

Re-viewing Richard Foreman (and Theater of Images)

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Like "jumbo shrimp" and "military intelligence," Richard Foreman's work now inhabits an oxymoronic domain, one that can be dubbed the "established avant-garde" (perhaps the only avant-garde available in a postmodern culture). Having initiated his own peculiar brand of "ontological hysteria" more than two decades ago, Foreman continues to produce engaging theater, which allows us to take the measure of how the theater and the (now ubiquitous) theorizing of performance have changed during the past twenty or so years; if it now seems that his work is more conservative, more accessible, it's a little difficult to know precisely how much Foreman has changed (admittedly, a good deal) and how much our understanding has caught up with him.

Foreman is a rare breed; unlike the vast majority of American theater artists, he is both knowledgeable of and engaged in theory. While the contemporary efflorescence of theoretical discourse seems to have outstripped him in its sophistication, there is still a lamentable paucity of *practitioners* who theorize with the knowledge and rigor of Richard Foreman. Although his practice in recent years--exemplified by such works as *The Cure* (1986), *Film Is Evil, Radio is Good* (1987), or *What Did He See* (1988)--has veered away from the pure Ontological-Hysteric "style" (described below)--of such works as *Angelface* (1968), *Total Recall (Sophia = Wisdom, Part 2)* (1971), *Pain(T)* and *Vertical Mobility (Sophia = Wisdom, Part 4)* (1974), or *Pandering to the Masses: A Misrepresentation* (1975)--that established his reputation in the early 1970s, much can still be gained by studying his highly-wrought system of theory-into-practice.

Transcending the idea of a Theater of Images, the category in which it is usually placed, Foreman's work lays claim to a singular landscape within the territorial plurality of postmodern performance. By examining Foreman's

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methodology--refracted through certain critical concepts from the writings of Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida--the distinctiveness of his approach to performance is seen to project an alignment with the deconstructive urge of poststructuralist critical strategies and to demonstrate the inextricable relation of theory to practice which is characteristic of the twentieth century's relativist paradigm.

Post-texts from the Theater of Images

Unlike the play texts of canonical drama, which--despite any protested "respect" with which they may be approached--remain always only *pretexts* (to what we make of them in the act of "re-writing," whether in our minds as readers, on the pages of our critical commentary, or on the stages of our theater), the texts generated out of that style of performance which (in another era, it now seems) was called Theater of Images are *post-texts*. While it is true that these texts, as we read them, are also--like not only everything we read, but, indeed, everything we perceive and experience--pretexts to whatever subsequent ab/use to which we subject them, and, even though (as we all know) the "death" of the authors of these texts has long been proclaimed (their intentions counting for nought), still, in encountering one of these texts, knowing (as I do) about some of the stated and surmised intentions of these theoretically "entombed" authors--especially about the fact that the texts under consideration were generated post-production, as more-or-less literary artifacts, rather than pre-performance, as authorial guides to production--the new "author," I (inescapably revisionist) am nevertheless seduced into a particular mode of reading, which differs from how I read a text-as-pretext. More than hurled into the future (as they certainly also are), these texts seem to be hurled out of the past; and even though I am propelled forward as I turn the pages (into the future of the text?), my mind--like Walter Benjamin's "angel of history"--is turned to the past.

Slippery business

It may be a compulsion peculiar to those who practice performance in the tradition of what they (or others for them) consider to be "theater"--which is haunted by language as language is haunted by performance--to render their work at some stage in literary form, to aim it at the future. Such historico-literary yearnings notwithstanding, the turning to the past which the post-texts of the Theater of Images encourage in their reading has a strong correspondence to what may be perceived as a common force motivating the creation of theater performance (such as Theater of Images) without a governing *a priori* text. I should immediately acknowledge that while some of

what has been called Theater of Images *was* generated from *a priori* texts (as is the case, for example, with Richard Foreman), the text in these instances was not governing in any traditional sense, and that, even in the case of practitioners who used no *a priori* written text, there was of course a sense of text (as discourse, as ideology, as language) which--despite their various slippery maneuvers--nonetheless "governed" the production of performance.

It was in the face of this (inevitable?) government by the text that much of the Theater of Images flew, motivated at least in part by a desire to constitute performance without language, to turn away from language toward some conceivable (in language of course) originary spacetime of performance existing in polymorphous prelinguicity. Theater of Images dreamed (in language of course) of experience--both lived, and, in the theater, re-lived (or perhaps pre-lived)--unmediated by language.

On the surface (and like much of high-and postmodernist art Theater of Images was keenly aware of surfaces), Theater of Images appeared to be an attempt to slip away from the duplicity of language, which seems to mean, to point to something other than language, but may, in the provisional analysis of post-structuralist discourse, refer only to itself. In the attempt to construct a theatrical experience that slips before, below, beyond, or away from language, Theater of Images recognized that language--to paraphrase Brecht--"languages everything down." In its substitution of a system of primarily visual and aural sensory images, the attempt was to constitute performance phenomenologically as a non-lingual or perhaps pre-lingual experience. Of course these images, like Wittgenstein's "pictures," are models of reality and therefore constructs of language. Even if these images were conceived--as many appear to have been--in some pre- or non-lingual altered state of (unmediated?) consciousness (if we posit such a state), still, when they are offered up to an audience they are (inevitably?) "language down," that is, they appear--like language--to mean, to signify something, if only meaninglessness itself. As Roland Barthes noted:

Even were a detail to appear irretrievably insignificant, resistant to all functionality, it would end up with precisely the meaning of absurdity or uselessness: everything has a meaning or nothing has (1977:89).

It is perhaps unfair to apply Barthes' high-structuralist analysis of narrative to a style of theater which appears to be motivated in large part by the impulse to subvert narrative, to expunge narrative's linearity, literality, and literarity (to shamelessly alliterate) from the structure of performance.

Now, of course, the incorporation of spoken language--used in some guise by virtually all Theater of Images practitioners--even if only as aural image or

"aural tableaux," as Bonnie Marranca maintains (1977:xiv), unavoidably worked against this project. In all fairness to these practitioners, they knew this; the diverse strategies of language usage in their pieces invariably tended toward the subversion of language, or at least toward the subversion of the innate compulsion of Indo-European languages--with their simple linear causality of subject-acts-on-predicate--to construct meaning narratively. But even the sonorization of autistic utterances by Christopher Knowles in some of Robert Wilson's work, in its superficial refusal to signify meaning, only tended to frustrate the spectator's mind and prompt it to look elsewhere for significance, to glimpse it in the emotional (or vacuously non-emotional) tonality of the sonic image, or perhaps to view it in some micro-structural rhythmic correlation to the macro-structure of the piece, or perhaps to find it in Wilson's "therapeutic" intent.

If the Theater of Images was not just another example of "artistic dallying with forms," that "accursed, truly hellish thing" against which Artaud railed (1968:13), then its sustaining value may largely derive from the attempt to absent language--in its normal usage--from the stage, by either substituting sensory images or subverting spoken language itself. In seeking to break the strangle-hold of the linguistically induced linear-causal model of reality that has for so long held western theater (not to mention civilization) in its grasp, choking experience into language (assuming that the former exists without the latter), Theater of Images acted out a contemporary variation, considerably watered-down for all its high-tech propping-up, of Artaud's quest to "break through language in order to touch life" (1968:13). But if reality is indeed a construct of language, then this aspect of the Theater of Images project was as impossible as Artaud's; theater cannot slip out of the grasp of language without giving the theater--and life itself--the slip.

Field Theory

Richard Foreman--who knows that "images alone don't make anything new happen" (1976:136)--is that rarity in the American theater, a theater artist both knowledgeable of and engaged in theory. Foreman views his theoretical considerations as seamlessly continuous with his entire process of practice. As he has acknowledged:

The writing is generated in a certain way which ends up producing structures with a form and texture which is the very embodiment of the theory and goals which are the "reasons for doing the writing" (1985:238).

The thought which informs his work is engaged with contemporary issues in a broad range of disciplines, from that interplay of philosophy, linguistics, and the other human sciences with aesthetics and literary theory which comprises current postmodernist discourse, to the realm of contemporary scientific inquiry. It is, in fact, from quantum theory that he draws a recurring analogy to his work--the field. In quantum physics, as Fritjof Capra points out:

The classical contrast between the solid particles and the space surrounding them is completely overcome. The quantum field is seen as the fundamental physical entity: a continuous medium which is present everywhere in space. Particles are merely local condensations of the field, concentrations of energy that come and go, thereby losing their individual character and dissolving into the underlying field (1979:196-7).

In addition to offering many insights into the "form and texture" of his performed pieces, the field analogy is helpful in understanding Foreman's tightly integrated system of theory-into-practice. Foreman's theater is not simply *determined* by his theory, but--in a profoundly holistic sense, which expresses something of the shared etymology of the two words--his theater *is* his theory, transmuted (as in quantum physics) from the conceptual "field" of his consciousness into the "concentrations of energy" (or "local condensations of the field") which *are* his produced works. Marranca has noted that Theater of Images texts are "incomplete documents of a theatre that must be seen to be understood," that "one cannot talk about the works . . . without talking about productions" (1977:xi). In Foreman's case, the problematic of looking back from the text to the performance is compounded by an insidious tug that beguiles us to look still further back to not only the process that generated the performance, but to the conceptual field of theory that, in turn, generated that generation. Foreman's lamentable "death" notwithstanding, there is something in the nature of his texts that lures my attention back to him: he beckons, as it were, from the grave.

A strident critique of this situation suggests itself here. In the phallographic will to power of which theatrical "*auteur*-ism" smacks, is Foreman denying us our own autoerotic pleasure of the text by refusing to roll over and play dead? Perhaps. But it is interesting to note the correspondence between a *kind of text* that entices us to look back if not at Origins at least in the direction of origination, to a *kind of theater* that directs our attention if not backward--diachronically into our past--then certainly inward--synchronically into our own process and structuration of perception and its interface with language recognition and formation, that is, to the origination (if not the Origin) of meaning in our consciousness. Foreman's work seeks to expose the

apparatus of language--not only temporally-oriented aural-verbal language but also spatially-oriented visual language--to disclose the mechanism of meaning production as a function of language itself.

While Foreman's work has been categorized as "self-as-content" by Theodore Shank in his typology of American alternative theater (1982:159-70), it is unique among the other work that Shank includes in this category. It is unlike that of Spalding Gray who has reconstituted his autobiography as performance, or that of the Squat group, which has foregrounded their exiled existence in an urban storefront as the essence of their theater, or (perhaps less obviously so) that of Lee Breuer, whose work Bonnie Marranca has typified as "self-as-text," creating "with the poet's 'breath'" of "his own life spirit" a "thematics of consciousness" (1980:85-7).

Foreman's work can more accurately be understood as "self-as-process," as the structure and function of both his performances and his idiosyncratic creative methodology are designed to enact or embody not the theme or content of his consciousness but the very process of it, the function of the mechanism by which perception and awareness produce meaning and constitute the self and the world. His work can be seen to demonstrate the isomorphy of structure and function as understood in systems theory. According to systems theorist Ludwig von Bertalanffy,

In the last resort, structure (i.e. the order of parts) and function (i.e. the order of processes) may be the very same thing: in the physical world matter dissolves into a play of energies, and in the biological world structures are the expression of processes (1968:27).

While systems theory is admittedly a metadisciplinary structuralism of science, this collapsing of the structure/function binary, which suggests a poststructuralist orientation, is central to Foreman's project, which is--in many ways--a deconstructive one.

With an aesthetics of performance--both theoretic and applied--which is fundamentally in alignment with Derrida's deconstructive project to rehabilitate writing, to valorize the concept of writing--in an expanded sense of the word, the act--against the hegemony of the "living voice" of authentic self-present speech in the western phonologocentric tradition, Foreman accepts the process of writing itself as the basis of his entire enterprise, an enterprise which begins and ends as "writing."

In his work, Foreman says he seeks to embody

the underlying and exciting conflict going on in the writing; the conflict between the energy of being-in-a-certain stream of stylistic discourse, and the energy of having certain ideas I wanted to express

BEFORE I had entered and been absorbed by that discursive stream. That conflict between "expression," the self-energizing environment it creates around the writer vs. the claims of ideas, insights or images he--outside of being-in-the writing--wishes to communicate . . . that conflict is basic and echoed in many life fields other than "writing plays" (1985:239).

In her description of his rehearsal procedures for *Pain(T)* and *Vertical Mobility*, Kate Davy quotes Foreman as describing his intention to stage "what's going on in my head while I'm writing" (1974:28). This conception of the "underlying and exciting conflict" that Foreman has identified in his writing (or in his head while writing)--a conflict between the "meaning" that he wishes to express, to make present in his writing, and the very nature of language, which does not allow for the full presence of meaning--seems to coincide with the view of writing held by Jacques Derrida.

This may be the dis/seminal recognition by a writer that something always escapes, slips away, that there is always an unsaid--perhaps unsayable--remainder.

Rather than trying to fill these gaps, or to gloss over them with momentum (and he has used a kind of fiendish momentum in his later works--beginning with *Pandering to the Masses: A Misrepresentation* in 1975--to deliberately create gaps), Foreman fills his performances with "dissonances, disassociation, discontinuity, dehumanization" (1976:147), with "holes" which serve to deny any possible illusion of a remainderless whole, of an original, final, correct, or "authorized" meaning.

In a sense, his entire project can be seen as constituting writing/performance primarily of *différance*, seeking to deny, as it were, the poststructuralist critics any opportunity to demonstrate how his texts embarrass their own ruling systems of logic, by beating them to the punch and deconstructing them himself. As opposed to a self-destructing work of art (such as those by Jacques Tinguely), a Foreman piece is a self-deconstructing one, a kind of post-Duchampian "ready-*un*made."¹

Foreman has acknowledged the impossibility of achieving his purpose. As a stalker of *différance* however, he has developed an intricate process of setting traps for that illusive remainder--which he refers to as "truth," in a paper entitled "How Truth . . . Leaps (Stumbles) Across the Stage" delivered at an Italian Psychoanalytic Association conference on the subject of "The Truth" (1985:198-203)--which, if it can't be snared, may at least be tricked into "stumbling" and leaving a trace (like a subatomic particle) "as it trips over some irregularity in the constructed field" of the art work (1985:200). These irregularities are built into his process, and thereby his performances, as "a subtle insertion between logic and accident" (1976:68).²

In a kind of compression of the famous Artaudian dictum about masterpieces, Foreman seeks to situate himself in a position anterior to the condition against which Artaud hurled his injunction by employing an aesthetic of "No More Mastery." Although he thinks of himself as a writer and considers his literary medium to be "plays," his work diverges radically from the traditional dualistic model of play-writing/play-producing. Beyond a rigorous refusal--at least in his earlier work--to "rewrite" (in the sense of the craft he was taught at Yale), Foreman's method of generating texts is designed to capture, embody, and demonstrate the very ineptitude of writing, the awkwardness of being. In what he now refers to as his earlier, more "rigorous Ontological-Hysteric style" (Foreman 1987:128), he would select the textual material for his performances from jottings in his ongoing notebooks, many of which were intentionally written in a sort of "twilight" state, and which he allowed to become punctuated with intermittent sleep, taking them up again later--without re-reading--in a process of repeatedly "beginning again" (which he adapted from Gertrude Stein), until, as he rather cavalierly explained in a 1977 essay (reprinted later in *Reverberation Machines*): "At a certain point I pick up one of my notebooks, look casually through it and decide 'Hum . . . go from here to here and I have a play'" (1985:238).³

In their first, "notebook" materialization, the texts include drawings and diagrams as well as marginal extra-textual notes to himself of which he provides immediate textual examples. But he has commented that:

I have not the slightest hesitation at any point to a) directly contradict any of my theoretical notes in any way whatsoever that comes to me, and b) accept and include anything that comes to me arbitrarily for any reason from any source (1985:242).

What these "archeological records" (as he has called them) do *not* contain at this point is any consistent (if indeed any at all) indication of character, assignment of "lines" to eventual "speakers." This occurs in the next step, that of typing the original manuscript, of transforming "a concrete physical object . . . the encrustation of a history of 'marking'--of INSCRIBING mind into matter" into the "digital, bodiless form [of the typed text] which only the staging will return to concrete physical reality" (1985:237).

Foreman has described this aspect of his process in a manner which is suggestive as a contemporary analog of the *k'ai-ho* aesthetic of the enlightened Taoist poets, who sought to embody in their texts the fluctuating contraction and expansion of consciousness (mirrored in the complementary disciplines of concentrative and absorptive meditation), which was designed to allow the poet to disappear from the poem and present the reader with an unmediated (except of course by language) experience of that which inspired the poet to

write (Chang 1963:9). Foreman has noted that the "mediating 'typed' text is an important step which takes away from the original fullness, so that a *void* of sorts is created, which will then evoke the necessary '*filling*' action of the staging" (1985:237). He continues to mediate and re-mediate his text by next deciding what portions of it will be prerecorded on audio tape (usually most of it), taping his own voice and those of his actors, and then subtly inserting (somewhere between logically and accidentally) the copious thuds, thumps, pings, boings, and buzzes, and the diverse musical fragments which aurally texture his performances. He then stages the piece *to* that score, not so much logically (as if that were still possible at this point), but rather "*bricolage-ically*," using (as Brecht suggested) "the bricks that are there," i.e., whatever materials and resources that present themselves at the time.⁴

Mediating mediation

There is a theory of performance in all of this, or at least an issue in performance theory, which has recurred throughout the history of theater: the idea of unmediated experience. To understand the mechanism of most attempts to "get at" unmediated experience, it is helpful to consider the double negative inherent in the concept of "unmediated." Given the mediation of the original fall--into sin and/or language, depending on your point-of-view--any attempt at reconstituting that preceding state (if we posit its existence) is inevitably an undoing of something undone. Art (if and when it aspires to this), which is itself a mediating agent, is not unlike--in functionality if not intensity--the mediating force of, e.g., the grace of Jesus that "saves" the born-again, or the whack of the Zen master's staff (a suspiciously phallic instrument) that brings *satori* to the disciple; all are attempts to mediate mediation. In a constellation of actions that could be viewed as (at least) a triple negative, i.e., mediating the mediation of mediation, Foreman attempts to foreground mediation itself.

Focusing on writing as an agent which mediates consciousness, Foreman seeks to develop an extended form of writing which mediates itself in the act of mediating consciousness, which, if it doesn't exactly create unmediated experience, it does (in a certain sense) deconstruct his own consciousness and reveal some of the ideologically imposed preconceptions which mediate his experience.

Knowing that he cannot--as in the aspiration of the Taoist poet--disappear, as a constituted and constituting subject (to which his conspicuous presence at his Ontological-Hysteric performances, continuing to mediate even then, may have attested), knowing that he cannot disappear because he is always already *not there*, in the sense of a cohesive and coherent whole, cannot entirely slip through the many holes in his text, but can only

awkwardly trip over his own irregularities (the seams of his art as of his consciousness, which he leaves exposed), Foreman seems to be trying, in that very stumbling, to trip up the illusion of our own cohesion and coherence and to make us aware (if we care to notice) that our own slip is showing.

The third meaning

Another way of viewing this is to apply to Foreman's theater a concept that Barthes has used in a preliminary gesture toward the deconstruction of film (and film, we should note in passing, especially the independent American cinema, supplied Foreman with a positive aesthetic model that theater could not). We could see Foreman's theater as an attempt to foreground what Barthes--in an essay of this title--called "The Third Meaning." In his analysis of some stills from various films by Eisenstein, Barthes distinguished three levels of meaning: the first is an informational level, the level of communication; the second is a symbolic level, the level of signification--of "meaningfulness" beyond the basic "meaning" of the first level; and a third level of meaning that resists, even defies definition because "it outplays meaning--subverts not the content but the whole practice of meaning" (1977:62). Barthes (it is important to remember) discovered the third level of meaning only by studying the still, where--for him--Eisenstein could be seen to have injected it into the dominant informational and symbolic levels. By contrast, Foreman--who makes abundant use of the tableau, a theatrical analog of the cinematic still--can be seen as intentionally suppressing these first and second levels of meaning in an attempt to foreground the third, which Barthes says acts on the level of *signifiance*, the field of signifiers rather than signification (1977:54). Foreman typically employs a wide variety of reframing devices to indicate the play of meaning within the field of signifiers which comprises his performances. By repeatedly shifting the context in which they are embedded or the perspective from which they are viewed, he reframes objects, people, actions, words, ideas, and the performance itself, thereby focusing more on the process of generating meaning than on any fixed meaning itself.⁵

Accepting even its pejorative connotation, Barthes refers to the third meaning as "obtuse":

The obtuse meaning appears to extend outside culture, knowledge, information; analytically, it has something derisory about it: opening out into the infinity of language, it can come through as limited in the eyes of analytic reason; it belongs to the family of the pun, buffoonery, useless expenditure. Indifferent to moral or aesthetic

categories (the trivial, the futile, the false, the pastiche) it is on the side of the carnival. Obtuse is thus very suitable (1977:55).

This third meaning possibly loses some of its derisory quality by being thrust into the foreground (an operation that we should only conceive of metaphorically), and Foreman would object to Barthes' emptying it out of any aesthetic or moral efficacy. But a note to himself in his first manifesto suggests that something like Barthes' obtuseness is just what he chooses to focus on: "Make everything dumb enough to allow what is really happening to happen" (1976:77).

Barthes' definition, in "The Third Meaning," of the contemporary problem as "not to destroy the narrative but to subvert it" (1977:64) is in theoretical alignment with that aspect of the Theater of Images project. And his assertion that the third meaning "subverts not the content but the whole practice of meaning" (62) could serve as an apt description of Foreman's theater.

Mimesis and isomorphy

Another aspect of Barthes' analysis of the third meaning can be fruitfully thought in relation to Foreman's practice. In acknowledging that the difficulty of describing it arises from its being "a signifier without a signified," Barthes says: "If the obtuse meaning cannot be described, that is because, in contrast to the obvious meaning, it does not copy anything" (61). The reference here to the act of "copying" (or *not* copying) opens up the possibility of an inquiry into whether Foreman's theater--in its foregrounding of the third, obtuse meaning--is mimetic.

Marranca has described the Theater of Images as a "radical refunctioning of naturalism" (1977:xiii) and Foreman has written of the "REALISM" of his theater, which he immediately qualifies as seeming "unreal to most people" (1976:138), and these two concepts, realism and naturalism, are intimately bound up with the concept of mimesis. Whether or not we conceive of the Theater of Images in general, or Foreman's work in particular as mimetic depends not only on how we think of mimesis (and of theater) but also on how the theater "thinks" mimesis. It appears that an essential aspect of the theater's "theatering everything down" is that the theater "thinks" mimetically. As semiotic analysis of theater has sought to demonstrate, even when the stuff of "real life" is brought on stage, it is emptied out of its materiality, of that which corresponds in "real life" to a potential signified, and becomes merely a signifier. The theater, a semiotician would say, "semiotizes" everything. Even in its least tangible dimensions (and perhaps precisely there), theater may be inescapably mimetic. As Herbert Blau has pointed out in "Universals of Performance," there may be no "kind of performance that is non-mimetic,

since what is being performed is . . . an image of perfection in the head" (1987:178-9). In Foreman's case, we may grant that this image is recognized as *im*-perfect, as is the process by which it becomes embodied in performance, still, some kind of "image of perfection" constitutes "what is being performed" in his theater.

In a passage from his third Ontological-Hysteric manifesto, which comprises, perhaps, his most comprehensive statement of intent, Foreman indicates the realm from which his image of perfection derives:

The task of art is to serve understanding . . . by trying to create a field which is isomorphic with what
stands-under
 experience--which is not experience itself.

Now, what *stands-under* experience cannot be experienced, experience is not the mode by which we can know it.

What *stands-under* experience are the laws (processes) of perception and other laws-of-configuration of the universe.

My task is to make work, the structure of which is isomorphic with those laws.

Then I will be
 standing-under
 experience.

Then the work will be an ACT of understanding (1976:188).

If Foreman does not speak here of mimesis, he does speak of isomorphy, which, *in the theater*, may be the very same thing. While Foreman argues that his art is "in no sense a mirror or representation--but a parallel phenomenon to life itself" (1976:73), still, once he places this phenomenon on stage--as opposed, e.g., to applying for a patent for it, as for an invention--once he announces its existence as performance (like California performance artist Chris Burden announcing his disappearance, who can then no longer *merely* disappear but must--in a sense--*imitate* his disappearance), once Foreman subjects his isomorphic phenomenon to the specularity of an audience (even if that audience is only himself), it becomes mimetic.⁶

Admittedly, Foreman's "isomorphy" is a special kind of mimesis, a kind which corresponds--with a necessary stipulation--to one of the categories which comprise what Marxist aesthetician Stefan Morawski, in his *Inquiries into the*

Fundamentals of Aesthetics, has distinguished as the "three great traditions" of mimesis, i.e.,

the Platonic (representation of appearances, or of what is sensuously given in reality itself), the Aristotelian (representation of the essences of things), and the Democritean (representation of the actions of nature) (1974:204).

Without pausing to quibble (in dialectic oscillation) about Morawski's typology, we can see, I think, that Foreman's work fits best in his last category, that of Democritean mimesis. While Morawski goes on to point out that the "representation of the actions of nature" is central to the project of structuralism as practiced by Lévi-Strauss and Barthes (204), the stipulation which must be posited to allow Foreman's work a more adequate typological match with Democritean mimesis indicates the poststructuralist orientation of Foreman. To apply to Foreman's theater, Morawski's concept of "representation" must be able to embrace Foreman's brand of "isomorphic" representation, which, like Lévi-Strauss' "mythomorphic" discourse on myth, "must" (as Derrida has written) "have the form of that of which it speaks" (1978:286).

If Barthes' description of the "indescribable" third meaning as "not copy[ing] anything" seems to qualify it as nonmimetic, he elsewhere refers to it as "the representation of that which cannot be represented" (1977:64), not simply "that which cannot be represented" but "the *representation* of that which cannot be represented." As mimesis, then, Barthes' third meaning--especially if conceived of as the "subject" of Foreman's theatrical discourse, that which he seeks to foreground--is suggestive of the Derridean "enigmas of the 'first time' and of 'originary repetition'" (1978:202).

Writing as Performance

Despite the full range of his *auteur*-ial accomplishment--as director, as designer, and even as stage-manager--it is important to recognize that Foreman is first and last a writer: his theater begins and ends as writing. In his essay on "Freud and the Scene of Writing," Derrida traces the development in Freud's thought of writing as a metaphor for memory. This metaphoric of writing assumes vast importance for Derrida, because in his analysis--if not explicitly in Freud's--memory "is not a psychical property among others; it is the very essence of the psyche" (1978:201). Derrida describes the relationship of writing to psyche in Freud's model as one in which, "Psychical *content* [is] *represented* by a text whose essence is irreducibly graphic [and the] *structure* of the psychical *apparatus* [is] *represented* by a writing machine" (1978:199).

Developed slowly over some thirty years, Freud's modeling of psychic structure and process on writing reached its fullest expression in his "Note on the Mystic Writing Pad" (1974). The mystic writing pad, or *Wunderblock*, now a common child's toy, resolved for Freud a continuing difficulty in representing psychic functioning as a form of graphic inscription by presenting him with a "writing machine" which simultaneously provided the unlimited capacity for reception--corresponding to perception--with a potential for infinite preservation--corresponding to memory. For Derrida, of course, involved in the rehabilitation of writing, the door of this metaphor swings both ways: if psychic functioning can be seen as writing, writing can be seen to represent psychic functioning. Conceiving of writing in this fashion suggests some interesting insights into Foreman's work.

From the beginning, Foreman's generative process is an attempt to produce a writing other than normative, other than what Derrida suggests "we believe to be designated by the proper sense of the word--a script which is coded and visible 'in the world'," a writing *other than* a mere "metaphor of psychical writing" (1978:209). Recognizing, however, that no two-dimensional transcription of this "other-ness" of writing (regardless of the twilight maneuvers through which he seeks to capture it, or the repeated tactics of "beginning again and again," or the inclusion of drawings and diagrams) can ever hope to transcend its mere metaphoric relation to psychic writing, Foreman submits that two-dimensionally transcribed "archeological record" to his own pseudo-alchemical filtering mechanisms (of typewriter and tape-recorder) and transmutes it into the four dimensions of performance, hoping that there he can materialize what he's really after--psychic writing itself: what Derrida has referred to as "an original form of writing which puts words on stage without becoming subservient to them . . . a model of writing irreducible to speech which would include, like hieroglyphics, pictographic, ideogrammatic, and phonetic elements" (1978:209). In seeking to stage "what's going on in his head while writing," Foreman uses the stage as a kind of analog to Freud's "Mystic Pad" in an apparent attempt to stage "the scene of writing" itself.

Performance is the necessary vehicle of this project; in its third dimension it allows for the "space of writing, its extension and volume, reliefs and depressions," as Derrida has written, and in its fourth dimension it allows for the "time of writing" (1978:225).⁷

In a perceptive article about Foreman's scenography--which he aptly and (etymologically) correctly refers to as "scenic writing"--Guy Scarpetta says that "Foreman explodes the classical opposition between . . . [among other things] scenographic space and spectacular time" (1984:23). Foreman not only temporalizes the spatial, i.e., *normally* the visual, aspects of theater--by continuously transforming the space and all it contains, ceaselessly shifting perspectives, altering both the physical and psychical points of reference--he

also spatializes the temporal, by, e.g., physically redistributing in space (with the aid of a sophisticated sound system) the purely temporal, i.e., the aural, elements of performance. Writing of the confluence of time and space at the scene of writing, Derrida describes what may be seen to resemble, in an ideal state, Foreman's theater:

Temporality as spacing will be not only the horizontal discontinuity of a chain of signs, but also will be writing as the interruption and restoration of contact between the various depths of psychical levels: the remarkably heterogeneous temporal fabric of psychical work itself. We find neither the continuity of a line nor the homogeneity of a volume; only the differentiated duration and depth of a stage, and its spacing (1978:225).

Such is Foreman's theater, or at any rate, such was the older, more rigorous Ontological-Hysteric style: an attempt to render performance in "the form of that of which it speaks," to stage "what [was] going on in [his] head while writing," to make his theater isomorphic with "the scene of writing," or with Barthes' third meaning, "the representation of that which cannot be represented," or with Foreman's own "laws (processes) of perception and other laws-of-configuration of the universe"--a theater practice in fundamental alignment with current deconstructive modes of thought.

If, for the purposes of this re-viewing of the corpus of his work, I have found it necessary--in an admittedly humanistic gesture--to disinter the author in the process, I hope that both you and Mr. Foreman (may he rest in peace) will forgive me.

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Notes

This essay was developed in part during a 1987 National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Seminar for College Teachers in Performance Theory, and was presented--in considerably different form--as "Richard Foreman: Writing As Performance," to the Alternate Theatre Conference at the University of Alberta, 1988.

1. In a discussion following the seminar presentation of the first version of this paper, when I mentioned Foreman's notion of his theater as a "perpetual motion machine," Herbert Blau suggested that one might explore the correlation between such a notion and the "desiring machine" of Deleuze and Guattari (1977). The description that Foreman offers of his machine, however, as

not to do something to audience, but that makes *itself* run on *new* fuel. . . . Most machines (art) run on audience fuel--(Man's piggish desire to be at the center, to be made to feel there is "caringness" built into the world: old art manipulates that, tries to get a response: fuel is DESIRE in that case. FIND A FUEL OTHER THAN DESIRE! (1976:75),

suggests that what he has in mind is more of an "anti-desiring machine," or, perhaps, more along the lines of what Blau himself has suggested as "a system running on alternate currents between the 'desiring machine' of the *Anti-Oedipus* and the 'debraining machine' of *Ubu Roi*" (1987:190)—such alternating currents being suggested by Foreman as well, in the title of his collected later plays and essays, *Reverberation Machines* (1985).

2. Foreman's procedure for adding recorded sound and music to his productions illustrates one manner in which he activates his "subtle insertion between logic and accident." He buys lots of unusual musical recordings and makes tape loops out of them, sometimes at the wrong speed; he also makes his own recordings of various unusual sound effects, like pennies tossed into an empty glass bowl, often making loops of these as well. Then in a method that's neither entirely random nor terribly deliberated, he selects which tapes will accompany which pages of text, but these selections may change—again, neither randomly nor with great deliberation—during the staging. During the staging of *Vertical Mobility*, for example, Foreman told the performers he would add a "boing" as a cue to change their positions. Until the necessary sound effect was taped, he shouted "cue." The "boing" was never added; his shouting became a part of the performance (Davy 1974:36).

3. Since *Film Is Evil*, *Radio is Good* in 1987, he has loosened up his earlier "rigor" to allow rewrites, creating work which—as Richard Schechner noted—is "much more organized thematically than [his] other work." As Foreman explains it:

Film Is Evil was totally different . . . in rehearsal, a good 30 per cent of the play was added. . . . Many speeches were rewritten, amplified. In rehearsal I cut a lot—at least half of what I started with—and rewrote the rest. I'd estimate that 30 to 50 per cent of the words were created in rehearsal (Foreman 1987:125).

4. As Kate Davy reported in "Foreman's *Vertical Mobility* and *Pain(T)*" in the June, 1974 issue of *The Drama Review*:

In all of his technical work, Foreman aims for *bricolage*. . . . Before and during the rehearsal period, [he] devised several uses for a large quantity of white sheet material. It was used to make the curtains that comprised the basic setting, and it covered the long, narrow table, pyramids, and other objects throughout both plays. Rhoda wore it as a headdress that trailed on the floor. In *Vertical Mobility*, a ghost costume, a toga, a nightgown and nightcap were made from it. A stage direction at the end of *Pain(T)* reads "Enter people under white sheets." These costumes resembled Ku Klux Klan outfits with tall, pointed hats and masks, all made by Foreman from the same white material (1974:32).

5. In consonance with my comparison of Barthes' analysis of the "third meaning" in cinema and Foreman's work, James Leverett's comments in "Richard Foreman and Some Uses of Cinema" appear particularly apt. Focusing on his use of framing devices in *Book of Splendors: Part II (Book of Levers) Action at a Distance* (1977), Leverett contrasts Foreman's purpose to that of Eisenstein:

At one point during *Book of Splendors*, the spectators are invited to complete a simile: A stick of wood found in an actor's pocket is like a . . . Before the equation can be completed, however, two naked men are wheeled rapidly out on stage and a grotesque hunchback starts to diagram the figure of speech on a blackboard (another "frame"). The audience is trapped in mid-simile, and a complex set of responses—to comparisons, to incomplete comparisons, to the interruption caused by nudity [another type of "reframing" device—as he later explains—which throws "the viewer into the midst of his or her own reactions as it disrupts all other mental process by its intervention"], to a hunchback writing (possibly useful) information on a blackboard—is brought into high relief. The basic mental action of comparison is estranged and shattered into a number of components which are forced to coexist in a state of mutual disputation. The entire process is thus forced open for examination (an action perhaps not unrelated to the piece's partial title "Book of Levers"). . . .

All of these framing methods can certainly be compared to the fundamental framing nature of cinema. They can also be related to the techniques of montage. Wylie Sypher paraphrases Eisenstein by defining montage as a complex of composed images "seen together, or nearly together, in a compound image." However, whereas the montage served Eisenstein as a "polyphonic structure [which] achieves its total effect through the composite of all the pieces as a whole," Foreman, as may be noted in the simile sequence already described, keeps the various components discrete in order that the spectator himself may examine the multiplicity of ways in which the parts do or do not fit together. The emphasis for Eisenstein is on a whole of orchestrated parts; for Foreman it is on the orchestration itself (1978:11-3).

6. Jill Dolan, in her perceptive critique of Foreman in *The Feminist Spectator as Critic* (1988) argues against Foreman's assertion that his art is "in no sense a mirror or representation" by maintaining that:

any extended series of events happening in a space as tightly controlled and carefully constructed as Foreman's theatre is indeed a representation. Whether the events on stage represent what he calls the "flickerings" of his consciousness, an aesthetic idea, or a narrative construct, they are arranged to be seen as a heightened form of reality. The performers are behaving in a particular way during a period of time for a particular reason. Entering the liminal theatre space, they represent something; they are not simply presenting themselves. They remained framed by the representational apparatus (46).

7. Foreman actualizes this project by not only incorporating writing directly into the scenography, objectifying it in the form of signs and projected legends, but also by having words become actual objects, "properties" which figure in the action, as this excerpt from *Pain(T)* demonstrates:

(The word "mean" cut out of pieces of wood is carried on stage—each letter a separate piece. The word "painter"—each letter a separate piece of stuffed soft material is also carried on. Then Rhoda enters with an easel.)

VOICE

Oh Rhoda, try stuffing the word painter up your ass.

RHODA

It's too big a word (1968:198).

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