

Simultaneity in Modern Stage Design and Drama

Thomas Postlewait

Prologue

The second version of *Ariadne auf Naxos* by Richard Strauss and Hugo von Hofmannsthal, first staged in 1916 by Max Reinhardt, is a chamber opera on the topic of opera and theatre. The dramatic action posits an eighteenth-century nobleman (offstage but controlling events) who has commissioned an *opera seria* on the suffering of the forlorn Ariadne. He has also hired a *commedia dell'arte* troupe to perform a farce, either as prelude or postlude. At an early moment in the action--which is concerned with the behind-the-scenes preparations of the composer, the music and dance masters, the opera singers, and the *commedia* troupe--the Major Domo in charge of the evening's entertainment announces a change in plans. The nobleman, for seemingly inexplicable reasons, has commanded that both pieces, the serious opera and the harlequinade, are to be performed not successively but simultaneously in the same theatre space. In that way the set design for Ariadne's desert island will be decorated, as he proclaims, by the characters from the comedy. *Ariadne auf Naxos* thus presents the characters's preparations to meet this bizarre command, followed by their performance of the simultaneous task.

What effects were Hofmannstahl and Strauss aiming for in this pastiche, if not parody, of neoclassicism? What idea of the theatre were they attempting to achieve? Why did they, like Meyerhold in Russia at this same time, take up *commedia dell'arte* techniques, styles, and characters as a means for engaging and expressing serious concerns? And, specifically, what is the point of the simultaneous performances?

In the eighteenth century, of course, *opera seria* and *opera buffa* were presented either successively or in alternating scenes during an

Thomas Postlewait, Associate Professor of Theatre and Drama at Indiana University, is author of *Prophet of the New Drama: William Archer and the Ibsen Campaign* and co-editor of the forthcoming *Interpreting the Theatrical Past*.

evening's presentation. Mozart's great achievement, as in the cases of *The Marriage of Figaro* and *Don Giovanni*, was to take up these two distinct genres and transform them into one, unified style. No doubt, Hofmannstahl and Strauss intended that *Ariadne* would not only provide neoclassical homage to Mozart but fulfill a certain antiquarian authenticity in its styles. But these contributing motives were clearly balanced or offset by their shared (if not always harmonious) desires to create a work of modern sensibility, tone, and import.

Although Hofmannstahl and Strauss did not fully integrate the parallel actions of the *opera seria* and the *opera buffa*, they succeeded in juxtaposing the forms, characters, and themes for ironic purposes. *Ariadne auf Naxos* not only plays the two genres against one another for tragicomic effect but also mixes eighteenth-century and twentieth-century opera techniques, thereby yoking past and present in a series of relationships from counterpart to parody. As Herbert Lindenberger notes: "the juxtaposition of diverse forms of operatic discourse enables the composer [and librettist] to reflect ironically on the particular notions that these forms are meant to embody" (80).

Quite appropriately, given this eclectic program, Max Reinhardt was the director of the 1916 Vienna première (as well as of the 1912 Stuttgart première of version I, which even more ambitiously combined a revision of Molière's *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* with the *opera seria* and the *commedia*). Perhaps the most successful modern director at weaving various styles into a modernist web of intertextuality, he apparently understood that Hofmannstahl and Strauss wanted to create an art of yoked opposites that transfigures the discordant elements into a new, hybrid art form. Judgment continues to be divided on whether the opera fully succeeds in "forging harmony of the two components," as Hofmannstahl wrote to Strauss (Del Mar 75). Indeed, the disagreements among the critics (and even between Hofmannstahl and Strauss) on the nature and purpose of the opera illustrate a central issue in the development of modern art: what is the relation between the disruptive, innovative elements and the unifying, harmonious ones? Does a modernist work achieve its basic character and meaning by sustaining discordant tension or by creating a new mode of harmony? Whatever our judgment on the *Ariadne* experiment in ironic juxtaposition and transformation, we can see that it is a modernist work, emblematic of various attempts at temporal and spatial simultaneity in the theatre.

The emergence of this modern aesthetic of simultaneity is the topic that I want to examine in this essay. My primary concern will be the redefinition of scenic space: the modernist desire that the austere, desert island should also be a lush, tropic isle (as Alfred Jarry, in his own opposing terms, required for *Ubu roi*). So, besides

tracing the idea of simultaneity in a select number of modernist plays and manifestos, I want to provide a historical perspective on when and how a simultaneous technique developed in production design under the influence of both designers and playwrights. By examining the aesthetic demands for tension and harmony, I want to place modern design practices within the cultural history of the modernist aesthetic of simultaneity.

I

The return of simultaneous design to the theatre in the twentieth century, after the dominance for three centuries of perspectivism and pictorialism, is one of the key features of the modernist (and, in different ways, postmodernist) stage. Of course, this modern return to simultaneous or multiple locales, whether presented symbolically (e.g., Piscator's design for Toller's *Hoppla, wir leben!*), representationally (Mielziner's set for *The Glass Menagerie*), or environmentally (Ariane Mnouchkine's multi-platformed productions), is not actually a return at all. Modern simultaneous design and drama express a new idea of the theatre, a reinterpretation of the idea of simultaneity.

Thus, despite certain formal similarities between modern and medieval staging, the two are quite distinct in both function and purpose. Medieval simultaneous setting (*décor simultané*), with its scenic mansions situated across the stage or its scaffolds (and sometimes wagons) possibly arranged in a circle around a *platea*, represented spatially the culture's metaphysics of divine interfusion and continuity. This spatial order expressed a timeless presence of the Word, an ontological oneness of past, present, and future that united God and humanity within an ordained destiny. By contrast, the modern principle of simultaneity, self-consciously insistent in its multiplicity, is an art of contending correspondences and incongruities. Whether associational or oppositional in its method of joining elements and locations, it expresses a modern reformulation of the relations between time and space, identity and social being, history and moral order, tradition and innovation.

This aesthetic of simultaneity is not only a pervasive trait but also, as I wish to show, one of the defining conditions of modern theatre that cuts across various styles and movements. Normally, we make a categorical virtue of separating modernist stage drama and design into various types and kinds (identified by their creators and practitioners): *realism* (Ibsen, Chekhov, Antoine, Simov, Stanislavski), *naturalism* (Zola, Hauptmann, Gorky, Brahm, Belasco), *stylized realism and theatricalism* (Reinhardt, Stern), *symbolism* (Fort, Maeterlinck, Lugné-Poë, Jarry), *futurism* (Marinetti, Prampolini), *exoticism and*

orientalism (Ballet Russes, Bakst, Benois), *cubism* (Picasso, Braque, Vesnine), *surrealism* (Apollinaire, Breton, Cocteau, Hugo, Leger), *constructivism* (Meyerhold, Tairov, Popova), *expressionism* (Toller, Kaiser, Jessner, Fehling), *agitprop and Epic theatre* (Meyerhold, Piscator, Brecht), *Bauhaus formalism* (Gropius, Schlemmer), *theatricalism* (Meyerhold, Barker, Wilkinson, Copeau, Giraudoux, Jovet, Barsacq), and so forth. In turn, when we look specifically at the history and theory of modern staging methods, we always identify Adolphe Appia and Gordon Craig as the prophetic leaders who, in revolt against pictorialism, developed a nonillusionist, three-dimensional stage space that liberated movement within an architectonic order. We also make much of the modifications and rejections of the proscenium stage design in the modern theatre. And we show that electrical stage lighting proved decisive in the liberation of modern production methods and aims.

These stage reforms and revolutions, though quite various in their approaches, have usually been seen as sharing a common purpose: "the realization of a complete and homogeneous spectacle" of word, gesture, movement, color, music, costume, setting, and light (Furst & Hume 11). In fact, most of the new developments in the modern theatre--the rise and dominance of the director, the close partnerships between major directors and designers, the new and renewed theories of acting, the redefinitions of the relationship between performers and audience--have been carried out in the name of a greater unity, what Kenneth Macgowan in *The Theatre of Tomorrow* called the new synthesis: "a complex and rhythmic fusion of setting, lights, actors, and play." Or in Gordon Craig's words, all aspects of the production must be "brought into harmony, the one with the other" (Craig, *On the Art of the Theatre* 161).¹ In this sense, these new programs for theatrical order are the fulfillment of the romantic idea of organicism, Wagner's idea of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, and the modern theory of plastic unity.²

It is true of course that the modernist movement tended to see itself (and thus to be seen by us) as a revolution, a break from traditional forms and assumptions. Dissonance, dialectic, and disaffection prevail in the works and manifestos of modernism. Yet most modernists, whatever their methods of disjunction, aimed for a new synthesis, a fusion of discord elements (if only ironically). Even the Dadaists, who wrote manifestos against manifestos and produced art against art, celebrated the possibility of chaotic convergences in their acts of random construction. The world may be a grotesquerie, a waste land of false orders, but art in its very act of capturing the arbitrary achieves a new kind of fusion, what Tristan Tzara called "regulated chaos" (7). This pervasive idea of synthesis has become the common principle for modernist art, especially in the theatre. For this reason we need to look more closely at this presupposition in order to

understand how modern simultaneity--as both idea and form--realizes yet disrupts the demands for unity. Indeed, modern simultaneity not only joins and unifies domains but also fractures, upsets, realigns, dissolves, denies and divides stage space in order to intensify dramatic pressure at the uncertain boundaries of representation and meaning.

On the modern stage, simultaneity has been achieved most tellingly by means of two scenic types or modes: "simultaneous" and "multiple" design, decor, setting, or staging. Sometimes these two terms are used interchangeably, but I want to distinguish between them because I see them as two different but related scenic modes for dramatizing the modern idea of simultaneity. That is, I am designating "simultaneity" as the generative idea in modern culture for these two subsets of scenic decor.

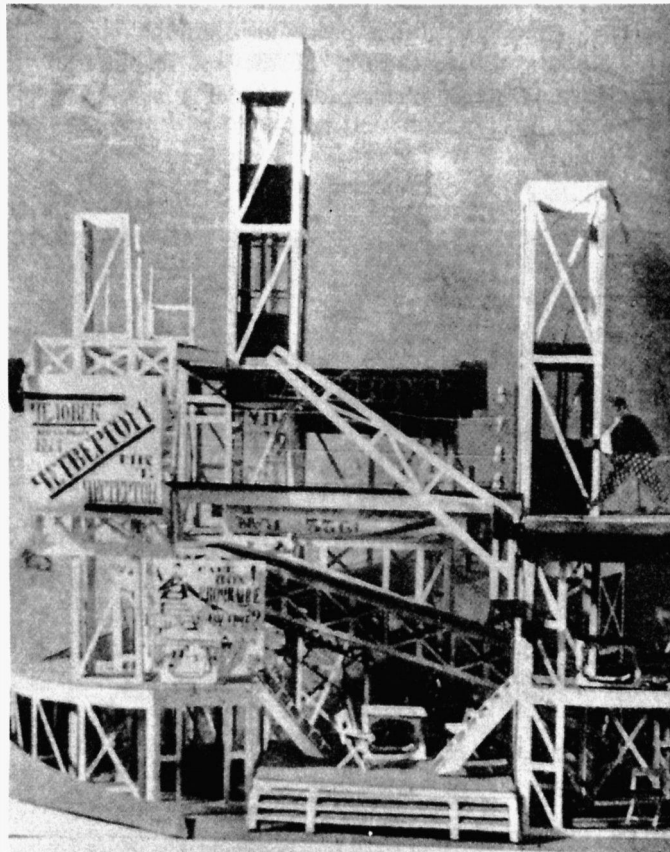
"Simultaneous design" is a *representational* stage setting of two or more fixed locales that are identifiable without dialogue and visible to the audience throughout the performance (or at least throughout a scene or act). Although lighting procedures on the modern stage may highlight or obscure different parts of the set at different times, the basic set remains on stage unchanged and definable. For example, *A*



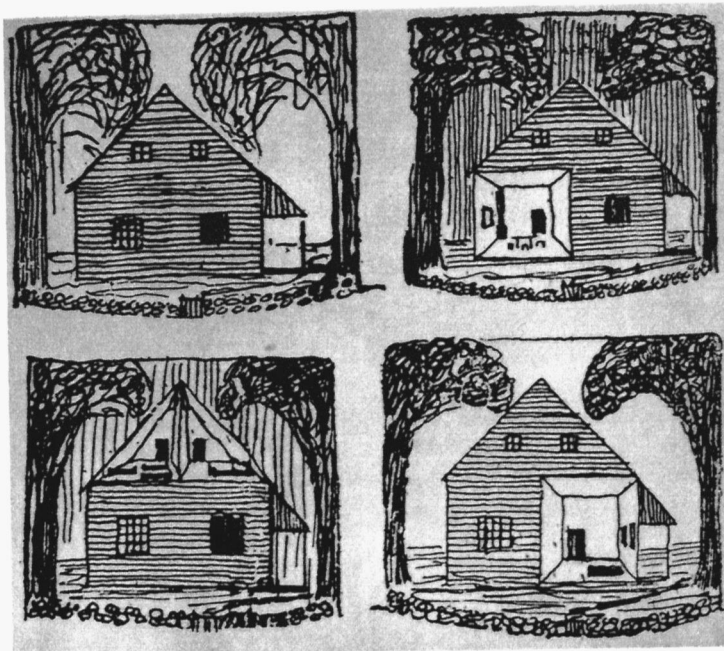
Jo Mielziner's design for Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

Streetcar Named Desire, as described by Williams and designed by Jo Mielziner in 1947, provided a simultaneous setting. The American theatre since the 1940's and the 1950's has been drawn to simultaneous design (whether or not the dramatic action benefits especially from it).

In contrast, "multiple setting" is a *nonrepresentational* design of two or more fixed locales that remain visible to the audience throughout the performance. Tairov's constructivist set for Chesterton's *The Man Who Was Thursday*, with its interiors spread out on platforms, or Meyerhold's and Popova's setting for Crommelynck's *The Magnificent Cuckold*, with its multiple locations in and around the mill, are examples of multiple staging.³ Both simultaneous and multiple settings can be used to represent simultaneous actions (e.g., the famous scene of the two adjoining bedrooms in Eugene O'Neill's *Desire under the Elms*), but simultaneous action is not a requirement throughout the performance.⁴



Alexander Tairov's set for Chesterton's *The Man Who was Thursday*.



Eugene O'Neill's drawings for *Desire under the Elms*.



Robert Edmond Jones's set for *Desire under the Elms*.



Tairov's production of *Desire under the Elms*.

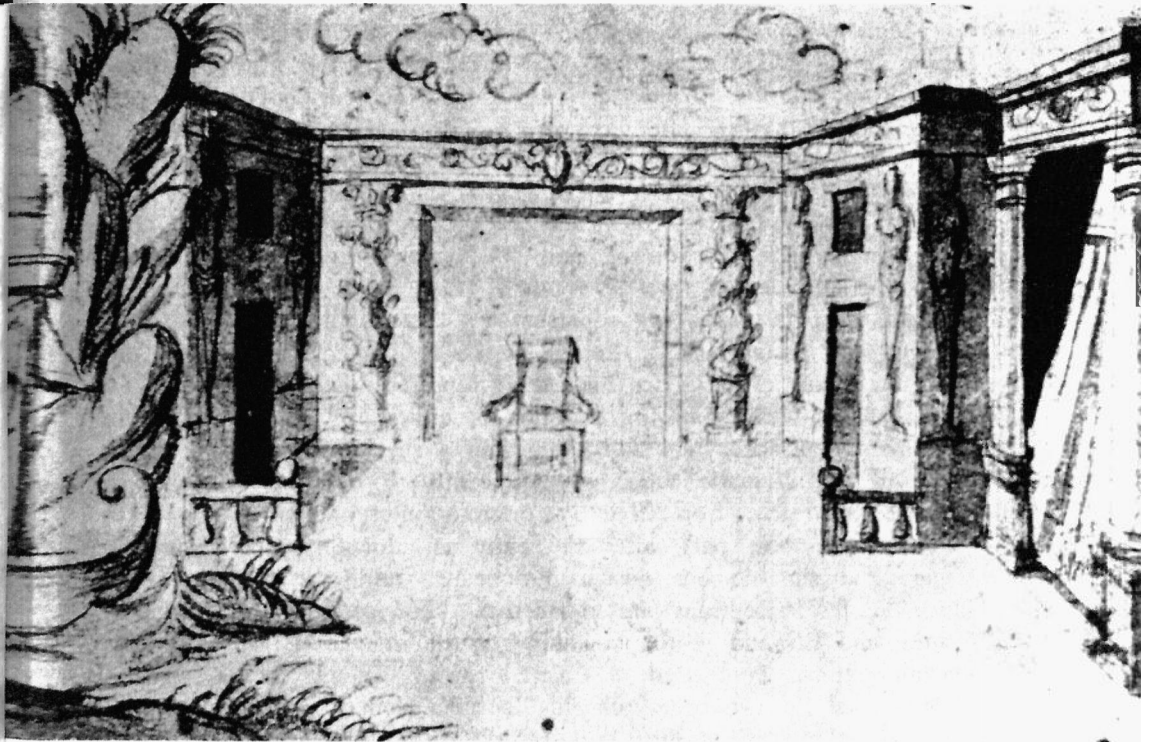
Also, it is important to recognize that simultaneous and multiple design are not mutually exclusive. Two early productions of *Desire under the Elms*--the original, designed by Robert Edmund Jones in 1924, and the revival by Alexander Tairov in 1926 at the Kamerny Theatre, Moscow--make clear that simultaneous and multiple designs can serve similar functions. Thus, we are distinguishing here between two alternative styles that express the aesthetic of simultaneity. Such a distinction should not be used, then, as the basis for defining necessarily opposing styles and movements in the modern theatre, such as realistic and nonrealistic (representational and presentational) kinds of design, drama, and acting. Quite often, in fact, designers, dramatists, and directors have purposefully mixed the styles of multiple and simultaneous design (e.g., Lee Simonson's design for O'Neill's *Dynamo*, Meyerhold's production of *The Lady of the Camellias*).

II

Traditionally, we tend to trace the multiple stage back to the Elizabethan facade stage and the simultaneous stage to the medieval theatre. Both stage types can be found, however, in the late medieval and renaissance ages. And we might note, just to complicate matters, that the classical street scene, with three or more doors to separate dwellings, comes close in function, if not purpose, to medieval

simultaneous setting. Also, Plautus' *Rudens* (*The Rope*) seems indeed to call for the simultaneous representation of three separate locales: a barren beach, a small cottage, and a shrine of Venus.⁵

Still, in the case of simultaneous design, as traditionally defined, it is the late medieval and early Renaissance theatres that provide our best examples, as in the famous case of the staging of the Valenciennes passion play. This staging method, as Richard Southern notes, was also used "in the earliest court masques in England, and probably also in the Elizabethan 'private' houses" (25). Moreover, Anne Barton argues that the performance of Shakespeare's *The Comedy of Errors* used simultaneous design: "Probably when the play was performed at Gray's Inn, there were free-standing structures of painted canvas to represent the Phoenix, where the native Antipholus and his family live, the Porpentine for the courtesan, and the priory or abbey which becomes so important in the fifth act" (Evans 80).⁶ Despite its occasional use of representational scenery, however, the Elizabethan stage apparently moved away from simultaneous design, and instead—with its possible division into three or four undefined playing areas



Simultaneous design for Alexandre Hardy's *La Folie de Clidamant*.

(forestage, inner stage [if such existed], discover space, balcony)--provided separate spaces for simultaneous action and multiple locales.

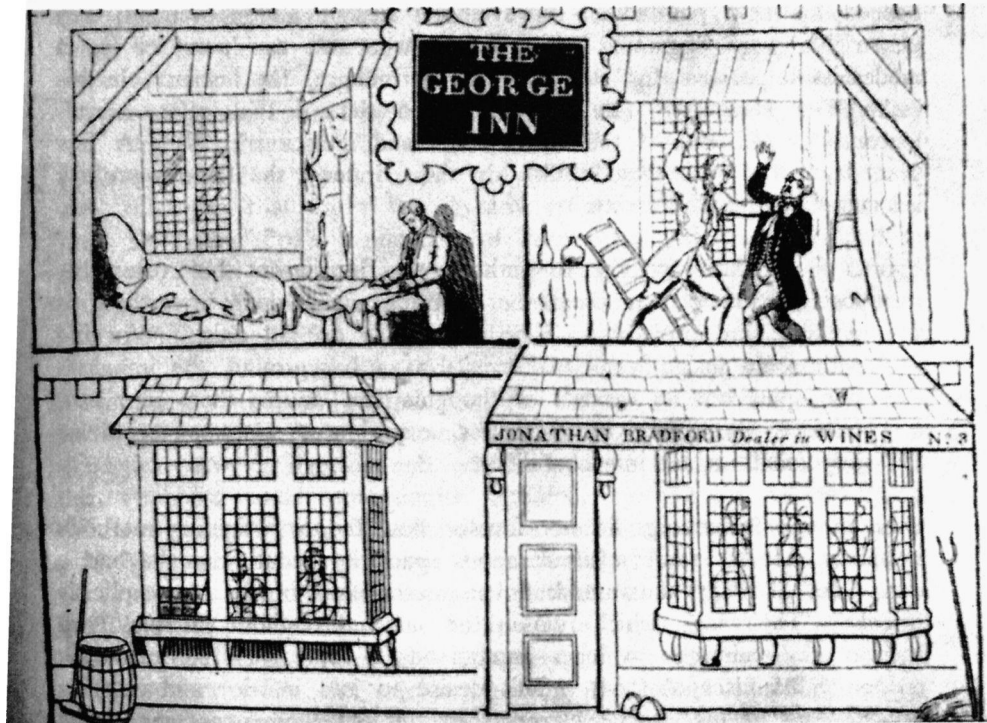
Beyond England, the Spanish plays of this era often called for simultaneous design, though we know little about the actual staging methods.⁷ And in France, well into the seventeenth century, simultaneous design continued to be used, as the *Mémoire* of Laurent Mahelot of the Comédiens du Roi reveals (e.g., the seacoast, throne room, and small room with curtain used apparently for Alexandre Hardy's *La Folie de Clidamant* in 1635). Also, in the case of French comedy, as Perry Gethner has recently shown, the scenery sometimes represented locales in a simultaneous mode, despite the growing emphasis upon perspectivism and unity of place. Although many French comedies by the second quarter of the seventeenth century observe the unity of place, often featuring the conventional city street, still "in a number of cases the set is more complex, showing the interior of the house (not just a balcony) and/or a secluded garden behind or to the side. Portions of the set that were not to remain visible throughout could be hidden and revealed by means of curtains" (386-87).⁸ Molière used this technique of room and discovered garden in *The Miser*.

Molière's plays and original productions, as Roger Herzog has shown in his definitive studies, mark most clearly the historic turning point from exterior to interior locations in comedy. For his early farces and for several later plays (e.g., *George Dandin*), he continued to use the traditional street scene. And for *Don Juan* and *The Doctor in Spite of Himself* he took advantage of the Italianate scenic innovations of changing the backdrop scenery as the locations changed. But with *Tartuffe*, *The Misanthrope*, and *The Learned Ladies* he shifted all of the action into an interior room. Thus, in *The Misanthrope*, for example, the exterior is not represented. Instead, it is designated (in dialogue and entrance-exit patterns) as the imaginary space beyond the door, the locale of reference instead of representation. The door then served as the focal point for a drama of either exclusion or inclusion, a drama of entrances into and exits from a special place. This scenic condition and dramatic action became central to modern drama, in a heritage that stretches from Molière to Ibsen to Pinter.

For the most part, after the early seventeenth century, multiple staging and simultaneous design disappeared until the twentieth century. A few exceptions are instructive. For example, in Germany, France, and England at the beginning of the nineteenth century simultaneous settings were used in isolated cases. "Monk" Lewis's *Venoni* (1808) called for two rooms as did George Coleman the younger's *The Actor of all Work; or First and Second Floor* (1817). Edward Fitzball's successful domestic melodrama of 1833, *Jonathan Bradford; or,*

the Murder at the Roadside Inn, presented four rooms in the inn simultaneously. Fitzball repeated this technique with another play a year later, *Walter Brand*. A few other attempts at simultaneous setting occurred during the decade, including George Almar's *The Clerk of Clerkenwell* in 1834. And in Vienna Johann Nestroy, intrigued with the comic possibilities of simultaneous design, called for four rooms in *The House of Temperaments* and two rooms in *The Ground Floor and the First Floor*.⁹

During the rest of the century the use of simultaneous settings spread in a piecemeal fashion, but without any telling purpose except commercial gimmickry or enhanced plot action. For example, in the United States J. J. McCloskey's *Across the Continent*, first produced at the Park Theatre on July 28, 1870, describes the Act I scene this way: "A street in full stage, with a house on either side. Interior of these houses with first and second floor may be seen by audience." At the rise of the curtain, "John Adderly is discovered upstairs in house on R., with two other men, Adderly sitting opposite the door. In the house upstairs on the left is O'Dwyer, and downstairs in this house George Constance is discovered asleep on the floor. Agnes is sitting



Fitzball's *Jonathan Bradford*; or, *the Murder at the Roadside Inn*.

on box in center of room. Children are near her" (McCloskey 67). The melodramatic action shifts from locale to locale, inside and outside, culminating in a farcical chase scene.

The use of simultaneous locales and actions in nineteenth-century melodramas and farces (like most attempts to use a split screen in twentieth-century film) was primarily a technical innovation for presenting plot action in a spectacular manner. Linear, sequential action is paramount in melodramatic plot. For this reason, the principle of causality in melodrama works against the complex idea of simultaneity. When melodrama pauses, it seeks the tableau, the crystalized moment, not multiplicity and incongruity. Interestingly, even at Bayreuth the panorama was used for Wagner's operas.¹⁰ Thus, pictorialism, however enhanced, still provided the aesthetic standard and rationale for dramatic production and action in the nineteenth century. Though the development of simultaneous design was sometimes clever, it did not embody and express a new idea of the theatre.¹¹

III

Yet by the 1890's, even before the ideas of Appia and Craig opened up new possibilities in symbolic design and movement, key playwrights were beginning to spell out what we can now see as a modernist imperative for simultaneity. Strindberg, for instance, in his essay "The New Art" (1894), calls for a theatre that offers simultaneously a "mixture of the unconscious and conscious" (99). A few years later *A Dream Play* fulfills this aim. Indeed, the famous preface is a manifesto for simultaneity:

. . . I have sought to imitate the incoherent but ostensibly logical form of our dreams. Anything can happen; everything is possible and probable. Time and space do not exist. Working with some insignificant real events as a background, the imagination spins out its threads of thoughts and weaves them into new patterns--a mixture of memories, experience, spontaneous ideas, impossibilities, and improbabilities.

Even though Strindberg did not foresee how the new lighting methods would be able to create a simultaneous space-time continuum, he had a clear idea of what he wanted, as his description of the set explicitly reveals: "The wings, which remain the same throughout the play, are stylized wall-paintings which simultaneously represent interiors, exteriors and landscape" (564). This desire to join interior and exterior became one of the crucial elements in the development of modernist simultaneity, whether staged in a simultaneous or multiple setting.¹²

Strindberg's set description recalls--and possibly shows the influence of--a similar set design that Alfred Jarry used in 1896 for *Ubu roi*. Its decor, painted by Paul Sérusier and Pierre Bonnard, represented interior and exterior (as well as tropic and arctic) locales simultaneously in a bizarre, fantastic manner. Before rehearsals began, Jarry had told Lugné-Poë, the director of the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre, that he wanted a single set. Jarry was guided by two principles of design that he defined in his essay, "Of the Futility of the 'Theatrical' in the Theatre": (1) "Decor is a hybrid, neither natural nor artificial." (2) "There are two sorts of decor: indoor and outdoor" (70-71). Jarry's aim, true to the concept of the grotesque (a major principle in romantic and modern art), was to collapse these supposed opposites into a single yet complex system of representation and meaning. Incongruity was thus not a problem to be overcome, as if it were a flaw in art. Instead, it became a new principle of representation, a new means of ordering--or, just as important, disordering--action and meaning.

The contributions of Strindberg and Jarry to a theatre of simultaneity are, in their own ways, significant complements to the subsequent theories of Appia and Craig (though it is difficult to show that the two designers were familiar with the works of Strindberg and Jarry). But there is a vital figure in this development whose works directly influenced Strindberg, Jarry, and Craig, and indirectly influenced Appia. I don't mean Wagner's operas and theory, though they are very important, but instead Ibsen's plays, from *The Vikings of Helgeland* and *Peer Gynt*, to the late symbolist dramas. Of course, we now recognize that Jarry was greatly influenced by Ibsen during his work on Lugné Poë's production of *Peer Gynt*, which Jarry helped to adapt in 1896. And we appreciate the shaping importance of Craig's production of *The Vikings* in 1903 and his design's for Eleonora Duse's *Rosmersholm* in 1906. But we still make a crucial mistake in our histories of modern theatre when we separate early modernism into realist and antirealist camps, thereby failing to reveal how Ibsen's social plays, with their profound geographic, social, and psychological dialectics between interior and exterior spaces, are the forerunners of the symbolist and expressionist attempts to present visually such dynamics simultaneously. Ibsen's influence was direct and decisive.

Most of Ibsen's plays, as I have analyzed elsewhere, center on the problems and consequences of leaving and returning home, of fateful exits and entrances. Both *Brand* and *Peer Gynt* give this theme a mythic significance by locating most of their scenes in expansive exteriors (with the interiors serving as spaces of confinement). In each of the twelve major prose plays, Ibsen represents the dramatic conflict, scenically and thematically, in terms of exterior and interior

realms of being (or nonbeing) that pull at the characters. Conflicts always develop and get played out not only between past and present (the temporal axis) but between exterior and interior (the spatial axis). The examples are not only plentiful but crucial: Nora's famous exit, the invading landscape of mountains, rain, and sun in *Ghosts*, the mock-heroic role of Dr. Stockman as a moral outsider whose home windows are shattered by the stones of the mob, the enclosure of the landscape within the interior attic in *The Wild Duck*, the threatening mill race outside the window in *Rosmersholm*, and the tower and the "castle in the sky" of *The Master Builder*. Repeatedly, Ibsen uses water and the mountains to represent various, often contradictory, aspects of the exterior-interior conflicts in such plays as *Pillars of Society*, *The Lady from the Sea*, *Little Eyolf*, *John Gabriel Borkman*, and *When We Dead Awaken*. Perhaps *The Wild Duck*, published in 1884, most explicitly yokes interior and exterior as simultaneous realms of action, but each of the plays, in its own particular way, juxtaposes inner and outer spaces as complexly as it joins past and present. William Archer astutely identified Ibsen's "retrospective technique" as the shaping pattern of his plot action. In like manner, we might note that Ibsen's interior-exterior technique is vitally important in the ways it reveals reciprocal penetrations between interior and exterior realms in the plays. Ibsen develops the temporal and spatial conflicts and actions that became the defining terms for the new theatre, the staging of simultaneity.

About the only thing Ibsen did not do is require a simultaneous design to represent his idea of simultaneity. Even in the late plays he contains his symbolist techniques within the realistic form (with some difficult it would seem).¹³ Strindberg and others would go the next essential step that made explicit the needs for the "new stagecraft." Nonetheless, Ibsen's plays set the modernist agenda, for as Ezra Pound remarked in 1916, "more than any one man, it is Ibsen who has made us 'our world,' that is to say, 'our modernity'" (217). That many modernists, from Strindberg and Yeats to Shaw and Brecht, needed to revolt against the father figure only proves that he was their progenitor. This is not to say, of course, that modernism has only one source, but in the theatre Ibsen set much of the agenda. Specifically, his complex methods of yoking not only the temporal realms of past and present but the spatial domains of interior and exterior proved to be the terms for an aesthetic of simultaneity in modern playwriting and design.¹⁴

This aesthetic principle is based upon juxtaposing two or more locations, time periods, actions, moods, styles, or themes. The aim for such juxtaposition may be a final unity, or at least the representation of the desire for unity, but typically modern art emphasizes the place

and moment of division, either potential or actual. It seeks to highlight rather than disguise differences between elements. In this manner, the modernist imperative of simultaneity is the culmination of the romantic fascination with the double, the uncanny, the grotesque, and the tragicomic.¹⁵ By evoking the principle of simultaneity, the modern artist can put forward either new ideas of unity and coherence or dark apprehensions of disunity and fragmentation. Some artists forecast or desire a new order, some announce the death of all order. And some proclaim both simultaneously.¹⁶

The modern theatre, partaking in this synchronist movement, not only creates multiple actions based upon a principle of simultaneous representation, reference, and reception but also derives its meaning from the dynamic interchanges that take place at the *boundaries* of these simultaneous realms. The aesthetic of simultaneity is essential to the modern stage's open-ended inquiry into the ambiguous, problematic, paradoxical, and contradictory nature of modern consciousness and society.

The Futurist movement, for example, created several plays that called for simultaneous action on a divided stage. In the essay "The Futurist Synthetic Theater," Marinetti, Settimelli, and Corra, called for a new theatre that could achieve "absolute dynamism through the interpenetration of different atmospheres and times." Their proffered solution to the "stupid" logical "demands of technique" in realistic drama was, not surprisingly, Marinetti's play *Simultaneità*, in which "there are two ambiances that interpenetrate and many different times [that are] put into action simultaneously" (127). (This action, we might note, seems a fitting description of an Ibsen play.)

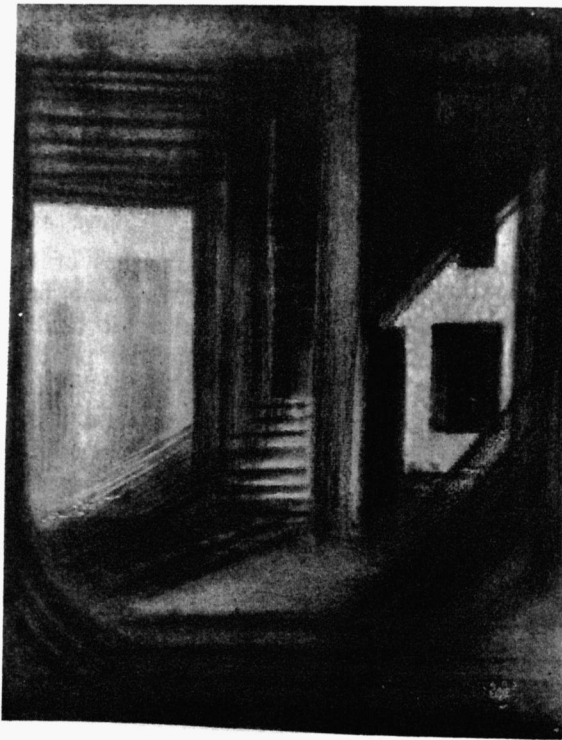
Of course, from today's perspective the claims of futurism often seem grandiose rather than grand. Marinetti's flame burned quickly. Yet despite the transitory qualities of futurism, it captured many of the traits of the modernist theatre, including the principle of simultaneity. When Marinetti, in "The Variety Theatre," called for a new theatre of "simultaneous movement" which combined performance and audience in dramatic action that "develops simultaneously on the stage, in the boxes, and in the orchestra" (117-18), he articulated an idea that also developed and got demonstrated in the theories and productions of Meyerhold, Reinhardt, Breton, Artaud, Piscator, and Brecht.

Because theatre is a spatial and temporal art, it became the laboratory of simultaneity. Like modern architecture, it conceived space in new ways; like narrative arts, it reordered time. In the case of spatial matters, it shared in the new ideas of architectonic order. Around the turn of the century architects began to reconceive space and construction, as Stephen Kern points out: "Whereas formerly they tended to think of space as a negative element between positive

elements of floors, ceilings, and walls, in this period they began to consider space itself as a positive element, and they began to think in terms of composing with 'space' rather than with differently shaped 'rooms' (155). Sigfried Giedion makes a similar point about modern architecture in *Space, Time and Architecture*: "The present space-time conception--the way volumes are placed in space and related to one another, the way interior space is separated from exterior space or is perforated by it to bring about an interpenetration--is a universal attribute which is the basis of all contemporary architecture" (xxxvii).

New materials liberated architects the way electricity liberated theatre designers. One consequence in architecture was Frank Lloyd Wright's "inside-becoming-outside" principle of design, a positive definition of how interior and exterior spaces interpenetrate. A consequence in theatre was the dynamic liberation of space as a plastic texture to be shaped into a simultaneous spatial-temporal action.

Much has been written about Appia and Craig, so there's little need here to summarize their accomplishments. Perhaps one example will suffice: Craig's drawing called "A Palace, a Slum, and A Stair-



Gordon Craig's "A Palace, a Slum, and A Stairway."

way," published in 1907. In one sense, it can be seen as an attempt to join what Sebastiano Serlio, whom Craig greatly admired, had separated: the three locales of tragedy, comedy, and pastoral that represent three different kinds of subject matter. Here's Craig's modern explanation for his evocative drawing:

I was asked how I should design a scene containing suggestions of the dwellings of the upper and lower classes, and also put into the scene a neutral spot where the two classes always met. So I designed, on the one side, a palace, of which the only thing palatial about it was its upright and severe form, and its golden colour, and on the other side [a] slum, with its little windows and shadows, and its geranium in the window; and in between these two came a stairway, as the magic spot where the whole world meets practically in harmony. It is for no particular plot or play, but one can imagine that perhaps some day a writer or even a stage manager will perhaps plan a series of dramas dealing with these two classes, wherein we see them separated and then continually united. Who knows, I might do it with proper care myself if someone doesn't light-heartedly seize the idea carelessly and, slapping me on the back, tell me cheerily I'm good to steal from. (*Towards a New Theatre* 66)

Indeed, he has proven to be the perfect person to "steal from," if that's the description we want to use for the flow of modern scenic ideas.

Several things are striking about this drawing and his explanation. The initial purpose--a setting for social drama--has proved to be less important than the method of representation. Craig joins two opposites, not simply to represent a conflict (though that is part of the aim) but to bring these opposites into contact at a meeting place, the liminal area of the stairway. This "magic spot" is supposed to be a place of "harmony." Whether it serves that purpose is the crucial issue--aesthetically, politically, socially, psychologically. Anything is possible. Craig conceived this magic spot, as we know from his important drawings of two years earlier called "The Steps" (1905), to be a place of many moods, a changeable atmosphere depending upon who comes into it and for what purpose.

We can envision, then, a man and woman entering into the magic spot of the stairway, one coming from the slum, the other from the palace. The stairway is the meeting place, the area of possible harmony or disharmony. Or both simultaneously, just as both place and slum are present simultaneously. Here at the place of entrance and exit, of interior retreats and exterior facades, the drama occurs: the

meeting spot. The action takes place on the stairs, but it also requires the presence of the palace and the slum on opposite sides of the stage, the two different realms and conditions of being: the powerful and the powerless, the public and the private, the past and the future, the society and the individual. In this magic spot the rhythms of movement and space join in the actor's presence and action.

Craig's drawing thus captures an essential drama in modern terms. It is an architectural space not of perspectivism, social separation, and aesthetic decorum, as we see in Serlio's drawings, but of confluence and interpenetration. It is about boundaries and thresholds but not borders, about opposites that join but do not dissolve (whatever the desire for harmony). It is, in this sense, the representation of simultaneity.

Craig and Appia are credited usually with opening up the stage space, of liberating it from the confining interiors and historical pictorialism of the nineteenth-century stage. But we should not lose sight of the fuller implications of their design ideas. Just as Ibsen should not be reduced to realism, they should not be limited to abstract symbolism. Modern scene design, whether the multiple set of Meyerhold or the simultaneous set of Mielziner, has attempted to create a stage space of synchronized interiors and exteriors in order to represent a fluid interchange. Of course, practical and economic problems are solved by these kinds of multiple sets. But more significantly, these designs represent our cultural idea of the theatre. Like Craig, we often talk of this idea as one of unity and harmony. That's one part of it. But the meaning of these designs, whatever the rhetoric about production unity, is often the modern one of disruption, disassociation, and displacement. That is, the theatre of simultaneity, of yoked oppositions, should be related to such ideas as Meyerhold's concept of the grotesque and Brecht's alienation effect, not just the theory of the new stagecraft.

Ibsen and Craig, despite their apparent differences, shared many similar aims, if not means, in their ideas for spatial tension and order. We should keep in mind that Craig designed and completed more productions of Ibsen's plays than of any other dramatist, including Shakespeare.¹⁷ In 1906, for the production of *Rosmersholm* starring Eleonora Duse as Rebecca West, Craig had prepared a program insert that included the following statements in defense of Ibsen's play and Craig's scenery:

Ibsen's marked detestation for Realism is nowhere more apparent than in the two plays *Rosmersholm* and *Ghosts*. The words are the words of actuality, but the drift of the words,

something beyond this. There is the powerful impression of unseen forces closing in upon the place. . . . Therefore those who prepare to serve Ibsen, to help in the setting forth of his play, must come to the work in no photographic mood, all must approach as artists. . . . Realism is only Exposure, whereas Art is Revelation. . . . Let our common sense be left in the cloak-room with our umbrellas and hats. We need here our finer senses only, the living part of us. We are in *Rosmersholm*, house of shadows. . . . (E. Craig 219-220)

In the shadows both Ibsen and Craig created their modern art.

Once we recognize their shared vision, we should be able to see how modern drama and modern scene design have developed together. Ibsen's yoked and unresolved opposites of interior and exterior in *The Wild Duck* and Craig's joining of palace and slum at the stairs, are emblematic of a series of theatrical oppositions that the modern designer, director, and playwright have endeavored to set up as basic elements of the modern stage. In fact, many of the paired opposites of modernism--speech-silence, horizontal-vertical, shadow-light, mass-body, curtains-openings, architectonic form-movement, container-contained, cyclorama-screens, frame-object, floor-actor, mask-face--are additional ways for investigating simultaneity. These opposites are reciprocating pairs that define one another. And just as Craig joins the palace and the slum at the stairs, so these other opposites are usually joined or mediated on the modern stage by stairs, bridges, doors, ramps, scrims, ladders, platforms, gestures, sounds.

The oppositions meet at the actor-character (another simultaneous pair that obsesses the modern theatre). The stairs, the bridges, the doors, the gestures all achieve meaning through human presence or absence. The actor-character in space and time is thus the essential need. The simultaneity of space and time is what the design has to work with, even when denied all else. Strip away the heritage of perspectivism and pictorialism on the stage and we are left with space and time, joined in a simultaneous and mutually defining relation. They cannot be dissolved into one another; they cannot be separated. They are--as Ibsen, Jarry, Strindberg, Appia, and Craig realized in their individual ways--the basic matter and manner of the theatre. Just as Hofmannstahl and Strauss joined *opera seria* and *opera buffa*, not to recreate neoclassicism but to create a modernist tension of yoke opposites, so the designers and playwrights of the modernist stage have used an aesthetic of simultaneity to extend, collapse, transform, confuse, mock, contradict, and rupture the boundaries of time and space. The tension, even in service to a new idea of harmony, is all important. The magic spot is thus the place and the

condition for simultaneity.

Indiana University

Notes

1. Besides Macgowan's *The Theatre of Tomorrow*, see Mordecai Gorelik's *New Theatres for Old* for an overview on the idea of synthesis in modern stage design.

2. In turn, our contemporary textbooks and "how to" manuals on stage design, lighting, costuming, dance, and directing almost invariably assume, at the level of presupposition, that the function and purpose of production work is to create this unity, which is broken down, chapter by chapter, section by section, into its component parts (e.g., color, line, form, movement, language, emotion). For example, here is a typical statement, in the textbook language of a popular design book: "Scene design in the modern theatre is concerned with the total visual effect of a dramatic production. In any production the total visual effect is the sum of all the elements that depend upon being seen to make their impression on the audience" (Parker, Smith, & Wolf 16).

3. A multiple set can be distinguished from a unit set, which a recent theatre dictionary defines this way: "A stage setting made up of a number of units—such as flats, drapes, platforms, steps, etc. It can be used in a variety of combinations or kept unchanged" (Trapido 917). Despite the distinctions that we often make between multiple and unit sets, they both can be used to represent more than one locale and simultaneous action. So, the definitions may well be misleading.

4. For a helpful overview on the history of simultaneous design, see Alice Lida Peet's unpublished dissertation.

5. Because one function of simultaneous and multiple designs is to reveal interior and exterior domains together, we might even note that the apparent use of the ekkyklema in Greek theatre served this function. As T. E. Lawrenson has stated: "The device is the mechanized reverse of the entry itself considered as a dramatic phenomenon: it is, conventionally, the spectator's passage through the wall to the horrors within" (9). Or we might say that the interior opens before us into the exterior, so that conventionally both are simultaneously present.

6. In a recent study of production methods at Gray's Inn Hall, Margaret Knapp and Michal Kobialka raise major questions about how plays were presented, including where the stage might have been. But they note that even with the stage placed in the center of the room, instead of across one end of the hall, the use of simultaneous scenery was possible: "If scenery were employed at all, it could have taken the form of booth-like medieval mansions set up in front of the walls on either side of the stage" (77).

7. See Shoemaker.

8. As we shall see, two features of this mode are especially relevant to modern simultaneous design: the concurrent representation of both interior and exterior spaces and the technique of masking certain parts of the set, either with a curtain or shadowed light.

9. Consult separate essays by Byrne, Speaight, and Winn.

10. See W. J. Lawrence's essay in *The Gentleman's Magazine* (1888, 87-88) on a production of *Parsifal*. And of course see Martin Meisel, *Realizations*, and Michael Booth, *The Spectacular Theatre*, for valuable studies of nineteenth-century production methods and aims.

11. For example, Augustin Daly's *Pique*, 1875, which played in New York for a long run, had one scene in a "Beggar's Paradise," with both the beggars' den and an attic above, but this division is purely a device for elaborating plot action

(Quinn 18). More attention needs to be given to fairs, circuses, and music hall performances, which often presented simultaneous events. Possibly it is these popular forms of entertainment rather than stage melodramas that provide significant cultural influence on subsequent avant-garde theatre practices.

12. Of note, some twentieth-century productions of Strindberg's plays have used a full simultaneous design (e.g., the production of *A Dream Play*, directed by Olaf Molander at the Royal Dramatic Theatre, Stockholm, 1935).

13. The absence of a specific requirement by Ibsen for simultaneous design should not limit our production approaches to his plays any more than Wagner's lack of a requirement for symbolic design has limited how we produce his operas. Somewhat strangely, despite the fact that we have freely opened up Wagner's work, we continue for the most part to be literal-minded in our production approaches to Ibsen. Ibsen needs his own Appia. Though Craig, Munch, Meyerhold, and others designed marvelously evocative productions for Ibsen, none of them, not even Craig, left a substantial heritage of influence like Appia's work on Wagner. We still await such an international figure.

14. Of course, it is possible, even necessary, to show that the cultural idea of modernity and the aesthetic forms of modernism have many origins in the conditions, ideas, and major figures of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The criticism on these developments has become overwhelming not only in its quantity but in its variety of definitions for modern art. Still, despite the many approaches to modernist culture, there is little disagreement that major transformations occurred. And as Stephen Kern demonstrates, a significant factor in these changes can best be identified as the idea of simultaneity (though Kern pays no attention to Ibsen's spatial themes and techniques). In the theatre this idea is, I want to argue, the decisive factor, especially when carried over to stage design of interiors and exteriors and production methods of entrance and exit.

15. The theatre thus shares in a widespread aesthetic: the multiple narrators and points of view in the novel, the different perspectives and uses of collage in cubism, the synchronizing of dissonance in music, the combining of the popular and the commonplace with the elite and the mythic in literature. For example, see Peter Jelavich's essay which examines the mixing of popular and elitist culture in German modernist art. The calculated use of popular styles, motifs, themes, entertainments, genres, and traditions in modernist "elite" art is a vital aspect of the aesthetic of simultaneity, and can be found, for example, in the work of Shaw, Joyce, Eliot, Meyerhold, Brecht, Picasso, Stein, Cocteau, Ives, Tzara, Beckett, Calder. In postmodernism the mixture is close to a requirement.

16. For a study of simultaneity as a unifying concept in modernist theory, see Margaret Davies, who writes: "One of the concepts which Apollinaire took up with great enthusiasm in 1909-10 was that of unanimism, the brainchild of the Groupe de l'Abbaye de Créteil, which counted Jules Romains, Georges Duhamel, and Henri Hertz among its members. What emerges predominantly from their work is the sense of the oneness of human life containing the multiple. For them an individual should be able to embrace simultaneous, multiform human experience at different points in space, just as through one's ancestry one was the sum of all past times. It is a powerful and inspiring idea that was later to spread in many other ways and link up with other influences to become the all important and ubiquitous 'simultanéité'. . . . It certainly inspired Apollinaire conceptually" (149).

17. The Ibsen productions were *The Vikings* with his mother Ellen Terry in 1903; *Rosmersholm* with Eleonora Duse in 1906; *The Pretenders* for the Royal Danish Theatre in 1926. He also took notes and made designs for *The Lady from the Sea* and *Peer Gynt*. Coincidentally, he even envisioned himself in the role Peer Gynt in 1896, just at the time the Paris production of *Peer Gynt* by Lugné Poë and Jarry was occurring.

Works Cited


- Byrne, M. St. Clare. "Early Multiple Settings in England." *Theatre Notebook* 8 (1953-54), 81-86.
- Craig, Edward. *Gordon Craig, The Story of His Life*. New York: Limelight Editions, 1985.
- Craig, Gordon. *Craig on Theatre*. Ed. J. Michael Walton. London: Methuen, 1983.
- _____. *On the Art of the Theatre*. London: Heinemann, 1911.
- _____. *Towards a New Theatre, Forty Designs for Stage Scenes With Critical Notes*. New York: Benjamin Blom, 1969 [1913].
- Davis, Margaret. "Modemité and Its Techniques." In *Modernism: Challenges and Perspectives*. Eds. M. Chefdor, R. Quinones, & A. Wachtel. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986, 146-158.
- Del Mar, Norman. *Richard Strauss, A Critical Commentary on His Life and Works*. 3 vols. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell U.P., 1986.
- Evans, G. Blackemore et al., eds. *The Riverside Shakespeare*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974.
- Fuerst, Walter Rene & Samuel J. Hume. *Twentieth Century Stage Decoration*. Intro. Adolphe Appia. 2 vols. N.Y.: Dover, 1967 [1929].
- Gethner, Perry. "Decor in French Classical Comedy." *Theatre Journal* 36.4 (October 1984).
- Giedion, Sigfried. *Space, Time and Architecture*. 5th ed. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967.
- Gorelik, Mordecai. *New Theatres for Old*. New York: R.P. Dutton, 1962.
- Herzel, Roger. "The Decor of Molière's Stage: The Testimony of Brissart and Chauveau." *PMLA* 93.5 (Oct. 1978) 925-954.
- Jarry, Alfred. "Of the Futility of the 'Theatrical' in the Theater." *Selected Works of Alfred Jarry*. Eds. Roger Shattuck & Simon Watson Taylor. Trans. Barbara Wright. N.Y.: Grove Press, 1965.
- Jelavich, Peter. "Popular Dimensions of Modernist Elite Culture: The Case of Theater in Fin-de-Siècle Munich." In *Modern European Intellectual History: Reappraisals & New Perspectives*. Eds. Dominick LaCapra & Steven L. Kaplan. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982, 220-250.
- Kern, Stephen. *The Culture of Time and Space 1880-1918*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983.
- Knapp, Margaret & Michal Kobialka. "Shakespeare and the Prince of Purpoole: The 1594 Production of *The Comedy of Errors* at Gray's

- Inn Hall." *Theatre History Studies* 4 (1984).
- Lawrenson, T. E. *The French Stage in the Seventeenth Century*. Manchester: Manchester U. P., 1957.
- Lindenberger, Herbert. *Opera, The Extravagant Art*. Ithaca: Cornell U.P., 1984.
- McCloskey, J. J. *Across the Continent*. In *America's Lost Plays*. Vol. 4. Ed. Scullery Bradley. Gen. Ed. Barrett H. Clark. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967.
- Macgowan, Kenneth. *The Theatre of Tomorrow*. New York: Boni & Liveright, 1921.
- Marinetti, Filippo Tommaso. "The Variety Theater." in *Filippo Tommaso Marinetti: Selected Writings*. Ed. R. W. Flint. Trans. R. W. Flint & Arthur A. Coppotelli. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1972.
- Marinetti, Filippo Tommaso, Emilio Settimelli, & Bruno Corra. "The Futurist Synthetic Theater." In *Filippo Tommaso Marinetti: Selected Writings*.
- Parker, W. Owen, Harvey K. Smith, & R. Craig Wolf. *Scene Design and Stage Lighting*. 5th ed. New York: Holt, Reinhardt, & Winston, 1985.
- Peet, Alice Lida. "The History and Development of Simultaneous [sic] Scenery in the West from the Middle Ages to Modern United States." Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1961.
- Postlewait, Thomas. "Pinter's *The Homecoming*: Displacing and Repeating Ibsen," *Comparative Drama* 15 (Fall 1981) 195-212.
- Pound, Ezra. "Mr. James Joyce and the Modern Stage." *Drama* 6 (Feb. 1916); reprinted in *Henrik Ibsen: A Critical anthology*. Ed. James McFarlane. Baltimore: Penguin, 1970.
- Quinn, Arthur H. *A History of American Drama from the Civil War to the Present Day*. 2nd ed. Vol. 2. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1951.
- Shoemaker, William Hutchinson. *The Multiple Stage in Spain During the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries*. Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1935.
- Southern, Richard. *Changeable Scenery: Its Origin and Development in the British Theatre*. London: Faber and Faber, 1952.
- Speaight, George. "Early Multiple Settings in England." *Theatre Notebook* 9 (1954-55) 15.
- Strindberg, August. *A Dream Play*. Trans. Michael Meyer. N.Y.: Random House, 1975.
- _____. "The New Arts, or the Role of Chance in Artistic Creation." In *Inferno, Alone, and Other Writings*. Ed., trans., & intro. Evert Sprinchorn. Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1968.
- Trapido, Joel et al. *An International Dictionary of Theatre Language*.

Westport, CT.: Greenwood Press, 1985.

Tzara, Tristan. *Seven Dada Manifestos and Lampisteries*. Trans. Barbara Wright. London: John Calder, 1977.

Winn, Peter. "Multiple Settings on the Early Nineteenth-Century London Stage." *Theatre Notebook* 35 (1981) 17-24.



STAGES

The National Theatre Magazine
8 Frasco Lane
Norwood, N.J. 07848

Here's my \$20 for 12 issues

NAME _____
ADDRESS: _____
ZIP: _____

THE SOUTHERN REVIEW

SUMMER 1988

- ESSAYS:** James Longenbach and Steven Helmling on Ezra Pound; Judith Weissman and others
- POETRY:** Anna Akhmatova, Osip Mandelstam, Edgar Bowers, James Applewhite, Peter Cooley, W. S. Di Piero, and others
- FICTION:** Enid Harlow, Joyce Carol Oates, Martha Ronk-Lifson, Betsy Wing, and others
- REVIEWS:** Fred Schwarzbach and twentieth-century criticism, Jefferson Humphries on Reynolds Price, Michelle Collins on Toni Morrison and Gloria Naylor

AUTUMN 1988: Writing in the South

- ESSAYS:** Nathan Scott on A. R. Ammons, Trudier Harris on Moms Mabley, Lewis Lawson on Walker Percy, L. D. Brodsky on William Faulkner, and others
- INTERVIEWS:** Walker Percy by Phil McCombs and William Humphrey by Bland Crowder
- POETRY:** Andrew Hudgins, John Finlay, Catharine Savage Brosman, David Middleton, Wyatt Prunty, Sue Scalf, Neal Bowers, and others
- FICTION:** William Humphrey, Allen Wier, Robert Canzoneri, Nancy Huddleston Packer, Jim Hall, Frank Manley, and others
- REVIEWS:** Richard H. King, Wayne Mixon, R. L. Barth, and others

Business Manager, *The Southern Review*
43 Allen Hall, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70803

Please enter my subscription to *The Southern Review* for _____ year(s).

<input type="checkbox"/> One year	<input type="checkbox"/> Two years	<input type="checkbox"/> Three years
<input type="checkbox"/> Ind. \$12.00	<input type="checkbox"/> Ind. \$21.00	<input type="checkbox"/> Ind. \$30.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Inst. \$30.00	<input type="checkbox"/> Inst. \$52.00	<input type="checkbox"/> Inst. \$75.00

My check is enclosed. Charge Visa MasterCard

Name _____ Acct. # _____

Address _____ Expiration Date _____

Signature _____



Vrubel's illustrations of Lermontov's poem, *The Demon*.