

Didascalia and Speech in the Dramatic Text

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Although the components of the dramatic text have received sporadic theoretical attention, the relationship between speech, stage directions, and other components of the printed playtext (such as titles, speech headings, lists of characters) remains under-theorized.¹ This is partly due to the sheer complexity of the issue, but also to the fact that Anglo-Saxon critics rarely take into account the work of untranslated European theorists who have tackled the problem extensively. Furthermore, most thinking about the textual status of plays is hampered by the compartmentalization of different strands of criticism and their methods. The approach in this article, as a consequence, will be three-pronged: it will draw on European theorists as much as on work in English, reviewing the literature in German and French in particular; it will take account of the interdisciplinary work of linguists as well as of work in drama theory, performance studies, bibliography and textual criticism; and it will aim to do justice to the complexity of the textual status of the different parts of the dramatic text both in reading and in performance.

The term “didascalia,” which loosely corresponds to what is commonly referred to as “stage directions,” will in the course of the article be defined as encompassing not only directions to the actors, but all textual components of a playtext that are not spoken on-stage. It will be distinguished from the “displaying agent,” the narrative instance—in the sense of an impelling motive—that is responsible for the didascalia no less than for the dialogue. My argument will result in a deconstruction of the opposition between didascalia and speech. I will also propose that there is a distinction to be made, in terms of both content and authorship, between the didascalia of the printed playtext and the displaying agent of the performed play (as partly textualized in posters, programs, etc.). The differentiation between the printed didascalia and the concept of the displaying agent is essential to my argument, and I hope that in this jargon-ridden field of studies this concept will serve to elucidate important distinctions rather than add to the general confusion created by the proliferation of typologies and terminologies.²

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I will start with a close reading of an excerpt from *The Card Index*, a play by the Polish experimental dramatist Tadeusz Rózewicz. The brief discussion of this provocative metatheatrical extract will allow me to highlight some of the problems in attempting to distinguish between speech and “action” or, more broadly, the parts of the printed text that remain unspoken on-stage. I will proceed to suggest that the difficulties encountered by Roman Ingarden, probably the most influential theorist of “stage directions,” stem in part from a general lack of acknowledgement of the kinship between drama and novel, and that narratology might be productively employed to explain certain features of the dramatic text. The next part of the article will be concerned with the different communicative situations that pertain for the playtext as a reading text as opposed to the playtext as a (future) performance. I will discuss the collaborative nature of theatrical authorship and show that different types of authority and authorship can be attributed to different parts of the dramatic text according to the *function* of that text in a particular situation. The article will conclude with the description of the components of the screenplay of *William Shakespeare’s Romeo + Juliet*, a performance edition whose textual and authorial complexity highlights the main issues discussed in the article, showing the necessity for a thorough theorization of didascalia and speech in the dramatic text.

“If you don’t move the theatre is in ruins”

As is frequently the case, some of the boldest thinking about the relationship between the different components of the dramatic text comes to us not from literary criticism and drama theory, but from theatre practice. Tadeusz Rózewicz’s *The Card Index* (1957-9) includes the following metatheatrical reflection about the essence of drama:

(Children’s voices are heard: “Mummy, mummy”. FAT WOMAN leaves. HERO stretched on his bed goes on reading. Enter CHORUS. They sit in their places.)

CHORUS OF ELDERS:

Do something, get a move on, think.

There he lies while time flies.

(HERO covers his face with the newspaper.)

Say something, do something,

Push the action forward,

At least scratch your ear!

(HERO is silent.)

There is nothing happening.

What is the meaning of this?

HERO: Leave me in peace.

CHORUS OF ELDERS:

Thank God, he is not asleep.

HERO: Are you saying I must do something? I don't know . . . (*yawns*)

. . . perhaps . . .

CHORUS OF ELDERS:

He's falling asleep, the gods will rage!

There can be no bread without flour.

There must be action on the stage,

Something should be happening at this hour!

HERO: Isn't it enough when the hero scratches his head and stares at the wall?

CHORUS OF ELDERS:

That is already something.

HERO: I don't feel like doing anything.

CHORUS OF ELDERS:

But even in a Beckett play

somebody talks, waits, suffers, dreams,

somebody weeps, dies, falls, farts.

If you don't move the theatre is in ruins.³

Contrary to most literary critics writing about drama, for whom the core of the dramatic text seems to reside in its dialogue, the Chorus of Elders' statement that "If you don't move the theatre is in ruins" suggests that drama at its most basic may be reduced to action. It is, however, typical of this debate about the precedence of dialogue or action in the theatre event that the chorus' reduction of drama to action rather than the spoken word should occur within the scripted dialogue of the play, thus undermining its own assertion of the primacy of wordless action over speech. A similar paradoxical effect that blurs the distinction between speech and action is produced by the stage direction introducing this extract, which, through its inclusion of spoken text ("*Mummy, mummy*") in its description of off-stage action, challenges the most basic and generally accepted definition of stage directions as "the elements of the text that are not the dialogue spoken by the characters"⁴—a definition I will, with some reservations, myself adopt in this article.

Not only is spoken text in Rózewicz's playtext part of the action, but instructions about how the dialogue should be spoken—normally the domain of what Michael Issacharoff refers to as "melodic" stage directions, i.e. directions that "describe the manner of delivery envisaged, the intonation and attitude of the speaker"⁵—are contained in the typographic layout of the dialogic text. Like early modern plays, whose actors' parts Tiffany Stern has shown to be full of "internal" directions to the performers,⁶ the dialogue's lineation in Rózewicz's play distinguishes between verse and prose, while the deliberate capitalization of selected line-beginnings and the occasional rhyme patterns suggest a difference in tone and/or stress.

Equally revealing and paradoxical is the fact that this extract authored by Różewicz should suggest that the origin of theatre as an event—whether expressed in speech or action—and thus its authority lie in the actor rather than the author. It is the hero's unwillingness to move or speak that is here seen as the main threat to theatre, not the author's unwillingness to script the hero's movements or speech. In another paradox typical of Różewicz, this moment is, of course, scripted and thus complicates the attribution of authorship to either author, character, or actor. As I will show towards the end of this article, the attribution of authorship in the theatre is, in fact, even more complicated than Różewicz's deliberate confusion suggests, since the "authorship" of a play in performance is shared also by the director, set and costume designers, lighting technicians—all the people involved in the production of the play on stage.

Różewicz's metatheatrical play thus highlights the incongruity of theoretical attempts at attributing dominance to certain components of the dramatic text. It emphasizes the difficulties involved in seeking to identify a single source of authority and authorship for the dramatic event. In doing so, *The Card Index* engages with several of the most complex problems facing drama theorists at least since the development of early twentieth-century avant-garde theatre and mid-century experimental drama.

Play vs. Novel: Issues of Genre

At the centre of the tugs-of-war between speech and action as well as between author and actor (or text and performance) lies the stage direction or didascalia with its complex nature as a liminal text of problematic authorship, authority, and textual status. I favour the Greek term "didascalia" partly because, as Laure Bourgknecht has noted, its use necessarily forces us to adopt a historical perspective.⁷ More importantly, the term, which refers to the Greek dramatist's written *and* oral instruction of his actors, encompasses both oral and written texts. It is a term that is wide enough, therefore, to include the oral text that I will later describe as the "script" of a performance. It also allows for the inclusion of instructions that need not have a direct bearing on the performance, such as George Bernard Shaw's description of the whole neighbourhood of "the northeast quarter of London" at the beginning of *Candida* (1895), when all that can be directly used for a staging of the play is the description of the interior of a sitting room inside St. Dominic's Parsonage, where the action takes place.⁸ The term "didascalia" thus exceeds the scope of reference implied by the term "stage direction."

In a large number of their incarnations in Western theatre, didascalia have occupied a literally marginal space on the manuscript or printed page that reflects their perceived marginal status in relation to the dialogues they frame and gloss. Roman Ingarden's seminal division of the dramatic text into main text (*Haupttext*) and side text (*Nebentext*), the latter of which, he specifies, "cannot constitute even

the skeleton of a work” in itself, is a logical result of this standard bibliographic layout.⁹ What Ingarden’s ranking ignores, however, is the medieval tradition of religious drama in which the equivalent of the modern stage direction may at times take up twice the amount of space and importance allotted to the spoken word.¹⁰ On the other hand, his theory, revised for the second edition of his immensely influential book in 1960, seems oblivious to the pan-European developments in modern experimental theatre practice which culminated in the 1950s and explicitly challenged the primacy of the spoken word in the theatre.¹¹ Samuel Beckett most famously did so in his *Acts Without Words I*, a play written in 1956, performed in 1957 and published in 1958.¹² But already in 1954, taking George Bernard Shaw and Bertolt Brecht’s narratorial and “epic” discussions of the historical, social and cultural backgrounds to their plays to an extreme—as in *Candida* or Brecht’s extensive commentaries,¹³ Eugène Ionesco had demonstrated the independence of the didascalía from the dialogue. In his “anti-play” *The Bald Prima Donna* (*La Cantatrice chauve*) he had insisted on the didascalía’s literary (as opposed to solely theatrical) value with the famous parodic opening stage direction:

A typical middle-class English interior. Comfortable armchairs. Typical English evening at home. Typical English MR SMITH, in his favourite armchair, wearing English slippers, smoking an English pipe, reading an English newspaper, beside an English fire. He is wearing English spectacles, has a small grey English moustache. Next to him, in her favourite armchair, typically English MRS SMITH is darning English socks. A long English silence. An English clock chimes three English chimes.¹⁴

(It is itself a sign of the difference in status perceived between speech and didascalía that the English translator of the play, Donald Watson, took more liberties with the translation of the didascalía than with the dialogue: whereas he went to the length of introducing a footnote when he could find no English equivalent of a French word in the dialogue, for the opening stage direction he felt quite free to give Mr. and Mrs. Smith each their favorite armchair—no such thing is mentioned in the original—and to change the seventeen chimes of the clock in French to only three in English.)

What these medieval and mid-twentieth-century examples that bracket a millennium of European theatre make obvious is that Ingarden’s ranking of the “main text” and “side text” is not helpful in defining the status of the didascalía and the dramatic text as a whole. It fails to account for Rózewicz’s hybrid didascalía containing spoken text or for the possibility that didascalía may become part of the spoken text in production. In the 2001 New Globe Theatre (London) production of Shakespeare’s *Cymbeline*, for instance, Imogen’s disguise was indicated not through

a costume change but through the actor's announcement "enter Imogen dressed as a boy" as she stepped into the playing space.¹⁵ Ingarden's discussion of the issue also shows no awareness of the different authorial voices that may lie behind dialogue and stage directions of different kinds and ignores the fact that the different types of text have various addressees.

This deficient theorization of the dramatic text can be remedied by drawing on and combining a number of approaches. While the interdisciplinary work of linguists interested in literature has contributed models of communication for literary texts, which, adapted to the situation of the theatre, reveal the complexity of textual transmission across different levels of communication, recent bibliographers and editors have come to appreciate the complexity of the didascalium's authorship and reception. In addition, the rise of performance studies has led to a greater appreciation of the differences between the various types of dramatic text that can all be subsumed under the name "play": the playtext, the script, the promptbook, the *mise-en-scène*, the performance text. Parallel to these developments, drama theorists, prompted by the public debates that arose when, in 1984, both Arthur Miller and Samuel Beckett took legal action against theatre companies that ignored their stage directions,¹⁶ have highlighted the context-specific nature of both didascalium and dialogue. I want to argue that it is only by combining these approaches with a historical perspective that we can arrive at a sensitive understanding of didascalium, and that it is through an appreciation of the generic specificity of drama and its kinship with narrative fiction that such an understanding can begin to be reached.

The weakness common to most approaches to didascalium lies in their contradictory attitude towards the status of the dramatic text as a whole. On the one hand, there is a sense that, in Ingarden's words, the "stage play is a borderline case of the literary work of art . . . to the extent that, besides language, another medium of representation exists within it—namely, the visual aspects."¹⁷ This does not, however, lead either Ingarden or his successors to the more thorough consideration of the communicative situation of the theatre that alone could justify his marginalization of the dramatic text in relation to the category of "literature." On the other hand the kinship between the playtext and the novel has, in Western theatre, regularly been apparent in "closet drama"—for instance the plays of Seneca, early modern writers like *The Countess of Pembroke* and Elizabeth Cary, and nineteenth-century exponents like Musset and Hardy—as well as in more recent dramatic experiments that challenge generic boundaries. Most prominently, the generic affinity between drama and novel was made explicit in a preface by George Bernard Shaw, who likened himself to "other poets and fictionists [i.e., novelists]" and emphasized the playwright's "powers of literary expression" in the non-dialogic components of dramatic writing.¹⁸ Shaw repeatedly insisted on the relation between the printed playtext and the novel, stating that in order "to make plays readable" he

“substituted readable descriptions for technical stage directions, and showed how to make the volumes as attractive in appearance as novels.”¹⁹ Nevertheless, even Patricia Suchy, whose article is the most sophisticated theoretical consideration of the generic affinity of drama and the novel to date, stops short of applying to the playtext Wayne C. Booth’s and Seymour Chatman’s semiotic models of communication for narrative fiction to which she alludes in her concluding remarks:²⁰

Stage directions seem to be assuming, with increasing frequency in the modern drama, many of the characteristics of the fictive discourse of other genres: most notably, of the novel. If the voice that tells the performer to bring down the curtain “to see if it works” speaks in fictive discourse, then the voice that utters these words emanates less from an author than from an author’s imaginary, and quite fictive, narrator.²¹

Far from being challenged only from the side of dramatists and, tentatively, drama theorists, the generic boundaries between play and novel have also been questioned by novelists. I am specifically thinking of the example of Henry Green, whose late novels consist essentially of dialogue and typographically undifferentiated stage directions. Edward Stokes describes how Green “deliberately set out to write a novel consisting almost entirely of what the characters say aloud, keeping descriptive passages and even ‘stage directions’ to the barest minimum.”²² It is certainly significant for this consideration of the differences between fiction and drama that Green claimed in an interview that his reason for not writing any plays lay in his reluctance to have his text “liable to interpretation by actors and the producer of a piece.”²³ This puts him into a surprisingly close kinship with Beckett, who was fiercely protective about any freedom of interpretation in the performance of his plays. Both modern authors are thus part of a long tradition of writers who distrust the creativity of the theatre practitioners who work with their texts, leading to statements such as Thomas William Robertson’s, in the 1860s, that “I don’t want actors, I want people that will do just what I tell them,” and George Bernard Shaw’s declaration that the “very originality and genius of the performers conflicts with the originality and genius of the author.”²⁴ It is surprising, in view of these recurring challenges by practitioners to the generic boundaries imposed by literary theory, that a cross-fertilization of drama theory through narratology has hitherto remained nearly unthinkable.

Such a cross-fertilization, however, becomes essential in order to account for plays such as Brian Friel’s *Dancing at Lughnasa*,²⁵ which is literally narrated by the adult character of Michael, who in reminiscing about his childhood (the subject of the play) becomes the focalizer of the plot.²⁶ Brian Friel’s play, in fact, is but an extreme example of the type of structuring of plot and dialogue, often amplified

through the didascalial focalization of the presentation, that is common to all drama. This is most obviously the case with so-called “locative” didascalial, i.e. didascalial that describe locations and characters from a specific physical point of view, which is normally identified with the seat of the “ideal spectator” the play is designed for in the author’s mind. Seymour Chatman convincingly argues that there is always a “someone—person or presence— actually telling the story to an audience, no matter how minimally evoked his [sic] voice or the audience’s listening ear.”²⁷

What Friel’s play highlights is that one of the most fundamental differences between novel and play lies in the obvious but important fact that whereas in the former, the plot is communicated through narration, the play in performance *displays* rather than narrates. What we refer to as the “narrative world” in the novel thus becomes the “displayed world” of the playtext and performance.²⁸ Even if the didascalial include narrative elements and the dialogue of a play like *Dancing at Lughnasa* may contain a distinct narrative voice, identified with a specific character, importantly this voice is displayed alongside the voices of the other characters and is thus itself a performance.

Analogous to the narrator in a novel, then, plays contain a narrative presence that, since dramatic action is not narrated but displayed, is more appropriately referred to as the playtext’s *displaying agent*. This displaying agent displays the dialogue as its object. It is partly “extra-textual” in that it is the agent responsible for the ordering of the plot and the privileging of certain parts of the play over others in a way that amounts to a guiding of the reader’s and future audience’s understanding of the play’s meaning. It is also partly textualized in the elements that can be subsumed under the broad term *didascalial*: the non-spoken parts of the text—including title(s), list of characters, act and scene divisions, speech headings, typographical features, etc., that guide the reader in a more immediately perceptible and tangible manner. The displaying agent is hence a prescriptive, narrative, and, importantly, commentatorial presence in the playtext whose aim is to provide the reader with a reading strategy. Humorous didascalial like Ionesco’s setting of the scene in *The Bald Prima Donna* are thus analogous to a humorous narrative voice that qualifies the narrative for the benefit of the reader in that they indicate the mood in which the dialogue is to be read.

The displaying agent, just like the novelistic narrator, is distinct from the playtext’s implied author, who “must be seen as a construct inferred and assembled by the reader from all the components of the text,”²⁹ and who, in turn, is distinct from the “real,” historical author. The importance of this distinction becomes clear if we consider a play like David Mamet’s *Oleanna*,³⁰ whose displaying agent seems outrageously sexist, but whose implied author appears to present the play as a critique of extremist political correctness. The play may therefore be said to be *about* sexism rather than simply sexist. It is the tension between displaying agent

and implied author that led to the strikingly divergent audience reactions, animated debates and numerous walk-outs which characterized the opening productions in New York (1992) and London (1993).

As in a novel, where the narrator's voice and presence, whether omniscient or subjective, is an intrinsic part of the narration, the displaying agent, most obviously when incarnated in a character like Michael in *Dancing at Lughnasa*, is an intrinsic part of the play. Didascalia, even if reduced to mere speech prefixes, are thus revealed to be *an integral component of the dramatic text* because they are a part of the structuring instance responsible for the dialogue itself. Another way of putting this is to say, with Antony Hammond, that "the entire script of a play is a series of stage-directions, the great majority of which tell the actors what gestures to make with their vocal cords."³¹ The dichotomy of instructions to the actors/readers vs. speech is thus undermined by the fact that such instructions are an intrinsic structuring part of dramatic speech.

Reading Text vs. Acting Text: Issues of Authorship, Authority and Reception

One probable reason for the widespread reluctance to approach the playtext with the tools of narratology lies in the fact that whereas narrative theory assumes, for the traditional novel, a single real-life author behind the constructs of the implied author and narrator,³² the authorship question is particularly complex in the theatre. In spite of its ultimately interdependent components, the dramatic text is divided into at least two voices of different "authority" and possibly also authorship that are responsible for the didascalia and dialogue respectively. This becomes particularly evident if we look at the medieval European dramatic manuscripts that are the ancestors, both in structure and layout, of the modern printed playtext. "In early vernacular drama," Linda McJannet has found, "the distinction between dialogue and stage directions is partly linguistic: the directions appear in Latin, the dialogue in the vernacular. The different voices are assigned different tongues."³³ With these different languages comes a difference in authority: whereas the instructions for staging are written in the authoritative, learned language of the medieval Church and administration, the vernacular used for dialogue implies greater accessibility but also lesser authority in a striking reversal of Ingarden's ranking of *Haupttext* and *Nebentext*. The didascalia's distinct voice and textual status in the medieval dramatic manuscript are also generally signaled by their marginal disposition on the page and the fact that they are written literally by and in a different hand: because these "rubrics" were either written or at least underlined in red ink, a specialized scribe was responsible for their insertion in the manuscript,³⁴ normally in an Italian hand as opposed to the secretary hand in which the dialogue is written.³⁵

Laure Bourqknecht furthermore provides evidence that shows that over time and as the result of theatrical performances, medieval dramatic texts underwent

revisions that resulted in the amplification of their “didascalie apparatus.”³⁶ This medieval practice is a precursor of the self-collaborations of early modern dramatists like John Webster and Ben Jonson and later playwrights from Victor Hugo to Samuel Beckett, who are all known for having paid particular attention to their didascalia in their revision of their own plays for print publication.³⁷ It also anticipates the types of theatrical and editorial collaborations, both synchronic and diachronic, that are typical of the relationship between the playwright, the text, the performers, and the scribe(s), bookmaker(s), editor(s) and printer(s) responsible for the actual wording of the amplified or modified didascalia we are familiar with from editions of Shakespeare’s plays, whether they be their earliest printed texts, subsequent “performance editions,” or modern scholarly editions. Margaret Jane Kidnie sums up the current scholarly view of theatre practice in early modern playhouses when she writes that

it seems safe to assume that not only the printing-houses but also playwrights and actors treated at least one element of the *nebenschrift* [sic]—the stage directions—differently: dialogue was usually committed to paper, while stage directions frequently seem to have been oral texts, either conveyed to the actors by the playwright verbally or sorted out in a collaborative rehearsal space.³⁸

When such oral didascalia are integrated into the printed playtext, they are both prescriptive, being a relic of an oral instruction to the performers, and descriptive, as a post-performance text written down for the benefit of future readers and performers, for whom they may become prescriptive once more. The tentative line drawn by scholars working on early modern drama between “theatrical” stage directions (referring to theatrical structure and equipment, hence presumably written by a book-keeper) and “fictional” ones (referring to dramatic fiction, hence presumably written by the dramatist) breaks down in this situation.³⁹ For here the same didascalia, which may be authored by dramatist or performers or book-maker or editor or all of these and others in collaboration, may be perceived as technical or narrative by its different addressees depending on the context and purpose of their reading. It is furthermore obvious that attempts to identify didascalia as an instance of particularly authorial and authoritative discourse because, supposedly, the author’s voice speaks directly through them in an imperative mode, are inadequate in the collaborative space of the theatre.⁴⁰

It becomes clear from this situation, in which a multiplicity of authorial instances collaborate in the production—whether textual or theatrical—of a playtext, that the simple model of communication adequate for the novel is insufficient for the playtext with its distinct groups of addressees and its double function as both a reading and an acting text. I therefore think it essential to insist on a distinction

between different *levels* of reading and authorship. In the first instance, analogous to the novel, one or more playwrights compose the playtext for the benefit of an implied reader who may or may not be a member of the play's future production team. For the reader who is not thinking of displaying the playtext in the future, the didascalia are descriptive of a "virtual" performance of the play;⁴¹ they are "a part of the play's fictive discourse" and have the same textual status as the dialogue.⁴² It is in this context that, as Jean-Marie Thomasseau points out, it is essential that the didascalia be given full literary status,⁴³ and it is in this context that they ought to remain unaltered by editors or critics or that such alterations be accompanied by a critical editorial apparatus outlining the reasons for the change. All too often, even in scholarly editions, editorial changes to the didascalia are "silent." Instead of supplementing the supposedly insufficient didascalia of early modern (and later) playtexts with editorial didascalia and by thus changing the displaying agent changing the meaning of the dialogue which is its object, "editors might instead acknowledge and embrace radical uncertainty, offering readers historicized understandings of both theatrical conventions and vagaries of performance with which to develop independent, even idiosyncratic interpretations of staging."⁴⁴ It is up to the individual reader to make sense of the playtext's didascalia as part of the literary text while being aware of its potential for a translation into theatrical performance.

For the "theatrical" reader, on the other hand, the member of the play's future production team, the situation is different. This reader is preparing to become one of the (dis)players of the dramatic text, and as such, this reader inevitably becomes involved in collaborating with the playwright(s) and the other (dis)players in adjusting the displaying agent of the playtext to the context of the particular production. This happens whether the playwright(s) be alive and willing to participate in the collaboration or not, in which case the collaboration takes place between the production team and the playtext. The dramatic text cannot be performed without this collaboration or negotiation, which normally centers on an adjustment of the displaying agent. This collaboratively authored displaying agent of the production constitutes a critical commentary, a metatext that is produced simultaneously with the playtext in performance and that, analogous to the didascalia in the playtext, creates a framework for interpretation that guides the audience's appreciation of the performance. The communicative situation in the theatre is thus, in Michael Issacharoff's words, "'stereophonic,' since it has two channels—that of the dramatist and that of the players."⁴⁵ Humorous didascalia *à la* Ionesco that are "unperformable" can nevertheless be "faithfully" translated into a humorous displaying agent that sets the mood for the production, or they may be discarded as irrelevant for the context of a particular production.⁴⁶

The transposition of the playtext into a performance leads to the creation of a variety of texts: the script, the promptbook, the *mise-en-scène*, the performance

text. The adapted displaying agent of a production is the oral text of the script, which is shared by performers, director, designers and technicians. A written, abbreviated version of the script which bears witness to the literal rewriting that is part of the production process is set down in the production's promptbook.⁴⁷ The performance of the collaboratively authored script, on the other hand, is the *mise-en-scène*, which is defined by Patrice Pavis as "the bringing together or confrontation, in a given space and time, of different signifying systems, for an audience" and is, he insists, "not obliged to follow stage directions."⁴⁸ In the *mise-en-scène*, the dichotomy of text vs. performance is invalidated because in it, text is performed and the performance is textualized and "read" by its audience. Sign language productions, in which language is literally inscribed by and on the body, are extreme examples of theatre that make it particularly obvious that text is performance and performance is text. Peter Novak explains that in American Sign Language, which was used for a production of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* in Philadelphia in 2000, "there is no 'disembodied' text or 'voice' . . . ; rather, discourse is intimately connected to the presence of a signer—an individual body within a specific cultural, ideological, and linguistic community."⁴⁹ As a result, it is no longer possible to separate text from performance.

The textualization of performance becomes literal once it is recorded on film or video, turning the ephemeral performance into a stable performance text. S. E. Gontarski's account of Samuel Beckett's revision of *Quad* provides an excellent example of how such a performance text can itself become an authorially validated playtext:

Beckett's final version of the work, the production for German television, broadcast on 8 October 1981, is called *Quadrat I & II*, a title that suggests at least two acts, if not two plays. Near the end of the taping, Beckett created what amounted to an unplanned second act for the play. When he saw the color production of *Quad* rebroadcast on a black and white monitor, he decided instantly to create *Quad II*. Beckett's printed text (in any language) was, however, never revised to acknowledge this remarkable revision of the work's fundamental structure. No printed version of the play bears the title of the production, and so no accurate version, one that includes Beckett's revisions, exists in print. Beckett's own videotaped German production, then, remains the only 'final' text for *Quad*.⁵⁰

The displaying agent of a production, which can thus be partly textualized both in the production's promptbook and in a recording of a particular performance on film or video may, within the theatrical space, furthermore take on additional written forms that exceed and complement the *mise-en-scène*. In the modern theatre, poster, program, and possibly even reviews are part of the production's displaying

agent and partly take the place of the printed playtext's didascalia in guiding the audience (rather than the readers) in their appreciation of the production.⁵¹ The various components of the displaying agent thus direct the *mise-en-scène* at an implied audience which is inevitably distinct from the implied reader of the playtext (even if a real-life reader may also be a real-life audience member).

This already complex situation, in which a reading of the playtext by a production team leads to their assimilation of the playtext and the adaptation of its displaying agent to the specific context of the production, is complicated further if, as is very frequently the case, the production of the playtext with its adapted displaying agent is subsequently transformed into a new printed text. Such performance editions "tend to offer the plays as collaborative efforts, associated with and created by both author and theatrical companies."⁵² They are descriptive of the *mise-en-scène* they are based on at the same time as they may be considered as partly prescriptive by future production teams. This is typically the case for the early modern playtexts I mentioned above, which have led to much meticulous work by editors who have either tried "to amplify the directions of [the] original texts" or to detect an authorial voice in them—an endeavour which Antony Hammond dismisses as "splitting hairs."⁵³ The same is typical of modern-day printed playtexts: they often exist in substantially different versions that have been revised over a number of years and following a number of productions.⁵⁴

Such different printed versions are not only the obvious result of the dramatist's self-collaboration in the process of textual revision but bear witness to the often conflicting authorial voices of playwright(s) and production team. Thus Ionesco, in the 1954 Gallimard edition of *La Cantatrice chauve*,⁵⁵ acknowledges the multiple authorship of his text in his inclusion of the names of the actors who premiered the play in the list of characters (a practice we find as early as, for instance, in a Jacobean Quarto text of *The Duchess of Malfi*), which is followed by details about the production's date, venue, and director. This admission of multiple theatrical authorship becomes a source of textual tensions when, within the playtext, Ionesco adds possibly tongue-in-cheek footnotes to the playtext (both didascalia and dialogue) that can themselves be seen as a type of didascalia in which he describes the alternative texts that are the result of the theatrical collaboration. On one occasion, the playwright's objection to the alternative text that he nevertheless chooses to include in this printed version is even made explicit when he remarks that a word was changed in production "in spite of the very keen opposition of the author."⁵⁶ On another occasion, Ionesco uses a humorous footnote to record a change to the didascalia that he himself apparently thought of as a result of the production: "In the performance certain exchanges in this last scene were omitted or interchanged. On the other hand, the final return to the beginning—so to say – was always performed with the Smiths, the author having had the bright idea of substituting the Martins to the Smiths only after the hundredth performance."⁵⁷

The printed playtext thus emerges as a potentially layered text whose authorship must be accounted for through the model of "collaboration analysis," one of whose recent proponents, Robert L. Carringer, explains:

Collaboration analysis has two phases. The first entails the temporary suspension of single-author primacy . . . to appraise constituent claims to a text's authorship. In the second phase, the primary author is reinscribed within what is now established as an institutional context of authorship. The result is a more judicious understanding of authorial achievement that ultimately enhances, not diminishes, the primary author.⁵⁸

The printed playtext, even if it is the result of theatrical and/or editorial collaboration, is thus firmly attributed to its "primary author" and hence has an authorial status that is distinct from that of the performed play, in which authorship is *shared* between the playwright and the production team. The litigious Arthur Miller and Samuel Beckett (see note 17) or Eugène Ionesco, who insisted that his "stage directions are to be respected no less than the dialogue,"⁵⁹ can only be justified in insisting on the didascalia's and dialogue's integral transmission in the written, printed playtext. It is only as a literary text aimed at an implicit reader who is *not* a prospective producer of the dramatic text that this text can claim to be "closed."

By virtue of the playtext's performable nature, however, insofar as its implicit reader is potentially a prospective (dis)player, the dramatic text remains open to interpretation, negotiation, and collaboration and thus resists closure. This is true of all productions but is particularly obvious in the case of contemporary productions of classical plays. In a production of a Shakespearean playtext, for example, today's production team, usually under the guidance of its director, must negotiate with the playtext across a vast historical and cultural, sometimes also geographical and linguistic, divide. Since, as William B. Worthen points out, "[s]tage performance not only takes place in the present, but can only speak in the idiom of the present," it is the "modern director's task . . . to make the play speak in a theatre and a world unimagined by the play's author."⁶⁰ A substantial modification of the displaying agent, potentially involving some part of the dialogue itself, adapting the playtext to the context within which it will be performed, is inevitable and entirely legitimate in this situation. Notions of "faithfulness" to the "dramatic intent" of the playwright who "must abandon a script to production"⁶¹ become evidently absurd if a production is considered as the collaborative re-writing of the playtext's displaying agent to suit it to the context of the production and if the displaying agent, analogous to the didascalia, is understood as a metatext that stands in a commentatorial and possibly critical relation to the playtext as a whole.⁶²

“A SUPER MACRO SLAM ZOOM”: Didascalia in a Modern Performance Edition

It is only through an awareness of the different communicative levels of the theatre or cinema and of the complex authorship behind the dramatic text that collaborative works such as Baz Luhrmann and Craig Pearce’s screenplay *William Shakespeare’s Romeo + Juliet* can be accounted for.⁶³ I will close with a discussion of this book to demonstrate that the nature of texts such as this requires a more flexible definition and understanding of didascalia than that hitherto theorized by bibliographers, theatre semioticians and literary critics in their separate fields. The screenplay’s very title highlights the collaborative authors’ negotiation with Shakespeare’s playtext, while its invocation of Shakespeare (as well as its substitution of the mathematical “+” for “and”) paradoxically signifies the screenplay’s challenge to Shakespeare’s authority. The bipartite volume begins with the Luhrmann/Pearce screenplay in easy-to-read typography that is generously spread over the first 162 pages of the book. The second part, consisting of the last 146 pages, contains the Shakespearean playtext in small type, followed by an even smaller-type apparatus of “Notes to ‘*Romeo and Juliet*.’” The layout thus literalizes the superimposition of the modern negotiated text on the early modern text while clearly establishing the priority of the screenplay over the playtext.

The text of this collaborative screenplay, whose implied reader, as in all traditional performance editions, is someone familiar with the production the text is based on, is composed overwhelmingly of quasi-narrative didascalia that recontextualize the early modern playtext’s dialogue for an audience and reading public of the turn of the millennium. The Shakespearean dialogue is, in fact, drastically cut in the screenplay. Rather than constituting the core of the screenplay and film, the Shakespearean dialogue is “cited” by the displaying agent, so that the modern production, as William B. Worthen points out, is presented “not as a performance of the text and not as a translation of the work but as an iteration of the work, an iteration that necessarily invokes and displaces a textual ‘origin’ by performing the text in a specific citational environment—the verbal, visual, gestural, and behavioral dynamics of youth culture, of MTV.”⁶⁴ The dialogue is not “updated” in the sense of being replaced by a more modern idiom (as happens in *West Side Story*). Instead, the film’s and screenplay’s displaying agents have frequently changed its *meaning* by recontextualizing it. Most famously, the word “sword” is made to refer to a 9mm gun in a didascalia that is typical of the screenplay’s attempt to recapture in the typography and choice of words some of the violence and “cool” of the film:

1000

1001 MUSIC STING; A SUPER MACRO SLAM ZOOM along the barrel of

1002 Benvolio’s gun; the engraved gun type reads:

1003 “*Sword 9mm series*”

CUT TO: Benvolio. He screams in desperation:

BENVOLIO

Put up your swords!⁶⁵

Notions of “faithfulness” and dismissive attitudes towards didascalía because of their multiple authorship are unable to account for such an extract, and it would be futile to seek for different levels of “authority” in this text or to try to dismiss its didascalía as a mere side text with little or no bearing on the meaning of the dialogue. We are closer to a real understanding of this intriguing volume if we accept its didascalía as the commentatorial metatext that complements and provides an interpretative framework for both film and screenplay in the stereophonic medium of drama. They are the collaboratively authored displaying agent of the production that is here textualised both as a performance text and the printed equivalent of the promptbook, the screenplay as a performance edition.

Notes

1. Following Barbara Hodgdon, I use the term “playtext” throughout “both to convey some sense of [the dramatic text’s] indeterminacy and to differentiate [it] from other, more determinate, textual categories.” *The End Crowns All: Closure and Contradiction in Shakespeare’s History* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1991) 20.

My thanks to David Hillman and M.J. Kidnie for their astute and thought-provoking comments on earlier drafts of this essay, to Richard J. Watts for pointing me in the right direction many years ago, to Felicity Poulter for doing so more recently, and to the SNSF for the Fellowship that funded this research.

2. See, in particular, the typologies of Michael Issacharoff, *Discourse as Performance* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1989); and Elaine Aston and George Savona’s subsequent categorisation of 57 types of stage directions according to their function in *Theatre as Sign-System: A Semiotics of Text and Performance* (London: Routledge, 1991).

3. Tadeusz Rózewicz, *Reading the Apocalypse in Bed: Selected Plays and Short Pieces*, trans. Adam Czerniawski, Barbra Plebanek, and Tony Howard (London: Marion Boyars, 1998) 40-41.

4. Thierry Gallèpe, *Didascalies: Les mots de la mise-en-scène* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1997) 72 (my translation).

5. Issacharoff 24.

6. Stern notes that in early modern actors’ parts, which are relatively bare of external stage directions, directions to the actors are contained within the layout and the content of the text: “The transformation from prose to verse marks a change in the pace and tempo of the scene, but it is also an actor’s stage direction, visually obvious from the arrangement of speeches on the part. . . . Other acting directions can also be seen in actors’ parts—for instance, in the exchange between the terms ‘you’ and ‘thou’, formal and informal modes of address that direct the actor as to the nature of the relationship being explored on stage.” *Rehearsal from Shakespeare to Sheridan* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000) 65. For

an analysis of the playtext's typographical layout and its punctuation as part of its stage directions, see also Gallèpe 82-92.

7. Laure Bourgknecht, "Didascalies: Du mode d'emploi à la poésie: Parcours dans le théâtre français du moyen âge à nos jours," diss., U of Fribourg, 1995, 5.

8. *The Complete Plays of Bernard Shaw* (London: Odhams Press, 1937) 123.

9. Roman Ingarden, *The Literary Work of Art: An Investigation on the Borderlines of Ontology, Logic, and Theory of Literature. With an Appendix on the Functions of Language in the Theater*, trans. George G. Grabowicz (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1973) 209.

10. See Jacob Steiner's discussion of the tenth-century *Ordo ad visitandum sepulchrum* of Metz: "The smallest part of the entire text of this Ordo of Metz consists of words that are spoken or sung. More than twice as great a part of the text is nothing but a most exact description of the plot into which the [spoken] word is embedded, i.e., in modern terminology, a stage direction." *Die Bühnenanweisung* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1969) 17 (my translation).

11. Types of experimental theatre in which the written text emerges from performance and does not precede it (as in devised pieces and performance art), are outside the scope of this essay and deserve separate consideration.

12. *Collected Shorter Plays of Samuel Beckett* (London: Faber and Faber, 1984).

13. Brecht's commentaries are collected in *Schriften zum Theater 3: Anmerkungen zu Stücken und Aufführungen 1918-1956*. Bertolt Brecht: Gesammelte Werke in 20 Bänden, vol. 17 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1964).

14. Eugène Ionesco, *Plays: The Lesson, The Chairs, The Bald Prima Donna, Jacques or Obedience*, vol. 1, trans. Donald Watson (London: John Calder, 1958) 85-6.

15. See also Robert Shore's review of the production, "Morally Magnetic," *Times Literary Supplement* 20 July 2001: 21.

16. For details about this controversy, see Gerald Rabkin, "Is there a Text on This Stage? Theatre / Authorship / Interpretation" *Performing Arts Journal* 25 (1985): 142-59; Patricia Suchy "When Words Collide: The Stage Direction as Utterance," *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* 6.1 (1991): 69-82; and Marvin Carlson "The Status of the Stage Direction," *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 24.2 (1991): 37-48.

17. Ingarden 377.

18. George Bernard Shaw, "Preface: Mainly About Myself," *Plays Unpleasant* (London: Penguin, 1946) xx.

19. Qtd. in E. A. Levenson, "Shaw's Stage Directions," *Reading Plays: Interpretation and Reception*, ed. Hanna Scolnicov and Peter Holland (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991) 212.

20. Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1961); and Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1978).

21. Suchy 80.

22. Edward Stokes, *The Novels of Henry Green* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1959) 21.

23. Terry Southern, "The Art of Fiction XXII: Henry Green," *Paris Review* 5.19 (1958): 67.

24. Robertson, qtd. in Erika Meier, *Realism and Reality: The Function of the Stage Directions in the New Drama from Thomas William Robertson to George Bernard Shaw* (Winterthur: Ziegler & Co., 1967) 17; and Shaw, "Preface" xix.

25. Brian Friel, *Dancing At Lughnasa* (London: Faber, 1990).

26. The terms "focalizer" and "focalization" are current in narratology and, following Gérard Genette, stand for the way the story in a text is presented "through the mediation of some 'prism,' 'perspective,' angle of vision,' verbalized by the narrator though not necessarily his." Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (London: Routledge, 1983) 71.

27. Chatman 33-34.

28. See Richard J. Watts for a distinction between the *fictional world* (the world implied by the narrative) and the *narrative world*, which is a subsection of the fictional world that contains the elements of the fictional world explicitly presented by the narrator. *The Pragmalinguistic Analysis of Narrative Texts: Narrative Co-operation in Charles Dickens's Hard Times* (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1981) 60-77.

29. Rimmon-Kenan 87.

30. David Mamet, *Oleanna* (London: Methuen and Royal Court Theatre, 1993).

31. Antony Hammond, "Encounters of the Third Kind in Stage-Directions in Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama," *Studies in Philology* 34 (1992): 73.

32. The automatic assumption of single authorship for fictional (and critical) texts is currently under attack. Recently, *PMLA* dedicated the "theories and methodologies" section of its March 2001 issue to collaborative authorship. In particular, Holly A. Laird, "'A Hand Spills from the Book's Threshold': Coauthorship's Readers," *PMLA* 116 (2001): 344-53, pays attention to the ways in which texts that have traditionally been seen as single-authored are in fact the result of a "multiple authorship" as a result of a collaboration between the author and her or his editor. In her discussion of Jack Stillinger, Laird also mentions Wordsworth's "self-collaboration" in his revision of the *Prelude*. This is a concept that has particular relevance in the theatre, where, as we will see, self-collaboration (or revision) and collaboration with a number of different theatre companies over a period of time is typical of the working methods of many playwrights.

33. Linda McJannet, *The Voice of Elizabethan Stage Directions: The Evolution of a Theatrical Code* (London: Associated UP, 1999) 35.

34. Bourgknecht 10.

35. McJannet 42.

36. Bourgknecht 18 (my translation).

37. The revised didascalia of all the playwrights mentioned here have been the object of critical studies. For Webster, see Hammond; for Jonson, see Peter M. Wright, "Jonson's Revision of the Stage Directions for the 1616 Folio Works," *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* 5 (1991): 257-85; for Hugo, see Jean-Marie Thomasseau, "Pour une analyse du para-texte théâtral: Quelques éléments du para-texte hugolien," *Littérature* 53 (1984): 79-103; and for Beckett, see S. E. Gontarski, "Revising Himself: Performances as Text in Samuel Beckett's Theatre," *Journal of Modern Literature* 22.1 (1998): 131-55.

38. Margaret Jane Kidnie, "Text, Performance, and the Editors: Staging in Shakespeare's Drama," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 51.4 (2000): 461; see also Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor, *William Shakespeare: A Textual Companion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987) 2.

39. See Alan C. Dessen's discussion of Richard Hosley's terminology in *Elizabethan Stage Conventions and Modern Interpreters* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1984) 27-28. The distinction is an important one, but it is, I would like to suggest, a distinction between extremes on a continuum and should not be used uncritically to determine the authorship of specific didascalia. See, in particular, William B. Long's cogent challenge of the identification of "technical" or "theatrical" stage directions with the authorship of a book-maker rather than the dramatist in "Stage-Directions: A Misinterpreted Factor in Determining Textual Provenance," *Text* 2 (1985): 121-37.

40. Jean-Marie Thomasseau, for instance, declares that "the para-text [his preferred term for didascalia] is really one of the rare types of 'literary' writing where one may be almost certain that the 'I' of the author – which, however, never appears – is no other [than that of the author]" (83, my translation). See also Issacharoff 17; and Dominique Maingueneau as quoted by Gallèpe 74.

41. Kidnie 465.

42. Suchy 78.

43. Thomasseau 101.

44. Kidnie 470.

45. Issacharoff 17-18.

46. See Patricia Suchy's important observation that humorous, absurd, or unperformable didascalia are "a part of the play's fictive discourse. As such, their very absurdity resists treatment as natural discourse, although the spirit or the tone of their absurdity may well enter into the fictive discourse of the stage" (78).

47. For the distinction between promptbook as a written text and script as its oral, and richer, equivalent, see my previous work on the textuality of performance in "Looking For Shakespeare: The Textuality of Performance," *The Limits of Textuality*, ed. Lukas Erne and Guillemette Bolens (Tübingen: Gunter Narr, 2000) 167. I am indebted to Richard Schechner, who, in "Drama, Script, Theatre and Performance," *Essays on Performance Theory, 1970-76* (New York: Drama Book Specialists, 1977) 85 and 91, describes the script as "the interior map of a particular production" which is "developed during rehearsals to suit a specific text."

48. Patrice Pavis, "From Text to Performance," *Performing Texts*, ed. Michael Issacharoff and Robin F. Jones (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1988) 86 and 89.

49. Peter Novak, "Shakespeare in the Fourth Dimension: *Twelfth Night* and American Sign Language," *Remaking Shakespeare: Performance Across Media, Genres, and Cultures*, ed. Pascale Aebischer, Edward J. Esche, and Nigel Wheale (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2003) 22.

50. Gontarski 142.

51. Marvin Carlson comments on the neglect of publicity, programs, and reviews by theatre semioticians and notes that even a minimal playbill "provides a certain orientation for the audiences, and unquestionably affects their reading." The example he gives of the production of *Sleuth*, in which the program provided deliberately false information to the audience, is an instance of how didascalia that contradict the dialogue can be adapted into the production's displaying agent. "Theatre Audiences

and the Reading of Performance," *Interpreting the Theatrical Past: Essays in the Historiography of Performance*, ed. Thomas Postlewait and Bruce A. McConachie (Iowa: U of Iowa P, 1989) 90.

52. Laurie E. Osborne, "Rethinking the Performance Editions: Theatrical and Textual Productions of Shakespeare," *Shakespeare, Theory, and Performance*, ed. James C. Bulman (London and New York: Routledge, 1996) 175.

53. Hammond 86 (he is reacting against a statement by Stanley Wells).

54. Kevin Jackson, "The Triumph of the Stage Direction," *The American Scholar* 68 (1999): 65, suggests that, in "quite a few contemporary playscripts you will find that the printed directions are less an indication of the playwright's ideal vision than a straightforward record of how the play was staged in its first or most profitable run." See also Marvin Carlson, who notes that "[p]ublication traditionally follows performance of plays, and thus stage directions are frequently not the author's suggestion of a virtual performance but a recording of a specific real performance at a certain historical moment, and the choices not those of the author but of actors and others" ("Stage Direction" 41).

55. Eugène Ionesco, *La Cantatrice chauve; suivi de La Leçon* (Paris: Gallimard, 1954).

56. Ionesco, *Cantatrice* 24 (my translation).

57. Ionesco, *Cantatrice* 80 (my translation).

58. Robert L. Carringer, "Collaboration and Concepts of Authorship," *PMLA* 116 (2001): 377-78.

59. Ionesco, qtd. in Manfred Pfister, *The Theory and Analysis of Drama*, trans. John Halliday (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988) 13.

60. *Shakespeare and the Authority of Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997) 60.

61. Jeane Luere and Sidney Berger, *The Theatre Team: Playwright, Producer, Director, Designers, and Actors* (London: Greenwood Press, 1998) xvii.

62. For a discussion of the difficulties of "faithfulness" in modern productions of the "classic" playtexts of Strindberg, see Egil Thörnqvist, whose article centers around the question "how can the didascalia of a brilliant dramatist defy the erosion of time?" In "Le didascalie di Strindberg in scena," *La Didascalia nella letteratura teatrale scandinava: Testo drammatico e sintesi scenica*, ed. Merete Kjølner Ritzu (Firenze: Bulzoni, 1987) 125 (my translation).

63. Baz Luhrmann and Craig Pearce, *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet* (London: Hodder, 1997).

64. William B. Worthen, "Drama, Performativity, and Performances," *PMLA* 113 (1998): 1104.

65. Luhrmann and Pearce 9.