

## Reading Scenic Writing: Barthes, Brecht, and Theatre Photography

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During the second visit of the Berliner Ensemble to Paris in 1955, Roger Planchon identified what he called an *écriture scénique* (scenic writing) in Brecht's work that Planchon distinguished from Brecht's *écriture dramatique* (dramatic writing).<sup>1</sup> This scenic writing, in Planchon's opinion, was neither an illustration nor a realization of the traditional dramatic text, but a separate narrative quite distinct from the narrative encoded in the play's script.<sup>2</sup> Planchon was quick to recognize how Brecht's technique created new possibilities for the theatrical treatment of narrative. Scenic writing made it possible to tell several different, even conflicting, stories at the same time or, as an alternative, it made it possible to present simultaneously the same narrative from a number of different points of view. Planchon subsequently incorporated Brecht's technique in his own work as playwright and director. What Planchon did not do, however, is address the question of analyzing scenic writing, a question that remains one of the most important unresolved issues in theatre semiotics. This essay investigates the theoretical problems involved in the study of scenic writing and explores ways in which some of Roland Barthes' work helps to bring key issues into focus.

Perhaps the best place to begin is with Roland Barthes' 1959 essay, "Seven Photo Models of *Mother Courage*."<sup>3</sup> The most remarkable aspect of this essay is Barthes' almost total silence on the subject of the seven photographs he reproduces with the essay. Barthes introduces the seven photographs as the ostensible subject of his essay in the opening paragraph with an anecdote about how the photos came into being: they form part of a roughly 100-photograph

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sequence shot with a telephoto lens by a photo-journalist named Pic during the Berliner Ensemble's visit to Paris in 1957.<sup>4</sup> Thanks to Pic's efforts, Barthes tells us, "we possess a true photographic history of *Mother Courage*, something quite novel in theatre criticism . . ." (44). The later Barthes of *Camera Lucida* (1980) might not, perhaps, have left stand the phrase "a true photographic history" without further comment or qualification.<sup>5</sup> In 1959, however, Barthes was interested in the photographs of the Berliner Ensemble for what they might be able to reveal about what he calls "the meaning" of Brecht's theatre.<sup>6</sup> Barthes puts it like this: "[W]hat the photographs reveal is precisely what was brought out by the production details. But the details are at the same time the meaning, and it is because Brecht's theatre is a theatre of meaning that its detail is so important" (44).

Despite his declared emphasis on the importance of detail, however, Barthes does not point to specific details in the photographs that might support his analysis. Instead, he leaves to his reader the task of relating the seven photographs to the argument.<sup>7</sup> He does not even discuss the photographs themselves despite his stated belief that the existence of such photographs represents an unprecedented opportunity for theatre criticism. These omissions seem all the more surprising given what we know about Barthes' influential work on the semiotic decoding of photographic images. They also make one wonder about Barthes' optimistic assessment of photography's value for the study of *mise en scène*: if photography is so valuable, why does he fail to discuss these photographs in his essay?

The present essay explores possible answers to this question in an attempt to understand some aspects of the complex relationship between theatre and the photography of theatrical performance. More specifically, it examines how photography enables an analysis of scenic writing and how, as a consequence of this enabling, it mediates our perception of theatre itself.

### The Analytical Value of the "Still"

In a 1970 essay entitled "The Third Meaning," Barthes introduces a number of analytical concepts that point to the potential value of photography for the study of scenic writing.<sup>8</sup> In this seminal essay, Barthes elaborates for the first time the distinction between what he calls obvious and obtuse meanings. The obvious meaning includes the denotative and connotative modes of signification that Barthes studied extensively throughout his career. Barthes devotes considerably less time to the discussion of the obtuse meaning, although it plays a key role in the development of his thinking about the photographic image. Both of these concepts have important consequences for the use of photography in the study of scenic writing, and I will return to them later.

"The Third Meaning" essay also contains an influential discussion of the value of the still for the analytical study of cinematic *écriture*. According to

Barthes, the still enables two different modes of analysis of cinematic *écriture*: it makes possible both the detailed study of a single frame and any number of relationships between individual frames. Because the still halts the flow of cinematic time, it reveals details captured by the camera that might pass entirely unnoticed during the projection of the film but which nevertheless contribute to the rhetorical power of a particular shot or sequence. For Barthes, the unique quality of the "filmic" resides precisely in such details. Although they pass unnoticed by the viewer during the projection of the film, they act powerfully on the viewer's subconscious.

This interruption of the flow of images, Barthes argues, also enables the reading of film as a text by making possible the practice of decontextualization and recontextualization, decomposition and recomposition of textual elements that is the core activity of interpretation. Thus, through the mediation of the still, according to Barthes, film can be seen as a language and interpreted as a species of *écriture*. As we know, the analysis of cinematic *écriture* such as Barthes describes is a familiar element of contemporary film studies.

The same argument can be applied to the relationship between the photograph and theatrical performance. As the film, the "still" photograph releases the viewer from the continuities of performance time. Again, as with film, the theatrical still enables the study of theatrical performance as a text by providing fragments of that performance that can be read and reread. Here, too, through the mediation of the photograph, *mise en scène* may be seen as a language and interpreted as a species of *écriture*.

A small number of semioticians have, in fact, made extensive use of photographs in documenting and analyzing certain *mises en scène*. Perhaps the most successful of these efforts are to be found in the series of volumes entitled *Les Voies de la création théâtrale* that have been published during the last twenty years by members of the scenographic research group at the *Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique* in Paris. Nevertheless, the use of photography as a technology for the analysis of theatrical performance as an *écriture* is quite rare. Tadeusz Kowzan's extended discussion of Planchon's *écriture scénique* in his stagings of Molière's *Le Tartuffe* is one notable instance of such an analysis.<sup>9</sup> Other good examples include Michel Corvin's book on Molière and Patrice Pavis's book on Marivaux.<sup>10</sup> But books on the semiotics of theatre, many of which discuss the visual coding of theatre at considerable length, rarely include photographs. While Anne Uberfeld's *L'Ecole du spectateur*, for example, contains a large number of photographs, her earlier book *Lire le Théâtre* contains none at all.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, Keir Elam's well-known *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* and Martin Esslin's recent *The Field of Drama* do not contain any photographs.<sup>12</sup> Perhaps the reticence of these scholars to employ photographs in the semiotic study of theatre is related to Barthes' reluctance to discuss the seven photographs he reproduces with his article. It is this reticence that I want to explore further.

### The "Filmic" and the "Scenic"

In the "Seven Photo Models" essay, Barthes indicates that the Pic photographs provide an unprecedented opportunity for theatre study because they make certain details of Brecht's *mise en scène* available for examination. As we have seen, he makes a similar argument for the value of the still for the study of filmic *écriture* in his "Third Meaning" essay. There is, indeed, ample evidence that film scholars as a matter of course use stills in their study of individual films and reproduce those photographs as "textual citations" in their published work. In terms of Barthes' distinction between obvious and obtuse meanings, such studies explore the obvious meanings of the cinematic image. That is, they are concerned, to use Barthes' language, with issues of denotation and connotation, with referentiality and with rhetoric.

Barthes' concept of the obtuse meaning, however, significantly complicates his understanding of the details that photography makes available for examination. In the "Third Meaning," Barthes theorizes this third or obtuse meaning as follows:

If we cannot describe the obtuse meaning, this is because . . . it copies nothing. . . . [W]hat the obtuse meaning disturbs is . . . criticism. [T]he obtuse meaning is discontinuous, *indifferent* to the story and to the obvious meaning. . . . [T]he obtuse meaning can be seen as an *accent*, the very form of an emergence, of a fold . . . marking the heavy layer of information and signification. . . . This accent . . . does not tend toward meaning . . . it does not even add an *elsewhere* of meaning (another content added to the obvious meaning), but baffles it--subverts not the content but the entire practice of meaning. . . . In short, the third meaning structures the film *differently*, without subverting the story . . . and it is at this level, and only here, that the "filmic" at last appears. The filmic is what, in the film, cannot be described, it is the representation that cannot be represented. (55-58)

Barthes thus locates what he calls "the filmic" *in* the very details revealed by the photographic still, details that normally pass unseen by the spectator. The intensely subjective experience of film that Barthes calls the "filmic" cannot, he suggests, occur during the projection of the film. Instead, he insists that this experience occurs only during the contemplation of a still, a single fragment released from the continuities of cinematic space and time. This leads him to conclude that the most intense cinematic pleasure (*jouissance*) can be attained, paradoxically, *only* during the contemplation of a still.

In his last book, *Camera Lucida*, Barthes again takes up the subject of photographic detail and its effects on the viewer in a discussion that offers some valuable perspectives on the earlier theories. Throughout *Camera*

*Lucida*, Barthes tries to come to terms with his lifelong obsession with photographs as he seeks to explain why certain images hold an enduring fascination for him and provoke a deeply felt emotional response. As his argument develops, Barthes begins to focus on certain details in the photographs that please him most. Such details, he notices, more often than not seem quite incidental to the evident subject of the photograph, yet it is around such details that the "meaning" of the photograph begins to coalesce for him. The Punctum, to paraphrase Barthes, is that detail in a photograph that arrests the viewer and seems to communicate a special meaning, literally by breaking through the envelope of the viewer's body, thus puncturing or wounding the viewer in his separateness and aloofness. To use a familiar phrase, the Punctum is the detail that gets to the viewer. Like the obtuse meaning, the Punctum remains beyond analysis, beyond representation. Only the ostensible subject of the photograph, the Studium, can be analyzed; the Studium alone is coded. That is, we can discuss the image in terms of its thematics and its poetics, in terms of its referentiality or its rhetoric, but we cannot discuss it in terms of its affects. Nevertheless, Barthes himself manages to point out which details affect him and why; while the Punctum cannot be analyzed, it can certainly be named. And in naming the detail of the Punctum, the obtuse meaning begins to contaminate the obvious meanings of the images; what cannot, by definition, be coded, can nevertheless skew the reading of the codes--the obtuse meaning, or Punctum, "subverts . . . the entire practice of meaning" ("Third Meaning" 56). (Even if we do not fully accept Barthes' argument that the Punctum is beyond representation, he is undoubtedly right about the ways in which apparently marginal and "irrelevant" details, details that are the result of unforeseen and even unnoticed accident, details that seem to work at cross purposes to the Studium, can strike the individual observer as carrying almost the entire burden of a scene's significance.)

Seen retrospectively from the vantage point of *Camera Lucida*, the "Seven Photo Models of *Mother Courage*" essay appears in a somewhat different light. Barthes' mention in passing of the details of Brecht's *mise en scène* as revealed by the photographs now seems less puzzling, as does Barthes' reluctance to explore the details of *mise en scène* made available for study by those photographs. In this essay, he is concerned only with explicating Brecht's story and clarifying certain aspects of Brecht's aesthetic--his concern, in other words, is the Studium of *Mother Courage*.<sup>13</sup> And it is in connection with the Studium of Brecht's theatre that Barthes urges us to see the Pic photographs as citations from a new theatrical *écriture* that Barthes and his colleagues at *Théâtre Populaire* hope will challenge the prevailing bourgeois aesthetic of French theatre. But, in the light of his autobiographical statements in *Camera Lucida*, one suspects that Barthes also sees in these same photographs the precise details that give him a new pleasure quite different from the pleasure of the actual performance, a pleasure that, in 1959, he cannot yet name. In 1959, Barthes had not yet developed the conceptual apparatus that would

permit him to address the "scenic," the Punctum of *Mother Courage*. Thus, in that essay, Barthes does not point to the specific details that strike him in each photograph; he says only that the photographs reveal detail and that detail is important in Brecht's theatre.

In the later "Third Meaning" essay, Barthes does discuss specific details of Eisenstein's *mise en scène* as they are revealed in the stills he selects from the film. Indeed, "The Third Meaning" is principally concerned with the analysis of detail. In this essay, Barthes examines photographic detail in two different ways. First, he draws connections between selected details and a more general discussion of Eisenstein's particular thematics and stylistics (in other words, he investigates the Studium of Eisenstein's film). Second, he isolates certain details, the examination of which leads him to theorize the "filmic," of film's obtuse meaning (in other words, he investigates the Punctum of Eisenstein's film). In the course of this bifurcated analysis, however, the concept of the "filmic" appears to contaminate film's obvious meanings in the same way that the Punctum appears to contaminate the Studium in *Camera Lucida*. Although Barthes discusses obvious meaning before obtuse meaning and Studium before Punctum, his presentation of the obtuse meaning as the third meaning should not be taken to imply that the viewer comes to the obtuse meaning either through the obvious meaning or after the obvious meaning. Rather, we should take it to imply that the viewer's attention to the image is itself divided and neither the coded nor the uncoded takes precedence. As a result, theorizing the viewer's subjectivity is at least as important as theorizing photography's own referential and rhetorical codes.

If we import the concept of the "filmic" into theatre studies, the new concept of the "scenic" will tend to function in a similarly bifurcated manner. That is, photographic documentation will make possible the same kinds of response we have seen in the context of film: it will make possible the study of both the Studium and the Punctum of theatrical representation. The translation of "filmic" into "scenic," however, is far from being a simple operation. If, from a semiotic perspective, the photographic reproduction of a single frame of film differs greatly from the projection of that same frame, the photographic recording of a moment of theatrical performance presents even more complex differences.

None of these differences is more significant than the introduction of the camera itself, as the use of the camera raises an extensive range of technological issues that are quite foreign to theatrical production. Taking a photograph of a moment in a specific *mise en scène* is radically different from printing one frame selected from the long sequence of frames that make up a film. In the case of theatrical *mise en scène*, no such sequence of frames exists. In film, the print retains the same angle of vision and composition as the projected frame (even color and contrast can to a great extent be duplicated); in theatre, the print introduces a new angle of vision at the same time as it creates a new visual composition. In short, the photographic enters the theatre as a new

technology of perception whereas it is already film's aboriginal technology of perception.

### Photography, Pregnant Moments, and Tableaux

Once we begin to use photography as an analytical technology, we are obliged to recognize that we can examine only what the camera has been able to record. Even accepting the well-known difficulties of available-light photography, we cannot escape the limitations of choice imposed by the camera--we cannot record all moments of a *mise en scène*, we must choose what we believe will be the significant moments. Video and film may appear to offer a way of circumventing the problem of choosing significant moments, but they too suffer technological limitations and impose different sets of choices. And, if Barthes is correct, we will in any case revert to the still for the purposes of detailed study.

In another essay, "Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein" (1973), Barthes develops an argument that appears to support his earlier statement about the value of photography for theatre criticism in general and for the study of Brecht's theatre in particular.<sup>14</sup> If we accept Barthes' contention that Brecht structures his plays as a series of "pregnant moments" (*tableaux*), then the possibility arises that photography may provide a valuable record of those very moments as they occur in performance (93). In so doing, photography would function as a technology for the recording of the *tableaux* created by the playwright/*metteur-en-scène*. And, as we know, Brecht himself used photography in the creation of some of his *tableaux* (notably during the staging of *Mother Courage*).<sup>15</sup>

Barthes traces the theory of the pregnant moment through Lessing back to Diderot who, according to Barthes, believed that the artist's most important function was the selection of *the* significant moment. As far as Diderot was concerned, the artist's ability to select this crucial moment was the most important indicator of that artist's achievement. In composing this hieroglyph or *tableau*, the artist communicates his historical understanding: "Diderot has thought of that perfect moment," Barthes tells us, "[as] a hieroglyph in which we can read at a glance . . . the present, the past, and the future, i.e., the historical meaning of the represented gesture" (93). Diderot transferred the conventions of painting to the pictureframe, proscenium stage and conceived of a play as a series of such *tableaux*. If Brecht conceived of his theatre in these terms, as Barthes suggests, then photography can be seen as merely substituting a modern technology for the graphic technologies of past centuries.<sup>16</sup>

It is worth noting, however, the extent to which Barthes' discussion of the Brechtian *tableau* in "Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein" remains ambiguous. In that essay, Barthes argues that the pregnant moment coincides with the Brechtian *gestus*: "With Brecht, it is the *social gestus* which takes up the notion

of the pregnant moment . . . a gesture, or a set of gestures, in which can be read a whole social situation" (93). Yet elsewhere in the same essay, Barthes introduces a notion of *gestus* that transcends the limits of any single moment. "Take *Mother Courage*," he says, "[its *gestus*] is in the blindness of the tradeswoman who believes she is making a living from war and who is actually making a death from it; even more, the *gestus* is in my own *vision* [the emphasis is Barthes'], as a spectator, of that blindness" (96). Here again, Barthes slips back and forth between the Studium and the Punctum, between the coded representations of the *mise en scène* and the subjective experience of its impact. For Barthes, then, the pregnant moment exists both as an aspect of Brecht's poetics and as a subjective aesthetic experience.

Barthes' discussion of the relationship between *gestus* and *tableau* points to some of the problematic aspects of deriving a practice or theory of theatre photography from Diderot's aesthetic of the dramatic *tableau*. As Barthes' analysis suggests, while the photograph can capture a moment of a "gesture" or moments from a "set of gestures," it cannot capture the *gestus* itself because the *gestus* is a conceptual category, an intellectual (re-)construction of a continuity of performance. In other words, the *gestus* is unthinkable in the absence of its complementary framing narrative, whether in the context of the *mise en scène* or the spectator's reading of that *mise en scène*. The theatrical *tableau* is likewise a conceptual category that permits us to decode scenic images. The concept of the *tableau* allows us to see scenic images as if all movement has been removed (and many directors use obviously pictorial blocking patterns to facilitate a *tableau*-oriented reading of their *mises en scène*). We can no more photograph the *tableau* as such than we can photograph the *gestus*.

If photography cannot record the *gestus* or the *tableau*, it can record moments from a performance that can be read in the light of those two concepts. Photography can record details of gesture and of blocking; it can show what all or part of the stage looked like (from a single position in the theatre) at a given moment. While it cannot itself show the significance of such a moment, it can mediate the discussion of a particular performance or *mise en scène*.

### The Mediations of Theatre Photography

As Ernest Gombrich theorized several years ago, we can see only what we have been taught to see. Theatre photography has played its part in our visual education about the theatre and I suspect that we see theatrical performance, at least in part, as a succession of potential photographs. But, as the example of Brecht's model books will make clear, the dissemination of scenographic ideas frequently occurs at the expense of the dramaturgies that gave rise to the photographed images in the first place.



In her 1977 book, *On Photography*, Susan Sontag develops the argument that photography has revealed, almost from the moment of its invention, a dual nature.<sup>17</sup> That is, photography has been seen as both a medium of notation and a medium of construction. In its notational mode, it offers almost limitless possibilities for the objective study of the physical world, detail by detail. In many instances, as we know, the camera records what the unassisted human eye cannot see by virtue of its ability to "freeze" the motion and to magnify the scale of the objects under examination. These notations of hitherto invisible reality inevitably cause us to see reality differently--that is, they make it possible for us to construct for ourselves new ideas about "the way things are." In this, its constructive mode, photography offers virtually unlimited opportunities for the subjective construction of reality/realities. These two modes are, more often than not, impossible to separate: the majority of photographs, including theatre photographs, are both notations and constructions of reality.

Most theatre photography in scholarly publications tends to be read largely in notational, evidentiary terms. When looking at rehearsal or production photographs, for example, we tend to use them as a source of information about elements of a particular production that would be either impossible or impossibly tedious to describe in writing. Such photographs function as a supplement to the written text that accompanies them. Theatre photography also serves to disseminate visual ideas, and while doing all of this, of course, it also promotes the discourse of theatre photography itself.

In addition to these informational functions, photography allows us to isolate and study details that would otherwise remain "invisible" in the flow of stage action, details of gesture, expression, blocking, etc. Brecht used photography extensively in rehearsal for this very purpose, which suggests that a critical analysis of *écriture scénique* may be as valuable for the artist as it is for the scholar. Ruth Berlau, who took so many photographs for Brecht and who played such an important role in the making of the modelbooks, makes the following claim for the usefulness of photography within the production process:

What really happens on stage can be checked only with the help of photographs. A picture can be examined at length in quiet morning hours far from the director's desk. Once the curtain goes up, it is already too late. And it is not without good reason that the Berliner Ensemble possesses a larger photographic laboratory and archive than any other theatre in the world. . . . Nothing of this . . . has anything to do with naturalism or formalism. From photographs of postures, gestures, walks, and groupings we take what we need to achieve truth on stage, bad postures as well as good postures: the bad ones in order to change them, the good to make them worth copying.<sup>18</sup>

Berlau's conception of use clearly remains exclusively notational. For her, the photograph facilitates the critical examination of human behavior by fragmenting that behavior into a series of frozen moments. And we know that Berlau, Brecht, and others in the Ensemble used photography as an aid to refining and verifying their *écriture scénique*. What Berlau has not written about, however, is the extent to which her own photographic activity may have conditioned the ways in which she saw the stage and its activities; nor does she speculate on the extent to which the scenic production of Brecht's company may have been geared toward the photographic--after all, actors too respond to the awareness of being photographed, perhaps more than most.

Apart from using photographs in creating his own *mises en scène*, Brecht also used them to make his modelbooks. There, the photographs tended not to function as a supplement to the written commentary that accompanies both the photographs and the script of the play; rather, Brecht's commentaries supplemented the evidence of the photographs. In the modelbooks, the photographs document Brecht's realization of his own script in performance, thus creating a photographic notation of the play's scenic text. Brecht wanted this record, this photographic text, to suggest one of the possible ways in which *écriture scénique* might supplement his dramatic writing. At the same time, of course, they also propagate and disseminate the Brechtian *écriture scénique*. This dissemination occurred in two ways. On the level of notation, the photographs provided information about the visual characteristics of Brechtian *mise en scène*. On the level of construction, however, they taught their viewers to see in what the photographs asserted was the Brechtian way. They conditioned actors, directors, designers, spectators, and even stage photographers to look for Brechtian blocking, Brechtian gesture, Brechtian emphasis, Brechtian scenography, etc. In short, they encouraged the consumption of Brechtian *mise en scène* as a style. As a result, in the photography-dominated culture of the twentieth century, the visual elements of Brecht's directing style were rapidly assimilated by the Western theatre community even though the assimilation of other aspects of his practice was significantly slower.

What made Brecht's visual style so easily disseminated was photography's constructive capabilities. The photographs that Brecht published in the modelbooks were offered to the public within a controlled context: the photographic discourse both supplemented and was supplemented by the dramatic discourse of the script itself and the ideological discourse of Brecht's own commentaries. Separated from the modelbooks, however, and reinserted in a variety of other contexts, the photographs took on other meanings as they constructed a gallery of images for Brecht's theatre in the theatrical culture at large that Brecht himself might not have recognized.

Separated from the context of the modelbook, or indeed from a context such as Roland Barthes provides, the "photo models of *Mother Courage*" cease to be models at all. Instead, they foreground their hitherto unnoticed photographic rhetoric, and announce themselves as exemplary moments of

Brechtian theatrical style. They invite questions as to how Brecht constitutes his rhetoric of the stage and seem to promise answers in their catalogue of gestures, postures, and configurations abstracted from the continuity of performance. This photographic catalogue of scenic images thus becomes, for the public to which these images are exposed, an incontrovertible aspect of Brecht's identity, if not the essence of that identity. If Sontag is correct in asserting that all twentieth century art aspires to the condition of photography, then Brecht's *mises en scène* have become, for a significant number of people, indistinguishable from the photographs we commonly associate with the Brechtian look.

John Berger suggests another way of looking at the distinction that I have been using between the notational and the constructive. He proposes that we divide photographs into two kinds, the private (notational) and the public (constructive). Berger puts it like this:

In the private use of photography, the context of the instant recorded is preserved so that the photograph lives in an ongoing continuity . . . The public photograph, by contrast, is torn from its context, and becomes a dead object which, exactly because it is dead, lends itself to any arbitrary use.<sup>19</sup>

Using Berger's distinction between private and public, the photographic component of Brecht's modelbooks continued to live in an ongoing continuity as long as the models were used either by Brecht himself or by someone relatively close to Brecht and the model-making process itself. Once the photographs were made public, they were opened up to other uses, which made it possible for others to read and reread Brecht for style and not for story. Any photographs used in the analytical study of scenic writing will inevitably move into the public arena and become divorced from their original context. Once in the public arena, they become subject to any number of different readings. As Barthes has shown, different readers will construct their own obvious and obtuse meanings. One inescapable consequence of this pattern of reception will be that a photograph reproduced to document a detail or details of a particular scenic text will also contain one or more details that provoke a very different response from another reader. The technology of photography cannot be separated from the textuality of the individual photograph.

Barthes' sense of the value of photography in "Seven Photo Models" is akin to the Berliner Ensemble's own--he points to the camera's ability to capture detail for subsequent analysis. Barthes, a consummate analyst of rhetoric and especially photographic rhetoric, might equally well have discussed the Pic photographs from a variety of other perspectives. He might, for instance, have used them as the starting point for a discussion of the new Myth of Brecht as it was emerging in Parisian cultural circles in the late 1950's (it

is useful to remember here that these photographs were taken on the occasion of the Berliner Ensemble's second visit to Paris with *Mother Courage*, two years after the French publication of *Mythologies* [1957]).<sup>20</sup> Or he might well have examined Pic's photographs as examples of the discourse of photo-journalism and theorized some of its recurrent tropes.<sup>21</sup> Instead, he said nothing at all about Pic's photography, preferring to let it speak for itself.

While photography may indeed offer the kind of analytical opportunities suggested by Barthes, its technological value for a semiotics of *mise en scène* cannot escape being compromised by the semiotics of photography itself. While a photograph may stand as a record of a significant moment, no analytical theory applied to the analysis of that moment can be considered adequate in the absence of theories of the photograph and the spectator. Such theories, as Barthes himself observed, have barely begun to be developed.<sup>22</sup>

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## Notes

1. Planchon travelled to Paris to see performances of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* and to meet with Brecht. By way of introducing himself to Brecht, Planchon brought along some photographs of his own October 1954 production of *The Good Person of Szechwan*: "Je me suis présente . . . avec, pour toute recommandation les photos de notre spectacle de *La Bonne Ame de Se-Tchouan*. Je suis resté cinq heures avec lui. Il me disait ce qui lui plaisait et ce qui ne lui plaisait pas dans notre travail, et nous discussions" (Qtd. in Pia Kleber, *Exceptions and Rules: Brecht, Planchon, and "The Good Person of Szechwan"* [New York: Peter Lang, 1987] 98-99). Photography clearly made possible much of the substance of this conversation.

2. John Rouse provides an excellent discussion of *écriture scénique* in his "Brecht and the Art of Scenic Writing," *Brecht: Performance*, The Brecht Yearbook, Vol. 13 (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1987) 77-87.

3. "Seven Photo Models of *Mother Courage*," trans. Hella Freud Bernays, *TDR* 37 (1967): 44-55. "Sept photo-modèles de *Mère Courage*" appeared in the Summer 1959 issue of *Theatre Populaire*. All subsequent citations will be given parenthetically in the text.

4. The Berliner Ensemble first performed *Mother Courage* in the context of the international theatre festival in Paris in 1954. Barthes reviewed this production in the July-August issue of *Theatre Populaire* in the same year. The Berliner Ensemble returned to Paris with different productions in 1955 and 1957.

5. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill & Wang, 1981). The French version, *La Chambre claire*, appeared in 1980 (Paris: Seuil). It is worth remembering that these early articles on Brecht precisely coincide with the writing of Barthes' "Petites Mythologies du mois" articles for the periodical *Lettres Nouvelles*. Interestingly enough, he did not investigate the presence of the possible functions of second-order sign systems in Brecht's theatre productions.

6. This article is part of a series of pieces Barthes wrote on Brecht around this time. In chronological order they are: "*Mutter Courage* au Festival International de Paris," *Theatre Populaire* (July-August, 1954); "Les Maladies du costume au théâtre" and "*Homme pour Homme* de Brecht, au Théâtre de L'Oeuvre," *Theatre Populaire* (March-April 1955); "Pourquoi Brecht," *Tribune Etudiante* (April 6, 1955); "Le Cercle de craie caucasien," *Europe* (September 1955); "Brecht à Lyon," *France-Observateur* (May 10, 1956); "Les Taches de la critique brechtienne," *Arguments* 1 (December-January 1956); "Brecht traduit," *Theatre Populaire* (March 1957) [co-authored by Bernard Dort]; "Brecht, Marx, et L'Histoire," *Cahiers Renaud-Barrault* 23 (December 1957); "Brecht et notre temps," *L'Arche*, 1960; "Sur *La Mère* de Brecht," *Theatre*

*Populaire* (Summer 1960). Barthes did not write again on Brecht until "Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein," *Revue d'Esthétique* (1973). This was followed by "Brecht et le discours: Contribution à l'étude de la discursivité," *L'Autre Scène* 8-9 (1975).

7. The seven photographs appear to correspond to the seven numbered commentaries that make up the body of the essay. The first photograph appears on the upper half of page 45. Toward the bottom of that same page, Barthes begins a section labelled "1. The Raised Finger." The photograph is thus not positioned at the head of the section to which it is presumably related. There is indeed a raised finger evident in the photograph which, I assume, is the finger alluded to in the section title. In his text, Barthes mentions the Sergeant's "philosophical shake of [the] finger" (46). But the actor in the photograph does not appear to be shaking his finger; he appears to be holding his finger up either to indicate something or to emphasize a point. In short, Barthes' text does not seem to relate to this specific photograph. The second photograph appears in the lower half of page 47 and Barthes' second section begins a little more than halfway down page 46. Again, the photograph is not printed at the head of (or anywhere within) the relevant section. There are no details visible in this photograph that relate to a specific point made by Barthes in his Section 2. As far as I can determine, any photograph of the wagon would have done equally well. The specific analytical relationship between the remaining five photographs and sections of commentary remains at least as elusive.

8. "The Third Meaning," *The Responsibility of Forms*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill & Wang, 1986). "Le Troisième Sens" was first published in *Cahiers du Cinéma* 222 (July 1970) and later included in the posthumous collection *L'Obvie et l'obtus* (Paris: Seuil, 1982). All subsequent citations will be given parenthetically in the text.

9. Kowzan, "Le Tartuffe de Molière dans la mise en scène de Roger Planchon," *Les Voies de la création théâtrale* 6, ed. Jean Jacquot (Paris: Éditions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1978) 279-340.

10. Corvin, *Molière et ses metteurs en scène d'aujourd'hui: Pour une analyse de la représentation* (Lyon: Presses Universitaires de Lyon, 1985); Pavis, *Marvaux à l'épreuve de la scène* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1986).

11. *Lire le théâtre* (Paris: Éditions Sociales, 1977); *L'École du spectateur: Lire le théâtre 2* (Paris: Éditions Sociales, 1981).

12. Elam, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* (London: Methuen, 1980); Esslin, *The Field of Drama: How the Signs of Drama Create Meaning on Stage & Screen* (London: Methuen, 1987).

13. Barthes is principally interested in discussing "the notion of distancing" and defending Brecht's theatre against what he calls "prejudiced anti-intellectualism" (44). For him, Pic's photographs show instances of "this new relationship" between "the actor and his pathos" and provide evidence that "to distance in no way means to act less." They show, according to Barthes, that the Brechtian actor is no less compelling than the actor who animates his characters with "the fire of his body, the lavishness and warmth of his 'temperament'." Curiously enough, Barthes does not show how the photographs demonstrate this thesis.

14. "Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein," *The Responsibility of Forms: Critical Essays on Music, Art, and Representation*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill & Wang, 1985) 89-97. All subsequent citations will be given parenthetically in the text. An earlier translation of this essay by Stephen Heath appeared in his anthology of essays by Barthes, *Image-Music-Text* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1977).

15. It seems unlikely that Barthes did not know about Brecht's modelbooks when he wrote the "Seven Photo Models" essay in 1959. For several years, Barthes had been in close contact with those French intellectuals most interested in Brecht's work, the group who wrote and edited the journal *Theatre Populaire*, which Barthes himself co-founded in 1953. Given this degree of participation in the French discovery of Brecht, it is unlikely that Barthes was unaware of the publication in Berlin in 1958 of Brecht's modelbook for *Mother Courage*. And it is even more unlikely that he was unaware of the existence of models for certain of Brecht's plays and of the important role that photography played in the creation of such models. Indeed, Jean Vilar and Benno Besson (at that time a member of the Berliner Ensemble) directed a production of *Mother Courage* in Paris in 1951 that was based on the still-evolving Berliner Ensemble model. Finally, the title of Barthes' essay suggests that he may have been consciously

invoking the Brecht modelbooks, although he chose in his opening paragraph to offer the anecdote about how a French sequence of photographs came into being while ignoring the existence of the German sequence.

16. For a discussion of Brecht's interest in painting and the visual arts, see John Willett, *Brecht in Context: Comparative Approaches* (London: Methuen, 1984) 129-150.

17. *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1977).

18. Ruth Berlau, *Living for Brecht: The Memoirs of Ruth Berlau*, ed. Hans Bunge, trans. Geoffrey Skelton (New York: Fromm, 1987) 234-35. The quotation is taken from an unpublished article Berlau wrote for the *Antigonemodell 1948* which was published in 1955.

19. John Berger, *About Looking* (New York: Pantheon, 1980) 56.

20. A comment in the essay "Myth Today," which was written in 1957 as an afterword for the republication of the "Petites Mythologies du mois" essays (written between 1954 and 1956) under the title *Mythologies* (Paris: Seuil, 1957), might be read as a prophetic comment on the silences of "Seven Photo Models." The relevant passage reads: "[O]ne must deal with the writer's realism either as an ideological substance (Marxist themes in Brecht's work, for instance) or as a semiological value (the props, the actors, the music, the colours in Brechtian dramaturgy)" (*Mythologies*, ed. and trans. Annette Lavers [New York: Hill & Wang, 1972] 137).

21. Such a discussion might have isolated the tendency of photojournalism to favor the grainy telephoto shot as a sign of its own objectivity. Telephoto shots tend to suggest their own objectivity on the basis of the distance between the photographer and the event observed. Evident grain results from pushing the film in the development process, indicating that the photographer was "obliged" to shoot in available light. Taken together, evident grain and the telephoto perspective invite the viewer to infer that the photographed event was not "staged" for the camera. If we are to accept Sontag's position, however, no event is ever *not* staged for the camera.

22. Portions of this essay were delivered at the Association for Theatre in Higher Education annual conference in New York City in August, 1989, and at the Modern Language Association annual conference in Washington, D.C. in December 1989.