

TWENTIETH-CENTURY THEATRE

A sourcebook

Edited by Richard Drain



London and New York

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It is particularly important that the theatre, the most transient of all the arts, which leaves nothing behind but a few inadequate photographs and vague memories, be caught in print if it makes claim to historical significance and progressive development. For that reason the theoretical discoveries that have been made deserve to be recorded just as much as the facts and events.

Erwin Piscator

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PREFACE

This is a collection of writings on theatre by those involved in theatre, whether as directors, performers, writers or designers. It is concerned with significant innovations in modern stage practice; and aims to illuminate the ideas behind them. Its span is wide: from the onset of this century to the present. So it cannot hope to be comprehensive, and has no illusion of being so. Numerous important figures are omitted, and it deals with five aspects of theatre only. These five aspects, however, have had deep and lasting importance, and offer perspectives into a range of key developments throughout the period.

These developments are not the work of one or two people, even if they come to seem so later. Here, key texts by renowned figures are placed in the context of other important writings: they are part of a running debate involving many. It is a debate on the aims and means of theatre ranging widely across national frontiers, conducted intensively throughout the century, and continuing actively into our own time. This precludes more than a short sampling of their work, but may help illuminate it from other angles. The selection aims to hold a balance between theory and practice, and suggest the importance of one to the other; and to highlight the continuing attempts to renew theatre that have been so important to its modern history, and remain so vital to its future.

The status of theatre has been uncertain throughout the century. If the low artistic reputation with which it began has been redeemed, its role within culture at large has diminished sharply with the growth of the media. But this precarious status has had one good outcome. As these writings witness, it has meant that theatre people have engaged throughout in a questioning of its role and purposes. The various answers offered in response to this have prompted the transformations that make up its modern history. Displaced from the centre of the larger cultural stage, theatre has sought fresh ways to engage with society. It has fought to be something more than entertainment for the privileged, or escapism for the many. Those at its cutting edge have used it as a form of intervention, whose function is to challenge preconceptions. This challenge has been signalled in the invention of new forms and styles. But it will not do to read the history of modern theatre simply in terms

of form and style, as these are rooted in deeper issues. This volume gives space to these, as its authors do.

Nor can the history of modern theatre be confined to theatres. Theatre has been pursued outside the institutional frame and allocated edifices that stand ready to contain it, and in the process the concept of theatre has widened. Anthropological and global perspectives have widened it still more. This sets this volume a difficult task, but it is not adequate to limit the boundaries of theatre by an outdated conventional measure. To do so would be to run counter to the spirit of all those who speak here, for it is they who challenged and are challenging such boundaries.

Theatre is live performance. The human encounter it involves between audience and performers, and the emotional dynamic that results, are essential to it. In consequence, theatre, unlike literature or film, cannot be preserved. This gives the writings collected here a special value. While they may be secondary to their creative stage work for their authors, for us they are primary: primary documents in theatre history, and a means of understanding at first hand the course of that history.

But these writings do not simply sketch a history; they make up a resource. Theatre is of its time, but the ideas voiced in these pages live on in the work of those who follow, finding new forms and fresh relevance. In the world of the theatre, they are freely passed on, to be freely redeveloped and freshly realised. This volume shows that process at work and is dedicated to its continuance.

PROLOGUE

ANDRÉ ANTOINE

FROM The Free Theatre (1890)

As the hoped-for emergence of a new generation of dramatists and dramatic works takes place, it may be affirmed that this rebirth will necessitate new means of expression. For works that are all observation and study, actors are needed who are spontaneous and authentic, in touch with reality through and through.

These long-awaited works, conceived according to a more spacious and flexible aesthetic and no longer circumscribing their characters; this new theatre, no longer based like its predecessor on five or six agreed types who are always the same, reappearing again and again under different names, in different plots, in different milieux; one cannot doubt that in this new theatre the multiplicity and complexity of the stage characters will bring about the rise of a new generation of actors flexible enough to take on any role. Young leading players, for example, will no longer all be cut from the same cloth, but will become in turn good, wicked, elegant, common, strong, weak, valiant, cowardly – in short, they will become living beings, diverse and variable.

The art of the actor, then, will no longer depend, as in previous repertoires, on physical qualities or natural gifts; it will gain its life from truth, observation, and the *direct* study of nature. . . .

Since the theatrical style of the new plays tends to keep close to daily conversation, the actor must no longer '*speak*' in the classic theatrical sense; he must *talk* – which without doubt will be just as difficult.

What is meant at present by the phrase *the art of speaking*, consists solely in endowing the student with an exaggerated articulation and concocting a voice for him: a peculiar *specialised* organ quite different from the one he really has. For sixty years, all actors have uniformly spoken *through the nose*, solely because this way of speaking has to be adopted for them to be heard by the audience in our theatres, which are either *much too big* or have *poor acoustics*; and also because this nasal voice is resistant to the passing years and does not age.

PROLOGUE

In present-day theatre, all the characters gesticulate and express themselves in the same fashion, whether they are old or young, sick or healthy. All the actors, by *speaking well*, renounce those infinitely numerous nuances which can throw light on a character and give it a more intense life. . . .

The same transformation must be carried through in other areas of dramatic art: once the scenery is scaled back down to the dimensions current in contemporary milieux, the characters will express their emotions in credible settings, without continually concerning themselves to strike pictorial poses and form *tableaux*. The audience will enjoy an intimate drama, with natural and fitting moves, and with unaffected gestures and movements appropriate to a modern man, living our normal daily life.

Moves that are part of the blocking will be modified: no longer will the actor continually come out of his frame to pose in front of the audience; he will move around among the furniture and props, and his acting will be filled out with the thousand nuances and thousand details now indispensable to the establishing and logical composition of a character.

Purely mechanical movement, and effects of the voice, along with flamboyant and redundant gestures, will disappear with the simplification of theatrical action and its return to reality; and the actor will revert to natural gestures, and replace *effects made only* with the voice with a *composition* of elements: his expression of things will gain support from familiar, real objects, and a pencil revolved or a cup tipped over will have as much significance and as intense an effect on the audience as the grandiloquent exaggerations of the romantic theatre.

Translated by Richard Drain and Micheline Mabille

Part I

THE MODERNIST DIMENSION

May naturalism in the theatre die!
Evgeny Vakhtangov

INTRODUCTION

1

The remarks of André Antoine that preface this selection, dating from 1890, signal the effective initiation of modern theatre; and propose lines of development for it which his own work in Paris with the Théâtre Libre did much to establish. They follow up Zola's advocacy of a stage reformed on naturalistic principles, vigorously elaborated ten years before. Antoine's aim was to realise such ideas in practice, and so enable theatre, in effect, to catch up with literature, where realism and its offspring naturalism were deeply established. Indeed, readers of *Balzac* and *Flaubert* might have said that the achievement of Antoine and his few fellow-spirits elsewhere was at last to drag theatre into the nineteenth century, some ten years before it ended.

Antoine's proposed reforms were gradually implemented. This meant not just changes in staging methods and the training of actors, but acceptance of the concept and practice of ensemble work. This was vital to the development both of a living inter-relationship of characters on stage, and of what Antoine calls 'composition' – the relation of things to a total effect. Ensemble work in its turn required a breakdown of hierarchy, a diminishing of the power of the 'great' actor, or actor-manager. Technically, Antoine was an actor-manager. But his innovations pointed the way to a shift in power from the actor to the director – that shift whose most eloquent advocate was Gordon Craig. In all this, a new concept was being born: of the director as artist, and theatre as an art form. But a 'composition' does not have to be in the realist manner, and an ensemble can be orchestrated in many styles. Fine art was developing from Manet to Matisse. Why should theatre not do likewise? So it is that hardly had the stage discovered how to become lifelike than it grew impatient of being so. By the start of the twentieth century, with Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* not yet written and the full implementation of realism in the theatre only beginning to be achieved, advanced ideas were turning their back on the whole project, urging theatre in quite other directions.

These ideas at first owed much to symbolism. The symbolists saw theatre as a potential crucible in which the arts of poetry, painting, music and dance might be harmoniously fused. Then it might manifest the dreams and

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yearnings of human life, freed from its mere material conditions. Such ideas predate modernism proper, and are largely reserved for Part IV of this volume. But the vital part played by this early movement in establishing the artistic credentials of theatre cannot be entirely passed over here; for this is the base from which much theatrical modernism operates. Hence the inclusion here of Adolphe Appia and Gordon Craig. Appia is a crucial pioneer, seeking a theatre sensitive to 'the spirit of music', and a stage that could offer equivalent qualities of rhythm, tone and harmony in the unfolding movement of its actors in a space architecturally conceived, the whole freely moulded and accented by the play of variegated lighting. Such considerations were not only foreign to theatres of the time, but impossible to realise without a wholesale rethinking of current stage practice, and indeed equipment. Appia carried this through, preparing the way for Craig and others, and implicitly introducing the stage to the concept of abstract form.

But modernism is an umbrella term covering a number of tendencies, and some have a very different character. In the world of the arts, many were keen to clear the air of what Tristan Tzara called 'the fumes of symbolism',¹ which for them were as musty and redolent of the previous age as naturalism. Delighting in parody and outrage, and championing the 'lowest' forms of popular entertainment, they fought a guerilla war against bourgeois culture, seeing it as a pervasive mess of reactionary values and nauseating sentiments. The first twentieth-century wave of this onslaught comes with the futurists; and is soon followed by Dada. But the great pioneer of these tactics is Alfred Jarry. Before the nineteenth century was out, Jarry had succeeded in achieving a *succès de scandale* with his scabrous and grotesque creation, Ubu, and the crude puppet-like staging of his sub-Shakespearean adventures. Much more than a jape, as Jarry's article here shows, Ubu and the toilet brush he brandished were a rude signal of things to come.

The futurist movement was launched a decade later in 1909, and initiated on many fronts the impact of modernist ideas on the arts. The futurists aimed to jerk the buried heads of all concerned out of the sands of establishment 'culture', uproot the arts from their pre-industrial past, and connect them to the age of the dynamo and the combustion engine. Significantly their ideas flourished best in two countries still at the time deeply agrarian – Italy and Russia. In Italy, where the movement began, the machine spelt dramatic advance – exemplified for F. T. Marinetti, its best-known spokesman, in Italy's thriving car industry with its new internationally competitive racing models.²

While futurism sought to revolutionise all the arts, Marinetti was particularly concerned with theatre. His withering analysis of its current forms is coupled with provocative suggestions for hijacking and rerouting it. Other futurists moved into theatre work from painting and the visual arts – notably

Fortunato Depero and Enrico Prampolini. Their revolutionary scenographic concepts may have taken their start from Gordon Craig, who was already based in Italy, exploring the idea of a theatre of mobile architectural forms. Prampolini and Depero outreached him, liberating scenography from the dramatic text, and devising spectacles geared to a musical or sound score, composed of moving shapes and changing light. They open a road which branches out to the constructivists, Tadeusz Kantor, 1960s' happenings, Robert Wilson, and other developments in performance art. The futurists' playwriting ventures point another way. A series of cabaret squibs or staged jokes, they ridicule the conventions of both society and stage. With their chopped-up or derailed parody of social behaviour and dramatic histrionics, they initiate many aspects of what is now known as absurdism.

This spirit flourished further with the anarchic intervention of Dada – represented here by Tristan Tzara. Dada was launched in Zurich in 1916: in the middle of the First World War, and yet outside it, for Switzerland remained neutral. From there, the mass slaughter of a generation that was taking place across the border in France was seen to make a bitter or farcical mockery of European values – hitherto seen as the values of civilisation. In Dada, bitterness and farce are mixed. Tzara and its other founders strongly opposed the war. But rational protest from the safe haven of Switzerland was condemned in advance to an inevitable futility. The lasting and sobering significance of Dada was that it first faced up to the ineffectuality of the artist and the intellectual, and of all that till then had prided itself on constituting 'culture'. It put Art with a capital letter under a lasting question mark.³ It did so partly by offering no answers, deliberately contradicting its own assertions and abolishing itself before they could be codified.

Dada denied its own modernism, and no doubt would have objected to its inclusion here.⁴ Dada preferred non-Western cultures to 'modern' culture; and was against all -isms, including modernism, seeing them as symptoms of dogmatic programme, or worse, academic classification. Dada favoured spontaneity and a cabaret environment – which it proceeded to create by setting up its Cabaret Voltaire. Its first '*grande soirée*' included poems (read simultaneously in two or three languages), dialogues, songs, dance, cubist paintings and cacophonous music. The cabaret format reflects the continuing endorsement by artists and writers of a whole field of performance outside the formalities of straight theatre. This is heralded in painting by Lautrec, by Wedekind's enthusiasm for circus and cabaret, and by Jarry's taste for *guignol* – the French equivalent of our Punch and Judy. It is witnessed by Picasso's early clowns and acrobats, and cheered on by Marinetti in his manifesto, 'The Variety Theatre'. The 'modernist' stage emerged out of this background. It quits the drawing room and raids the kitchen, stocking up with common fare including custard pies. Much modernist theatre is the offspring of the cross-over. It weds its advanced

aesthetics with the popular. This realm is too large to be adequately represented here, but will be explored further in Part III.

Tzara acknowledged Jarry as a main precursor of Dada, suggesting a double connection: 'the will to scandalise', and 'auto-mockery'.⁵ Jarry, writes Tzara, 'opens the way to the new spirit of Apollinaire', to the new world from which 'all the fumes of Symbolism have been swept'.⁶ Guillaume Apollinaire knew and admired Jarry. In the prologue to his play, he repeats Jarry's attack on 'the stupidity of *trompe l'œil*'; and in a preface coins the term 'surrealist' to describe what he is doing. The word is adopted by Yvan Goll in the preface to his play *Methusalem*, whose factory-owning protagonist is a grotesque blood brother of Ubu. The surrealist 'movement' under Breton's leadership begins soon after. Its members too admired Jarry, not least Artaud, whose earlier ventures went under the name of the 'Alfred Jarry Theatre'. While the rich possibilities of a surrealist theatre were resisted by Breton, who expelled Artaud from the movement, a line of surrealist plays followed, leading down to Ionesco's.

Next to this Dada might not seem more than a cabaret diversion, lacking the status of legitimate theatre; but Dada strews tintacks on the highway of Art, and both legitimacy and status end up badly punctured. It points an alternative way, across open country, where disruptive activities become theatre, and theatre becomes a disruptive activity. Its reverberations run through the twentieth century, to Artaud, Arrabal, Kantor, the 'happenings' of the 1960s, and much else.

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Dada took root also in Germany, but in a different context; for there the stage was powerfully affected by expressionism. Like their symbolist predecessors, the expressionists sought a theatre which might speak via non-naturalistic forms direct to the human spirit. But in a country at war first with the allied powers and then with itself, the forms it developed were, not surprisingly, conflicting or tormented rather than harmonious. Expressionist drama, while rejecting naturalism, had no wish to renounce naturalism's drive to lay bare unpalatable truths. In this it was faithful to its two most influential predecessors, Strindberg and Wedekind.

Though the movement began before 1914, the large extension of expressionism into theatre comes in the war years. It is represented here by Walter Hasenclever and Ivan Goll (who, coming from Alsace, had roots in both French and German culture). Hasenclever's *The Son*, written in 1914, was not the first expressionist play, but was the first to make its mark with a wide public. Its expressionist features include its subjective rendering of characters, who are portrayed as seen by the protagonist; and a theme involving, in Hasenclever's words, 'the struggle of the spirit against reality'. His essay here explaining his ideas calls upon Einstein's theory of relativity. Relativity is

a key modernist notion, invoked also by Tzara and the futurists. It is used to deflate the status of 'objective' truth, license multiple viewpoints, and release them from the judgement of a final authority. In that sense it backs the rebellion of sons against the father, the subject of Hasenclever's play. His denial that a play must be understandable, and his wish that his audience 'may lose the logic of their century', echoes Dada, as does the 'alogic' proposed by Ivan Goll. More widely, his hope that they feel in their heart 'the magic chain of love, hate, fury, greed, power, money and lies' bridges the way from Strindberg and Wedekind to Artaud.

The fullest fruition of modernist ideas in the theatre is seen in Germany and Russia in the 1920s. In Germany it continued up to the accession of Hitler in the 1930s, when modernist work was suppressed. Increasingly from the mid-1920s it took political forms, notably in Piscator and Brecht. In Russia the same is true, though there revolutionary *élan* and futurist audacity combine to give it a more celebratory character. These developments are traced largely in Parts II and III; but passages by El Lissitzky and Sergei Radlov are included here to register the impulse towards more abstract forms that flourished in stage design and movement.

Also included is a manifesto of the remarkable but short-lived Oberiu group, of Leningrad. The Oberiu, together with Stanislas Ignacy Witkiewicz, introduce us to the powerful absurdist work of eastern Europe, disturbing and premonitory. Witkiewicz was artist as well as writer; and his 'Introduction to the Theatre of Pure Form' of 1920 is a reminder that the contribution of art to theatre has not been confined to providing it with sets and costumes. It has also been a rich source of ideas. In Witkiewicz, the idea of 'pure form' drawn from art is carried over into theatre, and applied to characters and action. This prises them away from consistency and likelihood, into the free world of 'autonomous' theatre – a word that looks back to the 'Synthetic Theatre' manifesto of the futurists, and forward to his Polish compatriot, Tadeusz Kantor. The word applies well too to the two remarkable plays produced by the Oberiu, whose principles as expounded by Daniil Kharmis are very much in line with Witkiewicz's ideas.

These ideas mark a significant step in modernist thinking. Hitherto modernism had been opposed to realism largely on the grounds that it fails to cope with twentieth-century reality. For the expressionists, it cannot articulate its distortions and anguish. For the futurists it cannot convey the kinetic energies that animate it, nor the swift montage of sights and sounds that are everyday urban experience. Witkiewicz's theory of 'pure form' cuts this connection with the real. Theatre is envisaged as an alternative world, guided by laws relating only to itself, like the forms and colours in a Picasso painting. In contrast, under Piscator and Brecht the same decade sees the start of a major attempt to bring modernist ideas into relation with realism. Both ventures have their risks. A modernism wedded to 'realism' risks recuperation; while a modernism which seeks no inspiration in modern

reality risks becoming an introverted exercise. None the less, from then on modernist theory tends to be split between these two faiths, the defenders of one unwilling to give a hearing to the other.

3

This parting of the ways is left hanging as European modernism of either kind undergoes the double assault of fascism and Stalinism. Its surviving practitioners are reduced to refugee status in countries whose theatres, if not cultures, are broadly alien to it. Their energies are consumed in trying to take root, or make a living, rather than in developing their work. Alienation becomes a major theme, and for many there is every temptation to cultivate in their art an alternative world to those to which they are exiled. More recently, as we may see here, Eugene Ionesco echoes Witkiewicz in calling for theatre to 'invent a unique event . . . create an inimitable universe foreign to all others'. This project gained a further dimension in performance art. As Richard Foreman puts it: 'this new art is not extracted from the flux of life . . . but is a parallel phenomenon to life itself.'⁷

We arrive here in post-modernist territory, and some may question whether such recent work should be placed in a modernist perspective. But readers here may check this out for themselves. The boundary separating these two sprawling domains, never that clear, in theatre seems more one of chronology than principle. This is not because theatre lags behind, but rather the reverse. Many of the features commonly identified as post-modernist in the other arts are in one sense or another 'theatrical'; and they already have a long history in modernist theatre. The play of styles, pastiche, the celebration of artifice; the disclosure of fictional happenings as fictive; the open display of structural devices, or their dismantling and reassembly; the abandonment of artistic unity; the cross-over with popular modes: all these accepted trademarks of the post-modern are common features in modernist theatre of the opening decades of the century.

In more recent work, the continuity with modernism is perhaps clearest in the work of Kantor, if only because of the clear consciousness in his writings of his significant predecessors: Craig, Dada, the constructivists and the surrealists. From his awareness of these springs a concern with scenic materiality, and with images that fuse, below the conscious level, memory, personal archetypes and the 'impossible'. Following Dada, Kantor rejected the 'work of Art' in its traditional sense; and sought to incorporate elements alien to it. A parallel could be drawn with Beckett, who, in a rare pronouncement on his work, is reported as saying, 'My little exploration is that whole zone of being that has always been set aside by artists as something unusable – as sounding by definition incompatible with art.'⁸ In Kantor this zone takes in not only 'found' objects and detritus, but chance and accident.

Such work, while creating certainly an 'inimitable universe', does not

divorce itself from elements in the real universe. It is a 'parallel phenomenon' perhaps, but the word parallel entails a relationship. The purist stance of those who invoked 'Pure Form' in the 1920s has given way to an appetite for elements in real life ignored by 'Art'. This was true in the 'happenings' of the 1960s, devised in the States by Kaprow and fellow artists. A hidden formal element was retained in these: actions within them were frequently governed by a tight if arbitrary system. In this sense, happenings were less given over to the 'flux of life' than their name might suggest. But the elements deployed in them were none the less frequently matters of everyday experience – car tyres and a brand of breakfast cereal in the example Allan Kaprow offers here – commodities split from their usual context, but undeniably drawn from the flux of life as people in the West now experience it.

A principle shared by much of this recent work is its freedom to be 'non-matrixed' – a word coined by Michael Kirby to describe happenings. Its elements, that is, do not cohere to create an imagined reality where given characters, with a presumed life-history, are found at a particular time in a particular place. Coherence of this kind is discarded in favour of modernist collage (in Kantor and in happenings); free association (Robert Wilson); or of lateral hops of the musing intelligence (Richard Foreman). Things that commonly go together are dissociated. In Foreman's earlier work, dialogue is separated from performers by being put on tape. In Wilson's, what one sees does not accord with what one hears. As he has explained: 'it designs choreographies which have nothing to do with what the actors say. And what they say has nothing to do with the scenery and costumes.'⁹ The modernist impulse toward the separation and fresh recombination of elements is here pushed to a far point.

To understand fully the modernist background to this American work, it is helpful to look back to Gertrude Stein, a reference point for both Wilson and Foreman. Her essay 'Plays' offers characteristically original suggestions towards a new form of theatrical experience. Her notion that a play might be a form of 'landscape' reduces dramatic conflict and climax to a minimum. These qualities have ceaselessly been pronounced the lifeblood of theatre; but then, most pronouncements on theatre have been by men, who may have a predisposition to them. It is worth remembering that forms of performance that succeeded in dispensing with these supposedly indispensable factors were pioneered in the early years of the century by women in the field of dance, notably Loie Fuller and Isadora Duncan; and that Stein celebrates this in an early piece of writing, 'Orta, or One Dancing',¹⁰ which is a continuous flow of rhythmic repetitions and variations like the free dance that is its subject. This may have nourished her later sense of what she wanted from the theatre. It is only recently, in work like Robert Wilson's and Richard Foreman's, that these qualities of 'landscape' and free dance, along with something akin to the non-linear 'field composition' explored by

Charles Olson in poetry,¹¹ have flourished in new forms of stage practice. In ways like these, the heritage of modernism is not yet inert, but still a source of new creative work.

NOTES

- 1 Tristan Tzara, *Œuvres Complètes*, vol. 5, Paris, Flammarion, 1982, p. 357.
- 2 See Reyner Banham, *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age*, London, Architectural Press, 1960, pp. 99–105.
- 3 See 'Dada contre l'Art', Tzara, op. cit., p. 353.
- 4 Ibid., pp. 335–6.
- 5 Ibid., p. 363.
- 6 Ibid., p. 360.
- 7 Richard Foreman, 'Ontological-Hysteric Manifesto 1 (April, 1972)', in *Plays and Manifestos*, New York University Press, 1976, p. 73.
- 8 Israel Shenker, 'Moody Man of Letters', *New York Times*, 6 May 1956, Section 2, p. 3.
- 9 Translated from 'Bob Wilson', *L'Avant-scène, Ballet/Danse* 2, April–July 1980, p. 89.
- 10 Published in *Two: Gertrude Stein and Her Brother, and Other Early Portraits*, New Haven, CT, Yale University Press, 1951.
- 11 See Charles Olson, 'Projective Verse', in Donald Allen and Warren Tallman (eds), *The Poetics of the New American Poetry*, New York, Grove Press, 1973.

ALFRED JARRY

FROM Of the Uselessness to Theatre of the Theatre (1896)

'Let us note that there are many theatre audiences, or at least two: that of the intelligent, small in number, and that of large number . . .' So wrote Jarry in reply to a questionnaire in 1896. He speaks again here for the former, whose number he now puts at five hundred.

What follows is an index of certain things that are notoriously horrid and incomprehensible to these five hundred spirits, and that encumber the stage uselessly: above all the *scenery* and the *actors*.

The scenery is hybrid, neither natural nor artifice. If it looked the same as nature it would be a superfluous duplicate. . . . It is not artifice in the sense that it does not offer the artist a realisation of the outside world seen through himself, or better created by himself. . . .

There are two kinds of setting: interiors and open air. They claim to represent rooms or natural fields. We shall not go back over the question of the stupidity of *trompe l'œil*;¹ it is agreed upon once and for all. Let us simply say that the said *trompe l'œil* creates an illusion for those who see crudely, that is to say, do not see, and shocks and offends those who see in an intelligent and discriminating fashion, by presenting them with a caricature by someone with no understanding. Zeuxis deceived brute beasts, they say, and Titian an innkeeper. . . .

We have tried *heraldic* scenery,² that is to say, designing the whole of a scene or act in a unified and uniform hue, the characters passing harmonically on the field of a coat of arms . . . each entering into the *locality* desired, or better, if the author has known what he wanted, into the true scenery which appears on stage by a process of exosmosis.³ The signboard brought on according to changes of location avoids the periodic recall from the world of the mind caused by physical changes of scenery – scenery one perceives above all at the moment one sees it to be different.

In these conditions, every part of the scenery that meets a special need – a window that is opened, a door that is burst through – is a *prop*, and can be brought on like a table or a torch.

With make-up the actor assumes the character's face and should assume his body. Expressions, the play of the visage etc., are various contractions and extensions of the facial muscles. People have not considered that under the assumed face and the make-up the muscles remain the same, and that Mounet⁴ and Hamlet do not have the same zygomatic formation,⁵ although anatomically they are believed to be one man – or the difference is said to be negligible. By means of an enclosing *mask*, the actor should substitute for his head that of the CHARACTER in effigy. This would not have, as in the antique world, the appearance of tears or laughter (which are not characters) but the character of the part: the Miser, the Hesitant One, the Covetous, piling up his crimes...

And if the eternal character of the part is included in the mask, there is a simple means, similar to a kaleidoscope or even more a gyroscope, to highlight, one by one or severally, chance moments. . . . By slow movements of the head, from up to down and down to up, and librations⁶ from side to side, the actor moves the mask's shadows over its whole surface. And experience proves that the six main positions (and the same for the profile, though these are less distinct), are sufficient for every expression. We do not give instances, because they vary according to the original essence of the mask; and because all those who have known how to look at a Guignol⁷ could verify them.

As they are simple expressions, they are universal. The grave error of present pantomime is that it ends up with a conventional mime language, tiresome and incomprehensible. An example of this convention: a vertical ellipse around the face with the hand and a kiss on that hand to express beauty are supposed to suggest love. – Example of a universal gesture: the puppet shows his amazement by a violent recoil and by banging his head against the wings.

Through all these incidental happenings the intrinsic expression subsists, and in many scenes the best thing is the impassivity of the mask as it dispenses its hilarious or solemn words. This can be compared only to the inorganic nature of the skeleton concealed under the flesh, whose tragicomic quality has been recognised throughout the ages.

It goes without saying that the actor must have a special *voice*, which is the voice of the role, as if the mouth cavity of the mask could emit only what the mask would say if its lip muscles were supple. It is best for them not to be supple, and for the delivery throughout the play to be monotone.

Translated by Richard Drain and Micheline Mabille

NOTES

1 Painting that 'deceives the eye'.

2 The original version of *King Ubu* was the third act of a four-act work, *Caesar*

Anti-Christ. Each act shows the further metamorphosis of this Anti-Christ, from a golden cross into a heraldic band or fess, and then into the fleshly incarnation of Ubu himself. The second act is entitled 'The Heraldic Act'; each of its scenes is envisioned in terms of heraldry, and some consist simply of a heraldic motif, e.g. 'Scene II. Sable, a unicorn passant argent.' Here as elsewhere, his visual concept of theatre is of a kind of animated iconography.

- 3 *Exosmosis*: Jarry's notable erudition is evidenced in his frequent use of scientific terms. *Exosmosis* denotes the passing of a liquid etc. through a membrane from a region of high concentration to low. Jarry seems to suggest that the writer will bring the scene into being for the audience as if through the evenly-painted canvas 'membrane' of the set. In practice, the set for *Ubu*, whose production was in the hands of Aurélien Lugné-Poe, was painted to represent at the same time interiors and exteriors as well as different climatic zones, so that snow, blossoming apple trees, palm trees and a fireplace were all depicted. (See Arthur Symons' description in Roger Shattuck's *The Banquet Years*, London, Faber & Faber, 1959, p. 161). But Jarry had recommended a plain backdrop and no scenery, on the principle of the 'uniform . . . field' he recommends here.
- 4 Paul Mounet, one of the 'awe-inspiring *Shades*' whose memory still haunted the Comédie-Française when Jean-Louis Barrault joined it in the early 1940s. 'And in the Café de la Régence there survives the thundering Shade of Paul Mounet.' (Jean-Louis Barrault, *Reflections on the Theatre*, London, Rockliff, 1951, p. 92).
- 5 The zygomatic arch comprises the cheekbones and the front of the skull.
- 6 Again a scientific term: the librations of the moon denote the way it seems to oscillate as its 'edge' is alternately perceptible and imperceptible. Jarry seems to be suggesting that very slight turns of the mask could alter its outline back and forth.
- 7 A puppet character, who originated in Lyon. Like Punch, Guignol is often in trouble with the police. The word is also used generically to mean the puppet shows in which he features; hence 'Grand-Guignol': violent and gruesome melodrama.

Alfred Jarry (1873–1907), French writer and artist. This article by Jarry was written some three months before the staging of his play *King Ubu* in December 1896, and outlines the thinking from which it sprang. Written according to Jarry as a 'Guignol', the play broke drastically with the kind of scenery and acting that Jarry lambastes here, and with all other accepted theatrical norms of the time. Yeats, who saw its first performance, wrote: 'The players are supposed to be dolls, toys, marionettes, and now they are all hopping like wooden frogs, and I can see for myself that the chief personage, who is some kind of King, carries for Sceptre a brush of the kind that we use to clean a closet . . . after all our subtle colour and nervous rhythm, after the faint mixed tints of Condor, what more is possible? After us the Savage God.' (*The Autobiography of W. B. Yeats*, London, Macmillan, 1955, p. 233).

ADOLPHE APPIA

FROM A New Art-Material (c. 1902)

At present, theatrical technique is about one thing only: scenic illusion. With very rare exceptions, everything is sacrificed to the pursuit of this illusion. The important development of scene-painting on vertical canvases, the parallel aligning of those canvases, the construction of the stage with the single end in view of enabling them to be handled, and the almost total dedication of the lighting to the task of showing them off to best advantage – all this leaves no doubt that someone is wanting to make us believe in the reality of the scenic picture.

But...the Actor? Is it painted canvases that determine the drama? A play without an actor is a diorama. That plastic, living, moving form . . . how much care is taken over that? Where do we place it? Ah, that's it! – the actor is a most inconvenient necessity for our scene painters; they do not exactly resent him, but they make him feel how out of place his presence is in front of their fine painting. Every bit of the painted scenery designed to accommodate the real solid form of the actor, is called 'practicable'; these are the concessions that painting is willing to make to the free human body. Let us admit for the moment that reasonable concessions have been made. Here then is the actor in front of painting generously cut out on his behalf. To enhance himself, what is there left to him? A plastic form, whatever it may be, exists only by virtue of the light. How is the actor lit? Alas, not at all; the painting has taken all the lighting for itself. Those long rows of electric lamps which run parallel to the slices of scenery, or which even run right round the stage, are designed to let us see the painting clearly. No doubt they also let us see the actor clearly, lit from all sides at once . . . But is that *Lighting*? Would a sculptor have thought of lighting in this way his bronze or marble dreams? . . .

However, if we leave aside painting for a moment and attempt really to light the actor...what happens? All the vast apparatus of the stage would suddenly lose its *raison d'être*, and the actor would suddenly find himself in excruciating emptiness, in a veritable void. What is called twilight and night lighting on our stages witnesses to that with a crudity we know.

We must therefore conclude that our scene-painting is based on a

principle of immobility in contradiction with the presence of the actor, and the decorative factor which gives this away is: *the Lighting*.

It is useless to wish for movement without light, without real lighting that creates forms, and it is useless to seek to have light that creates forms if one remains under the tyranny of dead painting. This follows rigorously.

But in that case, some will say, how is the scenic illusion to be maintained?

Is this illusion then to be so cared about that anything and everything is sacrificed to it? In the presence of the actor, everyone knows that the most beautiful scenery is nothing more than an assembly of painted canvases; and if, perhaps accidentally, a particularly favourable arrangement for deceiving the spectator happens to be found, will not the following arrangement immediately destroy its effect? Now, an illusion which is not constant simply does not exist. Our eyes, tricked, do us a disservice here; and yet the first indispensable conviction we must acquire where representation is concerned is that illusion, not only does not exist on our stages, but that it is impossible and...*must* not be possible.

Yes, drama must not, any more than independent paintings or sculpture, seek to deceive the eye.

FROM How to Reform Our Staging Practices (1904)

An attempt of this kind¹ cannot fail to teach us the path to follow in order to transform our rigid and conventional staging practices into an *artistic* material, living, supple and fit to realise no matter what dramatic vision. It will even come to surprise us that we neglected for so long such an important branch of art, and abandoned it, as if unworthy of our direct attention, to people who are not artists. Our aesthetic feeling is thus positively anaesthetised where theatrical production is concerned; he who would not tolerate in his apartment an object of less than exquisite taste, finds it natural to book an expensive seat in a theatre, already ugly and built in defiance of good sense, to spend hours at a show beside which the garish prints sold at the fair are delicate works.

The procedures of staging, like other artistic procedures, are founded on forms, light and colour; now these three elements are in our control and we can in consequence arrange them in the theatre as elsewhere in an artistic fashion. Until now it has been believed that staging must achieve the