorted". Vladimir's remark "One daren't even laugh any more" (5) names a formal predicament, not a confession of an *existing* inhibition: what has been withheld is not the content of a laugh, but the temporal span through which a laugh could ever come into being. Estragon's rejoinder - "Dreadful privation" (5) - functions less as sympathy than as a bifurcated voicing of the cut itself: at once a fragmentary utterance within the fiction and a warning to the witness that affective expression here is only ever a remainder of a slice. What is shown in place of the laugh is a "face contorted", the afterimage of a movement withheld. The semblance here is not of an action incomplete, but of an expressive part torn from the whole process that would have rendered it intelligible: the face as a self-contained slice standing in for a laugh already removed by the cut.

This page-bound logic of Vladimir's "laugh" becomes even clearer later when Vladimir, after Estragon's rejoinder, attempts to "make do" with a substitute: "Merely smile" (5). The smile, here, is not a diluted version of laughter but another cut-bound semblance: "He smiles suddenly from ear to ear, keeps smiling, ceases as suddenly" (5). Rather than showing a face entering into and out of smiling, the text substitutes one facial slice for another, a smiling face is placed directly atop a non-smiling one, and then removed, denying a continuous passage into laughter. The page does not allow the smile to evolve; it only allows it to appear and disappear, leaving us with the semblance of affect in place of its duration. The effect is not that Vladimir cannot laugh, but that what laughter would require, an extended span of becoming, is exactly what the cut refuses. Smiling becomes the surface stand-in for a laugh we are not permitted to witness, while contortion marks the residue of an act whose movement has already been sliced away. Vladimir, then, is not more stable than Estragon; he is instead disjointed at the level of facial appearance, held together only by a series of

temporally disconnected slices whose accumulation produces the illusion of persistence, affect, or even fatigue, the impression that they “can’t go on.”<sup>29</sup>

#### 4. Plessner’s Hinge

The contrast in somatic slicing between Estragon and Vladimir is thus not merely a difference in dramatic style; it reflects a deeper structural hinge on the page at which bodily coherence is both generated and unsettled. This hinge - cutting through Estragon’s body and Vladimir’s face alike - evokes a semblance of Helmuth Plessner’s “eccentric positionality” (*exzentrische Positionalität*), in which the human is defined by a constitutive duality: one *is* a body and at the same time *has* a body. The human being both occupies a position and possesses it, simultaneously centred in himself and placed outside himself, an actor and spectator of his own appearance (1928). This dual status is not psychological but ontological, what Plessner calls our essential *breakability*: “the basis of man’s existence, the source, but also the limit, of his power” (32). Such breakability becomes visible in somatic excesses like laughing and crying, where the body erupts beyond the control of the self. As Plessner notes in *Laughing and Crying*, these are not symbolic gestures but existential ruptures — moments in which “the body takes over from the self,” because the balance between self, body, and world has become untenable. *Godot*, in its perduring logic, brings this rupture to the very surface of the dramatic page: its characters are not merely interrupted by disjunctions between being and having a body, they *are* those disjunctions, extended across temporal slices in which the body is successively possessed, abandoned, fragmented, and reconstituted.

Within this frame, Estragon and Vladimir appear as two textual semblances of Plessner’s eccentric embodiment. Estragon is sliced *macro*-somatically: his body is rendered through boot-struggles, limps, almost-falls, failures that flicker as if out of ordinary motion, so that his body seems “more had than is,” a burden carried rather than occupied, his apparent wholeness stitched from slices that never show his endurance. Vladimir, by contrast, is sliced *micro*-somatically at the face: the laugh appears only in its cancellation, stifled before it can unfold, and what remains visible is merely the smile as a privative residue, a facial slice that flashes up where the fuller temporal span of laughter has been cut away. What sounds like an inhibition (“One daren’t even laugh any more”) becomes less about an actual privation of laughter to which Vladimir gives a “face” than about the no less effective privation of the slice through which laughing would become visible. His body’s expressive excess is both signalled and withheld at once. In this way, *Godot* stages a *mise-en-abîme* of perduring embodiment, where *Vladimir’s truncated laugh is nested within Estragon’s failing body*, and the human is figured not as a unified subject, but as a temporal montage of having and being a body, existentially whole only in semblance yet ontologically dispersed. Vladimir’s smile thus becomes a textual condensation of Estragon’s expanded body, a semblance of a *single*

---

<sup>29</sup> One might object that a laugh and its stifling cannot literally coincide, since suppression presupposes that the laugh has already begun, and thus that the examples risk collapsing into pedantic impossibility. Yet this is exactly what the page enforces: it withholds the temporal span in which such distinctions could be observed, so that what appears is not a sequence but the semblance of simultaneity generated by the cut. A related objection might claim that such cuts could be generalised to any reading, and therefore say nothing singular about *Godot*. But this is to miss how the play’s very form - its alternation of dialogue and stage-directions, its refusal of connective narrative arcs or descriptive transitions - inscribes the cut as its own mode of appearance. As stressed earlier, what other texts presuppose and conceal, *Godot* literalises in its very fabric.

Estragon/Vladimir (Plessnerian) corporeality which, the moment it attempts to assert itself over the self, is pulled back again into the self's restraining breakability.

## VII. Estragon/Vladimir: Person-Stages of Substance as Subject

### 1. The Cut and the I-Relation

Unlike somatic theories of personal identity, which easily falter under the perdurantist framework of the Argument from Temporary Intrinsic (ATI), psychological or mentalist accounts are susceptible to more elaborate fragmentation. These accounts, which ground identity in psychological continuity, memory, belief, or first-person experience, are destabilized by Lewis's articulation of the I-relation: a relation of psychological connectedness and continuity that obtains not between enduring selves, but between distinct person-stages, that is, temporal parts of a continuant. Under this view, persistence is not a matter of diachronic identity in the strict Leibnizian sense, but of being appropriately I-related across time. Crucially, this non-identity repeats the same structural gap we encountered earlier in Lewis's account of *truth in fiction*, as reframed through Žižek, a gap that is not a defect but the very hinge by which admissible worlds, and admissible selves, appear coherent to Lewis without being complete. In *Godot*, that same hinge is mirrored in the signifying cut of stage-directions, where temporal slices of the play's world appear stitched into continuity without ontological fusion.

The problem began when Derek Parfit argued that what matters in survival is either identity or mental connectedness and continuity: "Identity is a one-one relation and does not admit of degree. But psychological connectedness and continuity do admit of degree. Therefore, what matters in survival can admit of degree, and so cannot be identity" (215). Parfit's argument displaces identity as the metaphysical ground of survival, replacing it with a graded, non-transitive relation of psychological continuity that better captures the phenomenology of persistence through change, fragmentation, and partial memory. Lewis, in his essay "Survival and Identity" (1983), reframes Parfit's debate by rejecting the very dichotomy between identity and psychological continuity. He argues that what Parfit calls psychological connectedness is not a rival to identity but a relation between temporal parts of persons, what he terms person-stages. Identity, by contrast, is a relation between continuant persons, which are aggregates of such stages. When one wonders, Lewis writes, "whether you will survive the battle, you wonder whether you - a continuant person consisting of your present stage along with many other stages - will continue beyond the battle" (5). The relation that binds these stages is not identity per se, but the "I-relation...the relation that holds between the several stages of a single continuant person" (5). He elaborates: "A continuant person is an aggregate of person-stages, each one I-related to all the rest (and to itself). For short: a person is an I-interrelated aggregate. And conversely, any maximal I-interrelated aggregate of person-stages is a continuant person" (6).

On the page, Vladimir and Estragon are not literal continuant persons in Lewis's metaphysical sense; they are semblances of mental states, structured by the gaps between them. Here, the I-relation's frame between person-stages operates through the signifying cut between stage-direction slices: it mediates appearance without supplying ontological wholeness. In this sense, Lewis's reframing not only dissolves the illusion of a singular, enduring self but also aligns structurally with *Godot's* modality of appearing "as if" its world - and its characters - perdure. This slicing, in *Godot*, extends not only to how Vladimir and Estragon appear, but to their very constitution as perduring aggregates. Temporal parts and person-stages, linked through Lewis's I-relation, articulate a reciprocity between the relativity of mental connectedness and the relativity of temporal parts, mutually constitutive only in relation to a four-dimensional somatic-mental whole. It is not enough, then, to have identified a somatic parthood interrupting the perduring Vladimir and Estragon through the structural contrast between movement ("Let's go") and stillness ("They do not move"), between Estragon's "joints" and Vladimir's "face." Mentally, too, they appear as person-stages of I-interrelated continuants whose extension exceeds *Godot's* two temporal frames. The challenge *Godot* poses to their mental connectedness and continuity directly echoes Lewis's observation that "if we left out any stages that were I-related to one another and to all the stages we included, then what we would have would not be a whole continuant person but only part of one" (6). *Godot* stages this partiality par excellence: the person-stage that is Vladimir (or Estragon) in Act I is I-related to that in Act II, connected both to their perduring selves and to the observed and unobserved person-stages of their wholes, however widely separated in time.

## 2. Speaking in Slices

Seen in this light, the familiar ascriptions - Vladimir as "the intellectual," Estragon as "the impulsive" - name not enduring essences but the contingent traits of particular temporal parts. Each act gives us only slices of their aggregates, and the perceived constancy of character is an interpretive stitching-together across cuts. To call Vladimir "the thinker" or Estragon "the doer" is to confuse the heuristic illusion of persistence with the ontological structure of the play on the page: a chain of discontinuous person-stages, connected by the I-relation, yet never present to us in full. This recognition generates a paradox that is not merely interpretive but heuristic. If these figures are aggregates, then their utterances are not the voice of unified selves but cross-sections of an unobservable whole. Their speech is not incomplete in the rhetorical mode of absurdism but already ontologically partial, suspended in the "as if" of their staged emergence. The apparent coherence of a speaker grounded in stable interiority is a projection invited by the I-relation heuristic, a projection the signifying cut interrupts at every turn. The 'absurdity' manifest in their behaviour is thus not theirs, but ours, the result of reading a mereological slice as if it bore the weight of a whole.

Looking at Vladimir, his "intellectual" gestures are often read as signs of philosophical depth. Such readings presuppose a diachronic continuity of thought that the text structurally denies. Vladimir does not endure through a single rational arc; he appears in discontinuous cognitive stages, each severed from the next by ellipses, pauses, and ruptures. The repetition of "resumes" in the stage-directions "He stops, broods, resumes... He stops, broods, resumes..." (79), does not depict a continuous speculation but marks the re-entry into a new stage of his I-related aggregate. Each resumption is not continuation but reinstantiation, incapable of retroactive unification with its

predecessor. This repetition is thus not persistence but interruption: the signifying cut reopens the self, and the speaker reappears, but not as the same. The page's juxtaposition of Vladimir's "moment of silence and motionlessness" with his subsequent "feverish movement" (53) is not a psychological oscillation but the visible seam between two distinct cognitive stages. Looking at the apparent transition from contemplation to agitation, it becomes an effect of the I-relation heuristic, a projection of persistence assembled from what the play's ontological structure withholds. Vladimir's reply to Estragon's "And now?" (81) "Now? ... (Joyous.) There you are again... (Indifferent.) There we are again... (Gloomy.) There I am again" (43), performs the cut in real time: the "you," the "we," and the "I" do not unfold along a continuous axis of subjectivity but reappear as separate person-stages, each fixed in an affective posture dispersed by the next. What we witness is not a stable perspective or a shifting tone, but a *relay of instantiations*, collapsing the difference between the speaker and the other into a sequence of I-related positions that replace images with words. Here, the "now" is not a temporal moment within a continuous flow, but a spatiotemporal cross-section of a four-dimensional being whose full extension the page can only partially disclose.

And while Estragon is equally subject to this ontological slicing, his speech, often dismissed as incoherent or impulsive, hints at an unmanifested intellect that, at times, exceeds Vladimir's. The remains of his utterances contain intellectual nodes, nascent points of expansive rumination, which aggregate with his initial yet accurate perception of seasonal change: "spring." Estragon, in fact, opens *Godot* with a profoundly existential observation, "Nothing to be done" (1), a line that frames the play's modular ontology. Later, his remark, "We are all born mad. Some remain so" (125), reads less as casual cynicism than as a distilled philosophical proposition that further shapes Vladimir's recourse to stories and songs. His laconic gaps may reveal an aggregate logic of order and resolution, as when he appears to reason: "Gogo light - bough not break - Gogo dead. Didi heavy - bough break - Didi alone. Whereas..." (17) but the elliptical syntax enacts an epistemological condensation, moving toward cause and consequence through rudimentary yet sharp material categories: weight, death, solitude. These slices root Estragon's aggregate engagement with existence in substance. i.e. turnips, carrots, etc., an immediacy of the physical that does not relinquish the conceptual but multiplies it: turnips rejected, carrots accepted, boots that do not fit.

### 3. *Substance Over Spirit*

This distilled I-related aggregate of Estragon enacts a semblance of Hegel's "substance as subject," not in the idealist register of self-overcoming Spirit, but in its Žižekian inversion: substance persisting in its intransigence, refusing sublation, even in the face of Vladimir's "spirit." Estragon's attachment to physical "things" is not a regression from Vladimir's philosophical posture but the inscription of thought into substance itself, its framing condition. Vladimir, for his part, appears as the idealist subject, a semblance of speculative agency whose "thinking" always arrives one slice too late: he re-grounds Estragon's utterances in songs, stories, proverbs, and metaphysical consolations, yet never generates thought *ex nihilo*. His philosophical positions are not constitutive, but reactive, a page-bound reconfiguration of Estragon's prior slice. In this sense, even when he appears to occupy the role of Spirit, it is Estragon who provides the *substance* into which he cuts. Vladimir thus reappears not as a sovereign subject but as Estragon's signifying residue, called forth whenever the bodily substrate breaks down. Estragon's intellect is not absent but unmanifested, and it is precisely in this

delay, caught as such on the page, that it resists the disembodied stylization of Vladimir's conclusive arc. Despite appearances, his intellectual nodes expose an aggregate of the very substrate that idealisation forecloses, transforming bodily preoccupation into a vector. His speech, its silences, and its fragments are not marks of falling short of articulation; they mark its ground zero "Nothing to be done", making *substance* speak only by momentarily assuming the *semblance of subject*.

It follows that Vladimir and Estragon, as part-stages, render any attempt at Cartesian closure not merely inadequate but conceptually incoherent. The illusion of a unified speaker, capable of expressing a stable self through speech, collapses under *Godot's* temporal fragmentation. Traditional pragmatic readings of Beckett's dialogue - whether as a mechanism for passing time (Oteiwy, 2012), a self-defeating communicative strategy (Robinson, 1969), or as Esslin's "devalued" yet semantically rich tool of expression - presuppose a speaker whose utterances are anchored in a synchronic, enduring self. In *Godot*, speech does not fail to disclose a hidden unity; it succeeds in staging the semblance of a unity through the very fragments that deny it. The spoken word here is not the expression of a whole self, but the inscription of temporal slices whose adjacency produces the *appearance* of coherence. In pragmatic theory, the "occasion of use" enjoys ontological privilege as meaning that is "worked out" rather than "looked up" (Cruse, 2006). Beckett inverts this: in a perduring *Godot*, "looking up" retrieves not the concealed totality of the speaker but the residual script of the signifying cuts, pauses, resumptions, ellipses, tonal shifts, through which the semblance of a speaker is then and only then generated. These residues are not clues pointing beyond themselves; they are the available ontology of the speaker in appearance *qua* appearance. Thus, when Mazhar Hayat reads Beckett's fragmented dialogue as "foregrounding" that conceals deeper intentions, he inadvertently reinstates the very coherence that the text dismantles. The "foregrounded" utterance hides nothing; it offers only the semblance of a whole that can never appear as a whole.

Vladimir's narration of the thieves' story, "One of the thieves was saved. (...). It's a reasonable percentage. (...). Gogo..." (11), is not a failed communicative act but a temporal fragment whose seeming narrative continuity depends entirely on the signifying cuts that hold it apart from its absent stages. *Godot* resists pragmatic recuperation by showing that speech is not the cause of self-revelation but the semblance of a self that is assembled from the residue of its own dispersal, a semblance that is not an illusion to be pierced, but the very truth of what appears. The speech itself makes this clear: its fragments are strung together as if narrating an event, yet each ellipsis cuts short any progression that would establish coherence. "One of the thieves was saved" gestures toward a theological frame, but the interpolation "It's a reasonable percentage" shifts the register abruptly to a statistical calculation, and the trailing address "Gogo" dissolves the narrative altogether into direct address. Rather than unfolding as a continuous story, the passage exposes gaps in such continuity: each fragment marks a distinct temporal part, sutured together only by our projection of sequence. What looks like narration is therefore the very structure of semblance, where the self that speaks appears only in cuts that prevent its persistence.

### **VIII. Pozzo's Watch: Personal Time and the Semblance of Return**

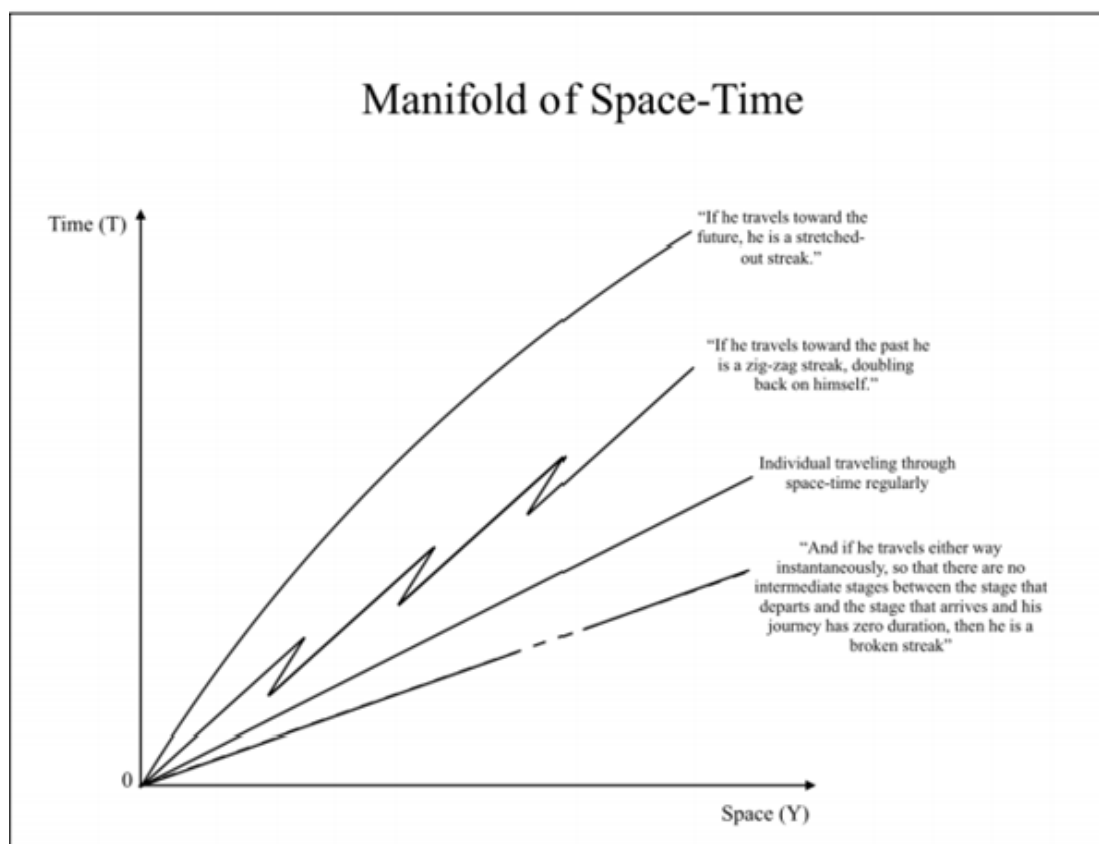
The second 'cut' aligning *Godot* with the doctrine of perdurantism appears in the stage direction "Pozzo is blind" (73), marking his re-entry in Act 2. At face value, this transformation recalls the manifestly absurd overnight growth of leaves on the tree, an event that, though temporally compressed, is nonetheless framed within a chronological sequence from "one day" to the "next." Yet whereas the tree's change can be received as a semblance interpolated across unobserved temporal parts, Pozzo's blindness offers no such continuous surface. It arrives already cleaved from any accessible temporal part, given instead as a residue within the dialogue, "one fine day as blind as Fortune" (83), that folds back onto the stage-direction naming him so. Where the tree remains 'silent' about its own time, Pozzo's blindness names its dislocation within speech, making the cut *legible*. Like Vladimir and Estragon, he reappears in the "next day" of the play's diegetic frame; unlike them, he voices a disorientation regarding temporality itself: "the blind have no notion of time" (93). The first question is not then when his blindness 'happened,' but how its appearance stages a conscious dislocation from time, rooted in the excess of the perduring subject over any single temporal frame.

To answer this, we should revisit Pozzo in Act I and examine how time appears for him on the page, in contrast to the semblances of time attached to Vladimir and Estragon. Unlike the latter pair, whose repetitive return to the "same place, same time" to wait for Godot sustains the illusion that "time has stopped" (33), Pozzo enters as a traveller, equipped with a "watch" and apparently certain that he has been travelling for six hours, a claim he immediately checks: "(consults his watch)." When Vladimir asks whether Lucky is truly his stooge ("A stooge?", Pozzo affirms: "Yes, a stooge... That was nearly sixty years ago,") again "(He consults his watch)" (21). More provocatively, he asks, "what happens in that case to your appointment with—Godot—Godin—anyhow you see who I mean, who has your future in his hands" (26), to which Vladimir, startled, responds: "How did you know?" While it is true that earlier the three had exchanged the name "Godot" after a moment of misrecognition - "You took me for Godot" (12) - that Estragon once called him "a kind of acquaintance," and Vladimir insisted "we hardly know him" (20), they never elaborated on Godot's identity. Vladimir's question "How did you know?" is thus directed at Pozzo's uncanny precision in naming Godot as holding "your future... your immediate future" (26). Pozzo offers no explanation, substituting instead what reads like a theatrical sleight of hand, slipping between past and future: "He speaks to me again. If this goes on much longer, we'll soon be old friends" (26). This recurrence of strange familiarity with Godot, coupled with his temporal self-measurement, scripts an anomalous relation to the play's frame of time, a relation that, in appearance, cuts across the act-division as if the world of *Godot* itself perdures through him.

The fact that Pozzo's "blindness" is unfolded in both dialogue and stage-directions, that he names Vladimir and Estragon's future without being told, distinguishing between immediate and distant horizons while collapsing the temporal contrast between "soon" and "old," opens the textually ramified semblance that he and Lucky move through the play as if they were not merely travellers but travellers through time. This semblance gains its interpretive traction from the way a perdurantist frame dissolves the traditional identity-based paradoxes that arise when a person appears at multiple points in non-linear sequence. In "The Paradoxes of Time Travel" (1976) Lewis asks, "What is time travel?", to which he answers: "Inevitably, it involves a discrepancy between time and time" (1). At first glance, Lewis's formulation might suggest two separate times or dimensions - one belonging to the traveller, one to us - but this is not so. For Lewis, "a time traveller, like anyone else, is a streak through the manifold of space-time, a whole composed of stages located

at various times and places" (2). The difference lies in how those stages are distributed: for the time traveller, non-contiguously across the "four-dimensional manifold of events." The manifold is not split into separate worlds; it is one world - ours and the traveller's alike - where "time is one dimension of the four, like the spatial dimensions" (1).

So, what is the difference between us and time travellers with regard to persistence in time? Lewis's answer is disarmingly simple: "The only difference is that whereas a common person is connected and continuous with respect to external time, the time traveller is connected and continuous only with respect to his own personal time" (3). This distinction between external and personal time is not between two separate dimensions of time, but between two frames of observation within time itself: "external time as I shall also call it, from the personal time of a particular time traveller: roughly, that which is measured by his wristwatch" (my emphasis) (2). External time is the global time along which the traveller's temporal parts are arranged; personal time is the measure of change for travellers themselves as they move through that manifold. For Lewis, personal time belongs to the traveller; external time belongs to the "bystanders" (2). These two times are thus the spatiotemporal correlates linking the traveller's temporal parts to the four-dimensional manifold of events. The traveller's "streak" is unlike that of a bystander: not a straight line, but a zigzag through the manifold, moving back and forth across the linear dimension. Lewis diagrams these possible streaks - into the past, into the future - and gives the example of a traveller moving both ways simultaneously:



Forward time travel, backward time travel and simultaneous back and forth time travel illustrated on a spacetime Cartesian plane (146)

In this semblance of “time” in *Godot*, Pozzo can be read as occupying the position of the time traveller, with the tramps as his bystanders, figuring personal and external time, respectively. This “time” should be read not as the lived duration of complete subjects but as a product of the active signifying cut, where dialogue and stage-directions together fold personal and external time into the semblance of travel. Pozzo’s blindness becomes the hinge for this fold, suturing the two times as if they belonged to a coherent traveller. The first fold in time between them emerges in Pozzo’s uncanny knowledge of Vladimir’s and Estragon’s “future,” a knowledge that seems to have been acquired along his own personal time intersecting with the tramps’ external time. At some point in time, before *or* after the first act, he was or will have been a “stretched out streak”, far enough to graze an encounter with Godot himself. Estragon’s later remark, “He could see into the future” (62), captures the truth of this appearance: not a literal metaphysical claim, but a residue of temporal displacement as it is staged in the play’s own frame.

Now this unobserved encounter does not seem to go without apparent consequences. Hence, the second fold; Pozzo’s affectionate reply to Vladimir’s concern: “if this goes on much longer, we’ll soon be old friends” (18). This reply is more haunting than it sounds. The provisional contrast between “soon” and “old”, seemingly a rhetoric for the affectionate, opens a frame proper to the time-travel semblance. “Soon” and “old” are not opposed but overlaid in the present act of speaking. Time travelling can explain how the future, i.e. “soon” can be in the past, i.e. “old friends” at the time of the present enunciation: “we’ll soon be old friends”. Lewis captures this logic in his own formulation, “Soon he will be in the past” (2). Lewis contends that there is no contradiction in such saying insofar as “a stage of him is slightly later in his personal time, but much earlier in external time, than the stage of him that is present as we say the sentence” (2). In other words, Pozzo’s reply to Vladimir demands to be taken as appropriate for a time traveller who can “soon” be in his personal time to travel to meet the tramps in their “past” external time so that they can become “old friends”. Pozzo can “soon” travel to the past to become old friends with Vladimir and Estragon, displaying a “zigzag streak, doubling back on himself” (see fig.1). Pozzo’s cryptic remark, “If this goes on much longer” in response to Vladimir’s startled “How did you know?” thus reveals more than an anecdotal deflection. It reveals an alternative temporal action that Pozzo would rather, and can, take instead of answering Vladimir’s question, which would inevitably entail disclosing what else he has seen. Whatever Pozzo has seen or encountered in the “future,” whether immediate or distant, compels him to go “back on himself” in order to *perpetuate* the waiting.

All of this remains possible within the play’s time-travel semblance, provided a traveller can coordinate between personal and external time, a coordination Lewis analogises to the keeping of “personal time” by a “wristwatch”, the device that anchors departure and arrival to precise stages. Pozzo’s possession of a “watch” thus acquires a formal significance, and his words, “I need a running start” (33), spoken as he exits Act I, recall the preparatory ritual of aviators preparing for take-off. Yet the seeming control implied by this line is already undercut. Before his re-entry in Act II, we learn he has lost the very object that maintained his personal time: “What have I done with my watch? (He fumbles) A genuine half-hunter, gentlemen, with deadbeat escapement. (He sobs) ’Twas my granpa gave it to me” (32). The loss fractures his link between personal and external time, and with it the capacity to calibrate a return. His earlier “running start” is retrospectively framed as the last

movement before this disconnection. Now he is no longer able “to depart” (33).

The path into Act II is thus marked by this semblance of losing one’s personal time. Without his “watch,” Pozzo appears unmoored within the play’s four-dimensional manifold where the coordinates linking personal and external time have collapsed. When the stage direction announces “Pozzo is blind” upon his second entrance, it is not to be read as the chronological result of a prior temporal part, but as belonging to some displaced part - *a past in the future, or a future in the past* - rendered inaccessible once personal time could no longer be measured. The blindness thus condenses a history of “stretched out streaks,” “zigzag streaks,” and “broken streaks” in the very void of his “straight line” (see fig.1), leaving him unable to tell whether he stands in the tramps’ past or future: “I don’t remember having met anyone yesterday. But tomorrow I won’t remember having met anyone today” (65). His claim to have awoken “as blind as Fortune” reads less as metaphysical fact than as the bad fortune of this temporal dislocation. When asked when Lucky went “dumb,” his reply gathers all such moments into one folded instant:

When! When! One day, is that not enough for you, one day like any other day, one day he went dumb, one day I went blind, one day we’ll go deaf, one day we were born, one day we’ll die, the same day, the same second, is that not enough for you? They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it’s night once more.

It might be enough for the bystanders to take Pozzo’s words with a grin, without questioning, assuming they know little about what such a loss means within external time, their own time, and assuming they have never time-travelled before. But Pozzo’s loss is our gain. In his words, we can infer the formal coordinates of persistence in spacetime, where past, present, and future are all equally real. Elaborating on Lewis’s rejection of time as ontologically special, Zan Bhullar explains:

Traveling to the ‘past’ or ‘future’... is not like traveling to another world, so to speak; but metaphorically similar to fast forwarding or rewinding through a movie. The location of each event is fixed and unchanging, and they run earlier or later than one another (3).

Time is extrinsic for perduring time travellers. So, when Pozzo remarks, “one day we were born, one day we shall die” (66), he is not simply referring to a linear chronology in which birth precedes death. Within the perdurantist frame, change is not governed by the passage of time from yesterday to today, in the form of a self wholly present at each moment. Rather, the self - or here, the semblance of a self, is distributed across time, composed of distinct temporal parts. For any given temporal part, existing on “this” day, at “this” hour, in “this” moment, “one day” refers to the same ontological plane, because dates, epochs, and eras are merely extrinsic to being itself. In *Godot*, the “cradle” and the “grave,” life and death, are not sequential but simultaneous, folded into view by the signifying cut that joins and separates personal from external time. They coexist ontologically, not as stages in a process, but as parts of a four-dimensional whole. We are not linear beings moving through time, but rather spacetime worms, entities extended across time just as we are across space. And like light that “gleam[s] an instant, then it’s night once more” (89), we flicker from part to part, never wholly present, always partially revealed.

## IX. Lucky's Rope: Foreclosed Coordination and Temporal Drift

Much has been written about the symbolic function of the "rope" in *Godot*, particularly in relation to the master–slave dynamic between Pozzo and Lucky. The rope by which Pozzo directs Lucky to move, speak, or even think, is often read as a material signifier of domination. But with a perduring semblance of Lucky, the rope pulls on an additional dimension. If time travel requires the coordination of personal time with external time - a coordination that, as Lewis suggests, demands a "watch" to navigate the four-dimensional manifold - then Lucky's rope becomes the inverse of such a device. He is bound not by a watch that could orient him, but by a rope "passed round [his] neck" (26) which Pozzo "pulls" across his own temporal displacements. Lucky is thus denied the instrument of self-coordination, forced instead to traverse temporal coordinates without the epistemic or existential grounding personal time affords. In this way, Lucky appears less as a willing traveller than as a semblance pulled through time against his own orientation, his movements registering a dislocation that is perceptible but never grounded in his own control.

Within the semblance of Lucky as a traveller displaced from personal time, his notorious speech can be approached more fundamentally than the colloquial label of "nonsense" allows. In Lucky's monologue, we encounter what Chadwick calls a "senseless torrent of words" or a "meaningless jumble of words" (257). The speech moves through a disorienting cascade of proper names, "Miranda," "Steinweg and Peterman," "Connemara", alongside incoherent references to motion and velocity, "intermittent is better than nothing but not so fast", derisive phonetic fragments ("quaquaquaqua, Anthropopometry, Essy-in-Possy"), and parodic academic jargon: "Acacacademy," "wastes and pines," "in spite of...the practice of sports...penicillin and succedanea" (29). These elements, delivered without syntactic cohesion or punctuation, form an alternative linguistic manifold that resists temporal parsing. In a semblance where Lucky appears as a traveller without personal time, the speech reads less as illogical improvisation than as a verbal surface registering the drift of orientation itself. Its fragmentation, recursion, and absence of temporal self-location are not the symptoms of an inner consciousness, but the formal traces of a figure pulled through coordinates without the means to anchor them in personal time.

This "loose" inscription of temporality in Lucky's speech cannot but reinvoke Lacan into the conversation, particularly through the lens of the *point de capiton* (quilting point), the structural mechanism by which the otherwise infinite deferral of meaning is momentarily arrested. As Lacan articulates in *Seminar III*, the quilting point is "the point at which the signifier stops the otherwise endless sliding of signification." This halting is not the result of a linear progression from sound-image to content, from space to another space, nor from one time to another in the endurance of a single temporal self. It is constituted retroactively through *nachträglichkeit*, a deferred progression whereby content is stabilized only once the progression terminates. In spatial terms, it is the temporal release of personal time from an atemporal tension across the personal time/external time manifold. Within this framework, Pozzo's watch assumes the structural function of a quilting point in spacetime, the nodal point that retroactively confers meaning on the subject once he/she gets sewn to it. It does not signify a present moment in itself but operates as a coordinator between external (objective) and personal (subjective) temporalities once time has been traversed as such.

What Lucky encounters in his rope, in place of any analogous “watch,” is thus a structural exclusion from this temporal coordination, pushed toward an extreme case of atemporal tension. The absent watch here functions as the signifier of foreclosure, the foreclosure of the symbolic operator that would mediate between personal and external time. In the rope is staged the projection of that exclusion: the Name-of-the-Father displaced, the absent quilting point that would otherwise bind his temporal experience and hold the sliding of personal into external time in check. The result is a semblance that appears *as if* psychotic: a figure whose relation to time is unregulated, and whose utterance bears the marks of a symbolic failure to anchor temporal experience. As Lacan observes of psychosis, “the unconscious is present but not functioning” (203). For Lucky, time is “there,” but inaccessible. His speech, while present, is disarticulated; he cannot be sewn into the Name-of-the-Father and instead encounters its absence as a “chain” around his arm. In this way, Lucky’s monologue is not simply a symptom but the enactment of the very failure of symbolic anchoring - an endless, circular suturing over a gap already foreclosed - producing the appearance of a temporally dislocated subject moving through the warped folds of the play’s spacetime.

## **X. The Boy: From Slice to Possible World**

The appearance of the Boy in *Godot* marks a turning-point in the logic we have been tracing. The Boy appears in every act of *Godot* and every act bears the same result. But his reappearance in each act does not merely repeat a character across two slices of a world, it produces a split in appearance itself. On the page he is named identically by the stage direction “Boy enters”, and yet in dialogue he insists that it was not him who came ‘yesterday’. This superimposition of affirmation and denial, of sameness and refusal, is the precursor for a logical incommensurability in appearance qua appearance. What matters here is not what the “Boy” signifies, but that the signifier itself collapses at the moment of recurrence: a nametag that returns as dead, and a speech-act that voids the continuity it presupposes. This stage-direction/dialogue exchange thus constitutes a virtual performance on the page as a self-interruptive event that refuses to be folded smoothly into the dramatic logic of what comes before, whether one treats the play as a continuity of action or of interpretation. At this point the signifying cut is pushed to its outermost consequence: rather than slicing a single four-dimensional world into temporal parts, it multiplies the world by two irreconcilable appearances under a single name. At this cut, we do not witness the endurance of a perduring Boy; we witness the production of possible worlds.

To be sure, it is difficult to decipher whether the speech prefix “Boy” refers to the first or second brother in both acts, that is, whether the signifier “Boy” denotes one or two referents. Vladimir’s sympathetic concern, “You don’t know me?” (70), “Do you not recognise me?” (146) and the Boy’s repeated “no” in each act cancel out any possibility of positive identification. Even more unlikely is the reductive suggestion that the Boy has a twin but shares physical characteristics too indiscernible for Vladimir to distinguish. There are two Boys, one tends the sheep, the other the goats, but standing as it is, it does not resolve the complication. Particularly in Act 1, we learn that the Boy also came “yesterday”; “It wasn’t you came yesterday?” (70). Yet the Boy continues to deny it, affirming in each act that it is his “first time” (pp. 35, 67). An affirmative “yes” or “no” would have been

expected at least once across the three known encounters. Unless we invoke some ethical concerns regarding the Boy/s, the contradiction remains. Nor has the Boy aged in any of his appearances much to the dismay of Vladimir, hence, again, the stage-direction/prefix "Boy". It is also unhelpful to argue that the Boy is a time traveller who enters Act 1 or Act 2 from either the past or the future. His arrival from an external time would not negate his being the same person, provided he possesses a personal time of I-related continuity and connectedness. And even if he is, there is no indication that he has what it takes, a 'watch', to coordinate between personal and external time. Nor is he Lucky. As it stands, the Boy's identity remains ambiguous.

If we follow this modal opening, then Lewis's theory of possible worlds resupplies the ontological backdrop against which the Boy's multiplication must be read. As we acknowledged, for Lewis possible worlds are not abstract hypotheticals or linguistic constructs but fully concrete realities, as real as ours, differing not in kind but only in content:

When I profess realism about possible worlds, I mean to be taken literally. Possible worlds are what they are, and not some other thing... I can only ask [the questioner] to admit that he knows what sort of thing our actual world is, and then explain that other worlds are more things of that sort, differing not in kind but only in what goes on at them (85).

On this view, "actuality" is not a metaphysical privilege but an indexical standpoint: each world is actual for those who inhabit it, just as each inhabitant calls their own place "here" and their time "now". Thus, the question "*might the Boy have been the same?*" is not a conjecture about a fictional deviation but a modal shift toward another concrete world in which an analogue of the Boy occupies a structurally similar role. As Alexander Rosenberg elaborates:

What makes all possible worlds but ours merely possible, as opposed to actual, is that we are not in any of them: none of their parts are spatiotemporally related to me or you... though all of each possible world's parts are spatiotemporally related to each of its other parts (1).

This modal framework of persistence across possible worlds stands in direct opposition to theories of "trans-world identity," which posit that a single individual can exist across multiple possible worlds. Such a view, while intuitively appealing, collapses under the weight of what Lewis terms "the problem of accidental intrinsics." This is exemplified in the well-known Humphrey case:

Hubert Humphrey has (in the actual world) five fingers on his left hand. But it is not a necessary fact that Hubert Humphrey has five fingers on his left hand. That is, Humphrey could have had six fingers on his left hand. The property "having exactly (n) fingers on one's left hand" is an accidental intrinsic property. The property "having five fingers on one's left hand" and the property "having six fingers on one's left hand" are both accidental intrinsic properties. (Sider 2006; Placek 2012; Eilstein 2013)

Trans-world identity entails that the same individual possesses different properties in different worlds, thereby introducing the problem of accidental intrinsics, further destabilizing the question of

identity. To avoid this logical misplacement, Lewis proposes that individuals do not exist in more than one world. Instead, each world contains its own distinct individuals, and modal claims about what someone “could have been” are made true by the existence of counterparts - similar but non-identical individuals - in other worlds. As Lewis writes:

I believe that we speak truly when we say that things might have been otherwise than they are. I analyse this by quantifying over possible worlds. But I do not think that anything is in more than one world. So, I analyse de re modal predications by means of counterparts (39)<sup>30</sup>.

The sequel of this reading promises a series of narrative recuperations not only for the Boy and his commensurable dwellers, particularly Vladimir but also for *Godot*. It compels the recognition that whenever the stage-direction/prefix “Boy” appears, *Godot* is not repeating a scene but splitting into another possible world. Across the two acts we are therefore dealing not with two temporal slices of a single perduring world, but with two distinct possible worlds, each actual on its own terms. In these two worlds, inhabitants are *not* identical but counterparts. They are the same *only* as counterparts. Not temporally continuous but ontologically parallel, each inhabiting a distinct world, each actual within its own spatiotemporal frame. Moreover, the relation between the Boy in Act I and the Boy in Act II is grounded in similarity, not continuity. The Boy’s denial is only indexical of what he conceives of ‘himself’ or of ‘himself in the world’ he thinks to be actual. Lastly, and more importantly, it allows a reordering of his manifestly contradictory exchanges with Vladimir while maintaining the fact that there are two boys. In each possible world (Act), ontologically isolated from the other, Vladimir misrecognises the Boy because he might have seen his twin brother who *came* “yesterday”, and so the Boy’s “first time” emerges as true. This resolves the Boy’s apparent contradiction without collapsing his identity. In each possible world, the same conversation would *not* repeat *even* if its counterpart did.

The upshot then is that where the stage-direction “Boy” appears in *Godot*, the latter moves into *possibilia*. A modal frame into a perduring frame that marks a temporal slice *without* stitching. A furthered cut from Estragon’s carved “joints” and Vladimir’s interrupted “laugh” to the “Boy” that can *only* appear on page as such. “Boy” does not become a stage-direction of the “identical” but of the “counterpart”, not depicting repetition but enacting it. It ceases to function as a marker of identity and becomes instead a modal operator or an index of divergence, a signal that *Godot* can once again enter a new instantiation of its own existential grammar. Within this grammar, the existential appears “as if” it is modal. It reties *Godot*, however minimally, to its existential doctrine, but this time through *the* blind spot between actual possible worlds. This modal divergence is not traversed *by the characters*, but *by us*, who move from one act to the next as if time-travelling across worlds. The signifying cut on the page here allows the reader to elide what Lewis insists must remain disjointed: we bear witness, fleetingly, to the internal time of two distinct possible worlds, stitched only in the moment of reading. We are not watching time flow within a world, but *travelling between worlds on the page as such*. Modally, the “Boy” fractures the continuity of time and self

---

<sup>30</sup> A de re modal statement concerns how a particular object itself might have been, as opposed to a de dicto modal statement, which concerns what is possibly the case according to a description or proposition. The present discussion is concerned with de re modality insofar as it bears on the persistence and variation of dramatic entities themselves, rather than with de dicto claims about what is true of the play under alternative descriptions or readings.

from a realistic disposition (from *disponere* "to arrange"), not by a certain qualification of persistence, but by its dispersion across discrete, non-overlapping segments of existence. Repetition becomes not a return but a reappearance, each instance a temporal part, ontologically sealed but structurally resonant. Like "Boy" it does not invoke existential repetition but enacts it, and lest we forget, *partially*.

## **XI. Conclusion: The Stage Direction as Event and the Spectatorial Split**

The present chapter has unfolded the third fissure in the schematic of this thesis: the spectatorial split. If the authorial split was disclosed through the dialectic of gaze and voice, and the referential split through the unstable inscription of stage-directions as referential artefacts, the spectatorial split names the impossibility of reconciling page and stage as objects of spectatorship. Drama is always doubled between the text that can be read and the performance that can be seen, but the very directions that would appear to mediate this passage exacerbate rather than resolve the fracture. Stage-directions mark the site where spectatorship itself divides: the eye of the reader imagines a "theatre of the mind," while the body of the spectator anticipates a scene whose conditions are continually deferred. This split is not supplementary but constitutive. The dramatic artefact no longer grounds itself in presence—neither the presence of authorial intention, nor the presence of theatrical performance—but in the impossibility of such presence, a split that persists precisely in its undecidability.

This spectatorial split complicates the ambitions of Poetic Drama, the tradition that sought to recuperate the text of drama as a privileged site of aesthetic experience. By elevating the act of reading over the imperfections of performance, that school transfigured the dramatic work into a form of literary poetry, a drama of the imagination more complete and pure than any theatrical staging could ever offer. Its strategies rested on the promise of close reading, extracting from the text a density of meaning that the stage was thought incapable of sustaining. Yet what this chapter has shown is that the very features Poetic Drama celebrated—the richness of reading, the sufficiency of the page, the imagined theatre of the mind—are themselves structured by fracture. The stage direction does not offer a secure passage into a "better production" in imagination; it inscribes the impossibility of production as such. The play does not resolve into the wholeness of dramatic poetry but persists as an artefact in which voice and direction, presence and absence, body and semblance, are all fractured by the cuts that make them appear. If Poetic Drama idealised the literary as superior to the theatrical, *Godot* exposes the instability of that very hierarchy, showing that the page itself is no less split than the stage.

The central claim of this chapter has been that *Godot* appears strange not because of what happens in it, but because of how it allows anything to appear at all. Its recursive temporality, its refusal of narrative culmination, and its semantic fragmentation are not thematic flourishes of absurdism but consequences of the stage direction as operator. The dramatic page does not stage continuity; it stages cuts. Each act, each direction, each pause and stillness functions as a signifying incision through which time and subjectivity appear only in fragments. "They do not move," "Next day. Same time. Same place," "The tree has four or five leaves": these are not neutral notations but operators

of semblance, coordinates that distribute what can be seen and said without themselves belonging to the world they frame. The absurdity of *Godot* lies not in its lack of meaning but in its structuration of appearance, its inscription of a world as if whole through slices that deny its wholeness.

In this light, the long tradition of reading Beckett through the categories of the absurd, or through existential despair, appears displaced. Absurdity in *Godot* is not thematic but structural. It is not the plight of Vladimir and Estragon that secures the play's absurdity, but the conditions by which their world can be accessed at all. Each gesture, each utterance, each silence is not the mark of a subject revealed but the semblance of a subject produced through the cut. The "characters" of *Godot* are not enduring selves but person-stages, temporal parts of a four-dimensional manifold whose completeness can never be given in a single view. Estragon flickers into semblance through falls that never quite occur, limbs that almost collapse, fragments of speech that trail into silence. Vladimir's face appears only in stifled laughter, in smiles that surface without duration, in contortions that reveal expression only in its suppression. Pozzo and Lucky traverse the stage as if through folds of personal and external time, their rope and watch staging the coordinates of travel and dislocation. The Boy fractures the play into distinct possible worlds, each actual in its own terms, his reappearance staging not identity but counterpart relations. Together, these figures show that *Godot* does not depict subjects but the slicing of subjectivity itself.

This reading has required the grafting of two philosophical frameworks: Lewis's modal realism and perdurantism, and Žižek's theory of the signifier. Lewis provided the ontological license to treat fictional texts as selectors of possible worlds, worlds that are concrete, complete, and admissible so long as their internal logic is coherent. Perdurantism gave us the metaphysical vocabulary to describe persistence not as enduring wholeness but as temporal extension through parts. Žižek revealed the structural lacuna in Lewis's account, the absent theory of the signifier, which makes possible the very appearance of worlds through cuts and repetitions. Stage-directions emerge here as the operators that fill this lacuna: not ontic entities within the fictional world, but formal signifying cuts that structure how the world appears to us. The strangeness of *Godot* does not belong to its ontology but to its access, to the parallax between a world that is stable and the fragments through which it becomes visible. The consequence is that stage-directions must be reconceived not as theatrical supplements but as ontological artefacts. They do not merely annotate dialogue or guide performance; they inscribe the conditions under which presence can appear. They are the sites where drama thinks. The opposition between dialogue and direction collapses; what is said is always already framed by what is staged, and what is staged is always already conditioned by what is sliced to be framed. The tension between "Let's go" and "They do not move" is not a contradiction in content but an articulation of this structural split: the play can only show stasis by slicing away the possibility of motion, leaving the semblance of stillness as residue. The growth of leaves on the tree is not an index of time passed within the world but the effect of a new entry point, a new slice of access. The Boy's denial of his own recurrence does not mark a failure of memory but the multiplication of worlds under a single name. What appears as absurdity or impossibility is the truth of the cut itself.

## Conclusion: The Ghost-Script of Theatre

### I. Opening Restatement

The wager of this thesis has been that stage-directions, more than being marginal, supplementary, or inert components of the playscript, disclose something fundamental about the ontology of Drama itself. What first appears as a mere apparatus for theatrical facilitation, indications for actors, notations for readers - visual or verbal - emerges under closer scrutiny as the site where Drama's "split in the One" comes most forcefully into view on page as such. Neither reducible to the literary, nor dissolvable into the theatrical, stage-directions insist as the parallax hinge through which the very distinction between page and stage is dramatized. They are at once too literary for performance and too performative for literature, and it is precisely in this excess that their philosophical potency lies. The opening problem of the thesis - the "other of the other" that stage-directions name - can now be seen as not simply a matter of textual self-reflexivity or performance residue, but as the locus of drama's constitutive fracture. Stage-directions dramatize drama itself: they expose the gap between signification and enactment, between inscription and apparition, between the seen and the said. If dramatic dialogue unfolds as the play's visible and audible surface on stage, stage-directions inscribe a substructure, one that cannot be assimilated into either narrative progression or theatrical actualization in a contention between audibility and visibility as such. This constitutive excess is not accidental. It is the mark by which Drama both belongs to and exceeds the categories through which it has been theorized.

In tracing this problem across traditions, this thesis has named three principal fissures through which stage-directions manifest Drama's divided status: the authorial split, the referential split, and the spectatorial split. These are not merely classificatory distinctions, nor are they reducible to stylistic tendencies. Together they act like Drama's Borromean knot. Each fissure discloses a different torsion in dramatic form, one that both reveals and complicates the vantage points from which Drama is approached: none is behind or ahead of the other. The authorial split, treated through Elizabethan Drama, and particularized through *The Winter's Tale* exposed the dramatist's divided presence in the playtext, suspended between authority and absence, inscription and performance. The referential split, read through Shaw's *Heartbreak House*, revealed how stage-directions corrupt or displace their own referents, producing an unstable relation between text and object, supplement and frame. The spectatorial split, articulated through Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, demonstrated how stage-directions fracture the very act of perception, slicing time and presenting the play's world as at once continuous and segmented, whole and partial. These three fissures do not cohere into a seamless system; rather, they map the contours of an incompleteness that is constitutive of the dramatic text. What emerges, then, is not a stable ontology of Drama but a recursive one, an ontology whose very persistence is bound to its partiality and excess. This is why stage-directions are indispensable to any philosophy of Drama: they materialize, with intractable clarity, the irreducible kernel of Drama to literature or performance, narration or enactment, presence or absence. They are the place where these oppositions coincide without collapse.

Such a restatement also discloses the methodological wager of this project. To approach stage-directions not merely as para-texts, extra-texts or meta-texts, and not as narrative statements per se, but as fractures in the dramatic edifice and its very possibility, has required holding open the very tensions that dramatic theory has often sought to close. The impulse to domesticate stage-directions - whether through semiotic taxonomies, narratological classifications, or pragmatic accounts of performance - can now be seen as itself symptomatic of the dramatic tension stage-directions generate. For if Drama is to be read not as a seamless whole but as a site of constitutive disjunction, then it is precisely in the resistance of stage-directions to being easily absorbed into theory that their significance resides. The conclusion of the thesis, therefore, cannot simply be a summation of findings chapter by chapter, nor a reduction of examples to abstract theses. It must instead return to the paradox from which the work began and show how the traversal of authorial, referential, and spectatorial fissures reconfigures the very terrain of dramatic thought. What has been disclosed is not an additional feature of dramatic writing, but the condition by which Drama inscribes itself as a philosophical 'thing'. To conclude here is not to resolve the paradox, but to insist upon its resistance to resolution, to affirm that Drama's ontology is constituted in its becoming performance, which stage-directions put on display as 'another' performance, as another story of the dramatic text.

## II. Synthesis of Findings

Across the trajectory of this thesis, stage-directions have appeared less as accessories to interpretations of Drama than as pressures that reframe Drama itself, spatially and temporally, between page and stage. The itinerary has never been a parade of examples, but a tightening of a single claim under three exposures: a stain where authorship folds against itself; an artefactual density where objects thicken into writing; a cut in time where perception finds its rhythm from the interval. The result is not a synthesis that heals the split, nor a neutral description of abeyance; it is a cartography of the 'missed encounter', drawn from the page outward, where the page gives shows the stage its horizon while keeping the passage towards it endlessly delayed

The Elizabethan fissure names the first figure of this delay. Contentious directions -permissive, elliptical, apparently contradictory - gather on the page as torsions rather than attempted clarifications or incidental quirks, as marks in which the dramatist's authority does not so much vanish as reappear as stains. The page bears the dramatist's hand in a way that does not guarantee legibility yet refuses to let the hand disappear: a presence that insists but only as a remainder. This Elizabethan aperture finds its emblem in the notorious direction, "Exit, pursued by a bear." Far from spectacle or allegory, this inscription condenses the dramatist's dispersed stains into an image, like the skull in Holbein's painting, raising the dramatist's lost object to the dignity of the Thing. What it stages is not an animal per se but a cut through space and time: the coast of Bohemia rendered as estimate geography, at once inside and outside the play's world. Antigonus is chased into absence and the entire temporal architecture of the play turns on this cut, propelling its movement from winter to summer. The page does not simply provide a cue for performance; it inscribes an interval where space is made uncanny and time accelerates. The dramatist's figure persists here not as sovereign presence but as a stain seen askew, hedged between inscription and enactment, animated in the very remainder that marks emptiness.

Shaw's house opens the second fissure, where the pressure shifts from the dramatist to artefact. Ship-architecture, carpenter's bench, wicker and teak, a catalogue whose promise of objects turns into a grammar of spacing. The opening direction does not describe a space; it begins the labour by which space is written into being and, in being written, acquires a thickness irreducible to prop or backdrop. Each item - sofa, chair, table - becomes a hinge through which matter and text weave into each other, leaving behind a parergonal rim that neither collapses into a scene nor floats away from it. Space here is not the container into which action is placed; it is the effect of inscription by which the object endorses action. Time follows suit: the house does not simply host the acts; it slows them, diverts them, subjects them to a sequence of textual hesitations in which the text passes through another sequence. Reading, under these conditions, is not a quiet transfer from the page to an imagined stage; it is a navigation through writing where the thing invoked folds back into description and the description advances as thing. The object referred to does not dissolve by the sign which carries the weight of reference but persists in a text as its own surplus, and the surplus is exactly what holds the scene together. The dramatic page, again, realizes and withholds at once - realizes by furnishing, withholds by thickening - so that the missed encounter becomes spatially legible: architecture is staged as inscription, and inscription is felt as architecture's first architect.

Beckett gathers the third figure by turning the pressure on spacetime itself until its joints are audible. "They do not move." "The tree has four or five leaves." "Next day. Same time. Same place." Each notation behaves less like a cue than like a cut: an incision through which the world appears in parts, where recurrence is reframed as reappearance rather than return. The spectator is caught by these cuts: attention is made to wait, to count, to hear the difference between a pause and stillness, to see the interval elevated to the dignity of a unit. What is present in the act does not extend by continuity; it persists by slices whose edges the page condenses and expands. Space follows this temporal grammar. "Same place" arrives as a written sameness that has to be reconstructed anew, a sameness not measured by an actual space anymore than by the page's own coordinates. Characters lean into this metric: Vladimir and Estragon gather as semblances that hold together across the cut without fullness beyond it; Pozzo and Lucky traverse the scene as if their passage belonged less to a road than to a sequence of time-travel; the Boy returns as a sign that both repeats and resets the scale anew. The spectatorial split is felt here in the body's relation to inscription: the theatre of the mind is directed by marks that are already performances of time. The page does not merely indicate when action changes; it composes the tempo by which an action can appear at all. The missed encounter in this register is no longer between a command and its staging or between an object and its place; it is between a flow one expects to receive and the cut one must learn to read.

Placed together, these three exposures do not cancel one another, nor do they compete for primacy. They accumulate a single contour. In each case the dramatic page acts as the first stage: a place where the gesture toward performance is enacted as a delayed performance; a place where space is built by writing that builds a rim of surplus around the thing it builds; a place where time is measured by incisions that give recurrence its shape. To call the page the first stage is not to elevate reading above performance; it is to acknowledge the law under which performance must pass, a law which is itself a performance. The page reframes the missed encounter by giving it form—stain, rim, cut—and by distributing these forms across the two dimensions that theatre cannot relinquish: space and time. Authority appears in the stain because the page brings space under a mark that will

not lift; architecture appears as writing because the page spaces the scene with a surplus that cannot be exhausted; perception appears as rhythm because the page cuts time into intervals that carry their own weight. To think Drama through stage-directions is thus to think how realization is bound to withhold, how presence is patterned by remainder, how the way a world appears is inseparable from the marks that pace its arrival.

### **III. Contribution**

What this thesis offers, in its most general sense, is a way of thinking Drama that refuses Oneness or its cognates, however innovative their theoretical closures happen to be. The fractures disclosed by stage-directions are not symptoms to be repaired, nor puzzles awaiting solution, but conditions of possibility for the dramatic form itself. To articulate this claim is to make a series of interventions across the prevalent domains of thought, each of which has traditionally sought to stabilize the latter by assigning stage-directions a place of interpretive comfort. By dwelling instead in their resistance to such placement, this thesis contributes not a new classification but a reconfiguration. In the field of speech-act theory, pretence emerges not as an aberration of language but as the form through which its force becomes legible. Stage-directions put this schema on display. Their force belongs to the fictional frame that sustains them. They are anchored in the dramatic text, at the same time filling the void opened by the stage's absence. Enactment appears as promise and remainder rather than as a result of 'recipe'. What seems like instruction is already performative in the very act of writing: the page stages itself in advance, producing efficacy through the very delay that withholds its completion. This logic of pretense is not a dilution of performative force but its condition: the act is doubled from the outset, appearing as if realized as it remains suspended. Stage-directions disclose this doubling, showing that the gap between saying and doing is not a deviation to be explained away but the interval in which the performative takes shape. The dramatic page unsettles the assumption that performative utterances rest on sincerity or felicity, revealing instead that their efficacy depends on form, on the recursive act of inscribing what can never coincide with itself. Force here is inseparable from the frame that houses it: the doing persists only through saying, and the act is legible only because pretense has already established the horizon in which it counts as an act at all. Stage-directions bring this recursion into view with an acuity no other form of writing sustains.

The field of Narratology receives a different kind of intervention. Here the problem has often been one of assimilation: how to treat stage-directions as though they were narrative statements, susceptible to the same taxonomies as the novel or the short story. Yet the readings pursued expose the limit of such analogies. Stage-directions do not simply narrate. They speak in a voice that is neither overt nor covert, neither wholly heterodiegetic nor fully embedded. They articulate a temporality that cannot be captured by the familiar grammar of story and discourse. What this thesis contributes, then, is not another adjustment within narratology's apparatus, but a demonstration that the apparatus itself encounters its blind spot on the dramatic page. Stage-directions disclose the point at which narratology must recognize its own performance, for they occupy a threshold where narrative categories collapse into a logic of fracture. In this way, the thesis positions stage-directions as a critical pressure on narratology, a reminder that its conceptual tools must be rethought when confronted with the dramatic form.

And finally, Philosophy. From Aristotle to Hegel, from aesthetics to phenomenology, philosophy has sought to situate Drama within its broader accounts of art, language, and form. Yet what is too often overlooked is the peculiar status of stage-directions, not as statements but as operators of disjunction. They resist aesthetic subsumption, refusing to be folded into the categories of mimesis, representation, or performance. Stage-directions are not objects upon which philosophy can simply apply its distinctions; they are visible sites from which philosophy is compelled to rehearse its own limits. They expose questions of ontology by staging being through fissure rather than through presence, they expose questions of temporality by inscribing time as cut and interval rather than as flow, and they expose the relation between sign and event by forcing the act to appear as both present inscription and deferred enactment. In this way stage-directions do not sit at the periphery of philosophical reflection but at its centre, as marks that trouble the very categories by which philosophy has sought to secure art, language, and form.

Taken together, these contributions delineate a terrain where critique and vantage coincide, not as abstractions but as marks displayed on the dramatic page. In the register of speech-act theory, stage-directions show how pretence structures force itself, giving visible contour to a doubleness: the act is anchored in fiction in advance, already performed in the very guise of instruction. In narratology, they display the fissure by which discourse dictates story, and where inscription resists assimilation to either plane. In philosophy, they press against distinctions of sign and event, form and presence, not to dissolve them but to show their endurance as fractures: being glimpsed as stain, temporality marked as cut, the relation of word to act stretched along a gap that does not close. These critiques do not hover in theory alone; they acquire shape and density because the page stages them visually and materially, giving them the form of spacing, direction, remainder. The dramatic page is not inert backdrop but hinge, the first stage on which these discourses turn, and from which their limits are exposed.

#### **IV. Methodological Reflection**

From the beginning, this thesis has wagered that the close reading of stage-directions could open an elementary path into a philosophy of the dramatic page. That wager was not self-evident. To linger with stage-directions, to treat them as the privileged object of sustained philosophical reflection, may have risked appearing pedantic or narrow. Yet it is precisely in this apparent narrowness that the method has found its force. For to read stage-directions with patience is to discover the fractures that structure Drama as such at least since Shakespeare. The method of this thesis, then, has been one of attending to the intractable: the textual residue that refuses assimilation, the indications that remain after both theatre and narratology have taken their share. Such a method has required a deliberate refusal of certain habits of thought. It has refused the impulse to classify stage-directions into a neat taxonomy of functions, as if their significance could be exhausted by categories, diegetic or mimetic, literary or theatrical. It has refused the temptation to subordinate them to performance, to read them only for what they enable on stage. And it has refused the narratological assimilation that would treat them as miniature narrative statements. These refusals were not acts of negation but acts of preservation: they preserved the fissures that stage-directions

themselves inscribe.

At the same time, this method has embraced a certain risk. To read stage-directions as operators of fracture is to court the charge of over-interpretation, of ascribing to them a philosophical depth they were never meant to bear. But the risk is necessary. It struggles with the relegation of stage-directions to the margins, and only through this struggle can they disclose elemental aspects of the ontology of Drama. Only by risking the charge of excess can one do justice to their structural role. The method, therefore, has been one of sustained attention to the seemingly contingent, to the extent that contingency itself transforms into philosophical nuclei. In this way, the thesis participates in a broader critical tradition that finds in the overlooked part the key to the whole: the supplement that overruns the system, the trace that leads to the heart of the traced.

What this method has yielded is not a system but a practice. It is a practice of reading that remains faithful to fissure, that allows the text to speak of its own incompleteness. It is a practice that situates philosophy not as an external framework imposed on Drama, but as a discourse provoked and unsettled by Drama's visual inscriptions on the page. To read stage-directions in this way is to open a little window on philosophy through Drama, in a movement that respects the disjunctions of both. However, no method is without its limits. The reflections of this thesis are bound by the texts it has chosen, and by the traditions it has traversed. Other texts might have revealed other fissures; other traditions might have demanded other categories. To acknowledge these limits is not to diminish the method but to recognize its situatedness. The fissures articulated here are not exhaustive. They are skeletal openings through which the ontology of Drama gains an extra layer of visibility. The method has been to trace those apertures with care, not to seal them definitively. In this sense, the methodological contribution of the thesis does not lie in the content of its claims. It models a stance. Such a stance can be taken up in other contexts, other aporias, other disciplines.

## **V. Implications and Future Directions**

The authorial, referential, and spectatorial splits traced across the thesis each instantiate a vantage point which exceeds the specific readings in which they were first situated. The authorial split, written within the Elizabethans, opened the gap of Theatre Studies, in which the dramatist no longer guarantees authority but appears as split inscription, simultaneously invoked and effaced. The referential split, extended within Shaw, interrupting the habit of Reading Drama, sheds light on how artefacts defile their own referents and render the activity of reading a confrontation with textual thickness rather than transparent visualisation. The spectatorial split, written in terms of Beckett, conjoined to Poetic Drama, in which time and perception appear only by virtue of fracture, and the world reveals itself in parts. Those vantage points are no supplements to the fissures but their necessary utterances: the frames for thinking within which Drama continues to act once its incompleteness has been acknowledged.

From the point of view of Theatre Studies, the impact of the authorial split is that stage authority cannot be located on the secure ground of the dramatist's presence. The figure of the playwright haunts the stage as a residue and not origin, a voice inscribed within lack. What this unsettles is the

classical conception of performance as the vision of the dramatist incarnate. Instead, the dramatist haunts only as the split inscription of stage-directions, both invoking and subverting his control. The impact for Theatre Studies is that authorship is necessarily mediated by fracture: that the authority of the text is not firm ground but a split surface. Future inquiry may track how split authorship gets redistributed in later dramaturgies, whether in the rise of the director as a figure of displaced authority, in collaborative authorship in devised performance, or in the protocols of technological rehearsal and notation. No less urgent is the question how anomalous, ellipsis-like, or indeed impossible stage-directions - those that are framed with "as if," or given in indeterminate quantities, "two or three" - might themselves be staged to endure in their strangeness. One may imagine such directions *materialised* in illegible props, in suspended images such as Holbein's skull, or jarring intrusions which make actors re-balance. Here the stage would not resolve ambiguity but extend it, transferring the page's fracture into the performance's very substance.

The advantage of Reading Drama arises from the fissure of reference, such that artefacts cannot resolve into fixed referents. Shaw's house, and furniture and fittings, revealed that what appears to clarify the stage becomes something in excess of inscription, a textual thing that cannot be translated into stage prop. Reading, in effect, is not a transparent page-to-stage movement but a confrontation with corruption, such that referents drop into their own textuality and appear as narratives in their own right. The effect for Reading Drama is that interpretation must be attentive to that instability, accepting that the light shed by stage-direction is through its primordial obscurity. Future research may be directed to seeing how that instability affects Drama pedagogy, shaping the teaching and reading of plays. It may also look to editorial practice, questioning how annotations and critical editions manage the corruption of reference, whether by resolving it at the expense of its doubleness or by foregrounding its resistance to fixity. In digital performances, in which scripts are inflected with metadata, hyperlinks, and interface design, that instability takes on new forms, redoubling the parergonal thickness of inscription. And beyond those settings is another project: to read the page not only for what its words signify but for the relation in which dialogue and stage direction are embedded, how margins and indentations and explosions of objects create a *visual* story on their own. To follow that line is to see the dramatic text as self-reflexive, staging its own architecture as part of its meaning, and to make reading a confrontation with the page as scene.

The Poetic Drama perspective is unveiled by the spectatorial fissure, where time is inscribed as rift and perception is split into units. The stage-directions of Beckett demonstrated that dramatic realities are offered on the page as if unbroken only because they are sliced into instants: the tree and its changing leaves, the immobilities and pauses, the intermissions that split and join acts. Poetic Drama here is not marked by high diction but by temporal cut, a stage poetics on the page that splits perception into units. Further research might investigate experiencing these split temporalities, how immersiveness becomes rhythm and not continuity, how hesitation and delay are not framed as themes but as formal impacts resultant on the page. The question of perception can thus be pushed harder: when dialogue stalls, when action breaks upon aporia, the reader may wonder if what they see is ever whole, or if perception is constructed out of its own fractures. Poetic Drama at such moments presents less a flow of meaning than an investigation of perception, a stage design around incompleteness as the perceptual act's own shape.

Combined, these perspectives validate that the fissures opened in the thesis are not restricted to the studied texts but interpret beyond Drama as a medium. They expose avenues of research that branch beyond Elizabethan, Shavian, and Beckettian exemplars, to larger landscapes where authorship, reference, and perception are undecidable. Postdramatic theatre, in its spreading of textual authority, spreads the authorial fissure across collaborative and technological protocols. Digital scripts, instilled with executable code and paratextual metadata, compound the referential fissure, pointing to the instabilities of inscription. Non-Western dramaturgies, with economies of notation and performance different from those registered here, may produce fissures with different shapes, necessitating revisions to the lexicon of stain, torsion, rim, and cut. Each line of development follows the thesis work by placing its arguments in new material and new practices. The place where stage-direction research must go, then, isn't one of patching up the fissures, but one of tracing them out, and letting them reveal the terms on which Drama can be thought. Theatre Studies, Reading Drama, and Poetic Drama are the gates along which that future research may wish to travel not as autonomous disciplines to be served, but as insights that the fissures themselves have given us, insights that make Drama's ontology active, agitated, and unfinished. Stage-directions are the ghost-script of theatre, the enduring trace by which Drama survives itself.

## Bibliography

- Augustine, S. (1997). *Confessions* (H. Chadwick, Trans.). Oxford University Press. (Original work published ca. 397)
- Austin, J. L. (1975). *How to do things with words* (2nd ed.; J. O. Urmson & M. Sbisà, Eds.). Harvard University Press. (Original work published 1962)
- Badiou, A. (2005). *On Beckett* (A. Toscano & N. Power, Trans.). Manchester University Press.
- Badiou, A. (2018). The common preoccupation of art and philosophy. In A. J. Bartlett, J. Clemens, & A. Badiou (Eds.), *Badiou and his interlocutors: Lectures, interviews and responses* (pp. 3–14). Bloomsbury Academic.
- Baker, Lynne Rudder. *Persons and Bodies: A Constitution View*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- Beckett, S. (1955, August 11). Letter to Thomas MacGreevy. In J. Knowlson, *Damned to fame: The life of Samuel Beckett* (p. 416). Bloomsbury.
- Beckett, S. (2006). *Waiting for Godot*. Faber & Faber.
- Bentley, G. E. (1971). *The profession of dramatist in Shakespeare's time, 1590–1642*. Princeton University Press.
- Bethell, S. L. (1947). *Shakespeare and the comedy of humours*. Methuen.
- Bhullar, Z. (2018). A practical understanding: Time traveling paradoxes. *Acta Cogitata: An Undergraduate Journal in Philosophy*, 5(1), Article 5.  
<https://commons.emich.edu/ac/vol5/iss1/5/>
- Biggins, D. (1962). "Exit pursued by a beare": A problem in *The Winter's Tale*. *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 13(1), 3–13. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2866888>
- Black, M. (1955). Metaphor. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 55(1), 273–294.  
<https://doi.org/10.1093/aristotelian/55.1.273>
- Brenkman, J. (1990). *Culture and domination*. Cornell University Press.
- Brook, P. (1996). *The empty space* (1st Touchstone ed.). Touchstone. (Original work published 1968)
- Brook, P. (1998). Does nothing come from nothing? Ernest Jones Lecture, 13 June 1994, Edward Lewis Theatre, UCL, London. *The British Psycho-Analytical Society Bulletin*, 34(1), [pp. xx–xx].

- Brown, B. (2015). *Other things*. University of Chicago Press.
- Carlson, M. (1993). *Theories of the theatre: A historical and critical survey from the Greeks to the present* (Expanded ed.). Cornell University Press.
- Carlson, M. (2001). *The haunted stage: The theatre as memory machine*. University of Michigan Press.
- Chadwick, C. (1971). *Samuel Beckett: A critical study*. Oxford University Press.
- Chatman, S. (1990). *Coming to terms: The rhetoric of narrative in fiction and film*. Cornell University Press.
- Coghill, N. (1958). Six points of stage-craft in *The Winter's Tale*. In A. Nicoll (Ed.), *Shakespeare Survey 11* (pp. 31–41). Cambridge University Press.
- Corneille, P. (1965). *Writings on the theatre* (H. T. Barnwell, Ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Courtney, S. (2015). *Ian McEwan's ethical humanism*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Cruse, A. (2006). *A glossary of semantics and pragmatics*. Edinburgh University Press.
- Culler, J. (1981). *The pursuit of signs: Semiotics, literature, deconstruction*. Cornell University Press.
- Davis, R. C. (1983). Lacan, Poe, and narrative repression. *MLN*, 98(4), 983–1004.  
<https://doi.org/10.2307/2906057>
- Derrida, J. (1973). *Speech and phenomena, and other essays on Husserl's theory of signs* (D. B. Allison, Trans.). Northwestern University Press.
- Derrida, J. (1976). *Of grammatology* (G. C. Spivak, Trans.). Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Derrida, J. (1977). Signature event context. In A. Bass (Trans.), *Margins of philosophy* (pp. 307–330). University of Chicago Press.
- Derrida, J. (1978). *Writing and difference* (A. Bass, Trans.). University of Chicago Press.
- Derrida, J. (1981). *Spurs: Nietzsche's styles* (B. Harlow, Trans.). University of Chicago Press.
- Derrida, J. (1982). *Margins of philosophy* (A. Bass, Trans.). University of Chicago Press.
- Derrida, J. (1986). *Glas* (J. P. Leavey Jr. & R. Rand, Trans.). University of Nebraska Press. (Original work published 1974)
- Derrida, J. (1987). *The truth in painting* (G. Bennington & I. McLeod, Trans.). University of Chicago Press.
- Derrida, J. (1988). *Limited Inc* (G. Graff, Ed.; S. Weber, Trans.). Northwestern University Press.

- Derrida, J. (1995). *The gift of death* (D. Wills, Trans.). University of Chicago Press.
- Derrida, J. (1996). *Archive fever: A Freudian impression* (E. Prenowitz, Trans.). University of Chicago Press.
- Derrida, J. (2000). Hospitality (B. Stocker & M. Takeuchi, Trans.). *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities*, 5(3), 3–18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09697250020034706>
- Derrida, J. (2005). *Rogues: Two essays on reason* (P.-A. Brault & M. Naas, Trans.). Stanford University Press.
- Dessen, A. (2018). *Rescripting Shakespeare: The text, the director, and modern productions*. Cambridge University Press.
- Dupuy, J.-P. (1994). The self-deconstruction of convention. In M. Y. Arbib & J.-M. Roy (Eds.), *Essays on the foundations of cognitive science* (pp. 85–92). Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Eagle, Antony. “Location and Perdurance.” *Mind* 120, no. 478 (2011): 207–245.
- Eco, U. (1976). *A theory of semiotics*. Indiana University Press.
- Eco, U. (1979). *The role of the reader: Explorations in the semiotics of texts*. Indiana University Press.
- Eddon, Anthony. “Persistence, Parts, and Presentism.” *Noûs* 44, no. 2 (2010): 253–266.
- Effingham, N., & Robson, J. (2007). A mereological challenge to endurantism. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 85(4), 633–640. [https://www.academia.edu/385587/A\\_Mereological\\_Challenge\\_to\\_Endurantism](https://www.academia.edu/385587/A_Mereological_Challenge_to_Endurantism)
- Erne, L. (2003). *Shakespeare as literary dramatist*. Cambridge University Press.
- Florensky, P. (1996). *Iconostasis* (T. E. Bird, Trans.). St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press.
- Freud, S. (1915). The unconscious. In J. Strachey (Ed. & Trans.), *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud* (Vol. 14, pp. 159–215). Hogarth Press.
- Freud, S. (1926). Inhibitions, symptoms and anxiety. In J. Strachey (Ed. & Trans.), *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud* (Vol. 20, pp. 75–175). Hogarth Press.
- Freud, S. (1953). *The interpretation of dreams* (J. Strachey, Trans.). In J. Strachey (Ed.), *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud* (Vols. 4–5, pp. 1–627). Hogarth Press. (Original work published 1900)
- Freud, S. (1958). Recommendations to physicians practising psycho-analysis. In J. Strachey (Ed. & Trans.), *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud* (Vol. 12, pp. 109–120). Hogarth Press. (Original work published 1912)

- Frye, N. (1962). Recognition in *The Winter's Tale*. In R. Hosley (Ed.), *Essays on Shakespeare and Elizabethan drama* (pp. 235–246). University of Missouri Press.
- Greene, R. (1588). *Pandosto: The triumph of time*.
- Gruber, J. J. J., & Jeffares, D. C. (Eds.). (1991). *The languages of theatre*. Elsevier.
- Gurr, A. (1983). The bear, the statue, and hysteria in *The Winter's Tale*. *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 34(4), 420–425.
- Hammond, A. (1987). “It must be your imagination then”: The prologue and the plural text in *Henry V* and elsewhere. In J. W. Mahon & T. A. Pendleton (Eds.), *Fanned and winnowed opinions’: Shakespearean essays presented to Harold Jenkins* (pp. 133–150). Methuen.
- Hammond, W. (2008). *Theatre: The rediscovery of style and other writing* (pp. 71–73). Nick Hern Books.
- Hammond, W. A. (Ed.). (1992). *Theatre: A way of seeing* (2nd ed.). Methuen.
- Hammond, W. A. (1997). *Theatre and the politics of performance*. Manchester University Press.
- Hart, A. (1941). Did Shakespeare produce his own plays? *Modern Language Review*, 36, 173–180.
- Hartmann, H. (1958). *Ego psychology and the problem of adaptation* (D. Rapaport, Trans.). International Universities Press. (Original work published 1939)
- Hattaway, M. (1982). *Elizabethan popular theatre: Plays in performance*. Routledge.
- Hegel, G. W. F. (1977). *Phenomenology of spirit* (A. V. Miller, Trans.). Oxford University Press. (Original work published 1807)
- Herrnstein Smith, B. (1978). *On the margins of discourse: The relation of literature to language*. University of Chicago Press
- Heywood, T. (1632). *The Iron Age*. London: Printed by Nicholas Okes.
- Hieatt, C. W. (1978). The function of structure in *The Winter's Tale*. *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 8, 238–248.
- Holland, N. (1964). *The Shakespearean imagination*. Indiana University Press.
- Honigmann, E. A. J. (1976). *Shakespeare: Seven tragedies—The dramatist's manipulation of response*. Macmillan.
- Hunt, M. (2004). “Bearing hence”: Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*. *Shakespeare Studies*, 32, 123–140.

- Hutchison, C. (1984). The act of narration: A critical survey of some speech-act theories of narrative discourse. *Journal of Literary Semantics*, 13(1), 3–34.
- Hvattum, M. (2006). “Unfolding from within”: Modern architecture and the dream of organic totality. *The Journal of Architecture*, 11(4), 497–509.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13602360600911509>
- Ingarden, R. (1973). *The literary work of art* (G. G. Grabowicz, Trans.). Northwestern University Press. (Original work published 1931)
- Ingarden, R. (1989). *The ontology of the work of art: The musical work, the picture, the architectural work, the film* (R. Meyer, Trans.). Ohio University Press. (Original work published 1962)
- Ioppolo, G. (2006). *Dramatists and their manuscripts in the age of Shakespeare, Jonson, Middleton and Heywood: Authorship, authority and the playhouse*. Routledge.
- Issacharoff, M. (1981). *Discourse as performance*. Stanford University Press.
- Isser, E. (2007). Exeunt omnes and *The Tempest*: Permissive, implied and missing stage directions. In M. Haddad-Johnson & L. Orlin (Eds.), *Staging Shakespeare* (pp. 1–15). Delaware University Press.  
[https://college.holycross.edu/projects/shakespeare/PDFs/Exeunt\\_Omnes.pdf](https://college.holycross.edu/projects/shakespeare/PDFs/Exeunt_Omnes.pdf)
- Jahn, M. (2001). Narrative voice and agency in drama: Aspects of a narratology of drama. *New Literary History*, 32(3), 659–679.
- Johnson, A. (2016). Architectural space and the failures of “complete” houses in *Heartbreak House*. *SHAW: The Journal of Bernard Shaw Studies*, 36(2), 203–214.  
<https://doi.org/10.5325/shaw.36.2.0203>
- Kalb, J. (1989). *Beckett in performance*. Cambridge University Press.
- Kant, I. (2000). *Critique of the power of judgment* (P. Guyer & E. Matthews, Trans.). Cambridge University Press. (Original work published 1790)
- Kermode, F. (1963). *Shakespeare: The final plays*. Methuen.
- Kidnie, M. J. (2009). *Shakespeare and the problem of adaptation*. Routledge.
- Knight, G. W. (1947). *The crown of life: Essays in interpretation of Shakespeare’s final plays*. Methuen.
- Knight, G. W. (2002). Great creating nature: An essay on *The Winter’s Tale*. In *The crown of life* (pp. 53–106). Routledge.
- Lacan, J. (1978). *The four fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis: The seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI, 1964* (J.-A. Miller, Ed.; A. Sheridan, Trans.). Norton. (Original work published 1973)

- Lacan, J. (1988). *The seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book I: Freud's papers on technique, 1953–1954* (J. Forrester, Trans.). Cambridge University Press.
- Lacan, J. (1988). *The seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book II: The ego in Freud's theory and in the technique of psychoanalysis 1954–1955* (J.-A. Miller, Ed.; S. Tomaselli, Trans.). W. W. Norton & Company.
- Lacan, J. (1992). *The ethics of psychoanalysis, 1959–1960: The seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII* (J.-A. Miller, Ed.; D. Porter, Trans.). Routledge. (Original work published 1986)
- Lacan, J. (1993). *The psychoses: The seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book III, 1955–1956* (J.-A. Miller, Ed.; R. Grigg, Trans.). Routledge. (Original work published 1981)
- Lacan, J. (1998). *The seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX: Encore, 1972–1973* (J.-A. Miller, Ed.; B. Fink, Trans.). Norton.
- Lacan, J. (2006). *Écrits: The first complete edition in English* (B. Fink, Trans.). Norton. (Original work published 1966)
- Lacan, J. (2008). *My teaching* (D. Brick, Trans.). Verso. (Original work published 2005)
- Lawson, M. (2013, July 15). The impossible stage direction. *BBC News*.  
<https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-23276432>
- Lewis, D. (1976). The paradoxes of time travel. *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 13(2), 145–152.
- Lewis, D. (1986). *On the plurality of worlds*. Blackwell.
- Long, W. B. (1985). “A bed / for Woodstock”: A warning for the unwary. *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England*, 2, 91–118.
- Lyons, J. (1977). *Semantics* (Vol. 2). Cambridge University Press.
- Malone, K. (1940). On defining mahogany. *American Speech*, 15(4), 308–317.  
<https://doi.org/10.2307/409529>
- Martínez-Bonati, F. (1981). *Fictive discourse and the structures of literature* (P. B. Manchester & H. M. Richmond, Trans.). Cornell University Press. (Original work published 1972)
- Meier, E. (n.d.). Teak. *The Wood Database*. <https://www.wood-database.com/teak/>
- Montaigne, M. (1603). Of the lame or cripple (J. Florio, Trans.). In *The essays of Michel de Montaigne* (Book III, Ch. 11). HyperEssays.  
<https://hyperessays.net/florio/book/III/chapter/11/>
- Naas, M. (2008). *Derrida from now on*. Fordham University Press.
- Norris, C. (2002). *Deconstruction: Theory and practice* (3rd ed.). Routledge.

- Nuttall, A. D. (1966). *Shakespeare: The Winter's Tale*. Macmillan.
- Ohmann, R. (1971). Speech acts and the definition of literature. *Philosophy & Rhetoric*, 4(1), 1–19.
- Oxford English Dictionary. (n.d.). Wicker. *OED Online*.  
<https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/wicker>
- Pafford, J. H. P. (Ed.). (1963). *The Winter's Tale* (Arden Shakespeare, 2nd Series). Methuen.
- Parfit, D. (1984). *Reasons and persons* (p. 215). Oxford University Press.
- Pavis, P. (1982). Problems of the theatrical text. In P. Esslin (Ed.), *The theatre and its double: Essays on dramaturgy and semiotics* (pp. 26–40). Routledge.
- Peele, G. (2004). *The Old Wives' Tale* (C. Mueller, Ed.). Manchester University Press. (Original work published 1595)
- Pereira, R. A. (2016). Pierre Corneille and the function of stage directions in French classical theatre. *Journal of Early Modern Drama*, 7(2), 115–135.
- Plessner, H. (1970). *Laughing and crying: A study of the limits of human behavior* (J. S. Churchill & M. Grene, Trans.). Northwestern University Press.
- Plessner, H. (2019). *Levels of organic life and the human: Introduction to philosophical anthropology* (M. Hyatt, Trans.). Fordham University Press. (Original work published 1928)
- Politzer, G. (1994). *Critique of the foundations of psychology: The psychology of psychoanalysis* (M. Apprey, Trans.; A. Giorgi, Ed.). Duquesne University Press. (Original work published 1928)
- Rabkin, G. (1984). The aesthetics of uniqueness: *Laokoon* and the problematic of performance. In T. Cole (Ed.), *Playwrights on playwriting: The meaning and making of modern drama* (pp. 139–153). Hill and Wang.
- Raleigh, W. (1953). *Shakespeare* (pp. 137–138). London.
- Reynolds, G. F. (1923). *The staging of Elizabethan plays at the Red Bull Theatre, 1605–1625*. Yale University Press.
- Rhenanus, J. (1613). Preface to *Speculum aestheticum* (German adaptation of Tomkis's *Lingua*).
- Ridealgh, D. (2013). Ghosts in the machine: Mediatised presence in theatre. *Platform: Journal of Theatre and Performing Arts*, 7(2), 45–60.
- Robertson, L. (2016). “Ne’er was dream so like a waking”: The temporality of dreaming and the depiction of doubt in *The Winter's Tale*. *Shakespeare Studies*, 44, 291–307.  
<https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A470868782/AONE?u=anon~8bbeca90&sid=googleScholar&xid=3b34ffc1>

- Rosenberg, A. (2011). *The atheist's guide to reality: Enjoying life without illusions*. W. W. Norton & Company.
- Rosner, V. (2005). *Modernism and the architecture of private life*. Columbia University Press.
- Rozik, E. (1998). *The poetics of theatre*. Sussex Academic Press.
- Searle, J. R. (1974). The logical status of fictional discourse. *New Literary History*, 6(2), 319–332.
- Shaffer, P. (1964). *The royal hunt of the sun*. Samuel French.
- Shakespeare, W. (2025). *The Winter's Tale*. Folger Shakespeare Library. <https://www.folger.edu/explore/shakespeares-works/the-winters-tale/>
- Shannon, C. E., & Weaver, W. (1949). *The mathematical theory of communication*. University of Illinois Press.
- Shaw, G. B. (1919). *Heartbreak House*. Constable & Co.
- Shaw, G. B. (1938). On architecture. In *New architecture: An exhibition of the elements of modern architecture* (MARS Exhibition Catalogue). Modern Architectural Research Group.
- Shaw, G. B. (n.d.). Preface to *Three Plays for Puritans*. In G. B. Shaw, *Three Plays for Puritans*.
- Shipherd, H. R. (1924). Play-publishing in Elizabethan times. *PMLA*, 39(3), 577–595.
- Sider, T. (2001). *Four-dimensionalism: An ontology of persistence and time*. Oxford University Press.
- Simmel, G. (1994). Bridge and door (M. Ritter, Trans.). In D. Frisby & M. Featherstone (Eds.), *Simmel on culture: Selected writings* (pp. 170–174). Sage. (Original work published 1909)
- Spalding, F. (1990). *Roger Fry: Art and life*. University of California Press.
- Suchy, P. A. (1991). Performing the text: Reading and the *mise-en-scène*. *Theatre Journal*, 43(1), 73–88.
- Taylor, G., & Wells, S. (1987). *William Shakespeare: A textual companion*. Clarendon Press.
- Tillyard, E. M. W. (1944). *Shakespeare's last plays*. Chatto & Windus.
- Tillyard, E. M. W. (1963). From *Shakespeare's last plays*. In F. Kermode (Ed.), *The Winter's Tale* (pp. 217–223). New American Library.
- Wellwarth, G. E. (1961). *The theatre of protest and paradox: Developments in the avant-garde drama*. New York University Press.

- Wigley, M. (1993). *The architecture of deconstruction: Derrida's haunt*. MIT Press.
- Wilde, O. (2001). *An ideal husband*. In I. Small (Ed.), *The complete works of Oscar Wilde: The plays* (Vol. 1, pp. 1–84). Oxford University Press.
- Wilden, A. G. (1977). Freud, Signorelli, and Lacan: The repression of the signifier. *Diacritics*, 7(3), 32–43. <https://doi.org/10.2307/464737>
- Will, B. (2014). The Resistance Syndrome: Alain Badiou on Samuel Beckett. *South Central Review*, 31(1), 114–129. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26410804>
- Williams, R. (1968). *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht*. Chatto & Windus.
- Williams, R. (1977). *Marxism and literature*. Oxford University Press.
- Yates, A. L. (2004). Repetition and homosociality in *Waiting for Godot*. [Journal details needed], p. 438.
- Žižek, S. (1993). *Tarrying with the negative: Kant, Hegel, and the critique of ideology*. Duke University Press.
- Žižek, S. (2004, May 21). What Rumsfeld doesn't know that he knows about Abu Ghraib. *In These Times*. <https://www.lacan.com/zizekrumsfeld.htm>
- Žižek, S. (2006). *The parallax view*. MIT Press.
- Žižek, S. (2008). *The sublime object of ideology*. Verso.
- Žižek, S. (2012). *Less than nothing: Hegel and the shadow of dialectical materialism*. Verso.

