

When Words Collide: The Stage Direction as Utterance

Patricia A. Suchy

Prompter [reading . . .]. 'When the curtain rises, Leo Gala, dressed in a cook's cap and apron is busy beating an egg in a cup. . . .'

Leading Man [To Manager]. Excuse me, but must I absolutely wear a cook's cap?

The Manager [annoyed]. I imagine so. It says so there anyway. [Pointing to the 'book']¹

In the opening scene of *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, Pirandello's Manager nonchalantly defers his authority to a stage direction in the printed text, in order to stop the Leading Man's complaints. Moments later, in a classic Pirandellian twist, the Manager is persuaded to act as "author" of the Characters' drama. Of course, we as audience know that the Characters, as well as the Manager, have entered the scene fully authored by the playwright, and we are enchanted with an apparent play upon this rather simple irony made possible by our vantage point as spectators. But Pirandellian dramaturgy defies such neat ontological correspondences and conflicts, and points of view are anything but stable once we have entered a Pirandello labyrinth. Within the fictive world of the play, the Manager struggles with trying to "author" characters who arrive with their histories intact, while in the world of natural discourse, the creators of the *mise en scene* have undergone a parallel struggle for authorship of their production.² The audience, left to negotiate all these layers of authorial discourse, may find it difficult to pull them apart for analysis; this phenomenon, no doubt, is part of Pirandello's plan for testing ontological boundaries:

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The stage--a stage which accepts the fantastic reality of the six characters--is no fixed, immutable datum. Nothing in this play exists as given and preconceived. Everything is in the making, is in motion. . . .³

Considering Pirandello's strong ties to the phenomenology of theatrical production, one cannot doubt that when Pirandello envisions the dynamic qualities of the six characters' stage, he refers not only to the fictive discourse within the play but also to the natural discourse of the *mise en scene*.

Since, as Pirandello implies, discourse and authorship in the theatre are in constant flux, it is not always easy to point to those occasions in which natural and fictive realms of discourse collide. However, recent theatre history provides us with a provocative example. When Joanne Akalitis staged Samuel Beckett's *Endgame* for the American Repertory Theatre in 1984, Beckett's agents threatened to revoke ART's production rights since, contrary to Beckett's stage directions, Akalitis set the play in a subway tunnel.⁴ The ensuing controversy, centering around the unstable boundaries of freedom of interpretation, vividly dramatized several issues that are at the core of much of contemporary literary criticism: What is the author's relationship to text and reader? Who determines, or how can anyone determine, how a text is approached by its readers and critics? How do authors assert or codify intention, or is the author's intention unidentifiable and therefore beside the point? If the reader cannot interpret or identify authorial intention, then just what does a reader do instead? What constitutes "legitimate" interpretation? These questions lose their abstract qualities in the arena of live performance, where interpretation takes on simultaneously the complexity and immediacy of a public event. In modern times, the struggle to assert the author function has been especially apparent within the phenomenon of *auteur* theatre. In post-modern times, however, the challenge to the insularity of the art work has forced our conventional understanding of authorship to become more fluid--and more nuanced. Nowhere but in the theatre is the authorship question so essential; nowhere is it more complex.⁵

Theatre thrives on conventions, but as the Beckett/ART controversy demonstrates, ideas about how a convention operates in its transition from page to stage can diverge radically. The convention of the stage direction is especially fraught with interpretive discord. As Patrice Pavis writes:

. . . *mise en scene* is not obliged to follow stage directions. Stage directions concerning the circumstances of utterances are not the ultimate truth of a text, a formal command to produce the text in such a manner, or even an indispensable shifter between text and performance. Their textual status is uncertain. Do they constitute an optional extratext? A metatext that determines the dramatic

text? Or a pretext that suggests one solution before the director decides on another?⁶

The irony of the stage direction's ambiguity is that even though it seems to emanate more directly from an author than dialogue, it is most often understood to be an option, not a given. The modern practice of publishing "acting versions" of scripts with stage directions taken from original productions further confounds the problem; in such cases, authorship of the stage direction may be multiple, and extremely difficult to pull apart. Barbara Herrnstein Smith, in distinguishing between the historical contextualization of the "natural" utterance and the ahistoricity of the "fictive" utterance, remarks that "Errors of identification produce erroneous assumptions and bring into play inappropriate conventions."⁷ In this brief examination of the functions of the stage direction, I will argue that the stage direction, although considered by most to be a natural utterance, existing apart from the text's fictive dialogue, can be read more appropriately as part of a play's fiction. But first, it will be necessary to consider the flaw in method that has led some scholars to read stage directions without accounting for the powerful ambiguity of the performative mode.

Current studies of the semiotics of the stage direction, in their rage to systematize, often fail to consider the complexity and the totality of the theatrical gesture, and the inherent messiness of the question of authorship in the theatre is often reduced to a dialectic between production and text. But, as Gerald Rabkin suggests, theatrical interpretation spins a complex web of signification, since "it interjects an intermediary layer between the non-performance text and its final destination: its audience, the readers of the theatre event."⁸ Additionally, as Roland Barthes has observed, "every performance is an extremely dense semantic act," *"a density of signs . . . at once dense and extensive, simultaneous and successive"* quite apart from any reference to the literary text.⁹ Barthes' struggle with the complex codes of theatre reveals a weakness in the very practice of semiotic analyses of events: the inadequacy of scientific systemization to account for the complexity of live communication.¹⁰ This problem is the inspiration behind much of the thinking of Mikhail Bakhtin, whose concepts of dialogue and unfinalizability evolved as correctives to the methods of semiotics, structuralism, and dialectics. Frustrated by the structuralists' deductive tendency to circumscribe communication within an abstract system (Saussure's *langue*) from which incidents of communication were derived (*parole*), Bakhtin and others of his circle sought an inductive method that would be able to account for asystemicity:

Semiotics deals primarily with the transmission of ready-made communication using a ready-made code. But in live

speech . . . communication is first created in the process of transmission, and there is, in essence, no code.¹¹

Events are particularized, unrepeatable experiences, and semiotics perforce robs events of their "eventness" (*sobytnost*). It follows that any moment in a performance event can transcend the abstract system into which we try to force it to conform.¹²

In interpreting a stage direction, whether on page or stage, semioticians most often want to attribute authorial force to either the playwright or the production. In actuality, the "voices" of production or script are seldom so discretely identifiable. A better way of describing the execution of the stage direction is suggested by Bakhtin's dialogism, in which both voices author and are authored simultaneously, and the emphasis is on the event itself, rather than any abstract system (in this case, authorship, or even interpretation). We will return to the problem of semiotic investigations of stage directions below.

The stage direction occupies a liminal zone between the literary text and the *mise en scene*; it is not meant to be uttered aloud, yet, in some cases at least, it is meant to be performed. In the case of *Endgame*, Beckett considered the stage directions, like the dialogue, an integral part of the fixed code of his text. Underlying Beckett's objections to the subway environment created by ART's production is the assumption that authorial intention can be identified, stabilized, and perhaps even enforced through copyright laws (although a compromise was reached and the case never entered the legal system). The stage direction, as Beckett would have it, shares privilege with the written lines as ultimate authority over the spoken or enacted text. Although Akalitis' production team more than likely read Beckett's stage directions for *Endgame* as expendable utterances, as Rabkin notes, "Beckett's defenders insist that the text of *Endgame* is *all* language immobilized in the printed book. *Endgame*'s last line is '(Brief tableau.)' not You . . . remain."¹³ If Beckett's position is accepted, then the stage direction loses its autonomy; it demonstrates no significant ontological independence from dialogue. Beckett has, in fact, written two plays, *Act Without Words I* and *II*, consisting entirely of stage directions. Beckett's dramaturgy, considered as a whole, demonstrates an unusual symbiosis of spoken word and stage direction. In his two wordless plays he seems to have arrived at something of an inverse of the "stage directions" uttered in the Shakespearean set speech. The imaginal base of many of Beckett's plays links his dramaturgy to that of Heiner Muller, for example--but with the contingency that Beckett's stage directions are comparatively much more precise, and thus preclude the kind of director interpretation of, say, Robert Wilson's production of *Hamletmachine*.

To push the example of Beckett's works to an extreme, we might say that a play's literary text is made entirely of stage directions, including the lines that are spoken aloud. The priority Aristotle gave to plot, character, and thought over diction reveals that this idea is not really as radical as it may sound; and

in modern times, with the concept of the "sub-text" or the idea that much of the play's meaning can be discovered beyond the surface of its language, the uttered lines of a play seem skeletal, only *suggestive* of dramatic life.

It seems, then, that in order to talk about the stage direction at all, we must identify its unique functions. What, precisely, is a stage direction, and how might it be read? Pierre Corneille suggests a few possibilities in his reading of the *Poetics*:

Aristotle wishes the well-made tragedy to be beautiful and pleasing without the aid of actors and quite aside from performance. So that the reader may more easily experience that pleasure, his mind, like that of the spectator, must not be hindered, because the effort he is obliged to make to conceive and to imagine the play for himself lessens the satisfaction which he will get from it. Therefore, I should be of the opinion that the poet ought to take great care to indicate in the margin the less important actions which do not merit being included in the lines, and which might even mar the dignity of the verse if the author lowered himself to express them. The actor easily fills this need on the stage, but in a book one would often be reduced to guessing and sometimes one might even guess wrong. . . .¹⁴

Corneille's premise that for the reader of a literary text stage directions can act as substitutes for the elucidation provided in a performance privileges, as does Beckett, the literary text. However, Corneille's banishment of the stage direction from the "dignity of the verse" signals its paradoxical position: The stage direction here functions like a footnote or a glossary, facilitating understanding but clearly not an integral component of the poet's expression. Corneille's assertions are contingent upon what Marvin Carlson identifies as a consideration of performance as "illustration" of text.¹⁵

Corneille continues:

We have another special reason for not neglecting that helpful little device [the margin note] as they [the Greeks] did: this is that printing puts our plays in the hands of actors who tour the provinces and whom we can thus inform of what they ought to do, for they would do some very odd things if we did not help them by these notes.¹⁶

Here, the stage direction communicates explicitly to the actors, in the manner of a "how-to" manual, prefiguring, perhaps, the role of the director as it would evolve in the modern theatre. Corneille's concern for the performer's confusion may not be as sardonic as it sounds to the modern ear; Corneille, unlike his contemporary, Moliere, did not tour the provinces with the acting

companies, and the practices of the time were such that actors often staged their own performances.¹⁷

Corneille is reluctant to elevate certain stage directions into his verse, perceiving the strained quality of the aside as a violation of his poetry: "When there is a whispered command to make . . . an aside would be necessary to express this in verse . . . and that seems to me more intolerable than the notes."¹⁸ Elizabethan dramatists, particularly in the Shakespearean "set speech," had fewer qualms about embedding or implying stage directions in the spoken line. In his defense of his lengthy narrative stage directions, George Bernard Shaw traces the set speech and its variations to the acting styles and stage conventions of the Elizabethan theatre:

. . . [L]iterary treatment is much more needed by modern plays than by Shakespear's [sic], because in his time the acting of plays was only imperfectly differentiated from the declamation of verses; and descriptive or narrative recitation did what is now done by scenery, furniture, and stage business. Anyone reading the mere dialogue of an Elizabethan play understands all but half a dozen unimportant lines of it without difficulty; whilst many modern plays, highly successful on the stage, are not merely unreadable but positively unintelligible without visible stage business.¹⁹

As Shaw indicates, once realistic representation dominated the stage, the set speech disappeared into the margins of the read playscript, and into the scenographic trappings of the performance. The stage direction hence acquired new functions.

It is not my purpose to investigate the historical evolution of the stage direction. However, even in the above passages from Shaw and Corneille the rumblings of schisms developing in the various functions and integrity of the stage direction can be sensed. In the contemporary theatre, the uses and parameters of stage directions have become so diverse that they have lost conventional force. Furthermore, as I have indicated above, even when a stage direction's function and intent can be identified concretely, the authority of a script is provisional: "The script is something to be used and discarded as its textuality is corporealized in performance."²⁰

Semiotician Michael Issacharoff separates "instructions" inscribed in the playscript itself into two groups, bracketing out, for the purpose of defining his paradigm, stage directions that exist outside of the playscript proper: the Shavian preface, for instance, and the "intertextual," "social and cultural" constraints that influence interpretation.²¹ Issacharoff's two groups are "didascalia (. . . the authorial voice) and glossing comments in the dialogue," such as the set speech. Didascalia can perform any combination of linguistic (attributive, addressive, melodic, and locative) or visual (kinesic, proxemic, costume, etc.) functions. In Issacharoff's analysis, "maximum code mesh"

between didascalía and dialogue is nowhere as evident as in the radio play, in which auditory images must evoke missing visual and spatial elements:

... elements such as gesture, movement, costume, facial expression, and so forth, do not 'exist' in a radio play until explicitly referred to either in the dialogue or, ... through the use of the other non-voice channel of radio drama [the sound effect].

Issacaroff's model relies on a dialectic relationship between the didascalía and the dialogue. Of the four types of didascalía he identifies, extraneous or extratextual, autonomous, technical, and "normal," the latter two mesh most fully with the dialogue. "Normal' didascalía" he writes, are "subordinate to the dialogue" and thus mesh with the dialogue in a "firm referential bond." When an author challenges or severs the referential bond between didascalía and dialogue, the didascalía takes on an autonomous or quasi-autonomous role. Issacaroff cites several stage directions that seem to be "crying out for release from their normally subservient status": In Ring Lardner's *Cora or Fun at a Spa (An Expressionist Drama of Love and Death and Sex)* a stage direction in the second act reads, "The curtain is lowered and raised to see if it will work," and in Lardner's *Abend di Anni Nouveau*, a waiter "coming on stage on horseback *'tethers his mount and lies down on the hors d'oeuvres. The curtain is lowered and partially destroyed to denote the passage of four days.'*" Also in the category of "referentially loose" stage directions, according to Issacaroff, fall J. P. Donleavy's narrative didascalía, replete with "deictic" expressions, as in the following description from *A Singular Man*:

The reaching out of Miss Tomson's long comforting fingers would save one from all the ancient depths of fear, as Smith longingly views that arm so marvelously exposed this evening from her dazzling dress. . . .

Donleavy's directions surpass even those of Shaw for their narrative detail. Bert O. States, comparing the media of theatre and novel, calls attention to the "macro- or microlevels of behavior and action" that can be explored by the far-ranging narrative eye in its suspension and compression of time.²² Donleavy's stage directions often belong deliciously to the highly subjective subtextual worlds of his characters, or their inner speech. In Donleavy's dramatic adaptation of his novel, *The Ginger Man*, Sebastian Dangerfield's consciousness pervades the stage directions describing the actions of his wife, Marion: "I'm going to town to shop," she says, "[*Leveling the housewife eyes at DANGERFIELD*] And I can't bear much more."²³ Donleavy's art as a novelist is always apparent.

Issacaroff's model is useful only as long as we consider the stage direction's function in the literary text, and then only accurate so long as the

stage directions support the dialogue, and vice versa. The binary model cannot account for the impact the deviant or "referentially loose" stage direction can have on the theatrical text. Issacaroff summarily dismisses the transposition of the stage direction into theatrical production: ". . . their regular role is frequently thankless. If they are not rejected outright by the director, they may be ignored by the reader." Furthermore, didascalia that contrast with dialogue are "for reading and for the reader." Issacaroff's analysis overlooks one key issue: The creators of the *mise en scene* are, at some point in the process, readers of the literary text. At least a trace of that experience enters into the performance, even though the performance itself is in no way confined to the impressions gathered from the initial reading(s).

At the end of Marsha Norman's *Night, Mother*, Mama pounds on Jessie's door, screaming, "Jessie! Stop this! I didn't know! I was here with you all the time. How could I know you were so alone?" The script continues:

(And MAMA stops for a moment, breathless and frantic, putting her ear to the door, and when she doesn't hear anything, she stands up straight again and screams once more)

Jessie! Please!

*(And we hear the shot, and it sounds like an answer, it sounds like No. . . .)*²⁴

To whom does the shot sound like "No?" Mama? The audience in a theatre? Or is the stage direction merely a communication to give readers of the script an experience commensurate with that of seeing the play in production, as called for by Corneille? Does the impact of reading the word "No" in this context approach the impact of hearing the gun fire in the theatre?

None of these functions is entirely correct, yet none of them seems too implausible (except, perhaps, if one attempts literally to make a gun say "no"). Norman's stage direction operates on all of the aforementioned levels, with the additional quality of communicating to the performers and creators of the *mise en scene* something of the total theatrical gesture present in the gunshot, and present as well in the character of Jessie from the opening of the play. That this stage direction exhibits all the qualities of autonomy of the "readerly" stage direction, that the actual sound of a gunshot may bear little or no similarity to the uttered word "no" is quite beside the point. *The referential bond between didascalia and dialogue cannot be limited to the immediate zone in which they come into contact in the script.*

Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the "hybrid construction," developed in his examination of novelistic discourse, suggests a further alternative to dialectical models of didascalia and dialogue code conflict. According to Bakhtin, the formal markers of narrative prose are unreliable indicators of voice; novelistic discourse often conceals multi-voicedness ("heteroglossia") in the hybrid construction:

What we are calling a hybrid construction is an utterance that belongs, by its grammatical (syntactic) and compositional markers, to a single speaker, but that actually contains mixed within it two utterances, two speech manners, two styles, two 'languages,' two semantic and axiological [horizons].²⁵

If we consider the stage direction as a kind of narration, belonging to both the realms of didascalia and dialogue, then we can see how Jessie's fictive voice is present in the above stage direction. On the stage, the word "no" resonates throughout *'Night, Mother's* fictive discourse, in both stage direction and dialogue. As a director of the play, I would consider Norman's powerful stage direction as a gesture that might permeate my entire production concept. As Barthes argues, the "final meaning" of a play is "retrospective."²⁶ Stage directions must be considered in the totality of the theatre event, not as inscriptions on a page.

If Issacaroff's model is insufficient for examining the less apparent ways stage directions manifest themselves in productions, a more satisfying method of addressing stage directions can be found in Barbara Herrnstein Smith's discussion of "the relation of literature to language." Smith develops a distinction between two primary types of utterances:

. . . by 'natural discourse' I mean all utterances that are performed as historical events. . . . There are, however, verbal structures which constitute, in themselves, neither historical acts or historical events, but rather *representations* of them and, as such, are understood not to be governed by the same conventions that obtain for natural utterances: and these verbal structures I refer to as *fictive* utterances.²⁷

Smith's categories are, most importantly, functional. Furthermore, the function of an utterance is not inherent in the utterance itself, but rather governed by conventional understanding in the specific context in which it is uttered. The quotation at the beginning of this paper, for instance, originally appeared as a fictive utterance in Pirandello's play. In choosing to wrest those lines away from their original context, presumably to introduce the issues my essay would address, I have made of them a natural utterance. As Smith would say, in "pressing into service" Pirandello's lines I have "reauthor[ed] them as natural utterances, inviting and expecting from [my] listeners a response to them different from that which was presumably intended and expected by their original [author]."²⁸ Linguistic function shifts with context.

When we look again at some of the stage directions to which I have referred so far, we can see how their functions change from the literary text to the theatrical text. The didascalia in Norman's script, even if it is read originally as authorial or natural discourse instructing readers to imagine that

the gunshot sounds like "no," becomes fictive discourse, akin to novelistic narration, when appropriated and transformed into the theatrical gesture. Ring Lardner's surreal stage directions conflict with the dialogue when they are read as natural discourse, or instructions to the performers to bring the curtain down "to see if it works." But these didascalias are, more properly, not didascalias at all; rather, they are a part of the play's fictive discourse. As such, their very absurdity resists treatment as natural discourse, although the spirit or the tone of their absurdity may very well enter into the fictive discourse of the stage. Once we test the stage direction's efficacy as natural or fictive discourse, in both literary and theatrical text, we can begin to sort out the complexity of the stage direction's function.

Peter Handke's *Offending the Audience* begins with a series of "Rules for the actors":

- Listen to the litanies in the Catholic churches.
- Listen to football teams being cheered and booed.
- Listen to the rhythmic chanting at demonstrations.
- Listen to the wheels of a bicycle upturned on its seat spinning until the spokes have come to rest and watch the spokes until they have reached their resting point. . . .
- Watch Gary Cooper's face in "The Man From the West."
- In the same movie watch the death of the mute as he runs down the deserted street of the lifeless town with a bullet in him, hopping and jumping and emitting those shrill screams.
- Watch monkeys aping people and llamas spitting in the zoo.
- Watch the behavior of bums and idlers as they amble on the street and play the machines in the penny arcades.²⁹

If Handke's directions are taken to "mean what they say," if this list of instructions is meant as natural discourse, then Handke has included with his text something resembling an acting handbook. However, if the directions are taken as fictive discourse, as part of the play's fictive discourse, then Handke's accomplishment is to communicate the tone of the piece by providing visual and aural metaphors for the play's expression; his stage directions are, like Norman's, infected with the voices of the fictional characters in his play. Handke's use of the term "rules" signals the fictiveness of the entire list.

After the rules, Handke gives these instructions:

Late-comers should not be admitted. Inappropriately dressed ticket holders should not be admitted. The concept of what is sartorially inappropriate should be strictly applied. None of the spectators should call attention to himself or offend the eye by his attire. The men should be dressed in dark jackets, with white shirts and inconspicuous ties. The women should shun bright colors.³⁰

Of course, Handke is pushing the boundaries of what the stage direction can possibly accomplish. The stage direction might tell the performer what to wear, but certainly such demands are not seriously made of the spectator. Clearly, Handke's tyrannical stage directions are part of the fictive discourse of *Offending the Audience*. As Smith writes,

insofar as [the unspeakable utterance] is being offered as fictive discourse, the reader and author have entered a special relationship, one that is governed by assumptions, claims, and responsibilities quite different from those that obtain between the speaker and listener of a natural utterance.³¹

One need only imagine trying to enforce Handke's dress code at the door to see the point. But, if Handke's directions are interpreted as fictive utterances, then they need not be abandoned; they might suggest other, more practical devices for including the audience in the fictive frame. For one recent Chicago production of the play, for example, the advertisement running under the arts' listings read, "OFFENDING THE AUDIENCE. Check the listing, dummy."³²

Smith's model is not without its difficulties. A case might be made for the idea that the theatrical text is framed at once as fictive and natural: fictive in its mimetic function, but natural in its status as event. Too, the fictive stage direction may carry just as little force as the natural. As Pavis notes:

The evaluation of [the] status [of stage directions] cannot be divorced from history; although one should not forget that they form part of authorial speech, it should be remembered that the producer has the choice of either using them or not, as in the case of Gordon Craig, who considered stage directions an insult to his freedom.³³

I would add to Pavis' comment, however, the notion that although a stage direction might not be "used" in its function as natural discourse, it can be interpreted, just as uttered text can be interpreted.

Barthes contends in his essay "From Work to Text" that if an author wishes to "come back" into his text, he can do so only as a "guest."³⁴ Beckett, in attempting to reenter *Endgame*, found that while he was concerned with the artistic expression of his *work*, Joanne Akalatis and her production team were occupied with a *text*, the very nature of their project denying Beckett control as what Barthes would call "Author-God." In effect, Beckett desired the conventional understanding that accompanies natural discourse, that is, the assumption that what is being uttered, and what is being heard, carries the force of truth; and that his readers, the ART, were obligated to conform to his desires.³⁵ Akalatis and ART, reading the stage directions calling for a "bare interior" as part of the text's fictive utterances, did not feel constrained to present them, literally, as such.

Stage directions seem to be assuming, with increasing frequency in the modern drama, many of the characteristics of the fictive discourse of other genres: most notably, of the novel. If the voice that tells the performer to bring down the curtain "to see if it works" speaks in fictive discourse, then the voice that utters these words emanates less from an author than from an author's imaginary, and quite fictive, narrator. Conversely, the increasing influence of modern dance and performance art on the theatre places more and more pressure on the stage direction, often simultaneously opening potentials for the director's interpretive authority. Bonnie Marranca notes the overwhelming trend of the post-literate American avant-garde theatre toward replacing language with visual and aural image:

In the Theatre of Images the painterly and sculptural qualities of performance are stressed, transforming this theatre into a spatially-dominated one activated by sense impressions, as opposed to a time-dominated one ruled by linear narrative.³⁶

Thus, the stage direction often takes the form of a cryptic "trigger" or a loose scenario inviting experimentation in the creation of *mise en scene*. A tantalizing example of a Theatre of Images stage direction, from Heiner Muller's *Hamletmachine*, reads: "[Hamlet] steps into the armor, splits with the ax the heads of Marx, Lenin, Mao. Snow. Ice Age."³⁷

As theatre moves increasingly toward greater self-consciousness, greater acknowledgement and celebration of the power of both its voice and body, it seems to be incorporating qualities of the novel and the plastic arts, including the temporal range of fictionalized narrative voice and the richness of the sensual image. As the boundaries between and amongst art forms are explored and blurred, these voices rooted in other art forms seem overwhelmingly present in stage directions--but only when performing artists have the freedom to interpret them as part of the fiction.

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Notes

1. Luigi Pirandello, *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, trans. Edward Storer, *Naked Masks: Five Plays by Luigi Pirandello*, ed. Eric Bentley (New York: Dutton, 1952) 213.

2. The distinction between "natural" and "fictive" realms of discourse to which I refer here and throughout this essay is developed and considered at length by Barbara Herrnstein Smith in *On the Margins of Discourse: The Relation of Literature to Language* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1978).

3. Luigi Pirandello, "Preface to *Six Characters in Search of an Author*," *Naked Masks* 373. The restless ontology characteristic of Pirandellian drama may be in part attributable to his writing process. In the essay cited above, he describes how the six characters appeared to him and "...embarked on the sad story of their adventures, each shouting his own

reasons . . . more or less as they do in the play to the unhappy Manager" (364). Pirandello goes on to describe his role as helping the characters to enter the realm of art. This description has provocative parallels to M. M. Bakhtin's description of Dostoevsky's polyphonic novel, in which "a plurality of consciousnesses . . . combine but are not merged in the unity of the event." See *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1984) 5-46. The radical conception of authorship Bakhtin develops in this text might provide alternative ways of considering the highly fraught question of authorship in the theatre.

4. For a provocative analysis of the critical controversies underlying Akalitis' production and a parallel controversy surrounding another production, The Wooster Group's *L. S. D.* (. . . *Just the High Points* . . .), see Gerald Rabkin's "Is There a Text on this Stage?: Theatre/Authorship/Interpretation," *Performing Arts Journal* 9.2-3 (1985): 142-59. Rabkin draws upon several paradigms in considering freedom of interpretation, including Roland Barthes' notion of work v. text and Umberto Eco's description of closed v. open texts.

5. Critics such as Rabkin borrow richly from several literary criticism schools of thought in their analyses of performance; perhaps one might invert the process and ask, "What issues about performance can illuminate our readings of literary works?" Mikhail Bakhtin, with his emphasis on the *event* as the site of truth, and the *embodiment* of utterance, provides a philosophy that would seem to give performance this primacy.

6. Patrice Pavis, "From Text to Performance," *Performing Texts*, ed. Michael Issacharoff and Robin F. Jones (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1988) 89.

7. Smith 141.

8. "The Play of Misreading: Text/Theatre/Deconstruction," *Performing Arts Journal* 7.1 (1983): 54.

9. Roland Barthes, "Literature and Signification," *Critical Essays*, trans. Richard Howard (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1972) 260-4.

10. Keir Elam's seminal study, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* (1980; New York: Routledge, 1988), acknowledges both the "problematic" and "powerful *intertextuality*" of the inscribed text/performance text relationship (209), and outlines the often reductive attempts made at analyzing either performance or text codes discretely.

11. Mikhail Bakhtin, "From Notes Made in 1970-71," *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, trans. Vern W. McGee (Austin: U of Texas P, 1986) 147.

12. Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson outline an early Bakhtin essay entitled "Toward a Philosophy of the Act" in their extensive introduction to *Rethinking Bakhtin* (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1989), in which an attack on "theoretism" constitutes the underlying philosophy of ethics that shaped many of Bakhtin's later concepts. This essay was published in the Soviet Union in 1986.

13. "Is There a Text on this Stage?" 149.

14. "Of the Three Unities of Action, Time, and Place," 1660, trans. Donald Schier, *Critical Theory Since Plato*, ed. Hazard Adams (Chicago: Harcourt, 1971) 222-3.

15. "Theatrical Performance: Illustration, Translation, Fulfillment, or Supplement?" *Theatre Journal* 37.1 (March, 1985): 5-11. Carlson finds a tantalizing alternative to traditional considerations of text-performance relationships in Derrida's concept of the "supplement": "Like the supplement, performance is necessarily engaged in [the] subversion of the illusion of plentitude in the original text. . . ." For Carlson, it follows that performance reveals its own lack of plentitude: "At the same time . . . the performance . . . reveals also a potentially infinite series of future performances providing further supplementation." However, the problem with supplement theory is that it proceeds from the assumption of a lack or absence, when in fact the experience of creating or watching live performance is almost always heavily charged with presence. Again, Bakhtin can be of some help: His many theories of dialogism rely upon the necessary full *presence*, or better, presences, of at least two voices, each one influencing the way the other is shaped, even if the influencing voice remains "silent." The event of these two voices interacting is the site of truth. (I am indebted to Joseph R. Roach for alerting me to the Carlson essay, as well as for his insightful reading of this essay.)

16. Corneille 223.

17. Oscar Brockett, *History of the Theatre*, 3rd ed. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1977) 223.

18. Corneille 223.
19. Bernard Shaw, Preface to *Nine Plays* (New York: Dodd and Mead, 1948) xxii.
20. Rabkin, "Is There A Text on this Stage?" 150.
21. Michael Issacaroff, "Stage Codes," *Performing Texts*, ed. Michael Issacaroff and Robin F. Jones (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1988) 59-74.
22. Bert O. States, *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms: On the Phenomenology of Theatre* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1985) 132-7.
23. *The Plays of J. P. Donleavy* (New York: Delta, 1978) 58.
24. Marsha Norman, *Night, Mother* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983) 88-9.
25. Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: U of Texas P, 1981) 304. Emerson has emended her translation from "two axiological belief systems" to "two axiological horizons." My thanks are due to her for her insightful reading of this manuscript in its early stages.
26. Barthes 262.
27. Smith 84.
28. Smith 68.
29. Peter Handke, *Offending the Audience, Kaspar and other Plays*, trans. Michael Roloff (New York: Farrar 1969) 3.
30. Handke 5.
31. Smith 111.
32. *Chicago Reader* 4 May 1990, 2:50.
33. Pavis 89.
34. Roland Barthes, "From Work to Text," *Image/Music/Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977) 161.
35. Smith writes of the ethical conventions of "the linguistic marketplace": "A natural utterance constitutes, for the listener, not only an invitation and a provocation, but ultimately an *obligation*, to respond to the speaker. . . . We agree not only to hear but to *heed* his promises, excuses, questions, and commands--and also, of course, his assertions" (101-2).
36. Bonnie Marranca, *Theatrewritings* (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1984) 80.
37. *Hamletmachine and Other Texts for the Stage*, trans. and ed. Carl Weber (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1984) 58.

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