Why Go to the Theater?

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When Mallarmé asks, in the essay which introduces his *Crayonné au théâtre*, "Why go to the theater?", the question itself expresses his fundamental ambivalence about the theater.[1] For the aristocratic idealist, the question translates into, "Why bother going?" but for the poet-philosopher, the question becomes, "What compels us to go?". On one hand, the theater is an "art pour tous," a popular consumer art form on which one wastes one's critical faculties simply by judging in the manner of a theater reviewer (297). Mallarmé prefers to stay home and read. On the other, the theater is by nature a "sublime milieu" (313) which invokes what Mallarmé calls the "paradox of the superior writer": his desire to mark the fluctuations of contemporary style in such a way as to transform theatrical criticism into a creative, poetic genre (295). There is a distinction, as such, between the poet's disdain for the merely communicative function of the language of the theater reviewer and his interest in exploiting the poetic value of language in a performance which may repeat the "essential principles" of the theatrical. The essays in *Crayonné au théâtre* are themselves the paradoxical reconciliation of this ambivalence in an obscure but convincing theory of the theater which may ultimately explain why we do indeed go.

The confusion inherent in Mallarmé's own oscillation between his critical appreciation of actual theatrical events in *Crayonné* and his metaphorical or figurative uses of the notion of theater everywhere encourages an association between the poet's own writing and the "essential principles" of the theatrical. For Mallarmé's figurative theaters can describe the nature of the mind (294, 300, 433), the act

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of writing and/or reading (315, 370-371, 380), the look of the observer (299), or the work of language (328), each theater resulting both in and from the others. This pervasive but ill-defined theatricality explains why there has been a great deal of intelligent critical attention given to the ways in which Mallarmé's interest in the theater may inform his figurative theaters, the theatrical or performative nature of his writing and even the theme of the theater in that writing. The titles themselves of essays on Mallarmé resound with these kinds of theatrical associations. Susan Bernard's *Mallarmé et la musique*, Gardner Davies' *Mallarmé et le drame solaire*, Frank Kermode's "Poet and Dancer before Diaghilev," Carol Barko's "The Dancer and the Becoming of Language," Barbara Johnson's "Poetry and Performative Language," Albert Sonnenfeld's "Mallarmé: The Poet as Actor as Reader," and Jacques Derrida's "La Double Séance" are just a few of the titles which reflect the very slippery nature of Mallarmé's theater and demonstrate his notion that the "seul théâtre de notre esprit" may be the "prototype du reste" (300).[2] In a more general way, the linguistic revolutions represented in the work of Roland Barthes and Julia Kristeva by the notion of the "texte" owe a debt to Mallarmé's figurative theaters because these theaters prefigure the current dislocation of communicative language and, as well, because they anticipate Freud's "autre scéne," the use of the figure of theatricality as a metaphor for the function of the Unconscious.[3]

However, in all of these writings about Mallarmé's theaters, there has been surprisingly little attention given to the ways in which his figurative uses of the theater may elucidate and indeed, depend upon an actual theatrical apparatus. That is, Mallarmé's exploitation of the figure of theatricality and its legacy to modern theory seem to be born of an actual theatrical experience, a specific affective subject-response articulated in *Crayonné*. As Derrida has suggested in his respectful critique of Richard, Mallarmé's theater is not exclusively a mental scene (Derrida 264-265), and as this essay will clarify, it is also not exclusively a writing scene but the experience of real events at the theater and, simultaneously, an evasive elaboration of the theoretical apparatus they define.

The gap in Mallarméan criticism that tends to avoid the poet's involvement with the physical theater is easy to understand when we consider that as the essays in *Crayonné* unfold, we are faced with a progressively intensified ambivalence about the theater. Indeed almost everything that comes under the heading of what compels Mallarmé to go is also the very reason to stay home, because, as Jacques Scherer has suggested, the figurative theater of the Book rivals the actual theater in almost every instance.[4] In *Crayonné au théâtre*, the poet refers to his era as one defined by an overwhelming influx of

theatrical phenomena (314). People are crowding the city, he maintains, under the apparent pretext of going to the theater to see a myriad of new plays, restagings and adaptations. Though the poet understands the importance of this new bourgeois institution, he personally feels that attending the productions of the Théâtre Français amounts to much the same thing as reading; in either case, he inevitably perceives the written play on the page (315).

If we add to this explosion of theatrical phenomena mime and music, we come closer to what compels Mallarmé to go. However, even these art forms are better served by the "absent mime" potentially present in the folds of a book and the silent musicality of the lines of verse on a page, verse "que l'instrumentation d'un orchestre tend à reproduire seulement et à feindre" (334). In other words, the figurative theaters of the book discussed elsewhere are continually referred to in *Crayonné* as a point of comparison. It is as if the kind of shift in Mallarmé's notion of theater represented by early versions of his "Faune" or *Hérodiade* and their poetic, ultimately unstageable, final forms was reflected in his scrutiny of the theatrical arts. As a result, the only theatrical arts Mallarmé finds fully satisfying on the stage are those which belong to the world of dance in the broadest sense: mime when it is completely silent and unencumbered by other art forms, rhythmic scenography or blocking (317), dialogic exchange which borrows instrumental techniques (316), and the "choreographic mobility" of decors and characters (309, 326). In sum, he appreciates any cultivated attention to "le pas où se compose l'oeuvre" (326), any organization of theatrical space which is captured in an "ambiguité entre l'écrit et le joué, des deux aucun" (319), any composition not reproducible at home but which is nonetheless like reading and writing in so far as it can suspend the spectator in an ambivalent position somewhere between the passive appreciation of the theater reviewer and the active participation of a spectator who writes.

Though the concept of such ambiguous art forms or aspects of art forms may be hard to define, we can simply understand them as any aspect of performance which does not adhere to the conventions of classical representation. In so doing, however, we must be careful to distinguish between what Mallarmé considers to be classical representation and what his contemporaries might see there. In "Le Genre ou des modernes" Mallarmé displaces the traditional debate. For whereas "modern" might define itself on the lips of Zola, for example, as a theory of Naturalism on the stage--realistic settings and props inhabited by believable characters who mirror the society of their day--such a "modernism" is, in Mallarmé's eyes, still in the classical tradition. In so far as French classiçism sought not to reanimate antiquity but to produce "les grandes poses humaines et comme notre

plastique morale" (319), Zola's modern theater of social mores envisions essentially the same operation (320). Both rely upon the laws of Renaissance perspective (336) allowing a passive appreciation that in no way risks a confusion of what Mallarmé calls the "bizarre luxuries of one's own fantasies" with what is on stage (316). By contrast, modern representation is precisely that which demands the confusion of one's own fantasies in order to result in an aesthetic experience as Diaghilev and other turn-of-the-century *metteurs en scène* would soon realize.[5] This emphasis on a spectator's imaginary participation explains why even a traditional art form such as the classical ballet can come under the categories of those art forms which offer a modern experience though it too remains prisoner to the laws of Renaissance perspective. Outside of the ballet, La Loie Fuller, and those aspects of theater which we have defined as "dance-like," Wagner remains Mallarmé's only contemporary example of the modern. For despite his criticism of Wagner's legends, of his painted cardboard settings and his exploitation of heroes and their deeds (not to mention the fact that Wagner is German) (544-545), the explosion of performance possibilities provided by the *Gesamtkunstwerk* points towards "un art en rapport avec le temps" (324). However, given these criticisms of Wagner, we might imagine that the modern day rock concert, "event" or other performance art piece with spectators ambiguously participating and observing is closer to what he has in mind.

Paradoxically, the ideal representation analogous to contemporary performance art--art with which one is required to confuse his own fantasies--marks the direction of the future and the only justification for the use of stage space because it provides an experience which resembles reading:

> La danse seule, du fait de ses évolutions, avec le mime me paraît nécessiter un espace réel, ou la scène.
>
> A la rigueur un papier suffit pour évoquer toute pièce: aidé de sa personnalité multiple chacun pouvant se la jouer en dedans, ce qui n'est pas le cas quand il s'agit de pirouettes. (315)[6]

The similarity of reading and attending a dance or mime performance relates clearly to the observer's capacity for mental acrobatics. Although the observer cannot perform physical pirouettes, his mind contains all the elements necessary to mental pirouettes, that is, to the creation of imaginary representations. With his intrinsic capacity to play multiple roles, the spectator can become both the spectator and the actor on his own personal stage. This potential suggests that reading functions as a "modern" kind of performance because it

encourages the confusing of one's own fantasies by calling into play the possibility of an identification with multiple positions available on a mental stage. Since this act rivals most classical representations, we may assume that a classical representation is precisely one which bars such identifications because it arrests the flow of imaginary associations both by enclosing characters in overly concrete and fixed interpretations and by securing the stability of a thinking subject on one side of the footlights thus allowing the judgments of a theater reviewer. However, the curious juxtaposition of the dance and reading experiences in this citation suggests that the "modernity" of a dance performance may invite precisely this kind of identification. Indeed, Mallarmé's further discussions of the theatrical capacity of an imaginary mental space would seem to confirm this notion.

In his celebrated essay on *Hamlet*, Mallarmé describes a mental apparatus of which *Hamlet* is symptomatic and defines it as a theatrical space. In this way, Mallarmé's argument in this essay parallels Freud's contemporaneous research into the theatrical nature of unconscious functioning, the burgeoning rudiments of the theatrical metaphor. Like Freud, and later, Lacan, Mallarmé finds the drama of subjectivity itself in *Hamlet* and discovers a paradigm for mental operations in the prince's inability to act.[7] Although for Freud, the case of Hamlet is linked, from the outset, to his "discovery" of the Oedipal complex--as Jean Starobinski has shown, Freud's discussions of *Hamlet* always appear in the same contexts as *Oedipus Rex*[8]--both thinkers are captivated by the symbolic significance of Hamlet's insurmountable interior conflict. Mallarmé notes:

> Son solitaire drame! et qui, parfois, tant ce promeneur d'un labyrinthe de trouble et de griefs en prolonge les circuits avec le suspens d'un acte inachevé, semble le spectacle même pourquoi existent la rampe ainsi que l'espace doré quasi moral qu'elle défend, car il n'est point d'autre sujet, sachez bien: l'antagonisme de rêve chez l'homme avec les fatalités à son existence départies par le malheur. (300)[9]

Hamlet's personal drama seems to explain the very existence of theater because it describes an essential antagonism between dream and reality or expectations and fatal disappointments inherent both in the nature of the mind and in the spatial layout of a theater. Just as 19th century theaters are constructed as a double scene, a golden space separated by footlights from the real life of the spectators, the mind is also constructed as a double scene. Hamlet's dilemma is thus emblematic of a drama of consciousness on the basis of which we have designed theaters. This means not only that the mind is like a

theatre but that the theatrical apparatus repeats the structure and functioning of the mind.

For Freud, Hamlet's dilemma also represents a drama of consciousness but this time because it describes a universal incestuous desire which must remain necessarily repressed. Hamlet is unable to act out this desire because it has been defined as criminal by his father's ghost and his incestuous uncle leaving him unable to surmount a feeling of guilt. As Freud explains in the *Interpretation of Dreams*, whereas *Oedipus Rex* stages the child's fundamental desire to kill his father and marry his mother, *Hamlet* only stages the effects of the inhibition of this desire (Starobinski 2118). Thus, Hamlet invites us to ponder that which may be dissimulated behind his conscious reflections (2123), namely, the way in which the light of consciousness bars the expression of unconscious desires therefore promoting their theatricalized expression in dreams, fantasms or dramatic scenes. In this sense Freud's analysis is not very far from Mallarmé's. For although Mallarmé cannot and would not identify Hamlet's dilemma as an Oedipal complex, he supposes a similar universality of the conflict by intimating that we have fashioned theaters on the model of our own mental structures and by seeing in *Hamlet* the dilemma of the divided subject of psychoanalysis who is suspended between his unconscious tendency to desire according to the logic of the pleasure principle and the exigencies of the reality principle. This explains why both thinkers will eventually liken this dilemma to that of a spectator at the theater.[10]

In light of recent criticisms of the analogy drawn by Freud between the spectator and the subject of psychoanalysis--I am thinking especially of Deleuze and Guattari's *L'Anti-Oedipe*, Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen's *Le Sujet Freudien*, and Lyotard's *Economie Libidinale*[11]--Mallarme's proposal of a pre-freudian theatrical model may help us to reassess the usefulness of this analogy especially in so far as it elucidates the metapsychology and pleasure of a spectator at the theater. For although Freud offers the theatrical analogy at the same time he is elaborating an Oedipal complex, a theory of the fantasm and a notion of hysterical identification, the Oedipal complex comes to overshadow the other issues becoming the butt of any criticism of the theatrical model. Deleuze and Guattari, in particular, take issue with Freud's theatrical model because it proposes Oedipus as the foremost figure in the theater of "psychic reality" thus substituting classical representation for what they call "desiring production" (31). As a despotic figure based solely on Freud's own auto-analysis, Oedipus then takes over the entire Unconscious subordinating the free-flowing and constantly productive energy of desire--as it is conceived in the theory of the primary processes--to an expressive Unconscious--as it

is conceived in the theory of Wish-fulfillment (65).[12] Hence, both Oedipus and the figure of the theater work to control the productive flows of desire by enclosing it in theatrical scenes: dreams, fantasms or the universal myth of the Oedipal drama.

Although Jean-François Lyotard would question Deleuze and Guattari's tendency to replace an idealist ideology with another that is Marxist (*Economie* 42-43), he would agree that the theatrical metaphor proposed by psychoanalysis is faulty because it supposes a dualistic world of theatricalized signifiers definitively barred from but containing the keys to some hidden, unconscious signified. That is, Lyotard criticizes the dualisms inherent in Freud's metaphor but he also criticizes Deleuze and Guattari's positing of an ideal "schizophrenic" state of fluid, unbound energy or productivity because it does not account for the ways in which such energy is channeled in a libidinal economy (*Dispositifs* 46-49). In other words, if we are to understand the means by which any individual human being accommodates his own impulses to psychic and/or material fields of reality, some principle of segmentation, of exteriors and interiors or signifiers and signifieds, must be articulated, even if duplicitously.[13] Since Mallarmé, like Lyotard but unlike Deleuze and Guattari, is interested in the spectator of modern representations, he offers insights into the means of this duplicitous articulation. For he begins his inquiry into a theatrical model by examining his own affective responses as a spectator and his own capacity for identifications. He is therefore concerned, as Freud will later be, with a subject's tendency to deny reality in favor of unconscious productivity at the theater[14] but he is not weighed down by an Oedipal "rock" which fixes the productions of unconscious thought in universal myths or familial dramas. His theatrical model tends, rather, to elaborate itself along the lines of those issues momentarily set aside by Freud in favor of Oedipus, to wit, the structure of the fantasm and a theory of identification. It thereby allows for a more fluid conception of both libidinal economy and the thinking "subject", at the theater.

Let us consider in this light the poet's evocation of a theatrical space formed by the structure of a fireplace and the subject's relationship to it:

> Aussi quand le soir n'affiche rien, incontestablement, qui vaille d'aller de pas allègre se jeter en les mâchoires du monstre et par ce jeu perdre tout droit à le narguer, soi le seul ridicule! n'y a-t-il pas occasion même de proférer quelques mots de coin du feu: vu que si le vieux secret d'ardeurs et spendeurs qui s'y tord, sous notre fixité, évoque, par la forme éclairée de l'âtre, l'obsesson d'un

théâtre encore réduit et minuscule au lointain, c'est ici gala intime. (295)[15]

Mallarmé sees the trance we assume before a fire as an aesthetic experience because it provides the occasion for a mental performance. The twisting ardor of the flames requires, like modern representations, the interaction of one's own fantasies. The poet may be a spectator consciously distinct from the golden space of the hearth but he is also able to turn those flames into the scene of his own obsession. The structural disposition of the theater evoked by the joining of the hearth and the fixed look of its observer replicates Mallarmé's concern with the figurative, minuscule theater of the mind. The flames then become the intimate performance of this obsessive concern. It is as if the poet is looking both forward into the mystery of the flames and backwards into the thoughts ignited by those flames in a duplicitous attempt to seize the source or place which produces illusions.[16] As a result, the aesthetic experience before the fireplace replays the actual theater's distinction of stage and audience while at the same time pinpointing the problematic nature of such a distinction. That is, the poet before his fireplace is suspended somewhere between the aesthetic appreciation of a passive spectator and the mental exhibition of an imaginary actor as when he reads. Moreover, though the poet intimates that the real theater may involve similar mental operations, he insists that it also silences critical competence and words; one throws oneself into the jaws of the monster and, thereby, loses any capacity to analyze or talk about it. The flames in the fireplace, on the other hand, offer an intermediate setting in which both critical competence and imaginary associations are possible. The flames reproduce an experience similar to reading: "on se les joue."

The significance of Mallarmé's reference to a fireplace as an intermediate setting in which both a structural distinction and an imaginary association of stage and spectator may be found is that it evokes the experience of the daydreamer, that intermittently conscious/unconscious spectator who finds himself both inside and outside the scene of his own fantasies.[17] For just as the structure of the fireplace places it somewhere between the theater and the subject's own drama of consciousness, the daydream or wakeful conscious fantasy functions in a similarly intermediate setting between dream scenes and theatrical scenes. In his "The Fiction Film and Its Spectator", Christian Metz distinguishes these scenes and at the same time outlines their points of intersection.[18] Dream scenes, fantasy scenes, and filmic (or theatrical) scenes, are primarily distinguished by the nature of their images--mental or real--and by the degree of belief they engender, that is to say, by the relative involvement they require

on the part of the subject. Following Freud's interpretation of dreams, Metz argues that in dream scenes a dreamer does not generally know he is dreaming and is therefore subject to total belief in the mental images furnished by the dream. The daydreamer or spectator, on the contrary, is consciously aware of either fantasizing or being at the theater and is therefore subject to only partial belief in the images before his eyes (96). Though the analogy is not perfect in that the daydreamer faces mental perceptions in which he sees himself acting out desires and the film spectator faces real perceptions in which he sees others acting, their situations are similar in that they are both caught in a state of intermediate wakefulness and reduced motor activity which can promote subtle overlappings of mental and real perceptions. For just as the mental images of a fantasy may be influenced by real perceptions, the real images of a film may be influenced by mental perceptions that momentarily interrupt the spectator's conscious attention to the film. According to Metz, such interruptions occur when filmic images are close enough to a spectator's own internal fantasies to influence his imaginary involvement in them (98). In this way, the situation of the spectator may fleetingly approach that of the daydreamer in that he may find himself both inside and out of a scene built on both real and imaginary perceptions which he partially believes. In addition, Metz notes that although the situation of the film spectator is materially different from that of a spectator at the theater since the latter faces real bodies on stage and therefore attends more to the representor than to the representation (101), this difference is only a question of the force and degrees of belief engendered.[19]

This notion of belief in dreams or fantasms has been contested by Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen who argues that there is no subject of the Unconscious who believes or not, belief being a conscious activity.[20] He stresses that dreams are less a question of belief than of a subject's capacity to identify with a dream agent or protagonist in the dream. As he puts it: "L'essentiel est plutôt qu'à chaque fois le moi mêle ses traits avec ceux d'un étranger, et qu'en cette indistinction du *je* et du *il* réside la condition nécessaire de toute *Wunscherfüllung*." (31) In other words, for Borch-Jacobsen, who would do away with the specularity of the theatrical metaphor, the pleasure of dreaming is in the identification with imaginary roles (and its concomitant disruption of any unified subject) rather than in the viewing of a scene of satisfaction (56). It is not an object which fuels desire but the subject's identification with another subject. (50). In transposing this situation to the theater, we could say that those brief interruptions of the spectator's conscious attention to which Metz refers may be precisely those moments during which Borch-Jacobsen's indistinction of the "I"

and the "s/he" is enacted. Metz's fleeting fusions of mental and real perceptions may be thus better understood as partial identifications.

It is these partial identifications which seem to explain Mallarmé's intimate gala before the fireplace. For the unidentifiable, meaningless movement of flames in the fireplace is the poet's way of both introducing the fascinating nature of dance as an ideal form of theater and suggesting, like Metz, that there may be a crucial relationship between the thoughts of the day dreamer and those of the dance spectator. For, unlike other more verbal forms of theater but like the flame (and probably like the movements of unconscious thought), dance has no meaning, or rather, no specific meanings, outside of the energetic accomplishment of its own act (295). It only means or makes sense in relation to its observer by setting thought itself in motion. The non-referential signifiers of dance can elicit an endless number of potential signifieds but only when juxtaposed with, then appropriated by, our own mental situation. That is, for Mallarmé, meaning in dance relies upon an indistinction between "I"s and "S/he"s or spectators and performers similar to the one proposed by Borch-Jacobsen but this indistinction, far from removing a theatrical metaphor, defines a theatrical apparatus.

Mallarmé continues:

> Quand s'isole pour le regard un signe de l'éparse beauté générale, fleur, onde, nuée et bijou, etc., si, chez nous, le moyen exclusif de le savoir consiste à en juxtaposer l'aspect à notre nudité spirituelle afin qu'elle le sente analogue et se l'adapte dans quelque confusion exquise d'elle avec cette forme envolée--rien qu'au travers du rite, là, énoncé de l'Idée, est-ce que ne paraît pas la danseuse à demi l'élément en cause, à demi humanité apte à s'y confondre, dans la flottasion de rêverie? L'opération, ou poésie, par excellence et le théâtre. (295-296)[21]

The potential multiplicity of meanings dance may evoke takes place by passing through the eye of the beholder: "le regard." Like the flame and like the dance, thought fuels itself: a flower becomes a wave, becomes a cloud, becomes a jewel, etc., so that a spectator's associations may be as mobile as the dance itself. Here, however, there is a two-fold procedure necessary to the production of these constantly shifting and reproductive meanings. First, a spectator looks at the dance. He is clearly separate from the theatrical space, a passive spectator. Then, he appropriates the object of his look, feeling it analogous to himself and causing an imaginary identification or "exquisite confusion" between his own mind and the dancer's unidentifiable

flight. The implication is not only that it is the "modern" anti-representational nature of those movements which allows and requires this identification but that the spectator's own mind or "spiritual nudity"--the mind not yet contaminated by the logical categories of conscious thought--is itself constituted by similarly meaningless movements, scattered signs, "forms in flight." In other words, Mallarmé intimates that mental productions, like the movements of dancers (or of flames), are not logical and coherent but rhythmic and confused. Indeed the poet tends to confirm this idea elsewhere when he refers to thought as a "volatile dispersion" ("Crise de vers" 366) or as a "rhythmic knot" ("La Musique et les lettres" 644). Therefore, the dance performance creates meaning only by enunciating the spectator's own thoughts. In the same way the twisting flames became the performance of Mallarmé's own obsession with theater, the scattered signs of dance present the poet's favorite recurring images: flowers, waves, clouds and jewels.

Furthermore, at the same time that the dance performance sets the subject in flight, suspending him somewhere between passive appreciation and active participation, the dancer herself becomes a kind of paradigm for this confusion of the subject and the object of his look. For she is both an object or representational element on stage and a real human being or subject always potentially lost in a role which is constantly shifting. Both she and the spectator are caught in that indistinction of subjects and objects Mallarmé refers to as the 'floating of daydreams.' The dance is then a form of theater which cannot fix representations on one side of the footlights and a spectator or subject on the other but one which promotes a mobile interchangability of subjects and objects: "on se la joue" but also, "elle m'y joue." When we consider in this light, Laplanche's and Pontalis' argument that the fantasm--conscious or unconscious--is a fixed structure that organizes desire into scenes offering multiple points of access to a thinking subject (Laplanche, 14) we could say that the image of a dancer in the theater replays a similar crossing over of structural boundaries.

Perhaps more important, however, is Mallarmé's indication that this phenomenon describes the essential operation of poetry--that reading experience which required an imaginary performance--but this time, at the theater. For, as previously suggested, although Mallarmé's particular interest in dance follows the line of argumentation put forth by critics of the theatrical metaphor, it offers this point of view as a theatrical apparatus. Like Deleuze and Guattari, he rejects the notion of an expressive Unconscious in favor of constantly mobile and productive unconscious associations which do not hide any hidden universal desire. Like Borch-Jacobsen, he undoes the notion of

a subject constituted by his identifications with others in favor of a subject who can no longer be constituted as a subject because the scene with which he identifies is no longer exterior to him. And like Jean-François Lyotard, he offers a duplicitous spectator who, instead of being on one side of a structural dichotomy defined as audience/stage, theater/world, reality/fantasy, conscious/unconscious, is caught in transit between the intensities of his own unconscious desires and those emanating from bodies and signs on stage (*Dispositifs* 102-3). In fact, what Lyotard envisions in his *Economie Libidinale* as a "rotating bar" which both distinguishes and confuses the above mentioned dualities (35-36), Mallarmé calls the "mobile synthesis" of dance, a potential adaptation or identification of the subject and the performance.

Indeed, dance, above all other performance arts, fascinates Mallarmé because in dance, this synthetic joining of the subject and the performance describes both a formal effect which takes place during the viewing of a spectacle and an essential subject matter or content of all dance:

> . . . le premier sujet, hors cadre, de la danse soit une synthèse mobile, en son incessant ubiquité, des attitudes de chaque groupe: comme elles ne la font que détailler, en tant que fractions, à l'infini. Telle, une réciprocité, dont résulte l'*in*'-individuel, chez la coryphée et dans l'ensemble, de l'être dansant, jamais qu'emblème point quelqu'un . . . (304)[22]

It appears that the first subject of dance has to do with an essential quality of suspension or unresolvability. This "mobile synthesis" is necessarily only a potential interaction of two elements: the movements of a group of dancers and dance itself. The dancers are infinite fractions of a whole which can never be outside of them and which is, therefore, only a potential whole. And since the possible permutations of "attitudes" or figures in dance are infinite, always changing, dance itself can only be that incessant mobility. In the same way, though a ballerina may be distinguished from the corps de ballet, she is endlessly moving among the others, endlessly repeated in their movements. She is confused with them and yet separate, as in a hall of mirrors. It is not then surprising that the result of this suspended synthesis is the "un-individual," not a representation of any*one*, no exact face, but an emblematic being, the being capable of taking on all beings or the thoughts of all spectators. The reciprocity or exchange that takes place between the dancers and the dance is then like the "exquisite confusion" that adapts the subject to the dance performance: the flight or mobility of the spectator's thought is also

a "mobile synthesis" making him, like the dancer, into a similar kind of "un-individual" who can potentially inhabit multiple imaginary roles.

Dance, however, is not always "hors cadre." This "first subject" of dance is often framed by narrative thematics, as in any classical ballet. In Mallarmé's eyes, though, the narrative or storyline of a ballet always mimics the nature of dance itself (296): that is, dance is always about itself; the "mobile synthesis" of its signifiers is always taken up by its signifieds so that any content mirrors its form. To illustrate this phenomenon, Mallarmé analyses the classical, if decadent, ballet, "Les Deux Pigeons" (303-307). What Mallarmé sees as emblematic of dance in the story of the two pigeons is first and foremost the choice of a bird story. For dance is always a question of wings and flight, endless departures and vibrating arrivals, take-offs and landings. The poet's interest in bird imagery, however, is not only due to the fact that dance is most easily spoken about in terms of feathers, wings and flight nor that classical ballets are often peopled with swans, sylphs and other flying creatures. Rather it is once again the effect of suspension which enchants Mallarmé. For the bird's suspension in air is indicative of the dancer's defiance of gravity. Each becomes an image of a loss of external grounding, that of a subject looking but also that of any specific reference which would arrest the movement of meanings on stage. For just as meaning in dance is always in flight--constantly moving and displaced--the spectator of dance is always potentially capable of mental flights. Therefore, the dance may tell a story of birds but the birds tell *the* story of dance.

The second emblematic theme of "Les Deux Pigeons" is also related to this quality of suspension and this is simply that the two pigeons are in love. Separated then reunited in what Mallarmé calls "a mysterious interpretation of the act of making love" (305), it is the space of their unrequited desire which fills the meaningless center of the ballet. The narrative frame of the ballet--like that of most ballets--is nothing but a desire-filled separation of lovers, an excuse for dancing, and their lovemaking at the end. In other words, the ballet presents a movement from suspension to "exquisite confusion" across the space of desire. It is the distance or separation of the lovers which fuels their desire and it is desire which fills the empty center of the impoverished narrative with meaningless, if creative, movement. In this sense, the ballet is a model for desire in general both as it is conceived in the theory of wish-fulfillment and as it is defined by the energetic displacements of the primary processes. For it is the distance or separation of a subject from a field of reality which, as in the case of Hamlet, cannot always be satisfying that induces the unconscious thought processes to propose those imaginary identifications

evident in both conscious and unconscious fantasms. And insofar as the pleasure that results is based not on any scene of satisfaction itself but rather, as Freud suggests, on the uninhibited movement of the different powers of the Ego stimulated in this process, desire itself might best be defined as the meaningless if creative movements of affective energy which take place in the space between suspension and "exquisite confusion".[23] Satisfaction, or in the ballet, lovemaking, brings an end to the ballet and, at least momentarily, to the creative mobility of desiring thought.

Octave Mannoni, a psychoanalyst concerned precisely with discovering the mechanism of unconscious identification at the theater, further refines both Freud's notion of pleasure at the theater and Metz's notion of partial belief by analyzing them according to the model of *Verleugnung*, the disavowal or denial of reality.[24] He reduces this model to a simple if meaningful formula: "Je sais bien, mais quand même." (Mannoni 10-11). For the spectator at the theater, this translates into something like: "I *know full well* that the scene before me is only an illusion, *but even so*, I will let myself believe in the reality of the illusion." As such, the formula suggests that it is *because* a spectator is consciously aware of being at the theater that he can deny that conscious knowledge and enter into an unconscious identification with the illusion on stage. In the case of the "Deux Pigeons," this does not mean that one would imagine himself to be a pigeon, but rather, would identify with the energetic movements of a dancer who can present himself as pigeon-like: always potentially flying, suspended, mobile, desirous, etc. . .

Mannoni's theory thus posits an ambiguous but necessary relationship between conscious awareness and imaginary associations. In this sense, we could say that he reconciles Metz's analysis of partial belief on the part of a conscious spectator at the theater and Borch-Jacobsen's notion of unconscious identifications in dreams and fantasms. For like the birds who are both real human dancers and fantasy creatures, the spectator is also double, also caught between reality and fantasy, between an unconscious willingness to believe according to the rules of a narrative lure and a conscious inability to believe based on the full knowledge that he or she is at the theater. As in a dream, because the spectator knows he is watching (sleeping) and thus is safely removed from the dangers of reality, he can imagine himself to be somewhere else, acting or dancing out a fantasy scenario of his own personal design (Mannoni 165). Mannoni, like Freud and Metz, explains that this sense of safety, during sleep or at the theater, relaxes the psychical defense mechanisms which adapt a subject to reality by hindering the movement of unconscious desires during waking hours.[25] Given this safe ambience, the dancer, as an un-individual

who invites all possible projections, promotes the possibility of those creative psychical movements.

The words enclosed in parentheses in the following citation suggest that Mallarmé would agree:

> Oui, celle-là (serais-tu perdu en une salle, spectateur très étranger, Ami) pour peu que tu déposes avec soumission à ses pieds d'inconsciente révélatrice. . . la Fleur d'abord *de ton poétique instinct*, n'attendant de rien autre la mise en évidence et sous le vrai jour des mille imaginations latentes: alors, . . . sans tarder elle te livre à travers le voile dernier qui toujours reste, la nudité de tes concepts et silencieusement écrira ta vision à la façon d'un Signe, qu'elle est. (307)[26]

A remarkable evocation of the double spectator, alongside the consciously attentive look of one (the theater reviewer who attempts to define a theatrical apparatus for dance), there is a second, very obscure Friend who, lost between parentheses or somewhere in the house, submits himself to the unconscious "révélatrice" (or revealer of hidden thoughts). Indeed, this obscure or estranged friend is the credulous double of the conscious spectator who allows himself to forget his conscious distinction from the stage. In so doing, he is lost in an unconscious identification with the dancer who thereby delivers unto him an image of his own concepts. She releases thousands of latent imaginations or unconscious associations "sous le vrai jour," that is, in the light of consciousness, during waking hours. The dancer becomes the sign of the spectator's own mental vision given an attentive look and the distance--that last veil, or the bar of the parentheses--upon which the mechanism of disavowal relies. Ultimately, one goes to the dance performance in order to lose oneself in the "visual incorporation" of one's own latent thoughts; one goes because of the desire to both see and to act out one's own desires.[27]

In conclusion, I would suggest that those choreographic strategies apparent in Mallarmé's writing as he "exhibits" theatrical principles in *Crayonné au théâtre* have a goal similar to that of the dance performance. For that writing, like dance, stages the operations of desire by requiring an extraordinary dose of conscious attention on the part of one's critical faculties and the necessary interplay of imaginary associations. Rather than offering a theory or ideology which a reader might endeavor to understand, the writing in *Crayonné* is only pencilled, open to both erasures and additions, demanding an incessantly mobile synthesizing of our own thoughts with it. In so doing, it presents the theatrical functioning of the psychical apparatus

or the Mallarméan notion of theatrical space. It should thus be clear that dance is not simply a metaphor for thinking or for writing but an always representational art form in which Mallarmé discerns certain laws or principles of representability which in turn influence his own writing. For if we consider that the space that separates a written drama like *Hérodiade* from the ambiguously written and performable dramas of "Un Coup de dès" or *Le Livre*, we could say that Mallarmé's real experiences at the theater fill the gap which separates his figurative theaters from his ambivalent interest in actual performance. Ultimately, Mallarmé's mental and physical theaters finish by being potentially separate yet inevitably and exquisitely confused.

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Notes

1. Stéphane Mallarmé, *Oeuvres Complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1945) 297. All further references to Mallarmé's writings will be indicated in the text.
2. Susan Bernard, *Mallarmé et la musique* (Paris: Nizet, 1959); Frank Kermode, "Poet and Dancer before Diaghilev," *Puzzles and Epiphanies* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, n.d.) 1-28; Gardner Davies, *Mallarmé et le drame solaire* (Paris: José Corti, 1959); Carol Barko, "The Dancer and the Becoming of Language;" Barbara Johnson, "Poetry and Performative Language;" Albert Sonnenfeld, "Mallarmé: The Poet as Actor as Reader," *Yale French Studies* 54 (1976): 173-187, 140-158, 159-172; Jacques Derrida, "La Double Séance," *La Dissémination* (Paris: Seuil, 1972) 199-317.
3. Julia Kristeva, "Quelques Problèmes de semiotique littéraire à propos d'un texte de Mallarmé: *Un Coup de dés*," *Essais de sémiotique poétique*, ed. Greimas (Paris: Larousse, 1972) 211. See also Roland Barthes, "Texte (Théorie du)," *Encyclopedia Universalis* 15 (1975) 1013-17.
4. Jacques Scherer, *Le "Livre" de Mallarmé* (1957; Paris: Gallimard, 1977) 38-43.
5. Denis Bablet, *Esthétique générale du décor de théâtre de 1870 à 1914* (Paris: Editions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1965) 197.
6. Translation: "Dance alone, because of its evolutions, with mime seems to me to necessitate a real space or the stage. In a strict sense, paper suffices to evoke any play: aided by his multiple personality each one being able to play it for himself inside, which is not the case when it is a question of pirouettes." All translations are my own.
7. Sigmund Freud, letter to Wilhelm Fleiss, 15 October 1897, *The Complete Letters of Sigmund Freud to Wilhelm Fleiss 1887-1904*, ed. and trans. Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985) 272-3. Jacques Lacan, "Desire and the Interpretation of Desire in *Hamlet*," trans. James Hulbert, *Literature and Psychoanalysis*, ed. Shoshana Felman (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982) 11-52.
8. Jean Starobinski, "Hamlet et Freud," *Les Temps Modernes* 253 (1967): 2117.
9. Translation: "His solitary drama! And which, at times [since] this walker in a labyrinth of trouble and grief so prolongs its circuits with the suspense of an unaccomplished act, seems the spectacle itself [of] why the footlights as well as the quasi-moral golden space which they border exist, because there is no other subject, mark my words: the antagonism drawn by misfortune between man's

dreams and the fatalities of his existence."

10. On Freud's analogy likening the spectator to the subject of psychoanalysis, see Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen, *Le Sujet Freudien* (Paris: Aubier-Flammarion, 1982) 29 and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, "La Scène est primitive," *Le Sujet de la philosophie (Typographie I)* (Paris: Aubier-Flammarion, 1979) 185-216.

11. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *L'Anti-Oedipe* (Paris: Minuit, 1972); Jean-François Lyotard, *Economie Libidinale* (Paris: Minuit, 1974).

12. The distinction between these two forms of desire is one I am borrowing from Lyotard's *Des Dispositifs Pulsionnels* (Paris: Union Générale d'Editions, 1973) 281.

13. A similar and more cohesive criticism of Deleuze and Guattari is made by Leo Bersani in *A Future for Astyanax* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984) 8-9.

14. Sigmund Freud, "Psychopathic Characters on the Stage," *The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey, 24 vols. (London: Hogarth Press, 1953) 7:305-306.

15. Translation: "Therefore when there is nothing on [at the theater], incontestably, which is worth going with a light step to throw oneself into the jaws of the monster and by this game losing all rights to defy it, oneself the only ridiculous one, is there not an occasion to proffer a few words sitting before the fire; given that the old secret of ardors and splendors twisting in it, before our fixed gaze, evokes, by the glowing form of the hearth, the obsession with an even more reduced and minuscule theater in the distance, this is an intimate gala."

16. One might see in this a reversal of the paradigm suggested by Plato's cave. Whereas the prisoners in Plato's cave are fastened to the walls in such a way as to watch illusions produced by flames situated behind them and not the flames themselves (the representation and not that which represents), Mallarmé looks into the flames to find that representations emanate from both a subject and the object of his look. The theater formed by the hearth requires both a space (*âtre*) and the philosopher's eye (*thé*).

17. Jean Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, "Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality," *The International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 49 (1968): 13.

18. Christian Metz, "The Fiction Film and Its Spectator: A Metapsychological Study," *New Literary History* 8 (1976): 75-105.

19. Christian Metz, "The Cinematic Apparatus as Social Institution--An Interview with Christian Metz," *Discourse* 1 (1979): 16-18.

20. Borch-Jacobsen 32.

21. Translation: "When a sign of scattered, general beauty isolates itself before one's gaze, flower, wave, cloud, and jewel, etc., if, in us, the exclusive way of knowing it consists in juxtaposing it [this aspect of it] to our own spiritual nudity so that this nudity feels it to be analogous to itself and appropriates it in some exquisite confusion between that same nudity and this form in flight--merely through the rite, there, the utterance of the Idea, does not the dancer seem [to be] half the element in cause, half humanity apt to confuse itself there, in the floating of daydreams? The operation, or poetry, above all and the theater."

22. Translation: ". . . the first subject, outside of any [narrative] frame [or setting], of dance, can only be a mobile synthesis, in its incessant ubiquity, of the figures of each group: as these figures only particularize dance, in fractions, infinitely. As such, a reciprocity, from which the *un*-individual results, both in the ballerina and in the ensemble, of the dancing being, only ever an emblem, never anyone. . ."

23. See Octave Mannoni's discussion of Freud's notion of pleasure at the theater in *Clefs pour l'Imaginaire on l'Autre Scène* (Paris: Seuil, 1969) 183.

24. Jean Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, *Vocabulaire de la psychanalyse* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1973) 112-117.

25. Mannoni 181. See also Freud 305-306.

26. Translation: "Yes, that ballerina there (were you to be lost in the audience, estranged spectator, Friend) all you have to do is to lay, submissively at the feet of this unconscious revealer of truths the Flower, first of all, *of your poetic*

instinct, expecting nothing more than the portrayal, in the light of day, of thousands of latent imaginations: then. . . without delay, she delivers unto you, across that last veil which always remains, the nudity of your concepts and silently writes your vision, like a Sign, which she is."

27. Jean-Louis Baudry comes to the same conclusion in his essay on the cinematic apparatus in "Le Dispositif," *Communications* 23 (1975): 72.