

## Physics and the New Theatre Historiography

### Rosemarie Bank

When *JDT&C* first proposed taking on the quantum universe, it seemed a bold if not forbidding move, and yet the quantum universe appears to have already taken on the theatre historian, theoretician, and critic. Although the postulates of relativity and quantum mechanics are as old as this century and may seem stale news to some, their increased application to critical and historical thought on a wide scale in the last twenty-five years is quite evident. Numerous concepts in our field and others--discontinuity, indeterminacy, the limitations of traditional logic and of language, an elastic and multidirectional temporality, and many more--are also important concerns to physicists. In this issue of *JDT&C*, we find the traces of these ideas in the analyses of medieval and Jacksonian theatres and in the accounts of performance art and performance represented here, as well as in the works we cite (the first sixty or so notes to my article may serve as an informal bibliography), all of which testify to the extent to which space (and inevitably time) has influenced how scholars conceive of art and history and the work we do.

Surely our representations of the quantum universe here will be inadequate, as all limited readings must be, since, as Nick Herbert observes of his reduction of quantum relativity to eight quantum "realities," such summaries reflect "selective emphasis of certain features of quantum theory and the neglect of others."<sup>1</sup> We are not physicists fielding theories about the nature of the universe; that would be practicing without a license. Yet, as one of the most appropriated disciplines in the world--even surgeons, for example, "perform" in operating "theatres"--we have long understood the value of analogies that help us and our audiences perceive what we see. It is in the belief that knowledge of the quantum universe has and will continue to enrich

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performance, playtexts, and theatre history in this century and the next, that the present project has been attempted. Conversely, theatre practitioners and scholars have something essential and unique to say to science about space as we know and use it in our work.

The authors of the articles in this special section devoted to physics and theatre were not asked to conform to any limitations (save imposed length), but to reflect upon and illustrate those aspects of twentieth century physics that have enlivened and informed their scholarship. For a theatre researcher, the displacement of the traditions of Newton, Hegel, and Darwin and the perception of a new spatio-temporal landscape are unavoidable and inescapable features of the quantum relative universe. In making our cognitive voyages, we do not claim to boldly go where no one has gone before; rather, we find ourselves in the good company of many who have sought out the new world quantum physics has articulated in this century. If as theatre scholars our discovery is belated, the execution of our mission inadequate, perhaps our wanderings will prompt others to undertake the trek, for as Foucault observes, "We do not live in a kind of void inside of which we could place individuals and things . . . we live inside a set of relations."<sup>2</sup> No relation exceeds the space of the universes the mind can conceive, spaces for thinking the future as well as the past. If theatre research can enrich that universe, let us make it so.

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## Notes

1. Nick Herbert, *Quantum Reality: Beyond the New Physics* (Garden City, NY: Anchor/Doubleday, 1985) 158.
2. Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," *Diacritics* 16 (Spring 1986): 25.