

Representing Power/Power of Representing: Esthetization vs. Production in Théâtre du Soleil's "Mephisto"

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Théâtre du Soleil's *Mephisto* could be summarized as a richly textured, complex and yet compelling play about a petty-bourgeois actor in the 1920s and 30s who abandons his left-wing political leanings, aligns himself with fascism and in so doing makes a brilliant acting career for himself which should outlast the Nazi regime. At the same time this description is entirely inadequate because it fails to address the role played by theater and its adjunct artistic mythologies in shaping Höfgen's political and professional choices. One of the central issues of this play indeed is the relation between culture and fascism, between the cultural discourses of theater itself, and how the subject positions which they hold out tie into fascism. Höfgen occupies a central place in the play insofar as he is moving through several possible subject positions until we see him as 'Mephisto'. But this does not mean that the Soleil suddenly proceeds toward a character study which would be a significant departure from the project of a popular theater that draws precisely on clown scenes, pantomime, on improvisations building on material taken from real life issues as experienced by the people in rural France or in working class quarters. The modification of this strategy and its integration into a more traditional type of 'plot' suggests, among other things, a dramatic change in the role of political theater. The political climate has changed; the connection between street and stage upon which the earlier productions of the Soleil relied in the early 1970s has been won and lost. The revolution, subject of the Soleil's productions *1789* and *1793*, has not taken place, and it appears necessary to again ask questions as to the role of theater, intellectuals and artists in this failure. Given this perspective, *Mephisto* is a parable. Theater returns to one of its most

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effective strategies: when in doubt tell a story. Vilar and Brecht never failed to emphasize this point, and more recently Roger Planchon stressed the importance of the plot. Planchon's view on this issue is exemplary and elucidates the Soleil's use of Höfgen in the play:

Le théâtre de fables possède une structure démonstrative qui refuse tout élément qui vient "entacher" cette démonstration. Est-ce un gain? La validité d'une fable est-elle dans son épaisseur ou dans son raisonnement démonstratif? Une vérité démontrée n'est qu'une banalité et peut-être qu'une pièce n'est que sa matière. Mais la volonté de briser la psychologie du personnage a conduit aussi à refuser l'histoire chez Ionesco, Beckett, Genet, cela est évident; chez Brecht, cela peut surprendre si l'on oublie la démonstration que Lukacs avait faite au moment de "La Décision." *Chez les uns, l'idéal est de réduire le psychologique au social dans une perspective de morale politique, chez les autres, la tentative est inverse dans une perspective de morale métaphysique en tentant de gommer la psychologie . . . [my emphasis]*¹

The issue is not psychology or character versus history, is not to show Höfgen as either morally deficient or politically unconscious, but to use the figure as the place where the interplay between the social and the psychological, class and individual, political and cultural discourses can be made visible. Unlike Klaus Mann's novel, the Soleil's play gives little room to Höfgen's association with fascism. It seeks to avoid portraying *the* fascist and shows Höfgen's political development as a function of his 'arrivisme'. His career thus cannot be reduced to a unique and ultimately accidental fact. Instead it becomes the spring board for a meta-discourse on political theater, and on the relation between theater and power. Esthetization and production mean, as I will show, two significantly different discursive inscriptions of this relation. At the level of representation, theatrical and social, these inscriptions become visible as two different ways of representing the social subject.

Contrary to the earlier works of the 'Soleil' *Mephisto* no longer is primarily concerned with the question as to what could constitute popular theater, and whether and how such theater can play an active political role in social change. But the emphasis has shifted insofar as *Mephisto* consciously explores the limits of different modes of theatrical discourses, of bourgeois and proletarian theater, while seeking to construct a critical counter-discourse that effectively undoes the identifications offered by the former. This counter-discourse is

assured in the play by the constant moving between stages, between bourgeois theater, opera, red-light district cabaret and proletarian theater, and the 'world', i.e., the reality of the life of individual agents. In short both bourgeois and proletarian theater are taken seriously as cultural discourses whose specifics are determined by their relation with each other and to the dominant culture, i.e., to social power. The identity which they offer is related to their agents' position in a hierarchical society and culture.

On the one hand we thus find representations of deprivation, hunger and inflation that haunt the lives of the popular classes, and which constitute the stock images upon which proletarian theater (the Oiseau d'Orage) seeks to build. And yet such theater seems peculiarly ineffective, without a working class audience, and as becomes evident in the sketch on inflation, incapable of explaining the social issues of the day. On the other hand there is the representation of the grand bourgeois life style which articulates itself through its deliberate references to and quotes from bourgeois theater. More than illustrating a general cultural sophistication these references do represent a privileged relation to the social world which manifests itself in the relative distance from material necessity. Such distance signifies a considerable freedom which manifests itself in the cultural attitudes of a bourgeois family like the Brückners which are characterized by a certain irreverence toward high culture (they take the piano into the kitchen), but also a curious blend of moral rigidity, liberalism, polite distance, tenderness and even eroticism in their relationships. The ideological value of this cultural representation, however, does not reside in the freedom it signifies per se, but rather in the fact that it appears as the unquestioned privilege of a happy few. To the extent to which the image which the Brückners project of themselves shows no trace of the social relations granting them their privileges, representation is an esthetization. The basis of such a specific form of representation, however, lies in a historically codified relation of the subject to the real, to nature, both biological and social, in short in the mode of representing or codifying this relation. The entire cultural grid of bourgeois society rests on this code which hypostatizes form versus function, i.e., a historically determined definition of esthetics *qua* its social institutionalization and appropriation. By opposing different theatrical models and modes of representing on stage, *Mephisto* points out precisely that representation is a matter of appropriating and hence controlling the world. Esthetization, after all, is a question of power.

In this debate about theater and representation within the theater, the 'Soleil' obviously seeks to find ways how this esthetizing mode of representation can be avoided and undone. The solution

suggested by the play is to show the discourse and codification of bourgeois as well as proletarian theater in their historical determination and complementarity. In so doing, it would seem that the 'Soleil' not only breaks down established viewing habits and spectator expectations correlated to each theatrical discourse, but also effectively initiates a counter-discourse, a discourse of disidentification against and from the terrain occupied by the dominant theatrical practice, i.e., bourgeois theater. Such practice is one of production, i.e., of creating a point of resistance against a theater which denies and effaces the historical and social conditions of its presentation and refers to its stage as the 'real'. Production thus appears as the dialectical opposite of esthetization. Production is nothing less than the politicization of art demanded by Walter Benjamin in his essay on the 'Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.'² The importance of this discourse of disidentification, however, goes beyond theater and extends to the realm of culture in general as the field of possible identities defined in relation to power.

The need to politicize art is articulated in the face of rising fascism all over Europe. Fascism, Benjamin argues, uses art for its own propagandistic purposes and the socio-political organization of power. While this is a politicized use of art, it is destined to limit and to preclude self-determined political exchanges and organization, i.e., the public rationalization and critique of policy. Public politics is reduced to the level of ritualistic representations. Esthetization thus describes a social functionalization of art which denies and obliterates the social determination of all esthetic, cultural practices and serves to impose an identity structure built on coercive relations of difference.³ The following study attempts to outline how the 'Soleil' seeks to create an esthetic as well as political discourse of resistance against such a functionalization of art through a dialectical re-appropriation of various theatrical traditions. In so doing, the company signals the historicity of its own position, and rather than trying to establish the work-immanent resistance of a work of art to society, it would make a case for art, and especially theater, as a communicative process whose critical potential is limited and itself historically determined. This assessment of its limits has its objective historical counterpart in the play when the fascist triumph renders political theater, the work of the *Oiseau d'Orage*, impossible while bourgeois theater, performances of 'Faust' and an opera by Verdi continue. Yet the new political situation profoundly affects such theater by assimilating it to the political representations of fascism. The power of representing is limited by power itself, and if the latter usurps the space of culture in the way in which fascism does, the result can only be the representation of power. Esthetization thus needs to be outlined with

regard to the dialectics between symbolic cultural and political power, i.e., the reception and appropriation of art and theater, the historical codification of theatrical signs systems, and the cross-over between theatrical and socio-cultural codes that constitute the "identity" of the subject Höfgen.

Cultural and esthetic practices are, as Bourdieu keeps reminding us, always interested and linked to the social position of the producing agent. In the following analyses, I will argue that the fascist esthetization characterized by its monumental mode of representation (Benjamin) is not essentially different from the esthetizing function of art in advanced bourgeois society. Both share the code of the 'natural' sign as one of referring to something irreducible to which it points as its essence, be it God, nature, reason or, in the case of fascism, the pure will to power of the nation. Furthermore, I will argue that esthetization, understood as the sociological function of art is, (from an esthetic viewpoint) a mode of artistic representation which effaces the conditions of its production through fetishizing the representation as a reflection of the real. The classical discourse about 'vraisemblance' and the three unities of time, action and space would belong here insofar as it is less a discourse of esthetic coherence but one that insists on the central status of a unified, known and recognizable human nature.⁴ Interestingly enough this effacement is particularly marked as literature constitutes itself as an institution and organizes the post-romantic mythologies of the 'personality', the 'genius', the 'creator--and by extension the critic--into a coherent discourse.⁵ The purpose of the esthetizing discourse thus would have to be the construction of a false universality which is recognizable as false inasmuch as socially, culturally constituted signs are mythologized and presented as universal. Such universality however is inevitably grounded in domination and can only be coercive.

Politicization of art versus the esthetization of politics. This is not merely a 'jeu de mots.' The formula reflects a sense of urgency as well as of the isolation of the artistic sphere. The former is due to the political situation in the 1930s, the latter is linked to the sociological conditions under which literature constitutes itself as an institution. It cannot be seen independently of the increasing specialization and rationalization of the lifeworld under the economic imperatives of high capitalism. Reason, the tenet of bourgeois Enlightenment, which originally implied a program for the political, social and economic self-determination of everyone, in the 1800s deteriorates rapidly into mere purposive rationality. This internal colonization of bourgeois society by its economic sector manifests itself in the breakdown of the public sphere analyzed by Habermas.⁶ Its breakdown and transformation signifies the end of a communicative structure which,

however imperfectly, assured the continuity between the economically and culturally oriented fractions of the bourgeoisie. The 'homme de lettres' experienced no strict separation between literary and political public. In fact, this structure explains the contiguity of his existence: at that time, writing is more or less explicitly political because subject to the absolute monarch's censorship.

As the original public sphere changes into the modern sphere of public consumption, an artistic and intellectual intelligentsia emerges which is looking for an audience or rather a market. While this new institutional situation increases the artist's freedom, it also subjects him more than ever to the constraints of the art market. In this market the mythology of the 'creative genius' immediately turns into a highly effective marketing strategy. The 'genius' assures the uniqueness of the work of art and thus assures its value, especially in the face of the rise of new means of mechanical reproduction.

Value, of course, is directly related to a product's rarity. The artefact's value is not so much of an economic but a symbolic nature. For the acquisition and collection of works of art amounts to an ostentatious destruction of wealth. To buy a work of art is to manifest one's personal taste. The act itself signifies one's personal culture. As Bourdieu points out, it is an irreproachable exhibition of wealth and a challenge to all those who are not able to dissociate their being from having and who fail to transcend the 'vulgar' world of economic, material interests.⁷ The appropriation of the esthetic artefact, in particular in the case where the latter is actually intended to resist its appropriation, is made possible by the esthetic disposition which underlies its structure. This disposition which the artist tends to share with his bourgeois public is characterized by the privileging of form over function and nature of the represented object. Such a mode of representing, which is inscribed in the transformations of taste and its restriction to a pure esthetic category (Kant) in the 18th century, is destined to preclude any 'naive' reaction.⁸ In short, the esthetic disposition inscribed in the dominant social position of both the economic and cultivated fractions of the bourgeoisie provides a mode of appreciation which denies any 'naturalistic' perceptions of and reactions to the real. It furthermore tends to constitute the esthetic artifact as work rather than as a product. Ultimately, the symbolic value of a work of art increases to the degree to which the artefact is purged of the circumstances of its production.

It is clear that a literary work does not reintroduce these circumstances by attempting to break with the existing esthetic forms and conventions. As Bourdieu shows in his analyses of Flaubert's *Education Sentimentale*, the very rejection of a particular convention and form presupposes a minimal consensus about their value and

importance.⁹ The question raised is never whether there should be form, but rather which form should be enforced. For political theater the problem thus is how to make visible the politics of form without falling into the trap of false alternatives of different forms or metaphysical conceptions denounced by Planchon. Such a process, of course, would in a sense recreate what Habermas termed "Offentlichkeit", i.e., a genuinely political communication. This, if anything, seems to be the problem of 'political' theater, for theater, above all, can be seen as a process of communication. The communication, however, cannot be reduced to denouncing certain ideologies. If theater wants to avoid an esthetizing of political issues, it must expose the codes informing its productions and its public's reception. The theatrical code itself must appear as a sign of theater's position in a differential system known as bourgeois culture. Only as such can it expose its ideological content, denounce the contradictions between culture's claims to universality, and the fact that culture represents and reproduces class differences in the symbolic order. Any global condemnation of the forms of bourgeois culture as false representations of reality would obviously be premature. In fact, what matters is not the particular act of cultural, esthetic representation but rather the mode of representing--the code according to which signs are put in order among themselves--, because such an encoding may conceal or reveal mechanisms of power, exploitation and humiliation.¹⁰ From the viewpoint of actual theater work this means that theater must speak itself as theater, as esthetic form and social practice. It must preempt its appropriation to some extent by making, as in "Mephisto", the appropriation of culture its subject. In so doing, it may just effectively expose the code or codes which constitute the cultural identity of the subject in relation to its respective class, and hence emphasize the historical nature of both. The proof, of course, is in the pudding, in the play itself.

Thematically--the term is used in a purely heuristic manner--Mephisto is the story of a petty bourgeois actor, Hendrik Höfgen, whose career coincides with his turning toward fascism in the 1920s and 30s. An actantial model can be built around the subject Hendrik Höfgen and his object represented by Erika, the bourgeois daughter of the writer Thomas Brückner. The subject is 'psychologically' motivated by its position in the social world; such psychology, however, is founded in the social dialectic of pretention and resentment characteristic of the class relation between upwardly mobile petty bourgeoisie and bourgeoisie. This dialectic structures Höfgen's objective and how he will attempt to realize it for himself, i.e., his political decisions. In this model the actantial function of the 'destinataire' is defined by Höfgen's personal quest for success inscribed in and motivated by the

star system of bourgeois theater.

Another conflicting actantial model could put Myriam, Alex and Otto, the three actors forming the political theater 'Oiseau d'Orage', in the position of the subject. It constitutes itself in relation to a textually absent audience, the working class. It is absent as a public insofar as the working class experiences domination differently from any intellectual. Yet it is also present, through its absence, because it serves the intellectual as the imaginary position of his protest against social alienation. The contradictory nature of the desire constituting subject and object in this actantial model immediately reveals the precarious and problematic status of 'proletarian' theater insofar as Knurr and Mme Efeu, who work in subordinate, non-artistic jobs at the Hamburg State Theater and who represent the popular classes, never even appear on the stage of the 'Oiseau'. To add to this problem, the ones most interested in the 'Oiseau d'Orage' are Carola Martin, an established actress, Magnus, the director of the State Theater and various of its members. Incidentally, Otto and his friends are themselves part of the ensemble of the State Theater. The motivations of this group can be found in their marginal roles in the bourgeois theater and in society. Especially for Otto, the reality of his own marginality leads to a strong identification with the cause of the working classes. His option for communism is, in the 1920s, a realistic choice and cannot surprise.¹¹ This 'psychological triangle' translates seemingly individual, private experiences of domination into a collective goal: to create, through a political revolution, a more humane society characterized by the absence of need and exploitation.

The two models expose conflicting interests: the ensemble of the 'Oiseau' works for the better of the community as they understand it. Höfgen works for himself only. His quest is personal and thus enclosed in the dominant social ideology of competition and merit. Individual characters such as Juliette, his mistress, or even Erika, his eventual wife, are mere pawns in his quest for success. Furthermore, his success ultimately will reinforce the value system based on competition, merit, and, in the specific case of the actor, hard work, artistic talent and excellence. The 'ideological triangle' shows precisely how the dramatic action folds on itself and appears as ideology.¹²

This "retour de l'action à l'idéologique" (Ubersfeld) is summarized in Höfgen's final, apologetic statement "Je ne suis qu'un comédien ordinaire" (199). Yet it is obvious that Höfgen is by no means an ordinary actor. He is Hitler's appointee and director of the Prussian National Theater (193). At the high point of his career, he no longer is a mere actor but an institutional representative of the fascist system. Although an actor, he represents a system which is responsible for the death of his former colleagues Miklas, Otto, Magnus,

Myriam, and many others, as the final optical and acoustic devices (a projection of the names of the victims of fascist terror and the song 'Moorsoldaten') indicate.

Höfgen starts out as a provincial, gifted and yet somewhat marginal actor at the Hamburg State theater. In this instance, marginality is defined by his absence from the cultural center of the time, Berlin. It is objectified through his ambiguous relation to Carola Martin, a well-known star and guest actress at Hamburg, and his 'interest' in the 'Oiseau d'Orage'. On the one hand he envies Carola, and yet he entertains the idea of making political avant-garde theater. But Carola sees through Höfgen and ironically points out that his desire to succeed will most certainly lead him to Berlin rather than to the 'Oiseau d'Orage'. "Ils vous ont fait un triomphe, mon cher . . . Comme si vous aviez vous-même mis en fuite toutes les sections d'assaut de Monsieur Hitler . . . C'est tout un art ça . . . Vous plairez à Berlin" (19), she says, referring to Höfgen's post-performance announcement of the averted Nazi putsch of 1923. Carola's premonition is proven correct. Höfgen never attends any of the rehearsals of the 'Oiseau d'Orage' and, at the first opportunity, leaves for Berlin to associate himself with the Nazis. His interest in the 'Oiseau d'Orage' ultimately is a rationalization of his assimilable behavior. In 1923, a socialist, anti-fascist rhetoric helps Höfgen create perceptions of himself which legitimate his claims to artistic authority and success in a predominantly left-wing milieu. He casts himself in the role of the artist as the outsider in bourgeois society and uses this dominated position to usurp the revolutionary discourse of the dominated classes for his own purposes. In the final years of the Weimar Republic such a rationalization makes little sense. The mood has swung. Germany's revolutionary and reformist socialist movements are by and large defeated. Nazism is on the rise, not at least because it addresses concrete needs rather than ideology.¹³

Höfgen's assimilative behavior may raise questions as to his ethics. But the more important issue is to show who he is and whose interests he serves. While Höfgen is not per se unethical, his acts engage consequences which are to be measured in ethical and political terms. In order to demonstrate this, Höfgen is juxtaposed with Miklas who is of similar petty bourgeois origin but seemingly less talented and a self-avowed National Socialist. While both strive to improve their lot, their options are as different as the result of their efforts. For lack of other means such as 'talent' or rather the recognition of his peers, Miklas makes a political decision whereas Höfgen espouses artistic mythology. These choices are themselves rationalizations of slightly different degrees of domination: hence the different social strategies. Such a difference, however, is not socially neutral. It

involves a symbolic conflict between competing conceptions of the world based upon class. The world of need and necessity is Miklas's social signifier. His is a closed, finite social universe. He stays within its boundaries, resentful of the constant humiliation inflicted upon him and his kind by those whose notion of culture is founded on values affirming the transcendence of nature and need. In this respect, Miklas clearly belongs to a petty bourgeois faction in decline which is ever so close to the proletarian condition. His entire psychological make up is different from Höfgen's. He rejects all strategies of delayed gratification, all forms of self-imposed sacrifice, and seeks to fully live in the present. In contrast to Höfgen, he denies neither his past nor his present. Drinking, eating, dancing, a little human warmth and solidarity in his relation with Knurr and Mme Efeu affirm this socio-cultural identity. It is an identity which Höfgen seeks to deny. He lives in the shadow of the bourgeois world of the Brückners, a world which he perceives as essentially open and accessible to him.

Consequently, the actantial relation between subject (Höfgen) and opponent (Miklas) is an existential one. Höfgen must assert himself at Miklas' expense. To realize his social pretensions, he must erase his past and distinguish himself in the most legitimate and legitimizing mode of self-representation: art and 'high' culture. Hence his treatment of culture as a treasure of knowledge: he objects to Erika Brückner's incorrect identification of Dostoevsky as the author of 'Anna Karenina' (96) and, in another instance to Miklas' acting on the grounds that he does not understand his text (118-120). The latter scene is particularly telling because he refuses to explain to Miklas what he does wrong. The message is unambiguous: The genuinely cultivated do not need explanations, and Miklas, by asking for help, disqualifies himself as an actor. To add insult to injury, Höfgen attacks Miklas' political convictions and asks that he be fired. He not only uses his cultural competence to deny Miklas a status as his equal or, at least, partner in the theater, but also to distinguish himself from Nazism as represented by his opponent. Nazism thus is conveniently dramatized as the opposite of culture. Within the dramatic context of 'Mephisto', this scene obviously serves to legitimize Höfgen's subsequent move to Berlin, and makes him immune against the criticism that he supports Nazism.

The conflictual triangle reveals that the personality conflict between Miklas and Höfgen builds on a larger issue: the relative value of cultural capital in society. Symbolic conflicts are not exactly 'academic', for they explode in real violence. Cultural capital constitutes real power as Höfgen himself learns. It does not surprise that he resents situations such as the dinner at the Brückner's house where

he is subject to various symbolic rejections due to his insufficient incorporation of the bourgeois cultural codes. The problem is that culture does not constitute a body of knowledge rather than that which remains when everything has been forgotten. This is never more evident than in the conversation about whether and where Dostoevsky said that 'Beauty will save the world'. As it turns out, there is not anyone who can identify the source. But it does not matter; nor does Erika's erroneous statement about Dostoevsky and 'Anna Karenina.' Thomas Brückner ultimately ends this exchange in saying that the statement is a great thought, regardless of where it was made (cf. 96). The entire debate is for naught. It is a playful interaction among people who are so intimately familiar with culture that they no longer need to prove it. They incarnate culture.¹⁴

Such lighthearted treatment of matters which are of crucial importance to him can only exasperate Höfgen. For it is as if his every step toward appropriating the dominant bourgeois culture, as if the appropriation itself removes him farther from his goal. The very act of appropriating betrays his deficiencies and turns culture into an ever so subtle, yet finite class barrier. Erika Brückner's friend Nicoletta succinctly points out the discriminating character of bourgeois culture and correctly reads Höfgen's resentful anguish ("ennui") as a reaction to this invisible barrier: "Nous sommes deux oiseaux bariolés, deux oiseaux carnivores! On n'entre pas comme ça dans une famille de doux herbivores" (97).¹⁵ Too self-conscious, too serious, too eager to prove himself and too conformist, Höfgen falls into all the traps of petty bourgeois "méconnaissance," resulting from his unconditional cultural docility.¹⁶ Instead of admitting to his origin, he keeps denying it. His symbolic failures to which he answers in the mode of moral indignation ultimately strengthen his desire to succeed (110). In the end, the very dialectic of pretension, rejection and resentment, the effort to escape the constant humiliation inherent in his class position, drives Höfgen into the arms of fascism. Furthermore, the structure of his insertion into the symbolic, i.e., his habitus,¹⁷ is such that he will continue pursuing a social strategy which destines him to fail: he is a prisoner of artistic mythology and a victim of his own strategy.

This imprisonment manifests itself in his blindness to fascism and through his constant theatrical posture. He poses as an anti-fascist, a political activist and revolutionary intellectual, a bohemian (when with Juliette), a cultivated bourgeois (the Brückners' dinner party), an avant-garde critic (discussion with Sarder, the playwright), and, finally, as a misunderstood actor. Yet as many roles as he assumes, he always plays within the limits of himself or rather his habitus. In the end, Höfgen's rationalizations of his chances to succeed override

whatever scruples he might have had. Miklas, on the contrary, recognizes his political error and refuses to play along with fascism as an informant for Johstinkel. Mnouchkine's play thus carefully avoids a dogmatic statement which says that the petty bourgeois inevitably turns fascist. Both Miklas and Höfgen have time to learn and understand the implications of their social and political options. While there is determination (*habitus*), there is no sociological determinism. Both make a choice. Both choices articulate specific relations to social reality that are themselves encoded in the relation to theater. This is particularly revealing in Höfgen who flirts with the idea of political theater only to move away from it. But to better understand this we need to take a closer look at the theatrical discourses in the play.

'Mephisto' is played mainly on two different stages:¹⁸ the bourgeois theater (Hamburg, Berlin) with the Italian stage and the theatrical canon (Goethe, Verdi, Chekhov), and the political cabaret with its open stage and its references to the circus, the *café-théâtre* and the *Commedia dell'arte*. This division is practically realized in the *Cartoucherie* where the *Théâtre du Soleil* set up two stages opposing each other and the audience in between them. While this may seem a mere spectacular gimmick, the organization of space thus emphasizes the difference and continuity between two theatrical codes. They are not mere ideological options but depend on each other. Their actual presence constitutes an instance of genuine 'theatralization'. Theater announces itself as theater.¹⁹ The very spatial arrangement structures the dialectical relation between spectator identification and distanciation.

Distanciation, however, is a double-edged tool because it is the matrix of all esthetic perception which, in essence, refuses to dwell on the obvious and seeks to go beyond a 'first' and therefore 'superficial' impression. "L'esthète (. . .) introduit une distance (. . .) par rapport à la perception 'de premier degré' en déplaçant l'intérêt du 'contenu', personnages, péripéties, etc., vers la forme . . ."²⁰ This type of distance can arguably be found even in Brecht's concept of distanciation insofar as it could be read as a means of making 'popular' art and art forms intellectually acceptable.²¹ In the present case, distanciation seems to espouse neither of the above models. In a sense, the *Théâtre du Soleil* subjects any form of esthetic distanciation to scrutiny. Henceforth, distanciation is a self-reflective, dialectical suspension of distance. It means to make the public aware of the theatrical, esthetic code of bourgeois theater as a historical manner of producing and defining the real. The system code of bourgeois theater is presented as a function of the construction of the bourgeois subject. This code is the mental image or representation of the

bourgeois's relation to power, philosophically expressed through the opposition of natural and divine law. Furthermore, as an image, it also is a performative utterance generating the reality which it describes. Its performative function is, more or less explicitly, of a pedagogical nature and determines the constitution of the theatrical sign as a natural one.

To be morally and pedagogically effective, bourgeois theater must convincingly represent the emotions, demeanor, opinions and conditions of the bourgeois individual. And the presentation of vice and virtue will be accepted only if the public recognizes them as elements of its own reality. Consequently, the foremost question is whether and how a realistic mode of representing can be found. Diderot addresses the problem in his "Lettre sur les Sourdes et Muets"; and argues that gestures constitute a 'natural' language. Hence his emphasis on pantomime in "Le Fils Naturel," "Le Père de Famille," and in the "Discours sur la poésie dramatique." The problem is to decide whether the kinetic, paralinguistic sign should be a copy or a perfected, ideal version of what is to be found in real life. In "Le Paradoxe sur le Comédien," Diderot further argues that theatrical reality cannot be constructed in the same way as non-theatrical reality because illusion is the condition under which theater produces the real. Truth in art, he says, is not truth in life.

Réfléchissez un moment sur ce qu'on appelle au théâtre *être vrai*. . . . Est-ce y montrer les choses comme elles sont en nature? Aucunement. Le vrai en ce sens ne serait que le commun. Qu'est-ce donc que le vrai de la scène? C'est la *conformité des actions, des discours, de la figure, de la voix, du mouvement, du geste, avec un modèle idéal imaginé* [my emphasis] par le poète, et souvent exagéré par le comédien.²²

Instead of fetishizing reality as the measuring stick of artistic representation, Diderot displaces the problem from reality to truth. As a philosophical universal truth subsumes any particular reality. Truth is what the latter somehow is not or not yet. Any merely realistic sign would only connote a particular and therefore fragmented aspect of the real. Representing truth, however, is representing the real by using signs denoting the general through the particular. Hence the demand that kinetic signs never correspond to actual signs such as are produced by a particular individual person A,B,C. Instead they should denote the reality of a human type.²³

Consequently the theatrical, kinetic sign is a child of inductive reasoning: the sign is based on the scientific study and observation

of the particular.²⁴ The gesture of grief, for example, is not anyone's particular gesture but one that reduces various individual forms of grief to a common denominator that is universally recognizable and reproducible. This theatrical sign clearly is an abstract. In fact, it is not a natural sign at all. The process of selection and abstraction really detaches the sign from nature. Emotions for example such as associated with tears are clearly purged: the sign no longer signifies the cause of the emotion but the idea of sorrow, pain, joy, etc. When Diderot objects to the accidental nature of particular kinetic signs found in everyday life, he really rejects them as too natural. They are too closely bound up with the sensual, physical aspect of life. As such they constantly recall the by and large uncharted, hence menacing territory of the body, i.e., of a barely controlled physis or nature which is both biological and social.

Une femme malheureuse, et vraiment malheureuse, pleure et ne vous touche point: il y a pis, c'est qu'un trait léger qui la défigure vous fait rire; . . . c'est qu'un mouvement qui lui est habituel vous montre sa douleur ignoble et maussade; c'est que *les passions outrées* sont presque toujours sujettes à *des grimaces* que l'artiste *sans goût* copie servilement, mais que le grand artiste évite.²⁵

In other words, natural signs as found in daily life are too functional and not formal or rather not ideal enough. Such signs could not function as esthetic signs; they are not constituted as esthetic signs.²⁶ As such they are inadequate to expressing the bourgeois self-perception founded in the rejection of the sensual associated with the hedonistic life-style of the aristocracy and the 'animalistic', vulgar tastes of the dominated underclasses.

Although bourgeois theater in the 19th century ceases to pursue its pedagogical objectives, this code remains in effect. Theater still is to create an 'illusion of reality' but reality is increasingly defined by the psychological processes and frames of mind of the bourgeois individual. These are no longer recognizable as socially structured by the historical insertion of the bourgeois into the symbolic, i.e., by the dual status of private man as *homme* and *citoyen*.²⁷ Diderot's considerations still reflect this understanding. Bourgeois reality, he says in the "Entretiens sur le Fils Naturel," is anchored in class rather than in the individual character.²⁸ Duties, obligations, constraints, privileges etc. are all tied up with the social rank of the bourgeois. It is not surprising that humanity and bourgeois class are, in Diderot's reasoning, virtually identical. For it is the opposition between the business and intimacy sphere which alone generates the historic

discourse about a genuine humanity based on love, friendship i.e., on relationships free of material interests. A value system elaborated within the private sphere, humanism defines a discourse undermining the principle of the divine right on which the legitimacy of the institutions of the public sphere rests. Humanism presents a universality *ex negativo*: the universality of all those whom the aristocracy equally denies access to power. The universality of the theatrical sign as conceived by Diderot is essentially founded in this institutionalization of the self in bourgeois society.

With the bourgeoisie's rise to social prominence, this institutionalization changes. Political egalitarianism, the flip-side of humanism, becomes ideologically undesirable and even dangerous. Hence the adjustment of humanism to the needs of advanced capitalism, most persuasively described by Sartre in his book on Flaubert. In theater this entails a shifting from representing truth (the universal) to representing the specific and to present it as 'natural' and hence universal. To do so, the existing theatrical code is refined. Signs are no longer constituted on the basis of the study and verification of similarities between body and psyche. Man is assumed to be a known entity. Consequently, signs are anchored in the authenticity of an expression rather than the relation between expression and situation. Authenticity guarantees the sign's natural character. As for acting, this means that all signs, especially those conveying the most minute and complex details of an individual's mental disposition, must be immediately intelligible and hence self-explanatory.²⁹ Such self-evidence, however, is grounded in the bourgeois public's shared social ethos, in its value system which expresses (and reproduces) a particular privileged relation to the world. The imposition of this theatrical code (representing bourgeois reality as the real) amounts to an act of symbolic violence by means of which the objectively particular (the bourgeois class) is presented as the universal (nature). In short, the class structure is 'naturalized'.

To a large extent, the system-code of such theater is constituted through tradition, i.e., the corpus of performances following the spirit and intention of the author. Tradition substantiates and verifies the 'natural' sign. Using its own theatrical discourse the Théâtre du Soleil shows that tradition itself is a social construct and juxtaposes the bourgeois theatrical code with that of popular theater, especially that of the *commedia dell'arte*. Rather than dismissing tradition, it thus uses it in order to restore the link between social interest and esthetic code, the discourse of power and its representation in the symbolic. The esthetizing mode of representing wipes out precisely this link by denying the symbolic its status as part of the real. Interestingly enough it does so through an intense proliferation and

institutionalization of the discourses about the symbolic. In theater, this involves the increasing division of labor, the rapid growth of a theatrical apparatus especially throughout the 19th and early 20th century which comprehends stage-director, actors, costume designers, technical personnel, musicians and song writers, stage designers and, of course, theater critics and scholars. This apparatus while giving room to conflicts ultimately surveys and controls what is being said about theater as an art form. In short, it preserves its codes.

This proliferation of discourses about the symbolic occurs not only in theater but also in all other cultural spheres. Adorno/Horkheimer analyzed this phenomenon specifically in their essay on the culture industry. While their conclusions may today appear exaggerated, though understandable given the historical situation in the 1940s, their analyses still concern us today. What sticks out in their analyses is the insipid colonialization of public consciousness through the dissemination of distinctive cultural signs which invariably undermines their ability to function as signifiers of difference. This abolition of differences in the public sphere and consciousness ultimately amounts to an esthetization of political life in that it erases the distinction between signifier and signified. The culture industry, Adorno and Horkheimer argue, essentially produces cultural signifiers that resemble artistic, esthetic signifiers. Like the latter they appear to signify a world of freedom in contrast to what is happening in the material world. But this resemblance is fraudulent. While the work of art would signify the world of freedom as a false universality as long as it is the privilege of a happy few, while it exposes the irreconcilable social wound between have and have nots, the products of the culture industry affirm that universality. They provide a surrogate identity, i.e., the illusion that the world of freedom already exists. And the constant reproduction of this illusion required by Market imperatives inevitably aligns the culture industry with the social hierarchy.³⁰

This however is not per se an argument against mass culture, but one that insists on the differential organization of culture as a sign system. As such, it denounces the depoliticized conception of art which in fact is inherent in the social relation of the dominant classes' relation to the world. The significance of the work of the Théâtre du Soleil lies in the fact that it restores the sign as a social construct linked to class practices. Höfgen's appropriation of distinctive cultural signs differs significantly from the Brückners' although and because it is mediated through the theatrical code of the natural sign. The following observations isolate three instances which demonstrate this appropriation and their dependence on the code of the natural sign. All three of them are important to the play's effort of

producing a discourse of disidentification insofar as they successively expose the symbolic violence and control over society mediated through the mastery of dominant cultural codes, the failures and humiliation which are inflicted upon Höfgen as one who seeks to appropriate them in order to realize his dream of a better life, and finally the entropy of dominant culture with its two poles, the Brückners' estheticist world view and Höfgen's esthetization of his existence.

First, the evening at Thomas Brückner's house. A rather conventional scene shows the family together, talking about art, the seasons and politics. Yet, as the conversation menaces to turn controversial on political issues, it is deflected and neutralized by a sudden transition to Chekhov's "The Cherry Orchard." Erika takes a clue from her father's meditating on the season and the elm trees to initiate an instant improvisation of the play. The real departure of Thomas Brückner on the following day (he will leave for Frankfurt to attend an evening honoring Goethe) blends into the play's departure scene. The linguistic and paralinguistic signs pertain to the play's as well as the family's reality. Life is art and art is life. This transition from an after-dinner conversation to actual play-acting--without appearing as such--can only surprise the uninitiated such as Höfgen. While he has learnt his share of the cultural canon, he has not incorporated it to the extent that it has become his nature. His is still a culture of quotation rather than of unmediated self-representation. The kind of obliteration of the boundaries between esthetic and non-esthetic practice demonstrated by the Brückners relies on a complete assimilation of and by the codes. The code of bourgeois theater is a mere extension of bourgeois *savoir vivre*.

This code as a function of the bourgeois relation to the world signifies the rise above and beyond nature inasmuch as it defines a world of needs and their satisfaction. Innocuous as the Brückners' little performance may appear, it articulates the bourgeois' claims to dominate the social nature. Chekhov's "paroles" help the Brückners create their world not only as different but also as the exact opposite of 'nature'. Chekhov's play and underlying esthetic, theatrical code provide, as it were, the blue-print for it. (Theater hence is the system-code, a "langue" defining what can and will possibly be said.) Reality is created in the image of an artistic creation and thus appears as a symbolic representation of power. Its characteristic is precisely the systemic repression of the natural. As Bourdieu argues:

Le monde que produit la 'création' artistique n'est pas seulement une 'autre nature' mais une 'contre-nature', un monde produit à la manière de la nature mais contre les lois

ordinaires de la nature [cf. Thomas Brückner eats raspberries late in the fall]--celles de la pesanteur dans la danse, celles du désir et du plaisir dans la peinture ou la sculpture, etc.--par un acte de sublimation artistique qui est prédisposé à remplir une fonction de légitimation sociale: la négation de la jouissance inférieure, grossière, vulgaire, mercenaire, vénale, servile, en mot naturelle, enferme l'affirmation de la sublimité de ceux qui savent se satisfaire des plaisirs sublimés, raffinés, distingués, désintéressés, gratuits, libres. L'opposition entre les goûts de nature et de l'âme, entre ceux qui ne sont que nature et ceux qui affirment dans leur capacité de dominer leur propre nature biologique leur prétention légitime à dominer la nature sociale.³¹

Yet the esthetic representation of power as such constitutes merely a partial aspect of the esthetizing moment. Its ideological, cultural significance appears only to the extent to which the signified is separated from the signifier. To that effect, power itself must be presented not as a strategic situation of a class agent but rather as the consequence of communal will and desire. Hence the importance of a vision of a homogenous cultural community as one of shared values. In a strange way Chekhov's play provides such a structure for the Brückners.

In Chekhov's plays life is strangely reduced to utopian dreams or the remembrance of things past. Communication is hard to establish, if not altogether impossible. Isolation characterizes his protagonists' existence. Such isolation, Szondi argued, brings out antagonisms between them but also preempts the need and desire to overcome them.³² Within the context of the dinner at the Brückners, Chekhov's play serves to subdue the obviously strenuous relationships between various members of the family and friends. But at the same time, it further strengthens the individual's isolation. Neither Höfgen nor Nicoletta participate in the improvised scene. The differences of opinion between Sarder, Thomas and Sebastien Brückner are not resolved or even discussed. The theatrical code introduces a level of abstraction--a genuine counter-nature--which intellectualizes the differences. By virtue of the objectivity inherent in this intellectualization--or more precisely esthetization--of conflicts, the latter are in a certain sense always already overcome.³³ In contrast to Zola's or Hauptmann's works where isolation unites all agents in a community of fate ("Schicksalsgemeinschaft"),³⁴ Chekhov's play freezes the Brückners simply in their estheticist worldview. In a sense, the bourgeois' relation to the world has become fate, and the

Brückners live as choice and freedom what is de facto an extraordinary degree of self-alienation. The symbolic violence exerted against the social order thus turns on them themselves. Within the 7th tableaux of 'Mephisto', the appropriation of bourgeois culture via Chekhov's play actually prevents the agents from insight into this structure.

And yet, it is not true that bourgeois theater is inevitably locked into reproducing only positions of power that are culturally mediated. There is a scene on the bourgeois stage which exposes the systemic contradictions of avant-garde bourgeois art and thematizes the promise of a future society free from the constraints of need and necessity. It is the scene from Sebastien's *Anja and Esther* portraying the awakening sexuality of two school girls and their warm, sensual playing with each other. In fact, Nicoletta and Erika eventually slip out of their roles and engage Sebastien in their playing. Eroticism marks an instance of a freely chosen communal act beyond any constraints. But this utopia is marred by the fact that the play fails to articulate the connection between personal emotions, pleasure and social privilege. The problem appears clearly within the dramatic context of 'Mephisto' because the eroticism of this scene contrasts with sexual degradation experienced by Lorenz, who prostitutes himself for a slice of bread. "Thus the exclusive indulgence in private emotions is perceived as a privilege accorded only the happy few who have the means to insulate themselves from vulgar concerns with material necessities."³⁵ As Sohlich points out, it is important to recognize that bourgeois theater holds out a utopian promise. But the fetishist institutionalization of art in bourgeois society also denies its realization except for a few.³⁶ Ultimately, bourgeois theater becomes part of the immense apparatus of cultural reproduction purporting and masking socially founded inequalities. Appropriated in such a manner, art and the familiarity with it signify social standing, prestige and distinction, i.e., power.

Höfgen, of course, directly experiences this appropriation. He clearly understands the symbolic significance of culture and yet his own appropriation makes him prey to every imaginable cultural error.³⁷ This appears in the course of the evening at the Brückners' but also in his rapport with his black mistress Juliette. In an attempt to appropriate the dominant cultural codes, he uses Baudelaire's "Venus Noire" to disenfranchise and magnify Juliette as his black goddess. Sexism and racism become indistinguishable as he forces her to cater to his sado-masochist fantasies (32). Although she asks Höfgen to tell her more about his work, the politics of the 'Oiseau d'Orage', communism, etc., he keeps her in the position of a mere sex object. And he does so through the use of his relative cultural superiority. He writes a scene for her ("La femme au Lasso") which is nothing less

than a not so subtle striptease and thereby reduces Juliette to her body. But this body, much like those of the prisoners in the Nazi camps, is a sign-vehicle signifying male fantasies, both Höfgen's and her public's. This culturally mediated disenfranchisement is produced by and through Höfgen's writing. His use of a canonized piece of poetry simply continues the act of writing. Their master-slave relation is founded on different degrees of cultural appropriation and control. As he uses Baudelaire's poetry, Höfgen transposes an esthetic-artistic code onto the level of the non-esthetic, social life. The poem hence esthetically represents and esthetizes his social desires. It furthermore esthetizes the violence exerted against Juliette. Her subjugation and objectification is legitimized by culture. Höfgen's 'writing' has tradition on its side: not only Baudelaire but also Faust and the bible. And Mephisto is after all the fallen angel, the prince of the dark who found a modern expression in Baudelaire's dandy. On the other hand, Juliette's objectification never really appears as an act of violence because the master/slave relation is extremely formalized. Desire itself is formalized. As Höfgen 'gently' forces Juliette to slap him in order to arouse his desire, he also purges it. He asks to be castigated for it and lives this as pleasure. Such a formalization feeds directly into the bourgeois notion of pleasure founded in the discursive rejection of everything vulgar, of unmediated desire, whether sexual or otherwise.³⁸ In this respect esthetization unequivocally appears as a function of Höfgen's relation to culture.

This image of sexuality, power and domination has its equivalent in the scene from the 'Cherry Orchard'. In either case, dominant cultural forms are used to ostracize those not familiar with them, thus creating a community which defines itself not so much by what it shares and creatively generates but rather by what it rejects and banishes. The elimination of differences is the price for culture. Barbarism is the other side of culture, as Benjamin and Adorno well knew.³⁹ In the final analysis, the esthetization of Höfgen's existence coincides with the fascist esthetization of power. The common denominator lies in the creation of allegedly neutral, apolitical and class-transcendent identities based on the suppression of heterogeneities or, at least, their carefully controlled existence in deliberately depoliticized niches of the public sphere.⁴⁰ As Höfgen appropriates art he transcends his original condition; as a 'mere' actor he keeps the very esthetic code alive which enables him to represent the social as the natural, the political as the personal, the historical as the universal. Usurping dominant culture he himself is appropriated and literally possessed by it. He himself 'becomes' an ornament of power. The Nazis, on the other hand, combine different esthetic codes (classicism, neo-bavarian baroque, Bauhaus functionalism, neo-gothic elements) so

as to generate acceptable images of collective identities. The main emphasis is on the beauty of the collectivity. Interestingly enough, the esthetic concept of beauty is set in a metonymical relation with virility, strength, youth, propriety, hygiene, harmony etc. In a sense, the discursification of sexuality outlined by Foucault provides interpretations which suspend the traditional relation between esthetic, the sign-vehicle/beauty/and its meaning. The condition for this assimilation of the esthetic into power is the calculated destruction of a sphere of relative autonomy for art. In a society characterized by an advanced division of labor and a powerful culture industry which commercially exploits the fascination of any upwardly mobile group with the symbols of distinction, this destruction is always already under way. Indeed, the masses organized by fascism become mere ornaments of power much like Höfgen and Juliette.⁴¹ The problem obviously is to find ways of counter-acting the institutional pressures of the unification of the market of symbolic goods.⁴² The issue is far from simple. Proletarian theater is no more lucid and capable of grasping complex social realities than bourgeois theater. The controversies around the sketches on inflation (44 ff.) and Hitler (80 ff.) make the members of the 'Oiseau d'Orange' - and the spectators-painfully aware of their limitations. They have as much to do with the insufficient knowledge of the actors about economic and other matters as with their own ideological closures which prevent them from correctly diagnosing political events. Sohlich argues that proletarian theater's task "to enlighten its public in order to transform relations of domination into relations of free association . . . is a highly problematic task [because] the social division of labor only allows partial access to and fragmentary knowledge of the social world." In a bizarre sense, the "master code of teleological historiography jealously guarded by an orthodox Marxist party" actually reinforces these blind spots, i.e., the fragmentation of knowledge, and produces ideological misreadings.⁴³

If proletarian or bourgeois theater is a false alternative, truth resides dialectically in their division. It articulates itself, however, not on the level of content but rather on the level of its codified representation. The discussion between Alex, Otto, Myriam and Magnus about the adequate ending for the Lazzi of Hitler illustrate the problem. The sketch portrays the collaboration between Hitler and the representatives of industry (Thyssen) and the military (Fonnesique). When Thyssen and Fonnesique visit Hitler in prison and elaborate their sinister political plans, Alex, playing the role of the warden, locks them in together. While the original analysis of the interests behind fascism is fairly accurate, Alex's dramatic solution is inadequate. This failure cannot alone be explained in terms of the reasons mentioned

earlier. Alex's own justification is esthetic rather than political: he wants a positive hero (84). But this hero turns out to be a mere mouthpiece of Moscow's propaganda apparatus. Furthermore, Magnus, the director of the bourgeois theater, does not fail to recognize the reference to the theatrical tradition and explains that the positive hero requires a negative counterpart, his boss who obliges him to let his prisoners out (87). This brief exchange reveals that the theater of the 'Oiseau' simply negates bourgeois theater on the level of subject matter all the while it recognizes and respects its formal imperatives. Proletarian theater, Magnus implies in his critique, will always be inadequate to its self-imposed task and deteriorate into mere propaganda as long as it remains simply a negative and negating discourse. As such, rather than esthetically representing what the codes of bourgeois theater deny and thereby revealing the interest underlying this denial, it merely reproduces the original denial. In other words, through the uncritical and unquestioned use of esthetic devices anchored, although at times contradictorily, in a tradition which is itself founded on the privileging of form over function, proletarian theater deprives itself of any critical possibilities. It is not only not proletarian but also cannot claim to enlighten its left-wing, generally bourgeois public.⁴⁴ Such theater actually could very well be accused of merely esthetizing the interests of a dominated and yet dominant bourgeois intelligentsia.

While the 'Soleil' may not be able to entirely avert this danger, it clearly recognizes the problem. Its own specific answer is the recourse to an essentially non-mimetic, theatrical convention operating with decidedly 'artificial' signs such as the circus and carnival plays, parody and, epitomizing all of the former, the *commedia dell'arte*.

Lazzi or comic routines are an important element of the *commedia*. Though there are many different types, they all have their esthetic function within a theatrical esthetics concerned with its impact on the public.⁴⁵ The *commedia* systematically sacrifices considerations of form to those of effect. Lazzi thus constitute instances of respite from the plot and permits the public an emotional withdrawal. Boredom, restlessness thus are avoided, and plot and *peripeteia* can be set up anew. Particularly lengthy lazzi could become integrated into the plot.⁴⁶ These comic routines consist of a series of set situations and roles. The lazzo of Hitler, for example, portrays Hitler as an *arlecchino*, the original comic type, the fool or childman from Bergamo who is known for his stupidity or childlike wit, his masterful disguises and acrobatics. And sure enough, Hitler takes the chirping of the birds for the voice of destiny. While his own words could create the misleading impression that Hitler is a laugh, his actorial function and role as harlequin hedge against it. The unmistakable

message, especially with hindsight, is that fascists come in many disguises. Thyssen, on the other hand, is the modern version of Pantalone, the gullible merchant from Venice, and Fonesique is the modern day edition of the pompous captain bragging about war and his adventures with women.

But in this instance as well as in the other sketches performed on the 'proletarian' stage, the 'Soleil' does not aim at reinventing a theatrical tradition of a bygone era. Nor does it use the non-naturalistic code of the commedia to juxtapose it, as a purely popular theater, with bourgeois theater. This would also be historically inadequate since the commedia's reception in Italy and elsewhere in Europe shows that it was equally appreciated by the aristocracy and the popular classes. The bourgeoisie, on the other hand, apparently had a much more difficult time accepting such theater, although its influence lives on in Marivaux' and Nestroy's theater.⁴⁷ One aspect in the Soleil's references to the commedia is that they create an effect of theatricality through meta-theater. And "if theatre is self-reflexive, if it consciously refers to its illusionistic nature through frank theatricality, then the two negatives cancel each other out and theater seems to speak honestly. (. . .) The Soleil's *Mephisto* is an especially fine example of the 'dénégation'/theatricalization dialectic at work, because this is one of the troupe's most realistic pieces. *Mephisto*, in contrast [to the earlier productions where dialogue is scarce and which thrived on improvisation and clowning techniques], stands on its own as both a literary and a production text. The clowning is present, but justified naturalistically by the theatrical environment."⁴⁸ A second point, however, seems more important. The commedia is not only a hoard of artificial signs but also of a historically different sensitivity, of a different relation of the human subject to its body. The lazzi of the commedia were often unambiguously 'obscene' and crude. Sexual explicitness is a sign of an eroticism which in Marivaux' adaption of the harlequin, for example in "Le Jeu de l'Amour et du Hasard", falls under the verdict of brutality and intolerable bestiality. Face to face with the bourgeois stage and its theater, the clown scenes are not only part of a Brechtian process of "Verfremdung" that shows reality in a new light and hence as changeable but also elements of an eroticization of theater.⁴⁹ Contrary to the eroticism in the *Anja and Esther* sketch, eroticism would not reside in a hopelessly exclusive privatistic pursuit but in the effort to restore pleasure and sensuality to a theater of ideas, and thus to defy and counter-act the symbolic violence exerted by a cultural and theatrical code that generates and validates all signs in relation to only one interpretant: the specifically bourgeois relation to nature whose negativity is inscribed in the esthetic disposition. The domination over one's biological and

physiological nature, and social domination are intertwined issues; Klaus Theweleit's analyses on the constitution of the fascist body in *Male Phantasies* only confirm what Bourdieu elaborated within the more general framework of a theory of culture.⁵⁰

Instead of a historicist reference to 16th century social reality, the reference to the commedia serves to speak about the present. The Théâtre du Soleil thus discloses the link between fascism and advanced bourgeois culture. The symbolic violence which shapes identity in bourgeois society is a latent prefiguration of "fascism's ruthless inauguration of the reign of identity through violence [which] is ultimately perceived as the eruption under economic stress of the inherent irrationality of a social order where economic and discursive differences are structurally lined to domination."⁵¹ Such domination is again structurally reflected through the presence of the bourgeois and proletarian stages: social reality in which the theatrical discours partakes especially because of the peculiar status of the theatrical sign, is the reality of its divisions. Yet as the 'Soleil' goes beyond a mere factual delineation of these splits and shows the code present in the esthetic and extra-esthetic order, it points the way toward how signs feed back into power. It avoids esthetization by reestablishing the link between signifier and signified, sign-vehicle and meaning, and reveals that systems of representation are, in Frow's words, "particular kinds of games rather than . . . a reflection of reality."⁵² These games, however, can be murderous as 'Mephisto' shows. Representation ultimately has very little to do with mimesis in the narrow sense but rather with the production of reality, that is the power of representing.

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Notes

1. Quoted in Emile Copfermann, *Théâtres de Roger Planchon* (Paris, 1977), 213-14.

2. Cf. Walter Benjamin, "Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner mechanischen Reproduzierbarkeit," *Gesammelte Schriften I*, 2, eds. Rolf Tiedemann, Hermann Schweppenhauser (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1980) 435-508.

3. Cf. Walter Benjamin, "Pariser Brief", *G.S. III* 490.

4. As Anne Ubersfeld writes: "Tout le discours classique de la vraisemblance indique moins les conditions d'une bonne réception que la continuité d'une conduite dont les motivations enclanchent une chaîne sans rupture d'émotions et d'actions. La dramaturgie classique est moins une dramaturgie de la cohérence esthétique (cf. Malebranche) qu'une dramaturgie du vouloir (cevoir étant à la limite le vouloir divin). A. Ubersfeld, "Le Jeu des Classiques," *Les Voies de la Creation Theatrale*, vol. VI (Paris: CNRS, 1978) 189-90.

5. Dubois compares Adorno's, Barthes' and Sartre's contributions to this problem and integrates them in a theory of literature as an institution which is

based on Bourdieu's analyses of the 'market of symbolic commodities'. Cf. Jacques Dubois, *L'Institution de la Littérature* (Buxelles: Editions Labor, 1978); see also Pierre Bourdieu, "The Market of Symbolic Goods," *POETICS* 14 (1985) 13-44.

6. Cf. Jürgen Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit: Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft*, 12th ed. (Darmstadt/Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1981).

7. Cf. Pierre Bourdieu, *La Distinction: Critique Social du Jugement* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1979) 320-21.

8. La disposition esthétique qui tend à *mettre entre parenthèses la nature et la fonction de l'objet représenté* et à exclure toute réaction "naïve", horreur devant l'horrible, désir devant le désirable, révérence pieuse devant le sacré, au même titre que toutes les réponses purement éthiques, pour ne considérer que le mode de représentation, le style, aperçu et apprécié par la comparaison avec d'autres styles, est une dimension d'un rapport global au monde et aux autres, d'un style de vie, où s'expriment, sous une forme méconnaissable, les effets de conditions d'existence particulières: condition de tout apprentissage de la culture légitime, qu'il soit implicite et diffus comme est, le plus souvent, l'apprentissage familial, ou explicite et spécifique, comme l'apprentissage scolaire, ces conditions d'existence se caractérisent par *la mise en suspense et en sursis de la nécessité économique et par la distance objective et subjective à l'urgence pratique* [my emphasis] . . . Capacité généralisée de neutraliser les urgences ordinaires et de mettre entre parenthèses les fins pratiques, . . . la disposition esthétique *ne se constitue que dans une expérience du monde affranchie de l'urgence et dans la pratique d'activités ayant en elles-mêmes leur fin, comme les exercices d'école ou la contemplation des oeuvres d'art* [my emphasis]. Bourdieu, *La Distinction* 56-57.

9. Cf. Pierre Bourdieu, "L'invention de la vie artiste," *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales*, No. 2, mars 1975, 67 ff.

10. Attempting to reassess the concept of ideology from a semiotic point of view Frow argues: "Ideological value does not reside in the falseness of a particular act of representation. it is only at the level of the articulation of the sign in a particular structure of signification that we can speak of a production of meaning, and here 'meaning' must be conceived strictly as a function of the diacritical coherence of the structure. Signification depends not on the correlation of signs with bits of reality but on the order of signs among themselves." John Frow, *Marxism and Literary History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986) 65.

11. Théâtre du Soleil, *Mephisto: Le Roman d'une Carrière d'après Klaus Mann* (Paris: Solin, 1979); hereafter, all references in the text.

12. Cf. Ann Ubersfeld, *Lire le Théâtre* (Paris: Editions Sociales, 1978) 88; the relation of psychological to ideological triangle is supplemental; it could be described in terms of the Moebius strip.

13. The historian George Mosse made the important observation that fascism responded to concrete economic needs, to the crisis of the growing petty-bourgeoisie and the working class, both hit hard by the economic turbulences of the 1920s and 30s, all the while responding to a socio-psychological and ultimately sociologically determined need for identity, for a perspective and for a vision. The play shows this by contrasting Höfgen's situation with Lorenz's, Knurr's, Mme Efeu's and Hans Miklas'. Need drives Lorenz to prostitute himself for a slice of bread (63), and Miklas objects to Carola because she is Jewish and thus represents those who allegedly live off the suffering people. Hence his violent refusal to drink French champagne—offered by Carola to celebrate a successful performance—while Germany starves (17). Economic deprivation and the need for identity born of the military defeat in World War I merge in these scenes. Cf. George Mosse, *Masses and Man: Nationalist and Fascist Perceptions of Reality* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1980) 159-196.

14. Cf. Bourdieu, *La Distinction* 381.

15. The image of the meat-eating versus the vegetarian culture summarizes

the different relation of dominant and dominated classes to nature. As Bourdieu shows, the consumption of meat, and especially fat, increases as one goes from dominant to dominated classes. The reason is found in the different conditions of existence which, in the dominated classes, demand an efficient reproduction of physical strength as the basis of one's labor force and 'marketability'. Such considerations naturally disappear where one's subsistence is not built on physical labor or any labor at all. Cf. Bourdieu, *La Distinction* 204-209.

16. 369-70.

17. Habitus or ethos of class are the two terms used by Bourdieu to describe what could be called an incorporated, internalized and therefore by and large 'unconscious' class consciousness. "Structure structurante, qui organise les pratiques et la perception des pratiques, l'habitus est aussi structure structurée: le principe de division en classes logiques qui organise la perception du monde social est lui-même le produit de l'incorporation de la division en classes sociales." Habitus thus consists of all the ways in which a subject learns to perceive, feel, think and act in his environment. The ethos of class thus can be roughly defined as the generator of all the ethical, moral, seemingly spontaneous responses of a subject to the social world. But they are not spontaneous rather than perceptions of one's place which are inculcated by various institutions such as family, Church, school, army, social clubs and professional organizations, etc. This also explains why habitus is not only a "structure structurante" but also a "structure structurée". Cf. Bourdieu, *La Distinction* 190 ff.

18. For a detailed account of the stage at the 'Cartoucherie', see Bernard Dort, "Das Sonnentheater im Stählernen Zeitalter," *Theater Heute* (July, 1979) 8-12.

19. Cf. Ubersfeld, *Lire le Théâtre* 51-52.

20. Bourdieu, *La Distinction* 36.

21. Fn. 6, 568.

22. Denis Diderot, *Paradoxe sur le Comédien* (Paris: Garnier Flammarion, 1967) 137.

23. Cf. Erika Fischer-Lichte, *Semiotik des Theaters*, vol. 2 (Tübingen: Narr, 1983) 129.

24. This also explains Diderot's objecting to the particular acting style where the interpretation of a role lies entirely in the hands of the actor and his emotional repertoire. "C'est à l'étude des grands modèles, à la connaissance du coeur humain, à l'usage du monde, au travail assidu, à l'expérience, et à l'habitude du théâtre, à perfectionner le don de nature. Le comédien imitateur peut arriver au point de rendre tout passablement; . . . Le comédien de nature est souvent détestable, quelquefois excellent. En quelque genre que ce soit, méfiez-vous d'une médiocrité soutenue . . . Et comment la nature sans l'art formerait-elle un grand comédien, puisque rien ne se passe exactement sur la scène comme en nature, et que les poèmes dramatiques sont tous composés d'après un certain système de principes?" Diderot, *Paradoxe* 125-26.

25. 137.

26. Cf. fn. 8 on the esthetic disposition as characterized by Bourdieu.

27. Cf. Habermas, *Strukturwandel* 74.

28. Cf. Diderot, "Entretiens sur le Fils naturel," in *Paradoxe* 96.

29. Cf. Fischer-Lichte 183.

30. Cf. Theodor W. Adorno, Max Horkheimer "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (New York: Continuum 1986) 131-136.

31. Bourdieu, *La Distinction* 573. To avoid any fetishist misunderstanding of the natural, it is clear from Bourdieu's use of the term here and elsewhere that the natural defines not a state prior to the symbolic, i.e., civilization, but rather a social and sociological relationship to the world as one of material necessity and interests.

32. Peter Szondi, *Theorie des modernen Dramas 1880-1950, Schriften I*, eds. Jean Bollack et al. (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1978) 84.

33. Cf. Georg Lukacs, "Zur Soziologie des modernen Dramas", *Schriften zur Literatursoziologie*, ed. P. Ludz (Luchterhand: Neuwied, 1961) 681.

34. Cf. Szondi 85.

35. Wolfgang F. Sohlich, "The Théâtre du Soleil's Mephisto and the Problematics of Political Theater," *Theater Journal*, (May 1986), vol. 38, no. 2 146.

36. Cf. Sohlich 148.

37. Bourdieu characterizes these errors as "allogoxia culturelle," i.e., an agent's belief to live according to the cultural norm all the while he perpetually transgresses it. The point of this paradox is that any cultural error signifies both respect of the norm and its misunderstanding. Cf. Bourdieu, *La distinction* 370.

38. Bourdieu discusses the elaboration of this notion of pure and purified pleasure in relation to Kant's notion of the disinterested pleasure underlying the esthetic judgment. Cf. Bourdieu, *La Distinction* 566ff. Foucault ultimately describes the same phenomenon when arguing the multiplication of sexualities through legal, clinical, pedagogical, psychological discourses which feed pleasure back to power. The institutionalization of speaking about sex and pleasure makes the unspeakable speakable. Discursification--in a sense 'writing'--literally subjects pleasure to the technology of power and thus turns it into pure pleasure which, like pure taste, is essentially negatif. Cf. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, tr. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1980) 36-73.

39. Cf. Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetische Theorie*, 2nd ed. (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1974), and Walter Benjamin's essay "Eduard Fuchs, der Sammler und Historiker," in G.S., II, 2 465-505.

40. One should avoid to give the impression that fascism totally regimented all of the cultural life. For an interesting and rich source on the divided cultural reality in Nazi Germany, see Hans Dieter Schäfer, "Das gespaltene Bewußtsein. Über die Lebenswirklichkeit in Deutschland 1933-1945," *Das gespaltene Bewußtsein: Deutsche Kultur und Lebenswirklichkeit 1933-45* (München: Hanser, 1981) 114-194.

41. On this subject, see Siegfried Kracauer's observations, which feed into Benjamin's thoughts on the same issue in "Pariser Brief 1," in *Ornament der Masse*, (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp 1963).

42. The 'Soleil', acutely aware of these forces, assures their theatrical presence on stage by way of the narrative framing of the play. The prologue to part I (Tableaux 1-7 covering the period 1923-24) consists of a letter from Klaus Mann's publisher and Mann's reply. In his letter, the publisher explains that he cannot publish the novel 'Mephisto' because of the political climate in post-war Germany, and because Höfgen again plays an important role on the German stage (11f).

43. Cf. Sohlich 142.

44. As Bourdieu writes, "un discours de dénégation appelle une lecture formelle (ou formaliste) qui reconnaît et reproduit la dénégation initiale, au lieu de nier pour découvrir ce qu'elle nie. La violence symbolique qu'enferme tout discours idéologique en tant que méconnaissance appelant la re-méconnaissance ne s'exerce que dans la mesure où il parvient à obtenir de ses destinataires qu'ils le traitent comme il demande à être traité, c'est-à-dire avec tout le respect qu'il mérite, dans les formes, en tant que forme. Une production idéologique [such as theater or any piece of literature] est d'autant plus réussie qu'elle est capable de mettre dans son tort quiconque tente de la réduire à sa vérité objective: le propre de l'idéologie dominante est d'être en mesure de faire tomber la science de l'idéologie [and any ideology-critical enterprise, theater or criticism] sous l'accusation de l'idéologie" [Magnus precisely calls Alex "un réducteur de tête" (87)]. Pierre Bourdieu, *Ce Que Parler Veut Dire: L'économie des échanges linguistiques* (Paris: Fayard, 1982) 196-197.

45. It would seem that the opposition of "Wirkungsästhetik" and classicist "Gehaltsästhetik" can be explained in relation to the bourgeois distance from the world of material necessities. It hardly surprises that the latter's importance increases as bourgeois culture solidifies its grasp on society.

46. Cf. Mel Gordon, *Lazzi: The Comic Routines of the Commedia dell'Arte* (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1983) 5.
47. For a more detailed account of the influence exerted by the commedia and an attempt to define its status as courtly, popular or bourgeois theater from a sociological perspective, see Wolfgang Krömer, *Die Italienische Commedia dell'arte*, *Erträge der Forschung*, vol. 62 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1976).
48. Rita Lundstrom, "Two Mephistos: A Study in Dialectics," *Modern Drama* XXVIII, No 1 (March 1985) 164-65.
49. Ariane Mnouchkine strongly emphasizes this aspect in *L'Age d'Or: Première Ebauche*, *texteprogramme* (Paris: Editions Stock, 1975) 17-20.
50. Cf. Klaus Theweleit, *Männerphantasien*, 2 vols (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1980). The translation of the first volume has been published in 1987 by the University of Minnesota Press.
51. Sohlich 152.
52. Frow 65.

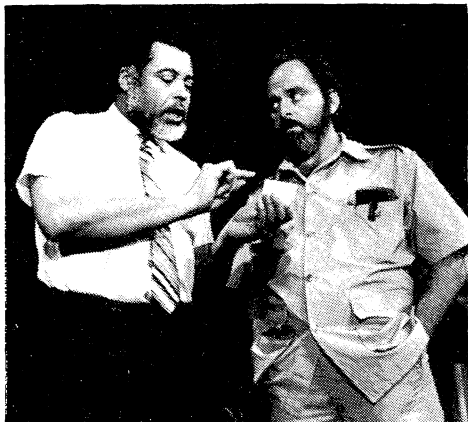
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