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Translated by Bruno Bosteels

RHAPSODY FOR THE THEATRE: A SHORT PHILOSOPHICAL TREATISE

I

It is as good a division of the world as any other to observe that there are and have been societies with theatre and others without theatre. And that in societies that know this strange public place, where fiction is consumed as a repeatable event, this has always met with reticence, anathema, major or minor excommunications, as well as enthusiasm. More specifically, next to the spiritual suspicion that befalls theatre, there is always the vigilant concern of the State, to the point where all theatre has been one of the affairs of the State and remains so to this day!

Who fails to see that this territorial and mental division has the additional merit of cutting across that other, all-too-saturated divide of West and East or of North and South? Because at the far end of this East we find the brilliance of a theatre of exception, whereas it is generally elided from Islam. I say “generally” because no consideration of universal theatricality can ignore the sacred dramas through which Iranian Shi’ism conferred Presence upon its founding martyr.

In this last case, the scandal is home to a heresy. But all true Theatre is a heresy in action. I have the habit of calling its orthodoxy “*theatre*”: an innocent and prosperous ritual, from which Theatre detaches itself as a rather implausible lightning bolt.

II

Another observation to set things in motion: if cinema is everywhere, it is no doubt because it requires no spectator, only the walls surrounding a viewing public. Let’s say that a spectator is real, whereas a viewing public is merely a reality, the lack of which is as full as a full house, since it is only a matter of counting. Cinema counts the viewers, whereas theatre counts on the spectator,

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and it is in the absence of either one or the other that critics, in a disastrous paradox, invent the spectator of a film and the viewer of a play. François Truffaut deciphers the spectator in the chandelier, but this chandelier is the opposite of the movie projector.

III

I once saw Guy Debord's complete cinematographic oeuvre (which, significantly, had been published in book form) projected without pause, centered on the superb *In girum imus nocte et consumimur igni* (1978) indifferent to the emptiness as much as to the fullness (not of the chandelier but of the seat) in a movie theatre in Paris. This was made possible by the grace of the friendship of Gérard Lebovici, whom killers have since then found it in themselves to shoot down (the man behind such an idea of friendship in art, it must be said regardless of all other considerations, is at once a bit suspect for those who traffic in shadows). This pure temporal moment speaks to the glory of cinema, which may very well survive us humans. It is utterly foreign to theatre, which does not take place without spectators, since in this last case the representation (a word that we will put to the test at length) changes over into a supplementary rehearsal—the exact opposite of those “dress rehearsals” and other “final run-throughs” that, through a bit too much of the spectator's real, turn into the premature event of the spectacle's already taking place.

IV

In the midst of the “red years,” around 1971–2, a group dedicated to cultural intervention, the Groupe Foudre, took it upon itself to cause a racket against the first outbursts of the “revisionist” malady in the reassessment of World War II. Movies such as *Lacombe Lucien*¹ or *Night Porter*² turned the equivocation between victim and executioner into a fiction, all the while making criminal choices seem innocent. Since then we certainly have seen where all this would lead. The Groupe Foudre thus readily went to shout down and interrupt those disquieting trips. Ah, to think of the charming lightness, the polemical health of that era! The watchword invented at the time was: “Down with the obscurantism of the obscure rooms!” The mistake consisted in ignoring the fact that obscurantism can only be public and that cinema, unlike theatre, is by no means a public place, even if it appears to be one. What is wrapped in obscurity is the private individual, to whom after all we cannot deny the right to obscurity just like that. It is useless to intervene in cinema, because there is no spectator to be found, and, by logical consequence, no public. Being a private industry, cinema is *also* a private spectacle. The time of projection is that of an inconsistent gathering, a serial collection. Cinema, disconnected from the State, proposes no collective signification. The Groupe Foudre was justified in its polemic, full of joy in its action (ah! the ink squirts against the screen on which the colonial paratroopers were strutting, all worked up by the awful John Wayne, in that abomination titled *The Green Berets!*), but it was mistaken in the choice of its site: theatre alone is tied to the State, cinema belongs only to Capital. The former oversees the Crowd, the

latter disperses individuals. Cultural–political intervention, which was what the Groupe Foudre dreamed of, has only one possible destination: the theatre. In any case, even here it risks becoming theatricalized rather than politicized.

V

So theatre is an affair of the State, which is morally suspicious, and requires a spectator. That much we know.

We would be better guided in all this, I will say it once and for all, if we relied on a systematic use of François Regnault's *The Spectator*, which is a nearly complete treatise on modern theatre. His guide would give us a different outlook from mine: the outlook of the man of the theatre, which is what Regnault is and which I am not.

The Spectator: Point of the real by which a spectacle comes into being and which, as Regnault tells us, corresponds to the taciturn and haphazard evening visitor.

VI

Unless we have recourse to Mallarmé, whose famous Book (as we know from the calculations with which he, like a dreamy apothecary, enumerated the necessary attendants) after all had the form of a Representation.

Mallarmé claims that in his time (but ours is worth as little as his) there is nothing historically real, for lack of a self-declared political collective, and, consequently, that it is theatre that gathers whatever is available to us in terms of action. Here are, in his own style, the two axioms which, for any contemporary thinking of theatre, it would suffice to clarify and meditate upon:

- There is no such thing as a present, for lack of a Crowd's declaring itself.
- Action does not go beyond the Theatre.

Let me add the lesson from Regnault that in him, the Spectator, reside the self-declared Crowd and the untranscendable Action. To him everything is devoted.

VII

Theatre thus distinguishes itself according to the State, of which it is an affair (but why?), according to Morality, for which it is a suspect (but why?), and according to the Spectator, from whom it derives its point of the real, namely, *that which interrupts the rehearsals*. In this last regard, the essence of theatre lies in the existence of the opening night. The fact that there is a second night, so feared by the actors, touches upon the State. That there is a third presupposes that Morality did not prevent it from happening. . . .

But, at the same time, theatre is made up of nothing of the kind. For theatre is a material, corporeal, machinic assemblage. How do those majestic instances (the State, Morality, the Public) come to attach themselves to the scattered and nomadic matter of such an outrageously artisanal operation? What?

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Some scraps of paper, some rags, a small lamp, three chairs, and a sweet talker from the Projects, and you are ready to claim that public power, morals, and the collective are put on hold, if not endangered?

You better begin by the strict enumeration of the “parts of the theatre,” in the same way that Aristotle spoke of the “parts of animals.” Show me the animal before concluding, like some abridged Mallarmé, as to its “superior essence.”

VIII

Let’s posit that there is theatre as soon as we can enumerate: first, a public gathered with the intent of a spectacle; second, actors who are physically present, with their voices and bodies, in a space reserved for them with the express purpose of the gathered public’s consideration; and, third, a referent, textual or traditional, of which the spectacle can be said to be the representation.

The third condition excludes mime and dance from being considered theatre, at least when they make up the entire spectacle; it also excludes pure and unrepeatably improvisation. These are theatrical exercises or ingredients, but they are not theatre.

The second condition is incompatible with the idea of a theatre of objects, or with the purely mechanical production of words. A tape recorder can figure onstage, as we see in Jean–Paul Sartre’s *The Condemned of Altona* or, better yet, in Samuel Beckett’s *Krapp’s Last Tape*. However, it is the interlocution between actor and machine that makes for theatre. The machine in and of itself could hardly provide for that.

The first condition excludes that we pretend to be doing theatre by way of the simple theatricalization, out on the streets or indoors, of life as it is. We require a special convocation and a willingness to respond. That there is the need for a public prohibits the idea of theatre for nobody, but not of theatre for a single person, since the latter, as soon as she enters the place of theatre and takes her seat, constitutes a gathering unto herself.

IX

But now onto this elementary description another one superimposes itself, as if theatre were isomorphic with that singular activity we call “politics” (I am not talking here about the monotonous administration of the State).

In fact, we could argue that there is politics when three things form a knot: the masses who all of a sudden are gathered in an unexpected consistency (events); the points of view incarnated in organic and enumerable actors (subject-effects); a reference in thought that authorizes the elaboration of discourse based upon the mode in which the specific actors in question are held together, even at a distance, by the popular consistency to which chance summons them.

The third point separates politics from everything that is merely blind fury or a nondiscursive impulse. The latter is only the material for politics, not its essence. The social as such is not politics, even if it may be required; nor is

the institutional dimension, when taken separately, or the national as the instinct for a place or for an identity.

The second point refuses the existence of a politics that would be unanimous, undivided, monolithic. All existing politics organizes a scission. There is no nonpartisan politics.

The first point, inversely, excludes that a reasonable play of institutions alone would be political. For politics to happen a haphazard point of the real is needed that is revealed by the dispersion abruptly introduced into that which, on the part of the State, ordinarily rules over the general passivity, the symbolic invisibility, of the real of History.

Public, actors, text-thought: would politics be that for which History is only the stage? Is this too romantic an idea? We must come to understand the effects of these axioms, all the while observing in passing that Mallarmé's axioms already engaged both the (missing) Crowd and the (restricted) Action.

X

Of the three elementary conditions of theatre (public, actors, textual referent), which are transcendental or a priori conditions, we can infer a large number of consequences.

The first condition suffices to impose the need for a stage set. A bare arena surrounded by the public turns this public itself into the theatre's setting. If the scene adopts the Italian style, any backdrop serves as a decor, no matter how desolate. When in the opening of the *Eumenides*, in Peter Stein's direction, the priest of Apollo paints the background panel white, he designates the pure act of a stage setting.

From the fact that there is at least one actor we infer that there must be at least one costume. Nudity is no exception, whether it be insignificant (as is often the case) or saturated with meaning.

The existence of a referent, textual or other, constrains the stage director, even if he or she is reduced to continuing a tradition, to the position of director of the company, of a "self-governed" collective, or the one who, marking the opening beats, guarantees that all the elements come together at the right hour.

Place, text or its placeholder, stage director, actors, decors, costumes, and public are the seven required elements of theatre.

XI

The theatre-politics isomorphism is not limited to this list alone. Indeed, the three obligations of any politics (massive event, organizations, text-thoughts), too, have regulated consequences.

The first is that the State is the inevitable setting of politics. For it is the State's subsistence, its dissemination or its sudden aleatory appearance, that orders the masses of chance. Politics has its origin in this visible event of the State's being given a final notice for proving its legitimacy once more. Some element of the symbolic is struck here, because it becomes manifest that its universality is purely contingent. This unpredictable visibility of the State as separate from

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the situation and perhaps illegitimate is the horizon for the unfolding of the crowds.

From the second obligation (all politics is organized) we can deduce that politics is never without the efficacy of proper names, those of the political leaders. The body and voice of these actors as the ultimate concentration of organic divisions—all politics exists against other politics—are crucial operators. The death of one of them, for example, suspends the course of events, whether for a long time or for a brief while. Interminable agony, murder, or abdication are the principal and unavoidable figures. What the political leader proffers in one tone or another sums up the causalities despite the illusion that it is he who administers them.

The political leader is a visible thought: that by which politics, beneath everything it represents, touches upon presentation itself, and thus upon Being and its truth (just as in theatre the actor finds support in an ethics of play in which some truth scintillates and is eclipsed).

Finally, the third obligation, the one involving referents and texts, includes in political action the historicized function of discourse and its nominal servants, the dead thinkers, in their arrested correlation with a given sequence of real politics.

XII

It belongs no doubt to the singularity of Marxism to have posed that thinkers, referents, and actors should fuse and this, ultimately, on the scale of the masses, just as it proposed to be done with the distinction between the legislative and the executive. In this regard the three obligations seem to add up to only one. This is because Marxism is the politics of a certain end of politics.

There has been a theatre of the end of theatre. It was convivial and potentially orgiastic. But theatre and politics continue: they can exist or not, but they cannot come to an end.

XIII

So: place, text, director, actors, decor, costumes, and public are the elements, deducible a priori, of theatre. And organizations, textual referents, thinkers, proper names, the State, contrasting points of view, and eventual³ masses are the obligatory ingredients of a political situation.

These ingredients do not realize themselves in an effective politics except in their fidelity to an event. They do not authorize us to represent politics as something permanent. Politics *takes place*, from time to time. It begins, it ends. And, similarly, from the fact that a theatre production requires the simultaneous and ordered presence of the seven elements, it follows (and this is an essential triviality) that a theatrical spectacle begins and ends. Representation *takes place*. It is a circumscribed event. There can be no permanent theatre. That adjective belongs to cinema, and at the most, to exhibitions. The fact that immediately the spectacle is played a second time changes nothing in this regard. It is two times One, with no access whatsoever to any permanence.

Finally, a spectacle is itself perishable by nature. It can certainly be repeated a good number of times. However, everything in it, or almost everything, is mortal. The seven elements are destined to disperse themselves, and in the end all that is left is the textual referent, which is not theatre in and of itself but at best an exhortation to give it existence.

XIV

The complete temporal precariousness of theatre—which is more easily grasped than that of politics for which the State’s nearly atemporal solidity offers some premature consolation—is disquieting to playwrights and directors alike.

The former, especially over the last century, multiply the stage directions for the decor, the interpretation, the gestures, and the costumes, as if to fix *ne varietur* in the textual referent the essence of these other elements. Not even the public escapes their prescriptions: Jean Genet describes its variants in the Foreword to *The Blacks*, and, in his projects for the presentation of the Book, Mallarmé manically enumerated its dispositions. The theatre would like to write not only a play but its representation. Though understandable, this desire is in vain. Theatre, which requires writing, never ceases to unwrite itself.⁴ Like the piece, the theatre author too is always played.

Stage directors are sometimes distressed by this impermanence. They would like either for the Drama barely to take place—as Mallarmé says, “the time to show its defeat, which unfolds in a flash”—or else, as Bob Wilson attempted, for it to last indefinitely. However, neither the eclipse nor the contemplative consistency of pure duration saves theatre from its extended finitude, from its long shortness. No art is so little a *ktèma es aiei* (*everlasting possession*).

At the same time, no other art form is able to pin down the intensity of what happens the way theatre does.

XV

But are you going to tell us finally what is implied by your extended analogy between theatre and politics? That politics is theatre? You announced that this conclusion is too romantic to hold up.

Yes, because it is rather the opposite that is the case. It is true that holding a meeting in the midst of riots is essentially theatrical, even down to the details. Everything, though, works in the other direction: it is theatre, in the circle of its provisional repetition, that figures the knotted components of politics.

Theatre is the figurative reknitting of politics, and this regardless of its subject matter.

Based on this turn of perspective, you should study the difficulty of making theatre out of real politics. Putting Lenin or Mao onstage never goes very far. Büchner’s Robespierre is in my eyes a dreamlike fiction that might as well be called Dujardin or Bassompierre.

Evidently, Caesar or Alexander will be more convenient: as ancient conquerors, they can be assimilated to Apollo or to Theseus.

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If you wish to obtain the figurative reknitting of politics, take the legend, or that legendary treasure of historical anecdotes that is Plutarch. Because for the others, politics itself provides for its own presentation as well as for its representation.

XVI

Neither the isomorphism with politics (keeping in mind the distance of figuration) nor the list of seven elements identifies theatre in its being. We know since Plato that no list is enough to define an essence, and no analogy amounts to an Idea.

The philosopher will be forgiven for providing a few clarifying barbarisms. Let's call *analytic* of theatre that which concerns the assemblage of the seven elements. Let's call *dialectic* of theatre the singular need for a *spectator* to be summoned to appear in the tribunal of a *morality* under the watchful eye of the *State*. I would say that the aim of the conceptual series whose plot I am anticipating consists in discovering, here and now, the *generic nature* of theatre, meaning that which the traversing of its elements (analytic) by an eventual occurrence of its challenge (dialectic) can produce in terms of truth.

If one prefers to *see*: it's a question of thinking the correlation between the two columns in the following table:

THEATRE	
<i>Analytic (elements)</i>	<i>Dialectic (at-play)</i>
Place	State (situation of representation)
Text	Ethics of play
Director	(provocation of the presentation)
Actor	Spectator (possible support of Truth)
Decor	
Costumes	
Public	

The productive assemblage of the elements of the analytic is (or is not) the event from which proceed a few truths, by the diagonal movement of the figures of the dialectic.⁵

A representation is then the inquiry into the truth of which the spectator is the vanishing subject.

XVII

If we had to find some order in the following fragments of thought, perhaps it could be the traditional one, in three parts, according to the articulations of the Dialectic:

1. Theatre as an affair of the State. I would say that, being at ease with princes and having been founded in the regime of democracy on the agora, theatre is now indecisive, or hurting—not because of the reign of television, as people pretend, but due to the essential lack of politics in which the electoral process is resolved. Theatre, therefore, is sick of parliaments and cared for by unions of all kinds as one is cared for onstage by Molière’s doctors (we will posit that the Ministry of Culture is part of the unions).

As art: theatre undoes the bonds of political desire with great virtuosity but it cannot accommodate the social, even though it is forced to do so.

2. Theatre as the putting at stake [*enjeu*] of an ethics—and first of all of an ethics of play [*jeu*], so rare and deeply moving. I would say that, accosted by the comic to pronounce that what has worth is only semblance, by the tragic that what saves is also what brings perdition, theatre has a hard time breathing from the moment that this semblance has value and all salvation lies in flight, which is the nonspirit of our times.
3. Theatre as the eclipse and impact of at least one spectator. This time we must tackle the public (or its notion, not its number, or its existence). Hyperbolically, the public is affected, or infected, by laziness, which is the only vice that theatre (which knows them all) cannot accommodate, and this precisely because it must please, and purge, the passions. No effect of truth, not even that of scenic sumptuousness, can purge the lazy of their passion, which is ignorance.

Or, as Antoine Vitez⁶ used to tell me—theatre having taught him this profound truth: the essence of vulgarity, even the worst kind that is that of the executioner, is laziness, that is, wanting to “live” without working or thinking.

XVIII

Yes, in the end, this is what gives me pleasure: that to speak of Theatre today, cornered as it is between the Ministry and the world of “cultural” entertainment, obliges us to write a sort of manifesto against the lazy. Every productivist society probably counts intellectual laziness, the loathing of thought, as its dominant passion (Lacan was the first to identify this passion, in correlation with hatred and love, as the passion of ignorance).

The impasse of theatre allows us to devise a *disorientation* of laziness. Or to confront it with its mirror image. Spectator! You are this precious point where thought becomes velvet, shadow, silence.

Theatre can *show* the ugliness of the lazy person (one will point the projector at his briefcase, at all the emblems of his unending work of laziness, his infinite and exhausting labor meant to ensure that, at the supreme point of time, thinking comes to lack).

The aridity of theatre as a mirroring glacier in which, having arrived in all innocence at the evenings of Culture, the lazy (the intellectual? the cadre? Woman? the critic?) becomes visible to us as the coalescence of himself and that which, through money, leads everywhere to the extinction of all fire.

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XIX

- THE EMPIRICIST: There is also laziness in your way of proceeding. You give yourself the luxury of heightening the brilliance of the event, the precarious, the scintillating, but all you do is pile up concepts. This is dogmatic slumber.
- ME: What do you want? Some examples? Some spectacles? Some frozen Eskimos?
- THE EMPIRICIST: That you take some risks, here and now.
- ME: Show me the battlefield.
- THE EMPIRICIST: You oppose “*theatre*,” the mere analytical combination of seven elements. . . .
- ME: I’ve said nothing of the kind, at least not until now.
- THE EMPIRICIST: But I can predict you. So to this “*theatre*” you oppose Theatre, which puts in motion the dialectic—the “diagonal,” you say in your jargon—of the State, of Ethics, and of the Spectator (the subject). Tell me, here and now, what is “*theatre*”? And Theatre? Why not distribute a few points, good ones and bad ones, so that we gain some clarity.
- ME: Do you authorize me to give one last dissertation?
- THE EMPIRICIST: Only if it is related to my challenge.
- ME: It’s about the link between “*theatre*” and private property!
- THE EMPIRICIST: So now you go for vulgar Marxism! Base and super-structure! You are making fun of people!
- ME: Give me a chance.
- THE EMPIRICIST: As soon as you’re done with your dissertation, you will give me a concrete list of real spectacles from the past ten years that in your eyes are Theatre and not “*theatre*.”
- ME: That’s not out of the question.
- THE EMPIRICIST: Dogmatic but prudent. Well then, go ahead.

XX

There exists a private, prosperous, and continuous theatre. It is faithfully multiplied by television (*Masterpiece Theatre*). It provides cinema with innumerable and triumphant adaptations. Between its stage and the screens of all formats, there is an uninterrupted circulation of dialogues, plot lines, roles, and actors. It balances its budgets without need for subsidies. It is called “boulevard theatre,” but we cannot decide whether this appellation does wrong to the theatre or to the boulevards. From Jean de Létra⁷ to Harold Pinter, it has its nuances, its high and its low classes, like cars. In its own way, it is complete, and most often that is also how it appears on the posters, as completely sold out, contrary to many national, regional, or municipal theatres.

What is interesting is that this theatre counts for nothing. This is by no means evident from the facts. With regard to the link between Culture and the State, the problems of representation and the unions, the aporias of form, the scandals of meaning, or the despotic surveillance, this theatre is as lowly as

the current film industry. Applauded by the shopkeeping bourgeoisie, greasy like pork and beans, conventional like an *Ave Maria* telephoned by actors whose only effect lies in tremor or slow motion, many of the spectacles of this private circuit are in their own genre more well-rounded, more put together, and better packaged than many of the cadaverous “creations” of the cultural circuit, not to mention the butchering of the classics, which the good intentions of modernization leave raw-boned and opaque—I am thinking of those *Cid* and *Athalie* from my youth performed for the high-school matinees, which in themselves would be enough to draw some crucial lessons, to be engraved on their tombstones, about the connection of the State to pedagogy, the boards of trustees, the classical repertoire, theatre productions in the style of *Captain Fracasse*,⁸ and the capacity of schoolkids to turn a ceremony into a riot. However, these comparisons are pointless, precisely because they only seem to function among genres, whereas in reality they compare one kind of place to another. Private, cut out from the conversations overseen by *Le Nouvel Observateur*,⁹ forbidden among teachers (and, furthermore, unworthy and repugnant indeed, but that is not what matters), the boulevard is destatified, deunionized, a bad object of theatre, a false theatre, “*theatre*” for laughs. Tied to the State, a reference point for opinionating, mediated by credit, budgets, and institutions, dignified and devoted to the instruction of the crowds, public theatre—national, regional, departmental (like the muse), or municipal—organizes a subject-spectator who is juridically cultural, even if empirically hollow. The theatre of meaning wants a minister, that is, subsidies for the cultural surveillance by the republican State. The theatre of the boulevard, the theatre of indecency, can desire only obscene revenues.

XXI

THE EMPIRICIST:	Knock yourself out.
ME:	One other dissertation, just one! It directly concerns our topic. It is about Theatre and “ <i>theatre</i> .” Let me return to the Good and the Bad, before giving out good and bad points.
THE EMPIRICIST:	The Good is only the common feature of all things good; the Bad of all things bad. How do we go from the Good to the good? There is Theatre only insofar as there are spectacles of Theatre, and “ <i>theatre</i> ,” insofar as there are spectacles of “ <i>theatre</i> .”
ME:	Indulge my taste for the a priori one more time.
THE EMPIRICIST:	OK, but this is the last time.

XXII

I call Theatre, without quotation marks, a production that conjures the seven constitutive elements of every analytic of Theatre (or of “*theatre*” as well, since analysis cannot make this distinction) in such a way as to pronounce itself about itself and about the world, and such that the knot of this double examination interpellates the spectator at the impasse of a form of thought.

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By contrast, there is a “*theatre*” that is fulfilling, a “*theatre*” of established meanings, a “*theatre*” from which nothing is lacking and which, abolishing chance, induces a convivial satisfaction in those who hate truth. This “*theatre*,” which is the inversion of Theatre, can be recognized in the fact that those who come to exhibit their salacious or restrained enjoyment in it are marked by an identitarian sign, be it constituted by class or by opinion. The true public of true Theatre, by contrast, is generic, by which I mean an indiscernible and atypical subtraction from what Mallarmé calls the Crowd. Only a Crowd can make a Spectator, in the sense designated by François Regnault, that is, someone who exposes him or herself, in the distance of a representation, to the torment of a truth. We should therefore say the following: complicit with certain representations, certain publics manifest their hatred of Theatre by the fervor of their attending “*theatre*.”

XXIII

There exists a specific hatred of Theatre, which every soul is capable of. Theatre is of all the art forms the most hated, under the cover of the adoration devoted to “*theatre*.” There are times when one would want to break one’s seat out of rage and hatred, when one would throw oneself out onto the boulevard to find consolation from so much torment and effort.

Fortunately, there is little, very little Theatre, because “*theatre*” most often protects us from it. As is the case of today’s politics, isomorphous to every collective instance of thought in the fixed time and material place of an intervention, Theatre has almost vanished, so that it is extremely difficult to discover it and to sustain it.

Just as the parliamentary form of politics, that commodity without concept, by virtue of the thickness of the consensus it organizes renders almost invisible and untenable all genuine politics capable of thinking at the locale where it takes place, so too does the omnipresence of “*theatre*” dissimulate the elevated, superior exigency of Theatre.

XXIV

And yet, theatre exists—as does politics. I will say that theatre is possible. It is to this possibility that we will speak when we remark upon the vigilant hatred that theatre provokes in critics and the public, and upon the unceasing effort to suppress its conditions.

Here, “conditions” is a stronger term than “elements,” in the sense of the analytic (the seven elements: place, text, director, actor, decor, costumes, public). “Conditions” means the elements but renamed in their tension, their prescription, their difficulty. These elements render possible *today* the dialectic of the theatrical State, the ethics of play, and the subject-spectator.

We could make this surnomination of the elements operative by saying: there is Theatre (and not “*theatre*”) only in the conjunction of the following elements: the text it elicits and thus makes contemporary; the division it effects; the haphazard thought of a stage director for whom this text—I am picking up an expression from Antoine Vitez—becomes the filter of a divination; actors

capable of unfolding the real point of departure that they and they alone constitute rather than showing off the rhetorics of body and voice; and at least one spectator.

Under these conditions, it is possible that we come upon the process of a truth, of an elucidation whose spectacle would be the event. Consequently, hatred will manifest itself for sure, due to the fact that it is properly impossible simply to watch what happens there. Because under these conditions, theatre makes it known to you that you will not be able innocently to remain *in your place*.

XXV

The hatred of Theatre, expressed in the love of “*theatre*,” is ultimately a form of self-hatred. We are that person who arrived for the sake of the ritual insipidness of a celebration of self, some laughs, culture, recognizable figures, feeling always one foot ahead, answers that “hit the nail on the head,” sublime decors, communion during intermission. All of a sudden, sticking closely to the event’s unfolding and following a set of trajectories subtracted from all calculation, we must pass through the twists and turns of desire, see the object eclipse itself before our eyes and, in the impasse of form, hit upon some incongruous point of the real. In order not to endure all this in a disagreeable commotion, and so as not to avoid it through the facile solution of boredom, there is no resource other than a willful attention and a sustained, though latent, exercise of thinking.

The paradox of theatre, which exposes it to hatred, lies in the fact that it presents itself as a figurative luxury, a solid chain, a cultural temple, but unless it is “*theatre*” it is actually made of flight and chance—a difficult art, one that is especially intellectual, whose spectator is the empty point from where the fragile instant of a thought proceeds, if it is not the nothing that exists as boredom. So much apparent or promised beauty for such an aleatory effort! The hatred of Theatre stems from the presence of some snare in this sensible arrangement of bodies, voices, and images that takes on meaning by fugaciously giving brilliance to the unassignable cause of a truth. It is as if a mathematical demonstration—and theatre is more demonstrative than representative—were announced to you for the purpose of the enjoyment of its fruits.

It also so happens that the idea of spectacle is commonly associated—any cinema, “*theatre*,” the opera that is “in” or the big show all converge upon this conviction—with a certain unanimous passivity, with being captured in the energy of the image or the divine voice. But Theatre demands that its spectator, who as a result will feel the hardness of his seat, attach the development of meaning to the lacunae of the play, and that he become in turn the interpreter of the interpretation. Who would not detest the fact of having paid for pleasure and being forced to perform a kind of work? Or rather, who would not hate that this pleasure, which one would desire to be immediate, is the doubtful product of the mind’s concentrated effort?

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XXVI

The truths lavished by the labor of theatre are essentially political in that they crystallize the dialectics of existence and aim to elucidate our temporal site.

To be more exact: of all the arts, theatre is the one that most insistently stands *next to* (or supposes) politics. I have already shown:

- the existence of a formal analogy between politics and theatre
- the implication of the State in the essence of theatre.

It is true that this analogy and this implication apply to “*theatre*” as much as to Theatre. But the latter makes an event out of the *saying*, in a torsion, of this analogy and this implication.

“*Theatre*” is *of* the State, though it has nothing to say about this. It perpetuates and organizes the easygoing and grumpy subjectivity that is needed for the State.

Theatre, for its part, always *says* something about the State, and finally about the state (of the situation). There are certainly good reasons for not wanting to listen to this saying.

XXVII

- THE EMPIRICIST: My lists, my lists! You won't escape any longer.
ME: I am far from having seen everything.
THE EMPIRICIST: If you thought it was Theatre, and not “*theatre*,” you would have gone to see it.
(*unforgiving*):
ME: No, there is such a thing as chance, laziness. . . .
THE EMPIRICIST: You said that theatre is a war machine against laziness.
(*ferocious*):
ME: There is the press, the time needed, forgetfulness. I am going to be unfair.
THE EMPIRICIST: So be it.
(*cynical*):
ME: Since when? Forty years?
THE EMPIRICIST: That's it! To celebrate only the living, and omit only the dead. No, no. I want your theatre spectacles from the last ten years.
ME: Well then, a restricted, minimalist, essential list.
THE EMPIRICIST: No precautions.
ME (*in one go*): Wagner's *Tetralogy* directed by Chéreau-Boulez in Bayreuth; Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*, by Chéreau; Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, by Peter Stein; Racine's *Bérénice*, by Vitez; and *Bérénice* by Grüber; *Phèdre* by Stein; Guyotat's *Tomb for 500,000 Soldiers*, by Vitez; Marivaux's *Triumph of Love*, in Italian, by Vitez; Goldoni's *Harlequin, Servant of Two Masters*, by Strehler; and. . . . No, I stop here. I should above all apologize for not naming the actors. It is always necessary to name the actors, and the stage designers, and the costume designers, and the musicians, if there are any.

Rhapsody for the Theatre

- THE EMPIRICIST: Only one contemporary author! Aeschylus, Racine, Marivaux, Goldoni! Such academicism!
- ME (*in one go*): Bernard-Marie Koltès's *In the Solitude of the Cotton Fields*, by Chéreau; René Kalisky's *Falsch*, by Vitez; and. . . No, I stop here. We would have to cite all the attempts. For the contemporary moment, we must support and salute *every* attempt. But, dear empiricist, you've granted me only ten years.
- THE EMPIRICIST: And all these spectacles, in the great official temples: Bayreuth, Chaillot, Villeurbanne, the Théâtre Français, the Schaubühne . . . Nothing lateral, not one small place, none of the provinces with their supreme discretion. Your "diagonal" is that of the sumptuous and of Big Credit.
- ME: Why is the dimension of the place important? Even if only ten persons went, theatre would persist in incarnating all by itself—for example, against the Ministry of the Police, or of War, or of Artisans and Commerce—the Ministry of Culture, lending it its living flesh and rendering its minister legitimate or illegitimate. Theatre, under the sign of its national grandeur, is the general union of culture. And since it is clear that this does not depend on its importance—socially very weak today—we are forced to conclude that it belongs to its essence. Theatre is essentially a form of the State.
- THE EMPIRICIST: I foresee a new dissertation.
- ME: Not at all! It's a memory from my adolescence. From 1953. My father was mayor of Toulouse. He tells of the incidents surrounding the vote on the budget of the municipal council. The mayor's role consists most of the time in skillfully linking the answer "Motion accepted!" to the question "No opposition?"—after reading at full speed from a book of magic spells whose emollient and somniferous powers are well demonstrated. The speedy syntagma "Nooppositionmotionaccepted" is the sesame of the vote. But for one chapter at least, this syntagma malfunctioned: when the theatre budget was announced—the budget for the great and glorious Théâtre du Capitole, loved by Stendhal. Ah! It is as though there had been a clarion call. The council members shake, they snort, they clack their heels and throw themselves into an endless quarrel. The discussion turns fussy, twisted, people deliberate the retirement of ushers and the replacement of a chipped harp. Wagner or *La Belle de Cadix*? The question poisons the mood.
- For the schools and the hospitals, the public roads, transportation, drinking water and public gardens,

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“nooppositionmotionaccepted.” For theatre, inevitably, the sound and the fury. The representations wake up the representatives. Theatre’s link to the budget is theatrical rather than budgetary.

THE EMPIRICIST: Finally something concrete!

XXVIII

1965. Mao Zedong, “China’s master,” as the newspapers say, proposes with the help of his wife—who is after all an actress—to reform the Beijing Opera. It is a matter of putting an end to the hegemony of aristocrats and warriors, of “squires and damsels” on the stage (as well as, for quite some time, in reality). Theatre must guarantee the popular triumph of workers, peasants, and soldiers. Of course, we keep the music, we keep the resources of the plot, we keep the good and bad emotions, in reality we keep everything, but for the princes we substitute the heroes of the people’s war. It is almost a simple costume change. Well, the affair brought about ten years of bloody tumultuousness; shady political episodes will shake China from the smallest factory in the provinces all the way to the Politburo; and in the end—surprise!—it will fail. Mao wasn’t even dead yet when it failed: squires and damsels were back on the stage, much to the relief of Deng Xiaoping, who used to be bored to death by the operas “with a contemporary revolutionary theme.” To purge theatre of its traditional heroes—kings, princesses, courtesans, elegant ladies and dandies, maids and soothsayers: they are the same everywhere, the affair has nothing particularly Chinese to it—was not within the power of the historical leader of the revolution, not even when supported by twenty million Red Guards, worker factions, and a few army units. Nobody can take the theatre by assault. Theatre is more solidly statelike than the State itself.

XXIX

1982. Antoine Vitez is enraged against the very notion of a “dramaturge.” This is one of his most constant themes: “As long as I am alive, he declares, there will be no dramaturge here, except in the sense of the one who writes plays.” The German tradition of the dramaturge in his eyes is that of a policeman of the text who forbids the theatre artist “on the spot” to seize hold of the scenic situation. The dramaturge introduces a legitimist politics into the theatre, with the director as his technical bag holder. What exasperates Vitez is this separation put in place between the textual exegesis, which produces meaning, and the actual theatrical gesture. This is because, for him, theatre is a form of thought, and there is no thought prior to it except the being of the text, which has no need of anyone, since it is the objective filter of the theatrical intervention.

Vitez is right about this, of course. It is all the more saddening that a cop in charge of meaning becomes involved in rehearsals just as we may conjecture that one cop (at least) in charge of public order will be present in the house. Theatre is essentially under surveillance. It is the possible place of political effects: an *official conspiracy*. In Molière’s comedies, in Racine’s tragedies, the king himself is

made privy, through the exaltation that is proper to art, to the ignoble world in which he participates, to the public conspiracy of his entourage, to the hypocrisies and cruelties of his own power. But his police are on hand to signal to him what might be excessive in this first artistic designation. There will be interdictions, there will be postponements. However, even while being under surveillance, theatre also does some surveillance of its own. It relates the real. It blows the whistle on the world better than any police report could. For this reason the king prefers to be instructed by the theatre, despite the palace intrigues, rather than listen to the bores around him.

Even today, this or that play touching upon Jewish topics, upon large corporations under threat, upon the church or the police, will produce a public effect of scandal and intrigue that no movie can hope for. This is because everything that the theatre pronounces is official in an obscure sense. It is something for which we can hold the authorities accountable. Cinema is capitalist and private. Nobody is responsible for it, other than a producer and his employees. Whatever is said in theatre, even in a schoolyard illuminated by two small lamps, is said *with majesty*. If it is scandalous, it is because the State does not keep watch over itself enough: it does not keep watch over its own words.

XXX

1984. Vitez produces my play from 1978, *The Red Scarf*, in an opera version scored by Georges Asperghis. The spectacle fulfills me. Several friends remark that in the third act, on the open blue space of the stage, the characters going their own way—all of them militants and cadres of a revolutionary adventure whose site and whose Party is invented, all of them taking different paths, torn and displaced, all of them stubborn in their conviction—end up resembling . . . Greek gods. Thus, it is all well to pile up “Central Committee,” “proletariat,” “Marxism,” “red flag,” “factory in revolt,” “revolutionary war”; to make all this sing, to tie it to love, to the embrace, to death; to assemble a comic interlude on the dialectic, and another (in a rowboat) between Althusser and Deleuze, more or less. Very well, but all this scares and darkens only the minds of the opera critics and the bourgeoisie in places like Lyon. For the spectator who simply accepts to be one, this story of the communist epic is inscribed in the great categories of myth where theatre, since the beginning, has articulated the effects of politics. It pronounces, in the splendor of the theatre, both that the time of these particular heroes is over and therefore that now comes the time of their scenic sublimation by which the State finally legitimates them, inscribes them on the tablets of the tragic law, and thus puts them to rest in death, in egalitarian fashion, next to Orestes, Creon, Titus, Polyeucte, Ruy Blas, Don Rodrigue—next to Electra, Antigone, Bérénice, Junie, the eternal queens and Ysé, and Isolde. I was already quite surprised that Antoine—the character in my play who, tied to the Russians, or “revisionist” as we used to say at the time, and enamored only with Europe, was in my eyes, in 1972–3, the incarnation of everything bad—reemerges on stage with a tragic consistency that is only further amplified by its irony. This shows that ideological intentions, even if they govern the lateral construction of consciousness, cannot pretend to control what theatre, as myth or rather mythification whose being is the State, will *discover* in the textual proposition. Thus filtered and dressed up, framed by the red of the

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stage and bathed in the modernity of song, my play said three things about the “red years,” which go from 1917 to 1977:

- It’s over.
- It possessed a beauty that honors our Greek ancestors, in tragedy.
- What it was exactly is a question that we are still charged with.

Indeed, if theatre distinguishes what mythifies from what is in decline in the name of the State, it is not in a position to draw any conclusion. It is the state of affairs put *in abeyance*.

XXXI

1986. People from the theatre world, under the energetic and inventive guidance of Ariane Mnouchkine, organize a powerful demonstration against François Léotard’s nomination as Minister of Culture under Chirac. What did he do, the poor simpleton, the baffled Boy Scout? First off, he has less money, like everybody else. As a result, after having guaranteed their seat to all the pontiffs of the major theatres (and with good reason), Léotard imagines that his “power” as minister, beyond the major conservative obligations (besides, the minister’s aid in charge of theatre, Robert Abirached, is still there and will remain there, a pillar of cohabitation), consists in wiping out a few subaltern subsidies. “But come on! We haven’t made the liberal revolution for nothing!” says the handsome hunk from Fréjus¹⁰ to himself. Generalized uproar!

Now, what is the directive behind this melodramatic episode of the class struggle in the theatre? People will march through the streets while shouting the surprising slogan, which is not without a little batrachian aspect: “We want a minister!”¹¹ Léotard was accused of not being one, given the modifications in quantity and hierarchy of the handsome payments.

The world-weary will tell me: “Don’t go and look too far. These people bemoaned the Left, they were doing a postelectional campaign.” Behind “We want a minister” I certainly hear “We want Jack Lang,” the bouncing Lang to whom all of cultural France, from the hard rocker in Saint-Gaudens¹² to the manager launching his brand of hip neckties, devotes a cult of recognition. But I maintain the importance of the symptom: no corporation has ever cried in public for obtaining a “true minister” the way theatre did that day, except perhaps that rather nostalgic bunch of phased retirees and repatriates of our late colonial wars.

XXXII

Quite a few theatres are national. There is the Comédie-Française, obviously, which cost Malraux (now there is a minister, perhaps like the one the frogs hoped for, but a military coup d’état doesn’t happen every day) a long battle, with a siege, bailiffs, decrees, just to drive out the administrator at the time who was called, as in a play, Monsieur de Boisanger.¹³ There is the national Theatre of Chaillot. Even at the time of its exile in Villeurbane, the Théâtre populaire remained national.

If it is not national, a theatre worthy of this name is at least regional. It is beaming, well established and active in Languedoc-Roussillon or in Poitou-Charentes. It thus remains in close proximity to the limitations and possibilities (above all financial) of the local Assemblies, for lack of the Bourbon Palace.

Like the government for the body of the nation, a theatre will also be a Center (for drama, culture, creation . . .) whose circumference is nowhere. However, this Center is always a House—a Molière House, which sounds like a cenotaph, or a Cultural House, which sounds like something from a university in the suburbs. In this house, the “house master and his team” receive the public, feed it, educate it, and of course they hold democratic debates with it. This equivocal relation between the verticality of the Center and the hospitality of the House is the same one that we find in our current Republic: firm presidential elevation of power, tender economical and pedagogical concern for the governed. Cult of the master (theatre people will not be the last to plead emphatically with the dark and obtuse Mitterrand to reenlist: “France needs you, and so on,” they know the drill) and cult of the public, in an uncertain balance, with the staging of “public debates” as their farce.

Can one imagine a “national cinema”? It would produce laughter. A film archive, yes, but everyone knows this is only a museum. Can one imagine a film director as “house master” interested in receiving the public in his “house”? A house about which he moreover would have the obligation to tell his hosts, with a phrase typical of republican banquets, that “it is theirs,” or that “they are at home in it”? Can one imagine a “beaming” cinema in Languedoc-Roussillon? Cinema is too trivial for the metaphors of the republican State. Crassly mixed up with the capitalist infrastructure, it cannot climb the steps of subvention, from the municipality to the Elysée, nor can it articulate itself, from the basic master of ceremonies to the minister, in terms of cultural demand.

XXXIII

Theatre and the State. The State and Revolution. Theatre and Revolution. I am thinking of the movie *Danton* (1983) by Andrzej Wajda. Drawing from a really beautiful play by the Polish Stanisława Przybyszewska who, trained under Mathiez, is a fervent Robespierriest, Wajda gives a rightist turn to the play thanks to a thundering, lewd, and thick Depardieu, demagogue of “life,” who is in fact utterly uninteresting (let’s say: an anarcho-desiring union leader of the CFDT¹⁴ from the years 1973–6). By contrast, the Robespierre played by the Polish actor Wojciech Pszoniak, is enthralling, entirely invested and absorbed in the political process. So I ask myself: how come, first of all, that the great theatre of the revolution is so rare (aside from this play, what do we have? Georg Büchner? Romain Rolland, in any case, has failed) and of foreign origin? Is there, furthermore, a truly convincing Russian theatre with 1917 as its subject matter? A Chinese theatre on the sequence 1923–49? There are books, poems, movies, nobody will doubt that. But has the theatre, grand theatre, gone this way? Even the political war that is the subject matter of my *Red Scarf* is a fiction, a dreamlike synthesis. I am afraid that we must conclude that the theatre *avoids* the revolution as the point of the real of politics. It likes the palace intrigues, the

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successions, the murders, the conspiracies but, always in a metonymical rapport with regard to the crowd, haunted by heroic representation and its irreparable division, it is troubled by the revolution. To the latter it prefers, so to speak, its retrospective premonition (Chekhov) or its legendary reconstruction (the founding of the public tribunal in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*). At best, it would mark its time of failure, its disastrous turn, the discussion of its setting sun—as in Sean O'Casey's plays where the conjunction between socialism and the national question inflames a premature youth or toughens the eternal old woman—melancholies of the decision that is also, always, where Brecht's uncertain heroes end up.

This is because in the theatre, in the form of the State, revolution is a matter of failure or success, and thus of death or life; and because in the theatre the existential categories of politics stand eclipsed. Theatre treats not politics but the consciousnesses raised in *the state of politics*. Theatre is confirmed in its statelike vocation by this state-ification of the revolutionary procedure, whose hero is the visible production. Theatre has always treated the revolution as a myth. Let me add in passing that this does not prove that it *was* a myth but only that, in theatre, that part of the revolution that was *not* a myth cannot be represented.

XXXIV

Unable to show the revolution, caught in the habit of the State, is theatre not the only art to establish a certain *visibility* of the State? The only art to show the State? What does the theatre talk about if not the state of the State, the state of society, the state of the revolution, the state of consciousness relative to the State, to society, to the revolution, to politics? To the state of love, too, which is very different from love. (I hold that the novel treats love, but that in the theatre love is an axiom, a condition for tying together a state of affairs, places and people. Nobody loves, onstage; here love is pronounced in terms of its consequences, but we need the novel to escort love itself artistically. In the theatre, love is a declaration to support a strategy, imbued with power. It is not, it cannot be, a generic sentiment.)

Theatre: art of the *declaration of the state* (of affairs). Inventory of all the parts of a closed situation as catastrophe. Final settlement in full, and explosion. The bursting, of tears or of laughter, as end (and as end goal) of the strategic enumeration of the passions and the meetings.

Theatre, indeed, represents: it *represents the representation*, not the presentation. The State, not the emergence of its place. It is the ceremony of all ceremonies. It does not begin until the (political, Greek) freedom to judge the representation is immanent to the conditions of art. It authorizes itself by representing representations. Thus, by the Idea (in Plato's sense). All theatre is a theatre of Ideas.

XXXV

But there is also a law of distortion, characteristic of the stage: being a form of the State, theatre can only show an "other state" of affairs than the one of

which it is a form. Theatre *distances* the State it shows because this showing is informed, put into form, on the basis of the State itself.

XXXVI

Examples: The tragic authors of the era of Greek democracy suppose the presence onstage of unlikely monarchs. The Chorus is certainly an assembly, but it is subordinate. Theatre, conditioned by democracy, aims at it through a legendary monarchical distance. Our tragic authors from the time of absolute monarchy have recourse to Roman emperors, Greek heroes, barbaric kings. They live in the court, but in a faraway discursivity. Our tragic authors from the Restoration, from the era of Louis-Philippe, who are prey to imperial nostalgias and look forward to the republican dream, find a way to balance these vexed dispositions through the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, or the Fronde.¹⁵ Claudel, our poet of the Third Republic, its colonies, its exasperated and absurd patriotism, except for *La Ville*, fashions some hyperbolic Spanish themes, belabors the revolutionary effect, or harkens back to the medieval land. Even the figures of the brothel in Genet's *The Balcony* are drawn from a defunct republic of notables, from a Cross and a Sword that evoke Boulanger rather than Pompidou.¹⁶ And nobody, it must be said, has ever been able to play or put onstage his solar rebel—to the contrary, the unpunished vice of the text excels in supporting, on the stage, the dickhead of the police prefect.

XXXVII

Theatre, which is a form of the State, says what this State *will have been* by lending it the fable of a past. Unable to come back to the present it activates, theatre establishes the future anterior of a state of affairs by putting it at the distance that is required for the present of its operation. Thinking in terms of time, theatre *executes* this thinking in the past tense.

XXXVIII

I claim that, at this point to which I've brought you, we can go back to the topic of Corneille and Racine. La Bruyère, who affirmed that there was nothing new to be said anymore, also did not say everything new that there is to say about our two tragic authors. (Their distance signifies the whole country, which a narrow and financially cheap Europe invites us to forget. "European Theatre?" I only know specific theatres, and what I like about them is their dissimilarity, their nonunity. I love England, Germany, Russia, France. . . . I do not love Europe.)

Corneille and Racine, and thus, France according to its hiatus (and France *is* a hiatus, a conflict, a gap, it is anything but a substance or a union), do not mean, and never have, "human beings as they should be" versus "human beings as they are." I will raise high Corneille's banner, with some bad faith: he still dwells on, gets mixed up in, and equivocates on the passes and impassés of politics. Trained by Richelieu in matters of invention and by the Fronde, in disorder, he still believes that politics exists, that the theme of the good king

clarifies its procedure, that the debate is open and complicated—and the old man adds to the mix some superb hysterics, which Racine's ferocious existential misers cannot match. When he comes to understand that all this is over, that nothing happens anymore, that politics has been suppressed for a long time, he maintains the anguished recollection of it in melancholic and suicidal figures, who are sentimental about politics all the while being led astray into the law-without-law of the State. As someone who dreams of a politics in dispute, it is true that Corneille is troubled by the theatre. There is something novelistic that animates and undoes his construction. The amplitude of his discourse, the subjective explanation of the torment of the Idea, the becoming eclipsed of the Real, the ungraspable horror of power: in all this there is a whirling that a balanced language captures, returns and indefinitely rebounds into the hall of mirrors of an essential deception.

Racine, the ingenious one, the professional sycophant, situates himself from the start in the nonexistence of politics. He shows no mourning over this. He takes delight in arranging its lack in the combinatory laws of power and desire. He observes the spiders in their jar, and, through the most perfect and precise language ever fashioned, he calculates their trajectories and their encounters. The cruelty of the State, its pure point of the real, the weakness of the vanquished, the watchful eye of the victors, the cause of desire, the evanescent complacency of love, all this is as though exhibited in a diamond cutter's montage. But at bottom, what do we care? What soul is educated here about what? Too much of the real is overburdening.

Corneille, in order to defend his chimerical constructions, often follows Boileau's statement:¹⁷ "The true sometimes may not be likely." Better yet, or worse: The true is *never* likely. Corneille searches for a theatre of truth, Racine for one of the real. That is the crux of the question: human beings as they are *in truth*, and human beings as they are, period.

Theatre in which the state of affairs is said in the shortest indirect manner: theatre of language and of desire (Racine). Theatre in which the political idea seeks to unravel the unreasonable grasp of the State: theatre of discourse and of truth (Corneille).

Racine, certainly, more perfect, as far as the theatre is concerned. The other, often on the verge of the unplayable. Racine at-play [*en-jeu*], Corneille disingenuously out-played [*in-jeu-nu*].¹⁸ But does this speak to the honor of Racine? Has the latter not fulfilled the theatre's functions of surveillance all too well? Dramaturge of himself, Antoine Vitez would say (and he detested Corneille while he admirably performed Racine).

Between the two, in any case, we can discern—or indiscern—that which theatre, in the throes of the real, can produce in terms of truth. Between the two, to be precise. It is always right, in school, to compare them. And if we no longer do so, it is because truth no longer matters, at least in its theatrical guise. The truth of the link between love, desire, power, and politics is at the point where Racine and Corneille are indiscernible: tragedy, classical. Theatre as superior art.

XXXIX

This number in my rhapsody is of capital importance: here I propose a practical measure, not so much a reform (I have two reforms with enormous consequences up my sleeve, see below) as much as a conservative or preservative measure. A “do not touch!” that is all the more intensely felt insofar as what is at stake has already been affected a lot.

Everything I have just said indeed comes down to a plea for *maintaining the intermission*. Yes, I beg the theatre and stage directors to maintain or restore the intermissions, no matter how mundane, annoying, or discomfoting they may well be. For the state of theatre, which consists in showing and saving, in the form of the State, the state of affairs in the actuality of its future anterior, it is indispensable that the public shows and preserves itself as public. The spectators must vanish into a thick and tangible crowd. We must hear the inane commentaries, the exclamations; there must be intrigues, whispers, beautiful women and men compelled to enter into civic competition with the luminous actors. This futility alone gives theatre, this paradoxical State, this contorted form of surveillance of the real, its dark brilliance. To suppress the intermissions is a barbarous, though tempting, act, one that at first sight might even seem salubrious. In sum, and to conclude, to suppress the intermission [*entr’acte*] is a cinematographic act [*acte*].

XL

THE EMPIRICIST: Your intermission will be the place of hatred, since you hold that people hate theatre.

ME: Alas! It is true that the discourse of the intermission is full of reservations, chronicles, absenteeism. If only they would allow the lady with the turban or the svelte gentleman to have a go at it, they would have done such a *better job!* However, these effusions are as indispensable as the bung-hole of a barrel.

THE EMPIRICIST: Give me a bit of psychology, just to see. We empiricists like only the objective facts and the mental facts. The list of successes for the season, that’s good. But I would have to know a bit more about that hatred of theatre and what it reveals about the ego, you get the gist. You said that the hatred of theatre is self-hatred?

ME: When one hates theatre, one hates precisely this hatred in oneself that consists in shrinking cowardly from the demands of the theatre. The detailed study of the prose of critics always brings out this symptom; that is, that the showy detestation of a theatrical spectacle automatically gets amplified because, really, if the critic had to admit that “that” was theatre, then he would be all the more discredited in his own eyes for not having been able to give his consent at the time. There is something terrible, even irremissible, about this, which is absolutely proper to the theatre. Nothing can ever make up for, or excuse,

not having been a Spectator. Since a representation is an event, those who do not muster within themselves, for the exact moment of its duration, the resources to implicate themselves in that from which a truth proceeds, are for all intents and purposes in the same position as the one who remains quiet in his room while below his window a revolution or a resistance is playing itself out. We understand that they are brought to the point of exasperation and become beholden to the sirens who whisper to them that all that was merely rowdiness and barbarism. That is the only thing that can explain that the most luminous and dense spectacles, those that are the nearest to our real time and tend the most to elucidate our history, are generally declared sinister or catastrophic, or else they are purely and simply passed over in silence. Most often we can expect that some well-intentioned epigones, careful to sidestep the hatred, turn into “*theatre*” the grain of truth delivered by the provocation of Theatre, so as to give the retrospective recognition that is owed to what they fled from, in the shelter against art that is culture.

In the open hatred of the theatre I decipher a great and obscure remorse, that of discovering oneself *incapable of Theatre*, and just good enough for “*theatre*.” And who would be so arrogant as to believe himself protected from such incapacity and such remorse?

However, we should also consider, with Spinoza, that “remorse is not a virtue.” To love theatre, by contrast, is a virtue, one that is quite difficult to conquer and nearly impossible to sustain.

XLI

The hatred of the theatre is aimed at those rare representations that mark an event for thought. One does not hate the theatre *texts*. One ignores them (which is another passion). School tended to force the choice: Racine, Corneille, Molière. As a result there remains something *obligatory* that is even more damaging to the free reading of the pieces themselves. Editors do not want any of them, writers do not live off them, readers do not get excited by them.

Consider this singular word: “piece,” like a piece of cloth. It indicates that theatre transcends its texts, which are only pieces, more or less accounted for.

Besides, how do we recognize that a text is a theatre piece? By the fact that it is made of replies? Entire novels are written in this way, and even (Martin du Gard’s *Jean Barois*) with the list of the protagonists. Conversely, certain unquestionable pieces are only *one* monologue—this is often the case with Beckett, or Jean Vauthier (*The Fighting Character*). Consider also that certain texts made up of pure dialogue are “too long,” according to general opinion, to be

considered true theatre texts. Thus, what are we to say of the original version of *The Satin Slipper*,¹⁹ of which there exists another, very different version “for the stage”? But who is going to fix the canonical length of a theatre text? The feeling is that certain texts, though written “theatrically,” are not for this reason *of* the theatre.

XLII

In fact, the ignorance, or the denial, or the disdain for theatre texts, for edited pieces, has its roots in an essential uncertainty. Can we give a simple answer to the question “What is a theatre text?” No, because taken in isolation the text does not decide this question: it is only one of the many constitutive elements of theatre.

Only that which has been, is, or will be *played* counts as *theatre* properly speaking. The event (the representation) retroactively qualifies the text whose written existence nonetheless anticipated it. A text *will be* part of theatre if it *has been* played. Hence: the theatre text exists only in the future anterior. Its quality is in suspense.

XLIII

Here we find again our stubborn analogy with politics. A text of political *thinking* participates in a procedure, it is the inscription of what Sylvain Lazarus²⁰ calls a “thinking in interiority.” The true political text is immanent to a “doing” the way matter is to meaning. The simplest case is that of the directive, whose destiny as thought lies entirely in the action it inspires. Thus the political procedure, which is a practical thought, characterizes the text in which it is stated, as project, as command, as orientation, as political *line*.

Is a written play not much more of a *theatrical line* than a theatrical process? And in the same way that, as long as a play is not performed, we ignore whether its text is truly a theatre text, so too a “political” text that is subtracted from all practical effects and foreign to all organization will be mere commentary, or philosophy; perhaps it will be written *with an eye toward* politics, but it will not be characterized politically as a political text.

XLIV

The structure of the theatre text, like that of the political text, is that of the not-all. For only that which ex-sists, and that which exists, namely, the representation, or the action, characterizes it qua text.

We can also say this as follows: there is no theatre *book* (if the book is the basis on which a text guarantees itself as the whole to which it belongs), whereas there are certainly books of prose, or of poetry.

There are also no political books. Only texts.

Thus we obtain the inverse of our initial problem: it is not the existence of theatre texts that is the enigma but the fact that there can *only* be texts, and hence something that is of the order of the not-all, the incomplete, the suspended. Fragments *for* the aleatory event of theatre.

What happens is that the real of the representation *takes hold* of the text, and gives it being qua theatre, which it was hitherto only by virtue of its incompleteness.

Theatre Survey

Every theatre text is thus latent to itself. It lies in the uncompleted nature of its meaning. Every representation resurrects it and brings it to completion.

XLV

But if a text belongs to the theatre because it is a text, and is thus given over to the eventual completion of the representation, any book can see theatre take hold of it, provided it first *undoes* it, detotalizes it, punctuates it. Indeed this is what we find: *Crime and Punishment*, as well as *Tomb for 500,000 Soldiers*²¹ can be *turned into pieces*. The theatrical action will thus ruin the whole whose glorious redoing it will then ensure.

And inversely, some texts written with an eye toward theatre, because they are too complete, too saturated, too novelistic, will tip over to the side of the book.

Thus there must be a certain intrinsic imperfection to the theatre text, a porosity, a plasticity. Something *simple*, too simple to articulate the whole of a world. Evidence of Molière's universal force *also* lies in the unfathomable equivocality of the characters and the situations, their simplified incompleteness.

Indeed, the representation must be able to be something more, just as the application of a political directive must be able to be creative.

XLVI

If theatre is of the order of the not-all, it is essentially feminine. We owe this algebra to Lacan: in the distribution of the sexes, which is less an affair of biological objectivity than of positions with regard to language and of modes in which a subject is linked to it, what counts is the function of the universal, of the "for all," in the sense in which we say in logic "for all x , there is the property P ," which is written, as everyone now learns on the school benches, $(x) P(x)$.

Man is defined precisely by the "for all," the property being the one inferred from the access to the phallus. "Man" is whoever sustains the "for all" of this access, whoever "totalizes" the property. "Woman" is whoever opens a breach in this totality, by giving existence to a point, one point at least, such that property is untotalizable: the existential point about which we can say that it is not "of the all" and which at once makes the whole exist by its exception. It is in this sense that woman is "not-all"—which already made Hegel say that she was "the irony of the community."

If the theatre text is such that only the exception of a representation gives it existence, if qua theatre text it is subject, for its properly theatrical totalization, to the singular point of the instant of the play that itself is outside of the text being played, then we can legitimately say that theatre writes itself "not-all," as opposed to the compact and self-sufficient world that is the imaginary of the classical novel. It follows that the theatre, perpetually subject to the spectacular vanishing of its being, belongs in effect to the feminine sphere. It, too, is the irony of community. We know, moreover, that by way of transvestism, through sexual insecurity, by the farcical auctioning up of the phallus, theatre posts this latent derision of the glorious "All" of masculinity. This clarifies why the

churches have a tendency to put actors, theatre, and women in the same obscure bag.

But let's complete the dialectic: since theatre is essentially feminine, it is no less essentially a men's affair. For a long time, we know, only men had the right to play theatre, and a hasty examination of the repertoire shows that the writers of theatre are almost exclusively men. There would be this law: men occupy themselves with what touches *too closely* upon femininity, since that is where their desire lies.

A contrario, since the seventeenth century women excel in the novel, which is the exact opposite of theatre, for its compulsion is to set up a whole world according to the completion of writing. Masculinity of the novel, which proposes its completeness to admiration, the Whole of what it stirs up. The novel is a women's affair.

Freudianism affirms all this in three words: "Girl is phallus."

XLVII

Grappling with incompleteness, martyred by the not-all, jealous of the novel, the theatre author often wants to *complete* things. Anxious of being suspended from the aleatory character of an event, he jumps ahead of the game in despair. Whence the stage directions, which became almost endless in the nineteenth century, claiming to define the decor, the costumes, the gestures, the figures. . . . In actual fact, this meant an invasion of theatre by the novel, under the law of an author who would much rather make a whole out of his theatrical proposition.

The theatrical real does away with all that, it expels the novel, and it chastises the stage directions. In this sense, it comes back *to the text*, by freeing itself from the harmful book to which the stage directions had pinned it.

The impossibility of unmooring the text from its novelistic saturation interferes with the representation. We can see this with Samuel Beckett. Roger Blin's productions, which had the author's approval, performed a considerable portion of the stage directions. No matter how great these productions may have been, however, today we should be able to do *something else* on the stage with these unquestionable masterpieces. Patrice Chéreau has tried to do so with Genet, our other great theatre author from after the war (before the war, there is only one, Claudel). However, although the attempt had to be made, this was not a decisive success. What would be needed is a *second intersection* of the text with a principle of completeness (to be brief: with a stage director). Beckett cannot do this, nor does he want to. We understand him, we respect him, but his theatre, which is huge, for the time being lies dormant.

Should we go so far as to make the following atrocious statement: that the death of the genius frees up the incompleteness of his plays? Yes, the theatre is cruel, even if it is not, if ever it is, a "theatre of cruelty." It is cruel because it cannot belong to any one person alone.

Theatre Survey

XLVIII

Paradox: we can thus write for theatre as much in the absolute haste of its urgency (the writer-comedians Shakespeare or Molière) as in the utmost indifference to representation (the early work of Claudel), because the decision will be made retroactively. The *distance* of a text to the theatre varies from zero to infinity, but that is not what decides whether a text is, artistically, a theatre text.

XLIX

I begin a play. I will always end up writing: So and so: “. . .” I do not have to describe So and so. He is what he says. Just as only the representation characterizes the text, so too, from within this text, only the proffering characterizes the character. The theatre text is thus the most absolute rule of the word imaginable. “Words, words, words . . .” The theatre text exhibits the very law of desire, since here the subject exists only as linked to his discourse. And nothing else.

Except that in the end some body is put forth to be marked by these words. The actor’s is a borrowed body, a precarious body, but also, therefore, a glorious body. “He *is* the character,” says the critic. He is nothing at all, because the character does not exist. He is a body eaten by the words of the text.

Besides, the political text does not describe any actor either. And yet, political action exists *only* in its actors. If I nevertheless describe them, it is no longer a question of a political text but of a history book.

L

The theatre text *is* a text exposed to politics, by necessity. Indeed, from the *Oresteia* to *The Screens*, it articulates propositions that become completely clear only from the point of view of politics. For the theatre text always subordinates its incompleteness to the open gap of *conflict*. A theatre text begins when two “characters” *do not agree*. Theatre inscribes discord.

Now, there are only two major discords: that of politics and that of the sexes, whose scene is love.

Only two subjects, therefore, for the theatre text: love and politics.

Theatre turns these two subjects into one. Everything depends on the knot of this one. And the whole point of theatre today is that neither love nor politics is a force that our time is ready, truly ready, to *clarify*.

LI

THE EMPIRICIST: It seemed to me that, in passing, you were proposing yet another list. Would you mind confirming this, so that I may take note of it on my empirical tablets?

ME: Damn! What list?

THE EMPIRICIST: That of the great authors of theatre, in the French language, and in the twentieth century. I heard: Claudel, Genet, Beckett.

ME: I consider excellent Vinaver, Vauthier, Kalisky, Koltès, and several others.

Rhapsody for the Theatre

THE EMPIRICIST: Don't play tricks. Your minimal-list, as you say, the sure names, the contemporary classics that are already guaranteed?

ME: OK, those three.

THE EMPIRICIST: And in Germany, for the same period?

ME: I see only Brecht.

THE EMPIRICIST: Botho Strauss, what do you have to say about him?

ME: If Botho Strauss counts for German, then Jean Anouilh for French.

THE EMPIRICIST: And in Italy?

ME: Pirandello.

THE EMPIRICIST: And Peter Handke, Austria, Thomas Bernhard?

ME: If Peter Handke and Thomas Bernhard, then Giraudoux and Montherlant.

THE EMPIRICIST: Remind me again of your minimalist one?

ME: Claudel, Pirandello, Brecht, Beckett, Genet.

THE EMPIRICIST: Would you have a list of the great actresses, the great actors?

ME: First a dissertation, in the form of a confession.

THE EMPIRICIST: I knew it!

LII

I want to confess a rather troubling and indefensible thing: I don't love actors very much. I *admire* a few of them, but there is a huge difference between admiration and love. In order for an actor, in his subjective being, to stop provoking in me a feeling of doubt and unease, I must have the assurance that he is also, as if at a distance from himself, the intellectual of his art; I must sense, as the flip side of his agility, the latent solidity of the concept. Someone like a Vilar, when I read him, or a Vitez, when I watch him, are actors, in my eyes, only on the firm basis of some reason. But what is the discernible reason of the actor? In the bygone era of syndicated authority, people tried to present the actor to us as a most ordinary "worker" who cares for his professional training and his bonuses, who faces the hard realities of the cost of life, and who is on the whole interchangeable, as far as the union's central offices go, with a bank employee. François Regnault has written about the aberration of this image. Closer to the real of the actor is excommunication: everyone senses very well, and I first of all by the limited appreciation I have of them, that actors, even outside the heat of the moment on stage, are the bearers of an irremediable singularity; that they could not function within the ordinariness of the social bond but participate in a procedure of exception; that their job is not one; that their identity does not belong on a card; that their beauty is subtracted from the simple graces of nature; that their voice is something other than speech; and that their gestures come from elsewhere than from the child's apprenticeships.

The actor poses a question. The sheer fact that this false employment exists causes an intellectual principle to teeter. But which principle?

LIII

The ordinary doctrine on this point is well known: having to give figure to all sorts of subjects, the actor would be the actor of himself, an evasive identity, an imitation without any stable point of reference. He would incarnate mimesis itself, and thus, deprived of a ground, or rather having only surface as ground, he would necessarily be someone in whom we cannot have much faith. Someone with not a lot of faith, the church thought. Having an organic need for a ground [*fond*] and a foundation [*fondement*], the church feels threatened in its fundament [*fond*], which is also its (commercial) fund [*fonds*], by the malleability of the actor who can be transported onto all surfaces and who bears witness, by the transports that this transport provokes in the public, to the fact that there exists such enjoyment in imitation that it is no longer even necessary to give it the support of a fixed point. However, the actor outside of the stage imitates nothing, being imitation itself. So it is he, even more so than the theatre, who is suspicious. Like women, about whom for a long time there was a dispute over whether or not they had a soul, the actor could very well show a *subject without substance*. There is a *cogito* of the actor, which is much closer no doubt to that of Lacan than to that of Descartes: I am not where one thinks that I am, being there where I think that one thinks that the Other is.

LIV

Is what teeters then the principle of identity? The fact that One is an Other-than-One? God subverted by mimetic profanation? It is true that regarding this *intimate* question about actors, we must also consider the point of view of the church.

The church, I mean the Catholic Church, is so evidently theatrical in its pomp, the decors that we would try in vain to improve, the purple hangings, the central actor in his white and gold costume flanked by fair-haired sidekicks marked with rouge, the thunderous music or the insidious birdsongs flowing from the organ pipes, tragic or subjugated choruses, a public brought to its knees by the central scene, called the Last Supper, the language elevated toward the esoteric, the unforgettable drama of Presence, the succession marked by turning points, the “original noise,” yes, this same church that every week gathers the entire crowd to its spectacle, that has written and performed for centuries without end the same play—a “hit,” that one, that can only make today’s impresario feel crushed—, that has invented the Displacement (when the officiant turns around and casts the injunction of the sacred gaze onto the public), the Decentering (when he rises in person on the secret and unsurpassable spiraling staircase in order to hurl abuse at the dumbfounded audience), the immobile Pause (when he mutters with his back toward the public, which waits for this suspension of the Acts to end), the cutaway Gesture (when he lifts the wafer box), the Change of costume, the Accessories, and even the Sweetness of the perfumes: Why has this church denounced and excommunicated theatre, thrown the actors overnight into common graves, and found luxury and oblivion in the public’s zeal for the theatre spectacle, but not in its own? Is it a matter of jealousy between tour operators, a sordid desire for monopoly? Would it be necessary for all theatres without exception to announce on their billboards only

the Mass? For the actors only to be priests, the extras, church boys, the costume designers, embroideresses of chasubles, the musicians, organ players? Would the right to discuss in the great halls the merit of the stars have to be limited, in the eyes of these atemporal and cantankerous authors, to the comparison between Bossuet and Bourdaloue?²²

LV

Today we can return to this irritating question with calm: the play of the mass is performed only convivially with the decors of prestressed concrete surrounding a white wooden family table on which an ironmonger's ciborium is placed with negligence. The central actor, who is concerned with differentiating himself as little as possible from his meager audience, sports a gray jacket; the side kicks have disappeared; people sit in circles for the sermon, which is reasonable enough since nobody is preached to anymore. Today, in the eyes of the Lord, who is only a Supreme Buddy anyway, who does not have solid excuses to invoke for every canonical sin? Besides, there are no more sins, only drives and fantasies, which an open democratic debate attributes to the legitimate diversities of the ego. And since all of this is done with guitar strumming in the background, nothing distinguishes a church anymore, except for the clock tower, which we expect to be shorter and shorter (because erecting it is offensive), and a cultural and youth center where we know that any theatricalization, if it ever occurs, comes at the expense of the theatre.

LVI

We will say that the fundamentalists, with their pack of old colonial sergeants, notables from Mayenne,²³ young vindictive bourgeois and skinheads from the Front National, seek to maintain—aside from Latin and the capital sins—a few effects of the Last Supper, in the ecclesiastical lair that they have actively occupied. These sinister parodies will not put us off the track; nor will the use of broken harpsichords and patched-up violas de gamba convince us that a baroque musician whose total oblivion honors the taste of the centuries is more vivacious than Haydn. The Mass is worn out, the theatre of Presence is obliterated. At the end of the road we ask ourselves why it considered itself the enemy of all profane theatre, and what this prosecution entailed in terms of truth, even without knowing it, about the profound dialectic of the scene and the soul.

LVII

Rather than the vacillation of a principle of identity, what intrigues me in this malediction is the fact that one can, and must, suppose some thought as regards to women. The church for a long time has had doubts whether they had a soul. Now, I hold that theatre is tied to this very obscure problem in a crucial way: the soul of women, whether it exists.

It is not for nothing that for so long, and in so many places, only men exerted the function of actors. Contrary to the banal hypothesis, which claims that people want to keep the maternal substance of women away from the perils of imitation (because about a woman actor, it must be said, one cannot put

one's trust in what she reproduces), I think that insofar as women are held to be imitators by nature, they would have corrupted the enjoyment of imitation that men had to acquire. Men take imitation to extremes, because they have to imitate it. Men imitate imitation, and that alone makes the actor, and thus theatre. Besides, we can say that an actor, and it matters little in this regard whether it's a man or a woman, is first of all the one who *imitates a woman*, because it is the one who *imitates imitation*. Everyone knows that a man playing the woman makes for theatre, which is not in and of itself the case of a woman who plays the man. As for a woman who plays the woman, that is an ordinary occupation in life, as long as she does not go so far as to play this play itself, and thus to imitate the imitation that she lavishes as woman. It is certain that actors subvert the difference of the sexes, and I am sure that what unpleasantly vacillates in me when I come into contact with them is this very difference, of which I am a strong partisan. But this subversion involves the twists of imitation to the second degree, it does not present itself in equivocation. I do not believe at all in the theme of the androgynous actor; to the contrary, there is nothing more distinct in theatre than men and women. Actors and actresses present the difference, they consolidate it, but this is also in order for imitation to circulate in such a way that this given is on the one hand emphasized and on the other decentered and turned back upon itself. A major stake of theatre, already suspect to every church, consists in proposing the following thesis: the two sexes differ radically, *but* there is nothing substantial in this difference. Theatre introduces us, through its play, to this first point of ethics: know that no difference is natural, beginning with the difference that institutes that there are men and women. We can say this differently: *if* women have no soul, then nobody has one.

LVIII

Theatre carries with it from the origin an essential "feminism" that is based not on equality but on the substantial nothingness of that which marks the difference of the sexes, the purely *logical* and transparent character of this marking. Or again, if you want, *the* woman does not exist, since a man or a woman, actor or actress, is justified in producing its signs or its in-sign-ia. This alone can explain the fact that theatre among the Greeks presents powerful figures of women, in a society in which women are politically absent, socially confined, and philosophically kept in a barbarous background.

LIX

I seem to observe, contrary to a widely held opinion, that there are fewer great theatre actresses than actors. It is certainly more difficult for a woman to be an actress, insofar as it belongs to the essence of theatre to imitate the feminine imitation. An actress functions to the third power (imitation of the imitation of the imitation), her play is necessarily mediated, on at least one point, by the masculine arrangement. She must *also* become one of those men who alone had the right to be actors; she must, on stage, reconquer at all times this right, which no institution can guarantee. It is indispensable not to lose sight of

the fact that an actress, a woman, plays what a man would consider necessary to play a woman who plays a man. This requires extreme poise of hysteria itself. The actor can always keep steady on the margins of equivocation, he *finds a foothold* in the limits of his own universality. An actress is always at the limits of the absence of limits, she functions *on the edges of the void*. Many actresses have tried to fill this void with the return to simple imitation, which is emphatic, subjugated, tearful. The ethics of play imposes upon actresses an unconscious distance that for them is the pinnacle of mastered artifice, the pinnacle of art. Whence also the fascinating grip exerted by a great actress, more generic than an actor, closer to humanity, which is this very void on the edges of which she holds steady.

LX

THE EMPIRICIST: Come on! You could take a few risks! Names! Who are those fascinating and ever so rare actresses? And who are those emphatic, subjugated, tearful ones?

ME: Their glory is so assured that I can cite, without harm to them, two actresses whom I don't like at all: Jeanne Moreau and Maria Casarès.

THE EMPIRICIST: You are not mincing words here! And those you like?

ME: Given my principles, they cannot be actresses in the sense of a proper name or a supposed subjective substance. They can only be actresses *in the eventual singularity of a spectacle*.

THE EMPIRICIST: No false excuses. The list!

ME: Every empiricist is a British police officer. Good. In one breath:

- Madeleine Renaud in *Happy Days* (Beckett/Blin)
- Claire Wauthion in *Britannicus* (Racine/Vitez)
- Madeleine Marion in *Bérénice* (Racine/Vitez)
- Maria de Medeiros in *Death of Pompeius* (Corneille/B. Jaques)
- Edith Clever in *The Oresteia* (Aeschylus/Stein)
- Jutta Lampe in *Phèdre* (Racine/Stein)
- Nada Strancar in *The Four Molière* (Vitez)
- Dominique Reymond in *Falsch* (Kalisky/Vitez)
- Maddalena Crippa in *The Triumph of Love* (Marivaux/Vitez)

THE EMPIRICIST: I am at the end of my roll call, but there are others. It's an eccentric list. I'll let you go back to your sexual dogmatizations.

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LXI

In general, bad theatre, capable of reassuring the church, is theatre that naturalizes differences. It gives up on the ethics of play insofar as it distributes substances. It pretends that the imitation of the imitation was only the redoubling of imitation, which supposes *that there is something to imitate*. Now, the second imitation, which alone presents differences as objectless transparencies, is the imitative procedure, which does not exist except in the act itself. It is the play itself, the play of play. It *must* surprise, unless it pretends that there exists a nature behind the role. Taken by the debates over whether Hamlet is a phobic or a schizophrenic or whether he does not know how to come to terms with castration, Lacan puts an end to all this with the remark, which has always made me very happy, that Hamlet *doesn't exist*. What presents itself is the actor, and if his performance presumes the existence of anything like Hamlet, theatre is dissolved. Bad theatre, which from the start I have called "*theatre*," turns the actor into the stabilized professional of a network of vocal signs and gestures by which we recognize that something exists. He stirs up a complicity of recognition. He avoids the spectator, the attentive work of thought that, starting from incalculable scenic presences, consists in gaining access to the universal conventions of difference without an object. "*Theatre*" proposes to us a sign-ification of supposed substances, and Theatre, a procedure exhibiting generic humanity, that is to say, indiscernible differences that *take place* on stage for the first time. This is why there is something painful in the attention that is required from the spectator of Theatre, whereas ease and easiness are the rule in "*theatre*."

LXII

Here is what I would propose: bad theatre, "*theatre*," is a descendant of the Mass, with its established and substantial roles, its natural differences, its repetitions, its falsified event. It is where one gets a taste of, where one gobbles up, the virgin, the aging hysteric, the tragic actor with the loud voice, the virtuoso of lamentations, the shivering beloved, the poetic young man, just as one eats, in the guise of the host, God. One comes away from this with one's dispositions taken care of and put on display. One obtains salvation on the cheap. Genuine Theatre turns every representation, every actor's gesture, into a generic vacillation so as to put differences to the test without any supporting base. The spectator must decide whether to expose himself to this void, whether to share in the infinite procedure. He is summoned, not to experience pleasure (which arrives perhaps "on top of everything," as Aristotle says) but to think.

LXIII

A capital consequence of all this is that the central virtue of the actor is not technical but ethical. One must always stay at a distance, just short of the quest for an effect, because every effect presumes that the imitation is straightforward, that it has an object at its disposal. One must hold steady at the edges of the void, at the edges of the abyss, against which it is always reassuring to invoke precisely the power of effects. One must at all times be *singular*. Singularity is much harder than originality, for a mere original ends up

playing itself, becoming the nature that supports the differences. Singularity is a composition without a concept. The result is that there is no “good actor,” if by this we mean a “guaranteed” actor, no matter what the circumstances on the stage are. This guarantee can only be technical. It is only in the stage event, when the ethical virtuality of play is achieved, that an actor or an actress can excel. But the stage event in turn demands the conjunction of two artists: the theatre writer and the stage director. An actor or actress is, in the end, *the ethical in-between of two artistic propositions*.

LXIV

Finally, what the church abhors in theatre and especially in the play is the fact that to the natural ethics whose spectacle it organizes, theatre opposes an ethics of the event and of singularity. For the church, art is ornamental; with its power, it heightens the scenic repetition of the figures of the sacred order. For true theatre, art is initial (the poet’s text) and terminal (the representation governed by the stage director). Between the two, there is no order to mediate, not even that of the profession, technique, or talent. There is an ethical availability that is directed against all substantialism, against all fixed conceptions of the roles, the people, or the representations. The actor exhibits onstage the evaporation of every stable essence. The decisiveness of the bodily and vocal gestures in which he or she presents himself or herself serves above all to establish, in delight and surprise, that nothing coincides with itself. The ethics of play is that of an *escape*, we could say: the narrow escape [*l’échappée belle*]. In particular, the actor operates against every natural theory of difference, and specifically of sexual difference. His or her play makes an artifice out of what we believe to be the most evidently *given*, it combines that which we imagine to be forever separate, it separates that which seemed an acquired unity. The actor’s play is always *between-two*. This between-the-two *operates* in the pure present of the spectacle, and the public, who in the Mass is molded by Presence, gains access to this present only in the aftermath of a thought. What true theatre presents is not represented, and the word “representation” is misplaced. A theatrical spectacle is every evening an inauguration of meaning. When the text and the staging know how to solicit the virtual ethics of play, the actor or actress is the pure *courage* of this inauguration.

LXV

A second crucial paragraph, this 65! And, thus, 66 as well! Here I propose a reform, a real one. A radical reform: that of the greeting, relative to the way in which, at the end of the play, the public *joins* the actor lined up by the clapping of the hands.

Like any reform, especially one announced as radical, mine stems from an axiom made dubious by obnoxious reasonings. The axiom, which I uphold under any circumstances (but that is the least of things for an axiom), is that of paragraph 63: the actor is not an artist, but a moral hero. He or she depends not on the critique of judgment but on the critique of practical reason. The actor’s ethical proposition presupposes an artistic proposition, and even two: at the source, there is

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the proposition of the theatre author, or the poet; at the other end, there is that of the artist of theatre, or the stage director. The only histrionics belong to the author and to the stage director. The actor is the interstitial seriousness of this double histrionics.

From this axiom it follows, by the simple use of a few laws of logic, that it is not only useless but also noxious, even blasphemous, for actors and actresses to come and greet the public at the end of the spectacle. The eventual introduction of the empirical and almost prurient appeal to applause and shouted bravos into the austere execution of the actor's duty inevitably corrupts its very substance. If they are booed, it is even worse, because either it is the saintliness of the moral Law itself, to which they are publicly sacrificed, that is thus covered in jibes, which would be horrifying enough; or else it is the actors who, having failed (being bad actors), are blamed for *not having* held up the moral order of the Subject, which is nefarious because, precisely, a supposed failure of the imperative of Play can be referred only to the inner judgment of the actors and actresses, and not to the sanction of some public disapproval. In order not to expose the actor to the temptation of a reward nor the public to the philistinism of blame, the most effective measure is to omit without delay the miserable habit of gathering before us, with all kinds of hypocritical faces, the actors immediately after they have achieved that alone which counts, namely, their Act, the everyday and collective redemption of the sexuated Subject.

LXVI

Will there then be no more salutation at all? Not! Because the same reasoning that excludes from such clowning the noble soul of the actors, devoted to ethics, also necessarily summons those who by contrast are devoted to art, that is, to some generic truth. If the duty of the actors consists in subtracting themselves from praise as much as from blame, the duty of the authors and stage directors (and of their acolytes: decorators, musicians, costume designers, light technicians, . . .) evidently consists in begging for them, or to be more precise: it consists in inquiring into the collective disposition of the spectacle. The author and the director of a spectacle will thus be *forced* to come and greet the public every evening. We could easily show that if they are raised up to the clouds by a delirious public, it is perhaps an excellent sign as to the positive values of the inquiry into the spectacle's genericity. If they are abundantly booed, it goes in the direction of negative values, unless we have to conclude the opposite, based on the hypothesis of the public's cognitive rut. Still, we will always be able to come to a conclusion and thus contribute to the becoming of some artistic truth.

What to do if the author is dead (we will posit that a dead director is no longer capable of directing)? As with any imperative, the one relative to the salute by the artists cannot allow any exception. Therefore, every evening an actor will be summoned to represent the dead author and to endure in his or her stead the bravos and the boos. The objection does not hold that in this way it is an actor who salutes, contrary to the fatal consequences of the axiom, for the actor in question does not salute, he plays the author who comes and salutes. And the actor invests all his

ethical conscience in this performance, deaf to the rumor in the auditorium, which he knows is not addressed to him but to the dead author for whom he is a placeholder.

Of course, it is excluded that the actor returns *afterward* to greet the public in his own name, with the aim of receiving compensation or punishment for his performance, executed according to those well-known roles of the repertoire, “Dead Molière greeting the public after *The Misanthrope*,” “Dead Shakespeare booed after a calamitous *Hamlet*,” and so forth. Once again let us leave it up to the actor’s conscience alone to know whether the respect of the Law was guided by his obsequious gestures as an author in an inquiring salute, or if he for a moment imagined that people were clapping for him, the actor, in the vain nostalgia for those corrupt times when the public was exposed, as in a fair, to morality’s immortal monsters.

LXVII

But the spectator: in the name of what, under what pretext, would he remain in his seat, if not because on behalf of the State, in which theatre participates, you are obliged to remain seated where the usher puts you, just as you are obliged to remain in your seat in school? Besides, it is always a bit in secret that, in entire rows contaminated by darkness, on the loud tip of their toes, or after the first intermission, those who refuse to listen any more leave, or flee. Usually they are all the more numerous, as a rule, the more the spectacle is innovative and dense, unless they are held back by the fact that the cultural opinion press (that is, when all is said and done, *Le Nouvel Observateur* and *Libération*, but these two organs, in matters of theatre, do not possess the most assured taste, nor do they have the capacity to distinguish between the conceptual summons and the razzle-dazzle that flatters our neuroses) has covered the spectacle from which our spectator is about to flee in all the perfumes of what the chitchat among teachers will have to be about.

We can already distinguish two regimes of the fixity of the gaze: the pedagogical constraint and snobbism. Theatre as dismal pedagogy (an aspect of Brechtianism, if not of Brecht himself), and theatre as the basis for cultural glossing, as the serious index of collective chatter. Thus. . . .

LXVIII

- THE EMPIRICIST: Of this “razzle-dazzle” for the “flattering of neuroses” with which the honorable opinion papers would like to pull the wool over our eyes, could you not cite a few titles to me? So that I may no longer be lost. . . ?
- ME: The best example is not from theatre but from dance: Pina Bausch, that inadmissible darling.
- THE EMPIRICIST: Leave dance alone, please, since you have no clue about it. A paradigmatic example of snobbish spectacle, in theatre, and a recent one, for the spectator shamefully fooled by the press, that’s what is needed.
- ME: I didn’t say that the press fooled the petit-bourgeois spectator, since it is also the latter who fools the press,

- because the press concentrates his predisposition to flee the theatre by keeping him there *for all the wrong reasons*.
- THE EMPIRICIST: An example.
- ME: Books of theatre, except those by the theatre artists Stanislavski, Meyerhold, Brecht, Jouvet, Vilar, Vitez, or those, all too rare, by spectators armed with a destiny for theatre, such as Regnault, are made up only of images and examples. They are old as soon as they appear in print, because theatre is measured in terms of eternity, not by staying on but by disappearing. The eternal essence of a spectacle lies in its having-taken-place, which no scattered journalistic account can reconstitute. All the more so since, if I mention a spectacle that in my eyes is mediocre but glorious in the opinion of these papers, weak in Idea but strong in Doxa, nobody will know, six months or one year from now, what I was talking about.
- THE EMPIRICIST: Do you think I am going to applaud this pompous feint? You quoted *Libération* and *Le Nouvel Observateur*, that should suffice to guarantee that you will not be understood by any eternity! If you do not give me my example, I will have to think that you are pusillanimous.
- ME: With arguments like these . . . OK, let's say *Zerline's Tale*, text by Broch, directed by Grüber, main role Jeanne Moreau. I insist, first of all, on underlining my admiration for Broch's *Death of Virgil* and, second, that Grüber is in my eyes one of the five most important European directors working today. But *Zerline's Tale* is a spectacle that is both weak and low, aesthetically and ethically demagogical. My thesis is that Grüber, aware of this, has slept, completely drunk, throughout the rehearsals, on the bed that appears in the back of the stage set.
- THE EMPIRICIST: You will be hard put to prove such a thesis.
- ME: So what? As Rousseau said: "Let's put aside all the facts."
- THE EMPIRICIST: One fact that you will not put aside is the list of the five greatest theatre directors in Europe.
- ME: You have a good ear.
- THE EMPIRICIST: So?
- ME: Chéreau, Grüber, Stein, Strehler, Vitez.
- THE EMPIRICIST: You're not exactly "making space for the young"!
- ME: For some years now theatre has not been doing very well.
- THE EMPIRICIST: You make me laugh! It never goes well with theatre.
- ME: It's true that, because it started one day, it cannot perish.²⁴ Then again, I am only one spectator, I do not see everything, I do not even see a reasonable not-all. I have a very poor knowledge of Russian directors. Peter Brook is also not too far from the top. There is a particular

problem with Bob Wilson, who is not really a “theatre director” but rather an “author of representations,” one whose spatiotemporal imageries oscillate between the upsetting and the repugnant (in the sense in which I am repulsed by having to endure what is shown and sounded there, as in a kind of puerile and artificial Nature). And so many others, which we would have to examine *case by case*.

LXIX

After all, is what I call the razzle-dazzle of neuroses so far removed from what Aristotle calls catharsis? Whether the passions are large or small, it would always fall to theatre to purge us from them (or to purify them? that’s the whole problem). And is what I describe as a pedagogical constraint not the effect of distancing or alienation? Brecht’s non-Aristotelian theatre, which must inscribe us in the dialectical circuit of class consciousness? We would thus still be at the same point:

- *Either* theatre is a capturing machine of desiring identifications, and its thrust is by analogy psychoanalytical—it transfers, displaces, filters and purifies that which the sexual underside of the speaking being attaches to it in terms of latent meanings;
- *Or* theatre is a perfected pedagogical apparatus, and its thrust is by analogy philosophical—it distances the Idea in the veil of representation, and forces us to an elucidation that, if we did not have the mirage of voices and bodies to elicit it, we would not even be able to know for sure it exists.

In neither case is there a direct mention of the classical rule (“the point is to please”). The spectator would be there, not for pleasure, but for a therapy or an apprenticeship. This would explain why, in spite of its so-called popular or trivial variants as well as its bourgeois degradations, theatre remains invariably *serious*.

LXX

So: in a location tied to the State, and conditioned by an ethics of play, a spectator-subject would be put in place by the seven constitutive elements of theatre in such a way that this subject either transfers onto the simulacra of the stage whatever insists in his or her desire, or else he or she occupies, with regard to the Idea latent in the golden and scarlet appearances, the universal position of the philosopher without knowing it.

LXXI

At once the unfathomable mystery of the theatre (but, in the end, what is theatre?) would occupy the material position of another question, which we know to be clarified only very little: that of the relations between psychoanalysis and philosophy. Theatre would be the *effectiveness* of this

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question, summoning the spectator to decide (if he or she is on the point of the real of his or her desire, it is psychoanalysis; if he or she is instructed by the path of the Idea, it is philosophy), without there ever being a way of knowing how to decide, because if one interrogates the spectator upon exiting, he or she will only be able to say “it was good” or “it wasn’t great,” aphorisms from which neither the psychoanalyst nor the philosopher would be able to draw the rule of their triumph.

LXXII

So Theatre would be the following: a complex machinery (seven elements), creating a situation whose *objective* dialectic is sustained by the majesty of the State, whose *subjective* dialectic engages an ethics, especially with respect to the difference between the sexes, and whose *absolute* dialectic brings into being a subject-result, a spectator, about whom one cannot decide whether the whole operation assigns him to the real of his desire or to the power of an Idea.

LXXIII

Of this notion that theatre has always been the materiality of an undecidable problem between philosophical mastery and the therapeutics of desire, we can no doubt find confirmation in certain hesitations on the part of Aristotle. However, it is even clearer in that which opposes, say, Plato to Lacan (but also to Freud) as soon as it is a matter of examining the theatrical poem. The former is alarmed by the fact that the poem may claim to educate the young in the one area in which the philosopher would much rather lord over them, namely, regarding what is meant by knowledge of the truth, how one can know the humans and the Gods. In his endless and painful polemic against theatre and poetry, Plato confronts a *rival* and banishes him from the place where the philosopher has seized power. By contrast, it is evidently an *accomplice* whom Freud and Lacan interrogate when they turn to Sophocles or Shakespeare.

Rivalry and complicity have this in common: they both presuppose the communality of some stake. Who does not know the fact that an accomplice is a potential rival, precisely because of that which, between the two, counts as one, and only one, for example, the crown? See, for instance, the lessons of Shakespeare, precisely on this topic: *Macbeth*, and so forth. We can thus be sure that philosophy and psychoanalysis recognize that the operations of the theatre take place on their respective terrains, and thus *at the intersection, which is always in dispute, of these territories*. Psychoanalysis, which sees here a social and artistic extension of its field, is glad to acknowledge this and takes its concepts (Oedipus) and its cases (Hamlet) from the repertoire. Philosophy is more reticent due to the fact that, for philosophy, the Idea latent in theatre can lay claim only to the generic particularity of art, and not to the master’s Great Lesson.

But perhaps it is above all the case that philosophy sees in theatre, which always fascinates it and gets it all worked up, a mode of the Idea that is *infected, always, by desire*.

Rhapsody for the Theatre

Theatre would be: philosophy seized by debauchery, the Idea on the auction block of sex, the intelligible dressed up in costume at the fair. Thus, on the side of philosophy (the Idea, the intelligible), it would rival with the master, and on the side of debauchery (sex, the street fair), it would be the accomplice of psychoanalysis.

Theatre: the putting-into-bodies of the Idea. From the point of desire, it is its life; from the point of the Idea, it is its tomb. Whence the anathema and the disputes. Theatre as bastard philosophy, or philosophical bastardy: principled impurity, diverted lesson, all-too-serious analysis, all-too-ludic truth to be assured. A revolving door.

LXXIV

A brief look back. I have distinguished the objective theatrical dialectic (the State of theatre), its subjective dialectic (the ethics of play), and its absolute dialectic (the putting into place either of a desire or of an Idea).

There are *roles* that correspond to these instances of the dialectics of theatre. The *stage director* is the regent of objectivity, he or she signs the spectacle, and besides he or she is also often the “boss” of the theatre in question. The actor, as we saw, is the body of subjectivity. And the spectator occupies the position of Absolute Knowledge.

There are also *financial relations* to these instances, because in the world as we know it every dialectic traces its outline against the background of the general equivalent of money. The financial point of the stage director is the Subsidy (objective, static), that of the actor is the Expenditure (subjective, sumptuous), and that of the spectator is the Revenue (insufficient, as is always the case of the Absolute).

LXXV

I am still not satisfied. Let’s see, what *truly* happens when I am a spectator? “An example!” the Empiricist would say, who has been mute ever since I gave in to the concept too much. What happens when I attend a representation of *Bérénice* directed by Vitez, or by Grüber?

But first of all, what happens when I read *Bérénice*?

LXXVI

When I read *Bérénice*, the principal effect is that of Eternity. There is something diamondlike. This is unlike the novel, which carries with it, sticking to its sole, a whole range of detailed stories, decors, and trajectories. The great text of theatre, because it is open and incomplete, because it will be played through the ages and by human beings who are indifferent to the whole context of this text, human beings who have changed gods, whose city no longer has the same form, and whose loves no longer have the same law, this text must possess the powerful simplicity of the atemporal, it must bespeak a *generic* humanity, capable of passing from actor to actor, from body to body, from State to State, all the while preserving its fundamental meaning. *Bérénice*: love, the State, renunciation. Conjunction and disjunction. The glacial transfixing clarity of

language, this music stopped in the tracks of its constant precision, all this formal work is only the receptacle of the Simple, the ingenious capture of an essence that bodies, voices, and breaths will incarnate for centuries.

Bérénice, Titus, Hamlet, Orestes, Mesa, Estragon, Scapin, Alceste, Peer Gynt, Rodrigue are proper names of genericity, they belong to a subject-language that is spoken by nobody in person, being the eternal flip side of any historical language. Men and women designated by these names *can exist at any moment*. The text merely is the guarantee, the depository, of this virtual existence, which nothing can interrupt except the blaze of libraries.

This is not at all like Swann, or Goriot, or Saint-Preux, or Don Quixote. About these great archetypes from the novel, we will say that *they exist forever in the text*, and not that they may exist at any moment. The characters of the novel are *immortal*, those of theatre alone are *eternal*: where a dialectical time is elaborated that subtracts itself from time (who fails to know that a spectacle retains time?), I may *encounter* them, since they have become *out-of-time*, but capable of becoming temporal before our very eyes.

There is thus—first strand in the knot of theatre—an eternity latent in the text and in that which singularizes it among other texts: the genius of its simplicity, its genericity, the fact that any proper name here is *also* a common name and that, based solely upon the duration of the text, we can have, forever, the race to pass on the torch of interpretations.

LXXXVII

And now when I watch *Bérénice*? There is the ineffable moment of each representation, that which I will never be able to retain or describe, this false time within the suspension of the true, this immense history that is told to me with the speed of lightning.

Vitez will tell me, with his own diction projected far beyond a body shrunk by gesture, the pain without concept of the intellectual Antiochus, unable to retain a woman either by the exploits of power or by the violence of desire, and who still and always believes that to tell subtly of his misery may convince her, as if love or desire could be caught in the rhetorics of lack, as if the confession of a defect, no matter how artistic or sincere, could—by looking for the all-merciful Mother—lead to anything other than to missing out on the woman.

Grüber will arrange, in a kind of trembling of the origin, the separation of men and women, at the same time as the legendary History of Empires. Speaking among themselves in a low voice from one side of the stage to another, marking by their gestures, their poses, their fabrics the fact that they are indeed the worn-out Rome, Egypt, Persia, the actors insert Racine in a revised vision of Hegel, in which every scene must be read as a figure of individual consciousness at the same time as it is a figure of historical consciousness. The same void separates the hearts and opposes the dead kingdoms.

But all this is in the moment, under the visible and artificially unified constraint of the seven constitutive elements of theatre. There are only displacements, lights, breaths, voices. There is also myself, captive in my seat,

and thinking only of seeing and listening *exactly*, which in and of itself constitutes an effort more akin to the understanding of a mathematical statement than to the beatific enjoyment in which television images leave me basking. Precisely in theatre *there are no images*, there are only sensible combinations whose perception, if it is sustained with exactitude, *clarifies the moment*. Titus' manner (because *it is* Titus, it is not an image of Titus, nor imitating Titus, who is inimitable, being only the eternity latent in the text) of wobbling, or of vanishing at all times (Grüber) or, on the contrary, his manner of falling asleep, satisfied and cunning, so as to avoid the stories and the reproaches (Vitez), organize in the moment the *encounter* of Titus and the spectator that I am. We had a date, now is the moment. Whether he vanishes into the shadows of Empire or falls asleep amid the duplicity of intrigues, it is he whom I have encountered, at two different moments of his eternity.

We will therefore say the following: representation makes an encounter, in the moment, of that which the text holds in the eternal. That is to say, a *good* representation does so (a *bad* one is a missed encounter: there is neither eternity nor the moment, there is only the painful duration of the spectacle). This encounter functions for the spectator as an elucidation of the present. Or again: because one encounters in it that which a proper name (Titus) designates in its eternity, the instant of theatre can be understood after the fact as an *instant of thought*. Theatre would be the perception of the instant as an instant of thought.

LXXVIII

There is reading, there is seeing, but there is also that which *operates*, that which remains. Of this encounter of the eternal in the elucidation of the instant, what is the effect on the spectator who endures it? Catharsis? Moral, intellectual, political education?

I am reminded of a comment from Vitez: that the real function of theatre consists in *orienting us in time*, in telling us *where* we are in history.

Theatre as a machine for answering the question "where?," a localizing machine, a machine for a topological relation to time.

Grüber, by means of an instantaneous encounter with Titus the eternal, would tell me that today we are at the pinnacle of the original discord between men and women, precisely because they are represented as equal, or even as identical. And he would also tell me that History is finished, that it has always found itself in the guise of its finishing, that our world, which is so prosperous, is above all and everywhere *tired*.

And Vitez, by means of an instantaneous encounter with the same Titus, seized at a different instant of his eternity, or with his companion Antiochus, would tell me that the critical intellectual, who wanted to remain in the proximity of the powers or the parties that be, has lost his energy and his reference points, that as a result confusion rules over matters of both desire and politics, and that to the great question "What is it whose death this century is experiencing?" we must answer, with the same outburst that Vitez the actor lends to Antiochus when the play comes to a close: "Alas, communism!"

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LXXIX

There thus would be three terms, and not just two:

1. the eternity of the figures, held in reserve by the text, which amounts to a simple capacity to exist at any moment
2. the moment of the representation, which artistically puts in motion the machinery of an encounter with the eternal, and which thus proceeds to a perceptive elucidation of the instant as an instant of thought
3. time, in which the elucidation of the instant serves to orient us, with this instant introducing a “cut” in time, in the obscure thickness in which we are situated.

Theatre would possess such complex and aleatory ingredients only because it ties together eternity, the instant, and time. And its destination would be:

- the elucidation of the instant by an encounter with the eternal
- the orientation in time by the after effect of this encounter.

We are all the more capable of orienting ourselves in time, the more we have experienced the instant as thought (should we say: just as the instant of insurrection sheds a lasting light on our tasks in our time? And is this not its only function? But in this analogy what is it that would represent the eternal? What is *historically* eternal? Perhaps, precisely, politics *itself*? Such as it happens in its text?).

LXXX

This experience, this localized fiction of an image of politics that combines, in the effort of becoming a spectator, the instant, time, and eternity, is so fundamental to us, and so precious, that it is inadmissible for it to be reserved for a small number.

The “problem” of the theatre public (its disappearance, or almost, its scantiness, its identity. . .) has primarily been phrased in terms of class analysis: it was a question, by way of lower prices and alliances with the syndicates, to bring the excluded from the Projects into the theatre. Or else it was necessary to go and “perform” in the towns and villages. This was the era of popular theatre, of culture for all, of theatre as universality above and beyond classes. This required austere theatres, reinforced concrete, the visibility of machines, the repudiation of all velvet and gold, the destruction of the boxes where the noble ladies planted their décolletages. We have lost the velvet and the gold and the décolletages, without having seen the real crowds come in with their blue collars and their berets, even less the totality of the actual modern proletariat, those profound intellectuals with their unimaginably complex factory lives that are our Moroccans, our Algerians, our Senegalese and our Malians, our Turks, our Yugoslavs, our Pakistanis, and so forth. Distributive equality has not established its rule over the theatre halls.

Rhapsody for the Theatre

And then, after the brief pause of militant street theatre, the theatre of soapboxes and of agit-prop, sketched out in the wake of May '68, there came capitulation pure and simple. Theatre found stability as a "middle class" activity, surrounded by bourgeois "*theatre*" and by "*theatre*" for television, both of which are connected in a consensual backwater of sorts, in which an unchanging cast of the same few actors stumbles through a few equally unchanging flabby stories.

LXXXI

Of course, we could argue that theatre will gather some real crowds only when there will have been a real of the crowds, politically educated. Theatre is, I will allow myself this word whose wear and tear is without cure, the very type of communist fiction. As a temporal elucidation, it could serve as an intimate analyzer of whatever meaning the crowd holds and as a projection of the conflict that constitutes it. Under the fainting lights, it could be the difficult flickering up of a public state of affairs, and better yet: the potentially controversial distribution of matters both public and private.

But what is to be done in the meantime?

LXXXII

Here I propose my second reform, which is so wide-ranging that it is a pleasure to see. It can be summed up as follows: *our presence in the theatre halls must become obligatory.*

LXXXIII

In order to realize this important reform of public morals, we must find support in our national traditions of Jacobinism. I have sufficiently demonstrated the necessary link between theatre and the State for this support to lose all its apparent arbitrariness.

We would obviously begin with the Comédie-Française, which is a royal institution that defies time. It would first of all be charged with establishing an affiliate in every Prefecture, a departmental French Theatre, endowed with adequate resources, a permanent cast, an administrator appointed by the political power, and so forth.

Aside from its activity in the Great Theatre of the Prefecture (vast and luxurious, offering *to all* the golds and velvets of tradition), each departmental theatre would be responsible for organizing, in the towns of some importance (let's say, starting at 3,000 inhabitants), at least four representations per year, three plays from the repertoire and one new creation.

It is understood that special buses—the service of theatrical gathering—would crisscross through the neighboring villages so as to bring their population into town when the departmental theatre is in season.

LXXXIV

Once such logistics were put into place, what would be the forms and means of the theatrical obligation?

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Every resident age 7 and up, except in cases of force majeure, would be expected to attend at least four representations per year.

Theatre would obviously be free. It is true that, aside from its evident secular nature, popular theatre in the fifties already wished to be free. However, in Jules Ferry's²⁵ model the essential element was forgotten: the obligation.

Control at the entrance would be limited to putting the official stamp in the theatre card that every resident receives at the start of each year.

The compensations and the punishments must always be of the essence: the theatre card will be joined to the tax declaration. Spectators who are particularly zealous, whose card offers a constellation of stamps, would be entitled to substantial deductions. By contrast, the recalcitrant ones, those who fall short of their legal theatre obligations, would pay a painful fine of a fixed amount, whose profits would go entirely to the theatre budget.

LXXXV

Such an abundance of theatre presupposes a real effervescence of the creative effort. The State would organize every year a major public competition for the writing of theatre plays. An international jury composed of ten noted directors would select at least twenty plays, which would be performed the following year throughout the national territory. The public success of these plays, as witnessed not by attendance (always maximal, given the obligation) but by the studied sentiment of the spectators, the critics, and so forth, would decide their inclusion in the repertoire.

Should we distinguish, as was previously the case with the entry exam for the Conservatory, between a competition for comedy and another for tragedy? This question of the *genres* of theatre is at the same time crucial and obscure.

LXXXVI

In comedy, everything attached to eternity, as has been said for some time now, depends on the phallus, that is to say, on that which supports that there can be signification at all. The instant of comical theatre is made up of the showing of the phallus, of eternity turned into the farce of a somersault offering a glimpse into its tiny glory.

The latent eternity of the text of comedy sketches a repertoire of functions, a fixed symbolic treasure from times immemorial: the old fogy of the Father, the Lover, the Parasite, the Vixen, the swanky Soldier, the Pedant, the Miser, and so forth: the whole "there is" of generic social signification. The instant pins this onto the stage. The effect of temporal orientation results from the fact that the functions and occupations enter into a rapport with what we might call a diagonal character, who is less a function than the zero point in which all functions are reflected as such. It is a question of the subtle slave, of the treacherous servant, charged with *dissolving* before our eyes the fixed connection of meanings, by means of an infinite social knowledge.

A modern comedy should tell us where we are in terms of what is socially serious and in terms of its dissolution.

Unfortunately, the social is taboo in our regimes of power. It has become categorically statelike, the object of innumerable *guarantees*. But you cannot have an inoffensive comedy, I mean: a comedy that would not offend anybody. How can we arrange onstage, with the necessary violence, the Syndicalist, the Parliamentary, the Priest, the Doctor, the Journalist, but also Mitterrand, John Paul II, or Deng Xiao Ping? Comedy is something other than cabaret. It tells of the other side of signification, it inflicts wounds for which there is no cure. Today, the tiniest Aristophanes would be dragged into court for defamation, and the play would be prohibited in a summary judgment, to be enforced immediately. There can be no comedy, in the classical sense, where corporations and private owners hold the right over their public image.

It is furthermore doubtful whether our societies present the recourses necessary to support the dissolving diagonal. In an unpublished play, *Ahmed the Subtle*,²⁶ I had recourse to the figure of the Arab worker to occupy this place of the diagonal. But this is only a hypothesis.

What is clear is that for the moment there exists no modern comedy (this does not mean that there exists no funny play, which is another question altogether).

LXXXVII

In tragedy, eternity is that of being, and not that of the phallus. However, being is indifferent to meanings. Whatever eternity there is in the tragic comes from nonsense, the name of which is: Fate. The latter's instant onstage can only be death. If this mortal instant teaches us something about time, it is because it establishes a rapport between the will (against the backdrop of the will-to-die) and the non-sense that undoes it. The tragic play represents the subject not against the complicitous and laughable background of meanings (comedy) but against the neutral backdrop of being.

Tragedy speaks to us of: Being and Time, *Sein und Zeit*.²⁷ It asks of us to think where we stand, in historical time, with respect to being. We could also say that it demands that we take a stand with respect to the history of truth.

It is a sign of comedy that it produces laughter, but the production of tears is not a sign of tragedy. Fear and pity? Rather anxiety and courage: anxiety over the excess of being over all meaning, and courage in nevertheless inscribing at least one truth.

The tragic hero is always the one who chooses truth rather than meaning. Death in this whole affair is only a figure of theatre, the aesthetic side of the operation. Death is this figural commodity that turns the choice between meaning and truth, onstage, into an elucidation of the moment.

Is it possible to have a modern tragedy? More easily no doubt than a modern comedy. The obstacle is the "democratic" consensus, the consensus of right. There can be no tragedy in the moderationism of right. Tragedy can tell of the origin of a law (Aeschylus, *The Oresteia*) or of its fall (several tragedies by Shakespeare), but it cannot inscribe itself in its celebration. Already the Greek tragedies, in the regime of the agora, appealed to the ancient monarchs. I have relied on this point to establish the collusion between

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theatre and the State, but we can also use it to discern that which in tragedy is so harshly nonconsensual.

A modern tragedy would have to summon us inevitably to think through the nonsense of law. In the moment of death (but who today is capable of dying onstage?), it would say that “democracy” is the opposite of truths. Or rather, it would indicate to us, against the backdrop of nonsense and in a paroxysmal state of the history of truths, *another sense* of “democracy,” one compatible with the event of something true, a sense that precisely would not be the trickling down of meaning, and that would not mistake as a form of thought what is only the depressing conflict of opinions and interests.

For the moment, there exists no modern tragedy.

LXXXVIII

Neither tragic nor comic, contemporary theatre is oriented toward simple *declarations*. This is the status of Beckett’s fables, haunted as they are by the monologue. Declarations bearing upon what there is (not a whole lot, but not nothing either), upon what there is not (neither comedy nor tragedy), and upon what there could be (first of all, no doubt, a modern tragedy). Contemporary theatre desires the tragic, without for the moment disposing of the means necessary for it. It has the desire to offend meanings, it desires the comic, but it does not have the means for it either. It is between-the-two, desired tragedy, measured comedy.

But that it could be otherwise does not depend on it. Its time will come, together with ours—uncalculable, but as a bonus on top of hard work, of restricted action. Which is where *a few* truths lie in the balance of meaning.

LXXXIX

Theatre is the proof, for any real and present state, of the link between being and truth. This proof is valid even when theatre shows signs of faintness on this or that point, which is the case of our current situation.

To conclude, let’s listen to this perfect definition of the theatrical act, which comes to us from Mallarmé: “This was to take place in the combinations of the Infinite face to face with the Absolute. Necessary—the extracted Idea. Profitable madness. There one of the acts of the universe was just committed. Nothing else, the breath remained, the end of word and gesture united—blow Out the candle of being, by which all has been. Proof.”

Mallarmé adds: “Think on that.” In effect: think.

NOTES, REFERENCES, REGRETS²⁸

For this small book I have freely used previously published texts, particularly from the journal *L’Art du théâtre*.

This journal, edited by Antoine Vitez with the enthusiastic support of Georges Banu, published ten issues between 1985 and 1989. After which it was suspended. It was the result of a joint edition between the Théâtre national of Chaillot (from the time of Vitez) and Actes Sud.

Thanks are due to this journal that, by its sheer existence and its link to the essential contributions of the Chaillot theatre between 1980 and 1988, fostered my taste for writing, as a spectator and as a playwright, about the strangeness of theatre.

The few notes that follow are numbered with reference to the paragraphs in the main text.

6. The texts in Stéphane Mallarmé's *Divagations*, and not only the subsection titled *Scribbled at the Theatre*, contain an intricate and dense meditation on the theatre, one of the most profound I can think of, situated between the theory of writing (or of the Book) and the theory of society. For Mallarmé, theatre simultaneously touches upon the mystery of letters and the mystery of the collectivity, or of the Crowd. The poem, in its essential vocation, thus confronts theatre as the only *public* fiction that, from the beginning, rivals it.

Let us recall that *Afternoon of a Faun* was first written for the stage and that *Herodias* was supposed to be what I call (in paragraph 87) a modern tragedy. This tragedy did not take place, nor did the Book of which it was supposed to be an integral part.

28. The Cultural Revolution, about which countless and outrageous stupidities are told today (which is only normal at a time when the market economy presents itself as the supreme collective and ethical value), led to intense debates about the meaning of theatre. Hundreds of texts, both passionate and brutal, as all revolutionary texts are, appeared on the subject between 1965 and 1976. Since nobody reads them or even knows of their existence anymore, let us cite a few of them:

- *Procès-verbal des causeries sur le travail littéraire et artistique dans les forces armées, dont la convocation a été confiée par le Camarade Lin Piao à la Camarade Kiang Tsing* (a pamphlet containing texts from 1964 to 1967) (Paris: Éditions en Langues Étrangères, 1968).
- *A propos de la révolution dans l'Opéra de Pékin* (Paris: Éditions en Langues Étrangères, 1968).
- *A propos du "système" de Stanislavski* (Hongqi nos. 6–7, 1969).

[In English, see "Summary of the Forum on the Work in Literature and Art in the Armed Forces with Which Comrade Lin Piao Entrusted Comrade Chiang Ching," in *The Chinese Cultural Revolution*, edited by K. H. Fan (New York: Grove Press, 1968). For a commentary, see Jean Esmein, "Cultural Politics," in *The Chinese Cultural Revolution* (London: Andre Deutsch Ltd., 1973).]

30. Personal plug: the complete text of *L'Echarpe rouge* appeared in 1979 with Maspéro editions (which has since then become La Découverte).

33. I probably did not mention Irish theatre as much as I should have. Sean O'Casey's plays remain among the rare examples of theatre whose precise historical articulation (the national and social struggle of the Irish) does not block universality. And John Millington Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* is a marvelous play. I still remember a lyrical and solid representation of it, directed at the time by Brigitte Jaques.

I would also like to mention that Stanisława Przybyszewska's play *The Danton Affair* has been translated into French [by Daniel Beauvois] and published by L'Age d'homme éditions (Paris, 1983).

41. Jean-Louis Barrault and then Antoine Vitez finally brought the complete text of *The Satin Slipper* to the stage. In this way they demonstrated that it was indeed a theatre text. About the event marked by Vitez's production, the reader can consult François Regnault's *Le Théâtre et la Mer* [in the same collection as the French edition of Badiou's *Rhapsodie pour le théâtre*] (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1989). Here one can find, among many other precious things, a slightly different reflection from mine about the link between theatre and the State and about the present conjuncture of this link.

43. Regarding the concepts of politics as Sylvain Lazarus rethinks them, the reader should consult the following three short texts (all of them included in the series "Les Conférences du Perroquet," Potemkine editions):

- *Peut-on penser la politique en intériorité?* (no. 4, November 1985)
- *La catégorie de révolution dans la Révolution française* (no. 15, 1988)
- *Lénine et le temps* (no. 18, March 1989)

[Lazarus's conception of politics is given a systematic form in *L'Anthropologie du nom* (Paris: Seuil, 1996).]

46. The formulas of sexuation according to Lacan can be found in particular in *Seminar 20, Encore*, chap. VII (Paris: Seuil, 1975). [In English: *Feminine Sexuality*, trans. Jacqueline Rose (London: Macmillan, 1982).]

51. Regret. I really like Aimé Césaire's plays a lot, too. In Peter Handke's theatre, there are parts that deeply touch me and that bear no resemblance to anything else. I am thinking of the worker's monologue ("Rubber! Rubber!") in *Walk About the Villages*. The overall form and the preaching are the most shocking to me. And, when all is said and done, what should we think of Federico García Lorca? Djuna Barnes's play *The Antiphon* (translated by Natacha Michel with L'Arche editions) is a stunning piece of writing. Not negligible either is Eugene O'Neill's invention of the whole tradition of American melodrama, an almost nauseating mix of family matters and psychoanalysis catapulted on the audience. There are also the Irish, as I mentioned above. Is it honest to hide, under the pretext that it has been such a long time since we went to see them, that in my youth certain plays by Ionesco (*The Chairs*) or Sartre (*The Devil and the Good Lord*) left a deep impression on me? And so on and so forth. From time to time, however, one must redo one's personal Pantheon, even if it is with a suspicious eagerness that one throws the once honorable bones out onto the streets.

59. The function of the transvestite, which is so important in theatre, with its detours and its difficulties, sheds some light on the dialectic of the actress. On this topic, see Judith Balso's remarks about Vitez's version of *The Triumph of Love* by Marivaux (in the newsletter *Le Perroquet* [no. 29, May 1991]).

60. Regret. I would nevertheless want to add in extremis the incredible performance by Dominique Valadié in the monologue of the Moon (*The Satin Slipper*, Claudel/Vitez).

78. The idea of theatre as an operator of historical orientation has been developed by Vitez in a conference (unpublished) for the series of *Le Perroquet*.

86. Personal plug: The play *Ahmed the Subtle* was read by Vitez at Chaillot in 1988. I swear under oath that the audience was cracking up.

87. It is striking to note that Beckett's characters never die. Therein lies the (bitter) observation of a contemporary impossibility to present "dying" on the stage, or even behind the scenes.

89. Mallarmé's phrase comes from the preparatory notes for the unfinished text *Igitur*. [English translation by Mary Ann Caws available online at <http://www.studiocleo.com/librarie/mallarme/prose.html>.]

ENDNOTES [BOSTEELS]

1. A film directed by Louis Malle (1974).
2. *Il Portiere di notte* (1974), a film by Italian director Liliana Cavani.
3. 'Event' [*l'événement*] is one of Badiou's central terms, and is used here as an adjective [*événementiel* in French, now commonly translated as "evental" in English], designating a mass that creates a true political event in Badiou's sense, that is not a simple occurrence, but a significant, revolutionary change that leaves traces and effects.
4. Badiou is playing on Lacan's own pun to define the real as *ce qui ne cesse pas de ne pas s'écrire*, literally "that which does not cease not to write itself," and *ne cesse pas de s'écrire*, or "does not cease to inscribe itself," which in turn is a play on *le nécessaire*, "the necessary."
5. Badiou's usage of the term "dialectic" to refer to a movement that diagonally cuts across and at the same time activates a static list of elements, here called "analytic," is not uncommon in his philosophical work. For instance, he similarly opposes "dialectic" and "combinatory" in *Théorie de la contradiction* (Paris: Maspero, 1975) and "dialectical" and "structural" in *Théorie du sujet* (Paris: Seuil, 1982). Here, in interpreting the diagram (Figure 1), the reader might want to consider how the effects of the theatre-event that is the always-singular performance of the spectacle pick up on the constitutive elements of the "analytic" so as to produce the higher concepts of the "dialectic": the three terms in the right-hand column thus can be said to traverse the seven elements from the left-hand column, even though this movement itself is almost by definition not visualized in the diagram.
6. French director, who headed the National Theater of Chaillot and later the Comédie-Française, and who sought to create a popular theatre without condescending populism, an "elite theatre for all."
7. A popular dramatist and TV writer, he was also director of the Théâtre du Palais-Royal (1942–54).
8. Originally a novel by Théophile Gautier, this adventure tale, full of sword fights and romantic drama, has been adapted to film and theatre repeatedly.
9. A liberal weekly newsmagazine.
10. A small, provincial town in the south of France and Robert Abirached's place of origin.
11. With the "batrachian" aspect of this episode as with the "frogs" in the following paragraph, Badiou is referring to Jean de La Fontaine's fable "The Frogs Asking a King," in which the frogs' demand, "We want a king!," is answered by God's sending a crane that gulps them down at pleasure.
12. Saint-Gaudens is a small town outside of Toulouse, in the South of France. Anecdotally, it is where Badiou often retreats to read and write in the country house passed down by his father, who was Mayor of Toulouse from 1944 to 1958. For a "phenomenological" description of the effects of another noise, that of a motorbike, for the "world" of Saint-Gaudens outside this country house, see Badiou's *Logiques des Mondes* (Paris: Seuil, 2006), book II.
13. Claude Bréart de Boisanger, director of the Comédie-Française at the time of Malraux's proposed reforms in 1959.

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14. Confédération Française Démocratique du Travail (French Democratic Confederation of Labour), one of five major French trade unions.
15. An era of civil war in France lasting from 1648 to 1653.
16. Georges Ernest Jean-Marie Boulanger (1837–91), a French general and reactionary politician. Georges Pompidou, president of the Republic during 1969–74.
17. Nicholas Boileau (1636–1711): French poet and critic known for his insistence on classical standards.
18. Here, in the original French, Badiou is playing on the homonymy between *ingénu* (“ingenuous” or “wide-eyed”) and *in-jeu-nu* (literally, “un-bare-play”).
19. *The Satin Slipper* (*Le Soulier de Satin*, 1925), a sprawling work of epic proportions by Paul Claudel, which is often considered his masterpiece.
20. A French anthropologist whose political theories Alain Badiou engages in *Metapolitics* (Jason Barker, trans., London and New York: Verso, 2005) and other writings.
21. A novel by the French writer Pierre Guyotat (Paris: Gallimard, 1967).
22. Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet (1627–1704) was a French bishop and theologian famous for his sermons. Louis Bourdaloue (1632–1704) was a famous Jesuit preacher.
23. An administrative area of the Loire.
24. Badiou is parodying and inverting Hegel’s famous dictum according to which everything that is born one day deserves to perish.
25. Jules Ferry, French politician, established free education in 1881, the so-called Jules Ferry Law.
26. Since published: *Ahmed le Subtil: Farce en trois actes* (Arles: Actes Sud, 1994).
27. Badiou is referring to the title of Martin Heidegger’s work, *Sein und Zeit* (*Being and Time*; 1927).
28. The present translator’s interpolations herein are shown in square brackets.