

Meta-enunciative Properties of Dramatic Dialogue: A New View of Metatheatre and the Work of Sławomir Świontek

Jenn Stephenson

Self-referential play abounds in drama. Often, metatheatre offers to the audience delight: a bubble of joy rising out of a knowing pleasure, out of the recognition of parody, and out of the reverberating infinity of fun house mirrors. Layering levels of fiction, drama indulges in a bit of cleverness and a self-absorbed contemplation of aesthetic form. But equally often the pleasure afforded by metatheatrical awareness is met with and countered by apprehension as spectators cast a glance into the existential abyss. Here, the serious concern is no longer with layers of fiction but with layers of reality. Displaced by the metaphor of the *theatrum mundi*, the audience member becomes a character on the stage of the world vulnerable to the same fate as the characters they observe. This dichotomous nature of the experience of metatheatre felt between the actual-world event of the play and the play-like qualities of the actual world generates wonderful performance paradoxes and invites investigation into the what and how and why of the metatheatrical events that trigger them.

From the outset, metatheatrical criticism has been, for better or worse, widely dispersed and the precise nature of this paradoxical device little theorized. Lionel Abel, in his book, *Metatheatre: A New View of Dramatic Form* (1963), is credited with coining the term metatheatre. However, despite this pioneering move, Abel's interest lay not with metatheatre but rather primarily with tragedy and the setting up of metatheatre as a new genre calved in the early modern era to replace the ailing classical tragedy.¹ As a result, Abel's contribution to the field has been of slight theoretical weight apart from his lexical addition. Independent of Abel, self-reflexive qualities in the plays of Shakespeare in particular and Renaissance drama in general have attracted significant scholarly attention, beginning with studies of specific metatheatrical devices such as dumbshows, insets, frames and "extra-dramatic moments," but also extending beyond initial census-taking to considerations of the thematic implications of metatheatre with regard to individual plays.² In recent years, similar approaches have been applied to metatheatrical events in Greek and Roman classics and contemporary British plays.³ Yet, few attempts have been made

Jenn Stephenson is an Assistant Professor of Drama at Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario. She received her Ph.D. from the University of Toronto (2003). Her articles and reviews have been published in *Theatre Journal* and *Shakespeare Bulletin*. She is currently at work on a book-length study on metatheatricality and the creation and collapse of fictional worlds in the plays of Shakespeare and his contemporaries.

to posit a formal, theoretically-inflected poetics of metatheatre, spanning both genre and period, in parallel to those developed for metatheatre's non-dramatic cousin, postmodern fiction.⁴ The move to extrapolate general principles requires an answer to two basic questions: "What is the 'theatre' that forms the foundation of metatheatre?" and "What is the active nature of the 'meta-' that constitutes this reflexive gaze?" In the main, the only substantial critical work to broadly theorize the nature of self-reflexivity in theatre is *Drama, Metadrama, and Perception* (1986) by Richard Hornby.⁵ Hornby derives metadrama as a mode of non-mimetic criticism presenting a different method of relating art to life. This relation manifests in the reflection of the drama/culture complex in dramatic art: "This drama/culture complex is about reality not in the passive sense of merely reflecting it, but in the active sense of providing a vocabulary for describing it or a geometry for measuring it."⁶ It is the role of serious art (as opposed to conventional art) to call into question the artistic system by invoking this reflection in the plays themselves. Through this discussion, he does deal with most traditional instances of metatheatre like the play-within-a-play; however, the breadth of his basic definition of the thing reflected, posited in answer to the first question concerning what is "theatre" or "drama," leads Hornby to include theatrical reflections of non-theatrical or paratheatrical items like ceremonies-within and quotations from non-dramatic literature, which might be considered outside the scope of metatheatre proper, although not outside the scope of the drama/culture complex as he defines it. To this taxonomy of the varieties of the metadramatic, Hornby appends several single play analyses which delve deeper into the thematic motives of metadramatic intrusion and the effect on audience perception of the drama/culture complex.

An important complement to this small corpus of metatheatrical theory is the writing of Polish theatre scholar Sławomir Świontek (1942-2001) formerly of the University of Łódź. Building on what he perceives to be innate meta-enunciative properties of dramatic dialogue, Świontek answers the twofold question of the theatrical what and the metatheatrical how, applying quite a narrow initial definition to develop a surprisingly inclusive model for understanding metatheatrical events. He published this approach in *Dialog—Dramat—Metateatr: Z problemów teorii tekstu dramatycznego* (1990). A second edition was printed in 1999. Also, two French language articles on the subject appeared in the Polish journal *Zagadnienia Rodzajów Literackich*. The first, "La situation théâtrale inscrite dans le texte dramatique," precedes the book; however, the second, "Le dialogue dramatique et le metathéâtre," comes several years later and represents a précis of the book's central ideas.⁷ The purpose of this present article with its accompanying translation, then, is threefold: first, to introduce the main tenets of Świontek's metatheatrical theory to an English-speaking readership; second, to trace a genealogy of that theory, connecting it principally to a phenomenological view of aesthetic experience; and

finally, to work under that interpretive lens, extending and recasting Świontek's ideas to sketch the prospects for a new and comprehensive view of metatheatre.

Approaching the lived theatrical situation from the perspective of dramatic dialogue, Świontek observes that theatre has a unique structure concerning the paths of communication. In ordinary conversation, someone speaks to another. Likewise, in the world of a play, characters adopt the stance of ordinary conversation and speak to each other in imitation of actual-world dialogue. Their speech contains the signs of the dramatic situation, indicating the relation of the characters to each other, their attitudes, their conflicts and alliances, and also their relation to the fictional world they inhabit. But in addition to presenting qualities of oral dialogue, theatre also expresses qualities of written dialogue. Beyond effecting communication between characters in the fictional world, dramatic dialogue mimics the printed word in its reiterative function of communicating to someone who is not a participant in the dialogue, someone who is at a remove from the original situation of enunciation, that is, for the audience. As such, dramatic dialogue, encoded with textual signs, also inscribes the theatrical situation: "The signs make possible, to some extent the theatrical act as a presentation, by a real executor (actor) in the presence of a real addressee (spectator), of the fictional acts of communication between the characters in order to provoke a real act of communication across the actor-spectator (stage-house) axis."⁸ Thus, dialogue is, first, a communication "to" someone, that is, one character to another ensconced inside the fictional world of the play. In this respect, dramatic dialogue replicates ordinary dialogue. And second, dialogue is a communication "for" someone, that is, for the audience excluded from the situation of enunciation. Dialogue does work for the audience-eavesdropper as well as for the character-participant. Reaching beyond the world of the play, dramatic dialogue has this performative meta-enunciative purpose, not only to communicate about that play world but also to create that world with every word. Świontek envisions this dual function of dialogue as two communicative vectors forming perpendicular axes; one traversing the stage (stage-stage) and the other arcing past the proscenium (stage-house). With this conception of the basic theatrical situation in place, metatheatre occurs any time the secondary meta-enunciative axis is exposed, any time the audience becomes aware of this higher-order pragmatic function of dialogue. In the largest sense, any time they are reminded that this is a play and not a world. To summarize in Świontek's words:

In every case, metatheatre can be understood as the revelation of the meta-enunciative aspect as dialogic text in which the true addressee is situated outside the situation where one finds the participants in the dialogue. Consequently, dialogic utterance addressed to someone becomes simultaneously an utterance aimed at someone else who is its external addressee, that is, to

someone who finds himself outside the situation of enunciation. The meta-enunciative aspect is therefore a mark of each written dialogue. Metatheatricity appears when the two addresses (axes of communication) and two destinations of the utterances that constitute dialogue are revealed or thematized.⁹

Świontek's central structure of dramatic dialogue described as two perpendicular axes prioritizes the geography of theatre, both in terms of its dynamism and in terms of its immediacy. Joining the stage to the house and indicating an active, open exchange between the two zones, the dual pathways stand in contrast to the traditional boundary model where a unidirectionally-transparent "fourth wall" separates the world of the characters from that of the audience. For metatheatre under the boundary model, the wall is breached as characters step forward and perceive the watching audience. By contrast, the vector model activates metatheatre through a phenomenological shift in perceiving consciousness, whereby the hidden, or perhaps more accurately, willingly suspended vector (*pace* Coleridge) is made present to awareness. There is a change of flow, rather than an act of violence shattering the theatrical illusion. The distinction is significant as Świontek's model acknowledges the arbitrary perception of art as art and the role of the audience in establishing an aesthetic event through that perception. Spatial immediacy is the other geographic factor particular to Świontek's model, rooted in "the proper situation of the theatre where there is an identity between the time of execution and that of the reception in a space that assures direct contact between the actor/character and the spectators."¹⁰ It is this communicative synergy between the actors/characters and the audience to create the theatrical event that distinguishes theatre from other pure literary forms and marks the quality of those works being printed rather than performed and so being inscribed in the past which "makes the passage to here and now impossible."¹¹ Cast in other terms, metatheatre occurs precisely in this perceptual passage to here and now. For the audience, the revelation of the secondary meta-enunciative axis is what brings us "back to ourselves," back to an awareness that the play is just a play, an event in the actual world. I would argue that it is this particular fluid characteristic of identity in the spatial matrix between the actual "here" of reception and the fictional "not-here" of execution, that makes theatre so prone to self-reflexivity, more so than any other art form. For the audience in that shared space, executing the slip in perception from the fictional world to the actual world is effortless. Because the spectator is inescapably rooted in a physical body in the actual world, an embodied eye/I in Merleau-Ponty's terms,¹² even the simple act of breathing or fidgeting may rein perception back to the world of the play as an event. The fictional world, although attractive and provisionally persuasive as real, can never hold us for long. This strong tendency to spontaneous (and perhaps

profoundly ubiquitous) metatheatricality is perhaps at least one reason why the label postmodern drama has never been actively taken up.

Świontek uncovers the double axes of communication through the pairing of dialogue to someone and dialogue for someone and, remaining in close proximity to this originating formula, concentrates exclusively on the metatheatre triggered by the spoken word. Nevertheless, other stage elements also “speak,” performing the same dual function of presenting themselves as “ordinary” objects in the world (parallel to ordinary dialogue) along the stage-stage axis, while simultaneously delivering information about that world along the stage-house axis. So, whereas in its meta-enunciative aspect, dialogue behaves performatively, creating the fictional world while also creating the potential for the metatheatrical revelation of that performative work, the same applies to every other staged element subject to the same innately doubled theatrical situation. Visual elements—set, props, costumes and lighting, and also facial expression and gesture—likewise display the same performative duality in terms of their concurrent ostention of both the fictional world of the play and the actual situation of the performance event, although perhaps in a more oblique manner. Focusing on dialogue, Świontek exhibits a blind spot in this respect. The extension of his model from dialogue only to encompass all stage objects is a significant but seemingly straightforward move. To build his model of dramatic dialogue, Świontek borrowed from Czech theorist Ivo Osolsobě the notion of “Operation Meta” wherein speech by an actor/character is always already a quotation of the speech of the playwright in the form of “I¹ (the playwright) say that I² (character) say . . .”¹³ Subsequently, it is in another part of the same article by Osolsobě where the projected application to stage objects first arises. Osolsobě digresses from a discussion of iterating citation in dramatic dialogue to describe communicative duality as a kind of self-quotation as the object performs itself:

The theatre is truly such a transformation, an ongoing transformation, a transformation caught in the act [*prise en flagrant délit*]. From the moment that it is used by the theatre, an ordinary object is automatically transferred to the level of meta-language, is placed between inverted commas, it transforms itself into a meta-object, the reality into meta-reality, the chair into a meta-chair, . . . the original into a model.¹⁴

When accommodated by the theatrical situation, the actual object performs as a fictional object. Still using the dialogic framework of meta-language and quotation, Osolsobě looks at the same innate duality described by Świontek but from the opposite direction as it were, depending on how one understands the word “ordinary.” In the creation of staged drama, fictional worlds of drama are populated by actual-world objects that are transformed into fictional objects. Actual people

(actors) become fictional citizens (characters)—Kenneth Branagh becomes Hamlet. Actual chairs become fictional chairs—a prop chair becomes a throne in Elsinore. Actual lights become fictional lights—theatrical lighting fixtures become the sun in an artificially darkened theatre. Osolsobě names fictional objects “meta-objects” as they transcend their actual-world status as props and become provisionally actual again in the newly-created fictional world. It is this provisional actuality that is the bridge linking these two dualistic approaches. For Świontek, the “ordinary” is the provisionally ordinary dialogue inside the fictional world. This is the dialogue that behaves as an imitation of dialogue from the actual world. And for the character-participants in this conversation, the fictional world *is* their actual world. And so, the prefix “meta-” works in reverse, attached to the actual world of the audience. Applying the equivalent formulation of the two axes of dramatic dialogue to mute theatrical objects is awkward (and thus one sees why Świontek may not have pursued this line of inquiry): a chair is a chair to someone (the actor) and a chair for someone (the audience). Certainly, the communication achieved by a chair is not as direct as that of a character who speaks; nevertheless, the chair will perform. So instead we have a fictional chair (the chair to someone) which behaves as an “ordinary” chair in that fictional world and an actual chair, that is, the prop chair, understood in its performative meta-ostensive function as facilitating the creation of the fictional world and thus the theatrical event. Dialogue for someone is “actual dialogue” or what might be called “event dialogue”—it makes the event go; it structures the fictional world bringing it into being. Likewise, the actual chair is an event chair. It concurrently aids the audience’s comprehension of the fictional world and brings that world into being, triggering the perceptual transformation (in Osolsobě’s terms) that makes theatre happen. Ultimately, the important common ground between these two models, concerning the nature of the theatrical meta-, is that both identify a dual ontological nature in a single staged object, although which is the original and which is the citational comment is up for grabs.

This duality, seen to be innate in the theatrical situation, recurs in the work of Mikel Dufrenne (*The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*). For Dufrenne, the material of a painting, its paint and canvas, constitutes the work of art. It is a thing in the world indistinguishable from other things. However, the same object can also express a world, becoming a bowl of fruit on a table, for example. In this alternate performative mode, the painting becomes an aesthetic object: “The work of art is what is left of the aesthetic object when it is not perceived . . . it lives as an idea which has not been thought through and is set forth in signs, while waiting for a consciousness to come and animate it.”¹⁵ So, like Świontek’s perpendicular axes of dialogue and Osolsobě’s twinning of chair and meta-chair, Dufrenne’s two states—the work of art and the aesthetic object—coexist in the same space. They are both valid descriptors for the same object. How the object is interpreted depends on the perceptual situation of the person standing in front of the work; it oscillates

in potentiality between being a mundane object and an aesthetic object. The ability to create or activate the aesthetic object comes from the audience and not from the object. The object merely expresses a potential.¹⁶ Another phenomenological theorist, Bert O. States, also picks up on this dual characteristic of theatrical objects, examining the relationship between the actual and the fictional: “My purpose has been to suggest points at which the floor cracks open and we are startled by the upsurge of the real into the magic circle where the conventions of theatricality have assured us that the real has been subdued and transcended.”¹⁷ To illustrate these “upsurges of the real,” he selects as his basic example of theatrically-challenging elements the most extreme case of objects which possess a high degree of *en soi*—objects which obdurately remain themselves within the fictional theatrical context. Standing firm against their integration into the fictional world, objects with this proclivity resist the transposition to stage objects. States includes in the list of these stubbornly actual stage objects ticking clocks, animals, running water or live flame, and child actors.¹⁸ Any object or occurrence that is blatantly real fails to be sufficiently integrated into the fictional world and operates in such a way as to distract the audience from the reality effect, pointing up the fact that the spectacle witnessed is artificial. For States, these objects are a potent but unresolved curiosity. Under Świontek’s model, however, these iconic objects can be properly understood as metatheatrical. By refusing perceptual absorption into the fictional world, these objects reject their secondary meta- role in the creation of the fictional world and by doing so expose the secondary performative axis that ordinarily constructs that world. Working in the context of phenomenology, guiding the perceptual attitudes of the audience-subject confronted with an innately dual work of art, both States and Dufrenne consider the effects of shifting from one mode of perception to the other. Both consider the detached awareness that comes from metaphorically stepping back from engagement with the fictional properties of the art work into a cooler, more detached stance that perceives the process of its construction as art. But, remarkably, neither of them identifies this shift in perception as “metatheatre.” It falls to Świontek to connect the essential duality of art in general and theatre in particular to the self-aware exposure of that duality, and so propose a new definition of metatheatre.

In “*Le dialogue dramatique*,” Świontek presents a preliminary taxonomy of dramatic dialogue based on diverse strategies whereby the metatheatrical level is exposed, contrasting a camouflaged theatrical situation with a revealed theatrical situation. In the revealed theatrical situation, there is an overt indication that this is a play. This occurs directly via framing devices such as prologue or epilogue, where the statement of actuality resides outside the primary fictional world. Indirect revelation happens in the breaking of the fictional plane by commentary from within the fictional world, such as an aside or Brechtian song. The term “camouflaged” is a bit tricky when set up in opposition to “revealed,” since metatheatre under this model

is all about revelation; but it is actually quite apt. “Camouflaged” indicates that the stage-house axis is present, not rendered entirely invisible, but is somewhat muted or screened. The potential for metatheatrical exposure is latent in the text. In the camouflaged situation, metatheatre is activated by the delivery of information that is not useful or only a little bit useful to the characters. This redundant information is nevertheless indispensable for the audience-eavesdropper and so draws attention to the stage-house axis. For example, the description of preceding or non-presented events, or dramatic monologue giving information into the mental state of the hero, will count as metatheatre. We find exposition of this sort in the speech of the chorus in *Agamemnon* recounting the sacrifice of Iphigenia or in the opening dialogue of Ximena and her lady, Elvira, initiating the audience to Ximena’s love for Rodrigue (*Le Cid*). It is the incongruous awkwardness we feel when characters repeat what they already know for our invisible benefit that brings the secondary axis to the fore. Capturing these subtle metatheatrical moments, Świontek carves out significant new territory, opening up a large field of clearly metatheatrical events. Not usually thought of as metatheatre of the common theatre-about-theatre variety, events belonging to this second category clearly behave as metatheatre, creating self-reflexive moments where theatre as an event breaks through the fictional surface, moments where the audience has an opportunity to view the play as a constructed art object, and to see how the construction is accomplished. Going one small but important step further beyond metatheatre that arises from the camouflaged theatrical situation, Świontek hints that, since the dual nature of theatre is always present, the potential for metatheatre is always close to the surface:

All dramatic texts as notation of dialogue already contain the address of the addressee placed outside the notation so the situation of the theatre is inscribed here. It acts always to a degree as its own camouflage or as its own revelation. . . . Each performance must materialise the theatrical situation that is more or less hidden in the dramatic text.¹⁹

He suggests obliquely that theatre is always already metatheatrical and that this meta-level perspective is always available to the audience, waiting only for the willed shift in the phenomenological perspective of the audience-subject to activate it.²⁰ From this perspective, the activation of metatheatre is akin to the well-known ambiguous image showing either two mirrored faces or a wine glass. One needs only to adjust one’s perception to see either one or the other. Świontek does not say quite this, however. As the examples in his taxonomy illustrate, his metatheatre is still very much playwright-centred, where the stage-house axis is intentionally exposed through dialogic techniques bidding for attention. The audience is a receptive but junior partner, picking up metatheatrical cues embedded in the performance text.

In its most basic etymological definition, metatheatre is theatre about theatre. Among the major representatives of metatheatrical theory, Świontek is the only one to delve down to the foundations of that key word “theatre.” His breakdown of the theatrical situation into two core components—the essential property of the dual object and the revealing perception of the audience—sets him apart from other theorists, each of whom tends to approach theatre-about-theatre by describing a macroscopic view where theatre-within repeats large scale elements—such as the actor, the playwright, a rehearsal. In his *Dictionary of the Theatre*, Pavis offers four principal strands of metatheatre. Świontek is associated along with Osolobě with the third subentry: “Self-consciousness of Enunciation.”²¹ There it is noted that this strand is “still a hypothesis in the making . . . We can expect it to be developed, however, through research on performatives and on discourse.”²² Using the four quadrants of Pavis’s entry as a road map, I will explore the interrelations of these disparate approaches to show the comprehensive potential of Świontek’s dual-status metatheatrical approach in combination with the phenomenological extensions sketched above, and how this extended approach might reconfigure and ultimately subsume the other three models mentioned by Pavis.

The first of these is the standard theatre-within-theatre model represented by Lionel Abel. This is perhaps the most familiar mode of metatheatre. Here, a play is nested inside the play already in progress. Characters in the fictional world of the play assume roles, becoming themselves actors and subsequently second-order characters in the fictional world of the play-within. Formal plays-within also feature a doubled audience, with some characters arranged as spectators to this event, mirroring the actual-world audience-without. Play-within as a model of metatheatre, however, need not always reproduce a complete performance. The same effect can be achieved through informal plays-within, through characters who play roles or who direct the actions of others. Metatheatrical reiteration of this kind qualifies as what Świontek might see as a “camouflaged” revelation of the secondary axis since it is through this performative reiteration that the audience is reminded of the constructed nature of the original framing event. In this manner, the play-within exhibits both a fictional world: world^c—the murder of Gonzago in *Hamlet*—and the actual world in which that play was produced: world^b—the court at Elsinore. By doing so, it triggers the perceptual shift to the stage-house axis, inviting reflection on world^b as itself a fictional world rooted in the actual performance event of *Hamlet* in world^a—the world of the audience. Extending beyond the innate duality of dialogue or specific stage objects, the whole play in its combined aspects of both a world and an event is thus exposed as possessing a double phenomenological aspect.

Writing about Shakespeare’s transition from poet to playwright, James L. Calderwood constitutes Pavis’s second subentry and provides another example of metatheatre through the reiteration of camouflaged core features of the dramatic

event, thereby exposing its constructedness as art. Calderwood's primary thesis is that "dramatic art itself—its materials, its media of language and theatre, its generic forms and conventions, its relationship to truth and the social order—is a dominant Shakespearean theme, perhaps his most abiding subject."²³ Calderwood offers an analysis of several early plays as meditations on Shakespeare's initiation as a craftsman for the stage, as the plays' plots and the characters-within employ language to comment on playwriting concerns and the use of dramatic language. Effectively, this metadramatic reflection constitutes another kind of doubling, operating in a similar manner to theatre-within, drawing attention to theatrical elements by staging them within the fictional world. Given Calderwood's focus on the role of the playwright as a constructor of fictional worlds and of actual world play-events, the connection of construction technique to their revelation in audience perception is even more closely aligned than in Abel's character-as-actor-centred model.

Last, Pavis's fourth subentry, "Staging of the Theatrical Work of the Stagings" from its reiterative title clearly indicates another type of doubling of usually camouflaged structures and constitutes a third kind of theatre-within. In this model, what is doubled is not something typically part of the present performance situation, but which is nevertheless part of the theatrical situation forming the creative substructures of the event. The work of Antoine Vitez and also that of the Living Theatre doubles the process of dramatic production, making visible rehearsal, warm-ups, costuming etc., and thereby commenting through performance on those hidden elements: "The staging (*mise en scène*) presented to the audience should give not only an account of the text to be staged, but also of the attitude and modality of its creators with respect to the text and acting."²⁴ Ultimately, each of these three strands chooses a different aspect of the theatrical situation—the performance event, playwriting, and production practice—which is fictionally doubled, creating in effect an array of different modes of the same basic relationship of theatre-within-theatre (what Świontek calls TT). These three vary in terms of the proximate status of the thing doubled to the immediate lived experience of the theatrical event; however, the doubling strategy is the same. Whereas Abel, Calderwood, and Vitez, as representatives of these three modes of theatre-within, insert theatre into theatre creating metatheatre through fictional doubles, Świontek, on the other hand, says theatre is always already doubled; it merely needs to be perceived to be activated as metatheatre. Theatre-within, then, is one device among many to expose to view the performative stage-house axis, accomplished in this case by revealing the first doubling through the addition of a second doubling. The layered doubling points to the innately doubled situation.

Developing a taxonomy based on Świontek's theoretical frame promises to be widely inclusive, incorporating many events that match the criteria for metatheatricality, addressing in its activation of a postmodern awareness of

the aesthetic process events that previously passed unnoticed. This extended taxonomy would account for different strategies employed for exposing the essential doubleness at the core. Some of these strategies are already apparent in Świontek's core outline, while others wait to be uncovered. The most prevalent of these strategies, theatre-within, exposes the actual-world situation of the fictional world through the dual action of nesting and reversing. The nesting of one theatrical element into the performed theatrical situation reverses the attention of the audience, pulling awareness "out" of the fictional world back to the perspective that the event we are witnessing is a play with all its attendant elements. To further define this strategic approach, it might be useful to distinguish between nested elements that appear in the performance, originating in the fictional world, from those that support the performance event from the outside, residing in the actual world. For example, Abel's theatre-within repeats the actor-character transformation which lives inside the play-event/fictional world, but the re-enactment of rehearsals or warm-ups are elements of the actual-world event that stand outside and behind the event. Along those lines, the inclusion of event-elements, like rehearsals, but also like the mentioning of the play's title by a character-within, would count as metatheatrical in the nesting-reversing mode. Beyond the nesting of event-objects of plays in fictional worlds, one might also look to the nesting of event properties—properties which are unique to plays or to works of art in general but which are inconsistent with the fictional world's illusion of being like life. Prophecies in plays work this way. Prophecies uttered in fictional worlds possess an uncommon power granted by the teleologically constructed nature of plays as works of art. Unlike life, the action of the play is predetermined, and so a prophecy of that action has behind it the force of fate/God here embodied by the playwright. Calderwood's metadramas are of this kind, displaying the constructedness of plays as actual-world events against the provisionally life-like fictional world. The intrusion of teleology exposes the meta-enunciative axis.

A second metatheatrical strategy which focuses on the basic duality of the theatrical situation might be termed citation. Where nesting as a metatheatrical strategy creates doubles, inserting theatrical elements into the performance, citation involves just the mention of theatre either in general terms or in the quotation of its language. Świontek touches on this strategy under the intermediate category (neither revealed nor camouflaged) that he names "discoursivisation," including characters who talk about theatre, or who are actors but do not act, and playwrights who do not write.²⁵ (I am always surprised how many of these there are: Polonius in *Hamlet*, James Tyrone in *Long Day's Journey into Night*, Helena in *Look Back in Anger*.) Extending this category, citation applies to objects as well as people. Hamlet addresses the ghost of his father as "this fellow in the cellarage" (1.5.151), using "cellarage" as a theatrical metaphor to indicate under the ground. But in performance, the term would also indicate technically the area below the stage

where Hamlet stands, and so it resonates with metatheatrical duality. Framing devices also function as a kind of citation. However, depending on how the frame is constructed, it can slide from simple ostention of the play as play to wholly doubling the performance presenting a play-within. If the frame is established by a choral prologue, then it simply points to the play as a play by containing it. However, if the frame is established fictionally, as in *The Taming of the Shrew* or *The Real Inspector Hound*, then it begins to repeat theatrical elements and adopts rather a nesting-reversing strategy.

The obstinately actual objects mentioned earlier that pique States's curiosity might form the kernel of yet another metatheatrical strategy related to duality. Animals and children on the stage, actual fire or water, all project a resistant singularity. To my mind, these objects along with certain others not on States's list, notably corpses and celebrities, constitute a special case wherein metatheatre is triggered by failure of objects to be transposed successfully into the fictional world.²⁶ These are objects that do not fit peaceably into Świontek's model of perpendicular vectors of communication because they refuse to participate in the theatrical duality that is at the center of that relation, instead remaining adamantly singular. But it is just this refusal that fulfils the second part of his model, exposing the normative dual theatrical situation which they deny and inviting consideration of the process of theatrical creation regardless, and so in this backhanded way function as metatheatre.

These briefly sketched examples show, I hope, the scope and diversity of material that may eventually and appropriately find a home under Świontek's metatheatrical approach. Metatheatre, which is premised on a view of certain basic characteristics of what constitutes theatre and the secondary "meta-"exposure of those characteristics, opens up new areas for consideration as metatheatre, moving beyond taxonomy to investigate the effects of particular strategies, and to suggest reasons for the ubiquity and longevity of this self-reflexive device. A theory of what should perhaps be called metatheatricality, rather than metatheatre, in recognition of its concern with essential dynamic theatrical traits over simply-repeated theatre elements, has the potential by becoming better known and connecting with the recent literature on theatricality to rejuvenate discourse about self-reflexivity and the possibility of the postmodern in drama.²⁷

Notes

1. Lionel Abel, *Metatheatre: A New View of Dramatic Form* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1963). Posthumously, the original essays with a few additions were reprinted as *Tragedy and Metatheatre: Essays on Dramatic Form* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 2003) with an introduction by Martin Puchner. See my review in *Theatre Journal* 58 (March 2006) 165-166.

2. Dieter Mehl, "Forms and Functions of Play within a Play," *Renaissance Drama* 8 (1965): 41-61; François Laroque, ed., *The Show Within: Dramatic and Other Insets: English Renaissance Drama (1550-1642)*, 2 vols. (Montpelier: Paul Valéry UP, 1990); Doris Fenton, *The Extra Dramatic Moment*

in *Elizabethan Plays Before 1616* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1930). Studies which consider metatheatre from a thematic rather than taxonomic perspective include: Anne Righter, *Shakespeare and the Idea of the Play* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1964); James L. Calderwood, *Shakespearean Metadrama: The Argument of the Play in Titus Andronicus, Love's Labour's Lost, Romeo and Juliet, A Midsummer Night's Dream and Richard II* (Minneapolis: U of Minneapolis P, 1971); *Metadrama in Shakespeare's Henriad: Richard II to Henry V* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: U of California P, 1979); *To Be and Not to Be: Negation and Metadrama in Hamlet* (New York: Columbia UP, 1983).

3. Niall W. Slater, *Spectator Politics: Metatheatre and Performance in Aristophanes* (Philadelphia: U Pennsylvania P, 2002); Timothy J. Moore, *The Theatre of Plautus: Playing to the Audience* (Austin: U of Texas P, 1998); Mark Ringer, *Electra and the Empty Urn: Metatheatre and Role Playing in Sophocles* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1998); Nicole Boireau, *Drama on Drama: Dimensions of Theatricality on the Contemporary British Stage* (London: Macmillan, 1997).

4. Linda Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox* (Waterloo, Ont: Wilfrid Laurier UP, 1980) and also by the same author *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (New York and London: Routledge, 1988); Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (New York: Methuen, 1987); Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (New York: Methuen, 1984).

5. Richard Hornby, *Drama, Metadrama and Perception* (Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 1986).

6. 22.

7. Sławomir Świontek, *Dialog—Dramat—Metateatr: Z problemów teorii tekstu dramatycznego* (Warsaw: Errata, 1999). "La situation théâtrale inscrite dans le texte dramatique," *Zagadnienia Rodzajów Literackich* 29.2 (1986): 19-29. "Le dialogue dramatique et le metathéâtre," *Zagadnienia Rodzajów Literackich* 36.1-2 (1993): 7-44 (A translation of excerpts from this French translation of the original Polish are published in this issue of the *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*; see pages 129-144). Świontek translated the Polish version of Patrice Pavis's *Dictionary of the Theatre* (Wrocław [Breslau]: PAN, 1998).

8. Świontek, "Le dialogue dramatique" 22. Translations are my own. Page references are to the original article and not to my translation.

9. 30.

10. 18.

11. 21.

12. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind," trans. Carleton Dallery. *The Primacy of Perception and Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology, the Philosophy of Art, History and Politics*, ed. James M. Edie (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1964) 163.

13. Ivo Osolsobé, "Cours de Théâtristique Générale," *Études Littéraires* 13.3 (1980): 413-35.

14. 430. Translation my own.

15. Mikel Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of the Aesthetic Experience*, trans. Edward S. Casey, Albert A. Anderson, Willis Domingo, and Leon Jacobson (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1973) 14.

16. Similarly, Martin Heidegger distinguishes between the thingly character of a thing and the workly character of the work in his analysis of the reception experience of Van Gogh's *Peasant Shoes*. See "The Origin of the Work of Art," *Basic Writings*, rev. and exp., ed. David Farrell Krell (1935; New York: Harper, 1993) 139-212.

17. Bert O. States, *Great reckonings in Little Rooms: On the Phenomenology of Theater* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: U of California P, 1985) 34.

18. 30-34.

19. Świontek 27.

20. Hornby does observe that all drama is metadramatic (31). However, he does not see this as particularly significant since, as he writes, all drama takes as its subject the vast drama/culture complex encompassing "literature, nonliterary performance, other art forms (both high and low), and culture generally" (17) and is a "vast model for understanding reality" (22). Ultimately, this relation between drama and its reflection of the drama/culture complex operates as a replacement for a mimetic theory of drama meditating on dramatic content and presentation.

21. Patrice Pavis, *Dictionary of the Theatre: Terms, Concepts and Analysis*, trans. Christine Shantz (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1998) 210.

22. 211.

23. Calderwood, *Shakespearean Metadrama* 5.

24. Pavis 211.

25. Świontek 29-30.

26. See Stephenson, "Singular Impressions: Metatheatre on Renaissance Celebrities and Corpses," *Studies in Theatre and Performance* (forthcoming in issue 27.2 [Summer 2007]).

27. Josette Féral, "Theatricality: The Specificity of Theatrical Language," *Sub-stance* 31:2 & 3 (2002) 94-108. This special issue was devoted to theatricality. Tracy C. Davis and Thomas Postlewait, eds., *Theatricality* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003).