

Introduction



ALL OF THESE ESSAYS, with one exception, were written just before or after the millennium, and while they reflect upon each other, that earlier essay does, not only across the years, but from so long ago that I might have forgotten what it was about. It would seem to have been an irrelevance until, working on an autobiography, I happened to read it again, while remembering the dissident 1960s, spilling into the 70s, when classrooms were invaded, students were lecturing teachers, and *relevance* was a watchword. That my view of it all then, as a rather chastening lesson, is still germane today was confirmed by my wife Kathleen Woodward, when she was recently asked to contribute to a special issue of *Daedalus*, where my essay was published over forty years ago, after a rather high-powered conference, sponsored by the American Academy of Arts and Science, “The Future of the Humanities.” That the future is still in question—and with the economy reeling, the job market worse than ever—is what Kathy was writing about.¹ Much involved as she is with the digital humanities, a possible source of salvation, about which I know very little, she nevertheless quoted me in her essay (without saying I was her husband), because “Relevance: The Shadow of a Magnitude” had apparently left a reproachful shadow on what, in the academy today, remains misguided, unthought, or knowingly hypocritical. And though I had serious misgivings, in those performative days of protest, about my alignment with the students, their insurrectionary fervor, I felt we had to come to terms not only with what they were demanding, but what we had been evading, with a repressed blush, as if the books we were teaching and analyzing—the sometimes forbidding subtext or darkling indirections, myths of otherness, love’s body, their implicit bearing on life, ethically, kinesthetically, never mind psychedelically—were telling us we were lying, even as the universities were being corporatized.

What I said at the conference, and what I wrote, apparently had sufficient fervor of its own, which caused James Ackerman—the distinguished art historian, in his introduction to the essays—to describe it as an “apocalyptic message” that had “the most radical implications of any in the issue.”² If the message was partially determined by my radical

work in the theater, which had produced a scathing manifesto a few years before,³ the more immediate site of provocation was my being at California Institute of the Arts, where as founding provost I was responsible for its conception as an implosive scene of learning, a sort of mixed-media merger of the Bauhaus and Black Mountain. With a faculty of major artists interacting with students, and the avant-garde as second nature—first in beautiful downtown Burbank, that right-wing wasteland, scandalized by it all, then with happenings and installations all over the landscape of the San Fernando Valley—CalArts became the exemplary model of the antiacademy. And while there were wild and whirling dilemmas in its uncensored beginnings, with an escalation of controversy (up to the Disney-world board) that eventually caused me to leave, there hasn't been in my lifetime, except maybe for Black Mountain, a pedagogical dynamic even remotely like it.

How all of this came about is rehearsed in a miniature autobiography, called an "Auto Archive," which I was asked to write for *Theater Journal*, explaining how I came to theater, and why, since I left it, I'm doing what I'm doing now. If much of that is theoretical, it's with a haunted materiality, what I first tried to define in *Take Up the Bodies: Theater at the Vanishing Point*—with the ghostings of (dis)appearance, "the body's long initiation in the mystery of its vanishings,"⁴ and the shadowy magnitudes there. As for the order of things here, with "Relevance" at the beginning, in an ambience of the Absurd, its manic, non sequitur theater, the "Auto-Archive" is at the end, as an appendix of remembrance, in the encroaching world of the virtual, with the "liveness" of bots and bytes, and mediatization setting the standard for what we take to be "real" in performance. Or with the body immaterial, so it would seem: the appearance of mere appearance, a techno-mimicry of mimesis. About the nostalgia of virtuality—liveness abolishing presence in a facsimile of *life*—there's a brief reflection here in "The Human Nature of the Bot," which was solicited actually for a debate online.⁵ The repercussions were such that I was asked to extend the essay for an updated anthology, *Critical Theory and Performance*, where I had written previously on the psychopathology of the actor and, from Brechtian Alienation to the hegemony of cultural studies, ideological vigilance and the illusions of *demystification*.⁶ As for the resources of mystification in the electronic age, from neural stimuli to info-phantoms of the brain, the programs proliferate, but despite the "body electric," the byte encoding of Whitman's dream, "*the subtext of the virtual is that it really wants to be real.*" Thus, I raised a jaundiced eyebrow over the performative allure of cyberspace and, without the smell of mortality,⁷ the empty

staginess of its digital seeming. The title of the revised essay, “Virtually Yours: Presence, Liveness, Lessness,” is a simulated sign-off on the devolution of it all. Which also suggests Beckett, who in the abbreviations of being, its synaptic circulation, made a commodious virtue of “Lessness,” as with the Fizzles and *Texts for Nothing*, or in his shortest play, that “faint, brief cry,” the plaintive “vagitus” of *Breath*.⁸

As for mortality itself, that difficult birth astride of a grave,⁹ it’s to be seen from another perspective, seemingly transcendent, in “The Faith-Based Initiative of the Theater of the Absurd.” A symptomatic image there, unconscionable in its excess, out the window and to the stars, is “*the long, long body . . . winding*,” in Ionesco’s *Amédée or How to Get Rid of It*, floating amid the supernal, an ever-ballooning corpse. The essay was originally commissioned as one of two keynotes for a symposium at Stanford, a retrospective on the Absurd, from that existential period when all values were up for grabs, or seemed to have disappeared, even in celestial regions, into a black hole, where gravity is so impacted that nothing, not even light, can escape its relentless pull. How to think about that, or if value exists at all, might require “complexity theory,” as with the fractals of disordered systems. If that seems, systemically, cosmically, an overview of absurdist dramaturgy, the invitation came with a cautionary note to me, about how things should be said, not said, for a not entirely academic, rather hypothetical audience, the “educated public.” With an apology, then, in advance, and “chronometrably” in submission, I abided by “the game of the rule,” taking my cues from Ionesco, with a hyperawareness of words, wearisome, slippery words, the crimes committed in their name. That didn’t prevent me, alas, with a disposition to theory and subjunctive habits of mind, from doing precisely, criminally, what I was warned against, making things difficult, in appraising the theatricality that, with every inconsequent gesture or conscious incoherence, “inevitably returns to the tortuous question of whether or not there is meaning in the world, or whether we were merely born deceived into a reality that is incurable.”

The other keynote was by Martin Esslin, whose book *The Theater of the Absurd* (published in 1961), began with an account of that now-legendary performance of *Waiting for Godot* at San Quentin Prison (1957), where we weren’t quite sure, as the convicts assembled, the actors nervous, there’d be an educated public, or what kind of education. As for sophisticated San Francisco, when I first directed that production at The Actor’s Workshop, and the now-canonical Beckett just about unknown, there was not only in the audience, but even in our company—the knowledgeable ones, of course, really experienced in the-

ater—much resistance to our doing that gratuitously unintelligible, pointless nondrama. I'd given various talks at Stanford over the years, but if it was a pleasure to be there with Martin, by then an old friend, it was like a pleasure postponed, amusingly ironic, to find myself this time on the stage of the Little Theater, where there'd been (in 1949) the first-ever production of any play of mine, then several others, written there at Stanford, to which I came by an almost capricious series of accidents, with a graduate fellowship in drama, as a temporary diversion from a career in chemical engineering (about which, again, see the "Auto-Archive"). It took some time, even while working in theater, before I really put the periodic table and fluid mechanics behind, but out of old reflex, ideas from the sciences, subatomic or astrophysical, will turn up in these essays, and another one in a moment on the selvage of the Absurd—now, but not then, linked to "chaos theory."

Meanwhile, unfortunately, back to the incurable. It may have been up in the air, like that corpse in the Milky Way, but mortality came down to earth, as if through the retrospective. And we even saw it on stage, in the course of the other keynote, the quivering immanence of it. With no discernible change in an encyclopedic mind, but his whole body shaking from an advanced case of Parkinson's, the sad aftermath of the occasion was the death of Martin Esslin. Thinking of it now, I remember another symposium (back in 1969), when the two of us were together in western Canada. At the hotel, Martin and I were having breakfast, when we heard over a radio that Beckett had won the Nobel Prize. We tried to call him in Paris, but to avoid reporters and unwanted attention he'd already gone into hiding, somewhere in Tangiers, and he didn't show up in Stockholm to receive the prize. The morning after the talks at Stanford, when Martin was about to return to London, we again had breakfast together, and were reminiscing about that, when I saw his hands trembling, and asked about the prognosis. He said it wasn't good, nothing the doctors could do . . . That, to be sure, was the wrong kind of *nothing*, which in Beckett has to be *done*, as in the waiting for Godot. More to be said about that, and in the tribulations of Beckett, "the science of affliction," or with the apnea we shared, its suffocating perspective.

There are three pieces on Beckett here, but it was the faith-based irony of my essay on the Absurd that caused me to return, out of a "vertigo of nothingness," to when I was studying thermodynamics and became fascinated with entropy—a measure of the unavailable energy of the universe, which seemed, as I say at the end of the essay, a datum of the Absurd, "with its law of increasing disorder and commitment to

evanescence,” sneaking up in “a dizzying anguish on whatever made it available.” Along with the dizzying anguish, what made it available, too, was what I called in the following essay “The Soul-Complex of Strindberg,” which like complexity at the edge of chaos, disorderly, but adaptive, inclined to something rather than nothing—though we’re never quite sure what it is, since it came, as in *A Dream Play*, through an illusory “triplex cosmos,” and with “occulted symbols.” Or worse, what we’d rather forget, like “an anxiety dream that becomes increasingly nightmarish,” while the nightmare itself, in its seepage from the unconscious to the unspeakable in the world, brutally implacable, garishly banal, becomes reality principle. If there is, in the preface to *Miss Julie*, a provision of technique which anticipates Brecht, that effect of alienation is only momentary in the mind. Whether naturalism or symbolism, there’s still a double bind: in the penumbra of representation, from the materialist to the sublime, no escape by illusion from the oppressiveness of it all.

For in Strindberg, ultimately, whether in “vulvous grottoes” or whatever idyllic residues of the biblical garden, the world into which we’ve fallen is a time-induced pollution of ignominious lessness, making it hard to breath. In this suffocating regard, the soul-complex foreshadows, with its mordantly longing vision of a world outside this world, the lingering affliction in Beckett—that too, incurable, with its earthbound outbursts of rage, all the more because of nostalgia for what, “having terminated my humanities,” as Beckett says, but says in vain, with maybe “a new no to cancel all the others,”¹⁰ unnamably never existed. Not so for the early Strindberg, influenced by Swedenborg, who in his spiritual awakening could visit heaven and hell, to consult with angels and demons, charged by the Lord with parsing out holy doctrine. But for the dispirited Strindberg, nothing that ever lived was holy—no world but this world, no good, no truth, no meaning, there’s only hell on earth, a Swedenborgian “vastation,” where misery prevails. Thus with the Student in *The Ghost Sonata*, well tutored in disenchantment, a far miserable cry from the students we started with here, who in those cold war days of relevance, presumably telling it like it is, countered the threat of MAD (Mutually Assured Destruction) with the promissory note of a counterculture claiming to change the world. Strindberg’s unappeasable Student would probably have laughed at that, with a raging desire to say what he thinks, though if he did, and people were honest, he’s sure the world would collapse. As I say in the essay, however (as true now as it was then), “the horror may be that it wouldn’t”—which is the news that Indra’s Daughter, having descended

to earth, brings to the Throne above. And then there's the Captain in *The Dance of Death*, who, mortified, impotent—and without the magniloquence of Hamm in *Endgame*, even if self-deflating, the saving grace of his histrionics—can only shake his fists!

In the drama of modern Austria, historical site of one of the essays, the worlding is still demoralizing, as with the imprisoned Sigismund in Hofmannsthal's *The Tower*, “not sure he is in the world, or [*pace* Heidegger] where the world *is*,” with boundaries blurred, too, in a chimeric subjectivity, between within and without. (To return again to the virtual: that chimeric subjectivity may be even more so today, with split-screen attention to a world that is an elsewhere, with Googling, linkage, WinZip, and instant access to multiple selves, by merely the click of a mouse.) As for those words, words, words, and the crimes committed in their name, there's a logorrheic archive in Peter Handke's *Sprechstücke*, particularly *Offending the Audience*, and a magisterial indictment in Karl Kraus's massive drama, *The Last Days of Mankind*, which in no uncertain terms, and a corrosively assured omnipotence, is meant to be the last Word. “Where are all these corpses from?” asks the bewildered tramp in *Godot*,¹¹ who might very well be referring—after two world wars, by then in their ghostly presence—to the rotting horde of unburied corpses at the end of Kraus's play. Though he was not at all Marxist, what Kraus said with millennial scorn of post-Secessionist Austria would seem to be the fulfilment of what Marx once demanded, in an early letter to the Young Hegelians: “a *ruthless criticism of everything existing*.”¹² Such a criticism was actually initiated—about the time of that letter, and years before the Young Vienna, who just before the Secession met in the coffeehouses—in the satires of Johann Nestroy, whose wordplay buffoonery and redheaded mockery also took on the censors, that religiously endorsed surveillance, a refined dynastic tradition, covering up the scandals of imperial power, and its trickle-down hypocrisies, not only in highbrow Vienna, but at the city limits, among the theatergoers of an emerging middle class.

Nestroy stuck it to them, his insults making them laugh, but then was long-neglected, until rediscovered by Kraus, and then again neglected, not only in the Austrian theater, his plays rarely produced anywhere, but even by those of us who had studied European drama. Having read him last I don't know when, I rediscovered Nestroy myself, in wondering how to approach the keynote for an international symposium, here at the University of Washington, “Cultures of Performance in Modern Austria.” It wasn't only Nestroy I had to catch up with, but Kraus and others, and the Secession too, since I was hardly

familiar with what had happened under the Hapsburgs, or onstage, backstage, or the inner circles of waltzing Vienna, when I was asked by my Germanic colleagues to give that talk. I hesitated to do it, but they persisted, because of my background in theater and writings on performance. Even so, there would be scholars from here and abroad, who knew modern Austria and its heritage as I didn't, and all of whom read and spoke German (indeed, many of the papers were in German, and when mine was published in a collection from the conference, all quotations I'd made in translation were restored to the original.) Aside from that delinquency—next to no memory of the language, studied for my doctorate, but unused then and since—my major immersion in Austrian culture was at a rather remote scholarly haven, when I taught at the Salzburg Seminar, in the Schloss Leopoldskron, redesigned by Max Reinhardt as a sumptuous salon for artists, across the lake from the mountaintop castle where the aged Kokoschka had a workshop for painters, and might have been teaching then. I follow him here, however, through his wilder years when, as with the blasphemous erotics of *Murderer, Hope of Women*, he shaved his head, bloodied his actors, to make the theater outrageous, and through a propensity for derangement, became in the café scene of Vienna a spectacle himself. At Salzburg, much cultural history all around, but my seminar, for the equivalent of postdocs from all over western Europe, was on American drama. When I thought it over, however, what made me eminently qualified, as I said jokingly before the talk, as in accepting the invitation, was the fact that one of my immigrant grandfathers, an illiterate tailor, came from somewhere in Austria; hence, the name Blau. Actually, too, as can be seen in the essay, I had some direct experience at the more contemporary end of modern Austria, with Viennese Actionism; and in another context, with one of those affiliated, the versatile Valie Export (body art / cinema / video / mixed-media installations), with whom I had coedited an issue on performance in the journal *Discourse*.¹³

Recurrently in these essays, as in a previous collection, *The Dubious Spectacle: Extremities of Theater*, the thought of performance is not only confronting some limiting condition, but as with the Actionists, their self-abusive performances, extremities at the extreme, often hard to watch. Or, as with other body artists, such as Stelarc (with fishhooks through his flesh) and Orlan (with multiple surgeries on her face), even a photograph might make you wince. This would seem to be, however, the desirable state of things within the “*trajectories and becomings*” on the thousand plateaus of Gilles Deleuze, with its “rhizomatics of theatricality,” where the repertoire is endless, each of us many others, all roles

insufficient, in the assayings of nonidentity. In that period of demystifications, when theory was exposing systems of power, the anti-identity politics had to do with a pretentious subjectivity or the bogus individualism imposed upon us by capitalism. As for the anti-Oedipal dispensation of Deleuzian performance, where the desirable state is desire, the incessant production of which is assured by lubricious desiring-machines, when I wrote that “the autoerotic [is] on automatic in runaway machines, given over to pure expenditure in the libidinal economy,” it still made sense to compare that to Wall Street, which wasn’t much concerned then “with the prospect of recession, or stagflation,” no less a Great Depression. That was, of course, before the enlightenment of the economic collapse.

Whatever the stimulus now, there’s nothing like deficit spending in the superfluity of Deleuze, the incorrigible excess of its plateauing evanescence. In the early writings with Guattari, that excess was indebted—the instabilities and fluctuations, free of all normal causalities—to the utopian anarchy of May ’68. They concede about the dissidence (as I did about relevance) that there were agitations, slogans, idiocies, but despite all absurd illusions, there was an opening to the possible, a visionary phenomenon, throwing off the nightmare of cultural suffocation. And in the dream of a new existence, eventually betrayed, what appeared was a “spectral cosmos” that “superseded the world.” Chance was admissible too, but the betrayal, however, was always in the cards. For there was, at the outset, in the schizoanalysis of capitalism, a reversing, anomalous logic; even in boundless speculation the codes of capitalism determined semiotically the vaunted exposures of critical theory. Or given the law of value, with a marketable equivalence: “*floating theories*, . . . floating money,” as Jean Baudrillard concluded in an early book on symbolic exchange.¹⁴

With a momentum, nevertheless, overriding contradiction, Deleuze’s spinning circuitry spawned (all verbal, no object), in a profusion of instantaneity or haphazard of signs, as it might on the Internet. And with the libidinal inexhaustible, pure expenditure continued, neither mere data, nor pixelated, rather replenished in whatever becomings by an “energy-source machine,” which in rejecting the Oedipal structure had nothing to do with the Freudian unconscious, or the inadequacy of an Id. The machinic fact of the matter is that with all value going at once, into and out of all the bodily orifices, despoiling from ass to mouth the fiction of a natural function, the deterritorialized flows became, in a redundancy of irrelevance, the spaced-out apotheosis of the polymorphous sixties, with its perversity in regression. As

prefigured by infant autism, the yammering, stuttering tantrums, and with chiliastic dimensions, by the sonorous organless body in the alchemical theater of Artaud, the “vitalism”¹⁵ is examined here, in “Performing in the Chaosmos: Farts, Follicles, Mathematics, and Delirium in Deleuze.” Which will not be the first time, and I say this with no bias against it, we’ll encounter a lot of shit—though in other respects, unexcremental, I do take issue with Deleuze.

Given his long hostility to bourgeois theater, overburdened by representation, there’s a deep affinity with the “operations” of subtraction in the “minor” stagings of Carmelo Bene, who refused to think of himself as a director.¹⁶ Insufficiency the heart doth sway, as Shakespeare says in a sonnet,¹⁷ maybe releasing other prospects, but otherwise—and it may be the inversion of a *reductio ad absurdum*—Deleuze’s antitheatrical prejudice is dispersed through the rigors and excess of excess, though with insufficient deference to the future of illusion, which appears to be, as I think it (or is it thinking me? as I’ve also asked about history) the only future before us, and thus a reality principle. This rather unnerving thought is more than implicit in the balancing act of the prejudice, between *more* theater and *less* theater, which has varied through historical periods, but leads to the age-old question, *Why theater at all?* With history blurring, however, in a dromoscopic, simulacral, hyperdigitized world, given over to speed in the furor of information, theater would seem to be left behind, with the body as an encumbrance, no less the mortal body performing, arousing thoughts of death and dying, which can’t be outsourced, except into tragic vision. As to what death *is*, as Montaigne once remarked, it is a scene with one character. An unseeable scene, perhaps. To what extent, we might ask, is it related to stage fright?—which nobody can avoid, even the best of actors, but as covered up in performance, or from the body’s specific gravity working up a sweat, the dark energy of theater, what really activates acting. Meanwhile, there’s something other than mere liveness in new modes of genetic and molecular art, which suggest, however (if at all a knowable truth), that death may be dying, even as antitheater appears to be obsolete, its inexistence explored, with the perceptual permutations of that always reversing conundrum—reality of appearance? appearance of reality?—in “Seeming, Seeming: The Illusion of Enough.”

And when we speak of the future before us, there’s always the correlative question, what constitutes that *us*? which I’ve asked before in *The Audience*, and here with some afterthoughts, in “‘Who’s There?’—Community of the Question.” The issue is unavoidable in an ontology of theater, which is more than implicit through this entire book, though

not very characteristic of performance studies, which tends to be, while crossing nations and cultures, ethnographical or anthropological, and when merging with race and gender, ideological too—which, theoretically, just about everything is, but that predictably so. Wherever the theater comes from, and whether more or less, that essay was crossing borders for another international symposium, which in its conception was influenced by *The Audience*. What was in question there, in Zurich, Switzerland—where the floating money usually floats (through declared transparency now) in labyrinthine vaults—is the nature and status of the spectator in a globalized, migratory, mediatized world. As if resisting dissemination, there had actually been, several years before, a similar conference in Lisbon, Portugal, once politically isolated, but about to become, with Expo '98 scheduled a few weeks after, the cultural capital of the world. With a festival of performances already around the city, it seemed an ideal setting for a lively dialogue, between European Americanists and American scholars, about “Ceremonies and Spectacles, and the Staging of Collective Identities.”

What contributed to the festive atmosphere, for those of us giving keynotes, was our being taken for lunch and dinner to the finest Portuguese restaurants, where there was in the background, unbeknownst to me, the plaintive irony of a collective identity out of the city's past, and probably still in the barrios we weren't taken to see. I heard it, but nobody explained it, so far as I recall, but in the slow, lingering sadness of fado guitars and song, there was an unobtrusive staging of poverty and dispossession, what in newly prosperous Lisbon was better unremembered. As for the worldly scholars at the conference, what seemed to have been forgotten, in the acceleration of history, is that with the accumulation of capital into a Society of the Spectacle (what Guy Debord had called “Separation Perfected” or “an *abundance of dispossession*”),¹⁸ there was reason to be skeptical about the communitarian theme—which, though I took issue with it, provided the title for *The Dubious Spectacle*. To begin with in my talk, I confessed that I might be there under false pretenses, since after many years of directing, in multiple kinds of theater, conventional or open spaces, with distance or intimacy—even actors within the audience or the audience becoming actors—I'd come to think of the staging of collective identities “as a rather vain enterprise,” or a leftover platitude from the participatory mystique. Nor, since the more contentious days of The Actor's Workshop, and *The Impossible Theater*, could I buy into the tedious notion that the theater is at its best when it does what the audience wants—as just last week, praising a production, a critic said in *The New York Times*.

As for “the semblance of a gathered public,” I won’t belabor it here, nor elaborate as in *The Audience*, but as I’d written in its first paragraph, “Such an audience seems like the merest facsimile of remembered community paying its respects not so much to the still-echoing signals of a common set of values but to the better forgotten remains of the most exhausted illusions.”¹⁹ And so, too, those attending or watching being set up for participation, the audience becoming actors, and not only entertained, but edified by that. Whatever the identities among the sizable group in Lisbon, there was some discomfiture when I said, “As for the scholarship that takes for granted that theater is the site of the social, or an affirmation of community, that appears to me now—though I believed it when I was younger—an academic ceremony of innocence, assuming as a reality what is, perhaps, the theater’s primary illusion.”²⁰ Those few years later in Zurich, among the others there, it certainly seemed that the dubiousness was more advanced, as in the cadenced title of the conference, which was—with globalization speeding up, and the nervous European Union—phrased in three languages: “*Zuschauern / Quel Public? / As You Like It.*”

Have it anyway you like it—with everywhere linked to elsewhere in a computerized cursor(y) life, with Facebook, Twitter, doyouQ, the scrolling identities there—community *is* the question, and surely we know that the early-on autotexted, bitlet generation, growing up at the keyboard, gaming, with infinities of data, hardly goes to the theater. “Who’s there?” At the two major theaters in this city, the Seattle Repertory and Intiman, if you look around the audience, a large number are elderly, and the youngest in attendance are usually the baby boomers. And indeed, what’s up on stage is what that audience wants, invariably so familiar that, sitting on the aisle, I’m ready to leave after ten minutes, except that my polite, forbearing wife presses down on my arm, keeping me there until we slip away at intermission. Just last night, at dinner, an artist friend who works in a gallery literally asked what I was often asked when I was still doing theater, especially the more inquisitional, long-rehearsed, encrypted work of the KRAKEN group: “What kind of audience did you have in mind?” What I said—and he couldn’t believe it—is what I used to say then (often in stronger language), that I couldn’t care less about the audience. What I did care about is precisely what we were doing, on the premise that theater is *thought*, and whether verbal or ideographic, at its best when self-conflicted, or this one’s quarrel, that one’s pulse, or some last will and testament, stubborn but indecisive, which to believe it would make you bleed. And even then, with afterthought in the grain of the voice, as if the “geno-text” in Barthes²¹

came from the orifices in Deleuze, there'd be the spittle, sputtering, stammering, or at some extremity of a scream, shattered words becoming gesture—glottal stops, rasps, plosives, fricatives piercing the body—and we'd rehearse it all over again.

The method was psychophysical, in a process we called *ghosting*, but whatever it is we were after, it was impassioned by the necessity of understanding *that*, however inaccessible its meaning might be—or at some periphery of estrangement, as if the thinking had never started, and there you are confounded by the ghostly thing itself. So: “Who’s there?” No wonder that voice on the ramparts has been like a light in the dark, though it’s the wrong one making the challenge. Of course, as with everything in *Hamlet*, you won’t see it if you’re not listening. Then, that other voice out of the dark: “Nay, answer me. Stand and unfold yourself.” Who exactly is being addressed? Onstage, sure, but offstage? They can be in their seats, watching, as in the play within the play, watching and being watched, but there in the unfolding the audience is *what happens*. Or it does and it doesn’t, depending on who’s there. Some are there for entertainment, but there’s a second meaning of the word, as when one says, “I’ll entertain that question.” But how to entertain it when you don’t know what it is, or in the Hamletic vein, nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so.

Maybe so, maybe not, like to be or not to be—and is that really the question? If that exasperates the thinking, what may complicate the unfolding is some confusion of the senses, those lower bodily senses, which also inhabit performance: touch, taste, smell, breathing and being breathed. Thus, if there is a nuance there onstage—more or less discernible, sometimes unacknowledged—when two actors are kissing or making love, there are similar effects offstage, not always negligible, when somebody rustles a program, sneezes, shifts in a seat, whispers, puts a hand on a knee, or digesting a meal, has bad breath. Those fine distinctions kept in mind, there was a time, too, as in the novels of Henry James, when one could say s/he went to *bear* a play (and with Shakespeare spoken correctly, as now, indeed, some demand for Beckett). We’ve heard from Hamlet, too, about an interiority, that within which passeth show, but any way you look at it—the eyes with gazing fed, deconstruct it as you will—theater is specularly. What’s there, not there, you really have to *see* it, in that elision of seeing and knowing, whatever it is that escapes you, which is what keeps us thinking, and has caused me to say, too, that theater *is* theory, or a shadow of it. Or if only the shadow’s shadow, it’s no mere social construction (the shibboleth of cultural studies), and something other than virtuality.²²

Which goes to the heart of directing, or it eventually did for me, as in the most searching rehearsals, where sometimes manic obsessively, testing the limits of theater, its capacities, incapacities, and what it was meant to be, I was already doing theory. And though I came to theater belatedly, I was still wondering—after many years of directing, achievement recognized—what I was doing there, and why at recurring critical moments I also threatened to leave. That questioning was resumed at a conference on directing in St. Petersburg, Russia, appropriately enough at the Alexandrinsky, which had once been Meyerhold's theater. What I talked about, however, "The Emotional Memory of Directing," was cued in by Stanislavski, and my earliest reading of *An Actor Prepares*. At the time, if there was any technique among American actors, much of it was patchwork, but with a character's actions divided into units and objectives, and emotion turning inward, psychology was the going thing. Yet, from private moments to public solitude, with superobjective defined, and affective memory focused for access to the unconscious, there were indeterminate feelings, and feelings about feelings (some projected on the director, who has to decipher, deflect, turn back, get the actor to use them), and a maybe stressful subtext of "emotions *about* memory"—of which I've been particularly conscious, at an advanced age, in the writing of an autobiography.

The unconscious, according to Freud, is our oldest mental faculty. It is also, however imaged, whether as writing or *mise-en-scène*, the deepest form of memory, though what seems most deeply remembered, and no illusion of aging, is what you'd rather forget, so painful to even think it, it's never sufficiently thought, as with the egregious lessness of Beckett, where "the brain still . . . still . . . in a way" is still propulsively thinking. Indeed, it was a spasm of derangement, from a transient ischemic attack—brain fever? no painkillers?—that initiated the essay "Apnea and True Illusion: Breath(less) in Beckett," his thought, my thought, conflating his pain with mine, which in its empathic way, along with remembered amnesia, blurs into acting method. True, the methods may radically differ, but in the most powerful acting, whether subjective, from the unconscious, or before the Brechtian *gestus*, Meyerhold's biomechanics, or masking what it reveals, the "mathematical meticulousness"²³ of Artaud's naked life, there's some propulsion there, which like dark matter, unseeable or unseen, turns each thought in its thingness into a condition of possibility—or, as with high energies in particle physics, an "asymptotic freedom."

As for Stanislavski's injunction to make a life in art, it was not very long after I began to direct that I was trying to literalize that, by bring-

ing art, so far as I could, into my life in theater. This came about as I realized, after reading everything, seeing everything, to prepare myself for directing, that the high energies were elsewhere, and there was more to be learned about doing theater, and what might be done, from the other arts, whether visual, sonic, conceptual, or what was on the scene then, happenings and action events, or performative risks with the body. Not quite body art, but some approximation of it showed up in our stagings, as with the cataracts of madness in the storm of *King Lear*, and the self-shattering corporeality of its “thought-executing fires”;²⁴ or in the Grand Brothel of *The Balcony*, from masturbation to necrophilia, its carnal repertoire of perversion; or finished, nearly finished, the algorithmic steps of Clov’s opening walk in *Endgame*, the spastic immediacy of it, visceral, its *thingness*, which was also an act of mind. As for those extremities of performance that, at some limit almost illicit, can drive you out of your mind, there were times in directing when, urging the actor to *let it happen*, whatever it is, wherever it goes, latent violence, self-abuse, or at some perilous edge of the psyche, I seemed possessed myself. What made it next to immoral is that the actor could really get hurt, but if it were done as it might be done, in its asymptotic freedom, almost beyond acting, the performance would be out of sight.

Which doesn’t guarantee that it would happen again, nor that the emotion that went with it, ephemeral, uncertain, would even be remembered. And meanwhile, too, the question persists as to what constitutes *truth* in acting. Stanislavski required it, and believed he knew, but as you think through the possible forms of theater, across cultural distance, how do you ascertain it, truth in respect to what? and what kind of acting? *where? how? what for?*—is it meant to be spontaneous? or as with Brecht, ideologically constrained? or stylized by inheritance, as in the Japanese Noh? Despite early resistance—to the plays we did, and how we did them—experiment made the reputation of our theater in San Francisco, but whatever the gratifications of my work with the actors there, it wasn’t until the uncertainty principle in the evolution of the KRAKEN group, its “*methodical indeterminacy*,” that those elemental questions about acting were really explored, which taught me a lot more about what it means to be a director. That was the real substance of what I talked about in St. Petersburg, while returning to the emotional memory that, despite the anti-Oedipal, continues to haunt the theater, “ghosting its greatest drama, the ineliminable riddle, the riddle of self-doubt.”

There’s all the more reason for doubt when, with the uncertainty of riddling ambition, artists “try to go beyond the limits of what is feasible

and conceivable, so that we wake up, so that we open ourselves to another world.”²⁵ This desire to go beyond is not exactly mine, but from the notorious response by the composer Karlheinz Stockhausen to another extremity of performance, which seemed to come out of nowhere, with the most formidable, theatrically stunning dimensions, and for all the traumatized world to see, its mesmerically repeated, televised images. The phantasmic aureole of smoke and flame, the crumbling towers, the falling bodies, the horrific aesthetic of it—as if, indeed, a post-postmodern perverse sublime, though many were scandalized when Stockhausen proclaimed it the greatest work of art that has ever been. What art could follow after—whether for solace, testament, outrage, no less an impossible closure—became a distressing question, as when Theodor Adorno remarked that there could be no poetry after Auschwitz. But as if to alleviate 9/11, several faculty from the UW School of Drama and Dance initiated a yearlong project in honor of Myra Hess, the British pianist, who during the Nazi bombings of London tried to avert a cultural blackout, and overcome wartime stress, by bringing the foremost concert musicians to perform in the empty National Gallery. With another vast emptiness, Ground Zero, still awaiting a memorial, the Myra project, or *Myra's War*, was meant to demonstrate, in a series of performance events, that “in the midst of crisis art remains a vital and buoyant force in our lives.”²⁶ Whether it was adequate, however, to an era of insidious prospects, on color-coded alert, with a virtually invisible jihad, and “the foreboding infinity of the undeclared,” were issues I raised in a lecture, which was not the keynote this time, but the endnote to the project, “Art and Crisis: Homeland Security and the Noble Savage.”

Given his wealth from Saudi Arabia, and elitist family there, Osama bin Laden might have been the Noble Savage, that figure defined by Rousseau as having a mythic purity upheld by natural law, which for the Wahhabi bin Laden would be the sharia. The reference, however, was to a journal coedited by Saul Bellow, in which I'd published years before an essay on the cold war, and its Balance of Terror, called “The Public Art of Crisis in the Suburbs of Hell.” If hell is other people, as Jean-Paul Sartre once declared, the suburbs have certainly widened, way beyond the Paris *banlieues*, with indescribable legions of others, dispossessed, futureless, or fanatically fundamentalist, who were then, and no less now, ready and willing to kill us. And I say that still, for all the explanations about Islam, and cautions about categorizing Muslims, that go with the proliferating discourse on terrorism (what they're calling “terrorology”), including reminders that the United States has to be held

accountable for an exploitative capitalism, and with an eye on oil in the Middle East, sponsoring Israel in oppressing the Palestinians. As for the real “Axis of Evil”—according to revelations by counterconspiracy theorists—that consists of government officials, FBI agents, and military tacticians, who by creating war games and disaster drills that were supposed to avoid it, covered up “the fact” that 9/11 was conceived for the Bush administration, as a pretext for invasions in Afghanistan and Iraq, with a scenario written by the CIA.

Meanwhile, it’s not exactly to augment homeland security when, amid debates about health care, jobs, bankruptcy, and failing mortgages, there’s impatience about getting our troops out of a debacle, with insurgents, that has been reminding us of Vietnam. Should there be, however, with growing animosity in the Muslim world—whether exacerbated by our policies, poverty, madrassas and mullahs—another sudden attack, not at the L.A. airport or Times Square, or toppling the Space Needle in Seattle, but by a suicide bomber at University Village, between my house and the campus, followed by another in Tacoma, at a suburban shopping mall, and still another at a supermarket in Idaho, and in the serial terror, a magnetic bomb attached to a bus in North Dakota, we’d be ready for the return of Dick Cheney as national security advisor. It was Ronald Reagan that I always considered our most repellently hypocritical president, and I was certainly no supporter of the born-again George Bush. But when I suggested in the talk some tolerance for decisions that, with a globalized plague of “venomous hatred,” his suspect administration had to make, I could see that leftist colleagues in the audience were disgruntled, and at one point in discussion afterward, a woman who apparently knew just about everything I ever wrote stood up to say that she couldn’t believe, given my radical views in the theater, that I would ever justify what that crowd of thugs in the White House was doing.

Whereupon I said what I still believe, that until you’ve had some experience of power, it’s hard to know how to judge it, and while I haven’t been president of the United States, I’ve held some fairly responsible positions—on or over the edge of controversy, not only in the theater, but academically, as a dean (twice) and a provost—where you’re often confronted with decisions that, with all the advice you can get from those presumably best informed, are still a matter of guesswork. We can certainly see that now, with public advice from his generals, about President Obama’s delay in getting out of Afghanistan, and in the discrepancy between what he promised during the elections and—aside from those compromises that antagonize his leftist following—

his often discretionary hesitations in office. Which for the thugs really there on the right, who question where Barack Hussein was born, confirm that he's hypocritical.

Hypocrisy, too, has its own ambiguities, and sometimes you're not sure you're doing the right thing when you *are* standing on principle. And while I spoke of it earlier as the most extraordinary site of learning in my lifetime, my experience at CalArts, coming and going, was a lesson in that regard, testing ambition and possibility, and at the end, the willingness in principle to leave it all behind, though I might very well have stayed. When I was first invited to become provost, with an opportunity to conceive California Institute of the Arts (what we abbreviated first as CIA), I hesitated, because it was financed by money from Walt Disney's will, and while I grew up with Mickey Mouse, I remembered my father, a plumber, saying Disney was a union-buster in the 1930s, and anti-Semitic too. The family was right-wing, and the board consisted of those who became Richard Nixon's, and then Reagan's, kitchen cabinet. Watergate came later, of course, but the head of the board who actually hired me was H. R. Haldeman, who was an executive then in Hollywood with the J. Walter Thompson advertising agency. Haldeman and I hit it off, despite total political difference, and I could level with him, too, about what I thought of Nixon. As for the controversy that caused me to leave, that might have seemed inevitable, though it was my choice at the end, because that reactionary board was reasonable at first, willing to put up with a lot that offended or confused them. But because it was hard to believe where the money came from for this contentious, polemical, leading-edge institution, there were faculty and students who escalated conflict, always testing the Disneys—until their board eventually wanted me to do what I wouldn't do, fire certain people and alter the governance structure. That, too, was experimental, participatory, leveling out authority, in the mystique of the sixties, yet with a disciplinary consciousness among the artists on the faculty, which was with all the dissidence passed on to the students.

When I left CalArts, nearly forty years ago, I never expected to return, but a couple of years ago I received a call from Steven Lavine, current president there, who said they wanted to give me an honorary degree at graduation. When I was silent for a moment over the phone, Lavine asked a little nervously if I would accept, and I said I would, if it was offered "as a form of penance." If you look at the webpage of CalArts today, it still uses language from the original prospectus, which I wrote back then, defining that atmosphere of experiment, always open to risk. The graduation itself was spectacular, with everybody perform-

ing, dancing and singing through the awarding of degrees, and an ensemble of bongo drummers accompanied me to the stage. And I went up there, arms swaying, shuffling to the rhythm. With a laughing crowd and a Dada backdrop, it was hardly a scene for getting serious, but what Lavine had asked me to talk about, after receiving my Doctor of the Arts: *Honoris Causa*, was “the original vision,” which he has tried to revive against some resistance. The text of what I said, which is included here, relates the state of the arts then to what’s happening now, with reflections upon what, at Ground Zero, “challenged the powers, the significance, and dimensions of the arts.” The other honorary degrees were awarded to the singer/activist Harry Belafonte and the electronic, mixed with Buddha, composer Terry Riley, both of whom, with contrasting dimensions, took their own risks.

Another short piece that I’ve included was written for a controversy that I was asked to mediate at the University of Minnesota, having to do with the playwright Dario Fo, whose proletarian activism received a Nobel Prize, though he was twice denied visas to enter the United States, under a law excluding aliens with anarchist, communist, or terrorist inclinations. No doubt whatsoever, the anarchism was there in the off-the-Vatican-wall zaniness of *The Pope and the Witch*, really arousing outrage in the Catholic community of Minneapolis–St. Paul, because of what they considered its abusive ridicule, even hatred, of the church. What Fo intended to expose, in the pious idiocies of his agit-prop farce, was the injury done to the impoverished people of Third World countries because of the Vatican’s teachings on contraception and abortion, and the strictures enforced by the present pope. When the production was announced, there were denunciations in the Catholic press, and the archbishop of Minneapolis petitioned the university president to cancel the play. There were also threats by wealthy Catholics in the city, and on the university board, to withhold money promised to endowments, or for new buildings on the campus. With the support of the university administration, on behalf of academic freedom, the production was going ahead, but Michal Kobialka, chair of the Theater Department, who knew of my background in controversy, asked if I would come to Minneapolis to address the conflict before the first performance, and then participate in an open forum, at which there were Catholics and anti-Catholics, and liberal Catholics who were not for censorship. With the student cast listening, and apprehensive, there was quite a rabid discussion, by panelists on stage, by others shouting out from the audience, but the show did go on, with my “Blessings to *The Pope and the Witch*”—which came in part from old

relations with Jesuits at the University of San Francisco, who were faithful admirers of The Actor's Workshop, despite our rather frequent anticlerical plays, which they religiously attended.

If there was a lively dialogue over the play, that really took some doing, quieting some, letting others speak, shouting down the shouters, and one wonders still how many change their minds. When the words are flowing in public, as in a political debate on television, they're likely to be self-serving, specious, even vacuous words, and without going on at length about the entire repertoire of free-enterprising evasion, I did refer to the slippery signifiers in another short essay, "The Pathos of Dialogue: Unable to Speak a Word." A solicited contribution to an anniversary issue of the Polish journal *Dialog*, it was not quite what the editors expected, which was, I gather, some encomium to dramatic theater as a form of verbal exchange. What I wrote was actually published in translation, and though my grandmother was from Kraków, I don't read Polish, so I have no idea to what extent those words were my words, with the caustic disposition of the essay here. As for being unable to speak a word, we've seen in the academic world, through the era of political correctness into cultural studies, that there isn't much to say—not what you'd think of as dialogue—unless within the spectrum of race, gender, ethnicity, and regarding facts of the past, properly historicized, which is to say, with some revisionist Marxist view of what constitutes history. Or as it tends to be registered now, with suspect facticity, as a matter of social construction.

What of reality then, or reality principle? Or from the absurd to the virtual, is there nothing but metahistory? Whether what happened happened, and how we'd know it, that's a major concern of the last pair of essays, the first of which was for a special issue of *Theater Survey*, "Theater History in the New Millennium"; and the second was the introduction to the conference "Performance and History: *WHAT* History?"—which became another special issue, of *Modern Language Quarterly*. It was Marshall Brown, editor of *MLQ*, who persuaded me to put the conference together, after he'd read the first essay, "Thinking History, History Thinking," and that big red *WHAT* in the conference poster, italicized, capitalized, was there as a challenging reminder that there are variant ideas of history, and that the cultural materialism, and its reductive new historicism, which had dominated performance studies, was inevitably being rethought, as if history were doing the thinking. As for an interactive discourse on history, there isn't likely to be much in what passes for collegiality in academic life, where faculty for the most part don't know each other's writings, and at department meetings, instead of

engaged ideas, bureaucracy takes over, that spirit of corporatization.

Unlike Beckett, in his *Text for Nothing*, my humanities are not over, but with digitalized capitalism diversifying the world, in “a sort of corporate takeover of morphological flux,” the question persists “about the reality of the world, and how in the world we’d know it through the free trade of appearance,” which would seem to have purged history of anything teleological, while scattering remembrance with those seeds upon the ground. Or after the collapsing towers, in the accretions of dust. If what’s written there is terror, I’ve felt obliged to teach it, as in a seminar coming up, that is, the almost ceaseless discourse since 9/11, discourse producing discourse, if not, as some books claim, terror(ism) itself. Or in mortifying detail, with impartial documentation, we may see the compounded irony: that Americanization of the world, or its mediated appearance, corresponded with the renewed dream of a caliphate and, under the Prophet’s banner, an Islamic imperialism, with inevitable global jihad and apocalypse for the West. If that sounds melodramatic, or once again about Muslims, politically insensitive, it may also be what’s otherwise repressed, a more tragic view of history—what Secretary of Defense Gates seemed to suggest, in this morning’s news, when asked by a soldier in Kirkuk why, and how long, we’ll remain in Afghanistan. The repercussions of what I wrote in “Thinking History, History Thinking” are complicated every day, as when shortly after the Fort Hood massacre, by a crazed Muslim psychiatrist, the decision was made by the attorney general to prosecute Khalid Shaikh Mohammed, self-proclaimed mastermind of the 9/11 attacks, in a Manhattan federal courtroom just blocks away from where the World Trade Center was. And meanwhile the debate continues as to the propriety of that location, under civil jurisdiction, or whether it should be in a military court.

While all of this would seem to antiquate the once-influential critique of Orientalism, there are certainly residues of colonialism in various aspects of foreign policy, especially in assessing and acting, or mostly failing to act, on atrocities in the Congo, Darfur, Zimbabwe, or immeasurably elsewhere in the underdeveloped world. What remains undeveloped in the academic world is, as I’ve said, our attitudes toward history, and whether or not what happened can be perceived, no less authenticated, through the attritions of time—whether in the vanished immediacy of the living moment or over *la longue durée*, or extending to outer space, that realm of dark matter or “stupefyingly empty voids.” But I’ve now taken considerable time rehearsing the interwoven thematics, or possible empty voids, of these various essays, in which, though I’m not a historian, there is an emergent idea of history. As to

WHAT history? whether guided by vanities or “supple confusions,” failing memory or contradictions, it may very well escape me, but—conscious again, as in theater, of the ghostings of (dis)appearance—I’ll leave that now to be thought.

NOTES

Quotations in this introduction, without any superscript, and not annotated here, are either from what I’ve written in the essays that follow, or if quoted there, with references in the endnotes.

1. Kathleen Woodward, “The Future of the Humanities—in the Present and in Public,” *Daedalus* 138.1 (2009): 110–23.

2. James S. Ackerman, introduction to the issue “The Future of the Humanities,” *Daedalus* 98.3 (1969): 609.

3. *The Impossible Theater: A Manifesto* (New York: Macmillan, 1964).

4. *Take Up the Bodies: Theater at the Vanishing Point* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982) 299.

5. The debate was with Philip Auslander, who some years before had organized a session on my work at the American Educational Theatre Association convention. In an inscription to his book, *Liveness: Performance in Mediated Culture*, he acknowledged me as a “mentor,” but differed with me, nevertheless, as I did with him, as to what was mediating what.

6. “Ideology, Performance, and the Illusions of Demystification,” in *Critical Theory and Performance*, ed. Janelle G. Reinelt and Joseph R. Roach (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992) 430–45.

7. Lear to the blinded Gloucester on the heath, when he tries to kiss the mad king’s hand: “Let me wipe it first. It smells of mortality” (*King Lear* 3.7.132).

8. Samuel Beckett, *Collected Shorter Plays* (New York: Grove, 1984) 211.

9. Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* (New York: Grove, 1954) 58: “Astride of a grave and a difficult birth.”

10. Samuel Beckett, *Texts for Nothing 11*, in *The Complete Short Prose, 1929–89*, ed. S. E. Gontarski (New York: Grove, 1995) 145, 147.

11. *Waiting for Godot* 41.

12. Karl Marx, “For a Ruthless Criticism of Everything Existing,” in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: Norton, 1978) 13.

13. Valie Export and Herbert Blau, eds., “Performance Issue(s): Happenings, Body, Spectacle, Virtual Reality,” special issue of *Discourse* 14.2 (1992).

14. Jean Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, trans. Mike Gane (London: Sage, 1993) 44.

15. “Everything I’ve written is vitalistic, at least I hope it is” (Gilles Deleuze, “On Philosophy,” in *Negotiations: 1972–1990*, trans. Martin Joughin [New York: Columbia University Press, 1995] 143).

16. Bene’s work has been contrasted with mine, by Mark Fortier, in “Shakespeare as ‘Minor Theater’: Deleuze and Guattari and the Aims of Adaptation,” *Mosaic* 29.1 (1996): 1–18.

17. "O, from what pow'r hast thou this pow'ful might / With insufficiency my heart to sway?" (Shakespeare, Sonnet 150).
18. Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, trans. unnamed (Detroit: Black & Red, 1983), part 1, sec. 31, n.p.
19. *The Audience* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990) 1.
20. *The Dubious Spectacle: Extremities of Theater, 1976–2000* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002) 137.
21. Roland Barthes, "The Grain of the Voice," in *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977) 179–89.
22. That it's possible to think, however, through various meanings of the word, "across the fields of moral philosophy, optics, physics, and ontology," of virtual worlds on stage—or in diverse modes of performance, as a movement from science to spiritualism—one can see in an imaginative critique of the rites and strategies of representation, in Sue-Ellen Case, *Performing Science and the Virtual* (New York: Routledge, 2007). There's an overview of it all in the introduction and prologue, 1–14. What Case says of the virtual is not the rites we're concerned with here, nor is there any assent to what others have aspired to, the abolition of representation, which is, however theorized, as with Derrida on Artaud or the desirings of Deleuze, nevertheless wishful thinking.
23. Antonin Artaud, "On the Balinese Theater," in *The Theater and Its Double*, trans. Mary Caroline Richards (New York: Grove, 1958) 57.
24. *King Lear* 3.2.4.
25. "Documentation of Stockhausen's Comments re: 9/11," http://www.osborne-conant.org/documentation_stockhausen.htm (visited September 24, 2010).
26. "Innovative Projects in the Humanities," Walter Chapin Simpson Center for the Humanities, University of Washington, newsletter, vol. 6 (November 2003): 6.