

## Is Theatre Under Deconstruction? A Retroactive Manifesto in a Language I Do Not Own

Stratos E. Constantinidis

Hebraism and Hellenism--between these two points of influence moves our world. At one time it feels more powerfully the attraction of one of them, at another time of the other.

Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*

Are we Jews? Are we Greeks? We live in the difference between the Jew and the Greek, which is perhaps the unity of what is called history. We live in and of difference, that is, in hypocrisy.

Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*

### *Where's the Beef?*

Like all western theatre artists, I have two good friends, a Jew and a Greek, who are not very kind to each other: the Greek works in a theatre on

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Broadway while the Jew in a theatre off Broadway. When they lived in London a couple of years ago, the Greek was employed in a theatre on the West End; the Jew in a theatre on the "Fringe." In fact, the Greek always occupied the center of theatrical activity and the Jew the periphery in every capital of the western world that they worked. So, I think I understand why my Jewish friend is cross and wants to displace my Greek friend from the center; he has been dislodged himself all these years!

What I do not understand, when my two friends argue at my dinner table, is why they insist that their difference is fundamentally a linguistic problem. My Greek friend argues that the Greco-Christian theatrical tradition has been *logocentric*: that is, theatrical production always starts with a playtext which, no matter how sketchy and improvisational, is written by someone who functions as "playwright"; then, the director, the designers, and the actors develop this playtext into a performance.

This is true up to a point, agrees my Jewish friend; behind the playtext, however, lurks the voice of the playwright which is obeyed by directors, designers, and actors; therefore, the Greco-Christian theatrical tradition has always been *phonocentric*: that is, it always begins with interpreting not the playtext but the playwright's voice and intention by emphasizing speech over writing.

My Jewish friend emphasizes writing, of course. The playtext, he claims, precedes both speech and the natural world. In plain English, the manuscript of any playwright comes before the speech acts and concurrent environment of any reader. Even the playwright is a reader to his own finished playtext; therefore, a playwright can learn about the world and his playtext by listening to the interpretations and glosses of drama scholars.

In the beginning, according to my Jewish friend, is the playtext (writing), not *logos* (speech). Theatrical production proceeds through an interpretation of a playtext--of the written words that comprise it, to be precise. The Hebrew word (*dabhar*) and the Greek word (*lexis*) address reality in different ways. *Lexis* means "speech act" while *dabhar* means both "word" and "thing" (substance, not object).

So, Hebrew words constitute the essence of reality. They do not just represent objects like Greek words; nor is language separate from *being* as our Greek friend thinks. Being is contingent and particular, neither necessary nor universal. Consequently, our Greek friend can only arbitrarily postulate that theatrical production is regulated by necessary and universal "laws."

All this is "rubbish" according to my Greek friend. To begin with, in Classical Greek, *logos* meant a rational, ordering principle; it did not mean "speech." In Hellenistic Greek, under the influence of Christianity, this ordering principle came to mean a divine revelation (*theophany*). This revelation manifested itself primarily in visible terms in the New Testament through the incarnation of Jesus Christ. In fact, the Greco-Christian god--call him Dionysus or Jesus--is both visible and audible.

It is the Hebrew god who reveals himself only as voice through speech in the Old Testament. The christianized *logos* transcends language--both speech and writing--through incarnation. Being lies beyond language. Being is known from itself, not from language. By way of analogy, the playtext comes alive in performance through the voice and body of the actors in the Greco-Christian theatrical tradition.

The Hebrew tradition resents this *presence* because the Hebrew language does not have any form of the verb "to be" in the present tense; therefore, in the opinion of my Greek friend, the Hebrew tradition exalts the playtext because the written word does not require a presence. (Atkins 1980: 773). On the other hand, Greek language and logic concentrate on the relation between subject and predicate. The copula "is" requires an audio and/or visual presence. Presence in theatrical production means performance; it means live actors interacting with live spectators "here" and "now."

All this is "trash" to my Jewish friend. The central theatrical act is the endless interpretation of a playtext, not the "incarnation" of a performance. Performance ends interpretation because it materializes the signs of a playtext and imposes ontology to textuality. (Boman 1954: 68, 151). This Greek "idolatrourous" image-making views language as a system of audible and/or visible signs which represent reality through the use of metaphors. In metaphors, the figural meanings replace the literal meanings, but even Aristotle knew that the literal meanings can cancel out the figural meanings. Being, indeed, lies behind language, but being determines literal meaning because it allows this entire system of words and things to function.

This literal/figurative transfer of meanings through metaphors is hooked on the Platonic tradition. Plato's metaphysics, in the opinion of my Jewish friend, transfer the mind from the visible and audible world to the invisible and inaudible world. These relationships have dominated the metaphysical explorations of western theatre artists of pseudo-oriental tastes from Euripides' "dionysiac" theatre to Brook's "holy" theatre. In the work of such theatre artists, it appears as if the Greco-Christian theatrical tradition implicitly adopts the Hebrew notion that the metaphysical exists only on the metaphorical plain of language where meaning "is" and "is not" at the same time. This metaphorical transfer that is accomplished through language, makes the "presence" of meaning ambivalent. (Derrida 1974: 9; Ricoeur 1977: 20).

My Greek friend finds these statements to be misleading generalizations which defy history. Plato indeed belittled writing in *Phaedrus*, but Plato banished playwrights and theatrical performances from his *Republic*. In fact, classical Greek drama developed and flourished before the days of Plato and Aristotle. Greek drama at its best was neither Platonic nor Aristotelian; it was Dionysiac! As for the medieval theatre, it was founded in the spirit of Christ, the new Dionysus, well before the western scholars injected neo-platonic, neo-aristotelian, and neoclassical reformulations into western drama. My Greek friend believes that the endless interpretation and commentary that drama

scholars have imposed on playtexts has displaced the real thing, the true "being" which only an open performance can introduce.

The Hebrew tradition, in the opinion of my Greek friend, sticks to the signs of empty words on a page and ignores the fulfilling presence of whatever these signs refer to on stage for one basic reason: the performance is the death of the playtext! A performance reifies signs, renders presence, and eternalizes significance "here" and "now". On the other hand, the game of scholarly interpretations mediates, equivocates, and displaces by refusing to posit referents which fulfill a sign and stabilize it. In short, philological interpretations prevent the fulfilling presence of a performance.

For my Jewish friend it is precisely this endless record of textual interpretations which testifies that a performance cannot exhaust the multiple interpretations that the various readings of a playtext make available. For example, the unreconciled glosses of a Greek or an Elizabethan playtext exist in a state of difference and displacement which prevents unity and fulfillment. This is the reason, according to my Jewish friend, that the western theatrical tradition is irreverent to playtexts, updating and adapting their glosses for stage presentation. This tradition believes that performance restores being; that performance becomes a referent beyond language; that performance stabilizes meaning by collapsing difference, promoting direct identification and union.

The less patient my two friends grow with each other, the more confusing their arguments become. And the less I listen to them, the more I understand the theory and practice of deconstruction. Their etymological metaphysics give me a headache. I think that they are both wrong because--whether they argue for or against--they do not regard performance as one more text (a performance-text) which renders presence and being on the stage quite ambivalent. I also think that they limit their perspective when they discuss metaphors in the narrow context of playtexts or performance-texts. If a logocentric or deconstructive stance on metaphors can have any "cash" value for the artistic and economic viability of theatre as a progressive institution in society, this cannot be achieved by a playtext or performance-text analysis alone.

Simply put, I see deconstruction as a method of analysis and action which subverts the traditional ways of theatrical production. It questions established definitions of "text," "author," and "reader" in western theatrical tradition. Which "text" is most vital in the theatrical experience: the playtext, the performance-text, the prompt-copy, or the rehearsal-text? Who is the "author" of the most vital text: the playwright, the director, the designers, the actors, the reader or the spectator? Who is the most vital "reader" of the text: the critic/scholar, the spectator/reader, the director, the actor, the designer, or the playwright? These questions of "textuality," "voice," and "interpretation" are based on value judgments and have influenced--for better or worse--the structure of theatrical production in western societies over the years. In mainstream theatrical production, they have created a hierarchy of priorities

and a chain of command which control behavior and arouse expectations from the playwright right down to the audience.

*Don't Treat Your Puppy Like a Dog!*

This chain of command seems logical. At the one end of the communication line stands the playwright. Who stands on the other end of the line is conditional. It depends on the medium--say, page or stage--by which the "text" is transmitted and subsequently interpreted. The chain of command is also well-ordered in mainstream western theatrical production. The playtext moves from hand to hand: from the playwright to the director; from the director to the designers and actors; and from the actors to the audience. The "word" is saved and retained from the playwright's pen to the actor's mouth and limbs.

Deconstruction proceeds to upset this "logocentric" itinerary in the play-production system of most western theatre companies. Deconstruction first reverses the hierarchy in the system and then it dislodges the dominant unit in the system. In short, deconstruction, as a method of action, proceeds by displacement. The logocentric systems of western play production operate under two dominant spacial metaphors: the metaphor of the production-line and the metaphor of the market-ellipse.

Any theatre companies that operate under the metaphor of the production-line adopt a structured, hierarchical order of production which proceeds from playtexts to performance-texts through such intermediate, "subordinate" texts as the "prompt-copy" and the "rehearsal-text" (Figure 1). Under the metaphor of the market-ellipse, the theatre companies of a country look like planets rotating around a sun. For example, the Broadway group of companies occupy the center while the off-Broadway, the off-off-Broadway, and the regional theatre companies are displaced in the periphery of theatrical activity in the U.S.A. (Figure 2).

Figure 1

The Metaphor of the Production-Line

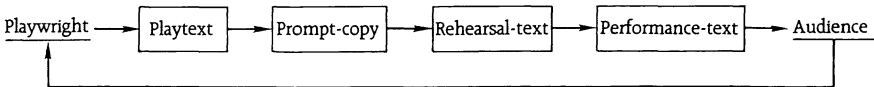
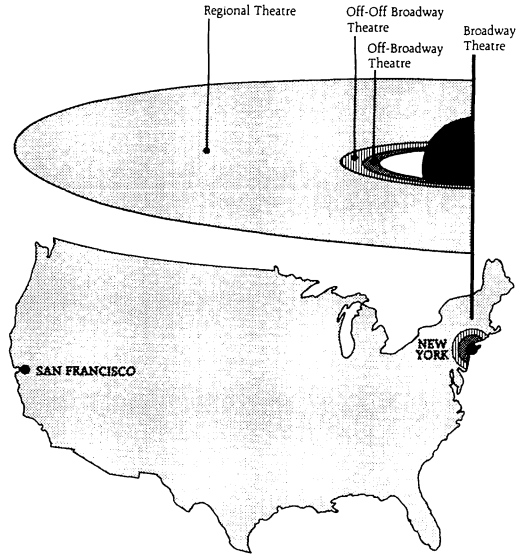


Figure 2

## The Metaphor of the Market-Ellipse



The companies on the outer rings generally repeat the shows and the production structure of the companies in the center, even though (1) they have been pushed to the "margin" under such indicative names as "off," "off-off," "regional," "fringe," etc., and (2) they are in economic competition and artistic-both aesthetic and ideological--opposition with the companies of the center. This paradox shows the strength of the metaphor in shaping perceptions and in "fixing" behavioral and professional habits which reinforce the economic forces that keep these companies in artistic and economic exile or displacement. The eyes and ears of theatre artists, critics, and audiences have been fixed on a group of about 35 companies at the "center" although the so-called "regional" theatre in the U.S.A. covers an area of 3,000 miles from New York to California and has had well over 1,000 operating theatre companies in postwar years.

Even today, a show that originates in the regional theatre gravitates towards the "center." The trip of the show from the outer rings to New York City is still considered a test of excellence. The closer the show travels to the "star-lit" center, the more it gains in economic, professional, and artistic status. These logocentric theatre companies, however, are not the only companies in the theatre market of a country. The efforts of artistically opposed theatre companies to de-center Broadway production in the 1950s and 1960s have been largely unsuccessful so far. The deconstructors have allied themselves with "marginal" theatre companies, but they do not delude themselves that the two

dominant metaphors of traditional western theatre will evaporate into thin air overnight.

On the one hand, the deconstructors have made a discouraging observation under the present economic and artistic conditions dictated by the value system of the metropolis: the more radically the activity of a theatre company antagonizes the two "metaphors," the further out to the margin the company is pushed. On the other hand, the deconstructors have realized that any abrupt displacement of the value system of the metropolis, which has controlled centrifugal and centripetal forces in the theatre, may cause severe economic, professional, and artistic disturbances that may ruin theatre at large.

Consequently, the deconstructors do not see their activity as the short-term destruction of the logocentric play-production system on Broadway or elsewhere. In fact, they are often employed within this system. Gradual displacement and the creation of multiple centers of gravity of equal status--such as those attempted by the educational and repertory theatre companies in the U.S.A.--seems, although it may not prove to be, efficacious. The gradual appropriation of unsettling trends by the traditional mode of western theatrical production may spare the world of theatre from unpleasant, ruinous shocks, but eventually may not change the structure of play production decisively. The alternative, of course, is revolution--which I discuss in my book in progress, *Theatre After Marxism*.

Deconstruction contests two fundamental positions in western play production: (1) it unsettles the "law" which gives priority to the voice of an authoritative consciousness--be it the voice of a playwright, a director, an actor or a critic; and (2) it undermines the value system that provides ideological justification for relations of power in the two dominant metaphors of western theatrical tradition. The deconstructors have turned displacement into a metonymic operation, (Jakobson 1971: 255) which expresses the repressed consciousness of all "authors" in theatrical production--not just of the playwright. The deconstructors see no essential continuity and preservation of value or meaning between a playtext and its subsequent performance-texts. The idea of "textual" displacements suggests that the inflections of a playtext are limitless.

Displacement introduces a violent intervention intended to shake the established modes of play production and interpretation. Displacement has an effect similar to that of shooting pool. The first ball sets off a new game and new combinations of meaning. Through displacement, deconstruction reverses the hierarchical order, but it can not eliminate all existing oppositions and tensions. For example, it does not eliminate the opposition between speech and writing. Speech does not become silence nor does it disappear in Artaud's "theatre of cruelty". Speech simply occupies a diminished place, and it continues to have a function within the new re-ordering of the system.

In other words, the deconstructive reversal displaces speech from a high point of dominance to a low point of subordination, introducing a new

relationship "that could never be included in the previous regime" (Derrida 1981: 42). The new relationship stands outside the previous binary opposition of dominance and subordination. Speech is severed from its authoritarian, metaphysical grounding and becomes just another aspect of the performance-text. The theatre artists are liberated from the "playwright-god" and his/her text; they are no longer the instruments who will re-present in their performance a "present" that exists elsewhere and prior to their performance (Artaud 1958: 106-107; Derrida 1978: 236).

The ideological impact of deconstruction in the politics of theatrical production is apparent. Deconstruction involves a "strategic" operation which wants to transform the field of theatre. The deconstructors incise the lines of possible rupture in the play production system where the logocentric discourse is vulnerable. They stress transformation and innovation at every step of the play-production process. These transformations have no end. Despite all deconstructive re-inscriptions, however, logocentrism still dominates the traditional theatrical production mainly because hierarchies of dual oppositions quickly re-establish themselves. For example, experimental theatre companies got rid of the "playwright-god", but now they have the "director-guru" controlling the creativity of the other theatre artists.

How can deconstruction transform theories and practices in the theatre in a way that is beneficial both artistically and financially? Deconstruction offers no programs of revelations and innovations. Instead, it offers a continuous, scrupulous analysis that can undermine a hierarchical structure of binary oppositions. Of course, hierarchies and structures of domination persist in the theatre. The deconstructors unsettle the old and the new hierarchies by working within the system of western theatrical production. They know that there are no final solutions, but they fend off the restoration of structures of domination and the myth of presence which still haunt theatre.

### *For Whom the Bell Tolls?*

Deconstruction has been associated with images of "death" and "rebirth" from Friedrich Nietzsche's dionysiac revival (*Birth of Tragedy*, 1872) to Antonin Artaud's bubonic plague (*Theatre and Its Double*, 1938). Radical theatre artists recognized the relationship between author and authority, and they questioned the eventuality of reconciling authority with artistic creativity in the context of theatrical production. The critique of authority which re-emerged in Europe and the U.S.A. in the late 1960s shook up once again the traditional mode of theatrical production. Many directors, designers, and performers believed that they could eliminate the playwright's authority by challenging the sovereignty of the playwright's creativity along with all the forms of obligation that result from it. Consequently, they advocated artistic creativity in the play-production process beyond or without the playtext.



The dissolution of the playwright's authority over the creativity of the other artists in a theatre company provides a point of departure for deconstructive theory and practice in the twentieth century. From Filippo Marinetti's "theatre of variety" to Richard Schechner's "environmental theatre," the deconstructive thought undermined the playwright and his/her playtext. By attacking the seams which join (separate?) tradition from innovation, deconstruction emerged in France in pre-war years and, like Artaud's plague, spread quickly to the rest of Europe and the U.S.A.

For logocentric theatrical tradition, the playwright is the supreme creator. His/her written words control the play production process because s/he stands as the origin (*arche*) and end-goal (*telos*) of the creativity of the other theatre artists. The director and designers make the prompt-copy in the image of the playwright's intention; the director and the actors turn the rehearsals into a purposeful process whose meaning can be presented to an audience coherently during performance. The rehearsal-text presents the unified results of the interaction between the playwright's words and the other theatre artists. The various "texts" generated during a play production interrelate in such a way that they "mirror" each other: a change in the playtext automatically causes a change in the prompt-copy, the rehearsal-text, and the performance-text.

The logocentric theatre artists regard a playtext as a single, complete entity. The *logos* organizes the different parts of a playtext into a unified, coherent structure (Derrida 1976: 18). The playtext and the playwright, therefore, become the origin from which "meanings" flow to the rest of the theatre artists who are involved in the production of the playtext. This privilege of origin gives the playwright the authority to exercise proprietary rights on the playtext and the subsequent performance-text. In other words, the playtext is protected by copyright which seeks to limit the proliferation of significations during the play production process (Foucault 1979: 159). The copyright turns directors, designers, and performers into faithful interpreters, not co-authors, because the playwright controls the decomposition and recomposition of the playtext in rehearsal.

Western theatrical production condones a "theological" bias by allowing the *logos* of the "playwright-god" to govern the activities of the other theatre artists from a distance. The "absent" playwright-god is "present" during the production process through his/her playtext which controls the meaning of representation in the prompt-copy, rehearsal, and performance. The directors, designers, and actors are permitted to represent the playwright's thoughts and intentions by rendering present the discourse of the playtext (Derrida 1978: 235). They become the "mouthpieces" of their master's voice in the same way that the playwright's playtext "voices" the universal *Logos* which, allegedly, permeates society and nature.

Clearly, the logocentrists see theatrical production in representational terms. The playwright "copies down" the universal *Logos*, and in turn the remaining theatre artists "represent" the *logos* of the playtext in their

performance. The deconstructors have fractured this chain of interdependence by redefining the playwright's contribution to theatrical production. Simply put, they challenge the notion of representation and re-interpret the concept of "author." First, they argue that the playwright's *logos*, manifested in the written words of a playtext, "re-writes" (does not "mirror") the universal *Logos*-if such a *Logos* exists. Re-writing involves creative interpretation (*poiesis*) not slavish imitation (*mimesis*). Therefore, playtexts have a presentational, not a representational value.

Western theatrical production was introduced to deconstruction when the theatre artists realized gradually that the "words" of playtexts had no representational value (Foucault 1970: 304) and that the general *a priori* structures of cognition could not explain how things really are. Under the influence of Georg Hegel these forerunners of deconstruction shifted their creativity from a representation of "the nature of things" to a presentation of "the artistic thought." Hegel had argued that Immanuel Kant's "thing-in-itself" does not designate an extra-mental reality but is, in fact, a cognitive construct which stands in critical tension with any form of knowledge. Consequently, authorship became creative, not imitative, at least for some playwrights.

The separation between "words" and "things" or, rather, between *logos* and *Logos* caused playwrights such as Luigi Pirandello to send six characters in search of an author in 1921. Pirandello's playtext, *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, challenged the relationship between the "dramatic" world ( $W_D$ ) and the "real" world ( $W_O$ ). Nonetheless, it was produced logocentrically because rehearsals and performances faithfully represented Pirandello's playtext.

Directors, designers, and actors crossed the deconstructive threshold when they gradually endorsed the following four premises: (1) playtexts do not point beyond themselves to the thoughts or intentions of playwrights; (2) playtexts do not embody the thoughts or intentions of playwrights; (3) playtexts are not composed of a finite number of signifieds; and (4) playtexts do not have a deep structure which lurks behind a surface structure.

In other words, the "meanings" inscribed in a playtext can only be explained in terms of "transpersonal," conventional structures (semiotic systems or codes), not as the result of an individual consciousness which appropriates them. The deconstructors further dissolved the identity and integrity of the playwright and his/her playtext by dismissing the universal *Logos* which allegedly was inscribed in the "deep" and "hidden" structures of playtexts. So they broke free from the logocentrists' theological quest for the recovery of the *Logos* which presumably stabilizes meaning.

All this means that the deconstructors "transgressed" from every major school of thought--be it Aristotelian, Stanislavskian, Artaudian, Pirandellian, or Brechtian--not to mention the "masters" of the Japanese Noh, of the Indian Kathakali, and so on. Schools-of-thought of either occidental or oriental persuasion generally protect the purity of the tradition and guard-the authority of the "master"--be s/he a playwright, a director, a designer, an actor, or a

critic. By securing "paternity," theatre schools try to prevent "illegitimate" thoughts and practices in play production. Tradition and authority join forces to establish orthodoxy and to repress heterodoxy--a Greek word which means "different opinion." The struggle against heterodoxy represents an effort to reduce difference and to promote unity in the quest for the origin--the master's thought or *logos*. The repression of difference regulates and regularizes play production. It establishes a normative canon of theories and practices for each school of thought that provides a standard against which "anomalies" can be judged and ruled out.

The deconstructors challenge the authority of the "great masters" of drama and theatre as well as the linear play-production process which ensures that authority is not dispersed but is properly channeled and delegated from the "master" to his/her "apostles". The deconstructors argue that all western theatrical production cannot be made to fit one single system. Theatre artists create collectively and their theories or practices form interdependent networks which frequently co-exist in conflict. For example, the dissolution of the individual "playwright" through collective "play-writing" during rehearsals--frequently called "workshops" such as Jerzi Grotowski's *Holidays*--allows for anonymous subjectivity and collective creativity to materialize. Collective creativity replaces "productivity" with "festivity" and "mastery" with "process." In *Happenings*, experience can no longer be graphed along a line which had a definitive beginning and end. The play-production process becomes a wandering, a carnival, a "holiday" in which individual identities dissolve and social roles break down.

The deconstructors argue that no single theory, or practice, or even school-of-thought is primary. Consequently, they proceed to re-examine the network of interrelated functions in logocentric play production. This network traditionally includes at least five spheres of activity: the playtext, which is regarded as the domain of playwrights; the prompt-copy which is viewed as the territory of directors and designers; the rehearsal-text which is recognized as the beat of directors and actors; and the performance-text which is considered as the ground of performers and spectators. This seemingly tight network was disjointed and re-structured in experimental deconstructive productions in the 1960s and 1970s. Such productions have demonstrated the intertextuality of the play-production process--namely that each "text" refers to other texts inside or outside the system of theatrical production.

Most deconstructive experiments suggest that "writing" is an endless process during which the "author" becomes a "reader" and the "reader" becomes an "author." The exchange of roles between "authors" and "readers" subverts any original or final authority. The deconstructors therefore argue that all "texts"--including the playtext--are derivative, never original. Each "text" repeats "texts" prior to it, and it does not express the intention of an individual author who poses as the origin of all meanings. Shakespeare's playtexts, for instance, re-write other "texts." In sum, all writing involves re-writing.

The notion of "author" beyond the playwright has freed deconstructors from a fixed center, the playtext, and has allowed play production to wander in all directions. Deconstructive productions have proved that the logocentric web of interrelations can be disrupted by turning the playtext into a prompt-copy, by transforming the rehearsals into workshops, and by eliminating closure in rehearsals or performances. Consequently, the deconstructors are promoting a new network of interrelations in theatrical production.

*Now You See It, Now You Don't!*

The power of origin, which a playtext enjoys in logocentric theatrical production, ensures that the playwright's word (*logos*) will control the play-production process. Like King Hamlet's ghost, the playtext forecasts a specific environment of experience for directors, designers, actors, and spectators. However, the influence that the playtext can exert depends on the responsive imagination of directors, designers, and actors, not on the playwright's intention. The playtext, therefore, is open-ended. Since meanings can not be complete in open-ended playtexts, the logocentric directors, designers, and actors try to construct complete and "closed" performance-texts. Closure fixes meaning, ending the continuous "re-writing" that takes place during rehearsals.

Understandably, the deconstructors challenge the logocentric notion of representation and closure. If a playtext represents an image of the universal *Logos*, the prompt-copy, in turn, represents an image of the playtext. If the prompt-copy is an image of an image, what then is the rehearsal-text? An imitation of an imitation of an imitation? To move interpretation three Platonic steps away from its "object" is to demoralize the directors, designers, and actors--not to mention that the playtext which they imitate is already moved a Platonic step away from the *Logos*. Clearly, the logocentric game of "mirrors" favors duplication and duplicity, discourages creativity and innovation, and frustrates and alienates theatre artists.

And so does the logocentric game of "closure." Closure turns a playtext into an organizing center of reference which helps the prompt-copy, the rehearsal-text, and the performance-text to achieve unity and coherence. In rehearsal, the logocentric directors ask the actors to recall, represent, and repeat the playtext and/or the prompt-copy. The actors who "write" the rehearsal-text, are not permitted to replace or reject any meanings in the playtext or the prompt-copy.

Consequently, logocentric directors and actors master space and time in rehearsal (1) by articulating sign-systems which re-present the playtext; (2) by rationalizing experience in the framework of the playtext; and (3) by remaining bound to the notion of a providential playwright.

Like the playwright who allegedly renders the universal *Logos* intelligible in a playtext, the director makes sure that the designers and actors render the playtext's *logos* intelligible in rehearsal and performance. The notion that this

principle of structure and order (*logos* or *Logos*) transcends all "texts" ranks meanings to a primary, secondary, or tertiary status. The logocentrists believe that, by working backward and upward through the chain of "texts," they can arrive at the primary (original) meaning of the playwright (*logos*) or, of the divine universe (*Logos*), in an act of revelation. In other words, the logocentric director controls the creativity and expression of the designers and actors in the name of the playwright's *logos* or of the universal *Logos*. Logocentric theatre artists look backward, not forward.

In an effort to overcome alienation and to gain self-expression, several directors and actors rebelled against the playwright and attempted to master the "master." The conflict between playwright Anton Chekhov and director Konstantin Stanislavski provides a clear example of the director's quest to dominate the playwright and the playtext. Chekhov called his *Cherry Orchard* (1904) a comedy, but Stanislavski thought otherwise and produced it as a tragedy. "It is neither a comedy, nor a farce as you wrote," Stanislavski told Chekhov, "It is a tragedy even if you do indicate a way into a better world in the last act" (Hingley 1950: 180).

However, not all directors, who overruled a playwright's interpretation (*logos*) of the world, were deconstructors--especially if they claimed to have a more intimate understanding of the universal *Logos* than the playwright and his/her playtext. Playwrights, directors, actors, and critics subscribe to logocentrism when they see "truth" as singular, simple, and permanent; not as plural, complex, or transient. Consequently, any discrepancies among the interpretations of logocentric directors, actors, and their critics are usually explained away as misunderstandings: either the playwright or the director and the actors must have confused the game between appearance (phenomenon) and essence (*ousia*) in the universe or in the playtext respectively.

The logocentrists love to read two levels of meaning into playtexts: Stanislavski, for example founded his "realistic theatre" on a double reading of the "text" and its "subtext." The text was the sum total of the denotative, literal meanings which were anchored on the words (signifiers) printed on the page. The "subtext", on the other hand, was the sum total of the connotative, figurative meanings "behind" and "beyond" the printed words on the page. In short, the text was "visible" while the subtext was "invisible."

Director Peter Brook also founded his "holy theatre" on a similar visible/invisible binary opposition. He trusted the universal *Logos*, but not the deceptive *logos*, and therefore he pressed his actors to make the invisible visible in their performance. Even Bertolt Brecht based his "epic theatre" on the visible/invisible opposition, but he carefully inverted its direction. According to Brecht, ideology makes people's perceptions familiar, automatic, and therefore imperceptible. The de-familiarization techniques, however, can make the familiar (natural) look or sound unfamiliar (unnatural), and thus render the "invisible" visible to the spectator's consciousness.

In all three cases--Stanislavski's familiar, invisible, deep structure, Brook's unfamiliar, invisible, deep structure, and Brecht's familiar, invisible, surface structure--decipherment is regarded as an act of revelation essential to logocentric understanding. Decipherment discloses and presents what otherwise would have remained "concealed" and, therefore, "absent" from human understanding. In sum, the logocentrists concur that playtexts possess determinate and determinable meanings which guarantee that interpretation is neither endless nor pointless.

But what if there is no universal *Logos*? What if the *logos* is a man-made invention which helps theatre artists "humanize" the world and "read" non-existent rationales and purposes "behind" the baffling disorder of life? As George Bernard Shaw prescribed,

. . . . the great dramatist has something better to do than to amuse either himself or his audience. He has to interpret life. This sounds a mere pious phrase of literary criticism; but a moment's consideration will discover its meaning and its exactitude. Life as it appears to us in our daily experience is an unintelligible chaos of happenings. / . . . / It is the business of Brieux to pick out the significant incidents from the chaos of daily happenings, and arrange them so that their relation to one another becomes significant, thus changing us from bewildered spectators of a monstrous confusion to men intelligently conscious of the world and its destinies. This is the highest function that man can perform--the greatest work he can set his hand to; and this is why the great dramatists of the world, from Euripides and Aristophanes to Shakespeare and Moliere, and from them to Ibsen and Brieux, take that majestic and pontifical rank which seems so strangely above all the reasonable pretensions of mere strolling actors and theatrical authors (Shaw 1911: xxiv-xxv).

Clearly, Shaw argues that playtexts can only present dramatic worlds in which events and motives have discernible directions and form meaningful patterns even if the playwright believes that the world has no inherent order or meaning. Shaw's dictum also holds true with absurdist playtexts and playwrights: there is method in their madness! The playwright's *logos* weaves the playtext in a continuous, coherent (however absurd), complete (however fragmented) sequence which has a beginning, middle, and end.

Logocentric directors and actors treat rehearsals as a rite of passage. Despite the apparent fragmentation of the playtext or, rather of the prompt-copy, during rehearsals, they present disparate scenes as interrelated episodes within a coherent pattern which emerges progressively. The logic of the narrative establishes a through-line which guides directors and actors to define every element in the dramatic world by its function and relation to the other elements.

In other words, the narrative renders events and motives intelligible in such a way that the reader--whether or not he is director, actor, or spectator--grasps the point (theme) of the complete sequence. Meaning, therefore, becomes a function of location of an element within the overall pattern. The rehearsals cannot extend the "end" of the playtext without altering its meanings. Consequently, the logocentric directors and actors leave no loose ends as rehearsals approach the opening night. They overcome discontinuity by stitching everything together with the strong thread of narrative.

The director's desire for control emanates from the logocentric assumption that mastery is manifested through unity, coherence, and presence of meaning in rehearsal and performance. The logocentric director, therefore, represses difference, chance, and absence by subordinating his understanding to the playwright's intention or vice versa. In either case, the logocentric director fails to subvert the logic of repression and to break away from the theological frame of western theatrical production.

Even self-conscious and conscientious directors could not escape from this pattern during (workshop) rehearsals. For example, Eugenio Barba who, among others, advocated an "alternative theatre," observed this theocratic structure of theatrical production in both western and oriental theatre.

With great loyalty my companions tried to motivate their own work with my words, my explanations. But something was wrong, something didn't ring true, and in the end a sort of split became apparent between what they were doing and what they wanted to do or believed they were doing to satisfy me, to meet me. When I realized this, I gave up all explanation. After working together many hours a day for many years, it is not my words but perhaps only my presence that can say something (Barba 1972: 54)

In the absence of a playtext, the "director-guru" or the "myth of technique" generally assumed control over the actor's behavior during rehearsals. Although Barba himself questioned the "myth of technique," he used it because it gave his way of working a useful and logical justification which was acceptable to others (Barba 1972: 52-53). Barba believed that training offers the possibility of bridging the gap between intention and realization (1972: 47), but he also argued that "virtuosity does not lead to situations of new human relationships which are the decisive ferment for a re-orientation (1972: 53). This quest for creativity made Barba arrive at a deceptive juxtaposition between oriental and occidental theatre.

According to Barba, the actor in oriental theatre must conform to a tradition of techniques, which codify a performance style, by "merely executing a role whose minutest detail has, as in a musical score, been elaborated by some master in a more or less distant past" (1972: 48). Conversely, Barba thinks that the actor in western theatre is--or should be--a creator, mainly

because the western actor has no prescribed rules of action which should guide and support his performance--except for the playtext and the director's instructions. "His clash with the text," Barba explains, "through his own sensitivity and his own historical experience, offers a unique and personal universe to his spectators" (1972: 48). This fallacious binary opposition between oriental and occidental theatre--which are seen as static and dynamic respectively--is founded on the pseudo-structuralist premises of Barba's "theatre anthropology."

Despite the research which has invalidated western views of the orient as static (Said 1978; Inden 1986), Barba continues to see oriental theatre as the opposite of western theatre for two reasons: First, Barba came up with a dubious discipline which he named "theatre anthropology." Barba's theatre anthropologists, by definition, study any recurrent principles which are common to the performers of different cultures, places and times; and they hope that these principles, which cannot prove the existence of universal and inviolable laws, may be useful when applied to specific theatrical performances (Barba: 1982: 5).

Unfortunately, most of these cross-cultural explorations indulge in qualitative analyses of oppositional tensions, reducing the history of world theatre into a binary molecular model. Barba, for instance, is quite convinced that theatre, in its long history around the globe, has always had a "visible, evident" dimension, and an "invisible, subterranean" dimension (Barba 1986: 1; Berberich 1984; Zarrilli 1988).

Second, Barba's essentially phenomenological "readings" of oriental and occidental theatre echo the ever popular writings of Antonin Artaud and Bertolt Brecht who, among others, introduced partial--if not misleading--views of the "oriental other" to western theatrical practice. Barba cherishes the visible/invisible opposition, and he claims that the "oriental other" houses the invisible, intangible, and ineffable experience. "Once again," Barba insists, "the exterior forms are of no importance" (1972: 54). The actor's business is to describe the indescribable by creating the ineffable "presence." This presence is an invisible energy which transcends the visible aspects of an actor's technical training and physical performance. In the state of "presence," the actor is not interpreting or experiencing anything (Barba 1986: 115).

In other words, Barba concedes that any representational performance narratives are arbitrary inventions which make sense only in the specific, time-bound cultural contexts that generate them. But he is reluctant to accept that any presentational performance narratives are also arbitrary man-made cultural codes without recourse to the truth or reality. Barba's research, which stemmed out of the crisis of representation in the western theatre, backfires because it tells us more about Barba's views than about the oriental theatre (Clifford 1986). In a quixotic quest for universal essences and binary opposites, Barba has overlooked so far the detailed description of the concrete



sign systems and codes which are employed by performers and spectators respectively in a specific (social) space and (historical) time.

In sum, the logocentric directors and actors in oriental and occidental theatre alike, look backward to the "text"--which can be part of an oral or written tradition--through recollection, and they look forward in expectation to the performance-text during rehearsals. Whether they practice a presentational or a representational theatre, they continue to operate within the framework of a theological metaphor. They regard play production as a straight line which organizes itself into a causal chain and controls everything from beginning to end in an inevitable sequence.

Allow me here to caricature--only for the sake of brevity--this "divine" metaphor. In the beginning, the playwright-god" creates the playtext (Creation). Next, the director-guru" and his/her "master-designers" produce a down-to-earth image of the prototype in their prompt-copy (Fall). Then, the actors lend sight and sound to the playwright's words and the director's production concept through the presence of their bodies and voices in rehearsals (Incarnation). The performance that ensues from their joint efforts temporarily annuls "real" life (Death) and revives a "fictive" life (Resurrection). At the end, the theatre artists receive feedback (Damnation or Redemption) from their audiences and critics. It is in the phase of rehearsals that the theological metaphor of western play production, along with its numerous variations, has cracked open.

Generally speaking, the logocentric directors and actors turn the rehearsals into a zone of discontent and restlessness because they feel suspended between a lost past (playtext) and an elusive future (performance-text). They try to preserve the past for the future--which are both absent during rehearsals--by suppressing the present that leaks in while the actors, in the manner of silk-worms, are trying to create a cocoon of fictive time around them.

The deconstructors, on the other hand, do not endorse a central narrative; they prefer open-ended, unfinished playtexts which are extendible both backward and forward during rehearsals. The deconstructors regard rehearsals as the work of creative imagination, and they argue that imagination is primarily productive, not re-productive. If that is not the case, why do directors, designers, actors and audiences feel compelled to produce (not to re-produce) certain playtexts again and again? To whom are rehearsals presented? How are rehearsals different from performances? Isn't the performance on the opening night a rehearsal for the next night? The deconstructors do not draw a line between performers and spectators.

For example, Happenings and Holidays have no organizing center--whether that center is a playtext or a prompt-copy. The deconstructive theatre artist resists any tendencies--his own included--to achieve mastery. Interpretation has no end or beginning. There is no solid point in interpretation. Each interpretation results from a certain viewpoint which is produced in a

figurational code. Consequently, no one code can be privileged over another. This unending game of signification/interpretation suggests that there is no exit from the labyrinth of interpretation. Viewpoints do not have secure *standpoints*. They are relational, and therefore, meaning becomes relative and liminal: i.e., meaning appears and disappears at the seams of interrelated viewpoints. Meaning is equivocal rather than univocal.

A sign, however, can not have several or different meanings present simultaneously. A signifier does not possess multiple meanings. In fact, an isolated signifier means nothing. It generates meanings and equivocality only through interrelationships with other signifiers. Meaning therefore is unstable because it is inscribed in changing viewpoints and shifting contexts. The signifiers are caught in an endless semantic web. The synchronic network of signification is too extensive and complex to be mastered. The diachronic network is also boundless. Consequently, the context which informs the signs and the viewpoints to which signs are configured, remains unfinished. The open-ended diachronic web of signification leaves the semantic context indeterminable. The absence of an origin (*arche*) and the end-goal (*telos*) makes the floating signifiers and signifieds yield only transient, migratory meanings. The deconstructors accept the endless drift of meanings and they do not attempt to fix meaning in rehearsal or in performance. As a result, they spell the end of the playwright and they inaugurate an open-ended rehearsal-text.

The deconstructors believe that texts depend on each other to produce meaning. This mutual inter-dependence turns every text into an intertext. Seen in this way, the rehearsal-text becomes a relational event which can not be self-contained because the signifiers that compose it are not self-contained. The rehearsal-text stands in a tangled relationship with other texts. This intertextuality in the play production process has no end or beginning. Playtexts, prompt-copies, rehearsal-texts, performance-texts, and all other texts in and out of the theatrical world are entangled in an endless web, a "benevolent" circle which spirals but never closes. The loss of origin results from the elimination of an organizing center (e.g., a playtext) or principle (e.g., a myth of technique). Meaning always forms and reforms, but never stands or fully presents itself. For this reason, the deconstructors overturn the notion of producing a finished, closed, packaged product for their audiences.

Instead, the deconstructors invite the spectators to experience the activity of production. This is why their performances look or sound like rehearsals. They no longer consider interpretation a parasitic activity which feeds on an original source (the playtext). Unlike Barba, they see interpretation as a generative activity because there can be no "text" without interpretation. They contend that the "I" of each theatre artist is not the original source of the sentences that s/he utters. Each personal voice is entangled in a web of linguistic and cultural references which precedes it, antecedes it, and encompasses it.

The deconstructive theatre artist knows that s/he can never fully own his/her own voice. And so, s/he acknowledges his/her lack of authority over his/her "text." For example, Shakespeare's *King Lear* (playtext), Peter Brook's "King Lear" (prompt-copy), and Lawrence Olivier's "King Lear" (performance-text)--to mention only a few "King Leirs" and fewer texts--are only masks which have attached a "voice," a "face," or an "identity" to the collective labor of many anonymous and eponymous contributors. These "texts" of King Lear resulted from the social activity and interaction of countless co-producers of meanings who were involved directly or indirectly with the "true chronicle history of King Leir" as early as the turn of the 17th century.

For the most part, the logocentrists have inscribed the history of western theatrical production in binary oppositions on an evolutionist canvas--whether the issue is Gerhardt Hauptmann's realistic theatre or Brecht's epic theatre (Figure 3). The theatre artists and critics who draw such exclusive, hierarchical oppositions, share an undialectical attitude, and they cannot conceive that oppositions can co-exist as equivalents. Instead, they privilege one term (e.g., epic) and impoverish the other (e.g., realistic), or vice versa. In this way, they sustain a hierarchy within the axiological domain of a theatre company that allows one opposition to rule over the other.

**Figure 3**  
**Brecht's Model of Binary Oppositions**  
**Between Epic and Realistic Theatre**

The modern theatre is the epic theatre. The following table shows certain changes of emphasis as between the dramatic and the epic theatre.

<b>DRAMATIC THEATRE</b>	<b>EPIC THEATRE</b>
Plot	1. Narrative
Implicates the spectator in a stage situation	2. Turns the spectator into an observer, but
Wears down his capacity for action	3. Arouses his capacity for action
Provides him with sensations	4. Forces him to make decisions
Experience	5. Picture of the world
The spectator is involved in something	6. He is made to face something
Suggestion	7. Argument
Instinctive feelings are preserved	8. Brought to the point of recognition
The spectator is in the thick of it, shares the experience	9. The spectator stands outside, studies
The human being is taken for granted	10. The human being is the subject of the inquiry
He is unalterable	11. He is alterable and able to alter
Eyes on the finish	12. Eyes on the course
One scene makes another	13. Each scene for itself
Growth	14. Montage
Linear development	15. In curves
Evolutionary determinism	16. Jumps
Man as a fixed point	17. Man as a process
Thought determines being	18. Social being determines thought
Feeling	19. Reason

Source: "The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre: Notes to the Opera *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*" (1931) in *Brecht on Theatre*, ed. & tr. by John Willet, London: Methuen, 1978, 37.

It is against such hierarchies as the above that the deconstructors have rebelled and they want to abolish the structures of domination/subordination which regulate western theatrical production. Revolutionaries such as Adolphe Appia, Gordon Craig, or even Bertolt Brecht, are not radical enough because they retain a hierarchical oppression. For example, Appia, in agreement with Gordon Craig, believed that the complete, composite performance-text required one creative mind, "one lordly dictator as designer-director," to bring all the elements into harmony by subordinating the actor and preventing him from making an independent display (Kernodle 1954: 7).

The deconstructors argue that repression will not be eliminated from the play-production process, unless theatre artists and critics avoid the trap of thinking solely in terms of domination and binary, conflicting opposites. Theatre artists and critics do not liberate themselves and their work from logocentrism by simply giving impressionistic theatre, realistic theatre, or epic theatre--to mention only a few--a negative or a positive appraisal. A reversal of the dominant/subordinate relationship is not enough. Nothing fundamental will ever change unless the values of the binary oppositions dissolve through a dialectical inversion. Consequently, the deconstructors chisel out a methodology which will allow them to creatively disorganize the entire inherited order of western play production.

At this point, deconstruction becomes a methodological tool which helps theatre artists and critics (1) to explore the structure of relationships of binary oppositions, and (2) to reformulate these binary oppositions by dissolving and recasting--not just reversing--their former values. So, the deconstructive criticism challenges the intelligence and integrity of such polarities in western theatrical production, and it creates a new future for theatrical practice away from the notions which have traditionally conditioned it. The deconstructors attack the logocentric theatrical network by turning its own tactics against it, "producing a force of dislocation that spreads itself throughout the entire system, fissuring it in every direction" (Derrida 1978: 20). In sum, deconstructive criticism exposes the instability and contradictions of foundational notions and practices in theatrical production, and it provides creative alternatives.

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