Stage Remains:
Theatre Criticism and the Photographic Archive

Peter Buse

I.

One of the great unthought conventions of theatre criticism is its use of photographs. This goes for academic criticism as much as journalistic reviews. In books on theatre, in scholarly journals, and in newspapers, photographs from performances are reproduced alongside the text with equal regularity and to no immediately obvious end. Journalism, so much caught up in the "society of the spectacle," can perhaps be forgiven for automatically furnishing images to its readers in its attempts to be as multi-mediated as possible. From scholarly pursuit, however, we expect a more thoroughly worked out justification for the provision of pictures. Amongst academics—and not only art historians—it is currently an acceptable, and even approved, practice to turn to the visual as an area of inquiry, on the condition that they carry out informed and sophisticated readings of the pictures they present. In line with disciplinary requirements visual pleasure is tempered, qualified and modified by scrutiny and analysis. Nothing of the sort happens in the case of photographs in theatre criticism. Not only is no attempt made to read these pictures *as* photographs, no reference is made to their putative content: they are left unread. The silence kept with regard to these photographs may be mere sloppiness; the presence of photos in texts on theatre may signal something as simple as visual relief, a sort of "taster." Or this convention may remain unthought because it is a symptom of larger and unresolved problems in much writing about theatre. Unconsciously melancholic critics, acceding to the convention, sprinkle their texts with photographs of their lost object—the theatrical event—like so many silent memorials; but these memorials are sadly ill-suited to deal with the demand to commemorate, never mind resuscitate, the absent object. All is not lost, though: these traces may offer no real consolation to the melancholic critic analyzing live theatre, but they are still traces, and therefore open to reading. The critic is consequently advised to abandon this unhealthy attachment to the mere reproduction in glossy finish of pictures from the photographic archive, and instead take them up as artifacts of cultural history.

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II.

"It is almost as unusual to pass a day without seeing a photograph as it is to miss seeing writing" writes Victor Burgin in "Looking at Photographs."[1] The very ubiquity of photographs in everyday life, Burgin implies, renders them invisible. Just as one infrequently remarks "this is writing" when reading, one rarely thinks "this is a photograph" when looking at one. How often are photographs viewed as photographs? When they are elevated to the status of art, in exhibitions in galleries or museums; and at the opposite end of the spectrum of photographic practice, in the collection and display of amateur holiday, wedding and family snapshots. And even then the photographic is evasive, disappearing in the object photographed. In the great bulk of mass-reproduced photos in between—news and advertising photos, posters, greeting cards and postcards, illustrations in magazines and books—the fact of photography recedes far into the background, making way for the formal conventions governing the multiple contexts photographs may appear in. Seen everywhere and everywhere in camouflage, photographs thus rely on whichever frame is available for a signifying charge, and not the least in writing on theatre.

If photographs consistently pass in and out of vision without being seen, then all the more reason to examine them closely. This is more easily proposed than carried out, for close scrutiny of a photograph may yield more questions than answers. Burgin notes how photos are meant to be glanced at and not examined, and if we look at them for a long time, we begin to feel uneasy, for we have time to ask, "What exactly am I looking at?"[2] Such uneasiness rarely arises, however, since photographs are generally looked *through*, a viewing practice encouraged not only by the camera's singular capacity to generate "effects of the real," but by the photographic apparatus's adoption of the picture frame, a convention inherited from the 15th century Albertian perspective, and one which only serves to reinforce the impression that photos are windows onto something else. In fact, photography may supersede even glass as the transparent medium *par excellence*, so rarely do we look *at* it instead of through it onto the content it reveals. Theatre photographs reproduced in texts on theatre do not diverge from this tendency towards transparency, because they do not in any sense seek to upset or destabilize the usual effects of photography; they do not provoke the remark "I am looking AT a photograph." However, the sheer gratuitousness (in the sense of "uncalled for") of their presence does summon up something of the uneasiness Burgin mentions. "What, exactly, are they doing here?" one is bound to ask, because while their status as photographs is not highlighted, neither are they simply illustrative and subordinate to the text. Obviously, in some sense they function mnemonically—not necessarily duplications of a production, but as a sort of *aide-mémoire* for the reader who saw the production. But this is not enough:

it is a *weak* deployment of photography, hardly different from a picture of a pop star's performance in *Smash Hits*, a picture we are equally expected to look through, without asking "What am I looking at?"

At one level, photographs in theatre criticism are the traces of an old relationship between photography and theatre. When A.A.E. Disdéri patented in 1854 the *carte-de-visite*, a specially framed photographic portrait taken from a series of ten photos, it was at first the bourgeoisie who posed most frequently for his camera, and the new portrait photograph quickly displaced the painted miniature as the favored mode of bourgeois self-representation. As a consequence, many miniaturists simply moved trades and became professional photographers.[3] But the bourgeoisie were not the only favored subjects for the camera for very long, as by 1860, as Elizabeth Anne McCauley tells us, stage performers and entertainers of all varieties came increasingly to be photographed by Disdéri and his fellow professionals.[4] The *carte-de-visite* photograph of a performer was posed for in a studio with all the props and costumes of the stage and was not meant merely for private consumption and display, but for greater production and sale for profit by the performer. Photos of the bourgeoisie and of royal, military, and political figures were also posed in studios, but as Laurence Senelick notes, in these photos the bodies of photographed subjects were de-emphasized, while in photos of stage performers, bodies are emphasized and exposed flesh tantalizes.[5] The *cartes* at once publicized the actress—and less often the actor—and provided a supplementary source of income, thus exploiting at a very early stage in the history of photography its twin potential for the pornographic and for mechanical reproduction to infinity. Senelick argues that the invasion of the studio by thespians and courtesans introduced a new dimension to the photographic portrait: whereas previously members of the bourgeois class posed as representatives of their profession, actors brought to the studio their stage roles, and it was these roles which were reproduced in the *cartes-de-visite*.[6] Presumably this meant that photography was as much valued for its potential for "staging" or set up, as it was for faithful reproduction. The repercussions of this photographic practice were widespread, infiltrating into non-theatrical institutions like the clinic, where Jean-Martin Charcot photographed some of his hysterical patients in the roles of Shakespeare's heroines, as Elaine Showalter has shown in her essay on versions of Ophelia and the inscription of female madness.[7]

Theatrical *cartes-de-visite* find their contemporary equivalent in the publicity photos of actors distributed by their agents and displayed in the lobbies outside the theatre and in the program; and while the pornographic aspect is still present, it is largely suppressed in line with the general legitimation of the stage since the nineteenth-century. Photography also continues to figure in the role of promotion for theatre, in brochures, posters and illustrations accompanying

reviews, and with the promotional aspect the characteristic theatrical Pose, a combination of gestural violence and expressive physicality, lives on. It is this posing which McCauley identifies and criticizes in her account of theatrical *cartes-de-visite*, "The Demi-Monde Revealed: Cartes of Actors and Actresses, Dancers, and 'Filles de Joie'." She complains in this chapter of her book that photography of the period generally fails to capture the acting styles adequately: on the photographing of actress Ristori she says, "the scenes selected by both the photographer and the young artist no more captured slices of action from the play than Degas's later paintings actually caught ballerinas in mid-air."[8] Similarly, Disdéri's photos of a Russian ballet dancer are found wanting: "how static and stylized her poses are"; "the tradition of ballet in which Disdéri was working was not that of its development on the stage, but rather that of the two-dimensional images of it that had been produced during the previous century."[9] Of course, the slowness of the collodion process meant that the poser had to remain motionless for up to five minutes in bright sunlight, so a pose was of necessity static. This technical explanation aside, McCauley's criticism must be taken as an application of twentieth-century criteria of documentary authenticity to a nineteenth-century photographic practice. What results is a failure to acknowledge that photography might have had (and still has) an agenda of its own and may not necessarily be simply subordinate to a documentary enterprise. Meanwhile, modern theatre photography of the sort which appears alongside theatre criticism strives partly to realize the contemporary project of documentary veracity and yet at the same time is haunted by this elaborate posing initiated by a nineteenth-century practice.

In order to substantiate this claim about the pose and contemporary theatre photography, it will be necessary to examine some actual instances of photographs found in criticism and attempt to read those photographs, assuming such a thing is possible. A book chosen fairly arbitrarily is J.C. Trewin's *Peter Brook* which may be taken as fairly representative because, like so many books on theatre, it contains a non-paginated section devoted entirely to photos somewhere in the middle.[10] This convention of providing a "bundle" of photos or other illustrations in the center of a text is of course not limited to writing on theatre and can be found in any number of texts. Alternately, photographs and/or illustrations appear in the body of the text, within the paginated structure. In the case of *Peter Brook*, there are twenty photos of Brook and of "scenes" (the word may be inappropriate for photography, but nevertheless) from plays he has directed. For the purposes of the exercise, two of these photos, one from 1946, the second from 1970, will be examined. In the first photo, three figures in period dress sit on a set of stairs and look up at a fourth figure in more elaborate attire who stands at the top of the stairs and gazes out of the frame (Fig. 1). The caption reads "A scene from *Love's Labour's Lost*, Peter Brook's first production
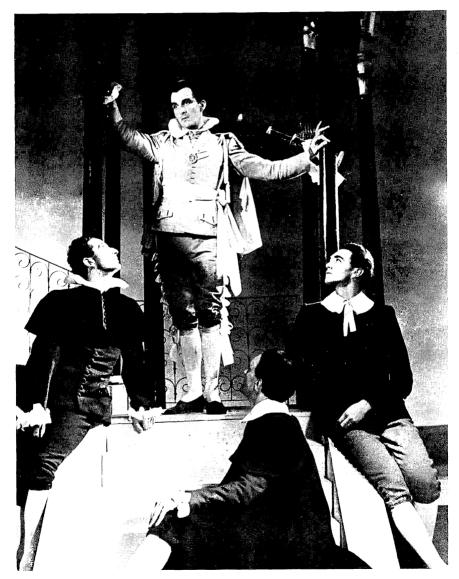
Fig. 1. Peter Brook's 1946 production of *Love's Labour Lost*.
An Angus McBean photograph. Courtesy: Harvard Theatre Collection, The Houghton Library.

at Stratford-upon-Avon in 1946, at the age of twenty-one. *Left to right*: Paul Stephenson (Ferdinand), David King-Wood (Berowne), Donald Sinden (Dumain), John Harrison (Longaville)." The 1970 photo bears the caption "Puck stilt-walking above the baffled Demetrius in one of the later wood scenes" and contains three figures: one on stilts, as the caption states, another below him, running, mouth wide open, and the third in the background, body twisted and face turned away (Fig. 2).

The twenty-five year historical gap between the two photos is legible, and not only in the differences between costume and stage props, although these are striking, and we are expected to notice the shift from elaborate period costume and stage design of 1946 to the smocks and casual clothing and the "empty space" of 1970. Historical difference manifests itself more conspicuously in the contrasting photographic styles, or in the contrasting choice of photographs taken to represent 1946 as opposed to 1970. The 1946 photo participates very much in the tradition of the "stylized and static" nineteenth-century theatrical pose McCauley criticizes. The four figures maintain a frozen studied composure too exact to be fortuitous; their heads almost form a perfect parallelogram, giving the photo a geometral basis which is reinforced by the triple gaze aimed at Berowne who consequently becomes the center of the composition. If the first photo reeks of Shakespeare in formaldehyde, the second proclaims a living, vital, contemporary (1970) Shakespeare. There is nothing studied or sedate about these figures who fling themselves about the stage, and if the framing of Demetrius by the stilts generates an interesting geometrical effect, one guesses that this came about through a lucky shot and not through a carefully prepared pose.

Ronald Argelander helpfully explains in "Photo-Documentation" that only relatively recently has it become common to obtain photographs from actual productions of plays because in the past photographers were barred from performances as disruptive, and in any case, photographic technology had not advanced enough to deal with limited light conditions. Consequently, the vast majority of theatre photographs of "scenes from performance" were—and still are, in many cases—taken during prearranged photo-sessions in studios where lighting problems can be adequately dealt with.[11] It is more than likely then, that the highly stylized photo from 1946 with the caption "A scene from *Love's Labour's Lost*" is in fact a studio shot prepared specially for promotion. There is no way of knowing whether the 1970 photo belongs to this category of posed shot or if it was taken during an actual performance, or perhaps a rehearsal. Certainly, it dates from a period when the practice of "documenting" theatre performance was becoming an issue; but in the end its provenance *does not matter that much*. What is clear is that it *signifies* differently from the 1946 photograph: it tries to defeat the tradition of static poses in theatre photography and imply that

Figure 2. 1970 *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Courtesy: The Shakespeare Centre Library: Stratford-upon-Avon.

this photo was indeed obtained from a live performance, and a dynamic one at that. What simpler way to achieve the effect of dynamism and movement than through the distortion of focus? The blurring of the stilt-walker's head and of Ben Kingsley's arm and leg contribute to the impression that this photo is only an arrested moment in the continuous action of a play. And not any play, but a play from an athletic, physical theatre. Bodies in violent motion is also the desired implication of a photo three pages before the 1970 one: in this instance—a photo from *US* (1967)—human figures and props are distributed helter-skelter, and several actors are out of focus, evidently because they were moving when the photo was taken. Pose, rehearsal, performance—the reason why it does not matter where these photos come from is that they all equally connote: as Roland Barthes writes in "The Photographic Message," every photograph "is an object that has been worked on, chosen, composed, treated according to professional, aesthetic or ideological norms . . . this same photo is not only perceived, received, it is *read*."[12] No matter how much the 1970 photo represents an attempt to escape the confines of the Pose on the way to authentic documentation, it still relies heavily on visual coding, such as the effect of focal distortion. And the photos in *Peter Brook* which are reproduced to illustrate his physical theatre phase fall back on an even older tradition in both film stills and theatre photographs—the dissemination of the images of famous actors (Glenda Jackson, John Gielgud, Paul Scofield in the book), a phenomenon Walter Benjamin identified as "fostered by the money of the film industry" in order to build up the "spell of personality."[13] In the end, what we in 1997 are left with in the 1970 shot is the uncanny aura of Ben Kingsley's hair.

I have shown then, (and only in the most schematic fashion) that these photographs can be read, that they are constituted by codes which are historically specific and contingent. I have not, however, come any closer to answering the question originally posed: what are they doing in these books, where no attempt at all is made to read them, and how can we look at them *here*, or what do we see when we look at them? In order to answer this deceptively simple question it may help to turn to Roland Barthes's *Camera Lucida*, a text which resists looking through photographs by never forgetting that "this is a photograph."

III.

Camera Lucida is not an easy text. In it Barthes makes statements about photography, and about the Photograph, which seem diametrically opposed to arguments he formulated some fifteen years earlier. However, what is puzzling and troubling in Barthes's final words on photography may be directly related to what is puzzling and troubling about the enigmatic photographs reproduced

without any comment alongside theatre criticism. In *Camera Lucida* Barthes frankly proclaims allegiance to a "realist" theory of photography, a declaration which is particularly surprising because Barthes first formulated the notion that photography merely produces "effects of the real." But in what, precisely, does Barthes's embrace of the "realist's" position consist and what does *Camera Lucida* actually set out to do? Barthes claims that he sets out from an "ontological desire": "I wanted to learn at all costs what Photography was 'in itself,' by what feature it could be distinguished from the community of images."[14] He concludes that what distinguishes the photograph from the community of images is its special relation to the Referent:

> Photography's Referent is not the same as the referent of other systems of representation. I call "photographic referent" not the *optionally* real thing to which an image or a sign refers but the *necessarily* real thing which has been placed before the lens, without which there would be no photograph . . . in Photography I can never deny that *the thing has been there*.[15]

By the same token, a special relationship is established between photograph and Event:

> What the Photograph reproduces to infinity has occurred only once: the Photograph mechanically repeats what could never be repeated existentially. In the Photograph, the event is never transcended for the sake of something else: the Photograph always leads the corpus I need back to the body I see; it is the absolute Particular, the sovereign Contingency, matte and somehow stupid, the *This*.[16]

Barthes by no means claims that the Photograph gives access to the object photographed: his point is that what is special about photography is its unique *relationship* to the Referent, a relationship which can be summed up by "that has been." In the endless stream of photographs encountered on a daily basis, this essential aspect is generally met with indifference. Barthes suggests, however, that as a result the spectral and frightening power of the technology is ignored: "by attesting that the object has been real, the photograph surreptitiously induces belief that it is alive, because of that delusion which makes us attribute to Reality an absolutely superior, somehow eternal value; but by shifting the reality to the past ('this-has-been'), the photograph suggests that it is already

dead."[17] The "real life" a photograph seems so ingenuously to offer is already inhabited by its absence and by an intimation of death.

Barthes argues that every photograph institutes an originary temporal division and distancing of the object, and yet he still comes dangerously close to thinking of photography as truth (presence, plenitude). It is a step he does not hesitate to take. What he discovers, however, is the *flatness* of truth, the disappointment and the "nothing to say." In the final pages of *Camera Lucida*, Barthes articulates this "discovery" in resigned fashion: "I exhaust myself realizing *this-has-been*; for anyone who holds a photograph in his hand, here is a fundamental belief, an 'ur-doxa' nothing can undo, unless you prove to me that this image *is not* a photograph. But also, unfortunately, it is in proportion to its certainty that I can say nothing about this photograph."[18] In the "that-has-been" of the photograph, Barthes finds the Lacanian Real, the intractable, that which cannot be avoided, which you inevitably run up against, but which equally cannot be symbolized (nothing-to-say). The Real cannot be used as evidence or in any "truth" claim, because as soon as it is brought into a symbolic order, its radical heterogeneity is removed, nullified. The question which remains is this: should not Barthes relinquish this ontological project which, after all, only yields up a kernel of "nothing-to-say," and dedicate himself wholeheartedly to interventions within the symbolic? Without forgetting that in the Lacanian schema, Real, Imaginary and Symbolic are not discrete realms but inextricable one from the next, we can say that *Camera Lucida*'s insistence on the intractability of the Real is useful insofar as it makes us hesitate when writing or speaking about photographs; and this applies forcefully, of course, to the case at hand of photographs in theatre criticism. We need not expect an answer to the question "what is?" when we ask it, but it is better to at least ask it, in case we should proceed under the assumption that we have already answered it.

In "The Deaths of Roland Barthes," a text which is part epitaph for Barthes, part explication of *Camera Lucida*, and part imitation of that text, Jacques Derrida provides a way of bringing *Camera Lucida* back to the question of theatre photography. Derrida's essay does not invoke the Real (in the last instance, a metaphysical concept), but takes up instead the question of singularity. It is the irreducible singularity of the event which Derrida addresses in his reading of Barthes, the absolute contingency which in a photograph cannot be avoided: "the immediate proof given by the photographic apparatus and by the structure of the *remains* it leaves behind are irreducible events, ineffaceably original."[19] "That-has-been" means that something has happened once only and can never be repeated again. But a photograph has the equivocal quality of the spectre (Is it absent? Is it present?) in its suspension of the Once of the referent: "in the photograph, the referent is noticeably absent, suspendable, vanished into the

unique past time of its event, but the reference to this referent, let us say the intentional movement of reference (since Barthes does in fact appeal to phenomenology in this book), also implies irreducibly the having-been of a unique and invariable referent."[20] Photographs are frightening because they imply the return of the dead; but this fear is rarely registered in the daily diet of photographs so quickly subsumed under categories of art, documentary, advertising, and innumerable other deployments of photography which must suppress the irreducibility of the past event. Perhaps in theatre photography, it is this troubling relation to the irreducibly singular event which is the source of the problem with the unthought convention under examination.

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IV.

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          What then, does this have to do with theatre photographs, with, for example, the photograph "of" Alcestis on page 63 of Johannes Birringer's *Theatre, Theory, Postmodernism*, a photograph which appears with a label but without any commentary? What can Barthes's formulations about "that-has-been," about the special relation to the Referent, and about the singularity of the photographic bring to a reading of this and other photographs? What we notice first about this example is that although the main body of Birringer's argument makes no direct reference to the photo (it does appear in a section where *Alcestis* is discussed), its caption serves to tame and generalize any singularity, the Once of the "that-has-been." As Barthes puts it, "What the Photograph reproduces to infinity has occurred only once: the Photograph, the event is never transcended for the sake of something else."[21] The title here, however, would have us believe that this photograph of an instant *does* transcend the Once and somehow testifies to, or represents, the entire performance of *Alcestis*, and not just that night, but all performances which took place in 1986, for it reads, "Figure 10. Robert Wilson's *Alcestis*, based on a play from Euripides, with additional text by Heiner Muller. American Repertory Theatre, 1986. Photo: Richard Feldman." The absolute specificity of the photograph undergoes a transformation by way of the title and enters into the service of the general. Victor Burgin writes, "We usually see words used to comment on the image in some way: for example, to give some extra information about what is shown . . . Alternatively, we see an image used to illustrate the text—to show pictorially what has already been mentioned verbally."[35] The *Alcestis* photograph in Birringer deploys the second of these conventions and is therefore read in a position of subordination with regard to the content expressed by the text. This text appears at the bottom of the photograph and so might be read more as an inscription than a title, but really, it functions as a title in the way it aims to encompass and summarize the content of the visual image from outside the actual frame of that image. Barthes once wrote about the

function of the caption in news photos in terms of "anchorage" because the linguistic message provides for the viewer of a polysemous image a specific signified not otherwise immediately available.[23]   Here, at the level of the photograph, the title limits the potential meanings of the image; at the level of irreducible event, it effaces the Once.

As has been pointed out in the previous section, this process of symbolization is not necessarily a bad thing, and it is hardly a question of maintaining the "purity" of the singularity of a photograph against the various intrusions of labels, captions, and diverse other deployments: this is inevitable, and can be productive.   Art historians, for instance, will of course use photographs and slides of paintings and other works of art in order to discuss them in their absence, since not every lecture on the Venus de Milo can be held in the Louvre.   The responsible critic should then highlight some of the methodological problems which arise with selection, framing, and angles of photographic shots, problems which can affect or determine the way a work is read, but which have nothing to do with the effacement of the singular.[24]   In fact, it is precisely these questions Ronald Argelander addresses in his interview with theatre photographer Peter Moore: he is at great pains to emphasize that the position from which the shot is taken, the distance, and the moment chosen during a play, can all color one's reading.   His conclusions are unfortunately rather prescriptive and he makes it clear that his ultimate criteria have to do with documentary authenticity, but his points are nevertheless valid.   In any case, the point is that in the instance of the art historian, singularity and "that-has-been" may be ignored, but the use being made of photography is clear.

Similarly, in John Berger's *Ways of Seeing*, another text which makes much use of photographic plates, and which also has sections composed entirely of visual images, the role of photographs is stated at the outset:

> These purely pictorial essays . . . are intended to raise as many
> questions as the verbal essays.   Sometimes in the pictorial
> essays no information at all is given about the images
> reproduced because it seemed to us that such information might
> distract from the points being made.[25]

Here, at least, there seems to be some reason or rationale for the appearance of photographs: they carry on part of the argument and make an argument of their own.   Brecht provides another example, and this time from the theatre, of the measured use of photographs as instrumental in some argument.   Ruth Berlau photographed pivotal scenes from Brecht plays and then compiled from these photos the *Modelbücher*—"model-books."   A model-book is in a sense a kind of

playtext, but composed of visual indices rather than, or as well as, actors' lines and stage directions. As Brecht puts it: "An obligatory model production has been worked out, which can be grasped from a collection of photographs accompanied by explanatory instructions."[26] Lest anyone think such a model restrictive, Brecht is quick to add "the model is not set up in order to fix the style of the performance; quite the contrary. The emphasis is on development: changes are to be provoked and made perceptible."[27] Whereas the use of photography by the art historian might be called of the order of the illustrative, with Brecht and Berger, photography becomes instrumental. Both cases participate to a certain extent in the other, but above all else, it is clear to what end photographs appear in a text or a presentation. In the case of theatre criticism, the photographs reproduced alongside the text seem to belong to neither the instrumental nor the illustrative orders.

In *Peter Brook*, of course, the photo bundle does follow a certain logic—the linear chronology of the book itself—and to this extent is instrumental. The photos cover the same period of theatrical work as the book (1946-71) and therefore function as a "photoessay" in their own right. Perhaps nothing more needs to be said because this is so obvious. However, if this is the case, it just shows how photographs are taken to be absolutely transparent and their purpose expected to be self-evident. They are also illustrative in a narrow sense to the extent that some of them are photos from moments of plays discussed in the book, but unlike photos of paintings or sculptures, they are relatively mute and uninteresting, because they can in no sense approximate the plays being discussed. They do not, at least not in the context they are presented here, in any tangible way enable the analysis of plays, whether as drama or performance.

If the photographs from plays belong to neither the instrumental nor the illustrative orders, then what purpose do they serve? Perhaps they are there to attest to the Referent of theatre, to proclaim the "that has been," as Barthes describes the effect of the photograph, or, in the case of theatre, the "that took place." Writing on theatre faces a fundamental methodological problem in that its object is irretrievably absent. In this situation, Christian Metz's comments in "Photography as Fetish" seem relevant because he argues that in photography the off-frame is absent, and this generates a *lack* associated with the fetish: "Photography is a cut inside the referent, it cuts off a piece of it, a fragment, a part object."[28] The theatre photograph provides a sort of part-object and appears in writings on theatre as a way of accounting for the event of theatre, the eventness of theatre which inextricably links it to history, to the writing of history. And this is where the relation to the past and therefore to death, reenters the picture. As Barthes writes:

> the photograph's immobility is somehow the result of a
> perverse confusion between two concepts: the Real and the
> Live: by attesting that the object has been real, the photograph
> surreptitiously induces belief that it is alive . . . but by shifting
> this reality to the past ("this has been") the photograph suggests
> that it is already dead.[29]

Insofar as theatre (as event) is discussed, it must be acknowledged as something which occurs only once, and this makes it exceedingly difficult to talk about, because as we have seen, the Once (the Real) is not assimilable to any symbolic, communicating system. The photographs in theatre criticism are there to claim or to remind us, weakly, that "that-has-been-there" and *live*, but the same criticism is reluctant to go further because what will greet it is the (terrifying?) absence of its object.

In *The Burden of Representation*, John Tagg concerns himself with refuting the claim that he sees Barthes making about the camera as "an instrument of evidence." A photograph, he argues, cannot render the truth about a prior reality, "can guarantee nothing at the level of meaning."[30] Barthes's thesis, as has been shown, does not make this claim, and cannot be asked to answer to Tagg's charge and neither can these photographs in theatre histories. They do not function as documentary proof, as means of identification, as tools in an argument about historical fact. How can they when they are not linked in any manifest way with the texts they appear in, when the texts never explicitly say, "Look, here's photographic evidence"? They are not evidence; they are (silent) interruptions. In fact, they are remarkable in that they do not happily rest on either axis of the traditional division of photography that Abigail Solomon-Godeau enumerates in *Photography at the Dock*—the iconic and the indexical.[31] While their indexical status is tenuous and not mentioned explicitly, they are equally neglected as photographs-in-themselves—the autonomous art line. For this reason, they are intriguing, and not simply stupid. To write about theatre, one cannot not take account of its status as a singular and irretrievably past event, and the photograph seems to overcome this singular difficulty, asserting the "this has been" irrefutably, and with all the simplicity of the self-evident. However, the photograph also has the effect of embalming: what it captures and freezes is death, about which there is "nothing-to-say." The photographs in theatre criticism are therefore as much symptoms of intractable problems in writing about theatre as they are an answer to the question of history posed by theatre, and for this reason, they appear as if from nowhere and with no explanation in the texts I have discussed.

V.

Jim Carmody has remarked on a general failure to read theatre photography fruitfully or even adequately. He cites an old essay by Barthes in *The Drama Review* where Barthes writes approvingly of some photo models from Brecht's *Mother Courage*. Carmody notes that although Barthes calls the photos valuable and they are reproduced alongside the essay, he fails to discuss them at all.[32] Claiming that there is a general reticence in the use of photography, he proposes that we go ahead and read them in order to understand and interpret performances better. He concludes that photos can usefully "record moments":

> Photography can record details of gesture and of blocking; it can show what all or part of the stage looked like (from a single position in the theatre) at a given moment. While it cannot itself show the significance of such a moment, it can mediate the discussion of a particular performance or *mise-en-scene*.[33]

In this more conscious deployment of photographs, Carmody reflects a move, a more general push, towards examining the relation between theatre and photography and more recently video. However, the general tenor of the debates is somewhat wrong-headed, since it focuses so heavily on the indexical value of both photography and video: the greatest concern seems to be about the accuracy of recordings and their validity as documents; in other words, they are evaluated within the traditional parameters of documentary.[34] In the most recent and most thorough account of the current vogue for "performance documentation," Annabelle Melzer outlines the narrowness of criteria when it comes to these theatre texts:

> the process of documenting a performance by making an electronic "replica" is fraught with problems, and the attack on performance documentation, even by supporters, begins as an attack on just this claim of the film or videotape to be a "record" of the live performance.[35]

The problems range from the "fallen" status of the record in relation to the original, through arguments about objectivity, about its validity and accuracy, and onto the possibility that the document is itself an adaptation, a "new" art form. However, even in the midst of agonized debate about the status of video and film, about how this "important and necessary" task is to be carried out, there is a general unspoken agreement that, whatever they are called—transcription, replica, adaptation, recording, Photostat—these videos or films are unproblematic in their

temporality: they have a bearing on the *past* only. I have already been slightly anachronistic by emphasizing photography—which has been displaced by film and video—but I want to go one step further in my dislocation of time-schemes and suggest that the history of theatre photography has been as much concerned with the *future* as with the documentation of the past, and that the current vogue for documentation ignores and even represses this history.

In one of the early pieces on the topic already mentioned, "Photo-Documentation," Ronald Argelander at once stresses the value of producing a visual record of theatre, and its many pitfalls. He sets out specific, even strict, criteria for what constitutes a legitimate photograph of a performance. Two kinds of photograph come under particularly heavy criticism. In the past, due to problems of light and other practical difficulties, photographers have not had the opportunity to record "actual" performances but have had to make do with "photo-sessions" during which performers stage certain situations for the camera. These pictures are illegitimate, according to Argelander: "Photographs produced in this way are misleading. They pretend to represent the performance, but, in fact, the information we get from them has more to do with *promotion* than with performance."[36] Argelander subscribes closely to the ideology of fidelity in documentation, but is equally aware of a photograph's potential for dissembling, for neglecting its proper task of faithfully recording. And how does it stray from this task? In corrupting the past with goals in the future—promotion, publicity.

Argelander's second condemned category of shot comes from actual performances but perhaps takes its cue from the first illegitimate photo. Even if a performance is faithfully and thoroughly documented photographically, there always remains the danger that only the highly "dramatic" pictures will make it through the negative process. An "accurate" process of documentation would include periods of lower activity on the stage, quiet periods when less energy abounds on stage. However, a process of selection often means that these sort of photographs will be left out: "Editors of books and magazines, those who make secondary selections, may not always make their choices from the standpoint of representing the work accurately. Photos are, quite often, chosen simply because they are visually exciting."[37] Once again, the demands of visual pleasure overwhelm the more serious task of archiving. That the basic prejudices against the theatrical Pose expressed by Argelander in 1974 and McCauley in 1985 have not shifted demonstrably in the interceding years is revealed by Barrie Kershaw in a recent review of an Encyclopedia of European Theatre. While he welcomes "the many photographs Routledge has sensibly allowed," he complains of "perhaps just a few too many boring publicity shots" and a "tendency to unrevealing close-ups in Israel and Italy."[38] One of Argelander's main tenets for theatre photography places wide-angle shots above close-ups in terms of

documentary value. More interesting is Kershaw's dislike for publicity photos, which although hardly spontaneous, presumably should be equally if not *more* interesting for theatre and cultural history as fleeting shots of "moments" from a performance.

The sort of "exciting" photos Argelander describes are precisely the ones which grace the covers of books on theatre and appear inside them as well. Within this strict policing of what constitutes an authentic or worthwhile theatre document, is there room to speak about such fascinating photographs as the highly stylized and posed, and frequently reproduced picture of Shaw, Granville-Barker, and Lillah McCarthy in rehearsal for *Androcles and the Lion*? (Fig.3). A fairly loose compositional code governs this order of theatre photograph: a premium is placed on gestural violence, on the aura of the mid-movement. Obviously, this sort of barely contained energy connotes "theatricality" in exactly the way Argelander wants to undermine. But what it also evokes, in the tradition of photography of movement, is the sense of an action partly completed and further action yet to come: it is a promise of more, as it were. It says not only this has been, but also something else will be. While Argelander would have the meaning of a photograph inhere in the past moment, its meaning refuses to arrive on time and continues to present itself retroactively.

G. B. S. strikes out, Granville-Barker defends himself and Lillah McCarthy intervenes—a scene from a rehearsal of *Androcles and the Lion*.

Fig. 3. Courtesy: Mander and Mitchenson Theatre Collection.

        In the meantime, very little in the way of actual analysis and reading
goes on, and Carmody (who does not read the Brecht photos either) seems to be
right. The key seems to be to avoid thinking about photography in terms of "use-
value" or utility. A great deal of energy is expended on a fixation with
documentation, the final hope being that somehow these documents will allow us
better to analyze past performances, or rather bring them back from the dead.
Much of current "performance analysis," driven by logocentric desires, ties itself
up in knots over such problems and ends up agonizing too much over its lost
object, the irretrievable event of theatre. I suggest, however, that this is not the
most important goal—it is much more interesting to look at theatre photos not as
documents of theatre which can be read transparently, giving access, however
partial, to the absent event, but as artifacts of cultural history in themselves, in
that they have their own sets of historically contingent representational
conventions and projects beyond simple documentation. We can learn most from
them if we neither privilege them as documents of theatre or photographs in
themselves (that is, evaluating them in terms of aesthetic criteria) but as legible,
and therefore plural and contingent traces. It is difficult, but necessary, to resist
placing these photographs in one of two narratives: either as transparent windows
onto theatre history, or as part of some independent history of theatre
photography. Instead, they might be considered as part of the history of
signifying practices, in which both theatre and photography participate. The
photograph of Shaw appears, among other places, in Christopher Innes' *Modern
British Drama 1890-1990* with the caption "1. A demonstration of operatic
acting: Shaw, Granville-Barker and Lillah McCarthy in rehearsal of Shaw's
Androcles and the Lion at the Court, 1912."[39] The photograph certainly seems to
give us access to an acting style whose gestural codes are alien to us and which
seem at least partially recoverable through this document. And yet, I still wonder
to what extent this picture is not simply a *demonstration* of a theatrical technique,
but *at the same time* an example of a particular photographic code. Does not this
photo in fact challenge any easy division we might seek to establish between index
and icon, between the scene and the Pose? If we want to begin reading photos
such as this one it means analyzing them within the contexts in which we find
them—in the late twentieth century, for instance, embedded in texts on theatre.
In this sense, we would ironically enough be being attentive to the very
photographic singularity Barthes identifies in *Camera Lucida*.

Notes

        1. Victor Burgin, "Looking at Photographs," *Thinking Photography*, ed. Victor Burgin
(Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1982) 142-153: 142.

2. Burgin 152.

3. See Elizabeth Anne McCauley, *A.A.E. Disdéri and the Carte-de-Visite Portrait Photograph* (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1985).

4. McCauley 85-86.

5. Laurence Senelick, "Eroticism in Early Theatrical Photography," *Theatre History Studies* 11 (1991), 1-49: 2.

6. Senelick 2.

7. Elaine Showalter, "Representing Ophelia: Women, Madness and the Responsibilities of Feminist Criticism," *Shakespeare and the Question of Theory*, ed. Patricia Parker and Geoffrey Hartman (London and New York: Methuen, 1985) 77-94: 86.

8. McCauley 91.

9. McCauley 109.

10. J.C. Trewin, *Peter Brook: A Biography* (London: MacDonald and Co., 1971).

11. Ronald Argelander, "Photo-Documentation (and an interview with Peter Moore)," *The Drama Review* 18:3 (September 1974) 51-58: 54.

12. Roland Barthes, *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1977) 19.

13. Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969) 231.

14. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (London: Flamingo, 1984) 3.

15. 76.

16. 4.

17. 79.

18. 107.

19. Jacques Derrida, "The Deaths of Roland Barthes," *Continental Philosophy I: Philosophy and Non-Philosophy Since Merleau-Ponty*, ed. Hugh J. Silverman (London and New York: Routledge, 1988) 259-96: 281.

20. Derrida 281.

21. Barthes, *Camera Lucida* 4.

22. Victor Burgin, *Between* (London: Basil Blackwell, 1986) 57.

23. Barthes, *Image-Music-Text* 38-41.

24. This point derives partly from a conversation with Catherine Belsey.

25. John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: BBC, 1972) 5.

26. Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, trans. John Willett (London: Methuen, 1964) 212.

27. Brecht 211.

28. Christian Metz, "Photography and Fetish," *October* 34 (1985) 81-90: 84.

29. Barthes, *Camera Lucida* 17.

30. John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 1988) 3.

31. Abigail Solomon-Godeau, *Photography at the Dock: Essays on Photographic History, Institutions, and Practices* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1991) xxii.

32. Jim Carmody, "Reading Scenic Writing: Barthes, Brecht, and Theatre Photography," *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* 5:1 (1990) 25-38: 26.

33. Carmody 32.

34. In addition to Argelander and Carmody, see Denis Bablet, "La vidéo au service de la recherche théâtrale. De quelques expériences," *Cahiers Théâtre Louvain* xvi (1981): 75-89; Marco de Marinis, "'A Faithful Betrayal of Performance': Notes on the Use of Video in the Theatre," *New Theatre Quarterly* 1 (Nov. 1985): 383-9; Rodrigue Villeneuve, "Photography of Theatre: Images Always Fail," *Canadian Theatre Review* 64 (1990): 32-37; Gay McAuley, "The Video Documentation of Theatrical Performance," *New Theatre Quarterly* 38:10 (May 1994): 183-94.

35. Annabelle Melzer, "'Best Betrayal': The Documentation of Performance on Video and Film, Part 1," *New Theatre Quarterly* 42 (May 1995) 147-57: 148.

36. Argelander 54.

37. 57.

38. Barrie Kershaw, "All the European World's a Stage," *Times Higher Education Supplement* (May 5, 1995) 28.

39. Christopher Innes, *Modern British Drama 1890-1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992) 29.