

Back to the Theatre of the Future : The Contribution of Theatre History to the Scenic Revolution

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Around the turn of the twentieth century, theatre history emerged as an academic discipline. At about the same time, theatre directors in Europe began to develop and utilize a self-reflective awareness of theatre history. This essay is concerned with the ways in which theatre makes use of its own past. How—and for what purpose—does theatre employ its historical self-knowledge? In exploring this theme, my focus will be on European directors of the early decades of the twentieth century. A particular feature of this phase of European theatre is its conscious quest for theatre's specificity. To describe the experiments and innovations which this inspired I use the term scenic revolution¹—'scenic' because they operated from the premise that the specificity of theatre was located in the stage, and 'revolution' because they transformed the conditions in which theatre was conceptualized. But it was a revolution rooted in theatre history. Its practitioners combined a desire for radical reform with a strong sense of their place in the historical continuum. Without exception, the artists who theorized what they optimistically called the 'New Theatre' (Craig), the 'Theatrical Renovation' (Copeau), the 'Stage of the Future' (Fuchs), drew their inspiration and model practices from the theatrical past. The primary aim of what follows is to characterize their distinctive approach to theatre history, which I will also contrast briefly with the antiquarianism of scientific history and the postmodernist concept of heritage. My starting point, however, is a consideration of cultural memory viewed as a form of interculturalism.

1) David Whitton, *Stage Directors in Modern France* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), Chapter 2: The Scenic Revolution.

The observation that we live surrounded by the past is simply a truism. Claude Chabrol films *Madame Bovary*. We go shopping and Che Guevara looks down at us from advertising billboards. John Lennon sings on the radio every day. However, while the present is saturated with the past, not all the past is equally accessible to us or of equal interest to us. The texts, objects, practices and information from the past that are available to us are limited, sometimes by accidental erasures, sometimes by the selective values which led earlier generations to consider particular materials worthy of preservation and transmitted.²⁾ Similarly, when we employ cultural products from previous eras, we do so selectively and according to our own priorities, privileging elements which serve some present purpose and disregarding those we consider irrelevant or useless.

Cultural amnesia is thus the necessary corollary to cultural memory. In general, materials produced by earlier cultures are actively present in contemporary culture only if they are regularly consulted and if they impinge on current consciousness in a form which makes them useful in some way. To describe the situation that exists when these conditions are met, Marco De Marinis uses the term 'synchronous':

The word synchronous does not apply to everything *that belongs chronologically to the same period*, but rather to everything that is *validated* by the given culture.³⁾

The notion of cultural synchronicity takes up the observations of Yurii Lotman and other semioticians of the Tartu school who argued that a given culture may recognize as its own (and hence may consider culturally contemporaneous, or synchronous) texts that belong to other cultures or to previous historical periods. Marinis gives the example of works of classical antiquity such as Vitruvius's *De Architectura* or Aris-

2) Of the forty or so plays that Aristophanes may have written, no more than eleven are extant. A more flagrant victim of historical carelessness is the French playwright Alexandre Hardy (c.1575-c.1631) who is estimated to have written between six hundred and eight hundred plays but whose work is now represented by a mere thirty-five surviving texts

3) Marco De Marinis, *The Semiotics of Performance*, transl. Áine O'Healy, (Bloomington & Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1993), p. 135.

totle's *Poetics* which he says can be considered synchronous for Renaissance humanists but not for the late Middle Ages nor, except in a very limited sense, for the eighteenth century.⁴⁾ As a different example, we might consider two plays both written and performed in the same city (London) around the same time (1599). Thomas Dekker's *The Shoemaker's Holiday* and Shakespeare's *Hamlet* are both recognised as texts belonging to a particular cultural space. Yet while Shakespeare is often considered as 'Our Contemporary' (to quote the title of the study by Jan Kott), the present cultural space obviously does not accord an equivalent degree of contemporaneity to Thomas Dekker. Although Dekker's play exists materially, it does so beyond the limits of most people's awareness, with little or no cultural actuality, albeit always with the latent possibility that it might some day be re-activated.

Lotman's interest was in the semiotic structures of culture, and De Marinis was concerned with the semiotics of performance, specifically the question of intertextuality, which required a working definition of what might constitute synchronous texts. Nevertheless, these ideas involving cultural semiotics may have a more general application in the field of interculturalism. Indeed, Marinis himself proposes the term 'cultural multilingualism' to describe the ability of cultures to validate texts from other origins, and Lotman used the term 'multiculturalism' to describe a similar phenomenon:

The assimilation of texts from another culture leads to the phenomenon of multiculturalism: to the possibility, while staying within the confines of a single culture, of adopting conventional behaviour in the style of another.⁵⁾

Now, neither Lotman nor Marinis makes any distinction between intertextuality involving foreign cultures and intertextuality involving different historical periods, presumably because the distinction was not relevant to their purposes. Cultural studies, however, assigns the two forms of intertextuality to distinct fields: 'interculturalism', concerning itself with transactions on an axis between foreign cultures (which in

4) *Ibid.*, pp. 135-6.

5) Cited in Marinis, p. 136.

practice may or may not be contemporaneous), and 'cultural memory', dealing with transmission on the axis of time. We should question whether this distinction really corresponds to any intrinsic differences. It seems rather to be the case that the processes of imitation, appropriation, assimilation etc. that characterize interculturalism occur in essentially the same form in *intra*-cultural borrowings from earlier historical periods.⁶⁾ When the European theorists and directors of the scenic revolution looked outside their own context for inspiration, they turned repeatedly to two sources—Asia and the past—both of which they saw as sources of useable models of theatrical practices. In this respect, the intercultural interest of Copeau, Dullin, Meyerhold, Tairov and Vakhtangov in, say, Japanese theatre seems in essence no different from their *intra*-cultural interest in early-modern European conventions such as the forestage, the masks of *commedia dell'arte*, and the improvisational techniques of farce. In some respects the theatrical past to which they referred was as idealized and misrepresented as the Asian theatres which they similarly admired. It nevertheless impacted profoundly on the way they envisaged and practised theatre. In fact, it is no exaggeration to say that theatre history supplied the material for their reformist programmes.

Looking at the theoretical writings of Fuchs, Evreinov, Meyerhold, Copeau, Jouvet and others, one is struck by the recurrence of a particular historical paradigm. It is a visionary narrative, situating the writer in relation to a corrupt present, and looking backwards, beyond the recent past to a more remote past—not in a spirit of escapism but in search of principles on which to construct an alternative theatre of the future.

6) A model of intercultural exchange such as that outlined by Marvin Carlson in his essay on Brook's *Mahabharata* and Mnouchkine's *L'Indiade* could be developed for considering historical borrowings. Instead of assuming a categorical and over-simple opposition between the indigenous and the foreign, Carlson proposes a continuum ranging from the entirely familiar at one end to the entirely foreign at the other. He then outlines a graduated scale of cultural exchanges in seven stages, passing from familiar indigenous traditions at one end of the scale, via the incorporation of foreign elements with greater or lesser degrees of assimilation, through to the wholesale presentation of foreign performances with no attempt being made to accommodate them to the familiar. A paradigm of this kind should prove applicable to historical *intra*-culturalism. See Marvin Carlson, 'Brook and Mnouchkine', in Patrice Pavis (ed.), *The Intercultural Performance Reader* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 79-92.

An example of this style of narrative is Copeau's manifesto for the Vieux-Colombier Theatre, significantly titled 'An Attempt at Theatrical Renovation'.⁷⁾ The essay begins with a wide-ranging and systematic denunciation of the theatre of the day. Copeau deplores its commercialism and exhibitionism, its dependence on ossified traditions and absence of originality, the star system and so on, and concludes by identifying the challenge confronting today's theatre artists: 'Thus, ineluctably, the problem that confronts us is the following: to build a new theatre on unshakeable foundations'.⁸⁾ He then proposes that in order to meet this challenge a *tabula rasa* is required. Everything currently in existence must be swept away:

For we have nothing to hope for from the present. We can not rely on anything that currently exists. If we are to recover our life and health, we must shun contaminating association with that whose form and substance are corrupt [...] Only one thing is certain. Before we can undertake any useful reform, we need to purify.⁹⁾

The remainder of the manifesto comprises a programme of reform, or renovation as Copeau calls it. He outlines the key aspects where the Vieux-Colombier Theatre will renovate: its public, repertoire, troupe, and production aesthetics. In each area, the aim will be to re-build on secure foundations, using sound and proven principles. In the repertoire, for example, pride of place will be given to the works of the past. Copeau, for whom Molière was always *le patron* (the Master), states that 'Our first concern is to show a particular veneration for the classics.'¹⁰⁾ As for how the classics will be performed, he carefully delineates an opposition between so-called 'tradition' and the true lessons of history: 'We will try to sensitize ourselves to the works of the past. Not with the aim of modernizing them. All the originality of our work will come exclusively from a deep understanding of the works of the past.' In an obvious

7) Copeau. 'Un essai de rénovation dramatique', *Nouvelle Revue Française*, 57, 1 September 1913, pp. 337-353. Reprinted in Copeau, *Registres*, vol.1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1971).

8) *Registres*, vol. 1, p. 21. My translation.

9) *Ibid.*, p. 23.

10) *Ibid.*, pp. 25-6.

reference to the traditional routines of the Comédie-Française, which were supposedly handed down within the company by generations of actors from Molière to the present time, he is setting out his company's intention to strip away the accretions of false or sterile tradition and drink instead from the pure source of the plays' original inspiration.

Copeau's historical perspective expresses itself in an architectural metaphor. After demolishing the rotten edifice left by the previous generation and clearing away the rubble, work can begin on building the new theatre on the solid historical foundations which will have been exposed. What ultimately drives his theatrical crusade, however, is a sense of moral mission where the recurrent keyword is purity. In Copeau's hands, theatre history becomes an argument in favour of a moral crusade to restore theatre to its prelapsarian state.

A prelapsarian vision also inspires Gaston Baty, one of the more radical members of the group of French theatricalist directors. Before becoming a director, Baty had worked as a theatre scholar and historian. His major writings like *Vie de l'art théâtral des origines à nos jours* (1932) and *Rideau Baissé* (1949) are a peculiar combination of manifesto and historical treatise. Considered as theatre history, these are highly personal writings. (Some would say idiosyncratic.) Where Copeau looked to the seventeenth century for inspiration, Baty turns instead to the late Middle Ages for solutions to the problems of modern theatre. The Middle Ages for Baty represent an age of faith and a holistic sense of cosmic order expressed in art works where matter and belief are fused in symbolic forms. He describes the gothic cathedrals and the religious dramas as the architectural and dramatic expressions of an integrated vision where science and faith, spirit and flesh, are held in balance and complement each other. From this high point, the subsequent history of theatre is presented as a two-fold process of decline: a shift from embodied drama to dramatic literature dominated by the spoken word, and the equally catastrophic disintegration of a once unified audience of believers into the fragmented, individualistic, secular, theatre-going public of modern times.

According to Baty, the rot sets in with the Reformation and the schism it introduces between humans and the rest of Creation. The Renaissance produces a cerebral art which Baty describes as an impoverished art because it celebrates matter and

form without spirituality. Humanism, the third devastating current, brings a new breed of writers who 'declare that only man interests them, not the universe, not the beauty of things and beings in whose midst he lives, but man alone'. The emphasis is now on mankind as separate individuals, but the disintegration is not yet complete: 'The poison is not yet exhausted; after reducing the universe to this dust, it will now decompose each particle of the dust. The individual, even separated from the world, is still living: he must be dissected. Here is his soul; there is his mind; and yonder is his body'. Jansenist doctrine presents humanity as errant souls in a world where flesh and the material world are nothing but invitations to sin, whilst Descartes confines the universe to the limits of human thought. 'He recognizes only one truth: human reason. He rejects matter, things, the animals, the body. A healthy mind will only interest itself in material things to the extent that they permit scientific hypotheses to be verified.' For the theatre, Baty concludes, the consequences of these ways of thinking are catastrophic. They lead to the triumph of classical tragedy which Baty describes as both Jansenist and Cartesian: Jansenist because 'the rules are narrow, strict, absolute, and outside of them there is no salvation', and Cartesian because 'drama is reduced to characters and characters are reduced to their thoughts'. In short, theatre had become a cerebral art, which is more or less what it was to remain across a wasteland of three centuries.¹¹⁾

In Baty's theatrical programme, exactly as with Copeau's, theatre history supplies a diagnostic tool to identify the pathology of modern theatre. And theatre history again indicates a remedy, which in Baty's case is to renounce the Jansenist-Cartesian tradition of textual theatre and build theatre anew on the medieval model of spectacular total drama. Ultimately, Baty's theatre history is inspired by different values from Copeau's, draws a totally different set of conclusions, and leads to a completely different programme of reform. But the same structuring historical narrative is present in both arguments. So too is the tendency to idealize the past. The Molière venerated by Copeau is a historical phenomenon which appears to be disengaged from its social and ideological environment to stand for a representation of pure theatricality. Paradoxically, it is this historical deracination that makes the concept 'Molière'

11) Baty, *Rideau Baissé* (Paris: Bordas, 1949), pp. 81-104. My translation.

useable as a living force in the present day. Baty presents a similarly idealized version of mystery plays as an expression and celebration of a shared belief system. There is no suggestion, in this transcendent theatre which operates as a unifying spiritual force, of the social and economic exclusions that actually characterized theatre-going in the later Middle Ages.¹²⁾

Copeau and Baty are just two examples to illustrate a historical paradigm which I would argue is a defining characteristic of modernist theories of the 'new theatre'. In addition, modernist writers commonly justified their reformist programmes by reference to a theory of origination. Nicolai Evreinov locates theatre's origins in a pre-aesthetic instinct, which he claims is most observable in children and 'primitive' peoples, to transform reality by means of play. There has been much speculation, writes Evreinov, about the origin of theatre. It has been asserted, for example,

that theatre developed out of religious ceremonies and rituals and that it was in the beginning, so to speak, a by-product of the religious feeling. It was also said the origins of the theatre lay in the choreographic proclivities of ancient man, that they must be sought in the general thirst of the human soul for aesthetic forms and image, that—etc., etc. I maintain, however, that all these explanations must be rejected and forgotten.¹³⁾

In reality, says Evreinov, only one instinct is sufficiently powerful and universal to account for the phenomenon of theatre—the 'theatrical instinct':

The instinct of theatricalization, which I claim the honour to have discovered, may best be described by the desire to be 'different', to do something that is 'different', to imagine oneself in surroundings that are 'different'

12) Konigson shows, for example, how segregation of audiences according to economic means, even exclusion of certain social categories, was widely practised. See E. Konigson, 'Religious drama and urban society in France at the end of the Middle Ages', in *Themes in Drama*, 1 (1979), 23-36.

13) N. N. Evreinov, *The Theatre in Life*, transl. Alexander I. Nazaroff (London: Harrap, 1927), p. 22.

from the commonplace surroundings of our everyday life.¹⁴⁾

On the other hand, Georg Fuchs in *The Stage of the Future* insists that 'the art of acting has its origins in the dance'.¹⁵⁾ It follows that only by restoring rhythmical movement in place of mimetic acting can theatre hope to recover its original function, which he assumes to be a festive ritual that serves to reveal the universal significance of personal existence. Edward Gordon Craig, meanwhile, locates theatre's origins not in an instinct, nor in the practice of dance, but in the visual. He purports to render any further discussion of theatre's true function superfluous by stating its derivation with a dictionary-style definition: 'Theatre, derived from the Greek *Teatron*, meaning a place for seeing shows, derived from the Greek *Teasthai*, to see.' To which he adds: 'Note: Not a word about its being a place for *hearing 30,000 words babbled out* in two hours.'¹⁶⁾

In universities at this time, anthropologists inspired by James Frazer as well as theatre scholars were debating the origins of theatre, generating ideas which interacted with those of theatre practitioners. For practising artists like Craig and Fuchs, however, origination theories were not matters of academic speculation. They were invoked to explain and justify programmes of reform which were always meant to be implemented in reality. Thus, the historical discourse underpinning modernist reforms of theatre is one which (a) charts a historical decline; but (b) is ultimately meliorist because it supplies models to be emulated, either *ab origino* or from a historical moment (variously identified) before the decline set in.

In this context, it is worth noting that there is always an implied historical perspective in the insistence on 'theatricality' which became the holy grail of twentieth-century theatre. Meyerhold's gospel of 'theatrical theatre' was taken up more or less universally by other practitioners of the period. Jouvet, for example, opposed *le théâtre théâtral* ('theatrical theatre') and *le théâtre des poètes* ('theatre of poets', i.e.

14) *Ibid.*, p. 23.

15) *Die Schaubühne der Zukunft*. Cited in Edward Braun, *The Director and the Stage* (London: Methuen, 1982), p. 115.

16) Edward Gordon Craig, *Towards a New Theatre* (London: Dent, 1913), p. 1.

of writers). Theorists repeatedly invoked the imperative to, as Artaud would put it, *re-théâtraliser le théâtre* ('re-theatricalize the theatre'). This apparently pleonastic expression assumes, first, that theatre in its current forms is in some way deficient in the theatrical, and secondly, that there must once have been a time when theatre was theatrical. The conclusions that individual artists drew from this were very diverse, according to the historical moment at which they identified the supposed golden age of theatricality. What they shared was the conviction that theatre could be rescued from its present decline by the selective revival of disused practices from the past. Ultimately—and this, rather than their selective or downright eccentric insights, is what makes their historical thinking significant—history supplies a tool with which to build the theatre of the future.

European directors were not only inspired by theatre history, they turned to theatre history for practical models. In the case of Nicolai Evreinov's *Ancient Theatre*, it gave rise to a proposal literally to stage the history of theatre. The fact of this theatre's existence illustrates the close relationship between the emergence of directors and the development of theatre history as a field of knowledge. In a letter headed 'Prospectus for the Ancient Theatre', published in *Theatre and Art* in 1907, Evreinov deplored the absence of theatre history from the wave of cultural retrospectivism that was affecting all the Russian art forms at the time:

Russian society's interest in the history of art embraces painting, sculpture, literature, poetry and music. It would be a mistake to assume it does not also include theatre. In the matter of aesthetic-historical education we have museums, galleries, historical concerts, special collections on the history of painting, sculpture etc. But where is the establishment, where is the Russian book which familiarizes us with the evolution of the stage, with the evolution of the actor's art, with the artistic developmental problems of the theatre of past centuries? [...] Theatre as a cultural force and indicator of popular tastes, morals and world view should not occupy last place in the history of civilization.¹⁷⁾

To raise theatre to its proper place among the other arts depended on a true under-

standing of theatre history. This, at least in part, was the purpose of the programme he went on to announce:

We have in mind a whole series of historical productions presenting in chronological order not only the history of dramatic literature but also the evolution of staging combined with the history of theatrical dance and music, costuming, make-up etc. Archaeological and historical truthfulness of staging and communication of the spirit and character of the epoch should have decided significance. Each production will transport the spectator to one or other epoch. The characteristics of the actor-audience relationship of the particular epoch will be re-created.¹⁸⁾

The history of theatre, as he envisaged it, would be realized through a series of cycles (of which in the end only two were attempted) devoted to the antique Greco-Roman theatre, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the age of Shakespeare, and the age of Molière.

According to Vsevolozhsky, the Ancient Theatre was merely an extension of the Naturalist staging practices of the Moscow Art Theatre since, methodologically, there was no fundamental distinction between the reconstruction of ordinary life in historical plays, and the reconstruction of ancient plays. This betrays a complete misunderstanding of Evreinov's intentions. As Spencer Golub writes, '[naturalist productions] strove to reproduce *life* as it is lived or was lived in times past. The essential aim of the directors at the Ancient Theatre was to recreate a *theatrical event* of the past.'¹⁹⁾ But if the Ancient Theatre was not simply an extension of naturalism, neither was it a straightforward archaeological exercise. Despite the apparent emphasis on historical research and accuracy, the productions were not conceived as museum pieces but with a more complex and ambitious aim. It was, as Evreinov says above, to 'trans-

17) Cited in Spencer Golub, *Evreinov. The Theatre of Paradox and Transformation* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1984), pp. 108-9.

18) *Ibid.*

19) *Ibid.*, p. 125.

port the spectator to one or other epoch', and ultimately to attempt to recreate the audience of the epoch. His method, to which he gave the name 'artistic reconstruction', depended on the exercise of individual creativity within a prescribed framework of historical authenticity. Evreinov said the director must enter into both the spirit and the detail of the historical epoch, but must not be slave to these. The difference between reconstruction and artistic reconstruction, he explained, was the difference between science and art.

One of the paradoxical features of this exercise, as Golub points out, was that the forms of theatre it recreated were not indigenous to Russia, and indeed were almost unknown in Russia at the time. As a result, some contemporary critics concluded that the Ancient Theatre was merely a symptom of the cultural eclecticism and infatuation with Western Europe that was affecting Russian art at the time. This rather missed the point that Evreinov's entire project was concerned with developing a proper understanding of theatre history. It was the historical epoch, rather than any particular cultural material, that dictated the choice of periods for the cycle of productions. What made a particular genre utilizable for Evreinov was that it allowed him to recreate periods when, unlike the present day, theatre embodied a spiritual and communal cohesiveness.

The Ancient Theatre served an important role as a forum in which the wider debate about the contribution of the past to the present was played out. One of the artists who drew lessons from it was Meyerhold, who continued Evreinov's experimentation with 'artistic re-construction' but modified it in an important way. Like most early directors, Meyerhold was concerned to understand the contribution that performance styles of earlier ages could make to the renewal of theatre. It seemed to him that some plays from the past are so steeped in the moment of their original creation that 'they cannot be appreciated unless they are presented in a form which attempts to create for the modern spectator conditions identical to those which the spectator of the past enjoyed.'²⁰ Methodologically this echoes Evreinov but there was a crucial difference between their objectives. Evreinov aspired to transport spectators out of the present by allowing them to experience the 'spirit' of the historical

20) *Meyerhold on Theatre*, transl. Edward Braun (London: Methuen, 1969), p. 101.

epoch. Meyerhold also aimed to make spectators, as he put it, '[breathe] in the atmosphere of the period'²¹⁾ but to do this in a way which encouraged them to reflect on its relevance to their present-day situation. A remarkable example of this approach is his production of *Don Juan* (Alexandrinsky Theatre, 1910) for which he brought the stage of Molière's Palais-Royal theatre into the Alexandrinsky Theatre. It was in no sense an archaeological reconstruction but rather 'a free composition in the spirit of the theatre in which it was originally staged.'²²⁾ However, Meyerhold extended the architectural lines and decoration of the auditorium on to the stage, and brought the stage into the auditorium by extending it on to a forestage. The auditorium remained illuminated throughout the performance. In their totality, the architecture, décor, costumes and acting style were harmonized in such a way that the environment of the play was reflected in the environment of the performance and vice versa. By this means Meyerhold aimed to sustain a dual awareness of the play as a polemical satire in its original historical context and as a theatrical performance in the context of a spectator in pre-revolutionary St Petersburg.²³⁾ Meyerhold was obviously not the first to appreciate that plays belong to a historical context, but he can be seen as a pioneer in the method of staging classics which inscribes into the performance what Bernard Dort would call—in contra-distinction to Stanislavsky's subtext—the play's historical 'supra-text'. Anticipating as this does the Brechtian method of staging 'old plays' (as Brecht insisted on referring to the classics), Meyerhold can thus be seen to have opened a new chapter in the re-use of historical material in theatre.

The foregoing account relates to a cultural moment when theatre history exercised a special agency in the development of theatre, more powerfully than at any time since the Renaissance. Placing it in a wider context, we can contrast its reformist use of theatre history with both the antiquarianism that preceded it and the postmodernist notion of heritage that has replaced it.

21) *Ibid.*, p. 102.

22) *Ibid.*, p. 99.

23) See David Whitton, 'A modernist *Don Juan* in St Petersburg', in *Molière: Don Juan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 92-110.

Antiquarian curiosity about the past has taken many different forms over the ages but in nineteenth-century Europe it was shaped by the scientific approach to history that developed out of positivist philosophy. In the field of theatre research, this manifested itself typically in an interest in uncovering and conserving historical remains and material objects—physical stage forms, manuscripts, costumes, properties, relics, the personal possessions of historical figures and so on. Meanwhile and in parallel, in the field of theatre practice, we find numerous examples of theatrical ventures proposing that the proper way to appreciate Shakespeare is by reconstructing the historical environments in which his plays were originally performed. As early as the 1840s Karl Immermann was mounting performances of Shakespeare at the Düsseldorf Town Theatre which incorporated aspects of Elizabethan and Italian renaissance stages. In London in the 1890s William Poel's Elizabethan Stage Society undertook a more comprehensive programme to reconstruct authentic Elizabethan stages, including a replica of the stage of the Fortune Theatre constructed behind the proscenium arch of the modern Royalty Theatre. There is clearly an affinity between this type of antiquarianism and the historically authentic environments used by André Antoine in productions of period plays at the Théâtre Libre and the Odéon. (In contrast to later directors, Antoine located plays such as *King Lear* and *Julius Caesar* not in the period when they were written but in the period where the play was set.) This affinity should not surprise us, given that naturalism and antiquarianism share common roots in scientific materialism. Thus, one can speak of a positivist theatre history manifesting itself in the antiquarians' concern with physical environments and verifiable material facts, standing in opposition to the more essentialist and experiential focus on performance traditions of the past that interested Fuchs, Evreinov, Meyerhold and Copeau.

If scientific antiquarianism was driven by curiosity and a preservationist instinct, and progressive directors went in search of useable historical models which represented the essence of theatre as they understood it, the current attachment to theatrical heritage reflects yet another approach to theatre history. Those who live in post-industrial societies are familiar with the commodified versions of the past that are packaged and consumed in theme parks. Theatricalisation of everyday life is a common feature of such sites, and indeed is one of the principal devices employed to

distinguish them from mere museums. The theatrical idiom they employ, dictated as it is by their claim to authenticity, borrows heavily from naturalism. In reclaimed industrial sites, visitors who descend a mineshaft may see coal-cutting enacted by redundant miners re-employed as actors. Or the visitors may themselves become actor-pupils reciting multiplication tables and experiencing the discipline of a Victorian schoolmaster in a preserved nineteenth-century schoolroom. Tourists can be welcomed to Plymouth Plantation by pilgrim settlers speaking seventeenth-century English, or experience encounters with the Victorian mass murderer Jack the Ripper in the vaults under London Bridge Station.

The para-theatrical simulacra which characterize the heritage leisure industry have their equivalents in the theatre proper, of which the most prominent is 'Shakespeare's Globe'. The packaging of Shakespeare's Globe, from its website, heritage street signs and souvenir gift shop, to the encouragement to spectators in the pit to behave in an 'Elizabethan' way, indicates to visitors that they are not theatre-goers in the ordinary sense but participants in an experience governed by a different set of conventions. The conventions are those of the historical theme park. There is the familiar concern for verisimilitude, which in some productions extends to the actors wearing Elizabethan underwear, and a familiar encouragement towards interactive participation. The historical research underpinning this enterprise is meticulous and truly impressive. There are, however, limitations which ensure that Shakespeare at the Globe must remain at some level a simulacrum rather than a re-creation. Just as industrial labour is sanitized and aestheticised for present-day consumption in industrial museums, so visitors to the Globe are insulated from the smells and other hazards of a seventeenth-century playhouse by twenty-first century public health and safety regulations. This is not to deny that, as a working laboratory, the Globe is capable of yielding insights into Elizabethan theatre practices. In fact, Globe scholarship is pursued and disseminated through an extensive research network, research bulletins and so on.²⁴⁾ Nevertheless, the fact that the project presents itself (and is apparently received) as the theatrical flagship of the heritage industry is something we must take into account when assessing its cultural significance. To the eye of the observer,

24) See <http://www.shakespeares-globe.org/globeeducation/research/>

Shakespeare's Globe appears to combine the functions of a living, working theatre *and* a theatre laboratory, *and* a site of sentimental pilgrimage for admirers of Shakespeare, *and* a heritage-style tourist attraction complete with interactive dimension.

Whether pre-packaged encounters with a simulated past are capable of contributing to a better understanding of the present is another matter. It is the aspect of commodified history that brings the heritage theatre dangerously close to the selective amnesia which, paradoxically, sets in when an imagined past is substituted for the present. As many cultural critics have noted, the appeal of the heritage industry is precisely that it offers a refuge from contemporary reality. In this sense, it reflects a more general postmodern preference to use history for escapist purposes rather than as a way of confronting the present. Not that the concept of heritage itself is intrinsically or necessarily reactionary. In fact, the concept of *patrimoine* ('heritage') originated in France as a Jacobin concept allied to republican ideals of universal education and free access to culture. And in England the first major movement of cultural conservation was associated with the early socialist movement through figures such as William Morris and Philip Webb. In its current form, however, the prominence of heritage within the leisure economy seems to reflect a wider abandonment of history in the social and political arena as a progressive instrument in favour of a conservative appeal to nostalgia. If this is so, then theatre history promoted as heritage must be seen as a retreat from earlier uses of theatre history, where the whole point was to construct a new theatre for the future.