

‘Der Weg ist nicht zu Ende, wenn das Ziel explodiert’

Frank Castorf and the Survival of Political Theatre

in the Postmodern Age

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Frank Castorf and the Survival of Political Theatre

in the Postmodern Age

Summary

The advent of ‘the postmodern’ and its derivatives (postmodernism, postmodernity and the like) into the contemporary historical, cultural and political spheres has been blamed by many for the alleged disappearance of truly engaged and engaging artistic forms. In this context, the concept of ‘political theatre’, understood as a modern(ist) goal and thus, from a postmodern perspective, belonging to an outdated rubric, would seem to have lost its capacity to depict, criticise and influence its environment.

It is the main contention of this thesis that elements of ‘the postmodern’ and ‘the political’ can be wedded into one theatrical form. The principal focus of the study will thus be the delineation, analysis, and verification of the superficially paradoxical notion of postmodern political theatre. So formulated, this aesthetic concept best allows one to engage critically with the artistic work of one of the leading directors in the German contemporary theatrical scene, Frank Castorf, whose productions are here analysed chronologically before being placed within a postmodern and political discourse.

The study has, by necessity, drawn on a variety of perspectives, in order to locate the theatrical analyses in their German-specific context. A political perspective raises the question of how and whether political theatre is at all still possible or

desirable in an age that has declared the end of history. A socio-psychological and cultural perspective considers the much speculated assertion of the distinctiveness of East German society and population. A (theatre-) historical perspective helps clarify the differences between Castorf's guest productions in Switzerland and West Germany and those in the (ex-) GDR, before and after unification.

By portraying the emerging concept of a theatrical aesthetics which has taken stock of, and indeed almost manipulated, those postmodern traits it sets out to criticise and ridicule in order to pursue its political aims, this study demonstrates that Castorf's theatre has managed to operate within postmodern culture whilst keeping a political edge.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The ex-GDR director Frank Castorf is one of the leading and most controversial figures of the theatre scene in Berlin and Germany as a whole, whose work has been either praised to the point of uncritical approval (Ivan Nagel) or scorned to the point of irrational hatred (Peter Iden). Either way, the Castorf phenomenon cannot be ignored: his theatrical practices are now discussed in drama departments at German universities, they have been crowned with prizes — amongst others *Regisseur des Jahres*, 1991, *Theater des Jahres*, 1993, *Fritz Kortner Preis*, 1994, *Inszenierung des Jahres*, 1995 (*Theater heute*), best direction for *Trainspotting*, 1997 (Sarajevo International Theatre Festival) — and invitations to perform abroad, from Brazil to New York, London, Sweden and Moscow.

As yet, though, Castorf has remained virtually unmentioned in publications outside the German-speaking world, whether academic or journalistic. In Germany, his work has formed the subject of two dissertations, Siegfried Wilzopolski's 'Das assoziative im Theaterspiel. Eine Untersuchung des assoziativen Denkens als mobilisierendes Moment der Spieltätigkeit, dargestellt an Frank Castorfs Inszenierung von Heiner Müllers *Der Auftrag* am Theater Anklam' (*Diplomarbeit*, Hans Otto Theaterhochschule Leipzig 1985) and Claudia Sieling's '“Aber sagen Sie nichts gegen Anklam!”' (*Diplomarbeit*, Hildesheim 1991). As titles and dates of publication suggest, both dissertations limit themselves to particular productions and periods, Wilzopolski's concentrating on one staging only (*Der Auftrag*), and Sieling's focusing specifically on Castorf's time in Anklam (1981-85). Additionally, Castorf's approach has been discussed, more or less extensively, in four books. The first publication, Siegfried Wilzopolski's *Theater des Augenblicks: Die Theaterarbeit Frank Castorfs — Eine Dokumentation* (1992), attempts to portray an up-to-date development of Castorf's theatrical practices; it provides short descriptions and reprints of theatre programmes

and reviews of a number of productions between 1981 and 1992. The advocated strength of the project is however simultaneously its weakness: by wishing to depict the development of a director who, after all, has been incessantly working for almost three decades, Wilzopolski is inevitably bound to limit material and commentary to a handful of productions only, and to deal with them superficially. The book thus fails to provide a complete chronology of Castorf's works, or, for that matter, the accurate description of a chosen few. More often than not, the anecdotal flavour of the portrayals is not counterbalanced by an in-depth investigation.

Some three years later, undoubtedly taking advantage of Castorf's reputation by then, three books were published at short intervals: Jürgen Balitzki's *Castorf, der Eisenhändler: Theater zwischen Kartoffelsalat und Stahlgewitter* (1995), Hans-Dieter Schütt's *Die Erotik des Verrats: Gespräche mit Frank Castorf* (1996), and Benjamin Henrich's and Ivan Nagel's *Liebe! Liebe! Liebe! ist die Seele des Genies: Vier Regisseure des Welttheaters* [Luc Bondy, Frank Castorf, Peter Sellars, Robert Wilson] (1996). Balitzki's contribution is the printed version of a monthly radio programme presented by Castorf, namely *Castorf, der Eisenhändler*, consisting mainly of interviews with his friends and colleagues (from Heiner Müller to Johann Kresnik to Gregor Gysi). Having been published after the radio programme came to an end, the book has the great advantage of being more structurally organised than its source and, despite failing to provide new approaches, indeed any approach at all, to Castorf's oeuvre, it contains enough new material (reprints of *Stasi* files, correspondence amongst GDR theatre directors, off the cuff interviews with members of the *Volksbühne* ensemble) to make for compelling reading, if of the non-critical kind. Both the other publications rely on already existing material: in Schütt's case, his own interviews with Castorf, previously published in various newspapers, and by now abundantly (over)quoted; in Henrich's and Nagel's, their own reviews of a number of Castorf's

productions which originally appeared in *Die Zeit*. If the existence of four publications on a relatively young director may tempt one to argue that his German reception is alive and well, their nature and content disqualifies them from being perceived as academically controversial, critical, or innovative. And if the sheer quantity of *feuilleton* material available on Castorf does confirm that his presence is indeed not a fleeting one, the lack of an in-depth-study of his productions appears all the more regrettable.

* * *

The aim of this study is thus to emphasise different or hitherto neglected perspectives on and aspects of his work, and, most importantly, to try and define the theatrical ‘concept’ that lies behind them, delineating and justifying them. Its fundamental characteristic lies in the creation of a theatrical style which, when successful, is simultaneously modern and postmodern: the modernist concept of political theatre, linked with an impertinent approach to (German) history, is made accessible and palatable to the public through postmodern means, most significantly through the comic treatment reserved for those works of literature notoriously labelled as ‘serious’. Hence it differs greatly from the theatrical achievements of, say, Thomas Langhoff (modern in theory and practice), or Robert Wilson (postmodern both formally and conceptually). The characteristics of what I have defined as Castorf’s ‘postmodern political theatre’ — his notorious de(con)struction techniques, his employment of images which have been labelled as politically incorrect by self-appointed arbiters of taste, his indebtedness to both Baudrillard and Piscator, his irreverent approach to German history from a consciously stressed East-German perspective which, however, ironises itself first — will emerge from the analyses of his productions; at this

introductory stage, it is sufficient to mention that such an apparently paradoxical amalgamation of contradictory philosophical and artistic principles has allowed him, amongst other things, to survive German unification unscathed — no mean feat in itself — and it has served as a useful tool in the attempt to overcome the problematical situation in which he (in a way typical for most theatre practitioners) could find himself entrapped, namely how to preserve the shock-value that originally attracted the public to his theatre and simultaneously prevent his own work from becoming an imitation of itself.

Castorf's work, as well as the identity he has imprinted on the institution of which he is currently artistic director, the Berlin *Volksbühne*, is put in different contexts. A political perspective raises the question of how the *Volksbühne* can justify its existence as political theatre in a society in which the former 'enemy' has been erased by historical events, and, generally speaking, of how and whether political theatre is at all still possible or desirable in an age that has declared the end of history. It is in this context that Heiner Müller's statement, which has been taken as the title of this study, 'der Weg ist nicht zu Ende, wenn das Ziel explodiert', acquires particular significance. The sentence, part of an open letter sent by Müller to Castorf in 1995 to congratulate him and his *Volksbühne* ensemble on the theatre's achievements, can be applied to a German-specific context as well as be inserted into a wider frame: the 'Weg' can be made to stand for socialist struggles or (political-) theatrical endeavours in the face of an exploded 'Ziel' which, in turn, can be applied as significantly to the reality of the new Germany as to the more generalised reality of postmodernity. In the first instance, the statement reflects Müller's political beliefs, essentially uninfluenced by the collapse of the GDR, and shared by Castorf to a certain extent; in the second instance, the sentence reflects an aesthetic belief in the persistence of (modernist) artistic engagement despite

the alleged advent of a new era. Both interpretations are tackled and problematised in the chapters that follow.

A socio-psychological and cultural perspective considers the much speculated assertion of the distinctiveness of East German society and population, and challenges the assumption that GDR culture can be summarised as a monolithic bloc of party propaganda. A (theatre-) historical perspective helps clarify the differences between Castorf's guest productions in Switzerland and West Germany and those in the (ex-) GDR, before and after unification, and questions whether Castorf's (or indeed anyone's) creativity and artistic energy can be interpreted differently according to the political background of the geographical and theatrical milieu in which he operates. In this context, Castorf's work is also tested against that of other theatres and directors in East and West Berlin, and special attention is paid to the influence he has been exercising on other practitioners and theatres — from 'Castorf-apprentices' like Leander Haußmann and Andreas Kriegenburg to the 'volksbühnisation' of the *Berliner Ensemble*. Finally, the critics' perspective, which will be incorporated into the analyses of his productions, gives focus to an apparently paradoxical reception: Castorf has been labelled all too quickly as either GDR-nostalgic and fascistoid by the West German press or as a disruptive force within the state and the representative of the last bastion of communism by the East German press. His *Volksbühne* has been variously called 'das lebendigste Theater in Deutschland' (*Theater der Zeit*), a 'Hochburg der Ost-Apartheid' (*Profil*), 'eine Wärmeküche für verhärmte PDSler' (*FAZ*), his ensemble a 'konspirative Spaßguerrillero-Schuppen' (*Berliner Morgenpost*), and Castorf himself from a 'Bandenführer, Räuberhäuptling, paramilitärischer Kulturkämpfer' (*Berliner Morgenpost*) to a downright 'Irrer' (*Frankfurter Rundschau*). It is in this framework that Castorf's own ambiguous role at the *Volksbühne* — on the one hand westernising the theatre by sweeping away old actors and dated traditions, on the other practising

continued resistance to the *Leistungsgesellschaft* from the standpoint of a typical GDR-mentality — is investigated.

* * *

This study might appear to overlap in some respect with an earlier publication by Elizabeth Wright. In her book *Postmodern Brecht: A Re-Presentation* (1989), she challenges the traditional notion of a ‘three-phase’ Brecht — the early subjectivist/anarchist, the middle rationalist/behaviourist, and the final dialectic/mature dramatist — introduced by Martin Esslin in 1959. She attempts to substantiate her challenge through Brecht’s theoretical works and fragments as well as through the theory that she claims one can extrapolate from his ‘contradictory’ early plays *Baal* and *Im Dickicht der Städte*. Her argument is that the formal characteristics of these (performativity, lack of didactic intention, disintegration, anti-narrative form, not reducible to any particular ideology) and Brecht’s dramatic forms generally (based on an understanding of theatrical practice in which traditional form and genres fall apart and the professional distinctions between actors, playwright, director and spectators are eroded) makes them postmodern. In this context, great importance is attributed to Brecht’s *Verfremdungseffekt*, which is elevated to a postmodern device that disrupts imaginary unities; it also forms the basis for Wright’s postulated connection between Brecht and Lyotard, since it is seen as the artistic proof of Brecht’s rejection of any single unifying explanation of the world based on a fixed ontology — a stance which mirrors Lyotard’s scepticism towards metanarratives.

It is Wright’s contention that her deliberately controversial postmodern approach to Brecht actually results in a ‘Brechtian’ reading which, by challenging received views on the playwright, saves his work from being turned into a museum-piece. Yet the

resulting connection between 'the postmodern' and 'the Brechtian' is neither defined nor problematised. She further claims that her intention is to provide a Brechtian reading of postmodernism as well as a postmodern reading of Brecht, yet neither is proven conclusively. Indeed, her declared wish to claim him back from consumer culture does not take into consideration that the latter is one of the fundamental characteristics of the postmodern itself.

Finally, Wright introduces in her analysis descriptions of the work of Pina Bausch, Heiner Müller, and Robert Wilson, artists who she claims belong to the postmodern camp. She states that they form part of a new theatre that has successfully taken up, transformed and refunctioned Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt*. Yet the connection she establishes is a very tenuous one, which does not take into account the fact that, for instance, Müller is simultaneously postmodern and (post)Marxist. Even if one were to follow her analysis unquestioningly, her conclusion would imply that, at best, Brecht is only postmodern by association. Also, there is a sense in which the *Verfremdungseffekt*, as a fundamental practice in art, is incorporated, in some form or another, in the work of every artist. Following Wright's argument through, every artist operating not only since Brecht but also indeed prior to him should be called postmodern.

The present thesis will attempt to overcome the problematics encountered by Wright, by not claiming that Castorf, or indeed any artist, can be made to represent a whole cultural movement (if only *avant la lettre*), least of all the postmodern. The latter incorporates in fact so many conflicting traits that one cannot adopt them in their entirety. The study's approach will be to recognise that Castorf's practices include elements that are postmodern in flavour, but that they cannot be made to stand for a wholehearted embrace of postmodernism by the theatre director.

* * *

Castorf's choice of material to be staged and, more to the point, the treatment he gives it, has rendered a genre-based methodological approach ineffectual. As I will argue in some depth at a later stage, Castorf systematically turns every text — be it a comedy, a tragedy, a melodrama, or whatever — into a self-parodying farce. Moreover, and with a few notable exceptions, the material often consists of less renowned plays (e.g. Laufs' and Jacoby's *Pension Schöller*, Karl Grünberg's *Golden fließt der Stahl*), of self-made collages (e.g. Nestroy's *Krähwinkelfreiheit*), of film sources (e.g. Burgess' *A Clockwork Orange*, Fellini's *Die Stadt der Frauen*). As a consequence, it is beyond the scope of this project to include a comparative approach that takes into account other directors' productions of the same texts. This thesis is based instead on analyses and interpretations of a number of productions staged by Castorf between 1978 and 1999, and on personal experiences at a number of theatres, on archive (television, radio and video) material, and on interviews (two actors who worked with Castorf in Halle's *neues theater* and the *Volksbühne*'s former literary manager Matthias Lilienthal).

It must be stressed that the attempts to define Castorf's working methods, to propose how he arrived at some of his striking theatrical images, are kept to a minimum, and that analyses of his rehearsal processes are not included in this study. This is not to be interpreted as a critical questioning of the validity of a drama / theatre studies approach focused on rehearsal style and directorial intentionality. After all, the ephemeral nature of a theatrical production requires precisely that information be collected from a widespread variety of sources — ranging from stage directions to promptbooks to set and costume designs — in order for the event to be registered, let alone investigated, at all. Moreover, an emphasis on the process of development of a theatrical production encourages the acceptance of the performance being the actual site of meaning, rather than the 'translation' or 'decoration' of a text. In this respect, the rise of the role of theatre directors, as well as of the importance attributed to them, has

been fundamental for a discipline which does not consider the drama text to be the only fixed and recordable part of theatre accessible to examination and analysis. It remains incontestable that to ignore rehearsal processes inevitably results in production analyses that are *perforce* incomplete. However, the nature of this thesis has necessitated a shift in emphasis: it is the final stage of the theatrical work, i.e. the production itself, which is subjected to scrutiny, and not its process of development, which remains outside its concerns. The present work, as I will argue shortly, is based on interdisciplinarity rather than 'in'-disciplinarity,¹ with respect to both theatre (*Volksbühne*) and director (Castorf). In the first instance it follows the postulates of Erika Fischer-Lichte, who, referring to 'die *Geometrie* einer Kultur',² defined the concept of the cultural identity of a theatre as a complex system of references, and thus it concentrates primarily on the relations between a theatre and its surroundings rather than on its internal mechanisms. In the second instance, this study attempts to overcome some of the problematical issues raised by notions of directorial intentionality. Far from claiming that intentionality is irrelevant to one's analysis, it rather perceives it within a complex matrix which is by no means exhausted in rehearsal processes, production strategies, and material conditions of performance. More specifically, Castorf's directorial intentionality is portrayed and tested against the 'intentionality' and expectations of his audience and critics, rather than his ensemble. This will emerge with more clarity from the following chapters; at this initial stage it is sufficient to draw one's awareness to Castorf's stress on the centrality of the spectator — as part of a real or desired audience as well as of the present Berlin *Volk*.³

¹ The prefix is used here to imply a sense of 'within'.

² Fischer-Lichte, 'Die Zeichen des Raumes', 135. See also Chapter 8, 226, in which Fischer-Lichte's theories are more specifically applied to the *Volksbühne*'s location.

³ The concept of *Volk* itself will be tackled in Chapter 3.

Work in theatre studies in recent decades has developed, more or less successfully, various perspectives on theatre in a number of areas which range from anthropology to psychology, semiotics, and sociology and which have recently culminated in the notion of performativity. This latest theory concentrates on the 'performative', an adjective which is generously applied to the most disparate manifestations, and which is extrapolated at the exclusion of the cultural, historical, political and social frameworks from which they derive.⁴ I have chosen to maintain a somewhat more old-fashioned approach, in view of what I consider to be the necessity to place Castorf's theatrical practices into wider contexts, and, generally speaking, because of my conviction that the very notion of theatre as a social medium — if only in view of the fact that it needs to be performed in front of an audience in order to be perceived as such — not only gains from but positively requires a relationship with its environment. Such relationship, however formulated, becomes itself worthy of analysis, and further contributes to the theatre's identity and function.

This study has thus drawn together a number of different narratives — the philosophical, the political, the historical, as well as the theatrical. This is partly due to Castorf's own and deliberately carried out process of 'reference-zapping', a term used here in an attempt to describe, necessarily imperfectly, Castorf's amalgamation of styles, techniques and sources, and itself worthy of analysis. More significantly, this has been necessary in view of the fact that the aforementioned perspectives do not simply offer a background (philosophical, political, historical, theatrical) but actually form the subject-matter of Castorf's productions at least as much as the literary primary

⁴ See for instance the debates centred on 'performance studies' versus 'cultural studies' which arose at the 5th PSi [Performance Studies international] Conference: '“Here Be Dragons”. Mapping the Undiscovered Realms of Performance Studies: Boundaries, Hinterlands and Beyond', University of Wales, Aberystwyth, 9 – 12 April 1999.

material from which they derive. Indeed, the most recurring argument employed by Castorf's critics is that, more often than not, the balance tends to tilt towards the former to the point where the 'original', be it Shakespeare, Müller, or Irvine Welsh, becomes unrecognisable. As a consequence, a certain compartmentalisation in the structure of the present study has been unavoidable:

- The qualification of Castorf's theatre as both postmodern and political has required a tentative, and by no means conclusive, explanation and evaluation of the two terms. As far as 'the postmodern' is concerned, a distinction between postmodernism and postmodern-ity has formed the basis of my argument. Drawing on the philosophical debates between Lyotard and Habermas, and arguing, as it were, for the 'end of modernity', I have placed the philosophical facet of Castorf's theatrical practice into a — relatively young — tradition which owes more to French, and to a lesser extent, American, thinkers than to their German counterparts (Chapter 2). As for 'the political', special attention has been devoted to the notion of *Volk*, given that Castorf is in charge of a theatre which still proudly proclaims 'die Kunst dem Volke', and that the roots of German political theatre invariably encompass the *Volk* in their name and purposes — from the *Volkstheater* to the *Volksbühne*. The uses of the term are analysed in their historical, literary and theatrical contexts, via Piscator, Brecht and Kroetz, in order to arrive at a notion of the present-day *Volk* which Castorf has attracted to his theatre. Finally, I will set Castorf's own notion of the term against that of his predecessors, analyse the relationship between the traditionally political notion of *Volk* and the Baudrillardian concept of mass, and, by establishing points of convergence and divergence, conclude with the suggestion that Castorf's theatrical practices represent a successful example of a theatre which has developed a postmodern form whilst keeping a political edge (Chapter 3).

- Thus qualified, philosophically and politically, Castorf's theatre needs to be placed into its very specific (East-) German historical context. Those notions of identity, nation, and cultural heritage which form the basis of a long-existing German tradition and which have been shaken, in one way or another, by German unification, still need to be problematised (on stage), bearing in mind that the modernist schemes traditionally adopted as tools are now obsolete. The attempt is not to force postmodern considerations on to a pre-*Wende* East German situation which was ill-suited to accommodate them, but, rather, to examine the historical, cultural, and sociological consequences of unification and argue that it is precisely in view of such developments that postmodern phenomena can be identified — from the discussions centred around notions of nation to the 'failure' of the intellectual class, Castorf included. His own response to unification and to the debates which followed it, including the defamation which he has suffered as a supposed right-wing radical, sheds light on his personal and artistically pursued notion of East German identity and further delineates the nature of his audiences (Chapter 4).
- Nowhere has Castorf's theatrical concept emerged with more clarity than in the theatre of which he has been artistic director since the early 1990s, the Berlin *Volksbühne*. In order to portray its unique character it has been essential to set it against the more generalised Berlin theatrical landscape. I have thus included a brief sketch of the city's other principal establishments, restricting my analysis to those theatres which have been developing a distinctive profile since the post-war era, and against which the *Volksbühne*'s identity can be tested (Chapter 5).
- Having provided the philosophical, political, historical and theatrical contexts in which to place Castorf's work, the remaining part of the study focuses entirely on

his artistic development. A reconstruction of his biography and career leads to descriptions and analyses of most of his productions to date, from his early work in the GDR (Chapter 6) to his pre-*Wende* guest performances in Switzerland and West Germany (Chapter 7) to his most recent work in the *Volksbühne* (Chapter 9). The latter is moreover preceded by an examination of Castorf's *Volksbühne*-takeover: it is centred around the theatre's new programme and aesthetics as well as its formidable PR campaign, which has strategically employed anti-theatrical statements in order to turn the *Volksbühne* into a meta-theatre (Chapter 8). The notion of postmodern political theatre is applied to all the productions taken into consideration, and Castorf's more or less successful attempts to strike the right balance between 'the postmodern' and 'the political' are investigated.

* * *

To summarise, the aim of this thesis is to introduce and verify the concept of 'postmodern political theatre' with the help of a critical biography of Frank Castorf and his artistic work, one which encompasses a variety of perspectives and narratives, and which is ultimately placed within the wider discourse centred around the possibility of theatre to operate politically in a postmodern age.

Chapter 2

Aesthetic Postmodernism and Political Postmodernity: The Philosophical Background of Frank Castorf's Practices

‘The point is that we are *within* the culture of postmodernism to the point where its facile repudiation is as impossible as any equally facile celebration of it is complacent and corrupt.’¹

The discussion around postmodernism has been characterised by its international and interdisciplinary extent, running from architecture through the visual arts and music, through literature and history, to the social and natural sciences, while bringing in contributions from several European as well as American cultures. A great deal of the controversy in this debate depends on misunderstandings — not at all surprising across so wide a range of disciplinary and national traditions — which obstruct significant direct engagement with the arguments, motives, and implications of the various positions. A sampling of significant positions in the overall debate would include those of Jean Baudrillard, Daniel Bell, Terry Eagleton, Francis Fukuyama, Jürgen Habermas, Fredric Jameson, Jean-François Lyotard, Richard Rorty; using even this limited group as a field for comparison, it becomes obvious how little the debate has achieved clarity. Even so, it remains typically the case that ‘to have a position’ on postmodernism means not just to offer an analysis of its profile, but to let everyone know whether one is for or against it, and fairly loudly at that.

Yet it would be a futile exercise to try and offer a simple definition or to try and set it within chronological boundaries, as Virginia Woolf did for modernism; indeed, much of the debate stems precisely from the question of (temporal) definition. Moreover, the postmodern label has been given, more or less correctly, to such an eclectic variety of themes that if one were to list all positions taken on the subject the result would be at best contradictory and at worst sheer nonsense. What I do find

¹ Jameson, ‘Theories of the Postmodern’, 62.

necessary, however, is to have a starting-point in order to approach the topic with relatively little confusion. My initial proposition will be to accept the existence of something called 'postmodernism' as a 'cultural dominant', to use Jameson's phraseology.² Rather than joining in the struggle to find once and for all who used the term for the first time, under what circumstances and for what reasons, I will proceed from a position where I take for granted the existence of postmodernity as opposed to postmodernism. I will then set it against other slippery terms — modern-ism/ity, (post/trans)avant-garde and the like —, and finally analyse some writings of the above-mentioned thinkers with respect to aspects of important terms such as Reason, Knowledge, Enlightenment, History, Subject, Identity, Representation.³ The conclusions I will reach are to be considered as the philosophical background against which to set the practices of Castorf. What I will suggest is that Castorf has gone over to the 'Object', as Baudrillard would have it, by consciously appropriating the existing postmodern means in order to achieve his own (modernist) ends, thus creating a theatrical concept that is modern(ist) in theory and postmodern(ist) in practice.

It would indeed be fruitless at this stage to create a link — or to show the impossibility of one — between postmodernism and political theatre, as the latter presents at least as many interpretative riddles as the former. Castorf's own notion of political theatre will be delineated later with the help of analyses related to specific productions. The initial, somewhat abstract link I shall try to establish here is the one between postmodernism and politics in general. I am aware that there is no easy understanding, conceptually or historically, of the term 'politics' either, yet political lucidity of any sort requires some sense of what we mean by politics at all, be it only in

² Jameson, 'The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism', 4.

³ These and other terms are capitalised throughout the chapter when they are borrowed from a modernist vocabulary.

the form of a received wisdom unfettered by complex formulations and academic trendiness. To quote Jameson again, 'as far as the "political" is concerned, any single-slot, single-function definition of it is worse than misleading, it is paralyzing' for the following reasons:

We are, after all, fragmented beings, living in a host of separate reality-compartments simultaneously; in *each one of those* a certain kind of politics is possible, and if we have enough energy, it would be desirable to conduct all those forms of political activity simultaneously. So the 'metaphysical' question: what is politics [...] is worthwhile only when it leads to enumeration of all the possible options, and not when it lures you into following the mirage of the single great strategic idea.⁴

The connection I will seek to demonstrate will thus be one between aesthetic postmodernism and political postmodernity, or, in other words, the aesthetisation of politics which constitutes one of the principal traits of postmodern culture.

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It would perhaps be desirable to start with an explanation of the 'cultural dominant' I mentioned earlier. I believe the distinction between postmodernism and postmodernity to be of fundamental importance, and more radical than the affinity of the two terms would suggest.⁵ The former implies that the postmodern is only one arbitrary style, whilst the latter seeks to grasp it as the quintessential characteristic of our age. These two approaches originate in fact two different ways of relating to the phenomenon: on the one hand, through subjective aesthetic estimations and assumptions; on the other hand, through an attempt to see this as (to use an old-fashioned word) an

⁴ Jameson, 'Interview', in *Diacritics*, 12, 3 (1982), 75.

⁵ The distinction between postmodernism and postmodernity has been made by various thinkers, including Eagleton and Jameson, only to be left aside in their discourses, which have centred around more generalised notions of 'the postmodern'.

historical chapter. A consistent application of the second position necessarily implies that the first position starts from the wrong premises. Moreover, the position of philosophical and cultural critics becomes itself questionable, for — like it or not — they are themselves living in this epoch, and they thus lack the necessary distance that would enable them to make objective qualitative statements about it. In other words, critics are contaminated by the very same ideological distortions they identify and condemn in society, and therefore find themselves in the paradoxical position whereby they reflect and criticise in an age in which every claim to Truth is under suspicion. This consideration works, admittedly, the other way round as well: the very critics who detect the dissolution of the Real, the death of the Subject, of History and of just about everything else, and the decline of the sheer possibility of any avant-garde in a society that moves more and more towards ‘Santa Monification’,⁶ are themselves children of that society.

Postmodernity, as the historical epoch which has abandoned traditional (modernist) concepts of Truth, Identity, Reason, Metanarratives, and History itself, has been brought about — according to some⁷ — by material and economic changes, which can be summarised in the movement to a new, more advanced form of capitalism that is being experienced by the West: a world of technology, consumerism, culture industry, post-industrial / media / information society and the like. Postmodernism is its cultural / aesthetic counterpart, one which mirrors such a transformation in a self-reflective, ironic, popular (and populist) art in which all boundaries between ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture have been blurred. One may well be against postmodernism as an aesthetic style for reasons of taste, but there is no escaping from the political and cultural reality of the

⁶ The term has been coined by Tim Adams in an interview with Francis Fukuyama, in order to describe the latter’s predicament that ‘this future [the end of history] is already being played out in California’. See Adams, ‘Francis Thought It Was All Over. He Still Thinks So Now ...’, *Observer*, 6 June 1999.

⁷ See for example all publications by Fredric Jameson and Terry Eagleton on the subject.

postmodernity in which one is immersed and by which one is surrounded. Once this has been accepted it becomes relatively easier to try and grasp the multi-faceted aspects of the '-ism' (i.e., the phenomenon itself) that is related to the '-ity' (i.e., the historical epoch it refers to).

Postmodernism identifies itself by something it is not. Most discussions of 'the postmodern', by which I mean a term generally adopted to include both postmodernism and postmodernity, establish a clear negative stance: it is not a whole series of things that modernism was, and it is in this sense its weak successor. Postmodern attitudes relating to the end of ideology, art, class, history, etc. have not helped either. What one needs is ultimately a positive description, not in any sense of value — to say that postmodernism is 'better' than modernism is just as inconclusive as saying the contrary — but in order to grasp it as a cultural logic in its own right. Discussions centred around the postmodern should have as their starting point an analysis of what postmodernism is, rather than what it is not, so as to prevent this phenomenon from becoming 'a litany of extinction rather than a chronology of creation'.⁸ The problem with this is of course that the debate focuses precisely around the dilemma of whether postmodernism is indeed something new or not. The fact that the new term contains the old, and sometimes refuses to be categorised as being simply the natural chronological succession of it makes the matter even more complicated, for it implies that before finding an appropriate definition of postmodernism one should have at one's disposal a definition of modernism with which everyone is in agreement. Such a problem is unknown to other periods, because their terminology itself suggested a break with the previous one; as Ihab Hassan pointed out:

The word postmodernism sounds not only awkward, uncouth; it evokes what it wishes to surpass or suppress, modernism itself. The term thus contains its enemy within, as the terms romanticism and classicism, baroque and rococo, do

⁸ Zurbrugg, 'Barthes, Belsey, and the Death of the Author', 16.

not. Moreover, it denotes temporal linearity and connotes belatedness, even decadence, to which no postmodernist would admit.⁹

The suspicion that postmodernism defies definition — hence the various orthographic variations of ‘post-modernism’, ‘Postmodernism’, ‘Post-modernism’ etc., all complete with scare quotes — , has also been corroborated by the fact that the term suffers from ‘*semantic instability*’: on the one hand, because of its relative youth, but more importantly because of its kinship to other terms, themselves equally unstable (modernism, avant-garde etc.).¹⁰ Postmodernism seems to imply a complete knowledge of the modern, yet it remains wholly unsettled whether the relation between the two is more a break or a continuity. Hassan captured the essence, and, to a point, the futility, of the argument, by stating that:

Modernism and postmodernism are not separated by an Iron Curtain or a Chinese Wall; for history is a palimpsest, and culture is permeable to time past, time present, and time future. We are all, I suspect, a little Victorian, Modern, and Postmodern, at once.¹¹

A further reason for not setting the two apart, and against each other, is the following: if postmodernism implies a taking leave of modernity, then it must call into question the modernist projection forward — towards Truth or whatever — itself. Postmodernism, in this sense, should be a turning against modernity, and mark modernity at its end rather than a surpassing of it. Yet the ‘modern’ is the ground on which the postmodern stands, a ground with which it is in dispute: it is through the modern that the postmodern is able to enter into dispute with itself (Lyotard will go as far as to say that the postmodern precedes the modern).

If setting the two apart, as if independent of each other, can lead to taking away a large amount of what postmodernism is about (in the negative terms of ‘not this, not

⁹ Hassan, ‘Toward a Concept of Postmodernism’, 87.

¹⁰ Ibid., 87.

¹¹ Ibid., 88.

that' elements constitutive of modernism), considering the two to be essentially the different sides of the same medal is just as counterproductive, as one would ultimately dismiss both as being unable to cope with the pressures of our contemporary culture industry. This is, for example, the stance taken by Daniel Bell:

Today modernism is exhausted. There is no tension. The creative impulses have gone slack. It has become an empty vessel. The impulse to rebellion has been institutionalised by the 'cultural mass' and its experimental forms have become the syntax and semiotics of advertising and haute couture. [...] The real problem of *modernity* is the problem of belief. To use an unfashionable term, it is a spiritual crisis, since the new anchorages have proved illusory and the old ones have become submerged. [...] The effort to find excitement and meaning in literature and art as a substitute for religion led to modernism as a cultural mode. Yet modernism is exhausted and the various kinds of post-modernism (in the psychedelic effort to expand consciousness without boundaries) are simply the decomposition of the self in an effort to erase individual ego.¹²

My starting point — that we do live in an age of postmodernity — presupposes of course that by 'postmodernity' I mean something different from 'modernity'. In this sense, one cannot escape the feeling that there has been a chronological progression, of the linear sort much hated by postmodernists. One can go even further and specify that, in order for a postmodernity to be born in the first place, what precedes it must have come to an end. It would be fruitless to start wondering whether modernity 'stopped', as it were, because all its projects had been successfully developed, or because it had given up on them, leaving them unfinished. However one wishes to see it, the simple fact remains that modernity has been surpassed, and its original projects can no longer be resuscitated, because they are no longer needed and others have been born which need taking care of. In this sense, I fundamentally disagree with Habermas, as I will now show with an analysis of his writings on postmodernity and postmodernism. The concept of postmodernity will be set against Habermas' theories on modernity,

¹² Bell, 'The Disjunction of Realms: A Statement of Themes', 20, 28 and 29.

Enlightenment and Reason; the concept of postmodernism will be set against Habermas' theories on modernism and avant-garde.

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Habermas, like Jameson, agrees in finding a significant break between the modern and the postmodern, even though there is no consensus as to where the break falls. Jameson roughly identifies the modern with the first half of the twentieth century and the postmodern with what has come later. Habermas identifies the modern with the still unfinished project of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, while the postmodern remains a threat rather than something that has quite occurred. He thus remains vigilant against what he sees as the Nietzschean, nihilistic character of postmodernity. Modernity is seen as an age of subjective freedom, taking different forms in the public and the private sphere, and leading to a sort of fragmentation of the individual into 'bourgeois, citoyen, und homme'.¹³ These spheres grew further apart from one another and became self-sufficient, with the positive consequence that they paved the way for emancipation from anachronistic dependencies, and the negative consequence that they were experienced at the same time as abstraction from the totality of human life, which even religion could not hold together any more. Habermas' main concern, here and in other writings, is precisely this excessive specialisation of mankind. He stated his point more clearly in the famous essay 'Die Moderne — ein unvollendetes Projekt', originally an address upon receiving the Adorno Prize in 1980. Quoting Max Weber, Habermas characterises cultural modernity as the separation of that Reason once expressed in religion and metaphysics into three autonomous spheres, namely science, morality and

¹³ Habermas, 'Eintritt in die Postmoderne: Nietzsche als Drehscheibe', 104.

art, each under the control of a specialist. As a result, the distance grew between the culture of the experts and that of the larger public, seen as 'was der Kultur durch spezialistische Bearbeitung und Reflexion zuwächst, gelangt nicht *ohne weiteres* in den Besitz der Alltagspraxis'.¹⁴ The project of modernity, as formulated by the philosophers of the Enlightenment, would have set things right:

Das Projekt [...] besteht nun darin, die objektivierenden Wissenschaften, die universalistischen Grundlagen von Moral und Recht und die autonome Kunst unbeirrt in ihrem jeweiligen Eigensinn zu entwickeln, aber gleichzeitig auch die kognitiven Potentiale, die sich so ansammeln, aus ihren esoterischen Hochformen zu entbinden und für die Praxis, d.h. für eine vernünftige Gestaltung der Lebensverhältnisse zu nützen.¹⁵

Habermas recognises that mistakes have been made in the attempt to reach such a rational society, yet he insists this should not negate the project of modernity as such. At a later stage, he will argue that the problem lies in the individuation of the 'rational Subject of consciousness', and argue for a 'theory of communicative action' which will relocate the Subject as the agent of a Reason whose basis lies in communication or discourse and in the social consensus produced by such discourse. The climax of Habermas' discourse is his adherence to what he defines as 'Handlungsrationalität und gesellschaftliche Rationalisierung'.¹⁶ Before proceeding to analyse Habermas' theory any further, it is worth pausing briefly to consider the meaning and implications of such a project. It is to be assumed that — modernity being unfinished — the project has remained fundamentally untouched. To consider whether such a project could be realised in postmodernity, one has to reflect why it was not realised in modernity. Habermas' imperative concerning a 'communicative rationality' would seem to automatically exclude from the project any mode of communicative irrationality or extrarationality, that is he makes the very mistake he attributed to the thinkers of the pre-

¹⁴ Habermas, 'Die Moderne — ein unvollendetes Projekt', 41.

¹⁵ Ibid., 41-42.

¹⁶ See Habermas, *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*, first volume.

Enlightenment, by taking into consideration only one specific element of human nature and excluding all the ones which do not fit into the plan. There is also, I believe, a certain arrogance in the assumption that communication, rational or not, will provide the solution to the problems of mankind. The concept of communication must surely imply the willingness to communicate of the participants. Keeping Habermas' metaphor going, it seems to me that he does not accept, or even contemplate the possibility of the participants not wanting or not being able to communicate. A discourse or dialogue can only function if all parties involved have the knowledge required to take part in the conversation in the first place, and are 'in the mood', as it were, to contribute to it.

Moving on with the analysis, one will note that, incidentally, such an erroneous judgement is also the one he attributed to the surrealist movement. According to Habermas, the Surrealists fatally disrupted rational discourse, thus not providing any emancipatory effects to follow from their actions:

Alle Versuche, die Fallhöhe zwischen Kunst und Leben, Fiktion und Praxis, Schein und Wirklichkeit einzuebnen; den Unterschied zwischen Artefakt und Gebrauchsgegenstand, zwischen Produziertem und Vorgefundenem, zwischen Gestaltung und spontaner Regung zu beseitigen; die Versuche, alles als Kunst und jeden zum Künstler zu deklarieren; alle Maßstäbe einzuziehen, ästhetische Urteile an die Äußerung subjektiver Erlebnisse anzugleichen — diese inzwischen gut analysierten Unternehmungen lassen sich heute als Nonsense-Experimente verstehen. [...] Wenn man die Gefäße einer eigensinnig entfalteten kulturellen Sphäre zerbricht, zerfließen die Gehalte; vom entsublimierten Sinn und der entstrukturierten Form bleibt nichts übrig, geht eine befreiende Wirkung nicht aus.¹⁷

Their second mistake would appear to be that their revolt was just what it stated, i.e. surrealist art, rather than a cultural tradition which covered all spheres of life. In this respect, it could only influence one sphere, art, and would consequently fail to fulfil the

¹⁷ Habermas, 'Die Moderne - ein unvollendetes Projekt', 46-47.

Enlightenment project to save everyday rational life from a 'kultureller Verarmung'.¹⁸

Habermas' conclusion is that:

Ich meine, daß wir eher aus den Verirrungen, die das Projekt der Moderne begleitet haben, aus den Fehlern der verstiegenen Aufhebungsprogramme lernen, statt die Moderne und ihr Projekt selbst verloren geben sollten.¹⁹

What is surprising in this context is Habermas' literal reading and interpretation of the 'extravagant programmes' of the surrealist movement. Not to see that Breton's Surrealist Manifesto, for instance, self-consciously intermingles serious intent with provocative overstatement, is to miss the point. Arguably, one might even apply the same principles to his own theories: his own wish to level art and life by declaring everything and everyone amenable to improvement through the rational organisation of everyday social life constitutes an equally impossible nonsense experiment, for the aspiration to infuse communicative rationality across all spheres of society seems extremely optimistic to say the least.

Habermas' chief characteristic is that he seems to share, along with the rest of modernity for which he acts as a spokesman, a self-confidence and a certainty that are no longer applicable in our age. Where Breton and the surrealists consciously invoke nonsense, Habermas refuses to accept it as having rationalistic potential; his 'optimistic' rationalism thus risks becoming involuntary nonsense in the face of reality. Moreover, Habermas' underlying assumption seems to be that modernism is a rationalistic project. In other words, he blurs the difference between modernity and modernism just as, more recently, others have blurred the difference between postmodernity and postmodernism. The rationalistic Enlightenment and belief in progress may well have characterised modernity, but modernism, while dialectically wedded to modernity, was also an

¹⁸ Op. cit., 47.

¹⁹ Ibid., 49.

expression of its crisis. The chances of the project of modernity being developed are now practically non-existent, for postmodernity is distinguished precisely by a 'confident lack of self-confidence', as it were, and by the abandonment of the search for the foundations of the superiority of Western rationality, having recognised the futility of such an attempt. Modernity, instead, never questioned its status, propositions and principles.²⁰ As Zygmunt Bauman rightly observes:

Those who once scanned the world as the field to be cultivated by Europe, armed as it was with Reason, tend to speak today of the 'failed' or 'yet unfulfilled' project of modernity. (Modernity, once the 'background' one does not reflect upon, has suddenly been perceived as a project now that its attributes have begun to disappear one by one).²¹

Habermas' confidence is mainly based on a concept of Reason that has been historically proved to be more counterproductive than advantageous. The modern age itself that he refers to was, above all, the kingdom of Reason and rationality; indeed, these conceptualisations provided modernity with its self-definition. All visions of modernity — via Marx or Freud or Nietzsche — assumed, explicitly or implicitly, the irreversible character of the changes that modernity had brought about. They might have been critical about the form of life associated with modern society, but they hardly ever questioned the superiority of modernity. Yet Enlightenment reason, thus considered, ends up being a potent weapon in the production of social normativity, and runs the risk of driving people towards a conformity with a dominant norm of behaviour. Reason, as the basis for action, thus faces the danger of becoming purely instrumental, and hence of degenerating into a pursuit of rationalism for its own sake. This risk has been recognised by both German and French thinkers (one only needs to mention Derrida's famous

²⁰ Modernism, on the other hand, did, tempting one to argue that the first stirring of postmodernity can be found in modernism rather than in modernity.

²¹ Bauman, 'The Fall of the Legislator', 121.

'White Mythology' essay in the latter case²²), and forms the basis of Adorno's and Horkheimer's critical theory, which Habermas does not appear to embrace fully. Adorno and Horkheimer realised that the chief problem of Enlightenment lay not in its theoretical principles, but in their practice: Enlightenment reason set out to think the natural world abstractly, with the result that the material world ended up being conceptualised in formal sets of categories. As they put it:

Von nun an soll die Materie endlich ohne Illusion waltender oder innewohnender Kräfte, verborgener Eigenschaften beherrscht werden. Was dem Maß von Berechenbarkeit und Nützlichkeit sich nicht fügen will, gilt der Aufklärung für verdächtig.[...] Aufklärung ist totalitär.²³

This critique is applicable to Habermas as well; the latter's concept of communicative rationality also automatically excludes, because suspect, forms of communicative ir / a- / extra-rationality, just as Reason, as seen by Adorno and Horkheimer, is turned into a coercive language and discourse which automatically excludes those aspects of reality that are not 'translatable' into its own terminology ('Die Vielheit der Gestalten wird auf Lage und Anordnung, die Geschichte aufs Faktum, die Dinge auf Materie abgezogen'²⁴).

Moving on to Habermas' concept of modernism and avant-garde, one will notice that the stance taken is fundamentally the same: modern art is to be preferred to the postmodern. He claims that 'true' modernism is that which simply makes an abstract opposition between tradition and present. 'The new' acquires value in the full knowledge that it will be made obsolete through the novelty of something else. He distinguishes, however, between 'das Moderne' which preserves 'einen geheimen Bezug zum Klassischen',²⁵ and 'das bloß Modische', which '[versetzt] in die Vergangenheit'.²⁶

²² See Derrida, 'White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy'.

²³ Adorno and Horkheimer, 'Begriff der Aufklärung', 12. One might even say in this context that Adorno was the first postmodern thinker, and that postmodernism eventually went beyond Adorno by abandoning dialectics.

²⁴ Ibid., 13.

²⁵ Habermas, 'Die Moderne - ein unvollendetes Projekt', 34.

²⁶ Ibid., 34.

The notion of something being 'a classic', in terms of 'surviving time', as he himself admits, is of course not the monopoly of a modern(ist) attitude; yet he maintains that a true modern(ist) work no longer borrows the power of being a classic from the authority of a past epoch, but, instead, from 'der Authentizität einer vergangenen Aktualität'.²⁷ (I will show later how Lyotard twists this sentence with reference to the postmodern). Such an attitude is best expressed through the avant-garde, which he sees as the spirit of aesthetic modernity; it is the avant-garde which allows modernism to revolt against the normalising functions of tradition. Habermas' main point here is that he accepts that this spirit has begun to age, and that it has already failed once because of the unsuccessful surrealist revolution. He then wonders: 'Aber was bedeutet dieses Scheitern? Signalisiert es den Abschied von der Moderne? Bedeutet die Postavantgare bereits den Übergang zur Postmoderne?'²⁸ Given the rhetorical tone of the question one would assume that his answer is clearly a negative one. What Habermas fails to see is that the contemporary problems of the avant-garde bear very little relation to the Surrealists. The practices of the former were bound to become themselves, in time, normative. In a century that has pushed avant-garde experiments in all fields to the extreme, it was almost foreseeable how the culture that produced them would eventually manage to master and market even the more serious challenges. As Jameson asserts:

Its own offensive features [...] no longer scandalize anyone. [...] What has happened is that aesthetic production today has become integrated into commodity production generally.'²⁹

The original powerful movement from aesthetics to politics characterised the early stages of an avant-garde which, traditionally, served the function of attacking any formalist *modus vivendi* and *modus operandi*. The troublesome word in this formulation is, of

²⁷ Op. cit., 34.

²⁸ Ibid., 37.

²⁹ Jameson, 'The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism', 4.

course, 'traditionally': the avant-garde entered into a crisis in the very moment in which it became a tradition. Luc Ferry quotes the musician Luciano Berio's comment on the avant-garde: 'he who calls himself avant-garde is a cretin ... the avant-garde is nothing',³⁰ and goes on to say that:

In becoming purely critical, the modernism of the avant-gardes turns against itself. Solely obsessed by the quest for novelty and originality for their own sakes, it slips over into its opposite, the mere empty, dreary repetition of the gesture of innovation for innovation's sake. The break with tradition itself becomes tradition.³¹

Seen in this light, Habermas' question concerning the future of the avant-garde being dependent on the acceptance of postmodernity can only be answered in the affirmative.

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What follows now is an analysis of the thinker who is universally considered to be Habermas' antagonist *par excellence*, French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard. The procedure will be the same adopted with respect to Habermas, i.e. to consider first his thoughts on postmodernity and secondly those on postmodernism. The writings I have taken into consideration can be mainly perceived as polemical answers to the suggestions made by Habermas.

As far as postmodernity is concerned, Lyotard differs from Habermas first and foremost because he acknowledges that it exists, i.e. that it is not the threatening shadow dreaded by Habermas. He sets it against the modern epoch thus:

I will use the term *modern* to designate any science that legitimates itself with reference to a metadiscourse, [...], making an explicit appeal to some grand narrative, such as the dialectics of the Spirit, the hermeneutics of language, the emancipation of the rational or working subject, or the creation of wealth. [...]

³⁰ Luciano Berio, *Libération*, November 1983. Quoted in Ferry, 193.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 196.

Simplifying to the extreme, I define *postmodern* as incredulity toward metanarratives.³²

What he has in sight are totalising metanarratives — which would include the narrative of emancipation proposed by Marx, that of psychoanalysis proposed by Freud, that of evolution proposed by Darwin, etc. —, codes of behaviour and action which in their abstraction necessarily deny the specificity of the local and traduce it in the interests of a global homogeneity, a universal History. Such narratives operate in fact like Enlightenment reason: in order to accommodate widely diverging traditions, they abstract the meaning of those traditions and ‘translate’ it in their own terminology. Such language, however, automatically and necessarily leaves the specific traditions unrecognisable, or, if they are hard to digest, simply not considered. As metanarratives, they also become coercive and normative. Lyotard therefore shares Adorno’s scepticism about such a drive to totality, and is aware that there is a potential inequality in a system which claims reason for itself. This inequality, albeit softened, is still perceivable in the solution of communicative rationality proposed by Habermas. In a debate with Richard Rorty, who shares with Habermas the belief in some kind of communication, Lyotard indicates that there is an ‘impérialisme doux’, an ‘impérialisme conversationnel’³³ in the drive to establish consensus between participants in a dialogue. In a letter addressed to Jessamyn Blau³⁴ he also makes it clear that the passage from modernity to postmodernity is not to be understood in the sense of a simple succession, as the idea of a linear chronology is itself perfectly ‘modern’. The notion of development as progress, also typical of the Enlightenment, is no longer applicable, as technological and scientific evolutions would seem to proceed of their own accord, and not to answer the demands issuing from human needs. On the contrary, humanity is even destabilised by the velocity

³² Lyotard, ‘Introduction’, xxiii and xxiv.

³³ Lyotard and Richard Rorty, ‘Discussion’, *Critique*, 41 (1985), 582.

³⁴ Lyotard, ‘Notes on the Meaning of “Post-”’, 64-68.

and the results of such a development, over which it has no control, and it is therefore divided into two parts:

One faces the challenge of complexity, the other that ancient and terrible challenge of its own survival. This is perhaps the most important aspect of the failure of the modern project - a project that [...] once applied to the whole of humanity.³⁵

This statement does not imply that he necessarily enjoys the present situation in a way that critics like Habermas do not. What it does imply, however, is that he is aware of the present situation for what it is. When describing postmodern society thus understood and the effects it has on human beings, he ironically observes:

Eclecticism is the degree zero of contemporary general culture: one listens to reggae, watches a western, eats McDonald's food for lunch and local cuisine for dinner, wears Paris perfume in Tokyo and 'retro' clothes in Hong Kong; knowledge is a matter of TV games. [...] In the absence of aesthetic criteria, it remains possible and useful to assess the value of works of art according to the profits they yield. Such realism accommodates all tendencies, just as capital accommodates all 'needs', providing that the tendencies and needs have purchasing power.³⁶

This remark is to be found in his essay 'What is Postmodernism?' — an explicit ironic reference to Kant's 'What is Enlightenment?'. Nowhere in it is a positive evaluation of the present situation to be found. His description, when stripped of its comic element, is incontestable. Agreeing that such a depiction represents our state of things does not have to entail a positive value judgement.

When describing postmodern aesthetics, Lyotard differentiates it from its ancestors in that it allows the unrepresentable to be put forward in terms of both form and content. He characterises modern art and writing as that which makes visible the fact that there is something which can be conceived but not be seen. Modern aesthetics is thus represented as an aesthetic of the sublime relation between the representable and the

³⁵ Op. cit., 67.

³⁶ Lyotard, 'Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism', 334-35.

conceivable, whereby the sublimation is meant in Kantian and not Freudian terms. This relation appears however only in terms of content, and not of form. The example he uses is a differentiation of the writings of Proust and Joyce. Whereas 'modern' Proust presents the unrepresentable by means of a language, syntax and vocabulary that still belong to the traditional novelistic genre, the 'postmodern' Joyce of *Ulysses* and above all *Finnegans Wake* allows the unrepresentable to become perceptible in his writing itself, that is in the signifier as well as in the signified. Using this as a starting point, he formulates his renowned concept of the future anteriority of postmodernism, which deserves quoting in full:

A postmodern artist or writer is in the position of a philosopher: the text he writes, the work he produces are not in principle governed by preestablished rules, and they cannot be judged according to a determining judgement, by applying familiar categories to the text or to the work. Those rules and categories are what the work of art is looking for. The artist and writer, then, are working without rules in order to formulate the rules of what *will have been done*. Hence the fact that work and text have the character of an *event*; hence also, they always come too late for their author, or, what amounts to the same thing, their being put into work, their realisation [...] always begins too soon. *Post modern* would have to be understood according to the paradox of the future [*post*] anterior [*modo*].³⁷

This implies that the avant-garde can never be identified as such until time has passed to allow for the verifications of its propositions; in this sense, one can only ever have been avant-garde. Lyotard appropriates Habermas' equation but changes the unknowns: if for Habermas a work can only become a classic if it has been truly modern first, for Lyotard a work can only become modern if it has been truly postmodern first. Following Lyotard's formulation through, 'postmodernism thus understood is not modernism at its end but in the nascent state, and this state is constant'.³⁸

³⁷ Op. cit., 340-41.

³⁸ Lyotard, 'Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?', 339.

Summing up the dispute between the German and the French thinker, John O'Neill concluded that 'Lyotard is fun but not serious, while Habermas remains serious but not fun. Yet too much else is occluded between these options'.³⁹ A lot of what is occluded between these options can be categorised as a 'humble' attitude towards postmodernity and postmodernism. Ernesto Laclau suggests that it would be better to consider the postmodern as a moment of 'weakening', which produces a pluralistic attitude in which the Subject is not considered as a unified entity anymore (be it one of class, race or gender), but a configuration of them all, and in which postmodernity, then, 'does not imply a *change* in the values of Enlightenment modernity but rather a particular weakening of their absolutist character'.⁴⁰ But it is above all in the writings of Gianni Vattimo and Zygmunt Bauman that a modest approach to the postmodern is definitely recognisable. Vattimo's theory of *il pensiero debole* (weak thinking) presupposes that modernity has been the era in which 'the new' has become the key value to which all others must refer, and postmodernity is the era in which one can trace a weak attempt to disengage from it, i.e. postmodernity is characterised by an effort to free itself from the constraints of innovation. For the arts in particular, once 'the new' has been revealed it loses all possibility of having any value, with the consequence that some of the once radical strength of the artistic revolutions inevitably gets dispersed. Yet this need not necessarily be negative:

If in this way the very notion of artistic revolution, caught up in this game of ungrounding, loses some of its meaning, at the same time it perhaps supplies a means of establishing a dialogue between philosophical thought and poetry, in view of that which in contemporary philosophy continually reasserts itself as the possible — though problematical — overcoming of metaphysics.⁴¹

³⁹ O'Neill, 'Conclusion: The Common-Sense Case against Post-Rationalism', 195.

⁴⁰ Laclau, 'Politics and the Limits of Modernity', 67.

⁴¹ Vattimo, 'The Structure of Artistic Revolutions', 107.

A more directly political line of argument is adopted by Bauman, who argues that the modern period has been characterised by a belief in a knowledge that is self-assured enough to feel itself capable of prescriptive legislation. He sees such an attitude as the arrogance of reason, and consequently argues for a humbler role for the bearers of knowledge and reason, the intellectuals, who are witnessing a crisis in their particular roles:

It is the mechanism of the market which now takes upon itself the role of the judge, the opinion-maker, the verifier of values. [...] The point is that the state is not necessarily weaker from this demise of authority; it simply has found better, more efficient ways of reproducing and reinforcing its power; authority has become redundant, and the category specializing in servicing the reproduction of authority has become superfluous.⁴²

Instead of through the traditional role of legislator, the postmodern intellectual will then be more pragmatically and modestly characterised by his or her 'interpretative' activity.

* * *

Before moving on to analyse the significance and the implications that postmodernity and postmodernism, thus described, have on contemporary theatre in general, and on the practices of Castorf in particular, it is worth considering some of the key-words that characterise the phenomenon: History, Subject and Identity, Knowledge, Representation.

The postmodern epoch is most familiar to the general public for having officially declared the end of history. It was in fact only one thinker, Francis Fukuyama, who proclaimed the 'good news', first, tentatively, in an article entitled 'The End of History?' and subsequently, in a deliberately prophetic and evangelical tone, in a book called *The End of History and the Last Man*. He is convinced that 'the triumph of the West, of the

⁴² Bauman, 'The Fall of the Legislator', 122.

Western *idea*, is evident [...] in the total exhaustion of viable systematic alternatives to Western liberalism'.⁴³ Fukuyama is triumphant about the way in which liberal democratic capitalism has survived the threat of Marxism, even though, curiously enough, he invokes Marx and Hegel to celebrate the victory of capitalism: both Marx and Hegel believed that the evolution of human societies was not open-ended, but would end when mankind had achieved a form of society that satisfied its most fundamental longings. Both thus postulated the end of history: for Hegel it was the liberal state, for Marx it was a communist society. Fukuyama appropriates this teleological principle for his own means; he thus defines the end of history as 'the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government'.⁴⁴ His conviction is that modern society has reached its ultimate goal in the form of liberal democracy, as the only coherent political aspiration that spans different regions and cultures around the globe, and which can be attained when allied with a free market economy. Interestingly enough, though, his teleological principles need not have a universal value:

At the end of history it is not necessary that all societies become successful liberal societies, merely that they end their ideological pretensions of representing different and higher forms of human society.⁴⁵

His 'last man' is in this context an entity who transcends the empirical realities of history and is, strictly speaking, a-historical. Fukuyama's main erroneous judgement here is that he seems to be stuck with a notion of politics according to which the only threat to a 'healthy' capitalist society must be of reddish nature. Yet the opponent, as it were, is not Marxism anymore (it has not been for quite some time), but the set of transformations in the spheres of science, technology and economics which characterises postmodernity.

⁴³ Fukuyama, 'The End of History?', *The National Interest*, 16 (1989), 3.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 13.

It is worth emphasising that if Fukuyama's declaration did in fact provoke turmoil in academic circles, yet very few thinkers operating in the postmodern field actually critically examined his writings;⁴⁶ what has followed has been a general debate on the nature of history and History, and the notion of 'the end of...' has become a part of a more widespread discussion. 'The end of History', thus seen, has joined the various 'ends' of Tragedy, Novel, Subject, Ideology, etc., that is, notions which have become so accepted, or at least so acknowledged, that it is actually of little relevance to refer to the person who coined the phrase first. The debate focuses instead on the difference between history, or, better, histories, and History. It is the latter that is refused by postmodernism. Postmodernism is thus not out to deliver a new or different or better metanarrative about history, but rather to deny that history lets itself be moulded any more. The counter-arguments that followed, which I will tackle by using Terry Eagleton as a typical example, failed to take into consideration the element of 'any more'. Eagleton states that:

For one thing, it is not easy to see how we can *know* that history is no way in particular. We would surely have to be occupying quite an Olympian vantage-point to be certain of any such thing. For another thing, the case is suspiciously formalistic: is every attempt to force history into a particular mould just as noxious as every other? Civic humanism as much as fascism?⁴⁷

Yet postmodern thought does not involve compiling a list of all the positive and negative historical events mankind has witnessed until now in order to throw it indifferently away at the end of such a task. A postmodern attitude to history involves only our present time; postmodernism, in other words, is not out to rewrite the history of mankind according to its logic. Eagleton's argument, which he explains in terms of the different stances to history taken by postmodernism and socialism, adopts therefore the wrong

⁴⁶ See for instance Thompson, 'Progress, Reason and the End of History', *History of European Ideas*, 18 (1994), 361-71.

⁴⁷ Eagleton, 'Ambivalences', 31-32.

starting-point. His belief is that socialist thought, contrary to postmodernism, always believed in the grand narrative of History, albeit in negative terms:

It is a truth to be mourned rather than celebrated. It would be far better if the postmodernists were right, and there was nothing constant or continuous about the chronicle at all. [...] What strikes a socialist most forcibly about history to date is that it has displayed a most remarkable consistency — namely, the stubbornly persisting realities of wretchedness and exploitation. Of course these things have taken many different cultural forms. It is astonishing just how many ways of being deprived and dominated there are, quite enough to assuage the postmodernist's hunger for plurality. But if history really *were* wholly random and discontinuous, how would we account for this strangely persistent continuity?⁴⁸

Again, postmodern thought does not — naively or cynically — deny that exploitation has existed, and indeed still exists. What postmodern thought is sceptical of is that exploitation, to name but one aspect of our historical past and present, is to be understood in terms of an historical metanarrative that one either agrees with (a position endorsing capitalism) or not (a position endorsing socialism). The concept of a single History has become too simplistic to fit in with the reality of postmodernity. Its alternative is constituted by a plurality of histories, which, optimistically speaking, should be distinguished by a localism devoid of parochial insularity. The grand metanarrative should hence be replaced by a plurality of micronarratives capable of interacting with each other. Individual histories and traditions would thus have the opportunity to develop their own distinctive traits without fossilising into provincial and narrow-minded habits. The politics of postmodernism have indeed contributed to the disclosure of new political issues — of sexuality, of gender, of ethnicity — to counteract older ones, most specifically that of class. The necessity to pose such questions has thus been turned into a virtue. As Eagleton admits:

The complicities between classical left-wing thought, and some of the dominative categories it opposes, have been embarrassingly laid bare. At its most militant, postmodernism has lent a voice to the humiliated and reviled, and

⁴⁸ Eagleton, 'Histories', 51.

in doing so has threatened to shake the imperious self-identity of the system to its core. And for this one might almost forgive it the whole of its egregious excesses.⁴⁹

Incidentally, the sheer fact of exploitation's existence has been so far only negated by Fukuyama, hardly the most becoming spokesman of postmodernism. Serious postmodern thinkers, and I am referring here to Baudrillard in particular, only acknowledge that our age is characterised by an indifferent or distorted attitude to big historical events. This view would lead one to think that a single concept of History does not exist any more, and would not actually interest anyone anyway. The progression from acknowledgement of this state of things to a celebration of them is not as straightforward and mechanical as it is often claimed to be. Viewing everyday life as an eclectic and invigorating arena for the interplay of different histories, cultures and identities is what postmodernity has to offer, yet fragmentation can assume a negative as well as a positive connotation. Even convinced postmodernists admit that the risk of getting too involved in one's microcosm without paying any attention to anything that does not affect one personally is ever-present.

On the eve of the Gulf War, Baudrillard famously remarked that there could not be a war. The moment for a Third World War, perhaps most notable during the Cold War, had passed. During the war, he insisted that it was not really taking place at all, and shortly after the cessation of hostilities he declared that the war did not happen.⁵⁰

He defended his view thus:

I treated the Gulf War in that way, as a process of the extermination of war, an operational stage set of a fact, war, which in former times, however, was above all a symbolic duel relationship. It was 'realized' by sophisticated technical means, and it doesn't take place, in the sense that there's no event.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Eagleton, 'Ambivalences', 24.

⁵⁰ See Bibliography for information on the articles.

⁵¹ Baudrillard, 'This Beer isn't a Beer: Interview with Anna Laurent', 185.

What had occurred instead, he argued, was a hyperreal TV representation of it. The real battlefields of the past had been replaced by mass media coverage, which provided military strategies and politicians' commentaries to the point of saturation. If Baudrillard's views on media cyberpower and cyberwars may seem to be exaggerated, they still highlight our condition with a frightening, if extravagant, precision. The vision of TV viewers tuning in to see and hear 'the latest from Baghdad' with the same indifference with which they would watch a film or, what is worse, with a morbid trepidation in case something catastrophic happened — and which they could experience in first person whilst sitting conformably and safely in their own homes — is not actually as far away from the truth as Baudrillard's provocative tone would tempt one to argue. Revolutions and wars are thus enjoyed as spectacles, and where the possibility of spectacle does not exist — for instance in the case of a nuclear war leading to instantaneous total annihilation, that is, of TV presenters and viewers as well — , the possibility of that war happening is also out of the question, which prompted Baudrillard to state that '*this is why it will not take place*'.⁵²

Somewhere else he admitted that the annihilation of any historical meaning does not depend on the lack of violence or events, but on a 'deceleration, indifference, stupefaction' of the subject caused by the disproportionate acceleration of the media. Each political and historical act is endowed with a 'kinetic' energy that stems from its power of media diffusion, and which lifts its meaning to a hyperspace from which there is no return. Thus:

History can no longer outrun itself, it can no longer envisage its own finality, dream of its own end; it is buried in its own immediate effect, it implodes in the here and now. Finally, we cannot even speak of the end of history, because *there is no time* for it to reach its own end. Its effects accelerate, but its

⁵² Baudrillard, 'Fatal Strategies', 202.

progress ineluctably slows down. It will come to a standstill, and fade out like light and time on the edge of an infinitely dense mass.⁵³

The identity of the Subject itself and its relation to a generalised Other (that is, environment as well as other subjects) also unsurprisingly loses any fixed meaning it might have had in a pre-postmodern age. We do not yet possess the right equipment to match the new age, since the 'trinity' of class, race and gender no longer offers defining attributes, or, better, no longer offers sufficient defining attributes able to provide the subject with a comfortable identity. I agree with Eagleton's formulation that 'identity is one of the great bugbears of postmodern thought, in an age where too many people languish for the lack of it. Low self-esteem is as widespread as poor eyesight, and a lot more disabling'⁵⁴ only insofar as postmodern thought has stopped searching for ways in which our identity-crisis can be solved, and has chosen the admittedly easier path of trying to come to terms with it. It is one thing, however, to say that postmodernism takes the crisis as a *fait accompli*, and another that postmodernism has been the motive and the reason why the sense of identity has been lost in the first place. Eagleton's accusation that the postmodern strategy is now to 'hymn the praises of the schizoid, dishevelled subject, whose ability to fasten its own shoelaces, let alone topple the political state, would be bound to remain something of a mystery'⁵⁵ is something of an exaggeration, and besides it applies specifically to the most extreme kind of American postmodern thought, that is one originating in a subculture that celebrated the 'different' and the 'bizarre' in pre-modern as well as in post-modern times.

Given that the general crisis of the Subject has existed since time immemorial,⁵⁶ and that there does not seem to be a way out of the specific postmodern crisis of the

⁵³ Op. cit., 20-21.

⁵⁴ Eagleton, 'Fallacies', 126.

⁵⁵ Eagleton, 'Beginnings', 16.

⁵⁶ After all, the notion of identity-crisis is, in itself, nothing new: one might go as far as to say that insecurity about one's identity actually goes hand in hand with the concept of having one at all.

Subject, Baudrillard has proposed, by way of a solution, that we focus our attention on the Object for a change. He defines the Object by stating that 'when I refer to the object, and to its fundamental duplicity, I am referring to all of us and to our social and political order',⁵⁷ and he further elaborates on it as follows: the Object is everything that disobeys our concept of metaphysics and of order, of distinction between Good and Evil, and therefore refers to our 'inhuman' strategies. Its own strategy is a 'fatal' one, that is one over which the Subject has no control: 'an objective irony watches over us, it is the object's fulfillment without regard for the subject'.⁵⁸ Baudrillard's solution is based on a shift of perspective: instead of trying to make the world a mirror of the Subject, it is time to pass on to the side of the Object, taking it for what it is. The Object would not answer our demands, but rather, following Baudrillard's postulates, disobey the laws of metaphysics and disrupt our conception of Good and Evil. Going over to its side — seducing it and letting oneself be seduced by it — is, according to Baudrillard, the only thing left to do. Seduction, so understood, has a deeply political connotation, which restores to the aesthetic its full capacity for the political.

The 'Evil'-side to which belong Object and seduction also includes what Baudrillard has termed the 'evil demon of images'.⁵⁹ Mankind's fascination for images, for their ability to create meaning and representation, is well-known. What is peculiar to our postmodern images, however, and what makes Baudrillard's contribution particularly relevant, is that they are seen as sites of the disappearance of meaning and representation. According to Baudrillard, the media have the power to make images circulate so quickly that they end up losing any significance and reference. As a consequence, images twist one's judgement of reality by providing, paradoxically, the

⁵⁷ Baudrillard, 'Fatal Strategies', 199.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 198.

⁵⁹ See Baudrillard, *The Evil Demon of Images and Simulacra and Simulations*.

equal possibility of the real and of the imaginary.⁶⁰ Baudrillard call this a fatal process because the immanence of the image, which now possesses no transcendental meaning or a dialectic movement towards the definitive meaning, revolves around itself and gets caught in its own game. Images therefore become more real than the real, whilst simultaneously denying the real any capacity to be so. The process works in four phases:

1. It [the image] is a reflection of a basic reality.
2. It masks and perverts a basic reality.
3. It masks the *absence* of a basic reality.
4. It bears no relation to any reality whatsoever: it is its own pure simulacrum.⁶¹

By the fourth stage, the image is no longer in the order of appearance, but of simulation; it feeds the concept of 'hyperreality' so typical of postmodernity. What was once capital's prerogative — to destroy or at least level out every distinction between true and false, good and evil — is now the image's prerogative: to provide a whole series of simulacra which destroy or at least level out every distinction between real and imaginary, original and copy, meaning and representation. Society produces the Other of the real in order to legitimise its own practices, just as, in Adornian fashion, mass culture's place in the culture industry dooms a work to cooperate with a system of domination. Political activity is reduced to the ritual form of such activity. It is the problem of representation, understood as the aesthetisation of the political, and typical of postmodernity — the age that has cancelled the leftist 'everything is political' and replaced it by 'everything is an interpretation', and is still none the wiser for it.

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⁶⁰ See also Chapter 3, 86 ff., for a further delineation of Baudrillard's theory with reference to the masses.

⁶¹ Baudrillard, 'Simulacra and Simulations', 170.

There is a ramification of postmodern thought which does not seem to be particularly influenced, let alone impressed, by such a vision. It expresses itself politically through a neo-conservatism best exemplified by Richard Rorty and his notion of postmodernist bourgeois liberalism⁶², culturally through a process of nostalgic or ironic 'past-isation' best exemplified by Botho Strauß⁶³ on the one hand and Umberto Eco⁶⁴ on the other, and artistically/theatrically through the continuation of the experimental mode started in the 1960s best exemplified by a whole series of American 'off'-artists. As far as the last sphere is concerned, one can roughly summarise their approach as an attempt to achieve a positive use of mass culture by admitting a fascination with that very amoral and uncultured notion of kitsch so passionately denounced by several ideologues of the modern, an attempt to celebrate nothingness as the liberation that relieves the perceiver from all the limiting 'somethings', and, generally speaking, a confident commitment to the positive synthesis of traditional creativity and multimedia activity. These artists accept and positively encourage the co-presence of conflicting categories: art and life, high culture and low culture, anonymity and subjectivity etc., with an enthusiasm for (multi)media concepts that bears strong resemblances with the Futurists' ardent belief in modern machinery.⁶⁵

Regardless of its geographical provenance, however, theatre (as performance)⁶⁶

⁶² See for example Rorty, 'Postmodernist Bourgeois Liberalism', *Journal of Philosophy*, LXXX, 10 (1983), 583-89.

⁶³ See for example Strauß, 'Anschwellender Bocksgesang', 19-40.

⁶⁴ See for example Eco, *Reflections on 'The Name of the Rose'*.

⁶⁵ The 'americanised' — as opposed to European — character of this phenomenon has also been recognised by Baudrillard, who distinguished between European and American intellectuals because he considered the former to be so caught up in their conceptual and critical understanding that they are unable to emulate their American counterparts' ability to evoke objects freed from their concepts. See Baudrillard, 'Utopia Achieved', 99.

⁶⁶ Note that the abstract notion of theatre as performance and the specific notion of a theatrical practice with political intent differ considerably. The former can be, almost by definition, associated with the postmodern; the latter is in sharp contrast to it, as I will suggest later.

remains typically a postmodern phenomenon, which has often been described using the postmodern vocabulary ('happenings', 'events' and the like). Indeed, Baudrillard's postulates on simulacra and his theories on reality and hyper-reality reflect the theatre's traditional dichotomy of real and imaginary.⁶⁷ This may explain why theatre and, generally speaking, theatricality, have been sometimes read as opposed to the modernist project. Arguing against minimalist art by equating it with the 'theatrical' in his 'Art and Objecthood' essay, for instance, Fried stated that there is 'a war going on between theatre and modernist painting, between the theatrical and the pictorial':⁶⁸ where the modernist work of art attempts to hide 'objecthood' (for instance its frame, the room in which it is exhibited, etc.) in order to emphasise its 'meaning', minimalist art — the one under attack — emphasises the traits which constitute their very sense of objecthood and, in doing so, becomes 'theatrical', hence negative. Also, according to Fried, minimal art goes against the other fundamental principle of modernist art which states that every kind of art is to be considered separately from all others. Any connection between the arts is seen by Fried as dangerous, because it endangers the search for individual meanings: 'the concept of quality and value [...] are meaningful, or wholly meaningful, only *within* the individual arts. What lies *between* the arts is theatre',⁶⁹ which he made even clearer when he stated categorically that 'art degenerates as it approaches the condition of theatre'.⁷⁰

The close link between postmodernism and theatre needs not necessarily be established just negatively, in terms of an opposition to modernism. Postmodernism is best qualified as something that 'happens', and it can be identified as an unstable 'event',

⁶⁷ Again, one might argue in this instance for a differentiation between pure postmodern performativity (which mirrors Baudrillard's concepts) and a more old-fashioned notion of theatre still based on representation.

⁶⁸ Fried, 'Art and Objecthood', 135.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 142.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 141.

as Lyotard suggested when explaining his notion of future anteriority. By its very nature, theatre (as performance) becomes automatically the most appropriate means to bring this aspect to the fore. I have mentioned in the Introduction that Robert Wilson's theatre is, in this sense, postmodern both in theory and in practice. This could be better qualified by maintaining that his theatre practices are postmodern both formally and conceptually. His meticulous insistence on structure and form over content, evident in his early productions, resulted in form actually becoming the content. It is to be admitted that the works that originated from his collaboration with Heiner Müller, and most of all his recent solo productions in Berlin (for instance *Hamlet-Monologue*, in the Hebbel Theater, 1996), show a weakening of this tendency, despite remaining visually impeccable. It is in the productions he directed in the 1970s that his basic postmodern approach is most recognisable. *Deafman Glance* (1970), for instance, contains a sequence in which a woman stabs two children, puts the knife on a table and reassures a deaf child who has witnessed it all: the whole sequence takes up to a full hour.⁷¹ The movements are entirely unemotional and rendered in the most extreme slow-motion, with the consequence that the viewers become more absorbed in the quality of the movements and in the pace of the performance than in what these actually signify. As Kaye pointed out, this and other early performances 'resist the effort to penetrate the surface of the work, frustrating the reading of structure, sequence, and pattern. In doing so, they mark a fundamental opposition to the desire for depth'.⁷² It is in this respect that Wilson's

⁷¹ For a detailed description of this production see Kaye, 'Looking Beyond Form: Foreman, Kirby, Wilson', 62-69.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 69.

theatre differs from that of, say, Thomas Langhoff, i.e. from 'traditional' directors who have remained modern in their approach to content and above all form.

* * *

Castorf's relation to postmodern-ism/ity and, more specifically, Baudrillard's theories, will be introduced in these final sections. It might be desirable, however, to precede them with a reconsideration of some of the concepts tackled in this chapter, in order to establish points of convergence and divergence in the final picture of the postmodern as well as to include certain provisos which will enable one to maintain a consistency with the concepts described whilst adopting them as tools in the analysis of Castorf's work.

It will have emerged thus far that attempts at defining the postmodern are problematical, often contradictory, and at best simplistic, if only in view of the fact that there is no objective 'outside' to postmodernity, and all one can do is work within its possibilities and limitations. In order to accommodate the positions of the thinkers who have been mentioned in this chapter — whose arguments by no means exhaust all the possibilities at hand — a generalised notion of the postmodern would have to include the abandonment of traditional concepts of Truth, Reason, Identity, offer a self-reflective, ironic, popular culture which blurs high and low culture, be incredulous towards totalising metanarratives because of their intrinsic coercive character, reflect a moment of weakening in its attempt to free itself from the constraints of innovation and the arrogance of reason, proclaim the end of History and encourage the development of histories, maintain a superficially optimistic character whilst being denounced as nihilistic, do away with the trinity of class, be fascinated with amoral notions of kitsch

whilst playing with ‘past-isation’ etc. Given that it is precisely the accumulation of paradoxical and unstructured elements which makes the postmodern postmodern, and that this prevents one from being able to articulate its traits with absolute precision and authority, it follows that it is impracticable, if not counter-productive, to try and apply a rational discursive logic to it, much in the same way in which Baudrillard’s terminology cannot be explained clearly or argued for or against persuasively, as I will suggest shortly. Ultimately, a precise definition cannot be offered because of the intrinsic nebulosity that characterises the postmodern. Analysis of the latter, in the words of Bauman, must bear an ‘until further notice’-quality:

Its propositions must be tentative, particularly in view of the fact that the only solid and indubitable accomplishment of the postmodernist debate has been thus far the proclamation of the end of modernism; as to the rest, it is far from clear which among the many topics of the discourse signal lasting and irreversible tendencies, and which will soon find their place among the passing fads of a century notorious for its love of fashions.⁷³

The strongest link between Castorf and the postmodern can be found in his proximity to Baudrillard, which will emerge from the following chapters, and which deserves a closer analysis. Castorf has been invoking Baudrillard’s theories as an inspiration for, corroboration of, and significant addition to his artistic work over the years. Quotations by the French thinker appear frequently in the *Volksbühne*’s programmes and have been partly incorporated in some of the productions themselves. This study’s intentional preference of Baudrillard over other postmodern thinkers as constituting the philosophical background for Castorf’s practices stems precisely from the regularity with which Castorf himself has declared and accentuated his similarities to him. Moreover, and quite aside from potentially different value judgements on the merit, significance and implications of Baudrillard’s body of work, there is a sense in which the

⁷³ Bauman, ‘The Fall of the Legislator’, 125.

thinker constitutes a part of the contemporary *Zeitgeist* in which Castorf operates, and that as such he provides a contribution which needs to be addressed. Finally, one can perceive an affinity in the structure of their works that deserves closer attention, and which will emerge from the following chapters. Succinctly put, both have mastered the art of mixing entertainment with intellectualism, and have inserted a component of game in their work. In Baudrillard's case, this emanates from his insistence on radicalising to the extreme notoriously problematic concepts (the masses, the object, disappearance, seduction and the like), on trivialising traditional moral values (identity, individuality etc.), and on cultivating paradoxes (perhaps most puzzlingly, how he manages to live with his own theories) that are purposefully left unresolved. In Castorf's case, the emphasis on games emerges most visibly in his ironic treatment of the German *Volksstück* genre, which is twisted for his own theatrical purposes, as will be illustrated in Chapter 3.

However, two provisos need to be made in this context. Firstly, it must be noted that Baudrillardianism and postmodernism are not mutually interchangeable terms. It is not the intention of this study to claim that Baudrillard holds the key to the postmodern condition nor that he is the sole, or ultimate, spokesman for it. The approach chosen does not exhaust the exploration of the (postmodern) issues at hand. In this context, it is worth bearing in mind that the definition of Castorf's practices argued for here is that of a postmodern political theatre: postmodern traits need not necessarily be Baudrillardian in character.

Secondly, the emphasis of the present thesis remains on Castorf: this study does not claim that a detour into Baudrillardianism is indispensable to an understanding of Castorf's practices, nor does it offer an all-exclusive Baudrillardian position on the theatre director. Baudrillard does constitute one fundamental element in Castorf's

reflections, but other influences — most importantly, perhaps, that of Heiner Müller — also need to be investigated, in order for the final picture to be genuine and complete. In this sense, Baudrillard's theories, whilst needing to be problematised, are ultimately used if and when appropriate, rather than being idealised *tout court* as the sole providers of the key to Castorf's 'meaning'. In his analysis of Artaud, Derrida argued that any complicity between Artaud's metaphysical theories and his theatre of cruelty was 'fatal', in the sense that the two concepts were impossible to reconcile.⁷⁴ Extending Derrida's argument somewhat, one could claim that a complicity between Baudrillard's abstract game-theories and the very tangible reality of political theatre practice is equally impractical. It cannot be stressed enough that these two concepts necessarily conflict with each other: Baudrillard's theories belong to a creative realm which is not only quite independent from the politico-theatrical (as distinct from the merely performative) one, but which is hardly reconcilable with an art and discipline whose focus is precisely on those notions of representation, interpretation, subjectivity and 'meaning' that the postmodern has repudiated. In other words, if a theatre director consciously and non-ironically embraced the whole spectrum offered by Baudrillard, and, for that matter, postmodernism generally, he or she would be faced with the impossibility of being practically creative at all. Just as philosophical and cultural critics are operating within postmodernity, and thus find themselves in the paradoxical position of reflecting and criticising in an age in which every claim to Truth is under suspicion, so directors whose intention is the production of political theatre attempt to provide meaning, representation and interpretation in an age in which these concepts have been negated and made to disappear. Even artists like Robert Wilson, whose work I have defined earlier as being

⁷⁴ Derrida, 'The Theater of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation', 232-50.

postmodern both formally and conceptually, work within a framework consisting of real individuals making artistic statements of sorts.

Baudrillard is a notoriously difficult thinker to examine, let alone relate to. As there are no empirically testable propositions on his part, his theories are impossible to corroborate with traditional means. He himself admits that 'my work has never been academic, nor is it getting more literary. It's evolving, it's getting less theoretical, without feeling the need to furnish proof or rely on references', and claims for himself 'the right to push writing and hypotheses to the very end, to points where, perhaps at the limit, they no longer have any meaning'.⁷⁵ I mentioned earlier that Baudrillard constitutes Castorf's philosophical background; 'philosophical' is here to be understood allusively, for his is not a philosophical, or for that matter sociological or aesthetic system of thought. Baudrillard's postulates are metaphysical, not realistic. In true postmodern style, his theories are fragmentary, often paradoxical and self-contradictory, and not structured to form a robust philosophy open to criticism. There is a sense in which they are indifferent to criticism, as the latter is understood to start from the wrong premises:

I've no wish to conceal the element of defiance and artificiality within my sort of fictionizing. [...] Let me repeat that I'm not interested in realism. I am not speaking of the real extermination of things, of the physical, biological disappearance of living beings. My books are scenarios. I *play out* the end of things, I offer a complete parody of it.⁷⁶

Any strictly sociological interpretation of his writings is thus a misconception, for these not do produce a model, but rather a utopian, metaphorical and fictional representation of events, and remain in many respects indefinable and volatile. If at all classifiable, Baudrillard's communicative aesthetic is an artistic one.

⁷⁵ 'The Power of Reversibility That Exists in the Fatal: Interview with D. Guillemot and D. Soutif', 43.

⁷⁶ 'America as Fiction: Interview with J. Henric and G. Scarpetta', 132-33.

Anyone wishing to use Baudrillard's ideas therefore faces the simultaneous impossibility of abandoning old modernist vocabulary (referring to intellectuals, subject, masses in the non-Baudrillardian sense) even after having argued with Baudrillard, and the impossibility of translating his postulates into more traditional terms. A lack of terminological clarity is thus, up to a point, inevitable. Moreover, any attempts at translating his theories into straightforward descriptions of reality are problematical, since with Baudrillard it is the theory which is a challenge to the real, and not the contrary. This may be better clarified by stressing that Baudrillard's mode of thought is post-dialectical, and that its governing principle is one of fatal extremism. Concepts are not discussed and tested against an existing or desired reality or against their counterparts; they are raised to the(ir) extreme to the point where they lose all meaning and sense of reference. Baudrillard's renowned 'more real than the real' theory may serve here as an example: hyper-reality is reality at its most extreme state, and becomes, as such, unreal.

Baudrillard's aversion to a form of criticism aimed at extrapolating from him a connection with reality or at accusing him for avoiding to do so is especially evident in his published interviews. One collection of interviews in particular, from which the above quotations have been taken,⁷⁷ has proven to be especially useful for an understanding of Baudrillard's own mode of thinking. Ranging from a depiction of cinema experiences to the Gulf War to photography to France's contemporary political situation, being characterised by a minimum — at times non-existent — amount of editing, and taking place between Baudrillard and a variety of interviewers, they are curiously united by one connection, namely Baudrillard's ability to maintain a rift between the abstraction of his theories and their relevance to reality, despite more or less explicit and critical challenges

⁷⁷ *Baudrillard Live: Selected Interviews*. See bibliography for further details.

to the contrary. In other words, Baudrillard makes blatant, indeed glorifies, the impossibility of translating his concepts in concrete terms, and prevents his interviewers from attempting to do so on his behalf. This will become more apparent in the following chapter, in which the Baudrillardian depiction of ‘the masses’ is, necessarily unsuccessfully, analysed.

While arguing for the presence of postmodern and Baudrillardian elements in Castorf’s aesthetics and theatrical practices, this study does not wish to imply that Castorf endorses all postmodern and Baudrillardian ideas. The intention of the thesis is not to portray Castorf as an illustration of how the philosophical and aesthetic concept of the postmodern translates in terms of political theatre — as I have mentioned earlier, the two fields cannot be synthesised. Any false process of harmonisation would be at the cost of the very conscious and jarring juxtapositions on which Castorf bases his work, and the postmodern its *raison d’être*. The claim is not that the apparently mutually exclusive modes of postmodernism and political theatre are reconciled in the work of Frank Castorf, for his work is not, and does not intend to be, simply a perfect blend of both, but rather that he combines — sometimes successfully, sometimes less so — elements of both.

* * *

Castorf has often been criticised for his postmodern ‘excesses’, which have ascribed to an alleged intention to favour (at times shocking) originality to the detriment of content. Yet he is aware that practices like Robert Wilson’s run the risk of losing

their radicality with time, and of becoming dated like most other avant-garde experiments which have lost their shock value. Those critics who seem to imply that Castorf is only regurgitating a GDR version of those experiments fail to see that, with Castorf, the formalism of the means never reaches the conceptual level of the intention. His uniqueness lies in making political theatre — here understood as a modernist goal — accessible to the public through postmodern means. Political theatre *à la* Piscator or Brecht is now unthinkable, but the genre in itself is far from dead. When successful, postmodern political theatre extrapolates the best of both: from postmodernism it derives its form (eclecticism, self-reference, irony, pastiche, hybridity, multimediality, localism, transgression), and from the tradition of political theatre its content (reference to everyday life, awareness of one's surroundings, political consciousness and involvement). Taken individually, postmodern theatre and political theatre could never achieve the same effects that they do when united: the former has all the means to express itself without having anything to say, the latter has a great deal to say but is unable to express itself.

The postmodern references in Castorf's work are numerous.⁷⁸ The postmodern lack of belief in Ideology is mirrored by the whole concept of the *Volksbühne* in its opening season under Castorf's direction, summarised as *Gebt uns ein Leitbild!* The postmodern interest in localism is expressed by a choice of themes that relate specifically to Berlin and by a whole series of devices ranging from the caricature of prominent locals to a parody of accents. The postmodern scepticism about the existence and importance

⁷⁸ The following represent just a brief enumeration, in order to bring this stage of the argument to a conclusion. They will emerge more clearly in those chapters (6, 7, and 9) that deal with Castorf's productions.

of an autonomous Subject is mirrored by a practice of aversion to a characterisation of the theatre's protagonists; it is no theatre of psychology. The postmodern interest in fragmentation is mirrored by Castorf's de(con)structionist tendency to depersonalise and repersonalise the contents of the texts put on stage. Most significantly, the postmodern notion of 'anything goes' is appropriated and inserted into performances that are only superficially 'politically incorrect' and it is thus given (political) meaning.

As I hinted earlier, however, there are postmodern or Baudrillardian elements which Castorf does not seem to have embraced at all. In most cases, this is due to their nature, which is irreconcilable with the task of a theatre director. The general postmodern disbelief in the possibility of representation/interpretation/meaning, for example, would hardly square with a theatre director whose intention is to provide it. Similarly, Baudrillard's postulates on the disappearance of meaning and representation in the images remain outside Castorf's preoccupations — mainly in view of the fact that Baudrillard refers specifically to the images as a media (mainly televised) product.⁷⁹ Finally, the notion of postmodern political theatre cannot be reduced to a winning formula equally applicable to the entirety of Castorf's artistic work; Chapter 6, 7 and 9 will show how postmodern traits have been employed, and with what degree of achievement, in specific productions, taking into account the temporal, geographical, political and cultural framework in which they originated.

⁷⁹ This applies despite the fact that Castorf himself uses media images in his productions; by becoming a part of the theatrical experience they are moved into a different context.

Chapter 3

Political Theatre:

An Overview of the German Tradition of and Frank Castorf's Indebtedness to the Genre

‘A “people’s theatre” is not for the people.’¹

‘Der Begriff *volkstümlich* selber ist nicht allzu volkstümlich.’²

The statement that all art is political has suffered so many literary dentings from all sides and has served such a variety of purposes that it now stands, bereft of meaning, for something that appears to be so self-evident it defies definition. The very word ‘political’ can be interpreted in so many different ways that trying to capture its ultimate definition, let alone trying to correlate it to another such altogether indefinable term as (postmodern) art would appear to be as ineffectual as it would be impracticable. The truth of the matter is, of course, that all art is political — in as many different ways as there are artists and critics — because, if one pardons another triteness, everything is political in some form or another. Accepting this fact *per se* seems to me to be the only constructive first step that can be taken towards a more profitable discussion. As Martin Esslin pointed out:

The theatre is the place where a nation thinks in public in front of itself. And in that context all sorts of matter assume political importance, for, ultimately, there is a close link between the general beliefs of a society, its concept of proper behaviour and good manners, its views of sexual morals, and the political climate of a nation.³

There are always social implications in any dramatic conflict simply because all human situations, all human behavioural patterns have social — and therefore also political — consequences. What is of interest, instead, is the variety of ramifications which stem from this general statement. The fine line between ‘political’, ‘party-political’ and ‘propagandistic’ (in their various tentative definitions) is for instance worth analysing in some depth, bearing in mind that the people who profess themselves to be opposed to propaganda (in art) nearly always turn out to be opposed only to the propaganda ‘of the

¹ Ionesco, *Notes and Counter-Notes*, 38.

² Brecht, ‘Volkstümlichkeit und Realismus [I]’, 407.

³ Esslin, ‘Drama and Society’, 101.

other side', propaganda 'on their side' not being propaganda at all. A further point to take into account is that the link between aesthetics and politics has been traditionally mediated by 'the social'; if it is true that the age of postmodernity is characterised by the elimination of the social — by way of implosion — one can legitimately wonder whether and how the relationship between the two terms has evolved.

The fundamental controversies that arose between political and a/anti-political theatre can be summarised in the opposition between the individual and the social. Whilst admitting that the choice as to where the scales should tip is an arbitrary and, from a practical point of view, hardly a mutually exclusive one, I would argue that political theatre as we traditionally understand it has outlived its usefulness. The issues brought to the fore by reception theory are inescapable for all forms of (theatrical) practices, but particularly so in the case of institutions and movements which have turned reception into their very subject matter and which have incorporated their audience — the *Volk* — in their designation. One should moreover take into account that the link between political theatre and the historical period to which it refers, mostly in an oppositional manner, implies that a change or a development in 'the times' must be followed by a similar transition in the artistic sphere, in order for the latter to be effective at all. My argument here is that the age of modernity was portrayed, more or less critically, by a form of political theatre whose possibility for existence and historical coherence was undeniable,⁴ and that the transition into the age of

⁴ Less so the realism or otherwise of its expectations, and the achievements of the function it attributed to itself. The argument on which the political theatre of, say, Piscator, stands is a fragile one, for it incorporates the most utopian wish of all, that for a proletarian audience. Utopian not because of any inability on the part of the working classes to understand, and indeed enjoy theatrical experiences, but in view of what is expected of them: if theatre critics still argue over the 'meaning' and implications of Piscator's and Brecht's theories, it seems at the very least naïve to expect the proletariat to be able to do a better job. And if the best way to arouse their interest is through shock techniques, one should hardly be surprised when the reaction that follows is one of bafflement (in the case of alienating techniques in the content and plot of the texts), or misguided involvement (in the case of stage techniques so complex that they attract attention to themselves). The same applies to the second stage of the political-theatrical process, that of putting the lesson learnt into practice by influencing one's own (political) reality. Again, this does not imply that the theatre is an obsolete institution unable to keep pace with its own times; the

postmodernity denies traditional political theatre the capacity to exist and operate successfully, and requires a 'renewal' of the genre which takes into account the change in external — economic, social, political, cultural — circumstances.

Just as Chapter 2 set the boundaries of the concepts of postmodernism and postmodernity, this chapter provides a similar framework with reference to political theatre. Given the vastness of the subject, I will restrict my analysis to those personalities and trends which Castorf has directly acknowledged in order to depict the development of the genre and to establish Castorf's own position. I will start with a brief sketch of the German theatrical tradition which led to the theories of Erwin Piscator, and include a critique of the latter's notions of proletarian and documentary theatre. The special connection between political theatre and (proletarian) audience will form the basis of an investigation of the term *Volksstück* — its designation and development from the Viennese *Volks theater* through to Kroetz's attempted revival, its dual function, its special bond with the *Volk*. Finally, I will set Castorf's own notion of the term against that of his predecessors, analyse the relationship between the traditionally political notion of *Volk* and the Baudrillardian concept of mass, and, by establishing points of convergence and divergence, conclude with the suggestion that Castorf's theatrical practices represent a successful example of a theatre which has developed a postmodern form whilst keeping a political edge.⁵

* * *

argument only applies when its social and political influence is idealised *tout court* rather than being evaluated pragmatically.

⁵ One will note in the following pages that mentions of Brecht are kept to a minimum. Whilst acknowledging that Brecht did provide major contributions to this genre, I have limited my analysis to his critical investigation of the *Volksstück* and to his conflict with Ionesco. The reason behind such an approach is that I see no connection, or a very thin one at best, between Brecht and Castorf. In my view, the latter has in fact managed to extrapolate himself from a position whereby, as an East German director, he has to establish an obligatory link (or justify a lack of one) with the former. This is confirmed by Castorf's own very rare mentions of Brecht (especially if one sets them against Castorf's links with Müller, which have been established over the years with clock-like regularity). On a practical level, this in turn becomes evident if one casts a glance to a chronology of Castorf's productions: the only Brecht play staged by Castorf, if one 'pardons' him his adolescent experiments, is *Herr Puntila und sein Knecht Matti*

The development of political theatre in Germany has been a peculiar one. Michael Patterson's introductory remarks to his *The Revolution in German Theatre 1900 - 1933* provide a brief and comprehensive synopsis of its evolution: Germany, for evident historical reasons, lacked a strong national dramatic tradition, especially in comparison with the French and English ones, which stretched back over a period of centuries. When German drama emerged, with figures like Lessing, Goethe, Schiller and Kleist, it represented a development in the language of poetry and in philosophical thought within the theatre; it still lacked, however, a new theatrical style — considering the theatre as a *moralische Anstalt* belongs certainly more to the philosophical than to the practical. It is only in the first third of our century that major contributions in that field were made; if beforehand German dramatists, rejecting the severe constraints of French classicism, automatically turned to Shakespeare as an example to follow, the new movement began to question Shakespeare himself, or, better, the way in which Shakespeare had been staged in the past. It thus developed in terms of form, but it did not evolve in terms of content. One has to wait until Brecht to experience achievements in both fields.⁶

Such 'revolution', which culminated in the development of the concept of political theatre, had its origins in history as well as art. It bore strong links with personal experiences of war and its consequences, with the political changes within Germany that took place in 1919, and with the effects of the Russian Revolution. As Willett commented, "the times" suddenly became a fashionable theme, driving out "Man" and "I", those two favourite poles of the Expressionist drama.⁷ Hence the various terms given to the new theatrical forms that developed: *Zeittheater*, *Zeitstück*

— a text which, in this context, belongs more to a specific *Volksstück*-tradition than to a generalised Brechtian one.

⁶ Patterson, 'Introduction', 1-5.

⁷ Willett, 'The political theatre', 110.

and later *Tendenzstück* and *Lehrstück*. A 'political theatre' already existed before Piscator radicalised the concept. It derived from the simplest forms of theatre (*Commedia dell'arte*, circuses, *variété*, cabaret, the Viennese *Volkstheater*) and developed various ramifications: the most basic form, the street theatre, with strong agitational character; the 'epic' and 'dialectic' theatre of Bertolt Brecht; the documentary theatre, to which Piscator adhered at a later stage in collaboration with Kipphardt, Hochhuth and Weiss; the conventional realistic theatre adopted by East European countries after 1945. Next to the forms of theatre which defined themselves as overtly political, moreover, there existed other forms, with no clearly defined programmes, which still understood themselves as politically orientated. There was the theatre of Leopold Jessner, for instance. The main difference lies here in the formulation of the concept 'political': where Piscator's theatre, at least in its early stages, was 'party-political', that of Jessner was political in its most abstract sense:

Wo wir an praktische oder ideell-orientierte Fragen rührten — die Zeit verleiht ihnen automatisch ein politisches Gepräge. So wird auch das Theater — sofern es nicht abseits der Zeit stehen will — in jenem großen weltanschaulichen Sinne politisch sein — so etwa, wie das Theater der Griechen in *weltanschaulichem* Sinne religiös war. [...] Es ist falsch, und dies kann nicht oft genug betont werden, Politik gleichbedeutend mit Parteigesinnung zu setzen. [...] Und so darf auch der Begriff des politischen Theaters nicht mit dem des Parteitheaters verwechselt werden. Politisches Theater, d.i. das Theater des allgemeinen *Zeitausdrucks*. Parteitheater, d.i. das Theater des begrenzten *Fraktionswillens*. Das eine hat zum Endzweck die Kunst mit den Mitteln gewandelter Weltanschauung; das andere die Verwirklichung des Parteiprogramms mit den Mitteln der Kunst.⁸

A practical example of this aesthetics can be found for example in his 1928 production of *Hamlet*, in which Jessner, instead of drawing attention to the 'Grammophonplatte von "Sein oder Nichtsein"', concentrated on the more politically crucial 'Etwas ist faul im Staate Dänemark'.⁹

⁸ Jessner, 'Politisches Theater: Zur diesjährigen Volksbühnentagung in Magdeburg', 92-93.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 93.

Piscator's programme was undoubtedly more radical: he founded six 'proletarische Theater' in Berlin, the first one of which — in 1920 — was characterised by his insistence that the word 'Kunst' be abandoned from its programme:

Die Leitung des proletarischen Theaters muß anstreben: Einfachheit im Ausdruck und Aufbau, klare eindeutige Wirkung auf das Empfinden des Arbeiterpublikums, Unterordnung jeder künstlerischen Absicht dem revolutionären Ziel, bewußte Betonung und Propagierung des Klassenkampfgedankens. Das proletarische Theater will der revolutionären Bewegung dienstbar sein und ist daher den revolutionären Arbeitern verpflichtet. Ein aus ihrer Mitte ausgewählter Ausschuß soll die Verwirklichung der kulturellen und propagandistischen Aufgaben verbürgen.¹⁰

One cannot but notice a similarity to the notion of proletarian culture devised by Lenin: equally against the 'sheer hypocrisy' of 'bourgeois-intellectual individualism',¹¹ Lenin urged literature, and culture in general, to become part of the cause of the proletariat. Yet Piscator seems to go far beyond Lenin's postulates. The latter recognised that proletarian culture 'is not something that has sprung from nowhere, it is not an invention of those who call themselves experts in proletarian culture',¹² and he saw the future of revolutionary art in the assimilation and refashioning of the achievements of the bourgeois epoch:

Unless we clearly understand that only by an exact knowledge of the culture created by the whole development of mankind, that only by re-working this culture, is it possible to build proletarian culture, unless this is understood, we shall not be able to solve our problem. [...] Proletarian culture must be the result of the natural development of the stores of knowledge which mankind has accumulated under the yoke of capitalist society, landlord society and bureaucratic society. [...] One can become a Communist only when one enriches one's mind with the knowledge of all the wealth created by mankind.¹³

Piscator's concept of proletarian theatre, instead, consciously stressed its break with previous theatrical and literary tendencies. It opposed Naturalism, whose products were

¹⁰ Piscator, 'Das proletarische Theater', 36.

¹¹ Lenin, 'Party Organisation and Party Literature', 46 and 48.

¹² Lenin, 'The Tasks of the Youth Leagues', 471.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 471.

condemned as 'schlechte photographische Bilder, von bürgerlichen Amateuren wahllos aufgenommen',¹⁴ and thus kept the metaphorical link with photography which Stanislavsky had adopted for diametrically opposite purposes going — the former complained that it was not realistic enough, the latter had scorned it for being too realistic — , a link which was to be adopted later by Brecht, and in recent years, most notably, by Heiner Müller. Piscator's proletarian theatre especially objected to Expressionism, which it characterised as 'symbolische Verschwommenheit, absichtlich wahlloses Nebeneinander von Farben, Linien, Gegenständen, Verzerrungen, Worten und Begriffen'.¹⁵ It also revolted against the Dada movement, to which the same Piscator had adhered in his first Berlin years, in view of the fact that Dada, whilst recognising the bourgeois element in traditional theatre, reacted to it by either dismissing the concept as a whole ('Kunst ist Scheiße'), or by concentrating on the formal element ('Die "Form" is alles'), whose propensity for revolutionary power Piscator very much doubted ('Die Form allein kann [...] niemals revolutionär sein. Der Inhalt macht sie dazu.'¹⁶).

Piscator's theatrical revolution permeated every aspect of the theatre, from the actual texts to playwrights, actors, ensemble and audience, all of which failed to come up to his almost utopian expectations. He famously complained of a lack of texts suitable for his purposes, arguing that political theatre had advanced beyond playwriting, as authors were still being affected by bourgeois Expressionist individualism. He rejected authorial autonomy, insisting that:

auch er [Der Autor] muß aufhören, die autokratische Person von ehemals zu sein, muß seine eigenen Vorstellungen und Originalitäten hintanstellen lernen zugunsten der Vorstellungen, die in der Psyche der Masse leben.¹⁷

¹⁴ Piscator, 'Über Grundlagen und Aufgaben des Proletarischen Theaters', 10.

¹⁵ Ibid., 10.

¹⁶ Ibid., 11.

¹⁷ Ibid., 12.

Indeed, the lack of appropriate texts constituted one of the main causes for his shift of attention to the technical devices in his productions. Other directors before him had made innovations of considerable importance. Jessner, for example, had abandoned the use of representational scenery in favour of a bare stage on different levels connected by stairways (what we now know as the *Jessnertreppe* or *Spieltreppe*). Even more evidently, Max Reinhardt's productions were so 'spectacular' that he was often accused of being a mere technician with no true artistic philosophy. Piscator's contribution lies rather in the function he attached to the devices. He called projections and screens 'die vierte Dimension des Theaters',¹⁸ and did not create a hierarchy of importance for technical appliances, arguing that 'ich kenne kein Mittel, das unkünstlerisch genannt werden darf, sofern es nur einen Hauch Bewegung, Angespanntsein, Ausdruck — kurz, Leben vermittelt'.¹⁹ It is interesting to note how this definition is closer to the Expressionist spirit, especially with regard to the inclusion of the term 'Ausdruck', than to a calculated political one. His real trademark, however, was the extensive use of film: front and back projections, and simultaneous or overlapping projections from more than one source. He went so far as to analyse the differences between 'Lehrfilm', 'dramatischer Film' and 'Kommentar-Film' in terms of their functions for the theatre.²⁰ Films permitted the portrayal of (historical) events in a way that not even a large cast would manage, and showed images with such authenticity that they gained the 'epic' ability to comment on themselves. Bernhard Diebold went so far as to say that Piscator's films were intended to work in the same way that the chorus did in Greek tragedies.²¹ The risk of taking technology too far, however, is not to be overlooked: during his productions of *Schwejk* and *Der Kaufmann von Berlin* in 1929 the noise

¹⁸ Piscator, 'Über die Regie', 15.

¹⁹ Piscator, 'Paquets *Sturmflut* in der Berliner Volksbühne', 18.

²⁰ See Piscator, 'Die Segment-Globus-Bühne', 171-74.

²¹ Quoted in Patterson, 'Piscator's Theatre: The Documentation of Reality', 125.

created by technical appliances was so overpowering that the actors had to shout in order to be heard at all.²² Piscator failed to realise that his complex stage sets achieved exactly the opposite reaction in the audience to the one he had wished for; instead of drawing attention to political themes they ended up drawing attention to themselves, thus gaining value as artistic rather than political accomplishments.

When one takes into consideration the number of practical innovations he introduced to the theatre, it comes somewhat as a surprise that he never followed them with innovations in acting methods. Meyerhold complained in 1928 that Piscator had built a new theatre but was making old actors perform in it.²³ He had, to be sure, formulated the concept of 'epic theatre', using the term for the first time in 1924 when he subtitled Paquet's play *Die Fahnen* 'ein episches Drama', but he never devised a notion of 'epic acting'. More often than not, actors felt and looked disproportionately minute in comparison with the complex stage apparatus that surrounded them.²⁴ Piscator vaguely defined the kind of acting he required as 'neorealistisch — nicht mit dem naturalistischen der 90er Jahre zu verwechseln',²⁵ simply stating that the actor had to turn away from representing the embodiment of bourgeois individualist characteristics to become the carrier of the Communist idea instead. The actor had to abandon the self-reference of Expressionism and strive towards objectivity. By 1929,

²² See Piscator, 'Die epische Satire', 193. Also quoted in Patterson, 'Piscator's Theatre: The Documentation of Reality', 128, and in Willett, 'The Political Theatre', 114.

²³ Priacel, 'Meyerhold à Paris', *Monde*, 7 July 1928. Quoted in Patterson, 'Piscator's Theatre: The Documentation of Reality', 129, and in Willett, 'The Political Theatre', 120.

²⁴ Difficulties in balancing 'technological' and 'human' resources on stage persist to this day. There is for instance a similarity between the above-mentioned result of Piscator's production and the outcome in some of the works by Robert Wilson and the New York Wooster Group. The latter's most recent guest production in Berlin, O'Neill's *The Hairy Ape*, consisted of a two-hour-long cacophony of metallic sounds that not even a consummate theatre actor like Willem Defoe could carry off. This is not to say that it is impossible to strike a balance at all: Michael Simon's 1996 *Volkstheater* production of *Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde*, for example, stretched the technical stage apparatus to its limit, and still left room for the actors to move and breathe, by turning the 'man-machine' relationship into its very subject matter. More generally, the whole artistic concept of the Berlin *Komische Oper* provides a successful example of how to deal with this apparent dichotomy.

²⁵ Piscator, 'Das Handwerk', 82.

however, Piscator was obliged to make room for the importance of the actor's talent and personality, as the following claim suggests:

In Wirklichkeit war ich immer ein Schauspielregisseur. [...] Ich sehe im Schauspielerischen eine Wissenschaft, die zur gedanklichen Struktur des Theaters gehört, zum Pädagogischen.²⁶

In reality, though, one gets the impression that, if equipped with enough projectors, Piscator would have been ready to do wholly without actors. Piscator's object of concentration lay in fact on the other side of the footlights. Convinced that he did not need the 'Kurfürstendammpublicum'²⁷ to attend his productions, he aimed at educating the proletariat in what should have been the real 'theatre for the people', in open competition with the Berlin *Volksbühne*. The latter had originated in 1890 in order to bring plays, preferably with a pronounced social content, to the working classes at prices they could afford. It represented the first form of subscription theatre, with tickets allotted through a lottery system. Piscator's relationship with the *Volksbühne* had always been a tempestuous one, and it came abruptly to an end in 1927 with his staging of *Gewitter über Gottland*, a play originally set in 1400, and which Piscator turned into a unmistakable celebration of Lenin, by transforming the main character Asmus into the Russian leader. Georg Springer's review in the *Weltbühne* drew a clear distinction between the politics of Piscator and the politics of the *Volksbühne*:

Die Volksbühne hat weder die Tradition noch die Absicht, noch die Möglichkeit, das Wort 'Volk' in ihrem Namen einfach mit 'radikalsozialistischer Arbeiterschaft' gleichzusetzen. Zweifellos ist sie aus dem Willen hervorgegangen, den Arbeitern die Kunst, zunächst die des Theaters, zu erschließen, und sie betrachtet es auch heute noch als ihre Hauptaufgabe, den Weg des Proletariats zu den Kulturgütern freizulegen. Aber weder in Berlin und noch weniger im Reich besteht die Mitgliedschaft der Volksbühne ausschließlich aus Proletariern; und wenn wir gar den Begriff des meinungsberechtigten, förderungswerten Volkes auf radikalsozialistische Gesinnung beschränken wollten, so wäre das mit einer Zerspaltung der Volksbühne gleichbedeutend.²⁸

²⁶ Op. cit., 84.

²⁷ Piscator, 'Von der Kunst zur Politik', 23.

²⁸ Quoted in Piscator, '*Gewitter über Gottland*', 99.

Only two years later *Die Rote Fahne*, the official paper of the KPD, condemned another production by Piscator — *Der Kaufmann von Berlin* — for being, again, too radical.

Gertrud Alexander went so far as to say that:

Kunst ist eine zu heilige Sache, als daß sie ihren Namen für Propagandamachwerke hergeben dürfte. [...] Was der Arbeiter braucht, ist eine starke Kunst. [...] Solche Kunst kann auch bürgerlichen Ursprungs sein, nur sei es Kunst.²⁹

Paradoxically enough, and despite his revolutionary claims, Piscator was simultaneously planning to start a new theatre in a part of Berlin which would have made the support of 'capitalist' investments vital, and the presence of an educated audience indispensable for the understanding of his productions. The ambiguity of his position caused him no little embarrassment; so undefined must his position have appeared during his own times — as Brecht's satirisation in his poem *Der Theaterkommunist* makes clear — that, according to Franz Jung, even Goebbels, whom Piscator knew well, once offered him his play *Der Wanderer*.³⁰ Piscator was nevertheless more aware of the impracticality of his intentions than some of his critics credited him with. In a lecture given to members of the Youth Section of the *Volksbühne* in 1929, he stated that 'ein revolutionäres Theater ohne sein lebendiges Element, nämlich ein revolutionäres Publikum, ist ein Unsinn'.³¹ Yet in the final chapter of his *Das politische Theater* he had to admit that:

wie ein roter Faden hat sich durch dieses Buch, durch die Geschichte meiner Unternehmungen, die Erfahrung gezogen, daß das Proletariat aus welchen Ursachen immer, zu schwach ist, um sein eigenes Theater zu unterhalten.³²

Piscator's position softened with time; after years in exile spent first in Russia, then Paris, and finally in New York, where he founded his own Dramatic Workshop, he moved back to post-war Germany in 1951. In the years between 1951 and his death in

²⁹ Quoted in Wolff, 'Nachwort: Glotzt nicht so romantisch', 119.

³⁰ Jung, *Der Weg nach Unten*, 315. Quoted in Willett, 'The Political Theatre', 123.

³¹ Piscator, 'Rechenschaft (1)', 55.

³² Piscator, 'Rückblick und Ausblick', 245.

1966, Piscator worked at a new concept, the development of which he explained in terms of 'Kenntnis-Erkenntnis-Bekenntnis'³³ — incorporating in his formulation, once again, a term (Bekenntnis) of expressionist flavour. The initial essential presence of the political element, which every other theatrical aspect had to serve, gave place to a form of art whose goal was to express, at its most radical, 'Bekenntnis zum Politischen'.³⁴ In fact, even if the initial chapter of *Das politische Theater* read 'Von der Kunst zur Politik', as early as 1939 — during his first year in America — he wrote:

Endlich möchte ich nun endlich umgekehrt sagen können: 'Von der Politik zur Kunst'. Das wäre — endlich, endlich — dein Wunsch, sagte ich mir. Ach — laßt mich doch Kunst machen. [...] Ach, ach, laßt mich doch fliehen ... von dieser *Politik*.³⁵

One can notice a return to a Schillerian position which treats the stage as a moral institution that should provoke public discussion, and act as a truly representative social forum, attracting working class and bourgeois public alike. Piscator himself claimed that 'wir sollen das Theater wieder als "moralische Anstalt" verstehen!'.³⁶ Ironically enough, the very KPD which years before had condemned him for being too unartistic now criticised him for not being revolutionary enough. The 'Bekenntnis' he had in mind was not the self-referential one of the expressionist individual, nor the politically radical one of the proletarian class, but, rather, a universal one, based on the recent past which all generations and classes had in common. A different trend was also developing at roughly the same time, a trend which had started with T.S. Eliot and evolved with Beckett and Ionesco. Piscator identified them with a disbelief in and a rejection of any notions of hope, and distinguished his own theatre as 'the theatre of positive people — against existentialists, degenerates and those who have given up

³³ 'Gespräch mit Erwin Piscator', 176.

³⁴ Piscator, 'Politisches Theater heute: Wo die ganze Nation betroffen ist, darf das Theater nicht hintanstehen', 333.

³⁵ Piscator, 'Der Schrei nach der Kunst: Zehn Jahre europäisches Theater', 33.

³⁶ 'Gespräch mit Erwin Piscator', 176.

hope'.³⁷ A concern with the post-war collective German conscience and the discovery of congenial authors allowed him to start afresh during his last years in Berlin. He famously remarked that:

Mir scheint, ich setze die Schriftsteller, die in den zwanziger Jahren mit mir arbeiteten, in ihrem Wert nicht herab, wenn ich sage, daß Stücke, wie sie mir seinerzeit als Ideal vorschwebten, erst etwa heute von Hochhuth, Kipphardt oder Weiss geschrieben werden.³⁸

Yet some critics accused the playwrights who had originated documentary theatre of being responsible for a 'Regeneration des Stoffes',³⁹ a reinstatement of the dominance of matter over form. Their preoccupation with content overruled formal considerations, and originated a whole new set of questions regarding the role of the playwright — whether he was to have merely editorial tasks, whether he could exercise his freedom in selecting, arranging, formulating, and concentrating the material. There obviously are difficulties inherent in this genre, for in the process of dramatisation documentary material necessarily undergoes a series of changes. More significantly, its limiting topicality prevents it from evolving into a form of political theatre worth expanding. To argue with Ionesco, 'topical drama does not last (by definition) and it does not last for the good reason that people are not truly profoundly interested in it.'⁴⁰

As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Castorf's own notion of political theatre, as well as the points of convergence and divergence which appear when one sets it against that of his predecessors, will constitute the subject matter of a subsequent section. Before contrasting the practices and philosophies of Castorf and Piscator I will therefore concentrate on another 'chapter' in the history and development of German political theatre which is of at least equal importance in order to sketch Castorf's artistic

³⁷ Piscator, diary entry 10 November 1954. Original in the Berlin *Akademie der Künste*. Quoted in and translated by Willett, 'The Long Road Home', 173.

³⁸ Piscator, 'Nachwort 1966', 267.

³⁹ See for instance Rühle, 'Versuche über eine geschlossene Gesellschaft', *Theater heute*, 10 (1968), 9.

⁴⁰ Ionesco, 'Still about Avant-Garde Theatre', 57.

background, namely that of the *Volksstück* — here understood as a revived genre which shows the subsequent attempt to formulate a ‘theatre for the people’, and which differs from its ‘documentary’ forerunner on all fronts.

* * *

The *Volksstück*, a type of drama that developed in German-speaking countries towards the end of the eighteenth century, and which has suffered a remarkable number of partial deaths and half successful resuscitations, has traditionally created problems in terms of definition, categorisation and genealogy, let alone in terms of its translation. Judgements on the literary merit of the genre have also fluctuated greatly, not least because of the vast differences amongst the texts that have borne, directly or indirectly, this designation. If one adds the link that has been established between the *Volksstück* and other typically German kinds of literature — from *Heimatliteratur* to *Posse*, *Schwank*, *Lokalstück*, *Bauernkomödie*, *städtisches* and *bäuerliches Volksschauspiel* — as well as with the theatrical institutions in which it was performed — from the *Volkstheater* to the *Vorstadttheater* and *Bauerntheater*, and eventually, albeit partly, the *Volksbühne* — , and the variety of elements it comprises — the class that provides subject matter and audience, its thematic and style — one cannot but come to the conclusion that an analysis of the *Volksstück per se* borders on the impossible. The difficulty of providing a definition emerges in various academic writing. Even Jürgen Hein, possibly the most prolific writer on the subject, initially classifies it so:

Der Begriff Volksstück, ursprünglich wohl österreichisch-süddeutscher Herkunft, meint den lebendigen, historisch-sozioökonomisch konkreten Bezug des Theaters auf Publikum und Gesellschaft in ihrem wechselseitigen

Verhältnis (Zusammensetzung des Publikums, geistige Bedürfnisse, Geschmack usw).⁴¹

There is a certain degree of vagueness in the definition; indeed, all theatre, including the anti-theatre of Ionesco, implies a 'Bezug auf Publikum und Gesellschaft' — if only in view of the simple fact that it is performed in front of an audience. Non-specialist reference works normally demonstrate, rather than challenge, the rather imprecise boundaries of the term, by providing vague and generic definitions, or, what is worse, by illustrating the pejorative connotations for which many criticise it. There is admittedly some truth in those views, for a number of *Volksstücke* constitute indeed examples of 'popular', i.e. trivial, literature; yet the literary reputation gained by other texts which belong to the same genre should not be forgotten. One can in fact distinguish between two lines of development in the history of the genre:

Volksstück ist einmal das regional begrenzte, dialektgebundene, anspruchslose, 'bloß' unterhaltende, 'triviale' Lokalstück auf der 'Schaubühne ohne ideale Ansprüche' [...]; zum andern sieht man in ihm — dies gilt besonders für seine Wiederentdeckung und Erneuerung im 20. Jahrhundert — eine Form der kritisch-realistischen, nicht minder mit Mitteln der Unterhaltung arbeitenden (Selbst-) Darstellung des Volkes.⁴²

Even the latter category does by no means consist of an homogeneous grouping, for it can be said to include authors as varied as Ferdinand Raimund, Johann Nestroy, Ludwig Anzengruber, Ludwig Thoma, Marieluise Fleißer, Ödön von Horváth, Carl Zuckmayer, Bertolt Brecht, Franz Xaver Kroetz. This heterogeneity shows that the form of the *Volksstück* is everything but static; what is more, the 'renewal' encouraged by some authors would seem to confirm the potential immanent in the genre.⁴³

Of paramount importance for a definition of the genre is, without doubt, the *Volk*, which acted as both audience and dramatis personae, and whose trials and

⁴¹ Hein, 'Das Volksstück : Entwicklung und Tendenzen', 10.

⁴² Ibid., 9.

⁴³ According to Aust, Haida and Hein, 'prononciert gesagt: Die "Geschichte" des Volksstücks besteht in seiner ständigen Erneuerung.' Aust, Haida, and Hein, 'Einleitung', 17.

tribulations constituted the very subject matters of the plays in question. Despite the fact that *Volk* is a social category — and one that has implied more than the neutral concept of ‘ethnic group’ in the German historical past of our century — and *Volksstück* a literary form, it is essential to acknowledge the existence of a two-way relationship between the two, for ‘*Volk*’ cannot be reduced to a ready-made notion of class: if that were the case, the classification would result in incompleteness and oversimplification. The early *Volksstück* as developed by the Viennese *Volkstheater*⁴⁴ referred to a social class below the nobility and the bourgeoisie that could not yet be called proletariat; its *Volk* included the population in the country, the actual underclass, and small craftspeople. The term *Volk* eventually came to be applied to the industrial proletariat and, more recently with Kroetz, to the petite-bourgeoisie in general.

The most recognised impulse behind the *Volksstück* is its dual function to educate and to entertain: a didactic content is made accessible through an entertaining form.⁴⁵ Any separation between form and content is however an artificial one, since both rely on each other and exist in dialectical relationship to one another: the ‘comic’ is not, per definition, simply a means to a (better) end. A different approach is taken by Calvin Jones, who substitutes the terms didactic and entertaining with the Adornian concept of negation and the principle of utopia formulated by Ernst Bloch.⁴⁶ Whether the contrast be between didactic and entertaining, or negative and utopian, one has to bear in mind that literature aimed at the *Volk* can also be grouped according to the intentions of the playwrights: it can either be produced for the *Volk* (again, with a series of ramifications, for such a position includes *Volksstücke* aimed at encouraging opposition as well as promoting the status quo), or it can be an expression of the *Volk*

⁴⁴ For a short history of the development of the Viennese *Volkstheater* see Bauer, ‘Das Wiener Volkstheater zu Beginn des 19. Jahrhunderts: Noch nicht und (oder) doch schon Literatur?’.

⁴⁵ Note the similarity to Castorf’s technique of achieving modern(ist) goals with postmodern(ist) means.

⁴⁶ See Jones, *Negation and Utopia: The German Volksstück from Raimund to Kroetz*.

itself. A further link should moreover be investigated in this context: given the inevitable association between *Volk* and mass culture, and given that the culture industry has often seized and twisted valid forms of popular entertainment, it is necessary to re-address the dichotomy that is at the very base of the *Volksstück*, and question whether this genre — indeed, any genre at all — can still claim to be popular and critical.⁴⁷ The ‘unpopularity’ of a *Volksstück* may be explained as either its inability to find mass appeal or as a sign of its autonomy. The problem, of course, is that by developing into a more intellectually acceptable form of art, the *Volksstück* inevitably abandons its initial audience and, to a degree, purpose. Such decline in mass appeal can be partly explained by taking into account that more recent forms of popular entertainment, from television to cinema to the Internet, have appropriated its original functions and purposes; yet this is an argument that may well be generally applied to every form of theatre, and depict the daily conflict that takes place between theatre and the mass media. When the specific development of the *Volksstück* is under analysis, when one compares the theories of Horváth and Brecht with the intentions of, say, Kroetz, one will notice that the contemporary *Volksstück* is not actually a *Volksstück* in the traditional sense any more. My argument is that not only has the *Volksstück* lost its original appeal, but its evolution has transformed it into a theatrical form that bears little resemblance with its traditional past.

Brecht wrote only one full-length play, *Herr Puntila und sein Knecht Matti*, that he called *Volksstück*, yet his theories on the subject, more specifically his essays ‘Anmerkungen zum Volksstück’ and ‘Volkstümlichkeit und Realismus’ still represent the culmination of the second attempt to revive the genre — the first one, during the Weimar Republic, had been carried through by authors who had subsequently been

⁴⁷ Moreover, there is as yet no hard proof of the actual social effectiveness of a work of art; in this particular context, even if the plays seem to preach opposition, they could actually function as safety valves, as was the case with oppositional theatre in the GDR.

suppressed by the Nazis and who were eventually rediscovered by Kroetz and others in the 1970s. Brecht recognised that the traditional *Volksstück* had become almost exclusively an example of trivial literature:

Das Volksstück ist für gewöhnlich krudes und anspruchsloses Theater und die gelehrte Ästhetik schweigt es tot oder behandelt es herablassend. Im letzteren Fall wünscht sie es nicht anders, als es ist, so wie gewisse Regimes sich ihr Volk wünschen: krud und anspruchslos.⁴⁸

He characterised its features as ‘derbe Späße’, ‘Rührseligkeiten’, ‘billige Sexualität’, where ‘die Bösen werden bestraft und die Guten werden geheiratet, die Fleißigen machen eine Erbschaft und die Faulen haben das Nachsehen’.⁴⁹ Yet he argued that the need, as yet unfulfilled, ‘nach naivem, aber nicht primitivem, poetischem, aber nicht romantischem, wirklichkeitsnahem, aber nicht tagespolitischem Theater’⁵⁰ was still felt and justified. Brecht’s distinction between the dated *Volksstück* and the new version of the genre he proposed mirrors Lenin’s differentiation between the concepts of ‘vulgarisation’ and ‘popularisation’. The former is in fact condemned as follows:

The vulgar writer assumes that his reader does not think and is incapable of thinking; he does not lead him in his first steps towards serious knowledge, but in a distortedly simplified form, interlarded with jokes and facetiousness, hands out ‘ready-made’ *all* the conclusions of a known theory, so that the reader does not even have to chew but merely to swallow what he is given.⁵¹

The new *Volksstück*, Brecht argued, would have to take stock of the best features of the revue and capitalise on them (again, much in the same fashion in which Lenin planned to absorb and re-work bourgeois culture). Both genres do without a unified and continuous story, and simply present sketches; the *Volksstück* should provide more epic substance and be more realistic. Both contain elements of poetry; the *Volksstück* should be poetic with reference to actual situations rather than through the characters reacting to them. Both have a style of presentation which is both artistic and natural, yet the

⁴⁸ Brecht, ‘Anmerkungen zum Volksstück’, 115.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 115.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 116.

⁵¹ Lenin, ‘The Journal *Svoboda*’, 311-12.

resulting 'cocktail' of elevated and naturalistic style should not result in a mixture of the casual and the declamatory. The new *Volksstück* should still adopt the synthesis of both styles, but approach it in a critical manner:

Der Gegensatz zwischen Kunst und Natur kann dann fruchtbar gemacht werden, wenn er im Kunstwerk zwar zur Einheit gebracht, aber nicht ausgelöscht wird: [...] Wir brauchen eine Kunst, die die Natur meistert, wir brauchen die künstlerisch gestaltete Wirklichkeit und die natürliche Kunst.⁵²

Herr Puntila und sein Knecht Matti is indeed far from being a work of trivial literature, and does stand for a new chapter in the history of the genre: the chauffeur Matti is superior to Puntila not just in terms of intelligence, as was often the case in similar situations with the *Commedia dell'arte*, but because he has more insight into the structure of capitalism. At first glance the play would seem to have the necessary requisites for the trivial kind of popular comedy, such as sex, drinking and cursing; what is different here is that they do not arise from alleged eternal basic instincts any more, but, rather, they are portrayed as historical, and they possess the 'epic' quality of calling into question their *raison d'être*. This comes particularly to the fore when one contrasts the ending of Brecht's play with Zuckmayer's superficially similar *Der fröhliche Weinberg*: the latter, which also features the daughter of a wealthy landowner, portrays a characteristic happy-ending scenario in which the daughter is reconciled with her father and is allowed to marry the man she loves rather than the upper-class youth originally arranged for her. Unlike Brecht's play, which emphasises social conflict, Zuckmayer's text maintains the myth of 'Volksgemeinschaft' and, as McGowan points out, even though it satirises excessive militarism and nationalism, which led it to being banned by the Nazis, *Der fröhliche Weinberg* still remains within the tradition of the trivial *Volksstück*.⁵³ *Herr Puntila und sein Knecht Matti* concludes instead with the chauffeur's rejection of both marriage to his master's daughter and reconciliation with

⁵² Brecht, 'Anmerkungen zum Volksstück', 118-19.

⁵³ McGowan, 'Comedy and the *Volksstück*', 75.

the master himself. Such a non-traditional ending has prompted some critics to view the play as more tragedy than comedy. Others have contended that failing to see its comic essence is to overlook its basic impulse. McGowan, for instance, does away with the distinction between the tragic and the comic, and concentrates on the contrast between the comic and the farcical instead. The former, he argues, still allows a critical stance to be included, the latter produces entertainment for its own sake. He sees Brecht's view of comedy as central to his work, because it contrasts the way things are with the way things should be; in other words, it 'presupposes a Utopia' with which it compares the present.⁵⁴ The actual comic conclusion is thus understood to be, as it were, still in progress. Whilst agreeing that Brecht's text belongs to the tradition of the critical *Volksstück*, and that the comic element is of paramount importance to an understanding and evaluation of the play, I find the relationship between *Volksstück* and *Lehrstück*, especially in Brecht's case, to be at least equally important.⁵⁵ The dialectical relationship between both is embodied respectively by Puntila and Matti, and, up to a point, within the character of Puntila himself, who actually possesses more 'popular' — in terms of 'volkstümlich' — traits than his chauffeur. The first production of the play in Zurich and its subsequent staging in Berlin showed how the same Puntila could accentuate either one of both elements: in the first case, the Puntila presented by Steckel won the sympathies of the audience by being portrayed as jovial and well-meaning; in the second instance, the same actor alienated the support of the audience and created a critical distance which forced the spectators to perceive the danger immanent in Puntila's drunken charm.⁵⁶ Their simultaneous presence, notwithstanding the possible

⁵⁴ Op. cit., 63-67.

⁵⁵ See for instance Poser, 'Brechts *Herr Puntila und sein Knecht Matti*: Dialektik zwischen *Volksstück* und *Lehrstück*', 187-200.

⁵⁶ See Brecht, 'Steckels zwei Puntilas', 22.

various degrees of accentuation, can be traced back to the entertaining and the didactic function traditionally associated with the critical *Volksstück*.

One has to wait over twenty years for a further attempt to revive the genre. As Hein pointed out, German comedy had been turned into 'Überlebenskomik' during the Third Reich, and, having lost its critical power, it found it difficult to re-establish itself as a valid literary genre after World War II.⁵⁷ In the late 1960s and early 1970s, though, a number of young playwrights such as Wolfgang Bauer, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Martin Sperr and, most notably, Franz Xaver Kroetz, began writing plays characterised by local settings and the employment of a 'dialect' of sorts. They acknowledged the influence of the dramaturgy of Horváth and Fleißer, and adopted (or accepted) the genre designation *Volksstück* for their own texts. Kroetz's early characters belonged to a *Volk* that was culturally, financially and socially inept. It was a *Volk* that did not pose a threat to society, but that, on the contrary, tried very hard to 'belong' to it, as *Stallerhof* and its sequence *Geisterbahn* make painfully clear. Kroetz's early plays are often criticised for portraying a picture of society devoid of commentary and elucidations, and his stance is often described as one of sympathy rather than one of constructive criticism: it is thus seen to provide at worst a de-sublimation through voyeurism (or an abreaction not dissimilar to the one involuntarily created by oppositional theatre in the GDR), and at best sheer sympathetic affirmation. What I find of interest in this context is the way in which Kroetz's early plays, for which he accepted their designation as *Volksstücke*, can be almost seen as an 'anti-genre' rather than the renewal of an existing one: as Cocalis has argued, they attempted to bring about political and social change and yet avoided explicit messages, they sought to promote the humanitarian and yet portrayed almost inhuman behaviour, and they appealed to compassion in order to

⁵⁷ Hein, 'Allgemeine Grundlagen: Zeitgenössische Dramatik und "Neues Volksstück"', 5.

awaken a critical attitude.⁵⁸ The contrast between traditional expectations concerning this genre and plays like *Stallerhof* and *Geisterbahn* may thus stand — with hindsight — for a partial admission that the attempt to renew the *Volksstück* was doomed to fail.

The development in Kroetz' writings went hand in hand with the development of his *Volk*, which came to include the petite-bourgeoisie, i.e. a social group which has become increasingly aware of, and able to articulate, its problems, and whose cultural, financial and social growth is accompanied by an uncritical appropriation of middle class attitudes. Interestingly enough, by the early 1980s Kroetz himself rejected the term *Volksstück* for having lost its political usefulness. The question of reception is particularly important for plays which claim to be socio-critical, and Kroetz came to realise that the *Volksstück* could not claim to be truly popular and critical:

Das Theater für das Volk sitzt weiterhin zwischen zwei Stühlen: entweder es hat die Massen, dann funktioniert es gegen die Interessen derselben, oder es hat sie nicht, dann funktioniert es, auch wenn es auf dem richtigen Dampfer ist, bloß als Insider-Scherz der Intellektuellen, die zum Wohlfühlen und zur Werbung halt einen Renommierproleten brauchen, privat oder im Job.⁵⁹

Even though the underclass has far from disappeared, and one is of course only too aware that the 'messages' of the critical *Volksstück* are still perfectly valid, the new notion of the masses that has developed since Adorno's criticism of the culture industry has shaken the belief in the foundations of the possibility of art to make important changes in the social and political spheres whilst simultaneously maintaining a position of alliance, sympathy and understanding with the masses themselves.

The positive achievements of the more recent critical *Volksstücke* should not be

⁵⁸ Cocalis, who has coined the term 'anti-genre' in this context, applies it indiscriminately to all critical *Volksstücke*. According to her, 'it [the critical *Volksstück*] is an antigenre, or *Gegenentwurf*, which cannot exist without the foil of the totally uncritical, traditional *Volksstück*. [...] It [the critical *Volksstück*] attempts to be both conventional and critical, compassionate and brutal, linguistically naive and sophisticated'. Cocalis, 'The Politics of Brutality: Toward a Definition of the *Volksstück*', *Modern Drama*, 24 (1981), 292 and 293.

⁵⁹ Kroetz, 'Soll der Kumpel Abonnent werden?', 543.

underestimated. As McGowan pointed out with reference to Kroetz' early plays, this genre insisted 'on the right of ordinary working-class characters to the identity crisis which [...] had customarily been reserved for the sensitive bourgeois intellectual.'⁶⁰ Yet one should be aware of the overestimation of the didactic influence of authorial power, as well as of the danger of creating compartmentalisations for the *Volk*, which runs the risk of being either idealised as a sentimental(ised) figure or of being turned into a laughing-stock.

* * *

'Ich mache realistisches Volkstheater, nichts Experimentelles'⁶¹

'Die Volksbühne ist nicht einfach nur populär, sie ist schon so etwas wie das neue Berliner Volkstheater.'⁶²

The theatrical practices of Castorf show similarities with all the above-mentioned authors and directors. Indeed, it is often Castorf himself who draws parallels between his work and that of a great variety of very different artists, and between his aesthetics and that of thinkers who are universally considered to be positioned at the opposite ends of the philosophical spectrum.⁶³ His position appears at first glance to be at best a veritable cacophony of styles, beliefs, and artistic principles, and at worst the result of a shrewdly calculated strategy based on contradiction for its own sake. In this section I will attempt to find a unifying thread in Castorf's thought which will lead to

⁶⁰ McGowan, 'Subject, Politics, Theatre — Reflections on Franz Xaver Kroetz', 79.

⁶¹ Castorf, quoted in Hitz, 'Stichworte, ungeordnet: Frank Castorf auf den Proben zu *Stella*'. Unpublished manuscript; original in the Berlin *Akademie der Künste*.

⁶² Schaper, 'Am Mikrophon: Frank Castorf', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 21 November 1994.

⁶³ The same applies to the ambiguous stance he has adopted in the post-unification debate, which will form the object of my investigation in the following chapter.

the formulation of a coherent (political) aesthetics whilst still allowing all elements to co-exist.

Castorf's connection with Piscator extends beyond their association with the *Volksbühne*. On a theoretical level, the treatment of 'Kunst' which emerged from Piscator's writings on proletarian theatre bears strong resemblances with Castorf's notion of 'Kunst' as something artificial and detrimental ('Keine falschen Theaterbedeutungen, keine Theaterpappe, sondern einfache, realistische [...] Vorgänge, sonst wird's 'ne Kunstnummer'⁶⁴). On a practical level, both directors have made extensive use of film techniques in their productions, and have utilised the theatre's stage apparatus to its full potential. In Castorf's case, however, this has not diminished or jeopardised the role of the actors: if on the one hand he is aware that the *Volksbühne* does not lend itself to being used as a platform for fine acting, if only for the large dimension of a stage in which every detailed gesture would hardly be seen, let alone carry meaning across, he has, on the other hand, developed a distinctive approach to acting which allows the ensemble to maintain control over non-human stage resources.⁶⁵ Finally, turning one's attention to the audience, Piscator and Castorf share the same problematic of having the very members of the public which the performances set out to ridicule, namely the educated bourgeoisie (or, in the *Volksbühne* vocabulary, 'Westberliner Zahnärzte'⁶⁶), sitting in the auditorium. Michael Patterson captured the essence of the situation with a statement that could be referred to either of the two:

Capitalist society would tolerate this subversive child only so long as his tricks continued to amuse them. And while it amused them, one was treated to the curious spectacle of the bourgeoisie applauding their own subversion.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Hitz, 'Stichworte, ungeordnet: Frank Castorf auf den Proben zu *Stella*'.

⁶⁵ Castorf's directing techniques are based on a reversal of the order of importance in the relationship between actors and roles: the starting point is never the fictional role that has to be learnt and portrayed, but the real biography of every individual actor, who is at liberty to incorporate the traits of his/her character which suit best his/her off-stage personality, and to discard those which have no connection with his/her identity.

⁶⁶ This is the terminology used by the theatre's former literary manager, Matthias Lilienthal. My interview, 26 September 1997.

⁶⁷ Patterson, 'Piscator's Theatre: The Documentation of Reality', 120.

Castorf's link with the tradition of *Volksstück* and *Volkstheater* is arguably the most evident. The *Volksbühne* itself, under the artistic direction of Fritz Wisten from 1954 to 1962, had lost its political nature and had promoted a repertoire which included mainly comedies and trivial *Volksstücke*. Castorf's predilection for the staging of notoriously 'bad' literature (from *Pension Schöllner* to *Golden fließt der Stahl* to *Des Teufels General*) would seem to align him more with the trivial than with the critical current within the genre. If the *Volksbühne* does represent the new *Volkstheater* one could argue, oversimplifying to an extent, that it is Marthaler who has taken the second route: his productions originate a feeling of immediate affection and sympathy for their characters not unlike that evoked by Kroetz's early *personae*. Both artists, moreover, have turned stage silence into a veritable new language; there is a strong link between Kroetz' direction of his own plays, which often insist on the importance of pauses, and the famous silences of Marthaler's ensemble.⁶⁸ Castorf's apparent triviality, instead, would seem to turn all texts into *Volksstücke*: those which are often recognised as using comic elements, like Jelinek's plays, are pushed further towards the comical, if not the downright farcical,⁶⁹ and those which are traditionally considered to form a part of 'serious' literature, like Müller's plays, are turned into a parody of themselves.⁷⁰ There is a sense in which this approach, which combines *Volksstück*-raw-material with a postmodern treatment, reveals an unsuspected connection between the two: *Volksstücke* are, after all, characterised by an emphasis on the local which is reflected in the identity

⁶⁸ Marthaler's technique is best recognisable in his first *Volksbühne* production, *Murx der Europäer! Murx ihn! Murx ihn! Murx ihn ab!*, and in *Drei Schwestern*, in which, as Matthias Lilienthal pointed out, 'endlich wird er seinen alten Traum von einem halbstündigen Schweigen auf der Bühne wahr machen' (theatre preview 1997/98).

⁶⁹ See, for instance, his Hamburg production of *Raststätte oder Sie machen's alle*, which gained him an invitation to the 1995 Berlin *Theatertreffen*.

⁷⁰ Castorf's last two stagings of texts by Müller made the connection particularly explicit, by uniting *Die Schlacht* with *Pension Schöllner* and *Wolokolamsker Chaussee* with *Golden fließt der Stahl*. See Chapter 9 for a detailed analysis.

and the language of their characters, just as postmodern philosophy has abandoned global issues and metanarratives to concentrate on 'local' matters. The postmodern ironic treatment of these texts has thus, paradoxically, saved them from literary oblivion. Castorf's Hamburg production of *Herr Puntila und sein Knecht Matti* of 1996 may serve here as an example. Bearing in mind that Brecht's *Verfremdung* techniques are by now familiar even to a theatrically uneducated audience, Castorf's production opened with an exchange between Matti and Puntila which simultaneously showed and ridiculed Brecht's theory: Puntila, in a state of drunkenness, could not recognise Matti, who, after various attempts at trying to remind his master that he was his trusted chauffeur, finally resorted to admitting 'Ja, ja, ja, ich bin Peter René Lüdiche und spiele den Matti in einer verfremdeten Form, wie Brecht es gewollt hätte' and thus parodied Brecht's maxim 'Zeigt das Zeigen!'.⁷¹

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, there are further features of Castorf's theatre which find their counterpart in postmodern or Baudrillardian philosophy. The fragmentation to which most texts staged by Castorf are submitted can be explained with Baudrillard's aesthetics of destruction and decomposition, for the disappearance of the concept of (theatrical) unity, which Castorf has exacerbated and turned to his advantage, is a typically postmodern phenomenon which Baudrillard has incorporated into his aesthetics:

It has all been done. The extreme limit of [all] possibilities has been reached. It has destroyed itself. It has deconstructed the entire universe. So all that are left are pieces. All that remains to be done is to play with the pieces. Playing with the pieces — that is postmodern.⁷²

There are two considerations to be made in this context. Firstly, and notwithstanding the fact that this artistic approach refers particularly to Castorf's guest productions in

⁷¹ It would also be interesting to contrast Castorf's staging with the performance of the same play by Einar Schleaf, which was simultaneously running at the *Berliner Ensemble*, and which concentrated on the political sphere of the text in a (typically Schleafian) visually powerful way.

⁷² Baudrillard, 'Interview: Game with Vestiges', *On the Beach*, 5 (1984), 24.

West Germany and Switzerland, it is important to stress that this form of postmodern theatre does not necessarily need the background (economic, social, political, cultural) of a western society as a prerequisite in order to be produced and experienced in an effective manner. Castorf's GDR productions also incorporated the theatrical principles I have outlined above, as did Müller's in the *Volksbühne (Macbeth)* and in the *Deutsches Theater (Hamletmaschine)* during the 1980s. Even more exemplary, perhaps, is the work of Jo Fabian, whose 1989 *Prometheus* series (*EXAMPLE NR. P.* in Dessau, *EXAMPLE IN MOTION* in Leipzig) escaped any attempt at being placed within the tradition of either Enlightenment 'informative' theatre or socialist realist theatre, and was characterised instead by a postmodern aestheticism not dissimilar to that of Robert Wilson. Secondly, it is worth bearing in mind that Castorf's theatre is political as well as postmodern, which implies that, when successful, fragmentation as a theatrical device is not used to generate provocation for its own sake (à la 'épater les bourgeois'); since the audience's processes of recognition and experience are activated through a confrontation with the 'different', it follows that these shock techniques allow the thin line between art and life to be lifted, and a confrontation with one's reality to take place.

Baudrillard's fascination with concepts whose value has been traditionally considered to be dubious (clichés, seduction, indifference, hate, evil) can also be perceived in Castorf's aesthetics, in philosophical thought as well as in theatrical practice. His habit of showing clichés, mostly GDR-related, on stage, in order for them to be ridiculed at a later stage, tempts one to think that Castorf takes as much pleasure from the former activity — the portrayal — as from the latter — the criticism.⁷³ The oppositional character of his political theatre is very much based on the communication

⁷³ Castorf often stresses 'die Kraft des Klischees', arguing that 'man muß [sie] erstmal begriffen und analysiert und ins Extrem gebracht haben in einer Art, daß diese Klischees immer mehr pervertieren und ins Gegenteil konvertieren'. Quoted in 'Alte Stücke neu gelesen: Rundtischgespräch mit den Regisseuren Frank Castorf, Karl Georg Kayser, Peter Konwitschny und Axel Richter, geleitet von Dr. Dieter Görne', *Theater der Zeit*, 1 (1989), 39.

of a zest for life which had been 'filtered' through censorship in the GDR, and which has grown numb in western society;⁷⁴ it thus links protest with desire and pleasure, insomuch as protest is directed against the elimination of both, and it resembles Baudrillard's call for seduction strategies as well as Barthes' defence of hedonism,⁷⁵ without succumbing to party-ideological impulses.

Castorf's mistrust of ideologies which claim to work against 'the system' and towards a political goal — ideologies which, in the best of cases, end up supporting only themselves, and this provided that they manage to avoid being absorbed by it — is, to be sure, hardly original. It strongly mirrors Lyotard's critique of Habermas, and, going back further, it bears a partial similarity to Ionesco's condemnation of Brecht. The latter case is of particular significance, for it places Castorf outside the obligatory Brecht-tradition which had been pursued and encouraged in the former GDR. Ionesco's position, one of negative engagement, or anti-engagement, was based on his insistence that theatre can only be theatre, and reflected a passionate denial of any form of political commitment and a condemnation of any form of committed art.⁷⁶ Brecht's work was for instance denounced as 'a pseudo-intellectualist work, a work already comprised in some ideology that it merely illustrates'.⁷⁷ Ionesco's motivation derived from a deep

⁷⁴ Indeed, this tends to be the only definition of 'political' theatre that Castorf accepts for himself. In his words: 'Mir ging es darum, die Theaterarbeit als Spezialfall glücklicher Produktion, als Modellfall freier Arbeit herzustellen, die nicht fremdbestimmt ist, sondern aus sich selbst kommt: ein alter marxistischer, vielleicht auch anarchistischer Gedanke. Das Abbild, das aus solcher Arbeit entspringt, ist etwas, was eine anarchoide, vielleicht auch eine nihilistische Färbung hat. Da verqueren sich links und rechts, es fehlt eine gedankliche Klarheit, vielleicht fehlt auch die geforderte und notwendige analytische Kraft. Das mögen berechtigte Einwände sein, und man wird mit solchen Inszenierungen viele Probleme haben. Aber man wird sie nicht zerschlagen können, weil das Grundgeheimnis ein ganz simples ist: die glückliche Arbeit. Und das ist das prinzipiell Politische daran'. Quoted in Nagel, 'Radikalität und Wahrheit: Laudatio auf Frank Castorf', *Theater heute*, 1 (1995), 9.

⁷⁵ See Barthes, 'Oppositions', 57 ff.

⁷⁶ His political scepticism was often in open contradiction to the political 'meanings' and 'implications' of his work which critics sometimes forced upon him. Most famous is the case of Kenneth Tynan, who had initially welcomed Ionesco's artistic arrival in England, and who eventually started an acrimonious attack against the playwright which initiated what became known as 'the London controversy'. In a review of a production of *The Chairs* he castigated Ionesco for his lack of any positive statements, and initiated a debate which included, amongst others, Ionesco himself, Philip Toynbee, and Orson Welles. The exchange of letters, originally published in *The Observer*, is reprinted in Ionesco, 'The London Controversy', 90-112.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 96.

loathing of the bourgeoisie (not unlike Brecht's), whose spirit of conformity, manipulated by political regimes, he saw as dehumanising. Equating bourgeoisie with conformism, he proceeded to condemn all other political stances for being just as doctrinal, and ultimately bourgeois, as he unequivocally stated in a lecture given at the Sorbonne in March 1960:

By the bourgeois spirit I mean: conformism from above, from below, from the left and from the right, bourgeois as well as socialist unreality, dried-up conventional systems. Unfortunately the worst bourgeois are often the anti-bourgeois bourgeois.⁷⁸

Castorf's own political approach has taken stock of Ionesco's critique ('Im übrigen fühle ich mich immer bestätigt in meiner Vorliebe zu Ionesco und zu seiner Kritik an Brecht, zu seiner Idee der kleinbürgerlichen Vernashornung aller nur an Macht und Besitz interessierten Gesellschaften'⁷⁹), even though it has not quite been brought to the same extremes. Castorf's anti-ideological stance does not exclude the possibility of a non-propagandistic politics; moreover, it derives from a perception of postmodern society that would hardly have been available during Ionesco's times. Castorf's merit lies precisely in his recognition of the futility of trying to administer ideology to the *Volk*; his approach, if somewhat more sombre than that of his artistic predecessors, is to try and reach a *Volk* — not to be confused with 'ein' *Volk*. The fact that Castorf's *Volk* has now come to include undesirable 'Westberliner Zahnärzte' cannot be conveniently forgotten, yet it must be equally stressed that any attempt to extrapolate a specific kind of audience from a generalised *Volk* already constitutes a highly political act.

It is in this context that a contrast between Castorf and Baudrillard is recognisable and, up to a point, inevitable. I have mentioned in Chapter 2 that Castorf does not fully embrace all Baudrillardian and postmodern postulates; the final section of

⁷⁸ Ionesco, 'Remarks on my Theatre and on the Remarks of Others', 84.

⁷⁹ Quoted in Becker and Merschmeier, ' "Ich möchte nicht in den Underground!" Gespräch mit dem Ostberliner Regisseur Frank Castorf', *Theater heute*, 12 (1989), 21.

this chapter will concentrate on the relationship between the traditionally political notion of *Volk* and the Baudrillardian notion of mass and will attempt to establish Castorf's position within the field defined by these opposing poles.

* * *

'Mass(age) is the message.'⁸⁰

At the core of Baudrillard's theories on the subject is his assumption that the term 'Volk', intended as a sociological entity, has outlived its usefulness in the age of postmodernity, and that it needs to be superseded by the postmodern notion of 'mass'. This, in turn, is seen as the direct result of contemporary media's over-distribution of information and (vain) attempts at manipulation. According to Baudrillard, the problematic initially captured by Benjamin's essay 'Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit' of 1936 — which originated a debate around politics and mass consumerism that served as a starting point for much academic speculation — has been transformed by what he sees as the 'acceleration' of media's presence. His discourse is not based around the possible manipulation of the masses by the media. Baudrillard's main argument here is that information produces, by its very proliferation, the opposite of what it means to, and that the over-circulation of ideas results in their specific impact being wiped out. He calls it the 'screen stage':⁸¹ media have the power to immediately capture and diffuse events with such a speed that that these events lose their reference, their depth, their contextuality, until, finally, they disappear. To the more conventional criticism based on the media's ability to deny and distort specific meanings Baudrillard opposes a more complex scenario, which results in the

⁸⁰ Baudrillard, 'In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities', 44.

⁸¹ Baudrillard, 'Game with Vestiges: Interview with Salvatore Mele and Mark Titmarsh', 84.

'disappearance' of meaning.⁸² In extreme cases, when events only seem to exist as media broadcasts, reality, as well as meaning, is made to disappear too; in these cases he argues that the event did not take place or could just as well not have taken place at all. Most notable in this context are of course his articles on the Gulf War.

This implosion of information is projected on to a recipient, which, according to Baudrillard, cannot be referred to as 'Volk' in the traditional and sociological sense. Hence his introduction of the term 'mass' — at times capriciously and confusingly equated by Baudrillard with 'masses' —, and of the series of metaphors which capture its lack of nature: mass is qualified as 'spongy referent, that opaque but equally translucent reality, that nothingness', 'a statistical crystal ball', an 'inertia', 'silence', 'figure of implosion', 'social void', 'opaque nebula whose growing density absorbs all the surrounding energy and light rays, to collapse finally under its own weight', 'a black hole which engulfs the social'.⁸³ The definition of mass as a black hole is particularly evocative, since it implies an absorption of meaning, information, communication, representation — in short, of all those media tools that, according to traditional criticism, can be employed for manipulative purposes. It is worth stressing, however, that Baudrillard never qualifies the term 'mass' using a rational discourse. His contention is that:

To want to specify the term 'mass' is a mistake — it is to provide meaning for that which has none. One says: 'the mass of workers'. But the mass is never that of the workers, nor of any other social subject or object. [...] The mass is without attribute, predicate, quality reference. This is its definition, or its radical lack of definition. It has no sociological 'reality'. It has nothing to do with any *real* population, body or specific social aggregate.⁸⁴

Since the mass does not withstand rigorous attempts towards a definition, it leaves one with, at best, a description of what it is not. Baudrillard is not talking about people in

⁸² See also Chapter 2, 42 f.

⁸³ Baudrillard, 'In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities', 1-4.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

any sociological sense; his mass is not locatable in terms of population, and it does not form the sum of specific individuals. What he does use are 'mass forms' and 'mass effects',⁸⁵ and, in so doing, he does away with notions of society, the social, and, ultimately, a sociology based on quantitative studies and statistical research. Equally strongly, Baudrillard is at the same time quick to defend the right of the mass to avoid any attempts made by the media, the intellectuals, or the political class, to impose 'the social' on it. Its self-proclaimed lack of identity thus stands as a sanctioning of the end of the social itself.

I have mentioned earlier that Baudrillard rejects the more traditional approaches based on the power of the media to manipulate and alienate. His postulates on the disappearance of meaning are complemented by his speculations on the indifference of the mass: disappearance and indifference are seen to form part of the same oddly logical theory, and provide the opposite viewpoints from which to consider it. The argument here is that the mass' response to an ever-increasing bombardment of information is silence, lack of enthusiasm and response, inertia. The mass refuses to be involved in anything social simply by ignoring all attempts at controlling it. To complicate matters further, Baudrillard then proceeds to bestow a positive connotation on its apathy:

One wants to impose a political field, one wants to impose a social field, a cultural field: all of that comes from above; it comes through the media, and the masses reply to it all with silence; they block the process. And in that, it seems to me, they have a kind of negative sovereignty.⁸⁶

It follows that in Baudrillard's view this very inertia already is a form of resistance, for it disturbs a power structure that relies on participation — however limited and restricted — in order to exist. Thus 'indifference', far from being the apathetic stance

⁸⁵ In other words, Baudrillard plays with the word's allusion to physical substance, earthly matter, as the translator of *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities ... Or the End of the Social* has pointed out with reference to 'la masse' and 'faire masse'.

⁸⁶ Baudrillard, 'Game with Vestiges: Interview with Salvatore Mele and Mark Titmarsh', 88.

inherited from the modernist vocabulary, becomes for Baudrillard equal to retaining one's autonomy and thus to remaining alert; indeed, it becomes possibly the only weapon to be adopted against an almost schizophrenic production of information. Reacting through non-reaction, as it were, the mass forces media proliferation to produce even more material to be indifferent to, and it threatens the fulfilment of media's claim to inform. As he puts it:

Media, *all* media, information, *all* information, act in two directions: outwardly they produce more of the social, inwardly they neutralise social relations and the social itself. But then, if the social is both destroyed by what produces it (the media, information) and reabsorbed by what it produces (the masses), it follows that its definition is empty and that this term which serves as a universal alibi for every discourse, no longer analyses anything, no longer designates anything. Not only is it superfluous and useless. [...] It conceals that it is only abstraction and residue, or even simply an *effect* of the social, a simulation and an illusion.⁸⁷

Baudrillard's theories originate from the belief that the mass 'know[s] that there is no liberation and that a system is abolished only by pushing it into hyperlogic, by forcing it into an excessive practice which is equivalent to a brutal amortization.'⁸⁸ This is of course reminiscent of his postulates on the 'more real than the real', and can be seen as a further example of his post-dialectical mode of thinking as well as of his tendency to play games with theory.

It will have become apparent so far that social class analysis is not necessary to understand the masses in Baudrillard's terms:⁸⁹ the new field of battle, in his theories, is the common struggle of all humanity, no matter what class, against the tyranny of signifiers. Hence his abandonment of traditional sociology, with its claim to be a science of the social, and the replacement of the tools and concepts at its disposal (class, ideology, alienation) with a new vocabulary: mass, the hyperreal, implosion,

⁸⁷ Baudrillard, '... Or the End of the Social', 66.

⁸⁸ Baudrillard, 'In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities', 46.

⁸⁹ This is particularly noticeable in his early writings. See for instance *The Mirror of Production* and *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*.

indifference.⁹⁰ Admittedly, the term that the mass is supposed to replace is not immune to certain problematics itself. The notion of *Volk*, which has been suspect to some of the Left from the twentieth century onwards, has also suffered from a variety of interpretations. These superseded a classic sociological position — in itself not unproblematic, as authors like Kroetz had to find out — and at times relied on descriptions so abstract or ripe with ideologies that the resulting final picture was at best inconclusive and oversimplifying and at worst misleading. The *Volk* is, in this respect, as indefinable as the mass, presenting a number of interpretative riddles that remain insoluble in simple denotative terms. Yet where Baudrillard's mass forms part of a game-theory which bears no relation with any sociological reality, and which cannot be translated by applying a rational discursive logic to it, the *Volk* can be placed within an historically definable framework, and, in theatrical terms, it allows one to extrapolate a specific, if always changing because historically contingent, audience from it.

The contrast between Baudrillard and Castorf is here at its most visible: where Baudrillard shows a fascination with the mindlessness of consumer culture and calls for a cultivation of indifference, Castorf remains politically engaged. To the criticism of those who blame the mass(es) for being the empty recipient of whatever message is thrown at it (them), Baudrillard opposes a praise based exactly on the same accusation. Castorf, in contrast, maintains the traditionally negative implication of 'indifference' and refuses to attribute any subversive potential to it. Indeed, his notion of political theatre, which I have outlined earlier, aims precisely at combating it. The postmodern techniques he adopts to achieve this aim should not lead one into erroneously assuming that its recipients have, as Baudrillard would have it, 'disappeared'. The following chapters⁹¹ will show how Castorf operates with a specific conception of his audiences.

⁹⁰ In this sense, to argue for a transition in terminology from the *Volk* to the mass would be to make a category mistake, as the terms belong to conflicting vocabularies.

⁹¹ From Chapter 6 onwards.

Chapter 4

German Unification:

Cultural Repercussions of, Frank Castorf's Responses to
and Involvement with the 'Wende'

‘Wir sind das Volk.’¹

‘Wir sind ein Volk.’²

‘Ich bin das Volk.’³

‘Ich bin Volker.’⁴

The theme of German unification is naturally of paramount importance for an understanding of Castorf’s (historical/political) background, as well as of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* that is the *Volksbühne* — a theatre which still prides itself on its typically East German provenance and identity.⁵ The subject of unification, as well as its derivatives, has been investigated from a variety of angles, each reflecting different disciplines with their own methodologies. The linguistics approach, for example, has concentrated on and challenged the assumption that the two German states were not divided by a language barrier.⁶ The psychoanalytical approach made use of one of the images most commonly adopted to feature unification, especially in the press — that of a marriage, with the Federal Republic as the all-powerful male and the GDR as the defenceless female — and has expanded on it to the point that the pressure put on the West German’s way of life by the East German masses has been made to symbolise a ‘threat of castration’,⁷ and the general behaviour of the GDR *Volk* has been portrayed as

¹ The first slogan proclaimed during the ‘revolution’ of 1989.

² Its natural progression.

³ Kroetz, *Ich bin das Volk*.

⁴ The final twist on the initial motto.

⁵ A detailed analysis of Castorf’s *Volksbühne* will form the subject of Chapter 8.

⁶ See for instance Lewis, ‘The Role of Language in the Fall of the GDR and the Aftermath’, *German Monitor*, 34 (1995), 125-34.

⁷ Lewis, ‘Unity Begins Together: Analyzing the Trauma of German Unification’, *New German Critique*, 64 (1995), 149.

an indication that it 'had never progressed beyond the oral and anal stages of development and had failed to achieve the maturity, responsibility, enjoyment and independence of the genital phase'.⁸ The feminist approach has tackled women's responses to the political, economical, social and cultural changes that followed unification, paying particular attention to important themes such as the abortion issue.⁹ Political science's approach is by far the most complex, ranging from a discussion of the 'unification' term itself to matters of internal politics to more amplified discourses: it has dealt with the difficulties which arose initially on whether to comment on the historical event in terms of 'Wiedervereinigung' or 'Vereinigung';¹⁰ it has concentrated on legal matters which included the choice between article 23 or article 146 of the Basic Law as a way to achieve unity¹¹ and between Bonn and Berlin as the capital of the newly formed state; it has taken into consideration international concerns, mainly focused on the delicate issue of the Polish borders, on the reactions and fears of the new Germany's neighbours, and on a reevaluation of its international role in the NATO and within the European Community.¹²

Thus, in view of the impressive variety of issues connected, more or less directly, to unification, of which the above-mentioned represent by no means a definitive list, and in view of the prolific amount of literature that has already been devoted to them, I have

⁸ Hans-Joachim Maaz, quoted in Lewis, 'Unity Begins Together: Analyzing the Trauma of German Unification', *New German Critique*, 64 (1995), 154.

⁹ See the special issue of the periodical *German Monitor*, Boa and Wharton (eds), *Women and the Wende: Social Effects and Cultural Reflections of the German Unification Process*.

¹⁰ See for instance Brockmann, 'The Reunification Debate', *New German Critique*, 52 (1991), 5 (note 5).

¹¹ See, amongst others, Brockmann, 'The Reunification Debate', *New German Critique*, 52 (1991), 7-8, Habermas, 'Der D-Mark Nationalismus: Weshalb es richtig ist, die deutsche Einheit nach Artikel 146 zu vollziehen, also einen Volksentscheid über eine neue Verfassung anzustreben', *Die Zeit*, 6 April 1990, and Brumlik, 'Verfassungsgebungspatriotismus', *Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik*, 6 (1990), 702-08.

¹² See for instance Pradetto, 'After the Bipolar World: Germany and her European Neighbours', *German Monitor*, 37 (1996), 167-216, Dennis, 'Looking on Anxiously: British Reactions to German Unification, 1989-92', *German Monitor*, 33 (1994), 83-99, and Hutchings, 'Reunited Germany: Bane or Blessing for Europe?', *German Monitor*, 34 (1995), 67-74.

not thought it necessary, or indeed profitable, to include a merely descriptive and recollective portrayal of the events in the present chapter, which will, instead, attempt to place the discussion I initiated in Chapter 2 into a specific German context. The concepts, and consequences of, postmodernism and postmodernity that have been tackled in Chapter 2 would apparently seem to be out of place in a discussion of German unification, an event which could be more appropriately termed as the 'rebirth' of history rather than its 'end'. Yet there is a sense in which the historical developments of the early 1990s, and most importantly the debates which followed them, can be placed into a postmodern frame. Utz Riese has even gone as far as to claim that the East German culture of the past forty years can be interpreted as one of the 'symptoms of the crisis of modernity', and that such culture saw itself 'not only as a critique of, but also as a solution of this problematic.' Indeed, he argues that it is precisely this illusory conception, coupled with the inability to bring together modern and postmodern traits, which contributed to the GDR's downfall:

A system that prided itself on being on the spearhead of emancipation was incapable of coming to terms with its enmeshment in practically all the symptoms of the crisis of modernity and the instrumentalization of reason. It invested bureaucracy with more unrestricted power, it produced more flat discourse in the public sphere, more apolitical, ahistorical, consumerist, ethnocentric 'clerks' [...], and even more epistemological indecision because any official or semi-official social construction of reality had to be delineated according to authoritatively and, moreover, quite contingently and opportunistically preestablished guidelines, separated from experience. That system had become a postmodern symptom without being its critique. This double aspect of being a producer of frozen time, of posthistoire, of historical specialisation, of an unrestricted will to power, and of claiming historical truth, plenitude, and emancipation subjected it to blindness without hindsight.¹³

A further attempt to bring to light the assumption that GDR Marxist-Leninist philosophy did not hinder other sub-philosophies — a postmodern one amongst them — from

¹³ Riese, 'Postmodern Culture: Symptom, Critique, or Solution to the Crisis of Modernity? An East German Perspective', *New German Critique*, 57 (1992), 157 and 162.

existing, just as, generally speaking, official culture could not stop sub-cultures from blossoming, can be recognised in the philosophical debates that developed from the process of 'Abwicklung', one which led in practical terms to the enforced retirement of significant proportions of the East German academic intelligentsia, and culminated in the summer of 1996 when Ulrich Johannes Schneider published the result of his analysis on the subject. Initially intended as part of a harmless world-wide study sponsored by Unesco on philosophy as an academic discipline, the inquiry formed the object of a debate between, principally, Schneider and Volker Gerhardt, the newly appointed professor in the department of philosophy of the Humboldt university in Berlin.¹⁴

The above arguments seem to me to imply too facile a connection between GDR ideology / way of living and 'the postmodern', one which can only be established with the benefit of hindsight and which, as far as Riese's theory is concerned, runs the risk of being instrumentalised in the creation of an equation of the post-modern with the pre-modern. The present chapter will thus not try to force postmodern considerations on to a pre-*Wende* East German situation which was ill-suited to accommodate them, but, rather, will examine the historical, cultural and sociological consequences of unification and argue that it is precisely in view of such developments that postmodern phenomena — from the debates centred around concepts of culture, nation, and identity, to the 'failure' of intellectual discourses — can be identified. More specifically, what Huyssen termed 'the Bermuda triangle of politics, philosophy and literature', which, as he claimed, 'is rich in casualties and poor in awards',¹⁵ will constitute the basis of an investigation which encompasses typically postmodern and typically German areas, for if the concepts under consideration have formed part of a long-existing German tradition

¹⁴ See Decker, 'Wenn Philosophen sich streiten: Gab es in der DDR nur eine staatlich verordnete Philosophie oder auch philosophisches Denken?', *Der Tagesspiegel*, 12 August 1997.

¹⁵ Huyssen, 'After the Wall: The Failure of German Intellectuals', *New German Critique*, 52 (1991), 111.

— of national identity, of national culture — , then it must be added that the (modernist) schemes traditionally adopted as tools are now obsolete. Traditional points of reference and convenient dichotomies of east-west, left-right, man-woman, young-old, exiled-non-exiled have proved to be detrimental rather than beneficial on all levels of the debates.

This chapter will thus analyse the role and the crisis of intellectuals in a literary context — of which the debates centred around Christa Wolf provide the most manifest, but by no means isolated example — and in a moral-historical one, with a special emphasis on the vitriolic attacks of parts of the West German feuilleton during the *Stasi* debates and on the more recent controversy surrounding the rise of Botho Strauß' 'conservatism'. Finally, the concept of 'nation' and its derivative 'national identity' will be tackled from a variety of perspectives which cover the response of East and West German intellectuals (including Castorf) as well as their assumptions regarding the East German *Volk's* reaction to the events.

* * *

The debates centred on the identity, function and alleged failure of intellectuals, in Germany as well as elsewhere, were as much about as amongst them, and have produced a 'Kritik am Intellektuellen (zumal linker Observanz)' which 'wird zum Modethema von Intellektuellen (auch solchen von ehemals linker Observanz) und provoziert eine Kritik der Kritik'.¹⁶ The specific German situation provides perhaps the most characteristic example of this contemporary phenomenon, both in view of the highly acclaimed prestige

¹⁶ Kreuzer, 'Zur literarischen Kultur im vereinigten Deutschland', *German Monitor*, 38 (1996), 82.

that intellectuals, East and West, used to enjoy, and, just as importantly, because the classification as German 'intellectual' includes a variety of positions, from that of writers and artists to that of prominent academics, journalists and publicists, whose impact on the public sphere is more noticeable than in other countries. Their somewhat undignified fall from grace has been described by Michael Geyer in terms of the end of the breed of 'engagés' intellectuals, whom he defines as:

the product of a century which so strongly believed in the[ir] ability [...] to remedy the social ills of the past. [...] These distinctly secular, public, state-employed, and academically organized classes were acting in an environment in which culture was considered a common good, albeit one mediated by specialists. They were a constitutive element in Europe's modernity.¹⁷

According to Geyer, what has been lost is the hope that intellectuals are still in a position to recognise and correct (abuse of) power, and, with it, the post-war interpretation of the rule of culture in general. The intellectuals' ability to raise and alter public consciousness is clearly no longer as unequivocal as it once was, and it is questioned at its very core:

At stake here is the postwar figure of a 'therapeutic intellectual' and the presupposition that the labor of intellectuals could generate the kind of recuperative initiatives to save or salvage a German society ravaged by Nazism.¹⁸

Nowhere does this emerge more clearly than in the 'failure' of intellectuals to anticipate, describe, or even understand the events that led to and followed German unification. In this context an introductory distinction between the attitudes of East and West intellectuals, even amongst those on both sides of the former border who viewed themselves as politically left-wing, is perhaps desirable. As far as West German intellectuals are concerned, their need or wish for an 'other', a 'better half' of the capitalist Federal Republic, had led to their acceptance of the GDR's legitimacy, however qualified. East Germany thus constituted the object of a tremendous emotional

¹⁷ Geyer, 'Why Cultural History? What Future? Which Germany?', *New German Critique*, 65 (1995), 106.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 103.

investment on their part. The reasons for this can be addressed not just with reference to their political beliefs; they also reside within the historical development which took place in the post-war era, most prominently during the Cold War years. It is Jürgen Habermas who has admitted that West German Marxism has been unsuccessful at providing a significant critical analysis of Stalinism and communism, because of its determination to oppose the conservative forces of anticommunism at any cost.¹⁹ As for East German intellectuals, the accusations most frequently thrown at them have ranged from their inability to understand the wishes of their *Volk* (or their refusal to do so) to their condemnation of its craving for bananas to their moanings about the 'Anschluß'. A more generalised critique which has affected all intellectuals refers to their — in my view, unavoidable — inadequacy at keeping up with the pace of events. Yet it is worth bearing in mind that the most widespread narratives of German unification consist of, and will be remembered as, television images. The argument that the speed of the events did not allow for intellectual discourses to develop with the same velocity appears to me to be founded on very logical considerations. One might almost say that in this sense television was the only means available which could provide instant representation, if not meaning.

The function and identity of intellectuals were thus questioned to their very core after 1989. Lepenies argued that 'der Mißerfolg der Intellektuellen [...] war weder das Pech von Amateur-Politikern noch der Fehlschluß von Mächtgern-Ökonomen: es war das Desaster der interpretierenden Klasse';²⁰ Meier prophesied more radically that 'es ist also mit ihrem Auslaufen zu rechnen'.²¹ The phenomenon is partly justifiable in postmodern terms, if one includes 'the intellectual' amongst the series of modernist

¹⁹ Habermas, 'Mehr Demokratie, weniger Illusionen', *Die Zeit*, 7 December 1993.

²⁰ Lepenies, 'Die Gegenwart: Das neue Europa und die Aufgaben der Intellektuellen', 59.

²¹ Meier, 'Nicht Zerstörung, aber neue Herausforderung der Vernunft: Erwartungen an deutsche Intellektuelle nach 1989', in Meyer (ed.), 85.

concepts and figures that postmodernity revolts against, or if one adopts, for instance, a more radicalised version of Zygmunt Bauman's distinction between the legislative and the interpretative role of the intellectuals themselves, which I tackled in Chapter 2: in the present context, the distinction is between the aforementioned interpretative role and, on the one hand, complete silence with reference to the 'primary' events (unification, its causes and consequences), and, on the other hand, more often than not simultaneously, vitriolic animosity with reference to 'secondary' events (other intellectuals' responses to unification, its causes and consequences). It is necessary to stress once more that the figure of the intellectual under scrutiny here is that of the (self-)proclaimed leftist intellectual, East or West of the former border — a clarification which would have amounted to a tautology two decades or so ago. I will engage with the rise of a new (German) conservatism later on in this chapter; at this stage it is sufficient to mention that the failure of left-wing intellectualism certainly contributed to it, and that those notions of history, national culture and identity which had largely constituted the monopoly of the left since 1945 did indeed change hands.

* * *

Even before the *Literaturstreit* broke out in the summer of 1990, controversies erupted amongst those East German intellectuals who had reacted differently to the events of 1989 and to the unification that followed. Stefan Heym and Monika Maron represent two typical examples of contrasting positions. Where Heym, visibly sickened

by the behaviour of his fellow citizens, went as far as to compare them to animals,²² Maron retorted that 'Heym denunziert sich in diesen Sätzen selbst, indem er seinen idealischen Anspruch als das erkennen läßt, was er ist: die Arroganz des Satten, der sich vor den Tischmanieren eines Ausgehungerten ekelt',²³ and thus expressed her own repugnance at the boastful hypocrisy of those who had enjoyed privileges under the old regime. One can notice at the core of both positions one of the ramifications which the more generalised debate was to take, namely the question whether oppositional artists should have left the GDR en bloc or whether they were justified in staying, (ab)using their privileged positions and de facto sustaining the system, a dichotomy which in some cases led to an over-simplified either-or binarism of 'victim'-'culprit'.

Such criticism pales however into insignificance when set against the accusations directed towards East German intellectuals by their West German counterparts. Peitsch has classified the development of attitudes towards GDR intellectuals into four main categories: '1. Der Vorkämpfer der Revolution (1989), 2. Der Kritiker als Privilegiertes (1990), 3. Der totalitäre Mitläufer als Opfer und Täter (1991), 4. Der totalitäre Täter (1992)'.²⁴ It is safe to assume that the attacks on Christa Wolf which characterised the opening stages of the literary debate were an indication and expression of the more general accusations I mentioned earlier (which applied to all GDR writers), just as it is understandable that some of the most passionate attacks came from émigrés like Wolf Biermann, expatriated in 1976, and Monika Maron, who left the GDR in 1988 because of the impossibility of getting her work published.

²² 'Welche Gesichter, da sie, mit kannibalischer Lust, in den Grabbeltischen, von den westlichen Krätern ihnen absichtsvoll in den Weg plazierte, wühlten; und welche geduldige Demut vorher, da sie, ordentlich und folgsam, wie's ihnen beigebracht worden war zu Hause, Schlange standen um das Almosen, das mit List und psychologischer Tücke Begrüßungsgeld geheißt war von den Strategen des Kalten Krieges.' In Heym, 'Aschermittwoch in der DDR', *Der Spiegel*, 49 (1989), 55.

²³ Maron, 'Die Schriftsteller und das Volk', *Der Spiegel*, 7 (1990), 68.

²⁴ Peitsch, ' "Vereinigung": Literarische Debatten über die Funktion der Intellektuellen', *German Monitor*, 34 (1995), 41.

The origins of the *Literaturstreit* — two acrimonious reviews of Christa Wolf's *Was bleibt* — are common knowledge by now. In the *Zeit*'s article 'Mangel an Feingefühl',²⁵ Ulrich Greiner had no hesitation in labelling Wolf as 'die Staatsdichterin der DDR', an offence which actually clashes with enough aspects of her personal and artistic biography. A subsequent article by Frank Schirmmacher, printed one day later in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* with the title ' "Dem Druck des härteren, strengeren Lebens standhalten" '26 (itself a quotation from Wolf's *Der geteilte Himmel*), accused the GDR writer of favouring authoritarianism, and expanded the criticism to include a large part of post-war German literature, claiming that the 'stabile, antiautoritäre, kritische Gesinnung' it was supposed to portray is in fact a 'Nachkriegslegende'. It clearly emerged from the very early stages that implicit in the debate was a (self-) questioning of the political role of post-war German literature per se — and that, as a consequence, the criticism was directed to both GDR and FRG cultural identity and aesthetics (in the case of the FRG admittedly to a minor extent). A further phase in the debate saw the same journalists, Greiner and Schirmmacher, expanding their criticism in a series of other articles. The latter's 'Abschied von der Literatur der Bundesrepublik' stressed the importance of the similarities between the literatures of East and West Germany, and attributed to them the same failures:

Nicht nur die Literatur der DDR sollte eine Gesellschaft legitimieren und ihr neue Traditionen zuweisen; auch die Literatur der Bundesrepublik empfand diesen Auftrag und führte ihn gewissenhaft aus. Der Preis war die Vergangenheit. Es scheint, daß ein Großteil der westdeutschen Literatur den Raum der Geschichte nicht geöffnet, sondern ihn, ungewollt, versperrt hat. Den Zusammenhang mit der Vergangenheit, den sie subjektiv herstellen wollte, hat sie objektiv suspendiert.²⁷

²⁵ Greiner, 'Mangel an Feingefühl', *Die Zeit*, 1 June 1990.

²⁶ Schirmmacher, ' "Dem Druck des härteren, strengeren Lebens standhalten" Auch eine Studie über den autoritären Charakter: Christa Wolfs Aufsätze, Reden und ihre jüngste Erzählung *Was bleibt*', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 2 June 1990.

²⁷ Schirmmacher, 'Abschied von der Literatur der Bundesrepublik. Neue Pässe, neue Identitäten, neue Lebensläufe: Über die Kündigung einiger Mythen des westdeutschen Bewußtseins', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 2 October 1990.

His criticism of a West German literature which had to fulfil a function 'als sozial-psychologisches Organ, als Instrument und Spiegel des kollektiven Bewußtseins, als Produktionsstelle der westdeutschen Identität'²⁸ appears to me to be particularly significant in that it indirectly drew comparisons between the linguistic and thematic means of representation adopted by both East and West German literature: on the one hand, the character of the Eastern 'slave' language (a skill which had been celebrated by Western critics before 1989) and, on the other, the tendency of Western language to shy away from a realistic representation and critique of the recent past, which caused the Third Reich to appear 'den Nachgeborenen denn auch wie eine böse, aber märchenhaft verzerrte Kindheitserinnerung, in mythischen Vorzeiten angesiedelt und aus aller Geschichte herausgefallen'²⁹ (the reference to Grass' *Die Blechtrommel* is unmistakable).

Greiner's thesis was based on an agreement with Schirmacher's announcement of the death of West German literature; indeed, he satirised its past legendary status as follows:

Die derzeitige herrschende Lesart läßt sich etwa so umschreiben: Trotz der unterschiedlichen gesellschaftlichen Systeme hatten die beiden deutschen Literaturen etwas Gemeinsames und waren im Grunde *eine* Literatur. Sie zeichnete sich in ihren besten und repräsentativen Beispielen durch zweierlei aus: Sie kämpfte mit hoher moralischer Integrität für humane Prinzipien, sie leistete Widerstand gegen Repression und Restauration. [...] Es waren, wenn wir dieser Lesart glauben wollen, und wir dürfen sie getrost eine Legende nennen, heroische Zeiten, im Osten wie im Westen.³⁰

His counter-argument, and it would be difficult to disagree with it, is namely that the post-war German generation was only too willing to bestow cult status to writers who could provide it with a new, forward-looking sense of identity. And it is precisely the moralising attitudes which characterised East and West German writers and intellectuals

²⁸ Op. cit.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Greiner, 'Die deutsche Gesinnungsästhetik. Noch einmal: Christa Wolf und der deutsche Literaturstreit', *Die Zeit*, 2 November 1990.

of the old school that Greiner criticises with his notion of ‘Gesinnungsästhetik’, a variant to Max Weber’s ‘Gesinnungsethik’:

Diese Gesinnungsästhetik hat eine zutiefst deutsche Tradition. Sie wurzelte in der Verbindung von Idealismus und Oberlehrertum. [...] Die Gesinnungsästhetik ist das gemeinsame Dritte der glücklicherweise zu Ende gegangenen Literatur von BRD und DDR. Glücklicherweise: Denn allzu sehr waren die Schriftsteller in beiden deutschen Hälften mit außerliterarischen Themen beauftragt, mit dem Kampf gegen Restauration, Faschismus, Klerikalismus, Stalinismus et cetera. Diejenigen, die ihnen diesen Auftrag gaben, hatten verschiedene Namen: das Gewissen, die Partei, die Politik, die Moral, die Vergangenheit. In der Bundesrepublik verwendete man dafür den Begriff der engagierten Literatur. [...] Das alles ist Vergangenheit.³¹

Whilst agreeing that West German’s insistence on political correctness neglected the aesthetic autonomy of post-war literature and insisted on its emancipatory character instead (a notion which in itself is hardly original — one only needs to think of Karl Heinz Bohrer’s postulates on the subject), I find the connection between ‘Gesinnungsästhetik’ and GDR literature rather too thin for it to constitute a parallel to its FRG counterpart. In other words, I see the connection between, say, the ‘Gruppe 47’ and Christa Wolf, Heiner Müller or Volker Braun as a merely superficial one. Political correctness of the kind described by Greiner is, after all, a typically Western phenomenon which as such is only possible and practicable when particular political circumstances allow it; even when it is set in the West German context, one has to distinguish between the periods in which it was necessary and fruitful, for instance during the conservatism of the Adenauer times, and the periods in which it was the state itself which provided a more or less digestible notion of political correctness. The East German example might serve perhaps as a clarification on this matter: given the left-wing orientation of the artists that Greiner criticises, and given that the GDR was born, as many at least initially believed, as an attempt to concretise socialism, one can come to the logical conclusion

³¹ Op. cit.

that the East German state was itself a provider of political correctness. In this light, it would appear to me that FRG and GDR writers pursued diametrically opposite paths with reference to political correctness. The former strove for and abused it, because of the fact that they resided in the 'wrong' capitalist half of Germany, the latter opposed it as a 'given' of the real socialist state they found themselves in, in some cases — most notably with Heiner Müller in the literary field and Frank Castorf in the theatrical field — adopting conscious 'anti-politically-correct' stances as a means of revolt. Thus, to conclude, I find myself in agreement with Greiner, and Schirmacher, inasmuch as they recognised, brought to light, and applauded, the need for the present 'departure' from dated concepts of engaged literature and from their modernist means of portrayal, whereas I would tend to distinguish between the different literatures, and arts in general, that characterised the pre-unified and just-unified Germany.³²

The positions taken by Schirmacher and Greiner, also represented to a minor extent by *Der Spiegel*, originated a veritable civil war in the literary field whose main characteristic may be defined as self-referentialism. Wolf Biermann's famous assertion that 'es geht um Christa Wolf, genauer: es geht nicht um Christa Wolf',³³ which was to shed light on the Stasi debates that followed, and which I will tackle later in this chapter, can also be adopted as a résumé of the literary debate. At its peak, the discussion shifted from an analysis of Christa Wolf's work and became an analysis of itself. One popular position reduced the caustic character of the intellectuals' accusations to a long awaited generation conflict, arguing that Schirmacher, for example, was only thirty-one at the time, and inevitably had to be in conflict with the generation of those writers who had

³² This is in fact part of the main focus of the present thesis, namely the movement and necessity to appropriate postmodern, i.e. non-engaged in the modernist sense, means of articulation, in order to achieve artistic — including modernist — goals. The final chapters which deal with analyses of Castorf's productions will elaborate further on the matter on a theatrical level.

³³ Biermann, 'Nur wer sich ändert, bleibt sich treu. Der Streit um Christa Wolf, das Ende der DDR, das Elend der Intellektuellen: Das alles ist auch komisch', *Die Zeit*, 24 August 1990.

moved from being 1968 rebels to being pillars of the establishment they once fought so vehemently. However, given that his position presented remarkable similarities to that of Joachim Fest, co-editor of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, and more than one generation behind him, Jürgen Habermas felt compelled to point out that:

Jeder Fall von Generationenarithmetik, wonach der Großvater und sein Enkel eine Koalition eingehen, weil sich beide Seiten im Affekt gegen die aus der Art geschlagene Zwischengeneration finden, mag ja vorkommen — aber eher im Feuilleton als in der Wirklichkeit.³⁴

Others accused Greiner of having fallen victim of his own accusations for perpetrating ‘Gesinnungskritik’: Greiner’s claim that ‘in der Gesinnungsästhetik [...] sind Werk und Person und Moral untrennbar. Der Text ist moralischer Selbstentwurf des Autors. Und der Autor ist identisch mit seiner moralischen Absicht’³⁵ could have a boomerang effect on his own criticism, a prominent feature of which was the linking of work, person and morality of Christa Wolf.³⁶ Embittered responses came unsurprisingly from the accused artists themselves: Günter Grass denounced Greiner and Schirrmacher for having initiated a ‘Hetzjagd’, Heiner Müller called their attacks a ‘Stalinismus des Westens’, and Ivan Nagel spoke of ‘einer rechten Verschwörung’.³⁷ The most sensible response seems to me to have been provided by the many critics and intellectuals, such as Anz and Huyssen, who saw the *Literaturstreit* as a second phase of the 1986 *Historikerstreit*, and who established a connection between the attempt to push forward a historiography devoid of moralisation — and thus to create a ‘respectable’ concept of national pride — and the recent efforts in the promotion of a literature and culture devoid of the same

³⁴ Habermas, ‘Die andere Zerstörung der Vernunft: Über die Defizite der deutschen Vereinigung und über die Rolle der intellektuellen Kritik’, *Die Zeit*, 10 May 1991. Discussed in Anz, ‘Der Streit um Christa Wolf und die Intellektuellen im vereinten Deutschland’, *German Monitor*, 38 (1996), 4-5.

³⁵ Greiner, ‘Die deutsche Gesinnungsästhetik. Noch einmal: Christa Wolf und der deutsche Literaturstreit’, *Die Zeit*, 2 November 1990.

³⁶ See for example Parkes, ‘Disunity and Unity — The Inter-German *Literaturstreit* of the early 1990s’, *German Monitor*, 34 (1995), 18.

³⁷ All quoted in Greiner, ‘Die deutsche Gesinnungsästhetik. Noch einmal: Christa Wolf und der deutsche Literaturstreit’, *Die Zeit*, 2 November 1990.

politically correct, engaged, moralising features. Also, there is a sense in which the 'generation' theory is worthy of some consideration, if one does not reduce it to a comparison of the intellectuals' birthdays. 1968 and 1990 can be made to form part of a cyclical phenomenon, if one presents the former epoch as the endeavour to force literature and culture into society at the expense of merely artistic values, and the latter as the opposite struggle to liberate literature and culture from society and to reestablish their autonomous character.³⁸ Finally, should one believe the disheartening postmodern prediction of a dreary future for 'high' culture, the nature of the literary debates could be clarified as the last, much publicised, and desperate endeavour by both writers and critics to rescue them(selves) from oblivion.

* * *

Given that the (literary) estimation of East German writers and intellectuals relied heavily on notions of rectitude and honesty, it is hard to draw a line and distinguish between the end of the literary debate and the beginning of the *Stasi* debate. Sparked in the autumn of 1991, when Wolf Biermann's speech upon being awarded the 'Büchner-Preis' also blew the cover of poet Sascha Anderson, and included proof of the latter's activities as a *Stasi* informer, the debate soon lost track of its purposes and became

³⁸ The latter struggle can moreover be seen as the continuation of, amongst others, Strauß', Handke's and Bohrer's attempts to 'disengage' literature in the 1980s. Both 1968 and 1990 were times of fundamental change, characterised respectively by the start of a new left and of a new right. Anz warns about the danger inherent in matching left intellectualism and right intellectualism with left extremism and right extremism, pointing out that Botho Strauß is not the highbrow speaker of the new neo-Nazi movement just as Günter Grass was not the intellectual theorist behind the RAF (such a connection has regrettably been made, as I will show later with reference to Strauß' *Spiegel* essay). Anz, 'Der Streit um Christa Wolf und die Intellektuellen im vereinten Deutschland', *German Monitor*, 38 (1996), 9.

entangled in a variety of conspiracy theories. The exposure of Sascha 'Arschloch',³⁹ and later of Rainer Schedlinski, as *IMs* relativised the commonly held perception of and admiration for the Prenzlauer Berg alternative scene in Berlin, of which they formed part (and this despite Biermann's confession half a year earlier that he too, in his youth, would have collaborated with the *Stasi* if he had been requested to⁴⁰). When in 1993 the two arguably most renowned GDR artists, Christa Wolf and Heiner Müller, also came under suspicion, the debate escalated to unprecedented proportions. What appears to be extraordinary with hindsight is the unprofessional, insensitive and often biased approach adopted by many of the critics in their responses, and the gullibility with which every rumour was automatically turned into a sanctified truth. As Ian Wallace rightly argued, the accusations were often based on fragmented knowledge, because of the fact that the daunting masses of files had not yet been read in their entirety, and because significant parts had been destroyed in late 1989 and early 1990. Moreover, as he added, no critic at the time seemed to have even contemplated the possibility that some of them may have consisted of fabrications, either planted by the *Stasi* itself — one only needs to mention Klaus Schlesinger — or by informers in order to show their loyalty, who, to make matters worse, were more often than not literarily and culturally inept.⁴¹ Something of a mythologised image of the *IM* thus emerged, which did not discriminate between the spectrum of various positions and degrees of 'commitment', and which showed a simplistic morality that condemned any compromise with the system as complicity. Incidentally, the same sweeping and generalising approach could be noted in the increase of the speculations regarding the *Stasi's* boundless infiltrations in private and public spheres of life, which led to the extreme speculation that the *Stasi* had been responsible

³⁹ Biermann, 'Der Lichtblick im gräßlichen Fatalismus der Geschichte', *Die Zeit*, 25 October 1991.

⁴⁰ See Biermann, '“Auch ich war bei der Stasi”', *Die Zeit*, 4 May 1990.

⁴¹ Wallace, 'Writers and the *Stasi*', *German Monitor*, 33 (1994), 116-18. See also my Chapter 6 for an account of the information on Castorf kept on *Stasi* files.

for the 1989 'revolution', as an act of political calculation carried through in order to regain the approval of the GDR people.⁴² Without wishing to deny the extent of its power and influence, it remains of paramount importance to stress that there is no easy and all-excluding equation between the GDR and its secret services.⁴³ The same argumentation can be applied with reference to those who were at the *Stasi*'s receiving end. In the words of Wallace:

To insist [...] that a writer's (moral) credibility hinges on his/her treatment of the *Stasi* theme is at the very least problematic. To suggest, too, that the *Stasi* theme is the key to a *literary* evaluation of his/her work is [...] certainly too reductive and would in effect disqualify any writer whose work did not satisfy this one criterion.⁴⁴

If the new literature and culture advocated by Greiner and Schirmacher is one devoid of moralisation, then the treatment of Wolf and Müller confirms that the concept is still in need of some refinement, and that a 'de-anti-Stalinisation' is to be wished for as much as a de-Stalinisation. Thomas Anz relativised the sensationalised portrayal of Wolf's case by stating that:

über den Vorgang existieren zwei Aktenmappen mit 130 Blättern. Ihnen stehen 143 Aktenordner gegenüber, in denen die Stasi seit 1968 Spitzelberichte über

⁴² A number of published documents have since stopped the rumours. See, for instance, Mönch's review of *Chronik des Mauerfalls — Die dramatischen Ereignisse um den 9. November 1989* in 'Unfall mit Todesfolge. Die Mauereröffnung am 9. November 1989 halten viele Forscher für politisch kalkuliert, andere für Ergebnis eines Irrtums: Der Historiker Hans-Hermann Hertle ist dieser Frage sechs Jahre lang nachgegangen', *Der Tagesspiegel*, 9 November 1996, and the article of Walter Süß, research assistant for the 'Gauck-Behörde', ' "Jeder bringt seine Lösung selber mit": Am 4. November gingen in Ost-Berlin Hunderttausende auf die Straße. War das der letzte Versuch der Stasi, das Regime zu halten, wie Journalisten unlängst behaupteten?', *Der Tagesspiegel*, 10 December 1995.

⁴³ Comparisons have been made between the Nazi regime and the *Stasi* regime, which already emerge on a linguistic level, in the employment of terms like 'Vergangenheitsbewältigung', 'Unfähigkeit zu trauern', 'innere Immigration', 'Verdrängung', 'Schuld', to name but a few. Yet the comment of Hans Krieger on the matter seems to me to be particularly illuminating: 'Die DDR hat eben keinen Weltkrieg mit 50 Millionen Toten vom Zaun gebrochen und nicht Millionen Juden vergast. Vor allem selber: Der Herrschaftsanspruch der Kommunisten entsprang nicht dem puren Machtrausch wie der der Nazis, sondern dem Versuch, ehrenwerte Ideale von sozialer Gerechtigkeit durchzusetzen. Und auch wenn diese Ideale bis zur Absurdität pervertiert werden mußten, weil Zwang und Gewalt sie im Ansatz diskreditierten, so haftet dem Scheitern dieses schrecklichen Experiments doch eine gewisse Tragik an [...]: Das Wahnhafte dieses Machtgebildes war kein bloßer Paroxysmus von Dummheit und Brutalität wie der Terrorstaat der Nazis, sondern gewissermaßen ein Fieberanfall der Vernunft.', in Krieger, 'Nachdenken über Christa W. *Was bleibt* — Ein Testfall für den Umgang mit DDR-Kultur', *Bayerische Staatszeitung*, 31 August 1990.

⁴⁴ Wallace, 'Writers and the *Stasi*', *German Monitor*, 33 (1994), 124.

sie und ihren Mann angesammelt hat. Die Artikel mancher deutscher Zeitungen haben diese Proportion umgekehrt.⁴⁵

Müller's case is a more complex one, which, at least partly, he was himself responsible for creating. He represents perhaps the most extreme example of simultaneously nonchalant and enraged behaviour, closely followed by that of Castorf. If their responses to unification and judgements of the GDR *Volk* do differ somewhat,⁴⁶ their reactions to the atmosphere caused by the *Stasi* debate present remarkable similarities. Both deliberately relativised the extent to which the SED regime had caused real threats to intellectuals: Castorf commented 'Bedrohtheit, na ja, in Wahrheit ist das doch ein kaltes Spiel gewesen in der DDR',⁴⁷ when asked whether he felt oppressed or intimidated in any way during GDR times, and replied with:

ich weiß nicht, warum die mich nicht gefragt haben. Ich kann mir nicht vorstellen, daß man sich ernsthaft mit jemand in die konspirative Wohnung setzt und dann erzählt, der hat von seiner Oma drei Westschrippen bekommen.⁴⁸

when questioned about his stance with respect to *IMs*. Müller similarly dismissed feeling threatened or limited as an artist, claiming that he had always written what and how he wanted,⁴⁹ and justified his *Stasi* contacts by claiming that they were unavoidable, and devoid of any moral dimension, and that they provided him with artistic material.⁵⁰ Yet at the same time both Castorf and Müller could switch with extreme agility to a defensive position and toy with victimhood, Castorf's justification ('leicht zu sagen: Ihr wart ein Volk der Täter, wenn man nicht selbst in einer totalitären Zeit lebt. Jeder Mensch hat

⁴⁵ Anz, 'Der Streit um Christa Wolf und die Intellektuellen im vereinten Deutschland', *German Monitor*, 38 (1996), 13.

⁴⁶ See Chapter 6.

⁴⁷ Quoted in '“Erhalte mir das Unglück!": Stasi-Beauftragter Joachim Gauck und Theaterregisseur Frank Castorf über das ostdeutsche Unbehagen', *Der Spiegel*, 45 (1996), 76.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 82.

⁴⁹ Quoted in '“Dichter müssen dumm sein": Ein Gespräch mit dem Schriftsteller Heiner Müller', *Die Zeit*, 14 August 1987.

⁵⁰ Interview in *Spiegel TV* of 11 January 1993. The verbatim transcription can be found in 'Man sprach mit Paranoikern": Der Dramatiker Heiner Müller und seine Stasi-Kontakte', *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 12 January 1993.

den Urtrieb zu überleben, hat ein Recht auf Opportunismus, auf Schwäche. Sogar der Verrat hat etwas Menschliches'⁵¹) strongly mirroring Müller's often quoted 'Recht auf Feigheit'.⁵² Moreover, both reacted aggressively against the often insufferable moralising of the West German feuilleton. Müller insisted that 'ich war und bin ein Stück DDR-Geschichte, und ich glaube schon, es geht um die Auslöschung von DDR-Geschichte, und da ist das ein guter Schritt, so eine Aktion, so eine Denunziation',⁵³ and stated, not unjustifiably, that 'ich beginne zu begreifen, daß es die wirklich geheime Funktion der Staatsicherheit war, dem Nachfolge-Staat Material gegen potentielle Staatsfeinde zu überliefern. Der Rechtsstaat als Vollstrecker des Stasi-Auftrags';⁵⁴ Castorf has been protecting the right to his biographical past with equal vehemence over the years.⁵⁵

I would argue that it is precisely their coquettish ambivalence which was, correctly or incorrectly, punished by the press. *Die Zeit* formulated its attack on Müller by asking its readers the rhetorical question: 'Ist der Dichter ein Schwein? Ist Heiner Müller ein Sascha Anderson im Großformat?'.⁵⁶ Their ambiguous and often contradictory remarks did not allow for a clearly marked classification of 'left-wing' or 'right-wing', and can be seen as the forerunners of the more recent disputes on the new

⁵¹ Quoted in Claussen, 'Café Abgrund auf dem Mond: Frank Castorf seziert *Des Teufels General* — Carl Zuckmayers erfolgreiches Mitläufer-Drama, das den Nachkriegsdeutschen zur Entsöhnung diente', *Stern*, 43 (1996), 209.

⁵² Quoted in ' "Die Wahrheit, leise und unerträglich": Ein Gespräch mit Heiner Müller', *Theater heute Jahrbuch*, (1995), 12.

⁵³ Interview in *Spiegel TV* of 11 January 1993. The verbatim transcription can be found in ' "Man sprach mit Paranoikern": Der Dramatiker Heiner Müller und seine Stasi-Kontakte', *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 12 January 1993.

⁵⁴ Müller, *Krieg ohne Schlacht: Leben in zwei Diktaturen. Eine Autobiographie*, dossier no. 3 ('Erklärung'), 1.

⁵⁵ Other East German intellectuals mirrored their view in this particular instance: Klaus Schlesinger, for instance, stated that 'das einzige, was mich im Moment herausfordern kann, ein paar Sätze über die verschwundene DDR zu verlieren, ist mein Trotz. Ich kann es einfach nicht mehr hören, wenn mir die geleckten Affen aus den Talk-Shows erklären wollen, wie ich dreißig Jahre gelebt habe und warum es sich *nicht* gelohnt hat.', in Schlesinger, Maron et al., 'Sehnsucht nach der DDR?', *Die Zeit*, 4 June 1993.

⁵⁶ Detje, 'XV3470/78. Heiner Müller und die Stasi: Der große Dichter schrumpft', *Die Zeit*, 15 January 1993.

right, which I will examine in the following section in order to bring the present argument to a conclusion, before moving on with the initial analysis of the connection between said debates and the concepts of nation and identity.

* * *

The debate had originated through an article by Botho Strauß ('Anschwellender Bocksgesang'), first printed in *Der Spiegel* and subsequently published in the collection of essays *Die selbstbewußte Nation* — quickly labelled as the manifesto of the new conservative intelligentsia —, in which Strauß urged his readers to overhaul the universal values bequeathed by the Enlightenment and, by striving to define a German 'nationalism of normality', aligned himself, as it were, amongst the country's leading nationalist-conservative intellectuals, to the astonishment of *Theater heute*. The periodical, to which he had contributed in the past, started a private correspondence with the author, repeatedly asking for explanations, and eventually brought the drama to its climax by publishing Strauß' replies, despite his request to consider them as private matters.⁵⁷ The tense atmosphere was corroborated by an interview given by Castorf to the newspaper *junge Welt* soon after, in which he described how, during the times of GDR stagnation and decadence, he had wished for, amongst other things, 'faschistoide oder vielleicht auch nur vitale Gedankengänge', 'apokalyptische Gedankengänge' to shake off the lethargy. *Junge Welt* printed a significantly altered version of Castorf's comments,⁵⁸

⁵⁷ See Wille, 'Bekenntnisse eines Unpolitischen? Ein Briefwechsel mit Botho Strauß', *Theater heute*, 12 (1994), 4.

⁵⁸ The first version, unauthorised by Castorf, in Nümann, 'Stahlgewitter in der Volksbühne: Die Berliner Volksbühne wird siebzig. Zum Jubiläum empfiehlt sich Intendant Frank Castorf als Heideggers Enkel', *junge Welt*, 30 December 1994; the second, altered version, which consisted of a

which caused a stir in the media and resulted in luminaries of the German theatre as well as leading German newspapers taking sides on the issue. Most notable in the first instance was the case of Peter Zadek, who denounced the new standard-bearers of the right, in whose rank he included Castorf, Heiner Müller and Einar Schleef. He vehemently protested against Schleef's 'Faschismus-Scheiße' (actually Schleef's production of Hochhuth's *Wessis in Weimar*) and attempted to prevent the production from being staged any further in the *Berliner Ensemble* — of which he was at the time co-director —, claiming that it was as 'artistic' as Hitler's shows in Nuremberg. He condemned Castorf for purposefully agitating 'halbgebildete Halbstarke', a category in which he also included the *Volksbühne-Intendant*, and reproached Müller, as well as a number of theatre critics (from Günther Rühle, Sibylle Wirsing and Michael Merschmeier to Franz Wille and Peter von Becker) for having dismissed Castorf's utterances as a bagatelle ('So dachten viele meiner Verwandten auch, bevor man sie nach Auschwitz brachte'). Finally, he plainly revealed the way the wind was blowing in his assertion that: 'Daß die ehemalige DDR und 40 Jahre Training einen Haufen "Rechte" (um noch ein zivilisiertes Wort zu gebrauchen) hinterläßt, ist klar.'⁵⁹ By so doing, he reduced a debate initially based on Strauß' newly embraced conservatism, Castorf's misquoted statements and, generally speaking, the possibility of being simultaneously 'right-wing' and 'intellectual' to the rather more stale 'East versus West' friction.

As far as the media's reaction is concerned, *Der Spiegel* entitled its report on the interview-incident 'Frank Castorf, einst PDS-Symphatisant, bekennt sich zu rechtsradikalen Ideen',⁶⁰ the *FAZ* 'Lust am Atomgewitter: Frank Castorf will

verbatim reproduction of the interview, in Nümann, 'Ungekappte Sätze. Aus der Reihe: Notwendige Richtigstellungen, neue Folge', *junge Welt*, 13 January 1995.

⁵⁹ All comments in Zadek, ' "Den Killern ein Alibi": Peter Zadek über Frank Castorf, Heiner Müller und andere rechte Linke', *Der Spiegel*, 4 (1995), 183.

⁶⁰ Doerry, ' "Wir brauchen Stahlgewitter": Der Theatermacher Frank Castorf, einst PDS-Symphatisant, bekennt sich zu rechtsradikalen Ideen', *Der Spiegel*, 3 (1995), 156-57.

“faschistoide Gedankengänge”⁶¹ the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* ‘Rufer in der Niemandsbucht: Der Fall Frank Castorf. Verwirrende Rollenspiele eines deutschen Intellektuellen’.⁶² The *Frankfurter Rundschau* published the by now notorious vitriolic attack of Peter Iden (‘Ein Irrer: Frank Castorf bekennt sich’), who declared Castorf ‘schon als Intendant ein Skandal’, condemned *Theater heute* for having honoured him with the ‘Fritz-Kortner-Preis’ in 1994 and questioned: ‘Kann jemand, den es so weit aus dem Konsens der zivilen Gesellschaft verschlagen hat, noch ein Theater führen?’⁶³ Rolf Michaelis, writing for *Die Zeit*, came to the conclusion that he could,⁶⁴ and Moritz Rinke closed the debate in *Der Tagesspiegel* by ironically asking whether *Theater heute* ‘ist nun ein linkes Blatt, das einfach Abschied vom rechten Dichter nimmt, oder ein rechtes Blatt, das einfach keinen Abschied vom rechten Intendanten Castorf nehmen will?’, and, after having imagined that the debate had been turned into a theatrical production, by taking, for once, the side of a confused audience which was left to wonder ‘wo ist rechts, wo bitte links? Wo die dichotomische Ordnung? [...] Kein Mensch weiß mehr, wo er ist’.⁶⁵

The intellectual and artistic scandal thus demonstrated how interchangeable the notions of democratically conservative aesthetics and radical right-wing terror have become. Ideals of cultural and national identity were also rocked by the emergence of this new way of thinking (which in my view represents one of the ways of dealing with the incontestable existence of postmodernity, as I argued in Chapter 2), as I will seek to demonstrate in the following section.

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⁶¹ Jessen, ‘Lust am Atomgewitter: Frank Castorf will “faschistoide Gedankengänge”’, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 7 January 1995.

⁶² Lebert, ‘Rufer in der Niemandsbucht: Der Fall Frank Castorf. Verwirrende Rollenspiele eines deutschen Intellektuellen’, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 20 February 1995.

⁶³ Iden, ‘Ein Irrer: Frank Castorf bekennt sich’, *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 10 January 1995.

⁶⁴ Michaelis, ‘Oberlehrer überall’, *Die Zeit*, 13 January 1995.

⁶⁵ Rinke, ‘Im großen Nebel’, *Der Tagesspiegel*, 17 January 1995.

The discussion of the concepts of nation / identity necessarily has to take a step back, and examine the intellectuals' responses not only to the aforementioned rise of a new conservatism, to the *Literaturstreit* and the *Stasi* debates, but to German unification itself. What follows is the portrayal of a brief selection of reactions only, which should however prove to be sufficient to provide a picture of the general spectrum of positions. It ought to be noted that no simple demarcation between East and West German intellectuals can be drawn in this respect: those from the former Federal Republic expressed positions as varied as those of Günter Grass and Martin Walser, Karl Heinz Bohrer and Jürgen Habermas, which I will now analyse separately; those from the former GDR included Monika Maron, whose approval of unification was mainly based on what she perceived as the sacrosanct wishes of the *Volk*, as well as Volker Braun, who believed that, notwithstanding — indeed because of — unification, the intellectuals' function has virtually remained unchanged.⁶⁶

The first dichotomy, that of Grass and Walser, is particularly significant, in that both artists could not have been further apart in their appraisal of the historical events that originated and followed unification. Martin Walser's claim that he had never felt at home in either half of Germany because of the artificial nature of its division was based on what he saw as the failure of post-war Western intellectuals to appropriate the concept of 'nation', which had remained a taboo-word in the official public sphere despite having retained its emotional value in the private one.⁶⁷ The danger immanent in such a situation, as he correctly foreshadowed, is that the concept might be appropriated by those who might want to misuse it. He remained however firmly with his feet on the

⁶⁶ Note for instance his comment that 'Die Literatur ist eine mögliche Instanz [...] der Vernunft des Widerstands gegen den Stalinismus der Bürokratie und den Stalinismus des Geldes', in Braun, 'Instanz der Gelassenheit', *Freitag*, 14 April 1995.

⁶⁷ See Walser, 'Händedruck mit Gespenstern', 7-23.

ground and was able to distinguish between a potential and abstract, thus not necessarily inevitable, prospect, and the present state of affairs, when he refused to view the occasional outbursts of right-wing incidents as unmistakable signs of dangers to come; instead, he recognised that the new right-wing nationalism of the young generations is hardly politically orientated, and, without overlooking its morally and legally negative connotations, it can be explained as the stance adopted by them in order to shock the system — hence their designation as ‘Kostüm-Faschisten’,⁶⁸ a position which is not dissimilar to Castorf’s own views on the subject, and, more interestingly, one which mirrors the latter’s own ironic employment of Nazi symbolism in a large number of his productions, as the following chapters will demonstrate.

The contrast with Günter Grass could not be harsher. With true prophetic pessimism, his position was based on a politics of eternal guilt according to which Germany lost its claim to (re)constitute itself as a nation-state with Auschwitz; a sense of (historical) responsibility therefore determined his opposition to unification, in spite of its apparent inescapability. His is a condemnation of Kohl as, pejoratively speaking, the ‘Einigungskanzler’,⁶⁹ a rejection of the capitalistic motives behind unification (‘die versprochene D-Mark. Die harte Währung. Die glückverheißende Münze. Der Gedankenersatz und Alleskleber. Das Wunder in Neuauflage’⁷⁰), and above all a disappointment at the way in which the intellectuals’ warnings and suggestions had been ignored:

Selten ist im Verlauf der oft genug unglücklichen deutschen Geschichte eine tatsächliche historisch zu wertende Möglichkeit aus Mangel an gestaltender Kraft so kleinkrämerisch verrechnet, so dumpf nicht begriffen, so leichtfertig verspielt worden. [...] Da nur noch in Geld mehr spekuliert als gedacht wird, erlaubt man sich, Gedanken, die nicht von der Einigungshast diktiert sind, und Besorgnisse, die der menschlichen Existenznot gelten, als lästige Dreinrede

⁶⁸ Walser, ‘Deutsche Sorgen’, *Der Spiegel*, 26 (1993), 40-47.

⁶⁹ Grass, ‘Einige Ausblicke vom Platz der Angeschmierten’, 20.

⁷⁰ Grass, ‘Ein Schnäppchen namens DDR’, 41.

abzutun: Intellektuelle Spinnereien sind das, abwegig, weil einen dritten Weg beschreibend, professionelle Schwarzseherei.⁷¹

Whist agreeing, as many have done, that the process of unification of Germany was strongly economic rather than cultural in character and that, if at all desirable, it ought to have been planned and carried through at a slower pace, it seems to me that the 'Auschwitz' thesis is ill-suited as a counter-argument for a variety of reasons. Firstly, it represents the residue of a modernist historical thinking that, one would have hoped, had been abandoned since the *Historikerstreit*. Secondly, it attributes an unnecessary legendary status to the historical event, thus glorifying it, albeit negatively. Thirdly, and most significantly, it classifies it as a typical German phenomenon, and so perpetrates a notion of German's uniqueness, which, as the Polish writer Andrzej Szczypiorski recognised, can be interpreted as a sign of nationalism in disguise:

Jetzt sage ich etwas, was wie ein Paradox erscheinen kann. Die Gegner der Vereinigung Deutschlands hielt ich und halte ich immer noch für deutsche Nationalisten gegen ihren eigenen Willen, ihre eigene Vorstellungen. Die Gegner der Vereinigung waren und sind der Meinung, daß ein zu starkes Deutschland für Europa und für die Welt gefährlich sein wird, denn die Entstehung eines einheitlichen deutschen Staates hatte jedesmal den Ausbruch einer teutonischen Wut zur Folge. Das klingt schön, elegant und fortschrittlich. Solche Meinungen haben aber irgendeinen grausamen, nationalistischen Hintergrund, der aus der Überzeugung von der deutschen Besonderheit, von der deutschen Ungewöhnlichkeit, von deutscher Drohung, von Kraft, Zorn, Wut resultiert, als ob hier die Rede von Giganten, von Titanen, und nicht von Durchschnittsmenschen wäre.⁷²

Incidentally, Grass' apprehension could also be recognised and confirmed, if in an indirect and veiled way, in Kohl's often quoted remark that the new Germany may well be the fatherland of the German people, but it is Europe which constitutes their future: an assertion which implies that German nationalism needs European reins to be kept under control.

⁷¹ Grass, 'Was rede ich. Wer hört noch zu', *Die Zeit*, 11 May 1990.

⁷² Szczypiorski, Andrzej, 'Wer sind die wahren Deutschen?', *Theater heute*, 1 (1991), 3.

A subsequent motivation provided by Grass against unification was that national unity could only be achieved to the detriment of a cultural one, that the former implied a loss of the *Kulturnation*, a typically German status which he argued can only develop and flourish when national feelings do not dominate the public sphere. To be sure, this belief was shared by other artists and intellectuals, the most blatant example being perhaps Günter de Bruyn. Despite being in opposition to Grass's wish for a third way, and favouring the idea of the continuation of a federalist state, claiming as he did that the GDR ought not to be kept as a 'Nationalpark für ein gesellschaftspolitisches Experiment',⁷³ he did echo Grass when he expressed his fear that political unity would mean the end of German culture, and he positioned himself with him when the attributed supremacy to the notion of *Kulturstaat* above all else:

Von der Existenz einer deutschen Kulturnation auszugehen, *zu der man gehört, ob man will oder nicht*, scheint mir ehrlicher und objektiver als das Reden von nationalen Gefühlen, die die Massen angeblich bewegen — oder auch angeblich nicht. [...] Für die praktische Politik der zwei deutschen Staaten wäre es vorteilhafter, den Begriff der Kulturnation zu verwenden, weil er sozusagen metapolitisch ist. Er sagt aus, daß die Deutschen, durch Kultur und Geschichte bedingt, zusammengehören, aber über Grenzen, Verfassungsgrundsätze und Souveränitätsrechte sagt er nichts.'⁷⁴ [my italics]

Even setting aside the criticism that it is precisely the metapolitical character of the concept of cultural nation that makes it hardly applicable in practice (borders, constitutional principles and sovereign rights are issues that one cannot escape from), there are at least two questionable aspects emerging from de Bruyn's, and, for that matter, Grass's, postulates, namely that firstly the notion of cultural nation relies on a sense of community and togetherness which is at best taken for granted and at worst imposed, and, secondly, that it does not pause to consider the identity of who actually constitutes such cultural nation (the *Volk* as well as the intellectuals?). As Huyssen has

⁷³ Bruyn, 'So viele Länder, Ströme und Sitten: Geschichte und künftige Möglichkeiten einer deutschen Kulturnation', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 3 February 1990.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

pointed out with reference to his analysis of Habermas, the concept of *Kulturnation* stands out for 'its anti-Western implications, its class-based notion of high culture and its populist ethnic, if not racist connotations'.⁷⁵

A different dichotomy comes to the fore when one compares Bohrer's and Habermas's concepts of (West) German identity. In line with the stance he took during the *Historikerstreit*, Habermas argued that West Germany had developed a new, 'post'-national identity since 1945, a 'Verfassungspatriotismus' that was characterised by concepts of democracy and human rights instead of being focused on a sense of ethnicity. He feared that the only element the two Germanies shared, the deutschmark, would bring the old status quo back into the picture (hence the term 'D-Mark Nationalismus').⁷⁶ Indeed, former Finance Minister Theo Waigel's speech on occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the introduction of the deutschmark would seem to have proven Habermas right: celebrating the currency in the same manner in which other countries might celebrate a war hero, Waigel even hinted at the erotic qualities of the deutschmark, remarking that few fifty-year-olds are as desirable.⁷⁷ Bohrer, by contrast, opposed the idea of any German *Sonderweg*, be it the left's third way, or Habermas's constitutional patriotism, or Grass's 'Auschwitz' theory. Denouncing the attempts to delineate a *Sonderweg* for being rooted in the self-interest of leftist writers of the old generation, he not only favoured unification, but argued that the former GDR's discovery of America would indeed substantiate the cultural identity of the newly formed German state, as it would allow it to do away with the moralism he saw inherent in the pre-*Wende* Federal

⁷⁵ Huyssen, 'Nation, Race and Immigration: German Identities after Unification', 83.

⁷⁶ Habermas, 'Der D-Mark Nationalismus: Weshalb es richtig ist, die deutsche Einheit nach Artikel 146 zu vollziehen, also einen Volksentscheid über eine neue Verfassung anzustreben', *Die Zeit*, 6 April 1990.

⁷⁷ Quoted in Staunton, 'Germany's John Major', *Observer*, 21 June 1998.

Republic.⁷⁸ His polemic, which undoubtedly influenced the discourses of Greiner and Schirrmacher, was clearly against the project of modernity of which Habermas had declared himself the apostle; his politics, if not postmodern, is certainly antimodern, just as his aesthetics, which insists on the autonomy of arts I mentioned earlier, is certainly an example of the new conservatism advocated by Strauß.

In contrast to West German intellectuals, whichever their positions, former GDR intellectuals approached the subject of unification from completely different angles. Terms such as 'Anschluß', 'annexation' or 'colonisation' may well be uncomfortable reminders of a not so distant past, but they do illustrate one widely shared perspective taken with reference to unification. It is clear that, in terms of the preservation of one's national and cultural identity, much more was at stake for the GDR *Volk* and for its intellectuals. East Germany, just as the rest of Eastern Europe, had to undertake a dramatic move from real existing socialism to capitalism (equally real and existing), without possessing the historical tools to master the shift. As Castorf correctly remarked:

Wir wollen uns nicht darauf einstellen, daß dieses Osteuropa sich dramatisch verändert und daß es auf uns zukommen wird in einer hysterischen Vermischung von 19. Jahrhundert, also der Abwesenheit von Demokratie, mit der nordamerikanischen Konsumhaltung des 20. Jahrhunderts und der Technologie des 21. Jahrhunderts.⁷⁹

As a consequence, East German preoccupations were much more focused on the notion of a specific GDR national identity than on a unified, pan-German one. The main issue revolved around the means with which the former GDR might find a distinctive voice which transcended nostalgia, bitterness, 'Ostalgie' in the worst sense of the word.⁸⁰ It is

⁷⁸ Bohrer, 'Warum wir keine Nation sind; warum wir eine werden sollten', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 13 January 1990.

⁷⁹ Quoted in ' "Erhalte mir das Unglück!": Stasi-Beauftragter Joachim Gauck und Theaterregisseur Frank Castorf über das ostdeutsche Unbehagen', *Der Spiegel*, 45 (1996), 81.

⁸⁰ Castorf, for instance, has been repeatedly accused of shamelessly exploiting the East-West conflict in his productions, exacerbating the current resentment against the West and acting in an opportunistic

clear that intrinsically connected with this discourse is the question I mentioned earlier of who actually constituted that nation, and who actually possessed that sense of identity. The very concept of nation can be defined from a variety of perspectives, ranging from a 'political' one based on citizens, to an 'apolitical' one based on ethnic notions of *Volk*, to a 'cultural' one which inevitably distinguishes between intellectuals and the masses. The much argued failure of East German intellectuals to comprehend the needs of their population, which seems to imply that national sentiments were perceived by the artists but hardly felt by the masses, is not without foundation in this context, as the different reactions of these two groupings demonstrate. Detlef Schubert analysed the relative prosperity of the early 1990s which, one might argue, tempted the GDR people into wanting unification, and characterised it negatively by pointing out that firstly, it had not developed gradually, secondly that it was imported and, as such, foreign, and thirdly that it was only temporary.⁸¹ It was only at a later stage that GDR people refused to write off their past experiences, realised that these did not automatically amount to political, economic and personal disaster, and questioned the assumption that they embraced, or ought to, West Germany's way of life enthusiastically. As Dieckmann pointed out with heavy irony:

Zu Ostzeiten galt die Bundesregierung vielen DDRlern naiv als Antithese zum Politbüro: human und effektiv, doch nicht minder befugt, die Wirtschaft zu planen und zu steuern. Heute sehen die Ostdeutschen *die Politik* weder als Lenkerin noch auch nur als Moderatorin der Wirtschaft, sondern als deren dienstbare Magd. Seine politische Gleichheit klagt der Osten als wirtschaftlich-soziale ein und beruft sich schamlos auf vorrevolutionäre *Erregungschäften*. Um zu begreifen, warum Wohnungen Spekulationsobjekt sein dürfen, fehlt dem

way in the face of social and economic rift. The success of his work, so the accusation goes, is due to his (East German) audience's prejudices being confirmed, in the same way that other audiences satisfy their need to be entertained and have their views confirmed in boulevard theatre. See however my Chapters 7 and 9 for an analysis of, respectively, his guest productions in West Germany and Switzerland, and those he staged in the Berlin *Volksbühne*, which focus on the consciously ironical, if not downright farcical (artistic) treatment of the issue.

⁸¹ Schubert, 'Between Gain in Prosperity and Loss of Competence: Reflections on the Social and Political Situation of the East German People after German Unification', *German Monitor*, 33 (1994), 31-48, especially 36-38.

Osten die sittliche Reife. Auch der bescheidene Eigenbedarf westlicher Alteigentümer wird mitleidlos kritisiert. Den Arbeitslosen schließlich mangelt es an Selbstkritik. Statt ihr sozialpartnerschaftliches Versagen zu bekennen, schimpfen sie den Rechtsstaat unsozial.⁸²

According to a widespread view, the attitudes and typical traits of GDR people — their *Nischengesellschaft*-mentality, their dismissive stance on matters relating to the public sphere, conveniently relegated to the all-powerful authorities — remained essentially unaltered after unification. Glaeßner, for instance, claims that their negative ‘perception of the new market economy and liberal democracy of the West was strongly influenced by elements of the old ideology. Capitalism was perceived as anti-social and brutal’.⁸³ Others have argued that the GDR people’s discontent with specific aspects of the new Germany’s political, economic and social orders shows that their criticism is now actually targeted, rather than directed against the system in its entirety, and that, as such, it is to be welcomed as a ‘democratic’ step in the right direction.⁸⁴ Yet it is true to say that the notion of a specific East German identity is more prevalent now than in 1990. Indeed, it would make sense to assume that it was precisely that initial passive and unquestioned acceptance by GDR people that was criticised by intellectuals, who thus found themselves at war, as it were, with their own *Volk* as well as with the West German powers. Even attitudes towards the so-called ‘revolution’ of 1989 became relativised and were influenced by the later turn of events (see for instance Castorf, who asserted that ‘ich höre nicht so gern das Wort Revolution. Also, da wird mir etwas übel, wie ich meine Landsleute in Erinnerung habe als Revolutionäre’⁸⁵).

⁸² Dieckmann, ‘Was heißt im Osten Opposition? Auf der Suche nach einem politischen Phänomen’, *Die Zeit*, 12 April 1996.

⁸³ Glaeßner, ‘Political Culture and the Aftershocks of Revolutionary Change in Germany’, *German Monitor*, 37 (1996), 34.

⁸⁴ See for instance Krisch, ‘German Unification and East German Political Culture: Interaction and Change’, *German Monitor*, 37 (1996), 5-16.

⁸⁵ Quoted in ‘“Erhalte mir das Unglück!”: Stasi-Beauftragter Joachim Gauck und Theaterregisseur Frank Castorf über das ostdeutsche Unbehagen’, *Der Spiegel*, 45 (1996), 76.

The preservation of a typical East German identity, both at the levels of intellectuals and at the level of the masses, was not only threatened by the consequences of the unification process; its abandonment seems to have been positively required as a necessary step to take in order to 'fit in' with the new reality, as, for example, the removal of embarrassing heroes of socialism (Lenin, Thälmann, Zetkin) from the street names of Berlin shows. Peitsch speaks of a 'Verbot von "Nostalgie"', of a 'Zulassung von "DDR-Identität" ausschließlich als posthumer', and argues that:

"Bewältigung" oder "Aufarbeitung" gewann die Bedeutung der grundsätzlichen Verurteilung der DDR von Anfang an — als totalitäre Diktatur und Unrechtsregime, mit dem zu keinem Zeitpunkt eine Identifikation erlaubt gewesen sein durfte.⁸⁶

Standard West German perceptions of the former GDR way of life seemed to oscillate between a trained ideology of trite anti-Stalinism according to which every citizen who did not stand up in arms against the system deserves to be labelled as 'guilty', and a moral-idealistic image, not devoid of a certain condescension, which stressed and mourned the disappearance of (stereo)typical East German traits, such as helpfulness, collegiality, solidarity, human warmth, and kindness.

What seems to me to be particularly significant in this context, however, is the extreme diversity of 'individual' and 'collective' concepts of national and self-identity, and the apparently paradoxical way in which they developed and were transferred from one (East German) state to another (West German). The collapse of the socialist regime left behind a vacuum which the new political culture of the West has failed to fulfil. The idea, so the traditional theory goes, is that the collision with the Western *Leistungsgesellschaft* has proved to be catastrophic for the people of the former GDR, not only in economic and financial terms, but especially with regard to their habitual

⁸⁶ Peitsch, ' "Vereinigung": Literarische Debatten über die Funktion der Intellektuellen', *German Monitor*, 34 (1995), 42, 42 and 41.

modes of behaviour, best defined as 'collective', which as such do not apply to a new society based on an extreme individualism. What I would argue is that there is no easy equation to be drawn, which all too easily matches East with collectivism and West with individualism. For a start, national feelings in both halves were collective, in one way or another: the Federal Republic citizens' collective guilt for Auschwitz in the post-war period originated a kind of 'negative' nationalism which applied to all, just as the GDR people could perceive themselves as being united — again, in a negative sense — and could rely on a feeling of solidarity based, correctly or incorrectly, on everyone's self-appointed status as 'victims', both before and after unification. More important, though, is the realisation that the seemingly boundless individualism which characterises the liberal democracy of the West actually functions as a cover for a collective conformity of a different kind. As Dresen pointed out, perhaps oversimplifying somewhat, with reference to alleged artistic anti-conformism or lack of it:

Ich behaupte nicht, daß die DDR ein Land besonders mutiger Leute gewesen wäre — die BRD aber war es ebensowenig, auch wenn sie jetzt Miene macht, neben manchem anderen nun auch Charaktere in die "DDR" zu liefern. Gewiß, in der BRD gab es kritische Köpfe, viele riskierten dort eine Lippe. Das Problem ist nur: Man *konnte* es, ja man *mußte* es sogar. Unter Künstlern, besonders unter Theaterleuten *war* man links, *hatte* man Non-Konformist zu sein. Die Konformisten des Nein-Sagens in der BRD aber glichen aufs Haar den Konformisten des Ja-Sagens in der DDR.⁸⁷

My argument here is that the post-unification GDR *Volk* finds itself in a position which allows neither a new individuality to emerge nor a feeling of collective solidarity to sustain itself. Castorf speaks of:

eine ungeheure Konformität, um nicht zu sagen einen Totalkollektivismus, genau umgekehrt zur Erfahrung in der DDR, wo sich in den kollektiven Strukturen Individualitäten extrem trainieren konnten. [...] In der DDR konnte man sich im Widerspruch zu den kollektiven, staatlichen Strukturen *durch postmoderne Individualität politisch verhalten*. Heute möchte ich eher

⁸⁷ In so doing, he showed the existence of similarities on a structural level, if not on a conceptual one. Dresen, 'Schlammschlacht — "Vergangenheitsbewältigung" in der alten DDR', *Theater der Zeit*, 3 (1992), 4.

umgekehrt kollektive Strukturen der Geborgenheit bilden, in der Leute eine Aufgehobenheit finden können.⁸⁸ [my italics]

Having landed in a system where postmodern individuality is *de rigueur*, radical anti-conformism ends up feeding and being appropriated by the system itself.

East Germans' 'complications' could be viewed positively and be made to signify the GDR's *Volk's* welcome arrival into the age of postmodernity; in other words, they could be brandished as a proof of an historical emancipation. The problem here is that, as far as the GDR was concerned, said emancipation does not appear to have been striven for; rather it caught East German people unaware and unprepared. It is therefore not at all surprising that they attempted to come to terms with it — by way of opposing it — using old weapons. If the GDR *Volk* can be seen as the latest arrival in the category of postmodern, consumerist masses, it is also true that the yearning for security and for a patriarchal 'Übervater' which characterised them has remained, and has nowhere to be channelled in. Two aspects emerge from this discourse. The first, of psychological nature, relativises my argument somewhat, but deserves to be mentioned, if only in passing, and is based on the acknowledgement that the need of belonging to a collective of some sort is surely not only the monopoly of the former GDR, just as reactionary (or, if one wants to adopt a German jargon, 'fascistic') traits are present in all of us.⁸⁹ The second aspect, which can be equally placed in a German-specific as well as in a wider frame, focuses on the channelling of such traits. The new conservatism which has emerged in the historical, literary and cultural field at large is also manifest in quotidian experiences: the 'left' alternative, be it a politically official one or not, does not seem to

⁸⁸ Quoted in Tiedemann, ' "Ich bin fremd in dieser Gesellschaft, weil sie keinen pädagogischen oder utopischen Auftrag hat" ', *Freitag*, 25 October 1996.

⁸⁹ See, for instance, Castorf's admission that 'viele haben das Totalitäre in sich. Ich auch, darum hängt hier bei mir Stalin an der Wand. Jeder von uns hat eine Verstrickung mit dem System; ich weiß, wieviel Totalitäres ich in mir habe und wie ich es täglich praktiziere', in ' "Erhalte mir das Unglück!": Stasi-Beaufragter Joachim Gauck und Theaterregisseur Frank Castorf über das ostdeutsche Unbehagen', *Der Spiegel*, 45 (1996), 80.

be able to seize such a potential for (wished) collectivism, which ought not to be dismissed as a negative one a priori, and turn it to its advantage. Consequently, a situation has emerged on an ordinary level, which at worst can be identified by the success of the quasi family-like structures of the 'right' alternative, which provide such sense of security and belonging, and at best by the as yet unsuccessful attempt to 'find a new enemy', as it were, against which to direct one's sentiments of discontent. Moreover, the new and abundant 'freedom' which has resulted from unification only seems to make matters worse in this respect, by having set new and enlarged temporal and spatial boundaries with which the former East German population does not know what to do:

An nichts läßt sich das Scheitern der Aufklärung mehr verfolgen als am Begriff der Freiheit. Freiheit war der Kampfbegriff westlicher Politik schlechthin. [...] Mit dem Kapitalismus ist nun auch im Osten die Freiheit von Arbeit, die Freiheit von der zudringlichen Fürsorge des Staates gegeben. Die gemeinsame Forderung der Prenzlauer-Berg-Szene und der Kreuzberger, 'Nie wieder arbeiten-Fraktion' ist heute Wahrheit geworden. Die alte Hippie-Forderung nach der Freiheit von Arbeit, um in den Tag hinein leben und sein eigener Herr sein zu können — plötzlich ist sie Realität. Nur eine Realität, die man sich nicht nur freiwillig wählt, sondern in aller Regel zwangsverordnet wird. Der Kapitalismus produziert immer neue Freiheiten.⁹⁰

The new (enemy-)free status has seriously endangered the cultivation and preservation of a distinct GDR identity: after all self-definition, be it the one of an individual or of a society, is easiest to achieve *ex negativo* — what one is not is always easier to define than what one is. On the intellectuals' level, their non-ambivalent categorisation by the very state into 'pro' or 'against' groupings, had provided them with a ready-made identity, one which they could adopt or set themselves against. On the level of the masses, what is left of their identity is a feeling of discontent which has lost its original object: 'Es gibt etwas, das man hier an den Mauerwänden liest: "Ich habe Haß, Haß".'

⁹⁰ *Volksbühne's* theatre programme for November / December 1996.

Man weiß nicht mehr, wogegen. Man hat eigentlich das Ziel, das Feindbild verloren. Und dieser Haß, das ist vielleicht noch das einzige Gefühl.’⁹¹

The notion of a hate without object is strongly reminiscent of Baudrillard’s postulates on the French equivalent, ‘j’ai la haine’, as Castorf concedes.⁹² According to Baudrillard, passions lacking directions — he cites ‘je manifeste’, which in truth is intended as a self-expression, a ‘je me manifeste’ — are a typical manifestation of the contemporary (postmodern) condition, and ought not to be dismissed as negative without further consideration: hate, just like aversion, disappointment, repugnance, is seen as a producer of energy, even though it is a negative and reactionary one (a sentiment which is mirrored by Castorf’s assumption that ‘das ist vielleicht noch das einzige Gefühl’). Baudrillard is also quick in pointing out that this form of hate, or ‘acting out’, bears no resemblance to the (modernist) class hatred, which, he argues, always remained a fundamentally bourgeois passion which could count on a theory behind it and thus had an identifiable object. The contemporary version is instead caused by feelings of boredom and indifference, which themselves are not monotonous, but which, as I argued in the last chapter, represent for Baudrillard ‘strategic passions’. Hate leads to a negation of the course of history — which is one of the reasons why Baudrillard never adhered to Fukuyama’s theories, calling them too optimistic —, results in the loss of political passion and, in view of a ‘lack of enemies’ (déprédation), in its replacement by political compassion, that is, by its watering down. Finally, communal

⁹¹ Castorf, quoted in “‘Erhalte mir das Unglück!’: Stasi-Beauftragter Joachim Gauck und Theaterregisseur Frank Castorf über das ostdeutsche Unbehagen”, *Der Spiegel*, 45 (1996), 80.

⁹² Consider, for instance, the following statement by Castorf: ‘Wenn man alljährlich zum 1. Mai am Kollwitzplatz die jungen aggressiven Bunten sieht, die auf den obligatorischen Polizeiansatz warten, dann erlebt man das neue: den Klassenkampf ohne Bewußtsein. Die haben doch das Gefühl, sich selbst nur noch durch einen Zerstörungsakt zu erleben. Das kämpferische Subjekt hat keine Objekt-Bezüglichkeit mehr; man weiß nicht wofür, eigentlich auch nicht so recht, wogegen. Dieses Phänomen beschreibt Baudrillard ziemlich stimmig’. Quoted in Schütt, ‘“Krise? Wahwitzige Kontinuität”: Volksbühnen-Intendant Frank Castorf über Rechts und Links sowie Lebensphilosophien in den “Fraktionen des Asozialen”’, *Neues Deutschland*, 14 / 15 September 1996.

feelings of hate are not to be mistaken for the possibility that a new collectivism, an ‘Internationale’ of hate, as Baudrillard calls it, might arise through them, since boredom and indifference are, per definition, unable to produce sentiments of solidarity.⁹³

It seems to me that Baudrillard’s discourse has important relevances to the new German situation, where feelings of hate, indifference, and boredom have been on the agenda since unification.⁹⁴ What is worse, so long as ‘modern democracies are tailored to the political and social interests of large, organised groups, capable of defining and organising their interests, and of upholding them in the arena of power politics’,⁹⁵ as Glaeßner maintains — conveniently forgetting that democracy’s strength is in fact put to the test with its treatment of minority groups — there does not seem to be any room for a change of direction. Happy in the knowledge that ‘a new German democracy will have to digest the experiences of over forty years of SED dictatorship’, but that it ‘can rely on forty-five years of consolidated democratic experiences in the Federal Republic’,⁹⁶ Glaeßner, and with him many others, can sleep the sleep of the just, while the hating,

⁹³ See the interview between Baudrillard and François Ewald in *Lettre Internationale* no. 26. The interview is reprinted in German in the theatre programme of *Die Nibelungen — Born Bad*, which Castorf staged in the *Volksbühne* in May 1995. The production itself abounded in Baudrillardian quotes.

⁹⁴ By this I mean a relevance whose value is descriptive in character, and not automatically endorsable. As I discussed in the previous chapter, Baudrillard positively calls for strategic acts of indifference, whereas Castorf’s position, and, for that matter, any position whose subject is the analysis of the German *Volk* post unification, cannot but endorse the more traditional negative connotation attributable to ‘indifference’.

⁹⁵ Glaeßner, ‘Attitudes to the GDR and German Unification’, *German Monitor*, 33 (1994), 55. Note the similarity with Fukuyama’s celebration of the victory of late capitalist / liberal Western democracies over every other possible political system.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 51.

bored and indifferent minority keeps looking for an enemy.⁹⁷

⁹⁷ That such a minority can be involved, if only partially and temporarily, in public discourses, has been proven by an incident which took place in the *Volksbühne* in 1993, when Castorf staged *A Clockwork Orange*. Traditionally seen as a cult book and film by the Neo-Nazi scene, the text was 'abused' by Castorf in his attempt to link Burgess' anarchic and individualistic portrayal of violence with images of totalitarian and organised repression, which ranged from fascist film-clips to extracts from the Stalinist Slansky-trials to Kohl's New Year's speech (!). Those members of the radical right-wing scene who had courageously set foot in the theatre thus failed to recognise 'their' Burgess (just as West German bourgeois audiences had failed to recognise 'their' Shakespeare' in Castorf's guest productions — see Chapter 7) and reacted by verbally and physically disrupting the performance, which eventually had to be stopped. They were subsequently invited by Castorf and members of the *Volksbühne* ensemble to take part in a radio debate in order to discuss the artistic merits and failures of the production, much to the dismay of a large part of Berlin's theatrical circles.

Chapter 5

Berlin's Theatrical Landscape:

Frank Castorf's Competition

‘Eine Hauptstadt mit zerstörter Kultur? Um sich von solch einem Schlag zu erholen, braucht eine Stadt zehn Jahre.’¹

No other city in Europe and, possibly, worldwide, owns more publicly financed theatres than Berlin. Without wishing to obscure regional differences, one could claim that its post-unification theatrical landscape offers a fairly accurate microcosm of the artistic situation throughout Germany; indeed, it exacerbates its positive and negative traits, in view of a unique geographical position and historical past. The analysis of the social and cultural background of German unification which has formed the subject of the previous chapter will now provide the framework for a more specific investigation into the development of the major Berlin theatres. The present chapter will thus offer a general picture of Berlin’s cultural politics, present the reaction of the city’s principal theatrical establishments to the events of 1989, and examine the repercussions on their financial and artistic spheres. Given the truly substantial number and variety of theatres that Berlin possesses — between three and five hundred in the alternative off-scene alone —, I have restricted my analysis to those houses which have been developing a distinctive profile since the post-war era, namely the *Schiller Theater* and the *Schaubühne* in the western part of the city, and the *Deutsches Theater*, the *Berliner Ensemble* and the *Maxim-Gorki Theater* in its eastern counterpart. The development of the *Volkshöhne* in the years that preceded Castorf’s arrival, as well as the alterations that followed it, will be dealt with separately in Chapter 8.

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¹ Peter Zadek, quoted in Tornow and Maier, ‘ “Bei Menschen und bei Schauspielern gibt es nur eines, das mich wirklich interessiert: Das Echte” ’, *Berliner Zeitung*, 11/12 May 1996.

The honeymoon period which immediately followed unification also extended initially to Berlin's theatrical environment. Initial expectations were high, and corroborated by memories of the city's active theatre culture of the 1920s, which — it was hoped — would become again one of the city's functions, its location within the European Community, and its proximity to the countries of Eastern Europe making it the juncture where the new interculturalism in the theatre might find a natural centre. The city, currently undergoing its millennial transformation into a capital — which has earned it the appellation of 'Baustelle Berlin' — has thus been invested with the potential of winning back its former status as 'the' European city of theatre. It is not surprising in this context that the further existence of the *Theatertreffen* has been confirmed: first envisaged in 1964 as a reaction to the erection of the Berlin wall, and now considered by many to be simply a relic of the Cold War, the *Theatertreffen* is a yearly festival to which the ten most remarkable productions from German-speaking countries are invited. Speaking at the festival in 1990, Günther Rühle proclaimed his faith in the resurgence of the 'Theaterstadt Berlin':

Ich glaube, daß durch den Wegfall der Mauer sich hier das alte Spannungsfeld zwischen den Theatern wieder herstellen wird. Davon hat Berlin immer gelebt, und das hat das Publikum und Kritik geprägt und gebildet: der permanente Vergleich zwischen ganz antagonistischen Theaterformen. So eine Theatergroßstadt ist ein nicht zu unterschätzender Mechanismus zur Qualifizierung von Theaterarbeit.²

A few months later, during a debate amongst artistic directors, Werner Rackwitz of the *Komische Oper* expressed the same belief with renewed confidence:

Die Berliner Landschaft wird pluralistisch, kontrovers und europäisch sein. Berlin ist bereits heute *die* europäische Theaterstadt mit profilierten Theatern und der größten Vielfalt der Konzepte, Ästhetiken und Handschriften.³

² Quoted in Wille, 'Einigkeit und recht und schlecht? Ein Bericht zur kulturpolitischen, finanziellen und künstlerischen Situation der Theaterstadt Berlin im Sommer 1990', *Theater heute*, 9 (1990), 8.

³ Quoted in 'Chance und Gefährdung: Berliner Intendanten zur Theatersituation in der Hauptstadt', *Theater der Zeit*, 12 (1990), 6.

One of the reasons for such a conviction relies surely on the fact that the theatrical scenes of East and West Berlin did share, to a certain degree, a number of common traits. Both, for example, relied on a subsidised theatre system which had been a German tradition since the eighteenth century. The two politically separate theatre cultures also shared the heritage of Brecht: during the 1960s and 1970s West German directors, dramaturges, actors and stage designers adopted Brecht's methods, if often critically, as did their East German counterparts, most notably Ruth Berghaus, Matthias Langhoff and Manfred Karge, who attempted to rescue Brecht's theatre concepts from the doctrinal value which had been bestowed upon them by various GDR culture ministers. In other words, political separation and geographical isolation did not automatically lead to artistic confinement, and exchanges between the two cultures did take place, if somewhat one-sidedly.

It is however worth bearing in mind that such similarities, which, as was assumed during post-unification euphoria, could be capitalised on, were clearly outweighed by a whole range of differences, which extended from the financial and organisational side of the theatres to their artistic sphere and their chronological development. First and foremost, the different role that the two parts of the city were made to play in political matters (East Berlin incorporating as it did all the functions of a capital city, West Berlin serving the purpose of a 'window display' in favour of the Federal Republic) had inevitable repercussions on the artistic sphere. The former has been characterised throughout its brief history by a concentration of theatres, including the only GDR state theatres, the *Berliner Ensemble* and the *Deutsches Theater*. The appeal of East Berlin was understandably strong for GDR directors and actors, as outside the capital only a few ensembles managed to maintain high standards over longer periods of time. West Berlin was, in comparison, a theatre city amongst many in the Federal Republic, its

importance and prestige not more conspicuous than that of, say, Hamburg, or Munich, or Frankfurt. Disparities could also be perceived with regard to sheer theatrical concerns. The notion of ensemble theatre, for instance, was equally present in both states, yet it was born out of fundamentally different approaches: whereas in West Germany it was a highly acclaimed status that theatres strove to achieve (the ensembles which developed in Bremen, Bochum, Stuttgart, and, most famously, in the Berlin's *Schaubühne*, made theatre history), in East Germany every theatre, from the Berlin state theatres to the smaller municipal houses, was de facto an ensemble theatre. The binding contracts of directors, actors and stage designers prevented the free movement of theatre practitioners; despite being celebrated as a social achievement they could not be actually terminated. Seen in this light, members of such ensembles were precluded from the fluctuation that was still the norm in West Germany, and forced into artistic fossilisation instead. Again, discrepancies could be observed in terms of chronological development. GDR theatre, seemingly quite in contrast to the general decline of the country (and in truth precisely because of it), showed a remarkable vitality in the second half of the 1980s. West German theatre, instead — after having achieved an enviable standard in the 1970s, with authors like Thomas Bernhard, Botho Strauß, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Franz Xaver Kroetz, leading directors like Peter Stein, Pina Bausch, Claus Peymann, Peter Zadek, Luc Bondy, Dieter Dorn, Jürgen Flimm, Klaus Michael Grüber, performers like Jutta Lampe, Bruno Ganz, Otto Sander, Edith Clever, and designers like Wilfried Minks, Karl Herrmann, Achim Freyer and Erich Wonder — was characterised by a period of stagnation during the mid/late 1980s. Indeed, that period was distinguished by a veritable takeover of the Federal Republic's theatrical scene by East German theatre practitioners.

Unification accentuated these different stages of development, and positively turned the table. In the spring of 1990, during the period that followed the end of SED rule, East Berlin theatres suddenly found themselves alone, their *entente cordiale* with the audience having been broken. Formerly venues for more or less quiet opposition and artistically clothed criticism, theatres had lost their function and, seemingly, their *raison d'être*. Attendance dropped to a record low after the monetary reform in the summer of 1990, when spectators turned into consumers eager to fulfil long suppressed wishes and to 'test the West'. It was the *Deutscher Bühnenverein*, the Federal Republic's association of theatre managers and producers, which intervened successfully and obtained a pledge from the government for temporary financing from the federal budget for all theatres in East Germany. Even though the decline in attendance was eventually stemmed by visitors from West Berlin, the principal problems initially faced by East Berlin's theatre houses remained of practical and financial as well as of artistic nature. On the one hand the drop in attendance figures, the awareness of an uncertain future characterised by spending cuts, and, most depressingly, the exodus of artists, who, lured by the prospect of higher standards of living and remuneration, left for West Germany, called for immediate drastic measures. On the other, the lack of clarity about the competence of various institutional bodies only worsened the situation: West Berlin's cultural administration showed an interest in East Berlin's theatres, whilst admitting that funding opportunities were out of the question; in East Berlin, the 'Magistrat der Stadt', in charge of the *Maxim-Gorki Theater* and the *Volksbühne*, found itself in the paradoxical situation of having to develop a theatre concept for the future whilst being aware that it would cease to exist as an institutional body after the October elections; similarly, the *Berliner Ensemble* and the *Deutsches Theater*, the only two GDR state theatres, fell under the competence of the GDR Ministry for Culture, also doomed to be

dismantled. The Land government of (West) Berlin eventually took over ownership of all theatres in the eastern part of the city, and its federal counterpart introduced a financing project — DM 210 million, DM 160 million, DM 138 million for 1991, 1992 and 1993 respectively⁴ —, which has now been replaced by the so-called ‘Hauptstadtvertrag’. The panic utterances of many a theatre artist and critic, who in the period immediately following unification not only saw their dream of a ‘Theaterstadt Berlin’ being shattered, but who also feared for the sheer survival of individual theatre establishments, can now be relativised with the hindsight that even a short historical distance has allowed one to develop. By 1996, with a sobriety not devoid of self-reproach, Michael Merschmeier could recall such expectations as follows:

Was hatten wir nicht an Wundern erwartet, als die Geschichte hierzulande wieder laufen lernte. Von den Ost-Theatern müßte nur die politische Subversion, von den West-Theatern die etwas raffinierte Ästhetik übernommen und beides vermählt werden: Schön wäre die Bühne der privilegierte Ort, an dem Zeitgeschehen nicht nur nachträglich und also folgenlos kommentiert, sondern vorgedacht und mitgemacht würde.⁵

Before turning the analysis of the post-unification Berlin theatre landscape to the achievements and developments of individual houses, it is perhaps desirable to provide a general picture of their major features. I will now therefore briefly sketch the pre-*Wende* characteristics of the West Berlin and East Berlin theatrical scene, with particular reference to those establishments which underwent a drastic change after 1990.

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⁴ Figures quoted in Nagel, ‘Berliner Theater: Hereinspaziert !’, *Wochenpost Extra*, 22 September 1994.

⁵ Merschmeier, ‘Das wohlverworbene Glück: Anmerkungen zur laufenden Saison’, *Theater heute*, 1(1996), 1.

West Berlin:

1. This part of the city is characterised by a clear geographical division between the official state theatres and the successful private theatres, which reside almost without exception in Charlottenburg and Wilmersdorf, and the alternative scene, concentrated in Kreuzberg. As all the historical theatre buildings were in the Eastern Berlin, local government proceeded to renovate existing houses and found new ones during the 1950s and 1960s: the *Schiller Theater* in 1961, the *Theater am Halleschen Ufer* and the *Kammerspiele* in 1962, the *Freie Volksbühne* and the *Hansa Theater* in 1963, the *Grips Theater* and a number of others towards the end of the decade.
2. West Berlin possessed three state theatres, the *Schiller Theater*, its *Werkstatt* and the *Schloßparktheater*, with a total of over 1600 available seats. Commonly known as 'die Staatlichen Schauspielbühnen Berlins', they constituted the largest theatre conglomeration of the Federal Republic. After initial years of notability, not least thanks to the collaboration of Samuel Beckett during its early days, and thanks to the input of guest productions (especially by Leander Haußmann and Katharina Thalbach) during the late 1980s, all three houses were facing a severe drop in attendance at the eve of the *Wende*, when no clear theatrical concept was being pursued. In early 1990 a four-person board of directors, consisting of Alexander Lang, Alfred Kirchner, Vera Sturm and Volkmar Clauß, was put in charge to try and remedy an almost irretrievable situation.
3. The private theatre scene was remarkably variegated, ranging from boulevard theatres (*Hansa Theater*, *Komödie*, *Theater am Kurfüstendamm*) to establishments created for specific purposes and audiences (*Grips Theater* and *Kammerspiele* specialising in children's and youth theatre, *Theater des Westens* in musicals, *Hebbel Theatre* in avant-garde guest productions) to artistically ambitious houses (*Schaubühne*, *Freie*

Volksbühne, Renaissance Theater, Vagantenbühne). As far as the latter category is concerned, the *Freie Volksbühne* and the *Schaubühne* are undoubtedly the ones which achieved the highest standards and the largest reputation, in West Berlin as well as elsewhere. The first attained remarkable success during the 1960s, when Piscator returned from his American exile and developed his concept of documentary theatre, but soon fell into a state of semi-permanent crisis after his death, and hardly ever managed to fill its 1100 seating capacity. The second, arguably the most renowned post-war German theatre worldwide, was born at the beginning of the 1960s as experimental theatre in Kreuzberg, and soon developed as a medium of political protest. It achieved fame through the pioneering work of, amongst others, Peter Stein, Luc Bondy, Klaus Michael Grüber, through the dramaturgy of Botho Strauß and Dieter Sturm, and through the accomplishments of the most distinguished ensemble of actors, which included Jutta Lampe, Bruno Ganz and Edith Clever. Productions like *Vietnam Diskurs* (1969), *Die Mutter* (1970), *Peer Gynt* (1971), *Sommergäste* (1974), *Wie es euch gefällt* (1977), and *Winterreise* (1977), for which Grüber turned the Olympic stadium into a theatrical stage, indeed made theatre history, and granted the *Schaubühne* a success which expanded throughout Berlin, West Germany and the rest of Europe. Famous for its intensive conceptual background research, which inevitably led to a slow production rhythm (five a year at most), and for its principle of a theatre collective which involved actors, dramaturges and other theatre participants in the decision-making process, the theatre consisted of a paradoxical mixture of features, including the refinement of a highly subsidised private house as well as the radicalism of a politically motivated independent company. In 1981 the Berlin Senate provided the ensemble with a new building, a disused cinema on the Kurfürstendamm, which was rebuilt for DM 80 million; the new

location, which accommodated over 1500 available seats (almost quadrupling the capacity of the former theatre on the Halleschen Ufer), caused however a gradual shifting of its audience base to take place, from the politically left avant-garde of Kreuzberg to the more refined tastes of the Berlin bourgeoisie. By 1985 Peter Stein had resigned as artistic director, returning to the house only sporadically for guest productions, and the theatre itself, more and more focused on its own aesthetic perfection(ism), turned, as a critic described it, into a 'Schmuckkästlein'.⁶

4. The alternative scene is possibly the most complex to survey, especially given the amount of contradictory statistics and reports that surround it. It is estimated that up to five hundred off-theatres operated in West Berlin, ranging from the independent groups working in the Kreuzberg 'Hinterhof'-subculture milieu to the workshops of theatre schools like *Die Etage*. Whilst some of them have achieved a quite remarkable level of success (for instance the *Zan Pollo Theater*, *Theater 89*, *Theater Affekt*, and the *Theater zum Westlichen Stadthirschen*), and can count on governmental subsidies thanks to the 'Optionsförderung' introduced by the Berlin Culture Minister in 1992, the great majority still conducts a daily struggle for survival.

East Berlin:

1. As all the GDR state and main municipal theatres resided in this part of the city, working in either the *Deutsches Theater*, the *Berliner Ensemble*, the *Volksbühne* or the *Maxim-Gorki Theater* was generally considered to be the culmination of one's artistic career. As I have mentioned earlier, the ensembles that were formed thus tended to be characterised by their static nature: the *Deutsches Theater*, for instance,

⁶ Merschmeier, 'Auf den Höhen der Tiefebene: Anmerkungen zur laufenden Saison am 20. März 1990', *Theater heute*, 4 (1990), 6.

could count on a troupe of about sixty artists, most of whom had remained faithful to the theatre over a period of twenty, thirty, at times forty years — a troupe which, incidentally, has remained largely unaltered since unification, with the only exception of Ulrich Mühe's defection to West Germany, and the addition of a limited number of younger performers. Continuing the tradition of Max Reinhardt, and acting as GDR's national theatre, the *Deutsches Theater* gained recognition for productions of German classics and Russian realist plays under the artistic direction of Wolfgang Langhoff, until his controversial production of Peter Hacks' *Die Sorgen um die Macht* forced him to resign. The theatre witnessed a second renaissance during the mid and late 1980s with the guest productions of Heiner Müller (particularly his *Hamletmaschine*) and Frank Castorf (with his *John Gabriel Borkmann* and *Sonjas Wohnung*). Of all the theatrical institutions in East Berlin, the *Deutsches Theater* was perhaps the most active in campaigning for a democratic 'Third Way' during the Berlin upheavals of the late 1980s.

2. The *Berliner Ensemble* was directed by the former Brecht assistant Manfred Wekwerth from 1977 until its privatisation in 1991. It was however thanks to the contributions of younger directors like Matthias Langhoff, Manfred Karge and choreographer Ruth Berghaus that independent and non-doctrinaire applications of Brechtian techniques were finally achieved.
3. The *Maxim-Gorki Theater* occupied a sheltered special place in the East Berlin cultural environment, which was also mirrored by the architectural symbolism of its geographical position: distanced from the quarter that housed the *Deutsches Theater* and the *Berliner Ensemble*, hidden from Unter den Linden and protected by the 'Neue Wache' monument, the theatre, founded in 1952, focused on east and west European drama under the artistic direction of Maxim Vallentin. His successor, Albert Hetterle,

continued the trend, indeed intensified the theatre's confrontation with GDR society, by allowing controversial guest productions (such as George Tabori's *Mein Kampf* by Thomas Langhoff) to take place, and by staging himself the highly controversial *Übergangsgesellschaft* of Volker Braun — the only GDR production invited to take part in the unified *Theatertreffen* of 1990.

4. Private companies and alternative groups were not allowed in East Germany, apart from a few puppet theatres. Even the establishments devoted to musicals, revue and cabaret (from the *Metropol Theater* to the *Friedrichstadtpalast* to *Die Distel*) or specialised in children's and youth theatre (*Theater der Freundschaft*) were publicly owned. The only significant exception was constituted by the legendary *Theater Zinnober*, born in the mid eighties in the *Prenzlauer Berg* district of East Berlin. Consisting mainly of professional puppeteers, the group worked within a close community, and thus formed part of the sub-culture of this traditionally working-class and artistically autonomous quarter of the city. Perhaps not surprisingly, the group was dismantled in the aftermath of unification.

* * *

In 1991 a team of theatre scholars, captained by Ivan Nagel, was invited by the then Berlin Culture Minister Ulrich Roloff-Momin to compile a report on the situation of all Berlin theatres and to suggest their future prospects. The investigation, which became known as the 'Nagel Gutachten', is still viewed as the most thoroughly researched, complete and impartial analysis on the subject of that period.⁷ I will now

⁷ Indeed, the attempts subsequently made by Roloff-Momin's successor Peter Radunski to update the report have found little approval amongst theatrical circles. His 'cultural guidelines' of September 1996

briefly outline the changes that they proposed, before finally recapitulating by offering a picture of the present situation of all the major theatres which have been mentioned so far.

The sixteen-page report, which opened with an obligatory reference to Berlin as ‘seit etwa hundert Jahren [...] die Hauptstadt des europäischen Theaters’,⁸ agreed with Roloff-Momin’s decision to appoint Thomas Langhoff as artistic director of the *Deutsches Theater*, and indeed with the latter’s demands for an immediate alignment of his ensemble’s remuneration with western standards. It praised the *Maxim-Gorki Theater* and its *Intendant* Albert Hetterle for the courage shown in dealing with ‘irritierende Stücke’,⁹ and encouraged its continuation. It qualified the future task of the *Berliner Ensemble* as ‘die Tradition Brecht fortsetzen — die Führung des Theaters als Familienbetrieb beenden’,¹⁰ and suggested as artistic director(s) Brecht disciples of the first or second generation (i.e. Ruth Berghaus, Benno Besson, Manfred Karge, Matthias Langhoff, Peter Palitzsch, B.K. Tragelehn). In so doing Nagel, Dieckmann, Rischbieter and Merschmeier set out the premisses for the catastrophic decision to appoint a five-person board of directors at the *Berliner Ensemble*, as I will show later. The report further praised in no uncertain terms the achievements of the *Schaubühne*, stating that:

Zur Schaubühne läßt sich zum Glück kaum etwas sagen. Sie ist wohl immer noch das beste Schauspieltheater in Deutschland (schlicht: das Theater mit der höchsten Trefferquote, was hervorragende Aufführungen angeht).¹¹

in particular have caused him no little embarrassment: after having divided the city’s cultural landscape into sixteen main segments, Radunski proceeded to outline his cultural politics as a mixture of structural reform and optimal exhaustion of potential Berlin visitors, arguing, amongst other things, that the *Deutsche Oper* should restrict its repertoire to modern music in view of its architectonic characteristics, that the *Staatsoper* should opt for a more classical repertoire in view of the historical features of the building, and that the *Berliner Ensemble* ought to use its historical past to its full potential in order to attract Berlin visitors. For a full description of Radunski’s report see especially Hanssen, ‘Kreisstadt Berlin. Nach langem Schweigen hat Peter Radunski jetzt seine Vision der zukünftigen Berliner Kulturlandschaft vorgelegt: Diskussionsstoff für einen heißen Herbst’, *Der Tagesspiegel*, 11 September 1996.

⁸ Nagel et al., ‘Überlegungen zur Situation der Berliner Theater’, *Theater heute*, 5 (1991), 37.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 42.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 40.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 41.

It went on to express that 'ihr müßte "priviligiert" geholfen werden', given that its directors, from Stein to Bondy to Grüber to Wilson, had until then remained loyal to this theatre in view of its unique (and costly) working conditions, and not simply out of devotion to the ensemble or to Berlin, and concluded that 'wäre die Schaubühne gezwungen, weniger großzügig, ja luxuriös, zu arbeiten, so wäre sie nicht mehr die Schaubühne'.¹² Considerably less praise was given to West Berlin's former state theatres: badly positioned (the *Schiller Theater* and the *Werkstatt* in Charlottenburg, the *Schloßparktheater* in Steglitz), and on the brink of artistic and financial ruin, they were proposed for a complete restructuring: the report argued for the closure of the *Werkstatt*, and for the privatisation of the *Schloßparktheater*. The former's functions were to be ceded to the *Hebbel Theater*, the role of which would be in turn taken over by the *Freie Volksbühne*, labelled in the report as 'die beste Gastspielbühne Berlins'.¹³ A final suggestion was made with reference to the institutional bodies in charge of the running of the Berlin theatres: rightly naming the Berlin Culture Minister as the biggest theatre manager of the western hemisphere, with sums of about half a billion marks at his disposal every year, and deploring the lack of a department devoted to theatre in the Berlin cabinet, the report asked for a committee of specialists to be founded, who would not only inspect and review the efficiency of the various houses, but also provide them with clear politico-cultural directions.

Of all the strategies contained in the 'Nagel Gutachten', some have been successfully put to the test over the past years, others were never implemented, and one has had disastrous consequences. The initial uncertainties surrounding the future of Berlin theatres, and the continuing debates centred around who should take over the

¹² Op. cit., 41.

¹³ Ibid., 41.

vacant positions as *Intendanten* gave origin to an almost incestuous merry-go-round of artistic talents in 1992, with Thomas Langhoff, newly appointed *Intendant* of the *Deutsches Theater*, giving the first staging of Volker Braun's *Böhmen am Meer* in the *Schiller Theater*; with Alexander Lang, *Intendant* of said *Schiller Theater*, producing Klaus Pohl's *Karate-Billi kehrt zurück* at the *Deutsches Theater* in return; with Frank Castorf, already appointed as the new *Volksbühne* chief, staging Lothar Trolle's *Hermes in der Stadt* at the *Deutsches Theater*; with Peter Zadek, co-*Intendant* of the *Berliner Ensemble*, directing Tankred Dorst's *Lola* in the *Theater des Westens*, and, last but not least, with Heiner Müller, also co-director of the *Berliner Ensemble*, promising to Thomas Langhoff that he would keep his promise to stage a production at the *Deutsches Theater* every year. By the end of 1992 the situation had somewhat stabilised. The *Freie Volksbühne* was eventually closed after the ruinous management of Hans Neuenfels and Hermann Treusch, having turned into the most expensive and superfluous theatre worldwide, with subventions of DM 13,4 million and only 28486 paying spectators — hence a subsidy of DM 505 per sold ticket.¹⁴ The suggestion to turn it into a *Theater der Nationen*, hosting guest productions from all European countries as well the *Theatertreffen* was never concretised, because of a lack of funds. The *Schiller Theater* followed in the *Freie Volksbühne*'s footsteps, and was closed in the summer of 1993. Both are now sporadically used as guest houses for musical productions.

By contrast, the *Schaubühne* has been receiving substantial subsidies over the years, but is now facing difficulties of artistic nature: towards the end of 1997 Andrea Breth resigned from her post as artistic director, after her planned production of *Dantons Tod* had to be cancelled because of a few actors taking time off to shoot a television

¹⁴ Figures quoted in Merschmeier, ' "Guten Abend, wir sinken. Darf ich mich setzen?" Ein Bericht zur Saisonhalbzeit in Berlin', *Theater heute*, 3 (1992), 9.

series. She bitterly declared that 'das Ensembletheater ist gescheitert', and blamed her actors for an 'allgemeinen Selbstvermarktungsdenken' and their 'Goldgräberstimmung'.¹⁵ Her resignation sparked a debate amongst other *Intendanten*, who warned that the *Schaubühne*'s present situation ought not to be automatically turned into the definitive proof that the problem is a generalised one. Leander Haußman added that 'die Zeit ist nun mal so. Wir werden sie nicht ändern, indem wir eingeschnappt einer mystifizierten, vergangenen Ethik nachtrauern'.¹⁶ There is indeed a sense in which that theatre has become trapped in its own mythologised past, a state best shown perhaps by Andrea Breth's attempts to revive the house as a continuation of Peter Stein's *Schaubühne*. Yet even its past distinctive features have by now undergone a sober revaluation. The weight and impact of the participation statute, for instance, once the envy of other theatrical institutions, have been relativised — by bearing in mind that the ensemble was, after all, relatively small, including at times only fifteen members, and twenty-two at most — , if not positively criticised. Peter Simonischek, *Schaubühne* actor since 1979, remembers: 'man [...] hat auch damals gesagt, an der *Schaubühne* gebe es mehr Sitzungen als Proben'.¹⁷ The celebrated loyalty of the ensemble to its theatre also assumes a more realistic dimension when one considers that Otto Sander, to name but one actor, has in fact not been an official member for over seventeen years. And as for its originally political *raison d'être*, Peter Stein, now director of the Salzburg Festival, perennially (pre)occupied with the realisation of his *Faust* project, and whose work turned less politically radical as it became more painstakingly detailed and precise, described his 'shift' as follows:

¹⁵ Quoted in Wille, 'Debatte: Ensembletheater', *Theater heute*, 10 (1997), 1.

¹⁶ Quoted in 'Ist das Ensembletheater am Ende? Stellungnahmen', *Theater heute*, 10 (1997), 6.

¹⁷ Quoted in Burckhardt and Wille, 'Demokratie als Liebe des Despoten: Ein Gespräch mit Peter Simonischek über die Mitbestimmung an der Schaubühne, über Peter Stein und seine Nachfolger, über Gagen, Besetzungen und darüber, wie ein Ensemble funktioniert', *Theater heute*, 10 (1997), 12.

Wir sind im Theater nicht dazu da, die Verkleinerungen und Verkrüppelungen unserer Zeit abzubilden. Nicht in einem Text, der aus einer anderen Zeit stammt. Dem eigenen Zeitgeist entkommt man schon früh genug nicht. Wir müssen im Theater doch schauen, was es einmal für andere Formen von Leben gegeben hat.¹⁸

Although invariably sold out at first, mostly to tourists and to a Berlin élite hoping to catch a little of its past greatness, this theatre is now running the risk of becoming its own classic, retreating into the state-funded temple of high culture it had once stormed, with productions — from Breth's *Hedda Gabler* to Bondy's *Die Stunde da wir nichts voneinander wußten* to Grüber's recent *Splendid's* — characterised by such hermetic unity that they resemble more and more a vacuous, if polished, *Gesamtkunstwerk* of text, stage and acting.

As for East Berlin's theatrical scene, Hetterle's *Maxim-Gorki Theater* failed to come up to Nagel's expectations during the first post-unification years. Indeed, no other theatre in the city radiated such an anachronistic atmosphere at that time, with a repertoire that, now devoid of 'irritierende Stücke', was not dissimilar to that of a high standard boulevard theatre. It was only after 1994, when Bernd Wilms took over as artistic director, and above all in 1995/96, with Katharina Thalbach's staging of *Der Hauptmann von Köpenick* (and Harald Juhnke's own personal drama that accompanied it) that the theatre gained new impulses. The *Deutsches Theater* tried, partially convincingly, to shake off its image as a conservative theatre. Yet the shift in audiences, due not least to the increased ticket prices, seemed rather to corroborate it. Martin Linzer described the spectators as follows: 'die Wilmersdorfer Witwen, und all die, denen das Schiller Theater nicht fein genug war, [besetzen] die Plätze derer, die diese nicht mehr bezahlen können oder wollen'.¹⁹ Admittedly, in 1997 up to 67% of the public

¹⁸ Quoted in Wille, 'Hauptstadt-Theater auf Abruf: Zur Situation der Berliner Bühnen und zu einigen Spezialitäten der örtlichen Kulturpolitik', *Theater heute, Jahrbuch*, (1994), 68.

¹⁹ Linzer, 'Störfaktor Theater? Notizen zur Berliner Schauspielsaison 93/94', *Theater der Zeit*, 5 (1994), 6-7.

came from West Berlin.²⁰ One must however concede that the repertoire of the theatre has been amplified to include contemporary drama; Botho Strauß' *Ithaka* and Peter Handke's *Zurüstungen für die Unsterblichkeit*, the two 'streitbarsten' texts of the 1996/97 season, and 'von denen selbst die auf Strauß und Handke abonnierte Schaubühne ängstlich Abstand genommen hat',²¹ as Thomas Langhoff pointed out, were in fact staged at the *Deutsches Theater* for the first time. Other productions of contemporary plays, from Trolle's *Hermes in der Stadt* (directed by Castorf) to the *Lissy*-monologues, were kept as part of the repertoire up until 1994. One could perhaps sum up the theatre's present situation by admitting that it is characterised by a certain pragmatism: its programmes usually consist of a balanced mixture between classics and 'trendy' moderns, the choice of which blurs Langhoff's proclaimed real engagement into a somewhat opportunistic alibi. The real surprise which has come out of the *Deutsches Theater* in the past few seasons is instead the unexpected tremendous success of its *Baracke*. Originally not more than a studio workshop, its new director Thomas Ostermeier managed to develop an artistic profile in the shortest period of time, and concentrated on the staging of the 'angry young writers' of the London scene. His two productions of Mark Ravenhill's *Shoppen und Ficken* and David Harrower's *Messer in Hennen*, were invited to the 1998 *Theatertreffen*.

The *Berliner Ensemble*'s situation represents possibly the most grotesque episode of theatre politics in post-*Wende* Berlin. As I mentioned earlier, the theatre, long reduced to an ossified monument, was privatised in 1991 — a good structural manoeuvre as such, for it finally allowed one to get away from old pay agreements and to renew an otherwise not dismissible ensemble. It was taken over by a rotating artistic

²⁰ Matthes, ' "Über allen Gipfeln ist Unruh": Während die Berliner Schaubühne kriselt, gilt das Deutsche Theater als Exempel des Erfolgs. Intendant Thomas Langhoff verteidigt das Ensemble und bekennt sich zur Tradition: ein Theaterporträt', *Der Tagesspiegel*, 17 September 1997.

²¹ Ibid.

committee of five directors, as suggested by Nagel: Matthias Langhoff, Fritz Marquardt, Heiner Müller, Peter Palitzsch, Peter Zadek. The names alone already suggest that no visible artistically coherent philosophy could emerge from such a peculiar and unwieldy troupe. Indeed, Langhoff left by the end of the first season, and was eventually replaced by the actress Eva Mattes; as for the other directors, they worked in splendid isolation from each other, pursuing their own projects and simply tolerating their colleagues up until 1994. Peter Zadek left in outrage the following year, unable to cope with the ‘Brutalo-Theater’ of Einar Schleef, also employed at the *Berliner Ensemble*, and not before throwing invectives against other East German artists (from Müller to Castorf).²² By March 1995 Heiner Müller had assumed the role of main artistic director — a position which, one suspects, had actually been his all along — , with Marquardt and Palitzsch keeping their associate positions together with managing director Peter Sauerbaum. It is therefore understandable that Müller’s death on 30 December 1995 shook the very foundations of the *Berliner Ensemble*. Perhaps more remarkably, it shook the foundations of the city as well, with an unprecedented outpouring of grief by ‘common people’, particularly from East Berlin. The theatre organised an eight-day reading marathon, attended by the most disparate variety of people; during the night preceding his funeral, the *Volksbühne* organised a wake — aptly named ‘Whisky and Cigars’ — , in which former Müller actors and friends, from Robert Wilson to Susan Sontag to Marianne Hoppe to Gregor Gysi, read from his texts. Thousands of citizens attended the funeral.

The post-Müller *Berliner Ensemble* era has been distinguished by disaster after disaster. The frantic search for a new *Intendant*, and the speculations that accompanied it, was put to an end by the theatre’s internal decision to appoint Martin Wuttke to the

²² See previous chapter for a more detailed description of the events.

post.²³ Joined by Stephan Suschke, who had been an assistant of Müller for years, and by Carl Hegemann, a dramaturge who shot to fame in 1992 when working at the *Volksbühne*, and who returned to Berlin after a season in Bochum, Wuttke found himself occupying the positions of main actor, director and *Intendant* overnight. The theatre's difficulties in attracting audiences, which in past seasons had been only partially alleviated by the successful staging of Müller's *Der aufhaltsame Aufstieg des Arturo Ui*, seemed not only to persist but to dramatically increase. With the planned production of *Germania 3* postponed indefinitely (it was Leander Haußmann who gave it its first staging in Bochum in May 1996, with Wuttke's own Berlin adaptation following in June), the repertoire of the *Berliner Ensemble* in the months that followed Müller's death consisted mainly of *Ui* repeats and days off. Even Castorf's contribution to the enrichment of the theatre programme, with his second staging of *Der Auftrag*, remained fruitless. By 4 December 1996 Martin Wuttke resigned from the post, after having demanded in vain a confirmation of the 1998 theatre subsidies from Radunski, and, most importantly, after having been unable to prevent the dismissal without notice of Einar Schleef. What may initially appear to have been the volatile behaviour of an inexperienced, money-orientated and self-centred *Intendant*²⁴ actually proves to have very valid foundations after some consideration: firstly, a traditionally subsidised theatre without an agreed financial support of some sort is automatically precluded from future planning, a situation which in the case of the *Berliner Ensemble* was all the more

²³ Rumours had it that Berlin Culture Minister Peter Radunski had gone to extremes and asked Peter Stein to occupy the post. One might argue that the *Berliner Ensemble*'s choice was a clear reaction against the standardised procedure favoured at the time, namely one which assumed that employing famous directors would automatically solve the theatre's artistic problems and give it a new profile. The unfortunate experience with Zadek in the past may serve here as an adequate, and by no means isolated example.

²⁴ Radunski refused to comment on the situation, and let his press officer express, not without condescending undertones, that it was 'Schade, daß ein junger Schauspieler die ihm gegebene Chance nicht nutzt'. Quoted in Grack, 'Und wieder ein Theater weniger? Nach dem Rausschmiß des Regisseurs Einar Schleef und dem Rücktritt des Intendanten Martin Wuttke stellt sich für das Berliner Ensemble die Überlebensfrage so dringlich wie nie zuvor', *Der Tagesspiegel*, 6 December 1996.

regrettable, in view of the 1998 Brecht's hundredth-birthday celebrations; secondly, the departure of Einar Schleef did not merely put an end to his fruitful collaboration with Wuttke, which dated back to the late 1980s, but, most significantly, deprived the theatre of the only public figure left still capable of arousing the interest of the media, and, indirectly, of a potential audience. Starting 1997 without an artistic director, with the added burden of Brecht's heirs, particularly Ekkehard Schall and Barbara Brecht-Schall, eternally acting as *Über-Intendanten*, and with Rolf Hochhuth fighting for the ownership of the theatre building, the *Berliner Ensemble* found itself facing the most dramatic crisis of its relatively brief history. It was only through the help of an especially devised commission — consisting of Frank Castorf, Frank Baumbauer (*Intendant* of the Hamburg *Schauspielhaus*), and Friedrich Dieckmann (Berlin theatre scholar) — that a solution was eventually found. They suggested that Claus Peymann, at present *Intendant* of the Viennese *Burgtheater*, assume the leadership of the theatre as from autumn 1999, ironically stating that he would have five years' time to make the *Berliner Ensemble* 'berühmt oder tot'.²⁵ Since then, the theatre has undergone a veritable process of 'Volksbühnisation'. In June 1997 an evening was devoted to the performance of previously unpublished Brecht fragments, mainly by directors Leander Haußmann and Christoph Schlingensief: the former involved the participation of a Martin Wuttke hopping on stage with typically Uj-hairstyle and wearing a tutu; the latter's contribution included a satirisation of Schleef's *Wessis in Weimar* and *Herr Puntila und sein Knecht Matti*. Rather tellingly, a banner hanging from the theatre's main façade warned, using Brecht's own words, that 'wer immer es ist, den ihr hier sucht, ich bin es nicht'. The summer of 1997 was further distinguished by public interchanges between the *Berliner*

²⁵ The reference applies to a similar comment made by Ivan Nagel in 1991 with reference to the *Volksbühne*. See Chapter 8 for a more detailed description.

Ensemble and other theatrical institutions, most notably the Bochum *Schauspielhaus*. The two houses organised an open press conference with the aid of a video-phone: the call, beginning in true television-like fashion with a 'Hallo, Bochum, hier Berlin!', interrupted by Christoph Schlingensiefel phoning from his home and joining in the conversation, terminating with the Bochum ensemble inquiring who would pay the bill and presenting their Berlin colleagues with a banner they had prepared earlier (with the words 'Noch leben die Brechts!'), was humorously praised as the *Berliner Ensemble's* 'beste Vorstellung seit langem'.²⁶

It is of course impossible to speculate whether the arrival of Claus Peymann will provide the theatre with the artistic content it so desperately needs. I would however argue that the temporary measures which have been taken to guarantee the theatre a further dignified period already move in the right direction. Rolf Hochhuth's Ilse-Holzappel-foundation is now the official owner of the house, which is put at Hochhuth's disposal for five weeks every summer, and for a not yet specified period of time every October, in order to allow him to stage his *Stellvertreter*; Berlin Culture Minister Radunski still favours the possibility of limiting the theatre's output to a collection of Brecht and Müller recyclings, in view of their favourable reception by Berlin visitors. In order to avoid an enforced resuscitation of the theatre of authors and the transformation of the *Berliner Ensemble* into a tourist trap, the 'Castorf-principle' seems to me not only inevitable, but positively worth encouraging.

²⁶ Brug, ' "Hallo, Bochum!". Beste Vorstellung seit langem: die BE Pressekonferenz zum Brecht-Sommer', *Der Tagesspiegel*, 15 June 1997.

Chapter 6

Frank Castorf's GDR Productions: Descriptions and Analyses

After having provided the philosophical, theatrical, political and social background in which to locate Castorf's practices, I will now turn my attention to his productions, which will be analysed in chronological order. This chapter will thus deal with his GDR work; his theatrical career, from his first attempts at directing in Senftenberg, Brandenburg, Greifswald, to his relegation to Anklam and to his final peregrination from theatre to theatre, will be reconstructed and put in its historical perspective. This will include a brief sketch of the cultural policy of Erich Honecker, and pay special attention to theatrical matters, from the subvention policies to the party-political tasks attributed to the theatres by the SED government. Their enforced responsibilities will be in turn contrasted to a number of functions ascribed to them at various times by the general public (an integrative, a compensatory and a social-therapeutical one) and by the media (an anticipatory one). Castorf's productions will be first described and analysed and subsequently placed in a more general political and postmodern context.

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The character of Castorf's GDR productions as political agitation can only be fully understood when viewed under the light of the more general cultural policies adopted by the SED during the regime of Erich Honecker. Replacing Walter Ulbricht in 1971, Honecker invited an 'offenherzigen, sachlichen, schöpferischen Meinungsstreit'¹ on literary matters; he wished topics to include 'nicht nur die richtigen, unserer sozialistischen Gesellschaft nützlichen Themen [...], sondern auch die ganze Breite und

¹ Rüß (ed.), *Dokumente zur Kunst-, Literatur- und Kulturpolitik der SED 1971-1974*, 180.

Vielfalt der neuen Lebensäußerungen’;² he pledged to support artists in their ‘schöpferischen Suche nach neuen Formen’.³ On the occasion of the fourth conference of the SED central committee, he confirmed the relaxation of cultural policies even more unequivocally in what has become known as his ‘no-taboos-speech’:

Wenn man von der festen Position des Sozialismus ausgeht, kann es meines Erachtens auf dem Gebiet von Kunst und Literatur keine Tabus geben. Das betrifft sowohl die Frage der inhaltlichen Gestaltung als auch des Stils — kurz gesagt: die Frage dessen, was man die künstlerische Meisterschaft nennt.⁴

It is however common knowledge that the cultural policy of the SED government in the time span between the 1970s and the late 1980s, despite showing an increased tolerance, was still to be understood within a framework which took for granted the socialist nature of the state. Generally speaking, all arts were still expected to be of proletarian nature, i.e. partisan in character and comprehensible to all. The focus was moreover more on future planning than on a critical discussion of past and present tendencies.⁵ The subvention policies of the SED government, which had taken shape in the late 1940s and in the 1950s, were further pursued:

Verwurzelt in der Tradition des deutschen Hof- und Stadttheaters, waren die Theater der DDR finanziell großzügig ausgestattet. Der Besuch von Vorstellungen sollte nicht länger ein Privileg für Wohlhabende sein, sondern jedermann offenstehen. Durch ein differenziertes Anrechts- und Preissystem sowie durch generell niedrige Eintrittspreise wurden die Voraussetzungen für eine sozial weitgefächerte Publikumsstruktur geschaffen. [...] Dabei hatte er [der Staat DDR] nicht allein kulturideologische Ziele im Blick, sondern stellte sich bewußt in die Tradition des deutschen Theaters.⁶

If it remains indisputable that different strata of the population were indeed given access to theatre visits they might not have been able to afford otherwise, and artists were given the opportunity to perform without financial worries, it must also be stressed that the

² Op. cit., 180.

³ Ibid., 181.

⁴ Ibid., 287.

⁵ This was in turn mirrored in the historical field: as soon as the GDR officially claimed for itself the status of socialist state, it also declared it had (automatically) had a critical discussion with its Nazi past.

⁶ Hammerthaler, ‘Die Position des Theaters in der DDR’, 197.

‘kulturideologische Ziele’ constituted an ever-present element in theatre life, and resulted in only one theatrical approach being favoured — one aimed at the support and improvement of the existing system rather than at its criticism. Artists were allotted an influence and a social function that was nowhere to be seen in the West, but their artistic freedom suffered accordingly.

The SED guidelines were unequivocal; in the 1960s they still stated that ‘das Drama soll parteilich sein: es soll die Wirklichkeit unter dem Gesichtspunkt des historisch unabweisbaren Endsiegs der kommunistischen Gesellschaft spiegeln.’⁷ Even if Honecker’s cultural policies appeared to be more liberal, it is worth pointing out that his ‘no-taboos-speech’ did contain an unambiguous clause (‘Wenn man von der festen Position des Sozialismus angeht’). The vigilant eye kept by the SED on theatrical matters is already a sign of the power that the ‘institution’ theatre enjoyed in the GDR. The opening sentence of Anthony Meech’s report on some East German productions of the 1980s rightly states that ‘theatre in the GDR is a serious business’:⁸ its ‘seriousness’ heavily relied on the awareness of the very important functions that were — more often indirectly than not — linked with it.⁹ The official function attributed to it by the SED government was a party-political one: theatres existed primarily to popularise the socialist doctrine and to concretise the concept of socialist realism on stage. This tended to imply that, however critical and dialectical, every approach to a text had to portray the obligatory optimistic ending, and include clear-cut ‘good-and-bad’ distinctions of characters, stressing that the future of the deserving ones would necessarily be a socialist one. It comes as no surprise that tragedy was not a favoured genre, and that the works

⁷ Quoted in Wendt, ‘Dramatik im Osten’, 74.

⁸ Meech, ‘A New Definition of “Eingreifendes Theater”’: Some Recent Productions in the Theatre of the GDR’, 110.

⁹ I will rely on Hammerthaler’s distinction between ‘politisch-affirmative’, ‘integrative’, ‘kompensatorische’, ‘sozialtherapeutische’ and ‘antizipatorische’ functions in the analysis that follows. See Hammerthaler, ‘Die Position des Theaters in der DDR’, 250-55.

of classical authors such as Shakespeare, Goethe, Schiller and the like could only be redeemed by acquiring somewhat moralising undertones. Notions of tragedy and of Marxism contradict each other: on the one hand, a genre based on the concept that man's misfortunes form an eternal part of man's condition, and are, as such, existentially ever-present; on the other hand, a doctrine which claims that man's misfortunes are historically, not existentially, conditioned, and are thus liable to be altered. The only authors who managed to produce texts which combine elements of both, and I am referring here to Heiner Müller in particular, irremediably show a departure from orthodox notions of Marxism (I will show later how Müller and Castorf deal with the portrayal of tragic themes such as death). At present it will suffice to mention how slippery and easily misunderstood the term 'political theatre' becomes when applied to the work of artists who lived in a state which itself issued strict 'party-political' guidelines. The most appropriate form of political theatre became in these circumstances *perforce* an anti-party-political one.

The official function pales moreover into insignificance when opposed to the sheer volume of expectations and requirements that the general public expressed. Firstly, the theatres were allotted an integrative function, whereby individual members of the audience could recognise themselves as part of a larger community, of a 'Nischengesellschaft' different from the one suggested by the SED. The GDR citizen could feel as an individual and act accordingly when protected by the masses, i.e. by others who also felt safe and confident in the anonymity of a full auditorium. Secondly, theatres were ascribed a compensatory role: the concept of free time that one could devote to culture / entertainment acquired the added significance of a counter-balancing element which compensated for the unhappiness of everyday life, whether at the

workplace or as a result of a general discontent with political issues. That the relationship between free time and working time is always one of compensation appears to me to be a debatable one; nevertheless, even if one were to assume the validity of the last statement regardless of the country to which it is applied, it is still worth bearing in mind that the GDR did not possess a developed cultural infrastructure typical of any western country (it had become commonplace, even within the GDR itself, to deplore the inadequacy of the East German press, radio and television). An added consequence of this state of affairs is also GDR-unique: regardless of the official attempts to create a theatre that would educate the masses, the public still wished for a theatre that would provide the entertainment and relaxation which could not be found elsewhere:

Das breite Publikum [suchte] nicht etwa Bildungserlebnisse oder politische Aufklärung, sondern Entspannung und Unterhaltung. Zwar schließen sich Vergnügen und Persönlichkeitsbildung nicht von vornerein aus, zumal wenn man über das Vergnügen zu lernen versteht, immerhin aber fällt auf, daß ein starkes Bedürfnis nach Unterhaltung im Theater bestand trotz einer teilweise forciert pädagogischen Theaterpolitik der SED.¹⁰

Finally, theatres performed a social-therapeutical function, deriving from the fact that the events portrayed on stage often mirrored those familiar to the public; in this way the fears and uncertainties that would otherwise have been kept private found a way of being exorcised by being shown publicly. Theatres thus provided a 'Befreiungsmechanismus vom Alpdruck psychischer und seelischer Probleme'.¹¹ Anthony Meech has described the feeling one had as a foreign audience member during performances as that of an 'alien',¹² since the relationship between the stage and an audience able to extrapolate the slightest nuance of GDR reference from the general content of the plays automatically excluded those who were not familiar with the general political and historical

¹⁰ Op. cit., 214.

¹¹ Ibid., 253.

¹² Meech, 'A New Definition of "Eingreifendes Theater": Some Recent Productions in the Theatre of the GDR', 123.

background. Yet this conspiratory trait, at the expense of a state which was convinced of having turned the theatres into instruments capable and willing to stimulate and influence the masses, paradoxically achieved the opposite of what it was meant to: the abreaction of negative feelings implied the sublimation of the very emotional energies which would have been vital for political protest. By absorbing such energies into the performance and its reception the theatre was indirectly contributing to the stabilisation of the status quo: artists and audience alike had in fact learnt to use a subversive language — the performers providing allusions to the spectators, who, in turn, were able to fill in the artistic pauses with their own political experiences and thus to link the theatre event with reality at large. Hammerthaler's definition of theatres as 'assoziative Öffentlichkeit' would therefore seem to be more appropriate than the commonly adopted 'Ersatzöffentlichkeit':

Die offizielle Ausgrenzung von Realitäts- und Erfahrungsbereichen begünstigte die Bildung einer *assoziativen Öffentlichkeit* in den Theatern. Ohne daß die Bühne als ein Forum der Opposition erschien, gelang es, mit Mitteln der Kunst das offiziell Verdrängte in Erinnerung zu rufen. Gegenüber der offiziellen Öffentlichkeit vermochte die assoziative für sich in Anspruch zu nehmen, sich auf die realen Probleme der Gesellschaft zu beziehen, wenn auch in verschlüsselter Form. [...] Statt sich offen, gar oppositionell über Mißstände zu verständigen, suchten die Theater durch Anspielungen und Andeutungen das Einverständnis des Publikums.¹³

The question of the unique character of the GDR language is one which is still being discussed at length and one which would necessarily have to include all the detailed linguistic analyses of the development and usage of the German language(s) on each side of the former border which have been compiled. In this context it is however more opportune to distinguish between the various facets of the GDR language itself rather than between a FRG-German and a GDR-German: the population had learnt to speak with one language and to think with another, as the 'double life' led by the citizens, a

¹³ Hammerthaler, 'Die Position des Theaters in der DDR', 225.

public and a private one, necessarily implied the existence of diverse, if not opposite, ways of being expressed.

GDR theatres, together with other cultural institutions, have often been attributed an anticipatory function, with regard to the events which led to the fall of the Berlin wall and eventually to unification. It is unquestionable that the need for change was felt and indeed expressed artistically through productions as well as more directly through open debates: letters of protest, signed by prominent artists, were sent to the government; the ensemble of the *Staatsschauspiel Dresden* exemplarily formulated a public document whose initial line 'Wir treten aus unseren Rollen heraus' was then quoted at the beginning of every performance; the *Volksbühne* and the *Deutsches Theater* in Berlin turned into meeting-points for those who wished to voice their discontent. Yet, without wishing to diminish the value of their contributions, it remains questionable whether their position was or could actually have been translated into concrete political action. The degree to which theatres had managed to turn from 'assoziative Öffentlichkeit' to 'öffentliches Forum' is also debatable: the public document with which the *Neues Forum* appealed to the citizens, on 10 September 1989, initially did not bear the signature of a single theatre artist. The same degree of diplomatic neutrality could also be discerned after unification, as the vigorous literary debate that took place amongst German intellectuals (which I examined in the previous chapter) was not followed by a more specific theatre debate. This somewhat detached behaviour can partly be explained by acknowledging that the political change the artists aspired to did not necessarily coincide with the wishes of the population. Castorf, for instance, used fiery words when describing the events of November 1989:

Als ich im Sommer vor fast fünf Jahren im Fernsehen DDR-Bürger sah, die weinend und zugleich lachend berichteten, daß sie drei volle Stunden im

ungarisch-österreichischen Unterholz gelegen hatten, war das miesig, nichts anderes. Das hatte nichts zu tun mit Revolution. Es ist die Reaktion von Leuten gewesen, die nicht wußten, was Abenteuer ist. Breit sächelnd: 'Nu simmer in dor Freiheit'. Natürlich war ich damals privilegiert, mit Geld in den Taschen, und doch wurde ich die Verachtung nicht los, Verachtung für diese kleinbürgerliche Gesellschaft, die atmosphärisch unangenehm war. Als ich diese Geschichte sah, wußte ich, daß die Leute das Wichtigste vergessen und verdrängt haben: Der erste Geschmack der Fremdbestimmung ist immer süß.¹⁴

Müller, more placidly, simply pointed out that different strata of the population demonstrated for different purposes:

Die Arbeiter in der DDR sind viel mehr rechtsorientiert als die Leute, die jetzt demonstrieren. Das sind junge Menschen und Intellektuelle oder Halbintellektuelle, Künstler. Die Arbeiter demonstrieren nicht. [...] 'Volk ohne Angst' — dieser dumme und richtige *Spiegel*-Titel — das ist ein Phänomen.¹⁵

The great majority of artists and intellectuals had produced an alternative to the real GDR in the form of an utopian one, an idealised socialism as opposed to the 'socialism' experienced in the previous forty years. 'Der dritte Weg' remained however de facto a rhetorical appeal untouched by the participation of the masses.

Another reason for the theatre's partial conformity to the authorities' guidelines lies in the fact that, in comparison with other forms of art, it enjoyed a relatively free atmosphere. Whilst on the one hand the government made sure to be in control of what was being staged (the main theatres, for instance, always had to present to party delegates not only their choice of texts, but also detailed conceptions of the productions) and did keep numerous files on potentially dangerous directors and actors, on the other the competences of the very institutions that were set up to keep an eye on theatrical events — from the *Theaterverband* to the *Gewerkschaft Kunst* to the SED itself — often overlapped, thus leaving gaps which could be exploited. Gerhard Wolfram came to the conclusion that 'der Zugriff der Macht auf das Theater war immer intrigant, nicht total.

¹⁴ Quoted in Schütt, 'Das erste Gespräch: Ein Sozialismus wie New York', 29-30.

¹⁵ Quoted in Merschmeier, 'Es kommen viele Leichen zum Vorschein: Gespräch mit Ulrich Mühle, Heiner Müller und Hilmar Thate', *Theater heute*, 12 (1989), 6, 7.

Er war immer taktisch intrigant'.¹⁶ It would have been for instance politically hazardous to arrest artists who were also renowned in the FRG; the SED government generally adopted more subtle means, which ranged from transfers (Castorf to Anklam, to name but one case), to sheer neglect obtained through an enforced lack of mention in the only GDR periodical specialised in theatrical affairs, *Theater der Zeit*, to the refusal of political concessions or to the denial of financial backing. It is within this framework that the concept of 'self-censorship' is to be understood. Leaving any all too easy judgmental comments aside, it is perhaps only fair to recognise the complexity of the situation in which artists found themselves: on the one extreme those who did not comply with the system, who consequently ran the risk of spending their life in complete artistic isolation; on the other those who did not enter into conflict with the authorities, who as a result gained for themselves the qualification of 'Staatsdichter' or other similar pejorative titles. During a symposium held in London at the end of 1988, the former GDR director Gerd Jurgons tried to relativise the problem by depicting an objective picture of the situation:

Nun wäre es billig, ungenau, diffamierend zu behaupten, daß die Kulturpolitik unseres Landes ausschließlich von einer Art dogmatisch verengten Dirigismus geprägt wäre. Die Lage ist bei weitem differenzierter, widersprüchlicher und nicht auf eine gängige Formulierung zu bringen. [...] Nicht ohne Bitterkeit, nicht ohne Scham merke ich an, daß wir Deutschen offenbar schon seit langem ein kritisierbares Verhältnis zur Obrigkeit hatten. Zivilcourage, persönlicher Mut und andere demokratische Tugenden sind bei ihnen nicht unbedingt weit verbreitet. Neigungen zur Selbstzensur, zur Reduzierung der eigenen Kreativität, der opportunistischen Anpassung an das politisch jeweils Dominierende sind immer wieder anzutreffen.¹⁷

On the other hand, theatre critics often acted as partners in crime with the artists, instead of carrying out their functions independently of state or theatre-based pressures. Well-meant intentions often clashed with negative responses from the playwrights, actors and directors themselves, who asked for more courageous attitudes. The emerging picture is

¹⁶ Wolfram, 'Wir waren alle auf der Suche...', 85.

¹⁷ Jurgons, 'Der Umgang mit der DDR-Gegenwartsdramatik aus der Sicht des Regisseurs', *GDR Monitor Special Series*, 7 (1990), 37.

that of a theatre criticism that was at the same time critical and loyal, and thus interrupted any potentially effective chain of protest, for the message originated in a performance (however indirectly) and received by the audience (however unconsciously) found no outlet in the general public. Critics would either limit themselves to reporting relatively insignificant elements of the performances, like scenic details, or, at the most, risk commentaries on the actual contents with undefined terms and vague formulations, effectively blocking the circulation of the ideas expressed on stage. Christoph Funke, a former GDR theatre critic, sees this as intrinsically positive:

Wie Kritiker bei uns Partner der Theaterschaffenden sind, so verstehen sie sich auch als Partner der Autoren. Weit über die Theaterkritik hinaus wecken sie Verständnis für neue Texte, deuten und analysieren das dramatische Schaffen, begleiten den Druck neuer Texte durch Nachworte und Erläuterungen, suchen in der Öffentlichkeit ein günstiges Klima für Vorstöße in Neuland zu schaffen.¹⁸

Hammerthaler, whilst mockingly commenting on the 'feinfühligsten Beschreibungen von all dem, was sich auf der Bühne ereignete, nachgerade eine Spezialität der Theaterkritik in der DDR',¹⁹ is at the same time quick to observe that the position of theatre critics was a priori much more potentially dangerous than the one of the artists, because of the intrinsic nature of their different tasks: the transitory character of a theatre event guaranteed a certain degree of security, and the subjective character of a theatrical interpretation allowed actors and directors to dupe the authorities, whereas a review printed in a periodical with a relatively large circulation automatically made theatre critics the targets of the SED's political power, together with playwrights and writers in general. Any attempt to back a specific director or a specific production had to be disguised within non-committal commentaries. A recollection of Martin Linzer, general

¹⁸ Funke, 'Über Theater schreiben', *GDR Monitor Special Series*, 7 (1990), 30.

¹⁹ Hammerthaler, 'Die Position des Theaters in der DDR', 221.

editor of *Theater der Zeit*, provides an example of how the periodical acted in such circumstances:

Der Punkt für mich war nicht, daß da [in Anklam] etwas politisch Hintergründiges oder Aufrührerisches passierte, sondern daß da einer war, der verrückte Sachen machte, die aus den bekannten Schemata völlig rausfielen. Das hat mich interessiert. Als ich merkte, daß die Tageszeitungskritik davon aus politischen Gründen nichts wissen wollte, habe ich versucht, das ganz naiv zu beschreiben — mit der Absicht, so einem Verrückten zu helfen. [...] Wir haben immer versucht — ob das Castorf war oder andere Leute, die nicht so im Zentrum standen, die Schwierigkeit hatten —, mit unseren bescheidenen Mitteln zu helfen, indem wir wenigstens gesagt haben, was sie inszeniert haben.²⁰

* * *

Castorf's initial attempts at directing, first in Senftenberg in 1978 (a production based on a collage of quotes by Brecht), then, a year later, in Brandenburg, collided with the guidelines of the SED, until the treatment of a particular text, Grünberg's *Golden fließt der Stahl* — a play about the socialist reconstruction of the GDR, which he put on stage again in 1996 in the *Volksbühne*, and will be dealt with extensively in Chapter 9 — caused him to be put on trial. Gregor Gysi, at the time still a lawyer, managed to win the case for Castorf, but could not prevent the consequential decision of the authorities to send him off to the 'schlimmste Provinz', Anklam, with a short detour via Greifswald. There he staged Wassili Schukschins' *Tüchtige Leute*, a play which deals with a group of petty-bourgeois people involved in small commercial transactions of dubious legal origin: they are aware of breaking the law but find justifications for their actions by creating their own law of economics, as illustrated by Aristarch, the main character:

Ich halte dir eine Vorlesung über Ökonomie, damit du nicht hinläufst und den Staatsanwalt zum Lachen bringst. Dein Staatsanwalt und all die Leute, die sich ernsthaft mit Ökonomie beschäftigen, wissen haargenau, daß geklaut wird: mehr noch, ein bestimmter Prozentsatz, wohl 15%, werden extra für Klauerei in

²⁰ Quoted in Balitzki, ' "Othello" in Anklam', 43-44.

Rechnung gestellt.²¹

The characters' main trait is 'improvisation', thanks to which they always manage to avert risky situations, and which allows them to build a financial empire. The problem arises when Wera, Aristarch's wife, threatens to go to the authorities, not to appease her guilty conscience, but because of jealousy. The play starts with a party to celebrate a successfully completed commercial transaction, and finishes with another, which is interrupted by the arrival of the police. In itself not terribly polemical, the text does not incline to moralisation either; there are no 'positive heroes' — the author made it clear that only the audience is entitled to that role. According to the review by a local theatre critic,²² the audience did make the best of that role, and translated the vices portrayed in the performance (calculation, greed, selfishness) into their own everyday reality, the corruption of bourgeois individuals indirectly mirroring the corruption of the Party. Castorf's transfer to Anklam was at this point inevitable.

* * *

'Castorf in Anklam, das war Rock'n'Roll auf dem Mond.'²³

Much has been said and written about the Anklam period (1981-85). It is therefore essential to sketch an historical background which incorporates theatrical details unfettered by anecdote. The Anklam theatre was not just another one of the

²¹ For further extracts of the adapted play see 'Konzeptionelles zu Tüchtige Leute von W. Schukschin', in the *Sammlung Theater Greifswald*.

²² Gundlach, 'Mehr heiter als satirisch: Wassili Schukschins *Tüchtige Leute* am Theater Greifswald', *Ostseezeitung*, 2/3 December 1978.

²³ Matussek, 'Rodeo im Wilden Osten: Über das Provinztheater in Anklam, DDR', *Der Spiegel*, 22 (1990), 195.

playhouses subsidized by the government; subordinated to the SED chief administration officers, it was the place where 'uncomfortable' directors were relegated to by the authorities, who could rest assured that no damage could be done to the system from a small town unknown to the majority of people in the GDR, let alone abroad. The official explanation of the *Intendant*, Mr. Bordel, who has been in charge of the theatre since the early 1980s, is that 'wer bei uns landt hat entweder Probleme mit dem Alkohol oder mit dem Leben'.²⁴ Perhaps more accurately, whoever landed in Anklam had problems with the government. Bordel, who is now on the verge of expulsion after an official investigation on charges of abuse of his position and corruption, is a trained physician and amateur actor, and represents the prototype of the loyal party-member, who was given the post by the SED and practically granted a lifelong contract, and who in turn kept a vigilant eye on his employees. His post-unification theatre plans shed light on his dubious theatrical vision:

Die Werkstätte könnten Anklam-Souvenirs herstellen, Tücher und Schlüsselbretter, wo 'Grüß aus Anklam' draufsteht. Und die Öffentlichkeitsarbeit könnte sich 'Nord-Agentur' nennen und eine touristische Zimmervermittlung übernehmen. Und in den großen Saal kommen Tische. Da können Getränke serviert werden und Noten zum Mitsingen.²⁵

It comes as no surprise that the relationship between Bordel and Castorf, at the time *Oberspielleiter*, was an awkward one, and that the *Intendant* eventually seized the first opportunity to dismiss him without notice. One positive consequence however emerged from this unpleasant state of affairs; given the complete lack of reputation of the theatre, one automatically had free hand over any possible conceptual development, by not having to follow a specific theatrical or aesthetic tradition that might have characterised the playhouse otherwise. As Castorf remembers:

²⁴ Op. cit., 195.

²⁵ Ibid., 206.

Man geht durch eine Straße, diese Straße ist die Stadt, [...] und der Ankommende hat die Gewißheit, dort sein Leben nicht zu beenden. Sinn macht deshalb, das auszuleben, was man vielleicht woanders nicht machen kann oder nicht gemacht hat. [...] Wenn etwas passiert, dann dort.²⁶

Indeed, the ensemble managed, at least initially, to perform undisturbed by the authorities; the punishment inflicted on Castorf consisted in fact in the absolute lack of any mention in the regional or local press, let alone in the specialised one. Yet the degree of the resulting artistic isolation — which has acquired mythical proportions — needs to be put into perspective. Firstly, the word had spread practically everywhere in the GDR that, in order to experience innovative theatre, one had to go to Anklam rather than concentrate on Berlin. Actors and directors alike, including personalities like Fritz Marquardt, organised veritable ‘weekend trips’ from Halle, Gera, Chemnitz, Berlin, which acquired the distinctive character of a ‘Gesamtereignis’, as the experience did not only include the viewing of the theatrical productions themselves but gained an almost fictional tone from the moment in which the train journey towards the ‘East German Siberia’ began.²⁷ Moreover, the first printed report allegedly dated 1986, whereas in truth, *Theater der Zeit*’s first review, on the occasion of the production *Die Nacht nach der Abschlußfeier* in 1982, already shows that theatre critics were far from indifferent towards Castorf, and, as mentioned earlier, Martin Linzer took his position seriously from the very start. This led inevitably to the authorities doing the same; Stasi files on the theatre, dating as early as 1982, are a proof that the SED was very much aware of the situation in Anklam:

Konkrete Formen des ‘alternativen Theaters’, die Etablierung negativ-feindlicher Kräfte, welche analoge Erscheinungen aus dem nichtsozialistischen Ausland anstreben, sind seit längerer Zeit am Landestheater Anklam sichtbar. [...] Mit hoher Wahrscheinlichkeit wird durch negativ eingestellte Kunst- und Kulturschaffende am Landestheater getestet, wie weit sie bei Inszenierungen gehen können, bis staatlicherseits dagegen eingeschritten wird. Nach internen

²⁶ Quoted in Balitzki, ‘“Othello” in Anklam’, 44.

²⁷ Recollections from Marie-Anne Fliegel and Jörg Simonides. My interview in the *neues theater* in Halle on 7 February 1996.

Einschätzungen ist am Landestheater eine Situation entstanden, die das Theater für die sozialistische Gesellschaft untauglich macht, da es nur materielle und geistige Mittel verbraucht, ohne der Gesellschaft zu nützen.²⁸

The analysis of the Anklam productions that follows will therefore also include Stasi reports, at times more accurate than the theatrical reviews themselves.

The choice of texts put on stage is revealing. With the only exception of Wladimir Tendrjakow's *Die Nacht nach der Abschlußfeier* (Castorf's first production), the remaining five consist of well-known plays: Müller's *Der Auftrag* and *Die Schlacht*, Ibsen's *Nora*, Shakespeare's *Othello* and Brecht's *Trommeln in der Nacht*, even though the last two, as will be shown later, were stopped after the première and the dress rehearsal respectively. The majority of the great 'classics' by Shakespeare and Goethe were only staged by Castorf in the FRG towards the end of the 1980s, when he was employed by various West German theatres as a guest director. He must have been aware of the unwanted attention one would inevitably draw upon oneself when staging Müller's texts; in more renowned theatres, for example, a special authorisation had to be secured before one could deal with Müller's and Volker Braun's works at all. It had become customary to stage 'safe' plays instead, with plots which would dupe the authorities into a false sense of security; the latter's belief was in fact that nothing could go wrong with a traditionally staged *Hamlet*, for the opportunities to infiltrate GDR references into the text were apparently minimal. And if a director did find a way of incorporating foreign elements into the original, he or she would meet with the disapproval of those who still insisted that faithfulness to the text was a vital precondition. I will tackle the debate based on the notion of *Werktreue* at some length in Chapter 7, in connection with Castorf's guest productions in the FRG, where his departure from 'classical' texts is at its most recognisable. At this stage it will suffice to

²⁸ 'Stasi-Information zum Landestheater Anklam, 23 November 1982'. Reprinted in Balitzki, 46-47.

stress the unique significance and implications that the term gained in a GDR-context: as long as a performance followed a certain text literally and dogmatically it was possible for the authorities to rule out unpleasant surprises from the start, by being in a position to anticipate its result-practically word for word. A ‘Trojan Horse’ effect, achieved by fooling the authorities into believing that the theatre evening would be a predictable one — that is, by adding or altering material only shortly before the première — inevitably led to the continuation of the production being prevented.

Not much is known about Castorf’s first Anklam production; its only review did not tell much about the theatrical intentions behind the performance: characteristically, it presented the plot without distinguishing between the original text and the version which was eventually put on stage, thus giving the impression that Castorf diligently followed the play. It praised the ensemble, ‘in dem jede Figur einmalig unverwechselbar ist’,²⁹ and the stage design, ‘in der jedes Kostüm den Geist der Figur atmet, in der jedes Detail nötig ist’.³⁰ One is actually none the wiser about what happened on stage, and, more importantly, why: we learn that ‘die Stückfassung des Anklamer Theaters [...] verschärft den Blick auf die Substanz des Stückes’,³¹ without actually being told what the substance is. If no insight into Castorf’s concept can be gained from its reading, the style with which it is written provides however a perfect example of the ‘vague formulations’ and ‘indirect help’ of theatre critics I mentioned earlier. The criticism relative to the second production, Müller’s *Die Schlacht*, provides a more accurate analysis and allows one to draw the first, tentative conclusions with regard to Castorf’s intentions. A degree of vagueness is still perceivable in the reviews, and the attention is still concentrated on

²⁹ Tasche, ‘Die Nacht nach dem Abschlußfeier’, *Theater der Zeit*, 2 (1982), 4.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

details: it is for instance reported how 'wenn dann die Fleischerfrau (Gabriele Gysi a.G.) zum Monolog im roten Unterrock erscheint mit Koffer, aus dem sie sich anzieht, sieht ihr der Mann (Arnst) wie bei umgekehrtem Striptease zu'.³² The explanation provided is that Castorf instructed his ensemble to show a 'verfremdete Spielweise', which 'löst grausige Beklemmung, gibt Gesehenes zu bedenken'.³³ Reading between the lines, one is tempted to come to the conclusion that the first attempts at irritating audience and authorities alike did not go unnoticed. The simple fact of showing a semi-naked woman on stage, in a country renowned for its prudish attitude to sexual matters, is surely provocation enough. When she then comments on the furniture that surrounds her (a piano, a gramophone, a leather armchair, 'Zeichen biederer Bürgerlichkeit', to quote Wilzopolski, at the time dramaturge in Anklam³⁴), the effect is undeniably reached.

It is however with *Othello* that Castorf's purposes and devices came to the fore, and that the first serious troubles with the SED started. The 'irritation-principle', a key concept in his theatrical vision, which had been only cautiously introduced in the former productions, reached its full scale. The opening scenes show two Cypriot ladies engrossed in conversation:

- First lady: Ich bin sehr gerne ins Theater gegangen.
 Second lady: Ich bin auch ins Theater gegangen. Aber lieber noch in den Zirkus oder sonst zu einer sportlichen Veranstaltung.
 First lady: Ja, war ja auch schön. Aber damals war es schwer, eine Theaterkarte zu bekommen.
 Second lady: Ja, da mußte man sich anstellen.
 First lady: Da haben Sie recht. Und wissen sie, warum? Damals waren die Leute theaterbegeistert.
 Second lady: Damals.
 First lady: Und heute?
 Second lady: Ja ...³⁵

³² Gleiß, 'Die Schlacht', *Theater der Zeit*, 7 (1982), 2.

³³ Ibid., 2.

³⁴ Wilzopolski, 'Notizen zu Frank Castorf's Inszenierung *Die Schlacht* von Heiner Müller am Theater Anklam', 25.

³⁵ This and the following quotations from the production can be found in Wilzopolski, 'Notizen zu *Othello*'. Original in the Berlin *Akademie der Künste*, partly reprinted in Wilzopolski, 33-36.

The performance was emphasised by the constant employment of music, a device which would become one of Castorf's trademarks. Rodrigo and Othello celebrated their agreement by singing together the Rolling Stones' lines 'You got my heart, you got my soul'; Montano and the clown, whose actions were accompanied by the sound of *The House of the Rising Sun*, ordered a bottle of beer only to be told that the fridge where it was kept belonged to Othello (Clown: 'Negerknechte. Für den Neger gibt's Bier und weiße Frauen...'). Montano then proceeded to list all the furniture present on stage: 'Klavier des Negers, Sofa des Negers', etc. The scenes between Othello and Desdemona were murmured in English. The main departure from the text was provided by the conclusion: Rodrigo demonstratively opened the fridge to fetch a bottle of beer, unaware that the fridge had been fitted with a spring-gun equipment in the meantime; Othello forced Desdemona's head into a bucket full of water and drowned her, before taking a handful of tablets and collapsing. *Othello* was taken off the theatre programme immediately after the première, the official reason given being that the audience's reaction after the performance had been so negative that no alternative had presented itself other than the cancellation of the following dates. Yet when one considers that, on average, the Anklam's audience actually consisted of theatre critics and various friends of Castorf and the ensemble on one side, and of SED officials on the other, it is not hard to guess whence the decision came.

Müller's *Der Auftrag — Erinnerung an eine Revolution*, Castorf's fourth production in Anklam, is possibly his most renowned. The text had been previously staged only twice in the GDR (in Karl-Marx-Stadt under the direction of Axel Richter in 1981, and in the Berliner *Volksbühne* by Müller himself a year later), and the interest for a play which dealt with revolutionary failures was very much awake. Castorf simplified

the text by omitting some of the dramatis personae: Danton, Robespierre, the 'Engel der Verzweiflung', whose lines were eventually taken over and coldly spoken by Antoine's wife (here a prostitute), and, most importantly, Debuisson's father, whose role in the 'Heimkehr des Verlorenen Sohnes' scene was replaced by a fictitious mother. The accent was purposefully shifted from revolutionary action to the act of its recollection ('Erinnerung an eine Revolution'), by showing Debuisson, Sasportas and Galloudec sitting on a stage covered with glowing sand, more interested in finding relief from the heat by playing with buckets of water than in the telling of their official assignment. A bag containing the 'Auftrag' was later returned to Debuisson, who continually dropped it on the floor. Castorf showed how betrayal of the revolution began with indifference and apathy. Debuisson's return home was turned into an occasion for a family party, arguably the most powerful scene in the production, and the father, as mentioned before, replaced by the figure of an hysterical mother. In a semi-senile state, she initially chanted to herself a meaningless song about the failures of a frog (not being able to sleep, not being able to shave), and suddenly recovered all her strength after having been made aware of her son's presence. With an immediate *volte-face* she enacted her authoritative greeting ritual by forcing Debuisson to kneel in front of her ('Auf die Knie, Kanaille. Bitte deine Mutter um den Segen') and proceeded to break a number of eggs on his head, before happily falling asleep. The scene had been observed and ironically commented by two women, the personification of Debuisson's 'Erste Liebe', who tried to win his attention by calling him alternatively with his real name and 'Oedipus'. Yet it was only after the mother had fallen asleep that Debuisson could turn to them, freed of his Oedipus complex: the facets of his first love — eroticism and intellect — literally divided between two women, and his hesitation transparent. The first woman had been

following his movements from the moment he entered the stage, provocatively licking her ice-cream faster and faster as he approached her, and dealt with the Jamaica theme by incanting some voodoo-rituals and by telling the story of a group of slaves who murdered their former owner after he had given them the freedom they did not want. The second woman consoled him with her theory of the disparity of human beings, explaining how revolution in France and revolution in Jamaica do not go necessarily hand in hand. Not being able to cope with the jealousy of the two, and not being able to decide between them either, Debuisson eventually dropped out of the action and of the theatre itself; the back of the stage opened to reveal an open green space from which a car appeared, blinding the audience with its lights and carrying him away. The stage design provided a significant connection with the following scene, 'Mann im Fahrstuhl': every door and aperture slammed shut, the lights dimmed, giving one the impression that the whole stage had become a lift. At the end of the monologue a breach was made visible again, this time of a different sort: through an opening of stage and theatre doors the character and the audience alike could see Anklam, which, despite being very much real, could hardly be recognised as such. Reality had been transformed into a theatrical prop.

Hartmut Meyer, Castorf's stage designer at the time, often insists on the artistic value of his work in and for itself. Making a virtue out of necessity, Meyer compensated for the lack of financial means by making the most of the materials always present in a theatre (paint, paper, walls, doors). The resulting spatial constellations appeared therefore in all their simplicity, and were often all the more powerful for that: the simplest material acquired a plastic quality and an architectural function, was characterised by an enforced timelessness — in that it could not be related to a specific

historical epoch or geographical area —, and thus simultaneously operated with the actors without hindering, or, worse still, outdoing them. Such a stage design also accentuated the theatrical intentions behind the production, instead of being a sheer consequence of them; the clear-cut division of the three main scenes (Paris, Jamaica, in the lift), which offered three different perspectives from which to view the same subject, was safeguarded by a distinct change of lights — through which every separation acquired a film-like quality — and by a few cleverly placed props, although the actual modification of the stage was minimal. Castorf's attempt to get to the core of the text implied in fact by no means a completion of Müller's fragment or its transformation into a coherent story line. The accent was on simplification rather than unity, the text reduced to a series of 'stories', to achieve what Castorf called 'Psychologisierung der Geschichte',³⁶ namely the activation of historical awareness as the 'Auftrag' passed on to the audience.

Try as they might, *Intendant* and official authorities could not find any objection to the production, other than the trite argument based on *Werktreue*. They however compensated for their unwillingly given placet with the following one. Castorf had planned to put on stage Brecht's *Trommeln in der Nacht* on 7 April 1984, yet 14 days before the première the actor Hans-Günter Marx was unexpectedly arrested, as the news leaked out that his character (Murk) would have to quote the line 'Ja, heutzutage muß man auf dem grünen Ast sitzen und Ellenbogen haben' (Brecht's original). The sentence would have been innocuous had the domicile of the SED in Anklam at that time not been in the Ellenbogenstraße. His role was quickly overtaken by the actress Sylvia Rieger,

³⁶ Quoted in Wilzopolski, 'Das assoziative im Theaterspiel. Eine Untersuchung des assoziativen Denkens als mobilisierendes Moment der Spieltätigkeit, dargestellt an Frank Castorfs Inszenierung von Heiner Müllers *Der Auftrag* am Theater Anklam', 4.

and rehearsals continued more or less undisturbed until it became clear that the dress rehearsal, at which a number of theatre critics and friends were present, had been changed into an 'Arbeitsprobe' behind closed doors.³⁷ Actors were forced to play in front of an audience consisting entirely of SED members and the(ir) loyal *Intendant*. The recollection of Gudrun Wilzopolski (another dramaturge in Anklam) may help give a general picture of the events that followed:

Was ich in den folgenden drei Stunden erlebte, ist bis heute für mich nicht genau faßbar. Die Grenzen zwischen Theaterspiel und Realität scheinen durchbrochen. Der Zustand von Wut und ohnmächtigem Haß haben die Darsteller in einer Weise motiviert, daß die darstellerischen Vorgänge ungeheuer direkt und bissig sind. [...] Die Verletzbarkeit der Schauspieler findet Ausdruck im Schlußtableau: Zu der Musik des 'Letzten Walzers' kommen alle Darsteller lachend an die Bühnenrampe und werfen weiße Nelken in den Zuschauerraum und winken, bis der Vorhang fällt. Danach Stille. Die Situation ist absurd.³⁸

The final decision taken by the authorities was that the première would not take place, as the Anklam public would not be in a position to understand the production, and it was the duty of the theatre to protect the interest of its audience. A Stasi-file compiled afterwards also clarifies how much the settlement had been an internal as well as an official matter:

Im Ergebnis dieses Leitungsdurchlaufs wurde [...] von den Intendanten eingeschätzt, daß die Inszenierung Mangel an Historiailät [sic] ausweist, die Fabel entideologisiert wurde und die Beschränktheit in den esthetischen [sic] Mittel kennzeichnet und so nicht dem Anklamer Publikum vorgestellt wird.³⁹

To make matters worse, disciplinary measures were taken against Castorf for having acted against the *Intendant* (by insisting that the rehearsal be an open one), and for having sullied the GDR's good name (by drawing comparisons between the prosecution of artists under the Nazi regime and the case at hand). Various commissions dealt with

³⁷ For a detailed description of the dress rehearsal see Sieling, 'Aber sagen Sie nichts gegen Anklam'.

³⁸ Wilzopolski, 'Erbärmliche Macht: Erinnerungen an *Trommeln in der Nacht*', 76.

³⁹ 'MfS-Stellungnahme zur OPK *Othello*, 15 April 1985'. Quoted in Balitzki, 52.

the matter and with Bordel's request to have Castorf dismissed without notice; as a definite verdict could not be reached, they settled for a severe reprimand. The *Intendant* made however perfectly clear how the future would look: 'Du kannst jetzt wieder arbeiten, aber du kommst immer wieder nur bis zur Generalprobe und danach setzen wir es ab. Du wirst aber trotzdem nicht entlassen'.⁴⁰

Castorf's last production in Anklam, Ibsen's *A Doll's House* (staged as *Nora*), was thus staged at the culmination of what had undoubtedly become an impossible state of affairs. Both the content of the play, a socio-psychological study of human behaviour, and the actions of all the characters were radicalised to the extreme.⁴¹ The character of Nora was given sharp contours. Hysterical, selfish, unhappy, she screamed a Christmas song in the face of the uninvited guest Krogstadt; she tried to perform morning aerobics exercises to relax but was hindered by frantic movements; she showed the power of her repressed strength by lifting an armchair; she endeavoured to channel her creative impulses, but in vain: her attempt at dancing the tarantella degraded into a convulsive dance to the Rolling Stones' *Honky Tonk Woman*. Helmer, in turn, was not shown as a stiff, diligent clerk, but presented as someone who could have become a rock'n'roll star and settled for a bank career instead, with the house, the car and the handsome wife to prove it. Dr. Rank was turned into a 'Frau Doktor' with lesbian tendencies. Krogstadt was not an unctuous profiteer, but a vulnerable character whose main preoccupation concerned his meeting with Kristine, his first love. The atmosphere was permanently loaded with repressed frustration. One of the most powerful examples is provided by the scene in the first act in which Nora expressed to Kristine and Rank the wish to be able to say 'Die können mich alle mal ...' in Helmer's presence. The phrase was reduced to the

⁴⁰ Quoted by Castorf in his interview with Claudia Sieling, Berlin 28 January 1991. Part of her thesis is reprinted in Wilzopolski, 79-84 .

⁴¹ I am relying on a description of the production provided by Martin Linzer. See Linzer, 'Theatralische Vivisektion: Ibsens *Nora* in Anklam', *Theater der Zeit*, 7 (1985), 25.

German word 'Scheiße', spoken first by Nora, who was then joined by Kristine and Rank: what might have appeared somewhat trivial at first was turned into a 'Scheiße'-aria which exemplified the misery and the triviality of their everyday lives. The ending reminds one of *Der Auftrag*; the back of the stage showed an illuminated door leading 'outside', the exit to freedom for Nora as it had been for Debuissou. Interestingly enough, with *Nora* we notice a breakthrough in the theatre critics' reception; surely aware of the fact that it would have been Castorf's last production in Anklam, Martin Linzer sided openly with the director for the first time. His review for *Theater der Zeit* ends as follows:

Unzweifelhaft ist hier ein Regie-Talent am Werk, das seine Interpretationen über die Schauspieler, deren Potenzen freisetzend, transportiert, und nicht über modernistische Regietricks. [...] Ich halte solche Experimente für nützlich und notwendig, dieser Regisseur braucht Aufgaben, die ihn selber qualifizieren...⁴²

Yet not even Linzer's authority could prevent the inevitable. After receiving a report by the *IM* 'Dario Fo'⁴³ and a series of complaints after the première the *Intendant* was only too happy to seize the opportunity to dismiss Castorf.

* * *

⁴² Op. cit., 25.

⁴³ The report is a masterpiece of SED theatre criticism. Here is a fragment relative to the stage design: 'Das Bühnenbild zum Stück ist bereits fertig. Ich habe es gesehen und möchte es folgendermaßen auslegen: Meiner Meinung nach wird ausgesagt, daß gewisse Grenzen in unserem Land gesetzt sind. Dargestellt sind eine Art Hochhäuser, die wie in einer Straßenschlucht immer weiter zusammengehen und dann am Ende durch eine Mauer abgeschlossen werden. Man kann das eindeutig als Mauer bezeichnen, weil sie hinten hoch ist. Unter der Mauer ist ein Schlitz, wo man vielleicht noch durchflitzen kann. An den Seiten ist dann zur Hälfte ein Klavier zu sehen. Das kann meiner Meinung nach aussagen, daß dort eine Mauer steht, damit Schluß ist. Aber einige kommen eben doch durch. Gewissermaßen kommt darin auch eine gewisse Symbolik zum Ausdruck. Zum Beispiel kann man die Klaviere, die zur Hälfte eingemauert sind, als Misere der Künstler bezeichnen.' *IM* 'Dario Fo', 29 March 1985. Quoted by Castorf in his 'Held Hübchen' article, *Theater heute Jahrbuch* (1994), 38.

The years between 1986 and 1988 are characterised by Castorf wandering from theatre to theatre, first in the GDR and subsequently in the FRG and Switzerland. As far as the working conditions in the GDR were concerned, he remembers how the *Intendanten* of various theatres, Klaus Erfort in Gera, Peter Sodann in Halle, above all Gerhard Meyer in Karl-Marx-Stadt, took him under their wings and offered him the little help they could give ('Kommst mal zu mir, haben sie zu mir — wie zu einem ungeliebten Verwandten — gesagt, dann schieben wir dich zum nächsten, der dich durchfüttert'⁴⁴). He staged Goethe's *Clavigo* in Gera, Lorca's *Bernarda Albas Haus* in Halle, Müller's *Der Bau* and Ibsen's *Ein Volksfeind* in Karl-Marx-Stadt, and finally Müller's *Wolokolamsker Chausee I-III* in Frankfurt/Oder.

Clavigo's main theme, the conflict between love and politics, between a spiritual and social existence spent longing for freedom and a petit-bourgeois opportunism, was exemplified on stage through the by then habitual modification of the dramatis personae: the roles of Guilbert and Saint George cancelled, Beaumarchais played by a woman, and, most importantly, Carlos played by two actors, Uwe-Dag Berlin and the present Bochum *Intendant* Leander Haußmann.⁴⁵ A certain conceptual affinity to *Der Auftrag* is recognisable: the opening scene portrayed Marie Beaumarchais emerging from newspapers (as Antoine did in the stage version of Müller's text). Joined by Sophie Beaumarchais, she cited Goethe's lines 'Ach, wenn ich dich ihn verachten lehren könnte' in raptures before being interrupted by the arrival of Beaumarchais. Both acted as surprised as the audience at seeing a woman: 'Wir hatten keine Schwester, wir hatten einen Bruder'. In Castorf's (stage) world every character insisted on being the centre of attention; indeed, misunderstandings arose precisely because no one paid attention to the

⁴⁴ Quoted in Balitzki, 'Karl-Marx-Stadt, Gera, Halle ...', 65.

⁴⁵ A detailed description of the production was compiled by Cordula Alwardt, Castorf's assistant director at the time. See Alwardt, 'Dokumentation im Auftrag des Verbandes der Theaterschaffenden der DDR'. Original in *Akademie der Künste, Bereich Theaterdokumentation*, Berlin.

presence of others. An example: as Marie rejected Buenco's apologetic defence 'Ich bin zwar ein unbedeutender Mensch...', Sophie appeared and interfered in the conversation by passing a judgement on Marie's actions ('Sie hat geschwitzt bis elf'). The oversensitive Buenco immediately applied the 'geschwitzt' to himself, raised his arms distrustfully, and with an offended tone made it clear that 'Ich bin zwar ein unbedeutender Mensch, aber schwitzen tue ich nicht!'. Every situation, every struggle, every ritualised game-play between men and women was caricatured and driven ad absurdum. Clavigo illustrated his thirst for power by using an armchair as a metaphor (as Nora did to show her strength): he attempted to balance it on his head as if it had been a crown, tried to find the best position for it by playfully moving it around the stage before sitting on it. He was shown caught between two poles, on the one hand his feelings for Maria (love) and on the other his friendship for Carlos (power, recognition), whose further division into two characters added tension to the conflict. This strategy, as applied to 'Erste Liebe' in *Der Auftrag*, brought the implied duality of a longing for freedom and a longing for conformity to the fore: the former not realisable because of the character's innate servility; the latter, a will to power which made use of everything from violence to flattery. The audience's reaction to the performance had been a mixed one, ranging from the enthusiasm of its youngest members to the accusations of its most conventional ones.⁴⁶

The occasion for the 1986 staging of *Bernarda Albas Haus*⁴⁷ in the *neues theater* in Halle had been the fiftieth anniversary of Federico García Lorca's death. Castorf's

⁴⁶ A third of the audience left the première under protest; the production was subsequently played only four times in the following fourteen months. Yet a letter sent to the theatre by a spectator help put the 'scandal' into perspective: 'Keine Buh-Rufe, keine faulen Eier, kein empörtes bühnenstürmendes Publikum. Nach der Pause waren nicht mehr gegangen als bei "normalen" Vorstellungen auch. Aber auch keine historischen Kostüme und Masken, keine idealistisch-ästhetisierenden Rezitationen und Theatralik, keine bürgerliche Langeweile und Fadheit'. Matthias Vernaldi, 'Clavigo — ein Theaterskandal'. Original letter in *Akademie der Künste, Bereich Theaterdokumentation*, Berlin.

⁴⁷ See photographs in Appendix 2.c.

production accentuated above all the sexual undertones of Lorca's female tragedy of misery and oppression in a Spanish village still dominated by matriarchal values. The mother, in Lorca's text a sixty-year-old despot with no signs of femininity, was impersonated by Marie-Anne Fliegel (an actress hardly older than the ones who personified the daughters), in a *primus inter pares* situation, whereby the former's attractiveness and youth generated a rivalry with the latter that went beyond the sheer establishment and control of power within the family. The grandmother, María Josefa, was in turn portrayed by a young actor, who wandered on stage wearing a bathrobe throughout the production. The stage design consisted almost exclusively of a leather sofa placed on central stage and a hothouse at the back. All these elements created a sultry atmosphere: the relationship between mother and 'grandmother' showing sexual connotations and unloaded sexual energy, illustrated by their embraces on the sofa; the hothouse, used by the daughters as playground and place of refuge, a symbol of organic nature, whilst at the same time referring to its enclosed, unreal character. The production opened with a drawing of lottery numbers supervised by a male notary (also not present in Lorca's text) — the daughters betting on the results and playing ping-pong with the winning balls, thus showing that the father's inheritance was of such a small amount that it was not worth arguing for it — and ended with Adela who, after having been shot by the mother for having sung the revolutionary tune of the Jarama-Front, resuscitated and spoke the last line 'Ja, Frauen können eben nicht schießen'. In between the portrayal of all the other things that women cannot do, always entrapped in the same oppressing space (the stage set remained unaltered during the performance), from finding true love to expressing themselves socially, historically, politically, even verbally: texts were repeated again and again until one of daughters irritatedly pointed out that 'die

Dinge wiederholen sich. Ich sehe, daß alles eine furchtbare Wiederholung ist' — a line which in Lorca's original text commented on the unalterability of women's condition. Despite references to the Spanish location (allusions to Dali's paintings, Buñuel's films, Bizet's *Carmen*), it became gradually clear that the condition portrayed was a universal one, which moreover went beyond boundaries of gender; hence the introduction of the two male characters in the original female tragedy. As soon as a number of newspaper reviews focused on the ensemble's impudence in (mis)using the text of an anti-fascist hero ('Sicher, da sieht sich manches ganz originell an, aber wo bleibt das Original?';⁴⁸ 'Wo bleibt die Ehrfurcht vor dem Erbe?'⁴⁹), the *Intendant*, worried that his theatre might attract the attention of the authorities, suggested that Castorf move to Karl-Marx-Stadt.

Der Bau and *Ein Volksfeind* are normally labelled as Castorf's most 'typical' GDR productions. The choice and succession of these texts had not been a casual one, Müller and Ibsen representing, according to Castorf, antipodal ways of analysing individual and social human behaviour:

Bei Ibsen interessiert mich die Art, fast naturwissenschaftlich exakt menschliches Verhalten analysieren zu können und in einen sozialen Kontext zu bringen. Das ist ungeheuer aktuell, wie das 'Geheimnis Mensch' funktioniert. Der Gegenpol ist Müller. Er läßt aus komplexen gesellschaftlichen Zusammenhängen menschliches Fühlen entstehen.⁵⁰

His treatment of *Der Bau* focused therefore on individuals and on their relationships to others, rather than on collective social behaviour. Müller, who read and authorised the stage version, had already warned that the text could not be staged as the 'Abbildung eines Baugeschehens' and that 'der Abstand (die Haltung) zum Material [...] ist mitgeschrieben, gehört zur Wirklichkeit des Stücks und muß mit dargestellt werden'.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Antosch, 'Sünden wider das Original. Kein guter Dienst an Federico García Lorca: Kritisches zur Premiere von *Bernarda Albas Haus* im neuen theater', *Der neue Weg*, 19 November 1986.

⁴⁹ Pantenius, 'Grausige Szenen im Irrenhaus: Ein Lorca-Drama als "Spielmaterial" in einer surrealistischen Inszenierung am "nt" Halle', *Liberal-Demokratische Zeitung*, 26 March 1987.

⁵⁰ Quoted in Winzer, 'Die Welt auf dem Theater', *Die Weltbühne*, 11 April 1989.

⁵¹ Quoted in Linzer, 'Bau-Arbeit', *Theater der Zeit*, 11 (1986), 2.

Castorf's attempt can be summarised as the telling of the histories of individuals who, initially alone, came into contact with others similarly 'handicapped', formed relationships of various kinds — in a background of love, politics, strikes — , and finally departed, bereft of all illusions and ideologies, but enriched by experiences. The events poetically told by Müller were translated into plausible experiences, and put into a real historical context through the addition of documentary material: audio material relating to Gagarin's first space travels, to Walter Ulbricht's speech of 19 August 1961, to Gustav Adolf's victory in the world amateur cycling championship (!). Müller's depiction of human feelings was rendered through associative chains of thought originating primarily in music, whose significance had already been allusively portrayed in the theatre-programme.⁵² party delegates were shown singing *Kauf Dir einen bunten Luftballon*, the workers intoned *La Paloma*. The path to enlightenment was suggested by Barka's shift from anarchy to communism, experienced not without pain and temporary loss of identity. The path to socialism — the stage design was dominated by a series of red strips of plastic kept meticulously clean by Hasselbein — pushed any subplots in the background: the love affair between the party-secretary Donat and the 'Ballerina auf dem Bau' Schlee terminated in a business-like manner ('Wir werden Freunde bleiben'), and did not constitute the performance's actual finale. The last scene was devoted to Barka, who reappeared on stage to proclaim 'Ich bin die Fähre zwischen Eiszeit und Kommune'.

Ein Volksfeind is remembered by Castorf as 'eine meiner besten, politischsten und bösesten Inszenierungen. Um es sehen zu können, sind Zuschauer durch die

⁵² See for instance the extract from Bogdanow's *Die Kunst und das Proletariat*: 'Das Arbeitslied war nicht ein Zeitvertrieb oder ein einfaches Vergnügen. In der gemeinsamen Arbeit vereinigte es die Anstrengungen der Arbeitenden, half ihnen, sich aufeinander einzustellen, gab den Anstrengungen eine rhythmische Regelmäßigkeit, einen rhythmischen Zusammenhang.' Theatre-programme, 1.

Toilettenfenster eingedrungen'.⁵³ The risk of it not reaching the première had been high, as neither Castorf nor the *Intendant* initially seemed to be able to convince the actor Gerd Preusche (Dr. Stockmann) to omit the line 'Vielleicht ist es im freien Westen auch nicht so viel besser, aber man wird nicht so langsam zu Tode gequält wie hier bei uns' from his speech, a line which could indeed be found in Ibsen's original but whose fortuitously implied meaning could have resulted in unpredictable reactions from the audience. Castorf's second Ibsen production was conceptually close to *Nora*; the stage design had been left practically unaltered, and, for those who missed the Anklam event, the actress Katherina Lange acted as a reminder, opening the scene with 'Ich heiÙe Nora, ich komme aus einem anderen Stück', before singing *Je suis seule ce soir*. Other characters had been added to the original *dramatis personae*: Asta, Peter Stockmann's wife, and 'ein Mann, so um die 54', whose identity was disclosed during the performance. The speech that Stockmann notoriously gives in the fourth act in front of a large gathering of assembled townspeople was shown on a TV screen instead: he was negated even physical contact with them, and eventually sought refuge in alcohol. Peter Stockmann, his hostile brother, Mayor, Chief of Police and Chairman of the Governors of the Baths, wore a fascistoid black uniform and spoke his lines in Norwegian. The closing scene saw the quartet Dr. and Mrs. Stockmann, Petra and Captain Horster, hanging Ibsen ('ein Mann, so um die 54') on the safety iron curtain on central stage while *Yellow Submarine* could be heard in the background.

Castorf's last GDR production, performed in the *Kleist Theater* (Frankfurt/Oder) in 1988, was based on Müller's *Wolokolamsker Chaussee I-III* (the fourth and fifth part had not yet been written). The theatre-programme, also compiled by Castorf, gave little hints as to what to expect from the production, but it helped establish the right

⁵³ Quoted in Balitzki, 'Karl-Marx-Stadt, Gera, Halle ...', 65.

perspective to it: the fragment of Scholochow's *Der stille Don* (of which a section of Chapter 20 was reprinted) suggested that its fundamental theme was a questioning of moral and political responsibility, and Müller's comment on the working classes' participation in the post-war inception of the GDR⁵⁴ indicated that the approach taken was a critical one. Castorf's alterations to the text — up to a point inevitable, given its monologue-format — were primarily based on his concern 'daß wir dabei sind, eine neue Vaterfigur aufzubauen. Heiner Müller als neue, unbewußte Zensurbehörde'.⁵⁵ So the first and second part of the trilogy were united, and all roles played by four actors, who thus, of necessity, combined together the most disparate characters. In the last section they spoke most of their lines behind a paper wall, and emerged from it slowly and with difficulty: initially only a mouth was visible, which told with a laconic tone of 'jenen Tagen im Juni, die wir in unserem Kalender gestrichen haben'; then a bleeding ear, a head, a wrist. The actress Gitta Schweighöfer related the story of the Spanish fighter who became minister and was destroyed by his post, and portrayed him as a sad, clown-like martyr, who dared only put his face and hands through the paper wall, while the others intoned 'Madrid, du wunderbare ...'. Another actor called for resistance by spraying the English word 'STRIKE' on the wall: the rest of them, dutifully impressed, followed his example and smeared paint on their faces. All characters eventually freed themselves from this 'Mauer des Schweigens' by tearing the scenic device to pieces, a powerful metaphor for an act of self-liberation and historical development.

⁵⁴ 'Die Revolution in der DDR konnte nur für die Arbeiterklasse gemacht werden, nach Dezimierung der Avantgarde, Depravierung der Masse, Zerstörungen des Zweiten Weltkrieges im Osten Deutschlands und in der Sowjetunion — nicht von ihr. Der Nachvollzug im Bewußtsein mußte ihr unter den Bedingungen des Kalten Krieges abgefordert werden, in einem besetzten und geteilten Land, im Trommelfeuer der täglichen Werbung für die Wunder des Kapitalismus im anderen deutschen Staat, Rechtsnachfolger des Deutschen Reichs, gesundgeschrumpft in zwei Weltkriegen. Diese Wirklichkeit ist mit den klassischen marxistischen Kategorien nicht zu greifen: sie schneiden ins Fleisch'. Theatreprogramme, 13.

⁵⁵ Quoted in 'Alte Stücke neu gelesen: Frank Castorfs Bemerkungen in einem Rundtischgespräch, geleitet von Dieter Görne', *Theater der Zeit* 1(1989), 36.

Wolokolamsker Chaussee I-III was eventually shown during the *Arbeiterfestspiele* in Frankfurt/Oder.

* * *

The analytical pattern I will introduce shortly with reference to Castorf's GDR productions will also be maintained in the chapters that follow, which will tackle his guest productions in West Germany and Switzerland (Chapter 7) and his more recent ones in the Berlin *Volksbühne* (Chapter 9). In essence, it will initially attempt to delineate those postmodern traits which have been appropriated by Castorf without losing sight of those he has discarded, and it will subsequently seek to establish a connection between the formal elements of his artistic work and the political implications and effects they secured.

Two issues open up in this context which need at least partial exploration. Firstly, the methodology which has been adopted in this thesis with reference to production analysis⁵⁶ is worth briefly reiterating. It will emerge from the following section that the attempts to define Castorf's working methods are kept to a minimum, and that analyses of his rehearsal processes are not included. Whilst acknowledging that this is partly the result of needing to make the best of a problematic situation,⁵⁷ I suggested in the Introduction that the approach favoured by this study remains legitimate in that it shifts its focus of attention away from processes of development, production strategies, and material conditions of performance, and onto the final stage of the theatrical work itself. Perhaps more crucially, this thesis aims to provide an analytic

⁵⁶ See Introduction, 9 f.

⁵⁷ Working methods and rehearsal processes are areas in which there have been practical difficulties in acquiring material and relevant information.

survey of the whole development of Castorf's work over the period considered (1978-1997) in order to engage with the evolution of his aesthetics, rather than a close reading of the genesis of specific productions.

Secondly, and more problematically, the attempt to label them as examples of postmodern theatre has led to an almost insurmountable obstacle, namely the transition from abstract (postmodern) philosophy to theatrical (political or otherwise) practice. This problematic is immanent in the relationship between postmodernity and postmodernism, more specifically in the way in which postmodernity is 'translated' in and 'represented' by one's subjective notion of postmodernism. Since the postmodern simply 'is', and it does not let itself be appropriated to create effects (political or otherwise) or to substantiate one's intentionality (political or otherwise) — for these are terms that it repudiates —, it follows that it cannot become a discourse of itself either, for there is no such thing as a postmodern logic, and that, as a consequence, it cannot be translated in or represented by practical apparatuses. This argument necessarily applies to theatrical devices as well. In other words, to talk about postmodern theatrical devices is, in truth, erroneous, because the postmodern loses its intrinsic nature once it is employed as a tool for definition.

Once the analytical viewpoint is shifted on to theatrical practice, however, one has to recognise that there is a line of postmodern 'tradition', according to which certain artistic elements — from the interweaving of high and low culture to fragmentation to self-referentiality etc., undoubtedly visible in Castorf's work — can be defined and generally accepted as postmodern. Hence the criticism sometimes directed at Castorf of being responsible for an 'Orgie der Postmoderne',⁵⁸ and, generally speaking, the

⁵⁸ Hensel, 'Wie man mit dem Hammer inszeniert: *Tasso* von und nach Goethe, angerichtet von Frank Castorf im Residenztheater München', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 29 October 1991.

postmodern label which has been given, more or less correctly, to artists like Robert Wilson, Jo Fabian, and The Wooster Group. As a result, notwithstanding the aforementioned preambles, and for the sake of analysis, this study will maintain the concept of 'postmodern' in the section that follows.

* * *

The most immediately recognisable accent which emerges from the productions I have described previously is on a process which unites mundane with intellectual elements, spoken word with music, stage design with dramatic performance, and which, as such, mirrors the postmodern tendency to blur distinctions between high and low culture as well as to do away with clear demarcations and indications as to what constitutes a work of art. The theatrical props that accompanied most productions played a vital role in the establishment of the aforesaid links. Newspapers, for instance, became tremendously effective and versatile theatrical devices. Always present in everyday life as objects of and representations for ideology and politics, and nevertheless scarcely noticeable as such, they were employed to protect concrete from frost (*Der Bau*), to shelter Antonie from bad weather (*Der Auftrag*), to hide Marie Beaumarchais (*Clavigo*). The piano, whether half stuck in a wall (*Nora*) or centrally positioned (*Die Nacht nach dem Abschlußfeier, Die Schlacht, Othello*), stressed the importance of music and art in general. Castorf's dramaturgy, characterised by breaks in and departures from the main story lines, does in fact call for a strong rhythmical basis, and legitimises a tendency to musicality.

The fragmentation, itself a typically postmodern feature, which Castorf imposed

on the original plays, bestowed on them a new structure and allowed the emphasis on particularly salient passages, sentences, words to emerge — a trait which was intensified by carefully chosen repetitions (for instance the line ‘ich bin froh, ich bin froh’ in *Die Schlacht*). The variety of quotes included and repeated ranged from the philosophical to sheer platitude, much in the same way in which Baudrillard nonchalantly mixes intellectualism with entertainment, and found its equivalent in music: arias from operas, drinking songs, pop refrains. Music’s function was thus not reduced to mere entertainment or to the alleviation of tense atmospheres; it introduced, framed and magnified conflict potentials and areas. The juxtaposition of *Schlager* and rock music by the Rolling Stones (*Der Bau*), or the simple act of placing a tape recorder on a piano (*Othello*) was sufficient to define cultural tension and a clash of stances. Disruption was also intensified by a frequently deliberate malfunctioning of technology: a broken record-player (hence the repetition of ‘ich bin froh, ich bin froh, ich bin froh...’) or the continuous fidgeting with appliances in *Der Bau* (tape recorders switched on and off, shower taps turned on and off).

The stage design suitably mirrored the ‘irritation principle’. Initial impressions concerning the symmetry and sheer logic of stage constructions proved to be deceptive; a peculiar tension was perceptible in the apparent simplicity, where rational self-assurance was made uncertain by theatrical tricks of illusion based on perspective, light, colouring. The latter, for example, often created an impression of bottomlessness, through a blurring of the separation between stage walls and floors. This in turn accentuated the ‘materiality’ of the stage area; Ivan Nagel has not unreasonably

suggested that 'Castorfs Inszenierungen rütteln am "Ding"-Charakter des Kunstwerks',⁵⁹ which is perceivable in every aspect of the theatrical experience.

The comical, game-based component ever-present in his productions has not gone unnoticed. It is here that the connection I established between a postmodern approach and Castorf's tendency to turn all texts into trivial *Volksstücke*⁶⁰ is at its most visible. Blatant and deliberate overacting, and all sorts of platitudes, were inserted in the original texts, regardless of their tragic or comic literary provenance. One heard the howling of a saw in the background and saw Donat's finger, adorned with a wedding ring, falling on the stage floor immediately after (*Der Bau*); one experienced Torwald Helmer getting pathetically worked up over the 'Dunstkreis der Lüge' while his son secretly puffed away at a cigar; again, one witnessed him crying out his maxim 'Keine falschen Töne' while he gruesomely pounded on the piano, and proclaiming his credo 'durchs Leben boxen', commented soon after by Mrs. Linde adopting a boxer's stance (*Nora*). It is worth remembering in this context Castorf's insistence on 'Die Kraft des Klischees',⁶¹ and the importance, indeed necessity, he attributes to them.

Thus, whilst acknowledging that his GDR productions did not embrace the whole spectrum of the postmodern 'tradition' I alluded to earlier, one can nevertheless recognise elements of postmodern provenance in his work. The anti-narrative, fragmentary form which he adopted as well as his tricks of self-referentiality, irony, allusiveness, pastiche, are unmistakably postmodern in flavour, in view of their playful and iconoclastic nature. Moreover, they find their equivalent in postmodern philosophy. Castorf's nonchalant combination of scurrilous and intellectual components mirrors the postmodern 'anything goes' principle; his aversion to *Werktreue* implies a lack of belief

⁵⁹ Nagel, 'Kortner-Preis 1994. Radikalität und Wahrheit: Laudatio auf Frank Castorf', *Theater heute*, 1 (1995), 9.

⁶⁰ See Chapter 3, 81 f.

⁶¹ See Chapter 3, note 73.

in the existence of the ultimate interpretation of a play, and reflects the postmodern suspicion of classical notions of Meaning without embracing it completely; the longing for acceptance of contradictions finds its philosophical counterpart in the postmodern attempt to find reconciliation with a life under conditions of permanent uncertainty.

Castorf's treatment of 'History' bears resemblances to the postmodern approach without internalising it completely, and a comparison between Castorf and Heiner Müller — another artist to whom the postmodern label has been, equally problematically and with various degrees of accuracy, applied — will help clarify his position. The postmodern negation of History and its replacement with local micronarratives is indeed present in Castorf's productions, which did deal almost exclusively with East German issues, and in such an exclusive manner that a foreign audience would have had difficulties translating GDR concepts and language into more neutral terms. His approach thus entails simultaneously a blessing and a curse. I have mentioned in Chapter 2 how, optimistically speaking, postmodern histories should be distinguished by a localism devoid of parochial insularity; Castorf would instead appear to make a virtue out of his very much pronounced — and, up to a point, enforced — provincialism. The notion of the death of History is moreover commonly coupled with either naive optimism or profound pessimism. Simplifying to the extreme, I would argue that Castorf and Müller represent respectively the two opposite facets of the same phenomenon. On the one side, a postmodern anarchic and irresponsible confidence based on acts of provocation and irritation; on the other, a deep cynicism founded on historical and biographical experiences, not least the witnessing of the downfall of two German states in one's lifetime, which combines post-modern with post-marxist beliefs. Possibly as the consequence of a generational difference, Müller's reminiscences of the GDR, portrayed

earlier, show a certain degree of bitterness, whereas Castorf's remain cautious, relativising the past with deliberate frivolity and containing an element of (n)ostalgia which could be interpreted as a postmodern tendency to ironic 'past-isation':

Honecker oder Mielke waren für mich mehr so Märchenfiguren, freilich mit beängstigender Machtfülle. [...] Kleinbürger hasse ich nicht. Das waren Gartenzwerge. Ich habe diese Leute verlacht, ziemlich freundlich sogar. Das sind keine Supermonster gewesen. Wer sie so nennt, sucht sich eine Ausrede, um sich im nachhinein mutiger zu machen, als er war und sein mußte. Gleichzeitig gab es so eine Utopie der Gleichen, der fühlte ich mich ganz seltsam verhaftet: Ich war also zuvörderst antikapitalistisch eingestellt, und deshalb blieb immer so ein Restposten Solidarität mit dieser Utopie — auch wenn die sich nun frech und blöd Deutsche Demokratische Republik nannte.⁶²

Castorf does not simply claim for himself the right to translate life's events into comic gags, but goes as far as to extrapolate the (hidden) funny side of a notoriously cynical Müller ('Ich wußte immer, daß ich komisch bin, aber du bist der erste, der das entdeckt hat'⁶³).

Their treatment of the 'death' theme may serve here as a clarifying example. Müller's texts show a ritualisation of death which bears strong resemblances to Artaud's theatrical theories, and which shows it as a vital force bringing about change.⁶⁴ The apparent contradiction between this stance and the pessimism I mentioned beforehand may be rectified when bearing in mind that, either way, the topic is given a 'serious' treatment. Castorf opposes a playful exorcism of death to Müller's ritualisation: characters revive (*Der Bau*, *Bernarda Albas Haus*), are killed by the most banal accidents (*Othello*), or do not die at all (*Clavigo*). Müller does not shy away from tragedy, indeed exploits traditional catharsis to portray death as the beginning of new life; Castorf turns every text into a tragicomedy. The distinction lies here in the means

⁶² Quoted in Schütt, 'Das dritte Gespräch: Kein Ziel. Nur immer Durchreise', 106.

⁶³ Interview between Müller and Castorf in the radio programme *Castorf, der Eisenhändler*, 7 April 1995.

⁶⁴ See McGowan, 'Geschichtsbild und dramatische Form bei Heiner Müller', *GDR Monitor Special Series*, 7 (1990), 72 ff.

they adopt, whereas the final goal remains fundamentally the same:⁶⁵ Castorf's strategy involves proletarianisation (hence a movement 'downwards') in order to simplify reality and its contradictions to the extreme; Müller's procedure is founded on intellectualisation (hence a movement 'upwards'), in order to render a simplistic approach to (postmodern) reality impossible.

As I suggested in Chapter 1 and 2, Castorf's practices cannot be conveniently made to stand for a wholehearted embrace of postmodernism. There are postmodern and Baudrillardian elements which Castorf has not merely left untouched (or manipulated for his own purposes) but positively rejected, as the present section will seek to demonstrate by examining his GDR-specific notion of 'political' theatre.

It must be noted that the GDR cultural authorities retained an arguably bourgeois sense of 'proper' art, and that, in this respect, Castorf's gleeful mixtures resulted in a process of re-politicisation of those theatrical devices he adopted. It might be argued that his concept was based primarily on principles of irritation and provocation which permeated every aspect of the theatrical experience, and whose intention was, as a result, not immediately recognisable as 'political' in the traditional pedagogic-didactic sense of the word. Yet, as I have mentioned earlier, an elucidation of this term is hindered by a specific, GDR-typical, impediment, namely the problematic relationship between 'political' and 'party-political'. Those forms of art whose aim was a criticism of the system (which, in GDR terms, implied a *volte-face* towards capitalist values) needed to be consciously and mockingly (and only seemingly) non-political. An overt rejection of politics in a society which insisted on the political significance of everything was after all

⁶⁵ Müller's texts, loaded with mythical images, stir up confusion and shake the readers and the audience out of encrusted beliefs and modes of behaviour. The following section will show how Castorf's notion of political theatre, and, perhaps more significantly, its effect on the audience, is in line with Müller's approach.

itself a political act. What needs to be defined is the distinctive meaning that the term 'political' acquired in a GDR context.

I would argue that Castorf was able to capture those desires which he rightly presumed to be repressed in the society of that time, using artistic means whose trivial traits — which, in contemporary consciousness, translate as postmodern — collided with the very principle of order on which the state was founded. The political force of those productions did not lie in the allusively voiced discontent of the general public, but found its expression in the communication of a zest for life that, long grown numb, was interpreted as rebellious. Castorf's concept was political inasmuch as it presented individuals as concretely intervening subjects, with a right to self-esteem in and towards a society allegedly based on collectivism.

The political dimension of Castorf's work which refers to his directing technique is worth briefly reiterating in this context, as his view of theatre as a 'Spezialfall glücklicher Produktion, Modellfall freier Arbeit'⁶⁶ applied especially to his GDR productions, where every première had the character of a commune-party. It moreover sheds light on and exemplifies the politicisation of art in a very concrete manner. One could claim that actors dissipating tomato ketchup or other 'valuable' western products, for which the average citizen had to queue for hours, caused the audience to be enraged for reasons which had very little to do with art. Yet in such a way theatre stimulated the awakening of very real feelings and created a tension between the 'supermarket mentality' of the majority and the squandering, apparent arrogance and narcissism of the selected few. This confrontation of the audience with the paradoxes of their own desires is at the very centre of Castorf's (political) art, and it distances the theatre director from any Baudrillardian notion of 'mass' and 'indifference'. Moreover, given that the clichés

⁶⁶ See Chapter 3, note 74.

which were staged more often than not referred to 'politically correct' stances commonly adopted by the masses, it becomes apparent that Castorf's inclination to put the concept of tolerance to the test through aesthetics is one which is relevant to us all. The political, not to say proletarian, dimension of this *modus operandi* is indisputable: none of the events portrayed on stage required a conventionally bourgeois education in order to be understood and appreciated; on the contrary, they were characterised by an ordinariness and a playfulness which allowed the audience to take part in the process and thus to gain access to the more complex textual context. The liaison between politics and comedy, admittedly not an unusual one, was thus given new strength through the inversion of the unknowns in the traditional equation: Castorf's aim was not to make political theatre entertaining, but to practise the political dimension immanently present within entertainment. As Matthias Lilienthal (*Chefdramaturg* at the *Volksbühne*), pointed out:

Wenn man spürt, daß ein Lachen aus dem Zuschauerraum eine existentielle Qualität bekommt, wie z.B. in der Karl-Marx-Städter *Volksfeind*-Premiere, dann merkte man schon die unvergleichbare Wichtigkeit von Theater in der DDR.⁶⁷

In other words, the immediate political impact of the productions that Castorf staged during this period was more perceivable in terms of effect than intentionality. The following chapters will show how his theatre aesthetics evolved and adapted in order to accommodate different historical, geographical and cultural circumstances.

⁶⁷ Quoted in Balitzki, 'Karl-Marx-Stadt, Gera, Halle ...', 68.

Chapter 7

Frank Castorf's Guest Productions in West Germany and Switzerland:

Descriptions and Analyses

I will now turn to an analysis of those productions staged by Castorf in West Germany and Switzerland in the period immediately preceding his *Volksbühne*-takeover in 1992 — Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Sophocles' *Aias*, Lessing's *Miss Sara Sampson*, Goethe's *Schauspiel für Liebende (Stella)*, Schiller's *Wilhelm Tell* and Goethe's *Torquato Tasso* — and, following the structure I adopted in the previous chapter, discuss their differences as well as their common traits, before placing them within a political and postmodern discourse. I have not included Castorf's guest productions in the *Deutsches Theater* in Berlin, namely Ibsen's *John Gabriel Borkman* (première 21 December 1990) and Lothar Trolle's *Hermes in der Stadt* (première 16 February 1992), as I believe that they differ from their western counterparts to such an extent that they could be seen as already belonging to Castorf's subsequent phase, which will itself be analysed in detail in the following chapter.

* * *

‘Ich kann mir Borniertheit leisten. Wenn jemand sagt, Wassereimer auf der Bühne kann ich nicht mehr sehen, dann kommen bei der nächsten Inszenierung nicht zwei, sondern zehn und bei der nächsten Inszenierung hundert Wassereimer.’¹

The first guest production that Castorf could stage abroad, after having been granted an exit visa by the GDR minister of culture Hans-Joachim Hoffmann ‘aus staatspolitischen Gründen’,² was Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (première 8 April 1989 in the

¹ Castorf, quoted in Schütt, ‘Das dritte Gespräch: Kein Ziel. Nur immer Durchreise’, 113.

² The letter of approval written by Hans-Joachim Hoffmann is reprinted in Balitzki, ‘Westkontakte’, 71.

Schauspielhaus in Cologne). Unsurprisingly, it resulted in a — calculated — scandal,³ which, as I will discuss later, did not in fact differ greatly from the attitudes taken by many a theatre critic and spectator in, say, Anklam or Halle. Here it will suffice to mention that the polarisation that characterises the positions taken with regard to Castorf, a polarisation which is still perceivable today, began to take shape: on the one end specialised and authoritative periodicals like *Theater heute* began to take interest in the former GDR director, and a veritable stream of followers began to attend every première; on the other critics like Peter Iden dismissed him and his work in no uncertain terms:

Vielleicht können Darbietungen wie diese in der DDR heute eine gewisse politische Bedeutung dadurch haben, daß sie ästhetisch (gegen Ibsen oder Shakespeare) abreagieren, was als Wut (auf einen verrotteten Sozialismus) gesellschaftlich auszuleben nicht möglich ist. In den Westen transportiert, bleibt nur den Eindruck von einem öden, dümmlichen Eklektizismus. Das westliche experimentelle Theater der sechziger Jahre hatte die Mittel, deren Castorf sich heute bedient, schon überwunden, als dieser Regisseur noch in den Windeln lag. [...] Überraschung ist es natürlich, daß schwache Intendanten, kopflos zur Steigerung ihres Renommées auf den Skandal hoffend, auch noch dem ärgsten Schwachsinn ihre Häuser öffnen.⁴

Indeed, what was offered on stage could not have been further away from the traditional expectations of the audience. Henry Hübchen, who played Claudius as well as the ghost, was accidentally found by Hamlet in a dustbin; he emerged from it wearing underwear and with a blackened face, fell off stage and practically into the first row, where he

³ By way of an example, here is the extract of a letter sent to a local newspaper by a member of the audience: 'Wie lange muß man sich als Steuerzahler so etwas noch anbieten lassen? Hamlet legt auf der Bühne Eier, der Geist sitzt im Müllsack, Schauspieler rotzen aus vollem Hals in die Mülltonne, beschütten sich mit Bier, pulen einander Halbverdautes wieder aus dem Mund heraus und ... und ... und ... Die Bühne glich einem Schweinestall! Mehr als hundert Besucher packte der Ekel; sie verließen vorzeitig die *Kuppel*. Wie lange kann es Herr Nestler bei solch einem Stück noch verantworten, daß jeder Theaterplatz pro Vorstellung mit mehr als 100 DM subventioniert wird?' Ryssel, 'Leserbriefe: Hamlet legt Eier', *Kölnische Rundschau*, 11 May 1989.

⁴ Iden, 'Verbrannte Erde: Ein DDR-Regisseur zerstückelt *Hamlet*', *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 19 April 1989.

started a conversation with the spectators, informing them of the duration of the production ('Wart ihr auch alle auf der Toilette ... es gibt keine Pause') and inquiring about their well-being. Hamlet had to go to some lengths to assure the audience that that actor was actually the ghost, first by trying to catch his attention with a bottle of Danish beer he fetched from a fridge ('Papa, gucke!') and eventually by starting a verbal exchange with him: the scene between a visibly embarrassed Hamlet ('Mach' nicht so'n Löffel, Papa') and an equally unperturbed ghost ('Wenigstens die erste Reihe, so viel Zeit muß sein') seemed to go on forever, when the ghost, irritated by the son's interruptions, extracted a gun and shot him in the foot. Repeatedly. The ghost was so convinced of the harmlessness of his action that he shot himself in the leg to counteract the rather different impression transmitted by Hamlet's howling and writhing. They both eventually 'cooled off' by placing leg and foot in the fridge placed on central stage. Every other character appeared on and left the stage through a wardrobe, and was given three wishes by the ghost. Those of Jürg Löw, the actor playing Polonius: 'ein bißchen mehr Natur um mich haben, gesund bleiben, woanders Theater spielen', the latter possibly an allusion to the precarious conditions of the *Kuppel* at the time, a circus tent in which all productions had to be played, that had been given to the *Intendant* by the local authorities to compensate for the extremely long time taken to renovate the original theatre building. Those of Susanne Barth (Gertrude): 'einen Garten, immer verliebt zu sein und einen Koch'. Those of Matthias Günther (Laertes): three times 'weit weg sein, vielleicht in Frankreich', a desire which allowed the slapstick to be placed back into the original plot of the production, albeit only temporarily. Claudius was shown looking for his crown and finding his dental crown instead; Ophelia 'won' the love of Hamlet like Cinderella by fitting perfectly into the shoe he brought on stage (the rivals being Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, also women who eventually even gave birth). Fortinbras

appeared wearing scruffy old clothes, speaking Norwegian and showing more interest in getting the last Tuborg than in acting his part. Every attempt of Hamlet to act in the traditional way — expressed through deliberate overacting — was ridiculed by the other characters, who appeared mockingly dressed up in evening clothes for the occasion. His ‘to be or not to be’ monologue, spoken whilst sitting comfortably on a sofa, was repeatedly interrupted, first by Ophelia, who tried to win his attention by smearing a raw egg over her face, and subsequently by the others, who momentarily abandoned their roles to show with arrogance and condescension how one has to speak those famous Shakespearean lines ‘properly’. Ophelia finally plunged into water only to be saved by Laertes, with whom she had a more than sisterly relationship, and to be shot by him immediately after. Hamlet tried to come to terms with his domestic situation: he tentatively approached his mother and started to kiss her, to be rewarded by a slap on the face; he tried the same with Claudius, with the identical result. After having shown Gertrude turning into a failed mother and a frustrated housewife, Ophelia converting into a nymphomaniac, and Hamlet becoming an alcoholic, the production reached its conclusion with the latter drinking a bottle of poisoned beer and quoting his last Shakespearean line: ‘der Rest ist Sch ... weigen’.

Castorf’s second guest production, Sophokles’ *Aias*⁵ (première 14 September 1989), followed as a result of an invitation by the then *Intendant* of the *Basler Theater*, Frank Baumbauer. The latter took over the artistic direction of the Swiss playhouse in 1988 and managed rapidly to bring the theatre out of the shadow of the more conspicuous *Zürcher Schauspielhaus*: a survey carried out by *Theater heute* found the *Basler Theater* only second to the *Thalia Theater* in Hamburg in the season 1988/89 for its artistic merits. The figure of Aias, who in the *Iliad* had already been portrayed as

⁵ See photographs in Appendix 2.d.

being second only to Achilles among the Greek warriors in his prowess as a powerful fighting man, was transported by Sophocles to the time after Achilles' death, when a dispute arose between Aias and Odysseus as for who should receive his armour. When the news spread that it was to be awarded to the latter Aias planned a night-attack on his own allies, but, driven mad by Athena, killed a flock of sheep instead. Shame and remorse eventually drove him to slay himself with his sword; the quarrel that arose over his burial between Agamemnon and Menelaus on the one hand, who at first refused to allow his body to be buried, and Odysseus on the other, was solved by the latter prevailing on them to relent. Sophocles' Aias, a character who spoke little and slowly, but who had a good heart and tremendous courage, could not be further away from Castorf's. The Swiss production did not portray him as a tragic hero at all, but, rather, stressed the normality, indeed almost banality, of his action, by transporting it into a century in which killing has become a business like all others. It was a version justified by the intrinsic logic of the current (postmodern) consciousness. It is however important to stress that the Swiss performance was not intended as an historical actualisation; when compared to Peter Sellars' famous production of 1986, for instance, in which Aias was clearly distinguishable as a Vietnam veteran, it becomes clear that Castorf's was very much characterised by its spatial and temporal neutrality, that is, its postmodern character derived from a de facto postmodernity rather than a chosen postmodernism. A depiction of the stage design may serve here to clarify the concept: a cube devoid of any theatrical props, the access to which was provided by two flights of stairs, one, apparently suspended on stage without any anchoring, leading up to a platform, and one leading down. All movements towards and away from the stage were hence, by necessity, vertical rather than horizontal. These two dominant elements thus acquired mythical implications: the 'up' may well have stood for the Gods' sky and the 'down'

may well have implied some form of nether world. Or, again, the ascent and descent of the actors, in itself very concrete, as it was the only way to reach the middle ground in which to act, gained a symbolic significance, as it mirrored their existential condition. Aias was seen descending the stairs at the beginning of the production, after having been called by Athena — here played simultaneously by three actresses dressed in military costumes, who also took over the role of the chorus —; he was listening to a portable tape recorder, which he cast aside in order to read the personal column of the newspapers from which the goddesses had emerged ('Liebe Maus Sonja zum 28. Burzeltag ... Grüße von Inge, Lars und Thomas'). All main events took place on the stairs: Aias' monologues were virtually impossible to hear as they were repeatedly interrupted by the theatre's cleaning personnel who kept appearing to scrub the stairs clean. Agamemnon was forced to climb downstairs after having incurred the rage of the three goddesses, who ran after him brandishing frying-pans while he shouted to them 'Wir bleiben in telefonischer Verbindung'. Aias' mistress Tecmessa provided a powerful portrayal of a war scenario, by descending the stairs with difficulty, armed with a pram packed with her belongings. As if to demystify the symbolic significance of the stairs themselves, a character, stranger to the action, occasionally climbed up and down them, forcing the very actors to stop and to engage in conversation over the possible meaning of such a deed. A parody of a stereotypical Greek atmosphere was provided by the three Athenas singing and dancing the *Sorbas-Sirtaki* in the very moment in which Aias was pondering over his past behaviour (by 'adapting' a quote from Strauß' *Fledermaus*: 'Warum ich das tu? S'ist mal bei mir so Sitte, chacun à son goût!'). His attempted suicide lost all pathos by being counteracted by the women singing 'Schlaf in himmlischer Ruh-hu...' whilst coming down from the higher platform. Agamemnon lost his nerve, finished a debate with Teukros with the exclamation 'Ausländer raus!', and

immediately after regretted his self-exposure with a thousand apologies to the audience: 'Meine Damen und Herren, ich gebe Ihnen mein persönliches Ehrenwort ... es war ein Mißverständnis!' The production came to an end with a portrayal of the behaviour of the remaining characters after Aias' death: Odysseus appeared on stage carrying Swiss flags and claiming the corpse for the usage of his political party as part of an advertising campaign, a notion which infuriated even the dead Aias to such a degree that he stood up, visibly irritated, threw his military costumes aside and left the stage. The (literal and metaphorical) theatrical exit lost however all its effect as Aias had to come down the stairs again because he could not find his wallet ('Scheiße, Scheiße, wo ist mein Portmonnaie?'). Once that small problem had been solved he shouted for a certain Else to make him a cup of coffee, as the production had almost ended. All other actors followed ('Für mich auch, Jörg!'), and reached the higher platform — which had by then lost all possible mythical implications, by being revealed as the theatre canteen — , and left Teukros alone on stage. Sitting on the stairs, with only a swinging light bulb for illumination, he recited his last lines 'Vieles vermag ja der Mensch zu erleben und klar zu durchschauen; im voraus jedoch darf keiner sein Schicksal erkennen' while the others could be heard celebrating in the background (singing 'Alles hat ein Ende, nur die Wurst hat zwei'). The last visible picture before the complete darkening of the stage was that of Zeus' bust being crumbled by the iron safety curtain that had fallen on it.

Castorf's reputation as a director who seemed to enjoy the destruction of plays much more than their staging reached its climax with the Munich production of Lessing's *Miss Sara Sampson* in the *Prinzregententheater* (première 22 October 1989). The play, which has made theatre history as the first German bourgeois tragedy, brought the public to tears when first staged in Frankfurt/Oder in 1755. It would surely be agreed by most that a 'classical', faithful reproduction of the original would turn the tragedy into a

melodrama, originating perhaps tears of laughter rather than tears of sympathy, and it appears therefore all the more surprising that Castorf's version created a scandal to such a disproportionate degree. An interview with the director, which was reprinted in the theatre programme, had already made clear from which perspective the text had been approached:

Die Verhaltensweisen der Menschen werden sich immer ähneln, wenn sie sich in sozialen, politischen, moralischen Streßsituationen bewegen. Die Vorgänge sind fast entschlackt vom historischen Umfeld, von den Anfängen des bürgerlichen Trauerspiels in Deutschland.⁶

The portrayal of the characters therefore paid special attention to their common traits, and their behaviour was depicted with sharp tones; using the same casting techniques he adopted in his GDR productions, Castorf reduced the dramatis personae to Sara, Sir William, Mellefont, Marwood and her daughter. The servants, who, according to Castorf, were 'verlängerte Moralträger, weil sie nur die Unter- und Nebengedanken der Hauptfiguren artikulieren'⁷ were thus cancelled and their lines, like some inner voices, spoken by the main characters. These appeared in turn characterised by an almost fairytale simplicity: Sir William Sampson, for example, was not simply the patriarch of a bourgeois family; rather, he simultaneously incorporated the fairytale potentiality of God the Father. It was above all in the figures of Sara and Marwood that Castorf's intentions came to the fore; the interest lay here explicitly in what the two women had in common rather than in what differentiated them, the sensitive, almost sentimental innocence of the former and the seductive craftiness of the latter being simply different aspects of the same male daydream about women as 'riddles'. The delicate Sara thus developed her latent instinctive driving forces, and the calculating Marwood showed her hidden emotional side. Both acted with solidarity against a world dominated by men, whose

⁶ Erken, 'Theater — ein Schuß Anarchie: Der Regisseur Frank Castorf im Gespräch', Theatre Programme of *Miss Sara Sampson*, 3.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

claim to power was reduced to a state of mercilessly humiliating comic gags. Mellefont was a narcissist weakling, who had as little interest and affection for Sara as for his old mistress; his behaviour to both was unsurprisingly similar. At the beginning of the performance he was awaked by Sara's screams: they had both eloped and she was then having nightmares as a consequence of her guilty conscience for having betrayed her beloved father. His indifference towards her situation could not have been more blatant: he simply turned to her and murmured a forced 'Morjen'; Sara's stupefaction appeared in all its innocent openness when, after having cast an inquiring glance to the audience, she answered him with 'Ich habe Sie rein akustisch nicht verstanden'. His attempts to console her were so insincere and contrived that he could not even bring himself to express what he had planned to say: the line 'Vergessen Sie das schreckliche Gewebe eines sinnlosen Traumes' became 'Vergessen Sie das schreckliche Gewerbe eines dreckigen Raumes'. As if amused by his own literary skills, he started a series of puns; 'Sara' was turned into 'Sahara' ('Die Wüste lebt!'), his own image as a gigolo confirmed by the quotation of an advertisement ('Bauknecht weiß, was Frauen wünschen') and a possible career as a pop star was also not excluded, as his singing of Bob Dylan's 'Sara, Sara, sweet virgin angel, sweet love of my life' seemed to suggest. His selfish attitude became even more visible when Sara showed a moment of weakness, expressed her wish to go back to her father and to a more uncomplicated life, and tried to recollect memories from the past by wearing layers after layers of those clothes the father had given to her, while Mellefont engaged in a physical fight with her over the possession of the last garment of clothing. His behaviour to Marwood, as mentioned earlier, showed the same degree of apathy or, at best, self-reference: every argument was interrupted by Mellefont, to whom the reaction of the unknown spectators seemed more important than what was at stake with his mistress ('Hör auf, die gucken alle!'). When Marwood's

string of pearls broke he was quick to swallow them until he had to choke — a tremendously effective image for the portrayal of the emotional state of Marwood (pearls traditionally standing for women's tears) as well as for the depiction of the squandering of her fortunes; his action, in turn, powerfully showed his indifference towards the feelings of his wife and his greed for her material property simultaneously. It was however with a scene of a different kind that Castorf managed to capture, sharply and rapidly, the essence of 'his' Mellefont. After having appropriated and worn Sara's black evening dress, and having voiced his satisfaction over the final result, he cast a quick glance over the two women in his life but remained more impressed by his new outfit, and went on to show who he really cared about by masturbating in front of them. Nothing the women said ('Pfoten weg!') and did seemed to preoccupy him in the least; Marwood eventually handed him over a piece of paper, which he nonchalantly threw to the audience after having finished his personal hygiene. It is this scene which caused a scandal of unprecedented proportions in that theatre,⁸ even though it had not been used in the performance for the sheer sake of it. It presented us with a picture of a man who was so enraptured with himself that the original dilemma — whether to move back with his former mistress or to start a new life with Sara — lost all importance. His fickle and

⁸ *Theater heute* reprinted a few of the letters that angry spectators sent to the *Intendant*; here some extracts:

'Solche Inszenierungen sind eines Bayerischen Staatstheaters nicht würdig. Ein Theater mit öffentlichen Zuschüssen hat nach unserer Meinung die Aufgabe, Theater für den normalen Bürger zu machen, der nicht pervers eingestellt ist und sich nicht an geschmackslosen Verirrungen belustigen will. Der Intendant hat die Pflicht, solche sogenannten Regie-Einfälle von seinem Theater fernzuhalten, da er sich ansonsten dem Verdacht aussetzt, selbst Gefallen an diesen schmutzigen Szenen zu finden. [...] Wir fordern ein sauberes Staatsschauspiel!'

'Was Sie uns vorsetzten, war scheußlichste und ekelerregende Pornographie, gegen die eine Peep-Show vermutlich ein ästhetischer Genuß ist. [...] Mir ist unverständlich, wie in der Hauptstadt eines CSU-regierten, katholischen Bundeslandes ein Haus Ihres Niveaus mit Steuergeldern subventioniert wird.'

'Da ich vom Kulturministerium, der Intendanz und dem Regisseur kein Einsehen erwarte, wende ich mich an das Finanzministerium, da Sie in meinen Augen den Schlüssel zum Wandel in der Hand haben. Wären nämlich Intendanz und Regie darauf angewiesen, den Haushalt ihres Unternehmens über die Gunst des Publikums und die Höhe der Eintrittspreise (Preis-/Leistungsverhältnis) sicherzustellen, dann wäre diese mit Sicherheit von entscheidendem Einfluß auf das Dargebotene.'

'Lessing im Menschenzoo — Castorf in der Kritik', *Theater heute*, 12 (1989), 24-25.

vain behaviour, which had been hinted at for the duration of the entire production, was caught here at its most radical. This calculated effect could also be interpreted as being part of the very tradition started by Lessing himself: his play shocked the audience at the time for being explicitly bourgeois, bourgeois not in terms of the provenance and social status of its characters (who were, if not of downright noble origins, nevertheless belonging to the upper-classes), but in terms of the topic that was dealt with. A similar reaction could not be obtained today by using the same means; in a century that has declared the end of tragedy it has become immaterial whether one chooses a genre of any kind at all. Much more significant becomes how one deals with the given genre, in order to achieve the same kind of effect that Lessing initiated over two centuries ago. This is not to say that Castorf's approach involved a process of enforced actualisation or that it entailed a modernisation of text and action into a 'ready-made' to fit a specific age: as with the *Aias* production, it was the audience which was brought in a position to translate the performance into a state of 'here and now' through a process of understanding and decoding. In other words, nothing was conveniently explained on stage; after all, audience reception implies that the spectators themselves have to fulfil that task and thus appropriate an active role. As Günther Erken rightly observed:

Castorf meint keine Transposition in die Jetztzeit, sondern ein Weiterdenken bürgerlicher Beziehungskonflikte über *Emilia Galotti*, *Clavigo*, *Kabale und Liebe* bis zur Eehölle von Strindbergs *Totentanz* und seiner Nachfolger. Das Pionierwerk der neuen Gattung 'bürgerlicher Trauerspiel' soll mit dem Bewußtsein *davon* betrachtet werden, was aus dem ganzen Genre geworden ist. [...] Das Publikum soll verstehen was ist, nicht was 'gemeint' ist.⁹

The character of what actually happened on stage was once again emphasised by the stage design of Hartmut Meyer, an empty framework, variously lit with neutral yellow, green and blue tones, furnished with an enormous triangle which allowed acting games of

⁹ Erken, Günther, ' "Theater ist wie Boxen...": Frank Castorfs Proben zu Lessings *Miss Sara Sampson*', *Theater heute*, 12 (1989), 26 and 27. Erken worked at that time as dramaturge in Munich.

various kinds to take place, and which appeared to have been halfway between a real and an artificial space, halfway between a mocking mirror-image of the 'triangular' relationship between Mellefont, Marwood and Sara and a sheer geometric figure. The ambiguously double meaning of theatrical props could be also applied to the way in which Marwood initially entered the stage: she was literally inside a 'Beziehungskiste' brought in by Sara and Mellefont, and had to tear open the cardboard box she was imprisoned in with a knife.

Castorf's third guest production, Goethe's *Stella* (première 29 April 1990 in the *Deutsches Schauspielhaus* in Hamburg) followed the pattern adopted for Lessing's text to such an extent that it could be viewed as its continuation. Goethe himself had written two versions: the first, in 1776, in which everybody — and that includes Stella and Madame Sommer — lived happily ever after with Fernando; the second, in 1806, as a moralistic tragedy in which the two lovers died. Castorf did not seem to think much of either alternative and reduced the play to a farce with a third solution, whereby Fernando was visibly incapable of coming to terms with an existence as father, husband and lover and simply broke down. The affinity to the former production may be due, in practical terms, to the difficult situation that presented itself to Castorf and the ensemble; the project should have been a staging of Beaumarchais' *Der tolle Tag*, which however had to be abandoned after two weeks' rehearsals because of the sudden illness of one of the actors. Goethe's text was therefore chosen and rehearsed quickly, keeping the same ensemble and even the original stage design initially planned for *Der tolle Tag*, in order to be able to comply with the première date. I would nevertheless argue that the approach taken to *Stella* as a 'part two' of *Miss Sara Sampson* is simply not to be discarded as sheer artistic laziness or convenience. The similarity in their plots allowed one to focus on the traits which united Mellefont with Fernando, or Stella with Sara, or

Marwood with Madame Sommer. Moreover, enough variations were present in both for them to maintain their individual character. Fernando, for example, distinctly lacked the hedonistic temperament that characterised Mellefont. The former was a weakling at the mercy of three women, as the daughter was also portrayed as an energetic, quick-witted adult. His incapacity to make a decision did not result from the fact that he did not possess enough affection for either of them but, rather, from his gullibility and his tendency to be a follower. And these three women, each in their own way, did know how to take the lead: Stella, hysterical, obsessed, almost on the verge of madness; Madame Sommer, rational, apparently the submissive housewife, whose emotions could only be expressed in spasms and convulsions; Lucie, arrogant and emancipated, who showed her independence by shouting invective of the worst sort in Italian at her father. Castorf's actresses bickered, scratched, shot guns; they never talked, they roared; they never walked, they flung themselves into somebody's arms or burst on and off stage. They humiliated Fernando by singing to him 'Schlaf, Bübchen, leise, Bübchen, schlaf ein, ich bin so groß, und du bist so klein, schließe deine Augen, bist ja so müd, Mutti gibt Obacht, daß nichts geschieht'. Stella had visions of escaping from reality and entered the stage literally carried by a multitude of balloons, which she frenetically and loudly destroyed as soon as she was made aware that her dream had very few chances of being realised. After having had a water fight with Fernando, Madame Sommer stripped him of his wet shirt with the excuse that she intended to wash it for him, as any obedient housewife would do, only to start sweeping the stage floor with it immediately after; she regained control over the situation and she could even allow herself to make mockingly moralising comments about the 'silly husbands' that every woman in the audience must also have: 'Wissen Sie, liebes, verehrtes Publikum, ich sehe ihn als einen Gefangenen an, der Mann. Diese Männer! Nicht wahr, gnädige Frau, Sie wissen, wovon ich rede?'. The

strength of the production lay in the juxtaposition of two very different ways of approaching the text: on the one hand, a meticulous adherence to the original with regard to the characters' monologues; on the other, the addition of apparently insignificant trivialities. As far as the former is concerned, it is interesting to notice how the ensemble was able to render those verses credible without falling into melodrama; when for example Sara had heard Madame Sommer's story of betrayal and unhappiness, still unaware of her identity, she exclaimed 'O Gott sei Dank! Sie haben geliebt! Ein Geschöpf, das mich versteht!', which made one smile but not laugh. When indeed laughter could not be suppressed it was directed to the situation, and rarely at the expense of the character in question; rather, it was a confirmation of the sheer fact that tragic love is at best incomprehensible, and mostly ridiculous in its excesses for third parties. As Benjamin Henrichs rather bluntly phrased it:

Liebende sind keine Engel, sondern Idioten: das ist tragisch für sie selber, aber komisch für alle anderen. Manchmal begreifen sie es sogar selber — verfallen in ein wildes Gelächter über den eigenen, herzerreißenden, lächerlichen Jammer. Das ist der Augenblick der Wahrheit. Oder des Irrsins. Castorfs Inszenierung ist also nicht alberner als die Leidenschaften, von denen sie handelt.¹⁰

As far as the inclusion of apparently trivial elements is concerned, it must be stressed that it was more often than not only a question of time before their meaning, and thus their link with the main plot, could be established. The production, for instance, began by not beginning: the servant Karl entered a dimly lit stage with tentative steps, as if wanting to make sure that the stage floor was capable of holding his weight, sat and assumed the pose of Goethe in the *Campagna* painting of Tischbein, and finally sang an aria from Mozart's *Hochzeit des Figaro* ('Ich weiß nicht, wo ich bin, was ich tue, bald in Frost, bald in Glut, ohne Ruhe! Jedes Mädchen entzündet mein Herz!'). This initial scene lasted several minutes, and was often interrupted by impatient spectators who would

¹⁰ Henrichs, 'Die siebenhundertundsiebenundfünfzigste Nacht', *Die Zeit*, 11 May 1990.

have preferred a more traditional, and thus recognisable, opening. Yet it was far from being a sheer provocation; the deliberate slowness mirrored one of the topics of the whole production, namely the meaningless passing of time, and it linked with the waiting for Fernando that both Stella and Madame Sommer had experienced. Another example: before old feelings could be shown and appreciated again they needed to have the dust of the past polished away. Hence the idea of Hartmut Meyer to cover the stage and the theatrical props with thick layers of dust. It was on the characters' costumes, in the air, it fell out of trouser pockets, gave theatrical props a somewhat surreal appearance and characters asthma attacks. It was even on Goethe's head, a miniature bust which was slowly unwrapped by the two women, who at first mistook him for Fernando and eventually realised their blunder after the head had been completely cleaned. Ironically speaking, Goethe was thus 'freed' from centuries of dust. As if in response to one's wish to clean it all up, buckets full of water also made their appearance on stage: Stella attempted suicide by holding her head in one of them (like Desdemona in Castorf's *Othello*), Fernando and Madame Sommer used them as weapons in one of their fights. It was therefore through a process of association that most apparent trivialities fell into place. The same procedure applied to verbal additions: Madame Sommer depicted the financial restraints in which she had been living when she caught only one of the words used by her daughter during an argument ('Es ist nun wirklich einmal Zeit, ihn zu vergessen') and followed her own train of thoughts ('Vergessen, vergessen. Weißt du, was das heißt ... Vergessen? Gegessen .. essen ... Hunger ... Hunger') before fainting for lack of food. Finally, the associative process can be applied to the added historical references: the more explicit theme of the scattering of the illusions of love expanded to include the scattering of illusions of another kind. Towards the end of the performance all characters started quoting numbers, until they all reached the date 1794 — the year of

Robespierre's death and of the end of the Jacobin rule; Karl swung a red flag in the background whilst the rest of the ensemble intoned 'Vorwärts und nicht vergessen...'. The final scene was devoted to Karl, as was the beginning, all women having abandoned Fernando, who left the stage after having squashed cooked cabbages on Goethe's head in desperation.

Castorf's second Basel production had its première on 8 May 1991, the jubilee year which marked the seven hundredth anniversary of the legendary oath taken on the Rütli Mountain by the founders of Switzerland. It is no coincidence that the text he was invited to stage was Schiller's *Wilhelm Tell*.¹¹ Equally unsurprisingly, the performance turned out to be an ironical analysis of the 'myth' of Switzerland. The more general intention behind it, namely to address the issue of the role of the masses in revolutionary processes through a critical examination of the euphoria surrounding unification (and not necessarily only the Swiss one), was undoubtedly still perceivable, yet a distinct feeling remained of this being a production addressed very consciously and provocatively to a Swiss audience. Gessler was portrayed as a kind of Pontius Pilatus who found himself in an uncomfortable situation and would rather have been left alone in his ivory tower than having to mix with a mountain race with no courtly culture. He quoted from Nietzsche's *Genealogie der Moral*, recited Shakespeares's sonnets in English, and declared his unhappiness with the mediocrity of the present epoch, in which everybody wanted to be safeguarded against possible pain. The final desire for his own destruction, with which he made himself available to Tell, thus appeared as the desperate spiritual act of an intellectual amongst village idiots. Even Tell himself was not excluded from this category: he was illiterate, which he proved by trying to read *Die Zeit* and failing miserably, and could not even compensate for his lack of brains with physical *bravura*:

¹¹ See photographs in Appendix 2.e.

when it came to the legendary shooting of the apple he was blinded by an halogen lamp and he aimed at the audience instead. The apple on Walter's head exploded by itself with tongues of flame. Later on he looked for his hat and was helped in the search by his son (here a role taken over by an actress): the latter exclaimed 'Ei, Vater, siehst du den Hut dort auf der Stange?', and, 'Stange' being a Swiss colloquialism for a glass of bier, the hat was found truly sitting on a pint of lager. We are left in no doubt that Castorf's vision of the past Swiss population was one of beer-drinking backwoodsmen. Little doubt also remained of his notion of present-day Switzerland. Towards the end of the production Gessler appeared on stage for another one of his monologues, this time taken from Jean Ziegler's book *Die Schweiz wäscht weißer*, in which the Swiss banks' recycling of dirty money from tradings in drugs and weapons was described in great detail. Tell, who was sitting in the auditorium during Gessler's lecture, was evidently affected by it (would he have been a dealer if he had been born in our times?), jumped back on stage and shot him. Yet Gessler returned back to life: Switzerland's past enemy resuscitated as one of Switzerland's present 'enemies', there to threaten its welfare, namely a foreigner seeking political asylum. He started speaking Swahili and was soon chased away over the Italian border (with the promise of a pizza upon his arrival on the other side of the Brennero) by all other characters, who immediately after started showering and scrubbing their bodies. In a fairytale atmosphere clean garments of clothing started to fall from the sky. Once completely disinfected, they returned on stage carrying lanterns painted with the colours of the Swiss flag, whilst Hedwig pondered about 'den Schmutz, den man nicht mehr abwaschen kann'. Whether she was referring to the dirty money or the dirty illegal immigrant remained unanswered.

Castorf's last West German guest production before moving permanently to Berlin was Goethe's *Torquato Tasso*, which he staged in the Munich *Residenztheater*

(première 26 October 1991). Given the scandal originated by *Miss Sara Sampson*, the theatre management thought it better not to include it in the première season ticket otherwise available. The expectations, even amongst theatre critics, had been particularly high; Franz Wille, for example, expressed in his review his regret that the production had failed to become a worthy successor to Peter Stein's 1969 famous staging in Bremen.¹² According to Wille, the fault may even have lain in the choice of the text itself; he reasoned that in every historical situation portrayed in and through the play (that is, Tasso's own age of the *Gerusalemme liberata*, Goethe's age at the time of writing, and Peter Stein's age at the time of directing it) artists had to compete against the governing power for their recognition: Tasso, by writing a work of praise of the church at a time when Reformation was imminent, Goethe, by writing in an age characterised by the triumphs of the French Revolution, and Peter Stein, by directing in an age where the demonstrations on the streets of West Germany did not involve only students. Wille's argument was that nowadays no artist even remotely wishes for the 'system' to collapse, a system which guarantees a large amount of security and comfort, as ours is the age where the central conflict between artists and state revolves around obtaining more subventions. Whilst agreeing with Wille's argument in principle, I do not share his pessimistic conclusion that *Tasso* must have lost of necessity all possible reference to the present condition. Castorf's starting point did take into consideration the fact that the artist's status has irremediably changed; indeed, one might go as far as to say that it was precisely this acknowledgement which constituted the main concept behind the production. The conflict was not between Tasso, Alfons and Antonio anymore, the conflict lay much more between all the characters in the castle and the

¹² See Wille, 'Der Subventions-Künstler: *Torquato Tasso* am Münchner Residenztheater inszeniert von Frank Castorf', *Theater heute*, 12 (1991), 33.

'outside world', or, to use Castorf's words: 'Das Stück behandelt den Frieden, den Wohlstand und die Normalität in der Burg. Es ist bloß die Frage, was um diese Burg herum passiert. Und die Frage, wie lange ihre Mauer standhalten'.¹³ Even the biographical situation of the artist (in this case, the director) cannot be compared to that of, say, Peter Stein; Castorf recognised that:

Der [Konflikt] liegt in der Zeit, in der ich mich befinde, und der liegt nicht zwischen München und Hamburg oder zwischen mir und Herrn Iden. Wir sind auf einer Seite. Natürlich kann sich innerhalb dieser Burg, dieser Ruhe das Schlimmste abspielen. Wenn man erstmal hinschaut auf diese Gesellschaft, Deutschland, und sagt: Das funktioniert doch gut, dann sieht man: Tatsächlich sind die Verschleißerscheinungen kolossal, und wie sie ausgeglichen werden müssen, ist mörderisch. Aber das ist tatsächlich die Technologie der Dekadenz und die wird von Leuten, die einfach Hunger haben, nicht akzeptiert. Das ist eine Not auf einer qualitativ anderen Stufe.¹⁴

Every conflict situation amongst the characters in the castle was portrayed in such a way as to make it bereft of any credibility: Tasso initially entered the stage and condescendingly threw his completed manuscript at the feet of the remaining ensemble; he showed how he wished to leave the castle by beginning to move his arms about spasmodically, giving the impression that he was about to take off any moment to fly in the auditorium. Understandably, Antonio, Alfons and both Leonores — as well as the audience — could not suppress their laughter; the artist's attempt to claim independence for himself was thus relativised by being rendered ridiculous. The antagonism between Leonore von Este and Leonore Sanvitale was perceivable as soon as the performance started: they both looked for Tasso and whispered his name in the dark, each unaware of the presence of the other; after having discovered it they took turns in hitting a piece of stone with a sledgehammer while they recited Goethe's verses. What may initially have

¹³ Huber, 'Akzent in einem gut funktionierenden System: Ein Interview mit Frank Castorf', Theatre Programme of *Torquato Tasso*, 10.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 14.

appeared to be simply a private joke between director and ensemble — the two women putting into practice Castorf's reputation as a 'Stückezertrümmerer' — acquired a deeper significance when one realised that their behaviour was one of de-sublimation of their repressions achieved through aggressive physical activity. It is desire and violent emotions that were suppressed, not courtly love. When for instance Tasso and Leonore von Este met, she covered her face to hide her private thoughts by lifting her dress up and wrapping it round her head, thus exposing her private parts instead. They muddled their conversation with the word 'vögeln'; the more the efforts to avoid it the more the word slipped out, as if they had lost control over the privacy of their inner thoughts. Leonore, a character which had none of the fragility attributed to her by Goethe, but was instead very much made of flesh, reached such a degree of verbal frustration that she could only exclaim in desperation: 'Mensch, Tasso, auf diesem Weg werden wir wohl nie gesellschaftsfähig!'. Pressure caused by isolation brought everyone to the edge of hysteria, as shown by linguistic slips, motor disorders, wild outbursts of aggression. Even Tasso's complaints and his rage could be seen as symptoms of the same generalised malaise. Their complicity appeared in all its clarity in the final scene of the production, when they sang together 'Brüder zur Sonne, zur Freiheit!' and then, addressing the audience, intoned 'Sklavenhändler, hast du Arbeit für mich? Sklavenhändler, ich tu alles für dich!'. The prostitution of the artist had become the prostitution of a whole society.

* * *

In the years between 1989 and 1991 Castorf's reputation as a 'Stückezertrümmerer' was established definitively. It is an appellation which particularly suited the expectations and prejudices of those who wished to impose on him an even more difficult tag to get rid off, namely that of being a GDR artist. Indeed, it was a label that seemed to reflect his own biographical situation particularly well. In truth, the SED had seized the possibility to get rid of a potentially dangerous element and simultaneously to promote GDR culture abroad (it was a well-known fact to the authorities that by the mid 1980s Castorf's reputation had spread to West Germany). However, the side of the emerging picture which tended to be stressed was characterised by crass stereotypes, all too quick judgements and automatic assumptions of how GDR artists (including Castorf) must have considered the possibility of working in West Germany as a heaven-sent outlet for their (artistic) frustrations. West German audiences appeared to tolerate them only inasmuch as they offered something 'different'. Writing on the Hamburg *Stella* production, Gerhard Stadelmaier commented that:

Das Theater ist so langweilig, sagen die Langweiler. Es müsse etwas passieren, egal was, sagen die, denen alles egal ist. Am meisten passiert das, was egal ist, zur Zeit bei Frank Castorf. Er verschafft denen, die sich am Kaviar übersatt gegessen haben, die Sensation der Blutwurst: das rohe Theater als Schwartenmagen-Phänomen. [...] Der wilde Westen greift sich besonders gern die verlorenen Helden des muffigen Ostens.¹⁵

Rolf Michaelis emphasised in turn how the degree of civilisation and development 'bei uns' allowed East German artists to almost exploit the Western system for their own ends:

Wieder eine der Inszenierungen, in denen ein aus der DDR kommender Regisseur seinen Protest gegen alle Autoritäten demonstriert und die in der Denunziations-Gesellschaft von Honeckers Stasi-Staat versäumte, pubertäre Rebellions-Phase bei uns nachholen muß — mit der 'Umfunktionierung eines Klassikers'.¹⁶

¹⁵ Stadelmaier, 'Zorro teutsch: Frank Castorf zerschlägt Goethes *Stella* in Hamburg', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 2 May 1990.

¹⁶ Michaelis, 'Liebesdonner, Flammenseufzer: Frank Castorf inszeniert Goethes *Stella* in Hamburg', *Theater heute*, 7 (1990), 34.

Viewed in this light, it becomes more understandable why Castorf sharply differentiated between his West German and his Swiss experiences, Switzerland being a country to which none of the above applied. Indeed, Castorf went as far as to discover a certain resemblance between the two countries ('Die Schweiz ist mir als reiche DDR ganz angenehm gewesen. Sie besitzt eine ungeheuer präzise Ordnungsmacht'¹⁷) and to draw a clear distinction between Switzerland and the more reactionary Federal Republic:

Die westdeutsche Provinz ist bei allem, was ihre Sicherheit attackiert, was ihre Selbstsicherheit, ihr Wissen, ihr Zeitgefühl durcheinanderbringt, ungeheuer reaktionär. Wenn zehn Minuten nichts passiert, Wiederholungen einsetzen, dann ist das für sie keine Kunst. Was der Bauer nicht kennt, frißt er nicht. Bezogen auf eine ästhetische Erwartung, ist diese bäuerlich-kleinbürgerliche Moral, wenn sie (wie im Ruhrgebiet) sozialdemokratisch-gewerkschaftlich geprägt ist, absolut reaktionär. Nicht ein Jota vom Weg ist abzugehen, sonst werden sie böseartig. Das ist der Unterschied zur Schweiz.¹⁸

The ability of West German (postmodern) society to assimilate even the work of the director who deliberately mocked it proved fateful for Castorf. He could initially claim with a certain irony that:

Der Narr wird so gut bezahlt dafür, daß ich mir die Kappe gerne aufziehe: Das ist der Stückezertrümmerer, und dem wird Unrecht oder Recht getan. Damit bin ich ein Akzent des gut funktionierenden Systems. Das war ich auch auf eine andere Art im Osten, damit kann ich leben.¹⁹

Yet it became gradually clear that the risk of stagnation was very much present. Castorf became a director who could provide, without much effort, scandals 'made to order' for those *Intendanten* who wished to pep up their theatre seasons and to make a name for themselves in the press. Looking back to his experiences in the 1980s, he admitted that 'Ich hatte meine Chance bekommen wie *Rocky 1*, aber am Schluß steht man da wie *Rocky 4*: Der Kämpfer ist fett und satt, bekommt eins auf die Nase und muß den

¹⁷ Quoted in Balitzki, 'Westkontakte', 76.

¹⁸ Ibid., 76.

¹⁹ Huber, 'Akzent in einem gut funktionierenden System: Ein Interview mit Frank Castorf', Theatre Programme of *Torquato Tasso*, 13.

Urgrund von Haß erst wieder finden'.²⁰ It remains undeniable that it is partly thanks to the reputation gained in West Germany that he was called to take over the direction of the *Volksbühne*, and that his theatrical career thus advanced. It is however equally irrefutable that, when arriving in Berlin, he brought with himself a label which proved hard to shake off.

* * *

One of the most recurrent critiques of Castorf's theatrical concept is that his style lacks originality and mirrors the experimental theatre of the 1960s; the guest productions analysed in this chapter normally serve as an example to corroborate such theory. I would argue instead that it is the effect achieved by these works that may bring back to mind the productions of, say, the early Zadek, as the inevitable consequence of both was more often than not the creation of a scandal. Brandishing the *Werktreue*-banner, West German audiences accused the director of manipulating material, thus ridiculing Shakespeare's and Goethe's names, and of offending spectators, by leading them on to believe that they were about to see a play by Schiller or Ibsen, only to be showed a performance based on Castorf instead. I have mentioned in the previous chapter how faithfulness to texts could be enforced by the SED authorities in order to ensure the predictability of a production. When transported to West Germany, such a demand from audience and critics lacked this political implication, and was thus reducible to a question of sheer artistic taste and preference. The provocative act of dismantling plays to turn

²⁰ Quoted in Schütt, 'Das erste Gespräch: Ein Sozialismus wie New York', 25.

them into single collage-scenes is not to be glorified or condemned *per se*, but, rather, requires a further clarification before it can be judged, namely whether the significance and relevance of that which is added / subtracted / altered is at least equal to that of the original. As I will show later, Castorf's attempts have not always been successful; yet a denunciation of his *modus operandi* simply based on the assumption that every alteration to a text is a 'Literaturverfälschung' and that a director who dares interfere with Schiller must have 'Angst vorm *Tell*', as Rolf Hochhuth presupposes,²¹ is just as prejudiced as the claim that every modernised version of a classical text must necessarily be more stimulating and compelling than the original it refers to.

The accusation that Castorf was not producing anything 'new' seems to me to be equally inappropriate: Castorf was never out to break with theatrical tradition. Iden's criticism, as reported earlier, adopts, I believe, the wrong starting-point. Castorf's theatre was and remains remarkably subjective and individual; if, at times, it does fall into a repetitive pattern, it is through a repetition of itself rather than of someone else's work. Its continuous self-reference is actually more problematic than the scenario pictured by Iden. The slapstick techniques included in his guest productions were constantly borrowed from his previous GDR ones. Stella's image mirrored that of Anklam's Desdemona; Hamlet's thirst for beer was equal to that of Anklam's Rodrigo; the obligatory piano appeared as part of the stage design in Hamburg, Munich and Cologne. The significance acquired by theatrical props in the GDR is one which could hardly be transposed into the Federal Republic. If a leather sofa, a piano, a fridge may well have

²¹ Hochhuth, 'Die Axt im Theater erspart uns nicht den Mode-Regisseur. Werktreue — nur eine Chimäre? Straubs *Antigone* des Sophokles in Berlin und Castorfs Schiller-Version des *Tell* in Basel', *Die Welt*, 16 May 1991.

served the purpose of symbolising an affluent society — simultaneously dreamed of and mocked — when adopted in Anklam, or Halle, or Greifswald, they inevitably lost their provocative impact when shown to members of that very western society for whom the possession of electric domestic equipment belongs to everyday reality. It is of course to be taken into consideration that the average West German spectator would not have been at all familiar with Castorf's work in Anklam or Frankfurt/Oder. Yet, as far the reception was concerned, one cannot help but feel that his technique was doomed to fail on all fronts. Those spectators and critics who witnessed his theatre for the first time were quick to claim that they had already seen it all thirty years before; the few who were aware of the fact that a certain amount of recycling was taking place were just as keen to point out that they had experienced it, if not thirty, then three years before, and with the same director. Even though there is a sense in which a considerable amount of knowledge about Castorf's past theatrical work is actually necessary to understand and appreciate the one that followed, it is precisely this prerequisite which eventually proved detrimental to his guest productions, for as soon as one could trace back scenes, props and acting techniques one was automatically tempted to make comparisons with the original productions from which they were taken. A typical Anklam production loses all its originality, radicality and power when transported to Hamburg. What is worse, it even acquires an affected 'radicality' of a completely different kind, which, one has to admit, fits in perfectly well with the stereotypical picture of a GDR artist who still thinks that, for example, using contemporary music when staging *Hamlet*, or *Torquato Tasso*, or *Wilhelm Tell* is a revolutionary act. One is left to wonder why Castorf persisted in adopting music from The Beatles, The Rolling Stones and The Doors, groups which would have been considered somewhat dated even within the GDR itself, and which gave West German critics a formidable weapon to mock his 'retro' taste.

Provocation is undoubtedly the key word to describe his guest productions.²² The sheer choice of the plays that were staged acts as a giveaway; Castorf very rarely relied on 'classics' when working in the GDR provinces. Admittedly, in the Federal Republic he often simply reacted positively to invitations from *Intendanten* who were aware of the fact that a western audience could be more easily persuaded to go to the theatre by a production of Shakespeare or Goethe than by one of Grünberg or Schukschin. It remains an ironical coincidence that Castorf was as impotent to choose his own texts in the Federal Republic as he was in the GDR, albeit for different reasons. It is however no accident that he started his career in the West with what is possibly the most renowned theatrical text worldwide, *Hamlet*. Provocation was here rightly assumed to be the only approach that was still available (even though not necessarily an original one). Castorf deliberately mocked certain aspects of the play that had been exploited in numerous theatre and film versions, applying a postmodern approach to traditionally sacred moments in the play. The semi-incestuous nature of the relationship between Hamlet and Gertrude was for instance ridiculed by having Hamlet kiss mother and Claudius, and by showing Gertrude react to her son's affection with a cuff. Again, the mythical proportions attributed to the play by many an actor were relativised by showing characters who mocked each other, and, in so doing, their own profession: the scene in which every figure gives acting lessons to the other functioned so well precisely in view of the element of truth which was recognisable therein, also shown a few years later in Heiner Müller's staging of *Der aufhaltsame Aufstieg des Arturo Ui* in the *Berliner Ensemble*, where a similar episode took place between Bernhard Minetti and Martin Wuttke.

²² I will draw a distinction between the different characteristics of the provocation principle when applied in a GDR context and in West Germany in the following section.

In his commentary to the *Tasso* production, Georg Hensel defined Castorf's theatre as 'eine Orgie der Postmoderne', and went on to examine his conscience:

Kurzer, aber heftiger Beifall für die Schauspieler, stürmisches Buh gegen den Regisseur. Hätten ein heftiges Buh auch wir im Parkett verdient? Was hat uns so oft zum Lachen verführt? War es die Lust am Zerstören? Auf den Autobahnen fahren wir langsam an der Unfallstelle vorbei, damit wir die zermanschte Karosserie und womöglich das Blut der Opfer sehen können, bei Überfällen drohen die Täter nicht mehr lange mit der Waffe, sie schießen sofort. Der Kaputtmacher ist eine Leitfigur unserer Tage: er zerrt unsere unter Schaudern verborgene Liebe zur Katastrophe ans Licht. Es ist schöner, ein Spielzeug kaputtzumachen, als mit ihm zu spielen, das weiß jedes Kind.²³

I would argue that *Torquato Tasso*, and Castorf's guest productions generally, made use of two different postmodern traits, which ought to have instigated different effects in terms of audience reaction:²⁴ a genuine one, which took postmodernity as starting point, and a more contrived one, based on postmodernism. In the former case, the performances won a political character which justified the use of provocation. Examples for this are the already mentioned treatment of specific scenes in *Hamlet*, Tasso's yearning to fly, the link between sentimental and historical illusions in *Stella*, the notorious masturbation scene in *Miss Sara Sampson*, Gessler's final appearance as a foreigner seeking political asylum. In the latter case, an affected and exaggerated provocation lost all reference to any concepts that might have otherwise characterised the performance, and became meaningless and artificial, provocation for provocation's sake, and, in this respect, entirely 'postmodern' in character: Fernando's act of desperation — portrayed by the appropriation and ridicule of one of Hegel's metaphors, which resulted in his smashing cooked cabbages on Goethe's head —, the actress Sylvia Rieger (Sara, Stella, Hedwig) turning The Doors' song *The End* into an operatic aria in most productions, regardless of their themes, the plagiarism of scenes from Anklam

²³ Hensel, 'Wie man mit dem Hammer inszeniert: *Tasso* von und nach Goethe, angerichtet von Frank Castorf im Residenztheater München', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 29 October 1991.

²⁴ Although they did not, as I will suggest shortly.

productions in his Cologne *Hamlet*. In order not to turn into sheer repetition, postmodern self-reference necessitates an approach based on self-parody in order to be politicised, an approach that was at times distinctly lacking in the aforementioned productions. If the will to be ironic about oneself, as well as about the audience, is not present, every production runs the risk of becoming an act of arrogance and of turning into a pointless exercise in self-infatuation.

It is precisely in this context that one can distinguish between the effects achieved by the application of the same artistic principles (provocation, irritation) in fundamentally different cultural, social and historical frameworks, most significantly those of the audiences. The political connotations attained by Castorf's confrontation with GDR audiences were here in fact at times manifestly missing. His attack on *Werktreue* resulted mainly in a process of self-reference, which, as I suggested previously, was only partially successful. When a fundamentally unaltered aesthetic and intentionality was targeted against bourgeois subscription members of West Germany's theatre with the help of those artistic means that were once successfully adopted 'against' GDR spectators, the inevitable result was a process of de-politicisation. It is useful to remind ourselves again that postmodern traits of a twofold nature are recognisable in Castorf's guest production, and that there are instances in which their application was legitimate and justifiable. In this respect, I would argue that they ought to have achieved 'political' effects — after all, productions like *Miss Sara Sampson* and *Stella* depicted the politicisation of relationships by turning the development of eternal triangles into a real war of the sexes, and *Wilhelm Tell* provided a discerning analysis of the masses' behaviour in past revolutionary times, as well as portraying an accurate picture of today's Switzerland. However, given that the accent was unmistakably on postmodern provocation and eclecticism, these elements were perceived as belonging to an artistic

category rather than a political one, and were criticised, as such, for their artistic tastelessness, if not downright offensiveness, and for their lack of originality.

The transition one can recognise from Castorf's GDR productions, which, simplifying somewhat, were political in effect rather than intentionality, to his guest productions, which lacked a distinct political element in either, was eventually completed when he took over the direction of the *Volksbühne*. Chapter 9 will depict how his Berlin productions showed a refinement and repoliticisation of his aesthetics on both levels.

Chapter 8

Frank Castorf's *Volksbühne*-Takeover:

Programme and Aesthetics

The political situation of post-unification Germany, most particularly Berlin, mirrors to a certain extent that of the Weimar Republic — economic recession, right-wing excesses, a general distrust in governmental politics. Interestingly enough, this parallel is also perceivable on a cultural and theatrical level, as the controversies between Piscator and Max Reinhardt are reflected in the artistic contrasts between Castorf's *Volksbühne* and Thomas Langhoff's *Deutsches Theater* (and, to a minor extent, Andrea Breth's *Schaubühne*). It is worth mentioning that both Piscator and Reinhardt had, at different times, artistic control over the *Volksbühne*, and that speaking of 'the' *Volksbühne* tradition can be misleading: Castorf's acknowledgement of and obligation to the theatrical past of the house of which he is now in charge refers to a trend originated by Piscator and Georg Grosz, and later pursued in the Besson era, rather than to the current represented by Reinhardt and Julius Bab, reminiscences of which can be seen in the recent productions of Leander Haußmann, as well as in the above-mentioned 'Sprechtheater' *Deutsches Theater* and *Schaubühne*. This chapter will provide a short coverage of the events which followed Castorf's takeover in 1992, and briefly sketch the 'new' *Volksbühne*'s programme and aesthetics. An analysis of specific productions will be the subject matter of the following chapter.

* * *

‘Die Volksbühne schläfert nicht ein, sondern erschreckt mit ihrem gespenstisch genauen Blick auf unsere Wirklichkeit. Sie ist kein Nachlaß der DDR, sondern das erste gesamtdeutsche Theater.’¹

On the occasion of the hundredth anniversary of the *Volksbühne*, almost two years before the publication of the ‘Nagel Gutachten’, Peter Glotz advocated for the *Volksbühne* a return to the overtly political and a realignment with its past tradition:

Die Volksbühne hat nur eine Chance als zeitkritisches, politisches Theater. Ihre Marktlücke ist ihre Geschichte, zeitgemäß interpretiert. Ihre Zukunft ist die Vergangenheit, wenn sie souverän und respektlos genutzt wird.²

This concept was further expanded one year later by the team of theatre scholars, captained by Ivan Nagel, who had been invited to compile a report on the situation of the various Berlin theatres by Berlin Culture Minister Roloff-Momin.³ The section devoted to the *Volksbühne* is quoted here at some length; I will subsequently analyse its various themes separately, as they were all recaptured and capitalised by Castorf after his takeover:

Der Bau ist von schlagender Häßlichkeit. Hier sollte man (eben deshalb) ein junges Theater gründen: mit ästhetischer Innovationslust, politischem Mut, ähnlich wie (und sicher ganz anders als) einst die Schaubühne am Halleschen Ufer. In diesem Haus (in bröckelnder SED-Stuck-und-Marmor-Pracht, auf der Strecke vom Prenzlauer Berg nach Kreuzberg, mit Blick sowohl aufs Liebknecht-Haus als aufs Programm kino Babylon) ließe sich etwas bewegen. Beispielbar, belebbar ist nicht nur die Hauptbühne, sondern drei Foyers und ein Studio. Wir schlagen vor, daß das Land Berlin (mit dem Mut, des es 1970 hatte, Peter Stein und die Seinen aufzunehmen) die Volksbühne am Luxemburgplatz einer jungen Truppe, vermutlich mit Ex-DDR-Kern, gibt: einer Truppe, die ihr Theater machen will. Die sozialen, kulturellen Shocks und Wirrnisse unserer Lage könnten sich gerade in Berlin umsetzen: in einen neuen, erhellenden und verstörenden Blick des Theaters. Die Truppe der Volksbühne Ost würde ungefähr so viel Geld brauchen, wie die Volksbühne West zuletzt bekam, vielleicht weniger im ersten und zweiten Jahr. Bis zum Beginn des

¹ Ivan Nagel, speaking on the fortieth anniversary of the rebuilding of the *Volksbühne*. Quoted in Klawitter, ‘Deutschland, eine Posse. Volksbühne Berlin: Frank Castorf inszeniert *Pension Schöllner: Die Schlacht*’, *Stuttgarter Nachrichten*, 26 April 1994.

² Glotz, ‘Die Kunst dem Volke’, 253-54.

³ See Chapter 5 for an analysis of the report with references to other Berlin theatres.

dritten Jahres könnte sie entweder berühmt oder tot sein; in beiden Fällen wäre die weitere Subventionierung unproblematisch.⁴

It is worth noting initially that great importance is placed on the geographical position of the theatre. Its location throughout its history has in fact always had a close connection with the cultural and political situations of the times. It is Erika Fischer-Lichte who, referring to 'die *Geometrie* einer Kultur',⁵ designated the concept of the cultural identity of a theatre as a complex system of references, which include its location, its architecture, its aesthetics as well as its relationship to various social groupings. The location of the *Volksbühne* at Bülowplatz, as it was called during the Weimar Period, was indeed largely determined by its specific needs and objectives: the area formed part of the district of Prenzlauer Berg, which was predominantly inhabited by industrial workers. The theatre's location thus emphasised its connection to the working-classes, which were to constitute the *Volksbühne*'s targeted audience ('Die Kunst dem Volke'). The area was renamed Horst-Wessel-Platz during World War II, and Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz during the existence of the GDR. These historical changes of hands are reflected architecturally as well as geographically: the theatre consists of a mixture of proletarian, streamlined interiors and fascist decorations, such as the vertical banners which hang down the main façade. Castorf capitalised on both architecture and location. He referred to the *Volksbühne* as a 'Konzeptionsbühne', and contrasted its political character with the more artistic refinements of theatres such as the *Deutsches Theater* and the *Berliner Ensemble* ('Sprechtheater') by claiming that 'es bleibt nichts mehr übrig' because of an 'architektonische Notwendigkeit'.⁶ His

⁴ Nagel, Dieckmann, Merschmeier and Rischbieter, 'Überlegungen zur Situation der Berliner Theater', *Theater heute*, 5 (1991), 42.

⁵ Fischer-Lichte, 'Die Zeichen des Raumes', 135.

⁶ Castorf in the *Akademie der Künste* on 21 January 1996, during a debate on 'Theatertexte — Texte für das Theater?' dedicated to Heiner Müller.

coquettish reference to the pastiche of styles that is the *Volksbühne*, however, seems to suggest that it is precisely this odd mixture which fits in so adequately with his artistic programme. The same can be said of the location: the programme for the initial artistic season 1992/93, devised by *Chefdramaturg* Matthias Lilienthal, runs as follows:

Wir blicken böse auf diese Gesellschaft. Entfremdung. Verzweiflung. Wollen zeigen, daß man sich wehren kann. Das kulinarische Theater ist zusammengebrochen. Die Bühne als Arena für das tägliche Leben. Mieten. Gespräche. *Prenzlauer Berg und Kreuzberg. Skinheads. Autonome.* Was für einen Begriff von Nation kann es denn überhaupt noch geben? Die Stadt muß eine richtige Reibfläche kriegen. *Leute von hier sollen für Leute von hier spielen.* Wollen endlich die dunklen Keller ausräumen. Und: Wir haben die Chance, daß wir keine haben. Darum ergreifen wir sie.⁷ [my italics]

The closeness to the two Berlin districts historically renowned for their politically agitational and oppositional character, and which have in recent years become veritable meccas for young artists, is often stressed by Castorf, Prenzlauer Berg born, and by Lilienthal, whose distaste for the western part of the city is legendary (one remembers his 'Westberliner Zahnärzte'⁸). The new theatrical troupe abandoned the subscription system, and introduced tickets at incredibly competitive prices (12 DM and 5 DM to students, pensioners, homeless and unemployed, still applicable to advance bookings) to establish a new audience, and to win over those who were customarily foreign to theatre visits. As for Nagel's wish for a 'junge Truppe, vermutlich mit Ex-DDR-Kern', Castorf proceeded to sack twenty-two actors and technicians who had been employed in the theatre for over fifteen years. Had he kept the original troupe the *Volksbühne* would still have consisted of an ensemble whose average age was above fifty, and which included only three actors under the age of thirty.

⁷ Quoted in Friedrich, 'Die Räuber fackeln die Bühne an: Am Luxemburgplatz macht eine junge Mannschaft junges Theater', *Berliner Zeitung*, 25 August 1992.

⁸ My interview with Matthias Lilienthal, *Volksbühne*, 26 September 1997.

A further point in Nagel's report which deserves closer attention is his mention of the various possibilities that the house presented. The reference to the Besson era of the mid 1970s is unmistakable. Benno Besson, in close collaboration with Heiner Müller and with other directors (Matthias Langhoff, Manfred Karge, Fritz Marquardt) started artistic experiments, reaching back to the tradition of European folk culture, above all *Commedia dell'arte*. His concept was most evident in what he called 'spectacles', events in which various spaces throughout the theatre were used to mount pieces of different themes and styles, letting the audience be in control and free to choose amongst a variety of opportunities (*Spektakel II*, for instance, consisted of eleven GDR *Zeitstücke* running on nine different stages). Castorf similarly transformed the theatre into an institution in which everyone could find something to their tastes. Given the time span that had occurred between the two *Intendanten*, the 'happening' nature of Besson's programme was promoted into a 'multimedia' concept: the main stage, as well as the smaller spaces of the foyers and of the Dritter Stock are now used to their full potential for purely theatrical events; the Roter Salon provides a variety of artistic events, from public readings, to the showing of films, to video installations, to music concerts; the Grüner Salon hosts weekly tango nights and a theatre workshop ('Macht euer Theater selber') for fourteen to eighteen-year-olds. Moreover, in order to attract the attention of its potential audience, the *Volksbühne* started a PR campaign — led by set-designer Bert Naumann and his LSD (Last Second Design) group — which had no precedent in the history of any German theatrical institution, and the success of which has prompted other *Intendanten* to follow the same path (most notably Leander Haußmann at the Bochum *Schauspielhaus*). It invested over 300000 DM for its initial campaign, armed to the teeth with identity features which ranged from freely distributed boxes of matches and

items of clothing bearing various logos ('Front', 'Satt', 'Raushalten', 'Haut ab', 'Feuer', 'Zünd an'), to the actual symbol of the *Volksbühne* itself, a coarsely outlined cartwheel with legs, first adopted by Castorf in his *Die Räuber von Schiller* production of 1990, and meant to symbolise the Müller quotation 'unsere Aufgabe ist ungefähr so, daß wir im Fahren aus einem Fahrrad ein Flugzeug entwickeln können',⁹ to the more subtle adoption of recycled paper (of the kind that was used in the GDR) for theatre programmes, further submitted to a process of hot-metal setting instead of the more technologically advanced photocomposition. The old method allows chance to play a big part in the amount of colour applied to paper and thus presents a final product whose deliberate imperfection is in direct opposition to cold precision of (western) computerised typography.

The main focus on Nagel's report, however, is to be given to his wish for a 'Theater [...] mit ästhetischer Innovationslust, politischem Mut'. The innovative spirit which, according to Nagel, was required in order to save the theatre from oblivion (and a possible closure¹⁰) found its concretisation in the opening season: the new management encouraged theatre projects performed by a homeless group (Die Ratten), who had originally been members of the cast chosen by Jeremy Weller for his guest production *Die Pest*; the new *Volksbühne* troupe performed a true *tour de force* by staging five premières in four weeks¹¹ as part of a cycle called '7. Oktober — 9. November', the dates referring to, respectively, the former GDR's national holiday,

⁹ The sentence is spoken by Belfert in *Der Bau*.

¹⁰ During the period which immediately followed the temporary closure of the *Schiller Theater* in 1993, the news leaked that the the Berlin CDU members of the local government had proposed that the *Volksbühne* be shut down instead.

¹¹ They were Castorf's *König Lear*, *Rheinische Rebellen*, *Fremde in der Nacht*, Kriegenberg's *Stadt der Gerechtigkeit* and Papakostopolus' *Stallerhof*. It is interesting to notice how some of the repertoire reflected the theatre programme of the *Volksbühne* in the 1920s.

and the Reich's pogrom night as well the day the Berlin wall fell. By the beginning of its second season the *Volksbühne* could boast an average of a première each month, not including guest productions and artistic events of a non-theatrical nature, and two new acquisitions which initially caused no little controversy between theatre academia and local government, namely director Johann Kresnik, who moved his political *Tanztheater* from Bremen to Berlin, and film-maker Christof Schlingensief, whose former work had been repeatedly banned from the Berlin Film Festival because of its alleged scurrilous character.

Taking as a starting point the not so unfounded assumption that the Berlin theatrical landscape left a lot to be desired with regard to the individual characters of the houses, Castorf's initial target was to establish and position the *Volksbühne* by providing it with a unique identity which, in terms of reception, left one with no alternative but to express either a strong (mostly uncritical) enthusiasm or an equally bold (mostly unfounded) distaste. Every season opened with a clearly stated programme: the historical one of 1992/93, for instance, also included a public debate named 'Über die neue Freiheit' — attended by Gregor Gysi, Ivan Nagel, Eberhard von Brauchitsch, Peter Wawerzinek, and an audience of over one thousand people — to discuss German unification ('oder wie man das Ding nennen soll', as one spectator phrased it). The following programme was named 'Gebt uns ein Leitbild!', after a line from the song *Geburt einer Nation* by the Ukrainian punk group Laibach, whose explicit right-wing politics¹² was ironically overturned when their scream for identity was boldly printed and paraded on banners hanging from the theatre's façade — a theatre which, it must be remembered, had by then received public acclaim for

¹² The rest of the song contains lines such as 'Eine Geburt, eine Nation, ein Volk, ein Führer, eine Rasse, ein Blut. Gebt uns ein Leitbild!'.

providing former GDR citizens with the very 'Leitbild' it allegedly sought. The season's concentration on and manipulation of right-wing ideology culminated with an accident which followed the première of Castorf's *Clockwork Orange*, when young skinheads disrupted the show, and, in true *Werktreue*-spirit, requested a more obsequious approach to their cult book/film (much in the same way, in fact, in which the West German educated bourgeoisie had reacted to Castorf's guest productions in the late 1980s).¹³ The following theatrical season focused on the portrayal of women, and included Kresnik's production of *Rosa Luxemburg* as well as Castorf's *Alkestis* and *Die Stadt der Frauen*. A year later, in 1996, the *Volksbühne* presented a celebration of 'Lokomotiven der Geschichte: 7 Jahre Mauerfall', a programme tellingly subtitled 'Freiheit macht arm' (from the homonymous book by Dietrich Dietrichsen), meant to comment on and criticise the 'new' freedom of GDR citizens. It is worth noting that the qualification 'new' may imply one of two very different concepts: it can suggest that the freedom originated by German unification is a 'new', i.e. previously unknown, phenomenon, and, just as legitimately, it might point to the fact that there existed an 'old' freedom, wiped away by historical events. The context in which the term was inserted runs as follows:

Mit dem Kapitalismus ist nun auch im Osten die Freiheit von Arbeit, die Freiheit von der zudringlichen Fürsorge des Staates gegeben. Die gemeinsame Forderung der Prenzlauer-Berg-Szene und der Kreuzberger 'Nie wieder arbeiten-Fraktion' ist heute Wahrheit geworden. Die alte Hippie-Forderung nach der Freiheit von Arbeit, um in den Tag hinein leben und sein eigener Herr sein zu können — plötzlich ist sie Realität. Nur eine Realität, die man sich nicht nur freiwillig wählt, sondern in aller Regel zwangsverordnet wird.¹⁴

Arguing against a concept of freedom which is at best 'produced' by society and at worst actually imposed by it, the programme went on to question whether democracy

¹³ See Chapter 4, note 97.

¹⁴ Theatre preview for the season 1996/97.

as we know it, characterised as it is as a 'Gesellschaft der Mittelmäßigkeit',¹⁵ actually represents the right form of government to tackle the problems of unified Germany. Castorf's position with respect to the East-versus-West debate has been outlined elsewhere; what is significant in this context is the successful link between the ideological programme and its concretisation, which provides a further example of the *Volksbühne*'s positioning against a rather bland theatrical landscape. The interest in the topics of democracy and dictatorship, and their connection with the Baudrillardian fascination for 'evil' was reflected in all the productions staged during that season, most notably in Müller's revolutionary piece *Zement*, in Zuckmayer's *Des Teufels General* and Shakespeare's *Richard III*. The debate which the *Volksbühne* had started in 1996, focused around the alternatives 'freedom to work' and 'freedom from work', was ironically put to an end by the very same theatre one year later: the season 1996/97 opened with the motto 'Wir werden arbeiten!'.

Before closing this chapter and proceeding with the analysis of a selection of *Volksbühne* productions, it is worth stressing that the notion of postmodern political theatre which I have applied to Castorf's individual productions lends itself particularly well to define the *Volksbühne*'s general identity that has emerged from the previous description. The ambiguous mixture of westernisation and anti-*Leistungsgesellschaft* attitudes has led many a critic to believe that the *Volksbühne* is unashamedly exploiting Berlin's political and artistic vacuum for its own (economic) purposes. I would argue, however, that its features may be recognised as calculated marketing tricks and still work as attempts to capture and voice the political situation of the nation. Indeed, one could suggest that the theatre's ideological purposes are coated with postmodern stratagems in order to make an initial public impact at all. If on the one hand the

¹⁵ Op. cit.

cultivated chaos, the programmed scandals, and the controversial nature of some of the early statements of Castorf and Lilienthal ought not to be naively dismissed as fortuitous accidents, one should perhaps ask oneself whether the theatre's new beginnings would have aroused so much interest in various social circles had its policy not been formulated so radically. It seems at the very least naive to expect a theatre to still be able to be in touch with the external world (let alone to provide significant contributions to its understanding and transformation) if one denies this institution the possibility of embracing the traits of which the very external world consists. I am particularly referring to the accusations that the *Volkstheater* has appropriated media techniques which are all too familiar to contemporary audiences from the pop culture and the entertainment industry. I have already addressed the issue of the *Volkstheater* audience in Chapter 3; my argument here is, quite simply, that had the theatre not done so there would not be a new audience to theorise about. The intellectual capacity of the new *Volk* that Castorf has secured deserves some credibility: it must be assumed by sheer logic that its theatrical interests extend to something other than the odd clip of film or song refrain which habitually form a part of the *Volkstheater* productions — after all cinemas and concert venues which can provide the same artistic product in its entirety are all but extinct. Also, the fact that more and more members of the educated middle classes now form a not inconsiderable part of the *Volkstheater* public — a fact which, admittedly, problematises Castorf's wishes for 'his' audience — is further proof that, more often than not, there is content under the postmodern coating.

Chapter 9

Frank Castorf's *Volksbühne* Productions: Descriptions and Analyses

‘Wer sind die Schutzheiligen der Berliner Volksbühne?
Marx & Engels? Liebknecht & Luxemburg? Brecht & Müller?
Oder doch am meisten Laurel & Hardy?’¹

Chapter 8 has dealt with Castorf’s *Volksbühne*-takeover from a (theatrical-)historical perspective; it has analysed the artistic and marketing policy of the new troupe, and it has included a brief sketch of the years that followed. I will now concentrate my attention on a number of those productions which have made the theatre’s achievements at all possible. Given that Castorf has directed over twenty productions in the *Volksbühne* alone between 1990 and 1999 a selective process has been unavoidable. I have thus included in my analysis his ‘Trilogie der Alltagsgeschichte’ — consisting of *Pension Schöllner: Die Schlacht*, *Golden fließt der Stahl: Wolokolamsker Chaussee I-III* and *Des Teufels General* — as well as *Das trunkene Schiff*, his first Berlin production in 1988, and *Trainspotting*, the production most recent at the time of writing. My attempt will be to try and show that the notion of ‘postmodern political theatre’ is best applied to his Berlin work, and to bring the discussion relating to the Castorf-Müller connection to its conclusion.

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The première of *Pension Schöllner: Die Schlacht*,² the first part of the trilogy, was on 21 April 1994. Castorf’s idea of juxtaposing such disparate texts — the former a Berlin boulevard-comedy by Laufs and Jacoby, the latter Heiner Müller’s grim

¹ Henrichs, ‘Pension Hitler oder Das fidele Grauen’, *Die Zeit*, 29 April 1994.

² See photograph in Appendix 2.f.

representation of fascism, first performed in the same *Volksbühne* by the duo Karge / Langhoff in 1975 — dated back fifteen years. First envisaged in Anklam, the project soon had to be abandoned as the authorities refused permission for it to be staged. Its concretisation, years later, in the *Volksbühne*, was unanimously considered to be one of the major theatrical events of 1994 and resulted in Henry Hübchen being awarded the title ‘Schauspieler des Jahres’ by *Theater heute* for his role as Uncle Phillip Klapproth, who arrived in Berlin from the provinces in search of adventure and with the intention of infiltrating into a real mental institution but was made to sojourn in the perfectly ‘normal’ Pension Schöller instead, where he wrongly believed the behaviour of the other guests to be insane. The connection with Müller’s text was primarily achieved by transporting the comedy, written in 1889 and thus originally set in the Wilhelminian period, to 1939, more specifically to 20 April 1939, the day of Hitler’s fiftieth birthday. The scene was opened by the two brothers of Müller’s text reciting their lines in all seriousness. It was only as their dialogue progressed that one gained the impression that, despite their absolute adherence to the original text, something was not quite right; both actors seemed to have difficulties pronouncing the letter ‘L’: the communist threatened his Nazi brother (‘Kriech in dein Fenn, Hund, draußen bennt die Meute’), who in turn explained that ‘ich hab geschwiegen im Gestapokenner’. The climax was reached as the audience learnt that ‘ans die Unsern in den Kennern schrien die nangen Messer schnitten durch Berlin hab ich getötet mein Bruder ihn’. The communist brother eventually turned into an SA officer, relaxing in the pension Schöller, who told racist jokes throughout the entire production, and his Nazi brother became a waiter. A reformed life but, alas, the same linguistic problems for the waiter serving ‘Pinsner’ in the pension ‘Schöner’, whose real aspiration in life was to become an actor and to be given a ‘tonne Ronne’ in ‘Othenno’, ‘Wannenstein’, or ‘Kabane und Niebe’. He eagerly recollected to his guests

memories from his past acting career, when his 'konossanes Tanent' could be publicly admired even by Hitler,³ and went on to proclaim that, had he been given a chance to act, he would have surely prevented the 'Schnießung des Schinner-Theaters', which actually took place in Berlin in 1993.

All other characters, that is, all the guests in the pension, appeared to have been extracted from a book of German caricatures: valiant young men in lederhosen, concentration-camp victims, Nazi commanders, and their female pendants, ranging from innocent blond maidens in dirndls to monstrous valkyries. All constantly drinking beer and eating (and throwing) potato salad, in a petty-bourgeois environment which incorporated a certain shabby GDR-gloominess: dreary furniture, purposefully repulsive wall-paper with flowery patterns, doors fitted with leather surfaces, a chandelier with tasteless lampshades, behind it an alternation of swastikas exploding like fireworks on the one side and the GDR emblem badly painted on a piece of wood on the other, brought on stage by Klapproth and eventually thrown over an imaginary bridge into an appropriate sea of oblivion. It was after having ordered lunch ('Zum Führergeburtstag drei Matjes und Kartoffelsalat') that Klapproth and his two young nieces began to meet the regular customers of the hotel: the globetrotter Fritz Bernhardt, the novelist Josephine Krüger, the musician Ernst Kissling. The former, just returned from one of his journeys to the East, appeared with typically Asiatic costume and make-up, and answered the waiter's questioning about where he had been with 'Flagen Sie lieber, wo ich nicht war. Palis, Kailo...'; his various new accessories were then listed ('Zigaretten', 'eine Uhl'...), to the astonishment of the waiter: 'Mit einem Wort, Sie sind eine wandernde internationale Industrierausstellung'. Strengthened by the discovery of the

³ This he does by quoting from Heinrich George's eulogy to Hitler: 'Wenn der Führer ins Theater kommt, haben wir Schauspieler ein besonderes Nervenfieber, jedes unheimliche, angenehme, ängstliche Gefühl, in dem sich Ungewißheit, Ungeduld, Erwartung, Stolz und Selbstbewußtsein sensam mischen ...'.

other's speech defect Bernhardt went on to tell his audience that after returning from his journeys he always had the distinct feeling of being the personalisation of the 'ewige Jude', only to be stopped by Franziska, one of Klapproth's nieces, who caught an asthma attack as soon as the word 'Jude' was mentioned, and who went on to scream the entire content of the 'Reichsbürgergesetz' of 15 September 1935 to Bernhardt's face. At that precise moment a new guest entered the pension Schöller; Ulrike Sprosser, Klapproth's sister, who wore a concentration-camp uniform and was consequently not recognised by her own daughters. She ordered a hot chocolate with 'Schlagsahne', and told the others that it had been so long since she last had it, since where she came from she only got 'Schlag' and no 'Sahne'. As the brother questioningly stared at her, still none the wiser, she could only reply 'Naja, wo werd'ich wohl geblieben sein'.

Klapproth's ingenuity — punctuated with a 'Jawoll, det is' Bälín', exclaimed at the end of every unusual episode in the hotel — became even more apparent when he was physically confronted with the other guests. Pension Schöller slowly turned into a house of disreputable nature: the novelist Josephine, one sexual innuendo after the other, sought to seduce him in order to gain an insight into his personal biography and thus to manipulate his life events into her own writings; the globetrotter Bernhardt, after a prolonged striptease inclusive of sock-throwing, approached the terrified Klapproth and his entangled legs only to extract two real snakes from his travel bags and wrap them around his own body, precariously balancing them while facing an astonished Klapproth and a possibly even more astonished audience — a silent scene which lasted over twenty minutes. Alfred, Klapproth's nephew, entered the stage riding a wooden tank with a cannon pointed upwards, causing the guest musician to run in the opposite direction, only to be reassured by Alfred's remarks 'Errätst Du es denn nicht? Ich bin verliebt!'. The tank, accompanied by a remote-controlled model helicopter launched into the

auditorium, marked the state of war and the leap to 1945, the time in which Müller's last scene ('Das Laken oder die unbefleckte Empfängnis') was set: the connection was ironised and turned into a communal copulative act — to which all characters joyfully participated on a white sheet — at the end of which they searched in vain for traces of their lost innocence. The final picture portrayed them all happily reunited around the table, practically immersed in potato salad, singing a tune borrowed from one of Christoph Marthaler's productions, 'Sag beim Abschied leise Servus'. All with the exception of Bernhardt, who stood leaning against a wall throwing rubber bands to the audience: the war may well have been over but the 'ewige Jude' was still *persona non grata* at the German table.

The anecdotes surrounding the origin of the second part of Castorf's trilogy, *Golden fließt der Stahl: Wolokolamsker Chaussee*,⁴ are almost as fascinating as the production itself. As I mentioned in Chapter 6, Karl Grünberg's play had already been staged by Castorf in Brandenburg in 1979, and his treatment of what was universally considered to be a socialist-realist classic had caused him to be put on trial. *Golden fließt der Stahl*, written in 1950 and first performed in the same year in Nordhausen, had in fact served as a prime example of laudable GDR drama during the debates on formalism, and its author, who had reached popularity with his novel *Brennende Ruhr*, written in 1929, and who had been awarded the GDR annual award for achievement in arts (*Nationalpreis*) in 1953, belonged indisputably to the category of the working-class writers. Interestingly enough, the play never made it to a main GDR stage, for the ingenuous content and the style with which it had been written automatically turned Grünberg's well-meant intentions of portraying the construction of a socialist society into a parody of themselves: even the most realistic, indeed dogmatic, approach would

⁴ See photographs in Appendix 2.g.

not have prevented the self-criticism coming to the fore. A hymn to the steadfast working people who protected the People's Own steelworks from the machinations of capitalist saboteurs, the play was set in the 'North German Steelworks' in the proximity of Berlin, shortly before the foundation of the GDR, and written like a crime thriller with an East German touch: intrigue, murder, love, betrayal, self-sacrificing activists, cunning saboteurs, evil western capital and courageous eastern reconstruction.

Two years before the première, Castorf and Gregor Gysi organised a public reading of the text in the *Volksbühne*, provided an explanation of the events which took place in 1979, and appealed to the audience to decide whether the play was worth a second staging by putting it to the vote with red ('Ja') and white ('Nein') cards. The connection with Heiner Müller's *Wolokolamsker Chaussee* was established only subsequently. His monologues, sketching the phases of the GDR's breakdown, were then inserted into Grünberg's text in a manner that differed profoundly from the approach taken in *Pension Schöller: Die Schlacht*. Whereas in the first part of the trilogy Müller's text was juxtaposed, indeed almost amalgamated, with Laufs' and Jacoby's comedy, the second part was characterised by a veritable compartmentalisation. The plot remained strictly based on Grünberg's unaltered text. The engineer Micha, once belonging to Hitler's Party, but a reformed character since the end of the war, respected by all his colleagues, had suddenly disappeared from the steelworks without explanation. The entire action was based on the search for the truth conducted by his wife and by his colleagues, who refused to believe in the official version given by their superiors (namely, that he had escaped to Düsseldorf to join the former director of the steelworks, who had also fallen into the western capitalist trap). Amongst a series of falsified letters, forgotten glasses and laboratory experiments, they eventually discovered that Micha had been thrown into the melting furnace of the steelwork: traces of his

golden teeth (his nickname was 'Goldpaul') had in fact appeared in the chemical solution prepared by the young laboratory technician Eva.

Of paramount importance in the production were the sharp contours of the dramatis personae. Their hackneyed characterisation strongly mirrored that of their counterparts in the first part of the trilogy, yet it was not achieved through deliberate overacting; the stereotypical images they portrayed derived precisely from an almost dogmatic adherence to the text. As I suggested earlier, the staging of *Golden fließt der Stahl* immediately threw light on elements of irony and self-parody: all characters were united by their political belief, their good intentions and their naive stupidity. One was thus not surprised at seeing the young laboratory technician Eva impersonated by an annoyingly well-meaning, hard-working young woman who talked with a high-pitched teacher's voice, took over some of the lines of the female engineer in Müller's *Der Bau*, and ended most sentences with 'Wir müssen wachamer sein!'; one was not disturbed by the foolish results of an attempt to repair the tap hole — namely water draining from the ceiling and pouring out of the receiver of a ringing telephone — by Kilian, a simpleton with alleged hidden talents; and one was almost relieved when the murderer was finally unmasked. The qualified engineer Rothkegel, a villain smoking American cigarettes, drinking ground coffee, wearing a fitted suit and thus immediately recognisable as an infiltrated western agent, had been clearly out of place in the environment created by Bert Naumann's stage design, which reminded one of the soberness and plainness of the so-called 'Produktionsstücke' of the 1950s: a sparsely furnished assembly room, with the portrait of a smiling, benevolent Stalin hanging from the wall, half-dead potted plants and dull curtains, full of rosy-cheeked people working to the sound of 'Freie Deutsche Jugend, bau auf!'. The only surprise in terms of characterisation came with regard to the cleaning lady, originally a proletarian mother-figure, and here named 'Mutter

Schreibvögel', and with regard to Minna, the worker in charge of the disposal of old iron. The role of the former was simultaneously played by three middle-aged voluptuous women, a trio of Graces with blond wigs and tight pink miniskirts who — *nomen est omen* — loudly trilled their verses in unison, constantly blathering, whining and sighing. The latter, in Grünberg's text a minor figure, was to acquire a significant role in Castorf's production: it was in fact Minna that was primarily responsible for Müller's monologues. Instead of placing them within the general context, Minna interrupted scenes and dialogues by carrying a bomb on stage, a relict from the Second World War, by transforming herself into the Russian commander of *Wolokolamsker Chaussee I*, and by beginning with her recitation ('Wir lagen zwischen Moskau und Berlin...') to the initial astonishment of her working colleagues ('Was redet sie denn da?'). It was only after a number of her performances that the others began to recognise the pattern ('Ah, Müller!'); their immediate reaction, as if they too were keen to show their literary knowledge, was to parade up and down, marching in step, and to sing 'Das Wandern ist des Müllers Lust'. Soon bored, they adopted the strategy of dozing off as soon as Minna took over; and when even their apathy did not prove enough to stop her, Kolasius, the chairman of the works trade union committee, ran to her pleading 'Schluß, Minna, Schluß! Hör auf mit deinen ollen Kriegskamellen!', and, as a gesture of conciliation, pinned two medals on her overall as an award for her former shows.

Thus inserted, almost monument-like, into the main plot, Müller's monologues acted only partially as sobering elements within the performance; images of fascism and dictatorship emerged more powerfully from the slapstick situations devised by Castorf, which, as I will portray later, collided against the good taste of many a theatre critic and journalist. At this stage it will suffice to describe them briefly, in order to bring the depiction of the production to a conclusion. A parody of fascism was initially rendered

through the meeting of two characters, Kolasius and Steinfurth, steered by the new director of the steelworks: the two greeted each other like old friends and explained to the surprised director ('So, die Herrschaften kennen sich?') 'Na, und ob, wir sind alte Kumpels aus dem Sonnenburger KZ!' with the same joviality with which one might recollect primary-school memories. The most powerful scene was however portrayed by the transformation of the assembly room (viz. changing room) into a gas chamber, as the three Mutter Schreivögel took a shower at the end of a hard day's work. Cheerfully intoning 'Singing in the Rain' they realised all too late that gas, rather than water, was pouring out of the pipes, and they were eventually carried away by the director of the steelworks, masked as a devil, who threw their bodies into a furnace and thus delivered them to the same fate as Mucha's, while loudly recollecting the events of 17 June 1953 in the form of a passage from Müller's 'Der Duell', as the picture of Stalin which hung on the wall went up in flames. The passage from fascism to Stalinism to GDR-reality appeared in all its clarity in the final moments of the production, when Castorf, as if with no interest left in the original plot, reduced the climax of the discovery of the culprit to a mere exchange of words (Minna to Rothkegel: 'Mörder!'; Rothkegel: 'Na und?') and allowed all characters to sleep the sleep of the righteous under a red sheet after having sung the punk group Fluchtweg's song *Arbeitsscheuer Ostler*,⁵ golden snow fluttering down the socialist sky. It was Mucha's widow who had the last word: actor Joachim Tomaschewsky, dressed as an old woman, related of the progressing bureaucratisation of

⁵ 'Ich lieg um zehn noch auf der Matte / Und ratz' mir einen weg / Draußen kommt der Westler / Und recyclet meinen Dreck / Er macht 'ne Menge Kohle / Und denkt er ist hier King / Und wenn er abends umfällt / Hört er wie ich sing / Ich bin ein arbeitsscheuer Ostler / Und das ist mir nicht peinlich / Ich bin ein arbeitsscheuer Ostler / Und hab meinen Spaß dabei / Ich bin frei und ostgeboren / Und das noch nicht mal heimlich / Ich bin ein arbeitsscheuer Ostler / Und hab meinen Spaß dabei / Er hört nicht auf zu schufteln / Was für ein armes Schwein / Versuch's doch mal mit Hungerstreik / Auch du kannst Ostler sein / Von Kiel bis Saarbrücken / wir haben nur ein Ziel / Ein Volk von faulen Säcken / Das nur macht was es will / Vom Rhein bis an die Oder / Wo dieses Lied auch klingt / Wir geben keine Ruhe / Bis auch der letzte singt / Ich bin ein arbeitsscheuer Ostler ...'.

socialism with the help of Müller's text ('Die Kentauren'), and wondered: 'Ist der Wurm drin?'

The last part of the trilogy consisted of the staging of Zuckmayer's *Des Teufels General*,⁶ which, as was phrased in the *Volksbühne*'s monthly programme, '[ist] das vielleicht einzige Theaterstück, das in jeder Bahnhofsbuchhandlung vorhanden ist'.⁷ Written between 1943 and 1945 in American exile, the play was dedicated by the author to the legendary fighter pilot Ernst Udet, and was welcomed by the German audiences with unprecedented enthusiasm. First premièred in the Zurich *Schauspielhaus* in 1946, the text had been performed over 5000 times in Germany by 1955, and Helmut Käutner's film version (1955), with actor Curd Jürgens as General Harras, permanently sealed the success of Zuckmayer's play. Up until the late 1950s spectators could in fact identify with the figure of Harras, and judge his destiny sympathetically: *Des Teufels General* thus became an identification-drama, incorporating as it did the attempt at self-justification of a post-war Germany begging for forgiveness. Intrinsicly linked with its *Zeitgeist*, it was foreseeable that the play would eventually lose its appeal, and, more importantly, its historical bond with the subject-matter it portrayed; by the 1960s, once a certain degree of objectivity towards the text and the war events themselves had been gained, and the documentary theatre of Hochhuth, Weiss and Kipphardt had emerged, taking a diametrically different approach to the historical past, it became clear to what extent *Des Teufels General* had played down the role of the *Wehrmacht* and, generally speaking, of the followers of National Socialism, despite its moral impulse.

Castorf transported the historical past into an imagined future; the time of action was extended from 1941 into the era of the German economic boom, whilst maintaining

⁶ See photographs in Appendix 2.h.

⁷ *Volksbühne*'s theatre preview, August / September 1996.

nebulous contours: the temporal shift allowed one to perceive how post-war Germans chose to remember their National Socialist past — namely in the form of a collective fantasy and often falsified recollections — by retaining a critical distance towards characters and actions. One might almost argue that, despite its historically accurate content and its consequent intrinsic realism, the production was set in a future that was imaginary as well as imagined: at the back of a semi-deserted stage — from which the characters emerged to the sound of easy-listening music — a globe rotating in a starry sky, whose surface was adopted as a projection surface for documentary photographs (corpses abandoned in concentration camps, crashing aeroplanes during aerial warfare, a mushroom cloud) that set a counterpoint to Zuckmayer's plot. The audience was thus provided with a vantage point from which to view the events, gaining the impression that the characters had been locked into a satellite station somewhere in the universe. The same distanced, almost surreal effect was moreover achieved by a calculatedly confused characterisation, as Castorf turned the performance into a continuous exercise in gender-bending and cross-casting. If the biographies of the characters were left intact, and brought to light all their different approaches to fascism — that of the believers in National Socialism (Hartmann, Pützchen), that of the popular heroes (Eilers), that of the beneficiaries of the régime (Sigbert von Mohrunen), that of the old fighters of 1923 (Pfundtmayer), that of the hypocritical followers (Diva Olivia) and that of the members of the Resistance (Oderbruch) — , the sexual gender of the characters seemed to have been caught in a whirlpool. General Harras was alternatively played by Corinna Harfouch and Bernhard Schütz, Dr. Schmidt-Lausitz by Sophie Rois and Hendrik Arnst, Olivia Geiss by Hendrik Arnst and Corinna Harfouch, Pützchen by Bernhard Schütz and Sophie Rois. The confusion arose because of a precarious situation whereby every role had to be performed by two actors/actresses, which, in turn, were each in charge of the

portrayal of at least two characters. To complicate matters even more, only sporadically did the sexual gender of the characters coincide with that of the performers. The purpose behind this superficially meaningless manoeuvre can be more easily explained when considering the most conspicuous example of cross-casting, namely that of General Harras himself. The character was impersonated by actress Corinna Harfouch in the first act; the audience thus witnessed a woman playing a man on stage and mirroring those real life situations in which men thought they had to behave in a 'manly' way. Harfouch's Harras showed his interest in 'Weiber, saufen, fliegen', and very little interest in the politics of war:

Ein Nazi bin ich nie gewesen. Da habt ihr ganz recht. Immmmer nur ein Flieger... und mein Geld habe ich selber verdient, hab oft genug den Kragen riskiert. Ich habe auch niemande eingeheiratet, nie aus der Parteikasse gelebt, keinen Juden bestohlen und mir kein Schloß in der Uckermark gebaut. Ich bin ein Flieger. Und wem's nicht paßt — der kann sich verpissen.

Once the role was taken over by Bernhard Schütz in the second and third act, it became gradually clear that, despite (because) being played by a male actor, Harras fell precisely into those stereotypical 'manly' gestures that had been previously mocked. Such gender games provided the possibility to present specific traits in a distinctively satirical light, showed that the participation in National Socialist activities was 'generalised', in the sense that it was not gender-related, and, most importantly, prevented the audience from falling into the trap of emotionally identifying with Harras and thus justifying his behaviour. By suspending the monopoly of male actors wearing uniforms, which might well have resulted in a behaviour explainable in terms of 'military psychology', Castorf shed light on the sex-related, as well as power-related, aspects immanently present in the wearing of an uniform. These were in turn exteriorised through the acts of sexual intercourse in which the production abounded. Monogamy obviously out of the question in a state of war, every character was attracted to everybody else: Harras, still a female,

displayed her sexual drive in the first act by practically raping Diddo Geiss, the niece of the Diva Olivia, and by succumbing to the advances of the aunt herself, played by a male actor. In the second act the Diva was played by Corinna Harfouch (the former Harras), who tried to win the attention of the 'new' General, impersonated by Bernhard Schütz. After realising that her attempts were in vain, she suddenly remembered previous engagements ('Mensch, Kinder, um Gottes willen, ich muß ins BE ... in einer Stunde geht der Lappen hoch!') and left the stage.⁸ Harras soon forgot her and devoted himself to an American journalist, under the envious eyes of Dr. Schmidt-Lausitz, a Nazi cultural delegate, who could not keep his eyes away from the gymnastic exploits of the two, while murmuring to himself 'mein Schwanz, mein Schwanz...'. And so forth.

Every aspect of fascism was mocked to such an extent that the apparently tasteless jokes actually produced a much clearer picture of it: from the misfortunes of the air force officer Hartmann, disqualified from marrying because unable to provide the necessary Aryan certificates relative to his foreign great-grandmother ('Sie ist unbestimmbar. Die Papiere sind einfach nicht aufzufinden'), to the ingenuity of Diddo Geiss, who wished she could be a Jew (one that managed to emigrate to America before the war broke out) so that she could see the world, to the ambiguous behaviour of Harras. He bitterly admitted that 'jeder hat seinen Gewissenjuden, damit er nachts schlafen kann. Aber damit kauft man sich nicht frei. Das ist Selbstbetrug. [...] Das Gemeine zu lassen ist schlimmer, als es tun', looked at his image reflected into a large mirror and then carried it to the front edge of the stage, inviting the spectators to examine their conscience too. The third and last act was summarised and spoken in

⁸ Corinna Harfouch had in fact the central role in Stefan's Kolditz's *Eva — Hitlers Geliebte*, a production which was running in the *Berliner Ensemble* at the time.

unison by a 'Chor der Opfer', constituted, of all people, precisely by those who had emerged as Nazi followers in the course of the performance, now acting the part of a court of justice; they answered Harras' question 'Was werdet ihr sagen über mich, wenn ich tot bin?' with 'Nichts', with which Harras had to content himself: 'Nichts. Nichts, geht in Ordnung'. Finally, by way of an epilogue, Oderbruch, the member of the Resistance who had been responsible for the sabotage of the aeroplanes, presented himself as a newly converted National Socialist, and, having been informed of Harras' suicidal mission, ended the production by speaking lines which originally belonged to the Nazi delegate Dr. Schmidt-Lausitz: 'Hauptquartier? Reibungslos abgewickelt. General Harras soeben in Erfüllung seiner Pflicht tödlich verunglückt. Beim Ausprobieren einer Kampfmaschine. Jawohl. Staatsbegräbnis.'

* * *

First staged in the Berlin *Volksbühne* by Erwin Piscator in 1926, *Das trunkene Schiff*⁹ is Paul Zech's translation of Rimbaud's *Le Bateau ivre* — a collection of poetry which turned the seventeen-year-old Frenchman into the main representative of the early Symbolist movement — and simultaneously the title of a scenic ballad composed by the same German author in 1908, which depicted the historical and political background (the war in 1870, the Paris Commune, the Third French Republic) of Rimbaud's biography as well as his complex relationship with Verlaine. Castorf's first Berlin production, which opened the 1988/89 season at the *Volksbühne*, ran until 1991 and was eventually resumed in the theatre calendar on 16 November 1995. It has been performed abroad on

⁹ See photographs in Appendix 2.i.

a number of occasions (from Zurich and Vienna to Moscow and Brazil) and it has achieved a cult status in Berlin. Its location has remained unchanged — it was initially relegated to the theatre's smallest stage (Dritter Stock) — and Bert Neumann managed to make a virtue out of necessity by constructing a stage design which provided the actors with a space of peculiar proportions (17 m. width; 3,5 m. depth), and the spectators with a mere 56 seats. The intimate character of the performance has been moreover safeguarded by the sporadicness with which it is staged (once monthly at the most). The intimacy that arises from the proximity between players and audience explains the changes adopted by Castorf: he reduced the number of characters from Zech's twenty-seven to six, and deleted a large amount of explanatory dialogues, thus preventing the performance from becoming visually tedious, in the awareness that the actors would not have been able to stand inconspicuously on such a small stage. The relationship between actors and audience constituted as much of a central focus as the performance itself, and the theoretical assumption according to which spectators are to be considered as a genuine part of a production rather than merely as its viewers found its concretisation. Two diametrically opposite modes of behaviour presented themselves, and both were grasped with equal force: *Das trunkene Schiff* abounded with scenes in which the audience was deliberately ignored and with scenes in which it became aggressively incorporated into the action. The production started in fact with prolonged sounds of laughter from Rimbaud and his sister Isabella, coming from a part of the stage invisible to the spectators because covered with paper; after having eventually destroyed the 'fourth wall' they looked around, astonished and scared at seeing so many unknown people, coyly covered themselves up with the paper and stared into the spectators' eyes as if to ask them the motive for their presence there. Alternatively, Verlaine first

appeared on stage loudly playing the trombone into the audience's ears, and spraying perfume in the air, after having commented on the stale air he was forced to breathe.

The various stations of Rimbaud's biography, from puberty to his post-revolutionary parting from the Paris Commune and Europe, were captured in short direct images. The initial childish crying and playing of Rimbaud and Isabella, for instance, announced their regression to childhood. The age of adolescence was physically portrayed by Isabella, glimpsing inside her blouse and wondering at the sudden presence of her developed breasts. The passing of time was indicated by a brief scene in which the two teenagers filled their mother's mouth with nails, which she spat out one by one as if they had been the decayed teeth of an elderly person. Her children's move to Paris was sketched by Isabella drawing a serpentine line on the stage floor with chalk, and then onomatopoeically imitating the sound of a train as she strode on it, accompanied by Labatut. The gimmick was also responsible for the encounter between the Rimbauds and Verlaine; the latter, intrigued by the drawing, followed it with his head bent, until he found himself at his destination, as it were, under Isabella's skirt. In the atmosphere of bohemian Paris, simply hinted at on stage by the presence of three pianos, Isabella turned into a prostitute and Labatut into a pimp; after having asked 'Wieviel' Verlaine was seen fondling her clothes, discovering a poem that Rimbaud had given to her sister, and reading it out enthusiastically, pausing only to look into the audience and exclaim 'Ist ja Wahnsinn!', while the two stripped him of wallet and clothes. Almost entranced by the poem, Verlaine had to be made aware of his nudity by his wife Mathilde, who appeared on stage and positioned herself in front of him in order to cover his shame. The bourgeois nature of their relationship was then caricatured *ad absurdum* through the introduction of scenes of everyday life in an unhappy marriage: the husband retiring to fetch new clothes and unable to find anything, the wife petulantly telling him where to

find them ('In der Schublade. Unten rechts'), the husband masking his embarrassment with anger ('Es kann doch wohl nicht alles in der Schublade sein. Scheiß Schubladentheater!'). Or, again, through their banal conversations: Verlaine and Mathilde discussing what to have for supper, listing to each other various possibilities with which the other partner, predictably, did not agree, and to which he/she responded by twisting his / her mouth ('Schon wieder Artischocken...', '...äks... Suppe von gebackenen Erbsen', 'Englischer Braten á la jardinière? Nee, danke', 'Apfelkompott!'), until they remembered at the end that they had just been listing the content of their wedding meal. The tumultuous relationship between Verlaine and Rimbaud thus gained, in comparison, even more weight, albeit maintaining Verlaine as the weaker partner. Rimbaud, the walking stereotype of the nonconformist, conceited young prodigy, was indifferent to or, at best, bemused by, Verlaine's love declarations and his attempts to corrupt him into producing even more poetry, attempts which included, incidentally, the offer of his wife, declined by Rimbaud with a mere 'zu wenig Busen'. When at last he set his genius to work, and lamented a lack of inspiration, Verlaine made himself even more laughable by jumping around him like a boxer and shouting to him words of encouragement ('Hols raus! Von unten ... von ganz unten hols raus! Drücks raus! Los! Zieh!').

The political background of Rimbaud's life was eventually brought to the fore by the arrival of Labatut, a multifaceted figure transformed into a Napoleonic invalid, a pimp, a clochard, a drunken Communard and a bogey of the middle classes depending on the needs of the plot. Escorted by a suddenly politically aware Rimbaud, and carrying with him a red flag, he sermonised Verlaine about the revolutionary cause until the latter, eager to win back the attention of the young poet, exclaimed with conviction that 'ich werde ein sozialrevolutionäres Ballet schöpfen. Ich habe schon eine Melodie im Ohr',

and, after a new attempts out of tune, began to sing the *Internationale*: 'Ein Lied geht um die Welt ...'. Having failed to impress Rimbaud, Verlaine shot him in desperation; the former collapsed, composed a poem whilst on the verge of dying, and was eventually brought back to life by Labatut, who sucked the bullet out of his body and led him off stage. Verlaine, abandoned and bereft of his muse, was finally brought to bed in a child-like state by his ever-present wife, soothed by her reassuring words: 'Komm, Paul. Nur im Ehebett gedeihen die großen Dichter, die das Publikum liebt.'

* * *

First a novel by Irvine Welsh, then a theatre version by Harry Gibson, then a cult film by Danny Boyle, *Trainspotting*¹⁰ was to have been staged in the *Volksbühne* — the first German theatre version — by the Hamburg film director Matthias Glasner, who, however, interrupted the rehearsals in December 1996 and gave the project up. The first German première thus fell into the hands of the Cologne *Trash Theater* in February 1997. Proving that 'die da an der Volksbühne machen nicht nur, was sie wollen (so die landläufige Fama), sondern sie machen auch tatsächlich, was sie machen wollen',¹¹ as the theatre critic Schultz-Ojala remarked, Castorf took over the direction and brought the production on stage on 26 April 1997. Compared with the *Berliner Ensemble*, which seems to have established a pattern of late according to which theatrical projects are advertised in the press only to be postponed indefinitely after a short period of time (see,

¹⁰ See photographs in Appendix 2.j.

¹¹ Schultz-Ojala, 'Der Rest ist Reden. Ambitioniert, aber beliebig: Frank Castorfs Versuch mit *Trainspotting* an der Volksbühne', *Der Tagesspiegel*, 28 April 1997.

for instance, the delays with *Germania 3*, *Monsieur Verdoux*, and the abandoned project of B.K. Tragelehn), the *Volksbühne* can claim for itself a seriousness which few would have originally granted it. Castorf had already contributed to the rescue of another production in the past — namely *Die Sache Danton* in 1994 — by actually taking over the role of Danton, after the première had to be postponed twice because of Henry Hübchen's injuries.

Trainspotting's theatre programme, which provocatively stated that 'auf folgenden Punkt sollte aufmerksam gemacht werden: Wenn es zu den Spritzenszenen kommt, kann es vorkommen, daß es im Publikum Ohnmächtige gibt. Es sollte für diesen Fall Vorsorge getroffen werden', nourished the expectations / hopes / apprehensions of many a theatre critic, convinced *a priori* that the production would be a 'Alle-Macht-den-Drogen'-spectacle and match the image of Berlin as a mecca for drug addicts, thus becoming a worthy successor to *Christiane F.: Wir Kinder vom Bahnhof Zoo*. Yet the allegedly calculated scandal did not take place. The sheer spatial environment in which the four actors moved could not have been further away from Leith, the dreary dock area of Edinburgh, home to the protagonists of Boyle's film adaptation. Castorf's theatre version was staged behind the iron safety curtain, practically backstage, with spectators and actors alike experiencing theatre from its entrails, the stage design mainly consisting of an industrial landscape, a quasi surreal no man's land: the floor, covered by rows of lamps, resembling a runway and leading to the safety curtain, on which hung a video screen, showing a documentary about the life of the icon singer Nico and endless railway tracks. A bed was the only prop. The costumes of the protagonists, by comparison, appeared positively comforting. The actor Peter René Lüdicke had apparently been forced to wear a monstrosity made of flesh-coloured bulges of foam material; it was only as he began to complain about it that one finally understood what it was supposed to

represent ('Na also ... sieht so'ne Darmbakterie aus?'); Hendrik Arnst gave the evening a Scottish flavour by wearing a kilt; Matthias Matschke showed the glamour world of drugs with a pair of glittery latex trousers, and Kathrin Angerer spent the evening under a duvet. This last artifice, actually brought about by a foot injury which the actress had suffered, preserved nonetheless all the characteristics of a deliberate dramaturgical move, and resulted in the performance being centred around her, the bed acting as enclave, love-nest, refuge, prison, throne, depending on the circumstances.

The only references to the film adaptation were of mocking nature; after a furious beginning, in which the three male actors virtually regurgitated their texts at impossible speed ('Willstndu', 'Passma'uff', 'Haltifresse'), the audience was told apologetically that 'wir spielen hier einen Film nach, den wir gar nicht verstanden haben'. The entire production oscillated between a selection of scenes which bore links of some sort with novel, play, or film, and the private conversations of the actors, intent on discussing their roles or complaining about Castorf's *Volksbühne*-politics. The satirical intention behind the former allusions emerged from three particular episodes. In the first one, Matthias Matschke dealt with the notorious opium suppository episode more like a market crier than a dealer, with a microphone in his hand, declaiming with enthusiastic tones the properties of various drugs, and selling three for the price of two. In the second one the death of a baby, caused by the neglect of his addict mother, was re-proposed with sharp coldness, by letting a doll crawl amongst the floor lights and cry with exasperating loudness for minutes on end until, its batteries exhausted, it hit a lamp and stopped moving, and the delayed — hence impeccable — lamentations of the quartet, inclusive of chest-beatings full of pathos, confirmed that the theatre production was not out to make false alliances with the protagonists and be an accomplice in their destinies. The third instance referred to the mourning of the death of one of the characters' brothers, a

British soldier shot while on duty in Northern Ireland, depicted by the three male actors marching on stage, sinking their teeth with fierce determination into Union Jack flags, and downheartedly realising: 'O Gott, das ist es also, das politische Theater'.

The mocking references to Castorf ranged from the bodily inspection of Kathrin Angerer, who publicly apologised to 'Frank' for her small breasts, to the criticism of Hendrik Arnst, who disagreed with Castorf's directing techniques and offered him a piece of his practical philosophy ('quäle nie den Text zum Scherz, denn er fühlt wie du den Schmerz'), to the plea of Peter René Lüdicke to treat the 'freilaufende Tiere auf die Hinterbühne' with more respect, whereby it was not clear whether he referred to the stuffed squirrel he carried with himself or to the ensemble of *Trainspotting*. After 105 minutes and not a single heroin-shooting-scene the actors, who at worst tapped meaningfully on their forearms, and most of the time actually contented themselves with the odd bottle of beer or two, took their leave by proclaiming 'Keine Macht den Drogen' with the same mock-conviction with which an American counterpart might have declaimed 'Just say no', thus gaining the biggest laugh of the evening.

* * *

I have been suggesting in the past chapters that Castorf's *Volksbühne* productions show a refinement of his aesthetics both in terms of effects and directorial intentionality. It is in these, in fact, that one can best test the validity of postmodern political theatre in its concretisation — one in which postmodern traits, deriving from the artistic and philosophical spheres, are appropriated and repoliticised. Castorf's merit lies in the recognition that if the ubiquity of mass media in postmodern society has important

political and social implications, it must also have a determining cultural / artistic influence. Moreover, 'the postmodern' has created a storehouse of images that has led not only to aesthetic practices but also to the shaping of the environment in which cultural discourses are disseminated and theatrical procedures are developed. In other words, the pressure of (any) theatre's competition with postmodern forms is inevitably reflected in production practices, in the material condition under which they take place, in the composition of the audience and the formulation of its expectations, and in the forms and contents of the theatrical productions themselves, whether affirmatively or negatively. While it is ironic that mediatised technologies and contents, perhaps the *sine qua non* of the pressures that compromise theatre's integrity, have become an integral part of it, this is, to a point, symptomatic of the technological and aesthetic contamination that is inevitable in the present cultural and social framework of postmodernity. Given that theatrical productions now often incorporate mediatised elements, it has become increasingly problematical to propose that theatre should remain ontologically pristine and that it should operate within a cultural economy separate from that of mass media. My argument here is that it is not possible for postmodernist artists (by which I mean contemporary artists living in postmodernity, rather than postmodern artists who invoke postmodernism), in their critique of postmodern culture, to represent themselves as somehow outside the culture they are criticising. Postmodern culture is so thoroughly saturated by media images and information, which, in turn, are reflected in one's social behaviour, that contemporary political art has had to find ways of mounting a critique while acknowledging its position within that culture. This becomes particularly noticeable in a German context when one takes into consideration, for instance, the myriad of mediatised projects (from documentaries to commercially successful films) which have been devoted to the historical portrayal of the Third Reich. Castorf's

appropriated those images in his productions, and disrespectfully mocked their impact and significance by either having them constitute the scenic background against which to set more pressing matters (Diddo Geiss and Harras dancing the twist in *Des Teufels General*) or turning them into artistically offensive gags (the shower-scene in *Golden fließt der Stahl: Wolokolamsker Chaussee*).

What is more, it seems to me that Castorf is aware that cultural discourses (and theatrical productions) depend for their very existence on representation, not simulation: a pure postmodern theatre could only present, not re-present, and, in this sense, it would become both a product of and an affirmative response to mediatised culture. In order to overcome this dichotomy — how to operate artistically in postmodernity, whilst not compromising his political aims — Castorf has appropriated those postmodern traits which were needed to make an artistic impact, and repoliticised their effects, as I will try to show in the following sections.

* * *

Postmodern elements abounded in the productions I have tackled earlier. The blurring of the distinction between high and low culture, for instance, was immediately perceivable in the juxtaposition of disparate texts with different artistic 'value'; slapstick devices, playful caricatures, genre-bending games, as well as the amalgamation of different artistic sources, styles and techniques, constituted a major artistic element. The very name given to the trilogy, 'Trilogie der Alltagsgeschichte', acted as a giveaway: world history was experienced through a perspective taken from everyday life — which demonstrated a shift of attention from grand narratives to caricatured postmodern localism — and was thus given an ordinary touch which was also apparent in some of the

Anklam productions (for instance in *Othello*, as the discussion relating to the number of ships with which the Turks were sailing to Cyprus and Rhodes was reduced to a chat between two old ladies sitting on a sofa) but which inevitably acquired a more immediate sense of 'here and now' when the historical events that were being referred to related to twentieth-century fascism and communism. *Pension Schöller: Die Schlacht*, the first part of the trilogy, was meant to bring forth a 'Genealogie deutscher Geschichte',¹² by contrasting the trivial, innocuous intrigues in the pension Schöller with Müller's parable of betrayal and fascism during the Second World War. Castorf displayed the German petit-bourgeois *modus vivendi* without teutonic grimness, and replaced Müller's horror scenes with joke articles, showing that he was far from stirred by the latter's pathos; indeed, *Die Schlacht* was not offered as a counterpart of or as a contrast to *Pension Schöller*, even less as an explanation of it. Müller's text became an indistinguishable part of the whole, and the audience's laughter applied to the former as well as the latter. The postmodern principle of 'anything goes', which is in direct contrast to any notion of political correctness in the way it ensures that a comical approach can be guiltlessly applied to practically everything, acquired a political connotation by having been made relevant to a subject-matter over which there is in reality little to laugh about. The theatre programme explained the intentions behind the production thus:

Lachen über Deutschland: Das deutsche Lustspiel wird von Müllers Stück über den deutschen Faschismus durchkreuzt und umgekehrt. Die Kategorien, die alle im Munde führen über Political Correctness, werden zum absurden Spiel. Dreht es sich um Auschwitz oder die deutschen Kleinbürger oder darum, daß man nur noch über dieses Land lachen kann. Man weiß nie: ist das Lustspiel irre oder dieses Deutschland lustig. Es ist das böse Lachen über Deutschland, das den Guten zum Bösen werden läßt und den Bösen zum Guten.¹³

¹² Theatre Programme of *Pension Schöller: Die Schlacht*.

¹³ Ibid.

By so doing, fascism and politically correct anti-fascism alike were deprived of their specific auras, in that the former was not portrayed as a forgivably tempting option and the latter did not evolve into the obligatory exercise normally practised by the post-war German generations.

Pension Schöller: Die Schlacht gained historical relevance through temporal postponement, that is, by being transported to the eve of the Second World War, which allowed for the interplay of Müller's text. *Golden fließt der Stahl: Wolokolamsker Chaussee* examined the next chapter in German history and concentrated on a recapitulation of the 'experiment' GDR. The optimistic flavour of Grünberg's text, written in the early phases of the socialist reconstruction — an era still characterised by a clear division between capitalist villains and communist champions — was relativised by Müller's monologues, which scanned its end. Even in the hopeful world of *Golden fließt der Stahl* there was however the need for a victim: the new society was indirectly proclaimed through a sacrificial ritual, namely the burning of a human being in a melting furnace. Castorf went so far as to say of Grünberg's text:

Es ist viel systematischer [...] als so'n Heiner-Müller-Stück, was ja immer geschichtspessimistisch, aber doch mit großem inneren Wohlwollen die Aufarbeitung der DDR wie im *Bau* angeht, letztlich mit einer großen Sympathie für diesen DDR-Aufbau. [...] Es signalisiert unfreiwillig, daß man ab einem bestimmten Zeitpunkt Nein sagen, streiken, prinzipiell etwas in Frage stellen muß.¹⁴

The production capitalised on those very images which brought to mind memories of an uncomfortable past, through the concentration-camp recollections of Kolasius and Steinfurth and, above all, through the shower-scene of Mutter Schreivögel described earlier, with the consequence that Castorf fell again into what the press had labelled a 'Faschisten-Debatte' three years earlier.¹⁵

¹⁴ Theatre Programme of *Golden fließt der Stahl: Wolokolamsker Chaussee*.

¹⁵ See Chapter 4, 111 ff.

memories back into the minds of the spectators. In order to achieve the same impact, fifty years later, a higher degree of provocation appears to me to have been inevitable. Finally, and most importantly, it is worth bearing in mind that laughter must not be dismissed *a priori* as a sign of agreement with what is shown on stage, or as a means to abreact or sublimate it. 'Das böse Lachen über Deutschland' was truly dialectic, as it demystified the fascist as well as the anti-fascist importance attributed to Auschwitz. By no means did it negate or ridicule the historical event itself; rather, it questioned the attitude taken towards it, both during and after the Second World War, in much the same way in which, in *Pension Schöller: Die Schlacht*, it caught an audience amused by the waiter's speech impediment and thus paradoxically laughing about 'die Nacht der nangen Messer'.

The last part of the trilogy, *Des Teufels General*, examined the same chapter in German history from a western perspective, and concentrated on a recapitulation of the years that followed 1945 in the Federal Republic. The text itself unintentionally exposed the ideological constitution of post-war West Germany, and it thus reminded one of Grünberg's equally accidental self-criticism. Referring to Zuckmayer's play, Castorf commented:

Ich hab so einen Hang zu [...] 'schlechten' Stücken, die den großen Vorteil des Ideologiegelagerten, Klischeehaften haben. [...] Das Stück [trifft] das Bewußtsein der fünfziger Jahre der Bundesrepublik, vor allem was die Einfachheit der Geschichte angeht: der schwarzgewandete Gestapo-Kulturleiter, erkennbar in seiner Schuftigkeit als Täter, und der Luftwaffenchef Harras als Opfer. Geschichtsklitterung im Westen und in der DDR [...]: Alles geadelte Anti-Faschisten, Kommunisten und Juden, der konsequente Anti-Faschismus als Verleugnung der historischen Kontinuität zu der Zeit vor 1945.[...] Das Totalitäre kann man ja nicht einfach an ein anonymes Es, den Staat, delegieren, sondern das haben wir alle als Struktur in uns, die Gefahr des Totalitären reproduzieren wir selbst. Wenn wir das lachend zugeben können, dann geht es uns ein bißchen besser.¹⁸

¹⁸ Quoted in Tiedemann, ' "Ich bin fremd in dieser Gesellschaft, weil sie keinen pädagogischen oder utopischen Auftrag hat" ', *Freitag*, 25 October 1996.

Zuckmayer's play, labelling National Socialism as the primordial evil, and Hitler as its embodiment, delivered in fact a convenient apologetic plea which was moreover substantiated by the renowned film version that followed: Curd Jürgens appeared on the big screen as a cheerful, hard-drinking daredevil making fun of the Nazis with courage and wit. It follows that the priority of a director wishing to stage it should have been the attempt to elude the playing down of fascism, immanent in the text, through a critical portrayal of Harras. Yet, much in the same way in which *Trainspotting* had disappointed the expectations of those who wished for a more exuberant drugs-based performance, Castorf did indeed remove the superficial attraction of the fighter pilot, but only to replace it with a deeper and more complex fascination. If, on the one side, all manly traits were either eliminated, denounced or mocked, on the other an erotic component was introduced through the gender games I described earlier, which made Corinna Harfouch's Harras worthy of sympathy.

It is interesting to note that the last part of the trilogy did not contain any texts by Müller. The 'schlechte Stücke' referred to by Castorf had been counterbalanced, in the first and second part, by 'serious' ones: *Pension Schöller* by *Die Schlacht*, and *Golden fließt der Stahl* by *Wolokolamsker Chaussee*, thus creating a juxtaposition of texts with different artistic 'value' which, as I argued earlier, mirrors the postmodern interweaving of high and low culture. My argument, as I will seek to demonstrate now, is that we have entered a late phase of postmodernity that the early postmodern Müller has not been able to survive; my assumption is that, after seven Müller-productions (*Die Schlacht*, Anklam, 1982; *Der Auftrag*, Anklam, 1983; *Der Bau*, Karl-Marx-Stadt, 1986; *Wolokolamsker Chaussee I-III*, Frankfurt/Oder, 1988; *Pension Schöller: Die Schlacht*, Berlin, 1994; *Golden fließt der Stahl: Wolokolamsker Chaussee I-III*, Berlin, 1996; *Der Auftrag — Erinnerung an eine Revolution 1996*, Berlin, 1996, a guest production at the

Berliner Ensemble), Castorf has taken his permanent leave of him. It was Peter von Becker who had first recognised the service that Castorf had rendered to Müller:

Beerdigt wurde Heiner Müller im Januar 1996 in Berlin auf dem Dorotheenstädtischen Friedhof, nahe Hegel, Fichte, Brecht. Begraben aber hat ihn sogleich das Theater. Noch vor den Inszenatoren in Bochum und am BE, wo sie Müllers Nachlaßwerk und Gespenster-Wiederaufstehungsrevue *Germania 3* gespielt haben, tat unweit des Grabs den ersten Spatenstich der Allerhellste, der Allerschnellste. Frank Castorf, natürlich.¹⁹

I have already discussed how Castorf extrapolated in his productions the (hidden) funny side of a notoriously cynical Müller; he created a trend that is now perhaps most apparent in the work of Leander Haußmann in Bochum, especially when one compares his staging of *Germania 3* with its more sombre counterpart by Martin Wuttke in the *Berliner Ensemble*. As far as Castorf is concerned, however, one has the impression that there has been a further movement from comedy to postmodern farce. In *Pension Schöllner: Die Schlacht*, the amalgamation of Müller's parable with the Berlin boulevard-comedy led the *FAZ* theatre critic Gerhard Stadelmaier to the conclusion that *Die Schlacht* was there 'nicht Teil der Literatur, sondern Teil des Systems. Die schärfste Müller-Kritik, die sich denken läßt'.²⁰ Castorf's postmodern games with genres were particularly noticeable in *Golden fließt der Stahl: Wolokolamsker Chaussee*, for instance through actress Heide Kipp reciting Müller's monologues with heartfelt pathos, eventually in tears, only to turn to her colleagues on stage at the end and enquire 'War ich gut?', as well as through the characterisation of Mutter Schreibvögel. Von Becker established an interesting connection between Castorf's three cleaning ladies and the three mysterious ladies of a completely different kind that appeared in Robert Wilson's

¹⁹ Becker, 'Gespenster am toten Mann: Heiner Müller oder Eine Variation über Vampire', *Theater heute Jahrbuch* (1996), 108.

²⁰ Stadelmaier, 'Bocksgelächter: Castorfs Berliner Sieg in *Pension Schöllner: Die Schlacht*', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 23 April 1994.

legendary production of Müller's *Hamletmaschine* in the Hamburg *Thalia Theater* back in 1986. Wilson had turned the actors into Pirandellian figures in a theatrical cyberspace, Hamlet into a 'virtual' Hamlet, Ophelia into a 'virtual' Ophelia. His three actresses reappeared in Castorf's production at the *Volksbühne* ten years later, blonder and dumber.²¹ Castorf exorcised what was, according to Becker, 'vermutlich die erste und wohl einzige Tragödie der — bereits zur Vergangenheit gewordenen — Postmoderne'.²² Bringing the argument to its logical conclusion, one might claim that he transformed modernist genres such as tragedy and comedy into a more generalised (late) postmodern farce.

Two further connections to the main argument can be established here. The first relates to my original statement that Heiner Müller's work has dated faster than one would have expected, the second could be viewed as a possible explanation for the first, and concentrates on the more generalised postmodern phenomenon of genre-bending. On the occasion of the first performance of *Die Schlacht* (*Volksbühne*, 1975), Henning Rischbieter, prominent theatre critic and co-founder of *Theater heute*, claimed that the German theatre had reached a fourth phase in its critical analysis of the Nazi era: the first phase, exemplified by Brecht's *Furcht und Elend des Dritten Reiches*, had been of a didactic nature; the second phase, portrayed through Zuckmayer's *Des Teufels General*, had been apologetic; the third phase, symbolised by Hochhuth's *Der Stellvertreter* and Weiss' *Die Ermittlung*, had had a documentary character. The fourth phase, according to Rischbieter, belonged entirely to Heiner Müller, who had moved beyond rash moral

²¹ It could be argued in this context that it is Wilson's figures which can be described as embodiment of 'the postmodern', in view of their digitalised nature, rather than Castorf's. Yet I would argue that the attribute can be given with the same degree of accuracy in both instances. Given the sheer impossibility of incorporating the postmodern in its conflicting and contradictory entirety in one's artistic work, it is legitimate to extrapolate from it those traits which best suit one's artistic intention — digital elements in Wilson's case, and parodying, playful ones in Castorf's.

²² Becker, 'Gespenster am toten Mann: Heiner Müller oder Eine Variation über Vampire', *Theater heute Jahrbuch* (1996), 109.

statements and had overcome the division between 'good' and 'bad', 'innocent' and 'guilty', 'right' and 'wrong', replacing it with a tragic historical fatalism (one which, incidentally, extended up to the family unit, as was shown by the two brothers in *Die Schlacht*).²³ Twenty years later, I would argue that the fourth phase has also become somewhat obsolete, what with historical developments like the German unification which Müller could not have prognosticated then, and with directors like Castorf who twisted Müller's pessimism into theatrical gags. It would appear to me that the fifth phase — with which we have entered into the late phase of postmodernity — is characterised precisely by this movement to the farcical.²⁴ The movement was, interestingly enough, initiated by Müller himself. Referring to Marx's famous statement that all great historical events occur twice, the first time as tragedy, the second as farce, Müller first positioned farce 'im Bauch der Tragödie' and then rectified it by stating that 'im Bauch der Farce lauern die Tragödien'.²⁵ One could take his last statement even further and affirm that it is by now of no relevance at all, in theatrical terms, whether a text is primarily intended as tragedy, comedy, melodrama, or whatever; it is what becomes of the text once it is

²³ See Rischbieter, 'Nazizeit auf dem Theater: Tötungs-Reigen. *Die Schlacht* von Heiner Müller in Berlin und Hamburg', *Theater heute*, 12 (1975), 6-14.

²⁴ See also Franz Wille's position: he recognises that 'inzwischen hat diese vierte Stufe der theaterhistorischen Nationalsicht auf vielen Bühnen ausführlich gezündet [...] und [...] aus manchem einsichtigen Müller-Kenner wird im Dunkel des Parketts ein gelangweilter Müller-Penner'. His desire for a fifth phase, however, is simply based on his (wish for a) recognition of postmodernity, whereas he does not prognosticate the features of a 'theatre for the future': 'Ein Theater, das Utopien erschafft, wäre trotz allem einschlägigen Gerede auch höchst überflüssig, denn an unerfüllbaren Träumen mangelt es derzeit nicht. Wer wollte schließlich nicht eine Welt, in der es sich etwas menschenwürdiger (siehe Bosnien), etwas besser (siehe die Ex-DDR), etwas weniger fremdenfeindlich (siehe Deutschland), etwas unverseuchter (siehe überall) leben ließe. Nur hat sich längst herumgesprochen, daß die simplen Ziele aus verschiedenen Gründen gerade mal wieder unerreichbar sind. Theater der Phase fünf braucht deshalb keine neuen Hoffnungen, die alten reichen vollkommen. Das Beste bis auf weiteres: Die eingefahrenen Denkbahnen der scheinbaren Unabänderlichkeit ein wenig auflockern und den Köhlerglauben an die eigene Unfehlbarkeit gründlich aushöhlen. Vorläufiges Endergebnis der phasentheoretischen Überlegungen: *Theater heute braucht das Nachspiel — der Aufklärung*'. [my italics]. Wille, 'Grimassen der Heiterkeit', *Theater heute*, 6 (1994), 11 and 17.

²⁵ More precisely: 'Daß in *Wolokolamsker Chaussee* die Farce ('Kentauren') vor der Tragödie ('Der Findling') steht, konnte ich 1987 nicht begründen. Heute scheint es mir die Norm. Im Drama seit Shakespeare steckte die Farce im Bauch der Tragödie, mit dem Bankrott der sozialistischen Alternative geht die Ära Shakespeares zu Ende, und im Bauch der Farce lauern die Tragödien.' Müller, '*Wolokolamsker Chaussee*, 1985-87', 344.

remembered with reference to Peter Stein or Andrea Breth, and not in view of its most recent successes; the *Maxim Gorki Theater* has experienced an artistic boom since the arrival of Katharina Thalbach; the *Berliner Ensemble's* destiny has been placed in the hands of Claus Peymann.

The loosened tie between theatre and literature (or, negatively expressed, the lack of literary material suitable to be staged — of which Piscator had already complained with reference to the 1920s) may also explain why an increasing number of directors have been looking in other directions to find their primary sources. The production *Das trunkene Schiff* was for example based on a biography, which, in turn, referred to a collection of poetry and, as such, hardly constituted the usual playwright's material. *Trainspotting* has been the last in a long series of adaptations which show that the link between theatre and cinema is just as strong as that between theatre and literature.²⁸ Even if limiting one's attentions to the recent productions which have taken place in Berlin, one cannot ignore the growing trend: Kresnik's *Teorema*, Castorf's *Clockwork Orange*, *Die Nibelungen: Born Bad* (with its evident reference to *Natural Born Killers*), *Die Stadt der Frauen*, *Trainspotting*, Werner Schroeter's *Monsieur Verdoux*. In *Trainspotting's* case, many a theatre critic had felt that the memory of the film was still too fresh in the people's minds and that the sheer power of the cinematic images could hardly be translated in theatrical terms ('Die tobenden Rauschbilder des Kinos, wie von innen gesehen, und zugleich diese aberwitzige Lebenslust, das hält kein Theater aus.'²⁹). Curiosity, however, prevailed at the première:

²⁸ This is of course not to say that the link between theatre and cinema is in any way intrinsically postmodern — one only needs to think about Piscator's productions in this context. I would however argue that Castorf's *Trainspotting* was given a postmodern treatment based on self-referentiality and self-irony, one in which the link between theatre and film (of which the audience would have been aware *a priori*) was subsequently not only acknowledged but openly parodied: 'wir spielen hier einen Film nach, den wir gar nicht verstanden haben'.

²⁹ Schulz-Ojala, 'Der Rest ist Reden. Ambitioniert, aber beliebig: Frank Castorfs Versuch mit *Trainspotting* an der Volksbühne', *Der Tagesspiegel*, 28 April 1997.

Die Hip-Dichte war ganz enorm. Ja, es scheint so, als wäre Frank Castorfs Volksbühne am Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz bei der Premiere von *Trainspotting* der hippeste *place in town*, denn so viel grünes Haar und Schwarzgewand, so viel Nach-Sartre-Existentialismus hinter der schwarzen Brillen, so viel Foucault-Glatze war selten. So einen Aufrieb kann der Kultursenator der Hauptstadt einen Beweis für 'kulturelle Vielfalt' heißen, und keiner wird ihm widersprechen. Theater tot? Ach was!³⁰

Undoubtedly aware of the cult status that the film adaptation had reached, and equally conscious of the fact that any moralising approach to the subject of drugs would sink in a sea of indifference, Castorf chose to turn this very apathetic stance into the main theme of his production, namely the temporary sharpening of one's awareness, artificially brought about by mind-expanding drugs or by intoxicating theatrical experiences. The connection between a drugs-induced and a theatre-induced inebriation was made clear by the placement of the actors' biographies into the performance. These theatre addicts spoke of their artistic beginnings and of their relationships with the *Volksbühne* director in the same tone with which drug addicts might recollect their first experiences with heroin and with their dealer.

I mentioned at the beginning that *Trainspotting* and *Das trunkene Schiff*, as well as the 'Trilogie der Alltagsgeschichte', can be viewed as examples of postmodern political theatre, and that their choice has not been an arbitrary one. Simplifying somewhat, one could view the trilogy as an example of typically (German) political theatre, in view of its political-historical subject matter, and the remaining two productions as examples of typically apolitical theatre for the very same reason, namely the lack of a subject-matter immediately recognisable as part of a German political-historical tradition, as well as for their extra-textual provenance. It would perhaps be more correct to state that they all constitute examples of postmodern, hence 'politically-

³⁰ Schmitter, 'Junkiepassion. Premiere an der Berliner Volksbühne: Frank Castorf inszeniert *Trainspotting* von Harry Gibson, nach dem Roman von Irvine Welsh', *Die Zeit*, 2 May 1997.

incorrect' theatre.³¹ Each production capitalised on an ironic, playful, in other words postmodern parody of its own subject-matter: fascism, socialism, post-war reconstruction, the world of art and drugs. One could argue that the mockery of fascism in *Pension Schöller: Die Schlacht*, that of socialism in *Golden fließt der Stahl: Wolokolamsker Chaussee* and that of the post-war German generations in *Des Teufels General* evade all politically correct stances and received wisdom. In this context, one need only be reminded of the speech impediment in *Schöller: Schlacht*, of the shower-scene in *Stahl: Wolokolamsker*, and of the genre games in *Des Teufels General*. Following the same pattern, *Trainspotting's* approach to the drugs world and *Das trunkene Schiff's* approach to the arts world clash with a received morality according to which drug addicts are either society's victims or society's culprits, and artists are either misunderstood geniuses or a social burden. In other words, drug addicts 'should' not have been attractive because of their addiction, and artists 'should' not have been appealing because of their reciprocal manipulations. I have already shown how, in *Trainspotting*, the attraction is dependent on the link between drugs and theatre; as far as *Das trunkene Schiff* is concerned, one's interest for the artist's situation is awakened by Verlaine's condition, and not by Rimbaud's. Castorf, who saw certain affinities with Verlaine ('Ich habe gerade meinen Intendanten-Vertrag bis zur Rente unterzeichnet. Das hat nicht mehr viel mit Rimbaud zu tun. Bei mir geht der Weg eher zu Verlaine. Ein Ermöglicher, ein Trüffelschwein'³²), portrayed him as a mixture between a bohemian and a philistine, a petit-bourgeois and a demigod. His wish to bring Rimbaud's poetry into the public eye bore strong resemblances to the self-centred machinations of those

³¹ This has already been shown earlier in this chapter, when it was suggested that the postmodern principle of 'anything goes' is in direct contrast to any notion of political correctness.

³² Quoted in Petzold, ' "Trinken Sie ihr Bier jetzt in Friedrichshain, Herr Castorf?" ', *Der Tagesspiegel*, 14 December 1995.

managers who 'discover' artists in order to market them as commodities. Verlaine, to sum up, 'should' not have emerged as a likeable character.

The extent to which (Castorf's) postmodern 'political incorrectness' has been criticised may actually serve as a very good example of its power to shock, particularly in a German context. Following the notion that, in the age of postmodernity, art's capacity to provoke a reaction — any reaction — dwindles almost to nil, political incorrectness seems to me to be the only (last?) means available to gain attention to one's work, and, admittedly, to oneself. Most significantly, its intrinsically postmodern character prevents it from being prone to manipulation: as I have shown in Chapter 7, Castorf's (mis)use of its features in some of his guest productions in West Germany resulted in those very productions becoming insipid and irritating copies of a theatrical work that had already been seen before, and not necessarily only in a Castorfian context. In this sense, political incorrectness possesses the same autonomous characteristics of a typical Baudrillardian 'evil object', in that it does not let itself be moulded or appropriated for the (theatrical) projects of a (directorial) 'Subject'.

All the instances I have just touched upon show that postmodern political incorrectness can be put to good (political) use: their depiction of fascism, of socialism, of post-war Germany, of the drug addicts' and artists' environment with typical postmodern nonchalance, coarseness and humour actually provides a disturbingly honest picture of those realities. By presenting us with images and situations which are familiar — which must be familiar, or else even the harshest criticism of some could not be justified — and yet none too often admitted, postmodern political theatre forces us to come to terms with our own approach to reality and to unveil politically incorrect thoughts and feelings to which we must all occasionally plead guilty. To misquote the *Trainspotting* characters, 'O Gott, das ist es also, das politische Theater'.

Chapter 10

Conclusions

Before drawing the final conclusions relating to Castorf's aesthetics and the theatrical concept I have introduced, it is worth summarising the various aspects that have been tackled so far. This study has attempted to delineate, exemplify and ultimately test the notion of 'postmodern political theatre', a concept which, as has been argued, best allows one to engage critically with Frank Castorf's artistic work. Without claiming that the apparently mutually exclusive modes of postmodernism and political theatre are reconciled in his work, it has been suggested that Castorf combines, more or less successfully, elements of both. Indeed, it has been argued that the sheer impossibility of incorporating the postmodern in its entirety in one's (political) work may stand as an acknowledgement of the conflicting nature of the postmodern itself.

From the realm of philosophy the thesis has appropriated the crucial distinction between postmodernism and postmodernity — a distinction which has served to shape the general background against which to set Castorf's theatrical practices — and it has introduced Baudrillardian notions such as 'mass', 'indifference', and 'disappearance' against which to test the more traditional, albeit no less problematical, concept of *Volk*. The study has acknowledged and investigated Castorf's proximity to Baudrillard, without wishing to provide an all-exclusive Baudrillardian position on the theatre director, and whilst recognising that their diverging artistic fields often generate theories and convictions (most notably on the possibility of representation) which, by necessity, have to clash. From the solid German tradition of political theatre it has appropriated and problematised notions of *Volkstheater* and *Volksstück*, as well as depicted the development of Erwin Piscator, in order to position Castorf within the *Volksbühne* tradition whilst still arguing for the radicality of his (political) approach. From the debates that followed the *Wende* and Castorf's more or less direct involvement with and reaction to them it has gained an insight into the present-day role of intellectuals and artists in the newly unified Germany — a concept of paramount importance for theatre

practitioners, like Castorf, who rely on the specificity of their identity and provenance in order to make (artistic) impact. From a general portrayal of Berlin's theatrical landscape and its development over the past decade it has gained an insight into the *Volksbühne's* 'competition', which, in turn, has helped validate the theatre's achievements under Castorf's direction. More specifically, an analysis of the *Volksbühne's* post-1992 PR campaign has shed light on its proclaimed identity as an 'Ost-Theater' and has led to an investigation of the relationship it has created and maintained with its audience.

The notion of 'postmodern political theatre' has been tentatively applied to all the analysed productions staged by Castorf, pre- and post-*Wende*, east and west of the former border. In view of the direct involvement and often transgressive relationship of Castorf with the specific surroundings in which he operated, the study has provided an historical and cultural frame in which to insert his work. Thus, his East German productions have been set against the theatrical landscape shaped by the GDR's cultural intelligentsia; the analysis of his guest productions has included the reaction of West German and Swiss theatre critics and spectators; his more recent *Volksbühne* successes have been investigated from a viewpoint that takes into consideration audiences' reception and other theatre practitioners' responses as well as their artistic merits. A number of issues have further emerged from the analyses, which have ranged from the *Werktreue* debates and their implications in both East and West German contexts to comparisons between Castorf's and Müller's different approaches to unification, (the loss of) GDR identity, and, generally speaking, theatre's role in a postmodern society.

It will have emerged from my analysis of Castorf's productions in the former GDR (Chapter 6), in West Germany and Switzerland (Chapter 7), and in the *Volksbühne* (Chapter 9) that his notion of political theatre has evolved with time, taking stock of altered historical and cultural circumstances, and that, as a result, his intentionality has

also undergone a series of transformations and refinements. I suggested in Chapter 6 that the concept of political theatre in the former GDR was hindered by a specific impediment, namely the problematical relationship between the 'political' and the 'party-political': the principal aspect of Castorf's GDR productions has been defined as being based primarily on principles of irritation and provocation. Being devoid of ideological stances, they resulted in an act of rebellion against a society which insisted on the political significance of everything. Castorf's attempt at communicating a zest for life that had grown numb in GDR society was achieved through an understanding of theatre as 'Spezialfall glücklicher Produktion, Modellfall freier Arbeit'¹ — a notion which is in strong contrast to Baudrillard's celebration of indifference. Indeed, as I suggested in Chapter 3, it was aimed precisely at combating it. Similarly, by presenting individuals as concretely intervening subjects, with a right to self-esteem in and towards a society allegedly based on collectivism, and by attempting to shake the audiences out of encrusted beliefs and modes of behaviour (through the above-mentioned principles of irritation and provocation), Castorf distanced himself from the Baudrillardian concept of mass. It must be stressed that the implications acquired by Castorf's 'political' theatre in a distinctive GDR context could hardly be successfully incorporated into his guest productions, as he necessarily found out when working in West Germany.

When tackling his guest productions, I differentiated between his work in the Federal Republic and in Switzerland. It was particularly in the former that a form of theatre often bordering on provocation for provocation's sake was employed. The political connotations attained by Castorf's confrontation with the audiences in the GDR were here at times distinctly lacking. His attack on *Werktreue*, though it generated theatrical scandals, resulted mainly in a process of self-reference that was only partially successful. Slapstick techniques borrowed from his own GDR productions, and

¹ See Chapter 3, note 74, and Chapter 6, 191.

theatrical props which lacked the significance they had gained in a GDR context, were transposed into a fundamentally different theatrical framework, and his guest productions thus acquired an affected, and, by western standards, somewhat old-fashioned, radicality for which Castorf was sometimes correctly criticised. Where his intentionality had remained unaltered, his audiences had changed. The partial failure of some of his work may stand here as proof that (political) theatre needs a profound understanding of its real, as well as desired, spectators, in order to make an impact, and may indicate the centrality of the audience in the theatrical process.

It is in Castorf's more recent work in the Berlin *Volksbühne* that one can see a refinement of his theatre aesthetics. Of paramount importance is here 'his' Berlin *Volk*. I have suggested in Chapter 3 that Castorf's main achievement in the *Volksbühne* has been perhaps his ability to extrapolate a specific audience from a generalised *Volk*, and I have shown in Chapter 8 that the formidable impact of the theatre's initial PR campaign is not to be underestimated in this context. The *Volksbühne* identity relies completely on its Berlin audience — one in which, at least initially, the 'real' and the 'desired' coincided. As a consequence, Castorf's shock techniques have been directed towards more external issues. In other words, those principles of irritation and provocation once targeted against the numbed GDR population and the bourgeois subscription members of West Germany's theatres have been re-channelled and directed 'outwards'. This becomes most apparent in the *Trilogie der Alltagsgeschichte*, the subject matter of which (fascism, socialism, post-war reconstruction) brings Castorf back to a solid German tradition of political theatre, thematically if not conceptually or formally.

One could argue that, in this respect, there is a demarcation between the work of Castorf before unification and after.² Perhaps more accurately, one could suggest that

² In this context, however, one also has to bear in mind that his pre-*Wende* productions included both those in the GDR and those in West Germany and Switzerland, which cannot be considered as a single period of artistic evolution.

the political intentionality in Castorf's theatre has become more immediately recognisable in his *Volksbühne* productions, both in terms of subject matter and in terms of his own positionality. Where he rejected any political label imposed on him and his work in the GDR, he has realigned himself within the political field since his *Volksbühne* takeover. One cannot avoid assuming that the altered historical reality of unified Germany, the direct consequences of which are undoubtedly more noticeable in Berlin than elsewhere, has contributed in no small amount to Castorf's radicalisation, and that his own stance on and response to the *Wende*, which I outlined in Chapter 4, are at least partly responsible for a re-politicisation of his aesthetics. This process seems to me to be noticeable on a dual level, that is, both in terms of intentionality and in terms of reception. While Castorf's GDR productions were political in effect rather than intention (in the sense that they were perceived as such by the audience despite Castorf's aforementioned denial) and Castorf's guest productions lacked a distinct political element in either (in the sense that his provocation, and the reception thereof, were perceived as belonging to an artistic category rather than a political one) his *Volksbühne* work, especially in its initial phase, has been characterised by a political nature which has made an impact on both levels — intention and effect. The programme for the initial artistic season 1992/93 ('Wir blicken böse auf diese Gesellschaft ...'³), the productions included in the *Volksbühne*'s repertoire, as well as Castorf's own utterances, had an unmistakably political flavour. This was in turn reflected by the 'Ost'-*Volk*, which considered the theatre as a symbol of its stolen identity and thus appreciated its resistance value, as well as by the new audiences, normally unacquainted with or sceptical of the participation in theatre experiences, that Castorf managed to attract. The spectators' role in the production-reception relationship

³ See Chapter 8, 227.

went beyond individual subjectivity, and both groupings turned visiting the *Volksbühne* into a politically implicated act.

Similarly, the postmodern traits that characterise Castorf's theatrical work have also undergone a process of development and refinement. As I have argued in the previous chapters, they were present at different levels of intensity in his GDR productions, in West Germany and Switzerland, and in the *Volksbühne*. More often than not, their presence and significance was intrinsically linked with the 'political' function that Castorf intended them to perform. When the latter was missing, they emerged as merely playful or iconoclastic devices, to the detriment of the artistic work.

The final picture is thus that of a theatrical concept which, when successful, takes stock of, and indeed manipulates, those postmodern traits it sets out to criticise and ridicule. By participating in those very activities that are being denounced (in order to denounce them), Castorf's theatre has managed to operate within the culture of postmodernity whilst keeping a political edge, by showing how self-reference, slapstick and multimedia techniques need not remain politically neutral. Its political character is both resistant and transgressive, or, simplifying somewhat, simultaneously anchored in the past and orientated towards the future. It has capitalised on (n)ostalgic notions of GDR identity whilst actively reacting to the new picture offered by a unified Berlin, thus maintaining the support of East German audiences and drawing new ones to itself. By 1997 Castorf and his *Volksbühne* ensemble could count on a theatrical programme which nonchalantly combined Heiner Müller with Irvine Welsh and Karl Grünberg, on a troupe which included directors whose approaches ranged from one extreme of the artistic spectrum to the other (from Johann Kresnik to Christoph Marthaler to Christoph Schlingensiefel to Castorf himself), and on a wide recognition — achieved in the shortest of time — which united Prenzlauer Berg teenagers and theatre critics.

* * *

‘As It Must to All, Death Comes to Postmodernism.’⁴

‘Den Auftrag, politisches Theater zu machen, die Gesellschaft zu verändern, haben wir verloren. [...] So marginal war Theater noch nie.’⁵

‘Das ist Castorfs Problem. Er [hat] keinen echten Dialogpartner. Er will den Dialog. Aber niemand antwortet ihm. Also wird er lauter.’⁶

Perhaps not surprisingly, Bauman’s insistence on the necessity to approach ‘the postmodern’ with a degree of scepticism and distance seems to have been justified. Indeed, not only have some postmodern tendencies ‘found their place among the passing fads of a century notorious for its love of fashions’;⁷ if one was to follow Grundberg’s postulates based on the death of postmodernism it would appear that the postmodern in its entirety has served its more or less controversial purposes, and it has now fallen prey to the same kind of obituary it had itself provided for other aesthetic movements. Grundberg’s article is based on what he sees as the resurgence of spiritually and politically pursued values in the arts, and, most significantly, on his conviction that postmodern features have lost their freshness and radicality and are now at best a parody of themselves. What clearly emerges from his contribution is that the distinction between *postmodernism* and *postmodernity* on which I have based this thesis remains of paramount importance in the debate on the (alleged death of the) postmodern. I would in fact argue that Grundberg’s theory applies to *postmodernism* only, and that, as such, it condemns the resulting style without critically engaging with the historical reality that has originated it. Even setting aside the fact that postmodernism can hardly have fallen victim of self-parody and self-irony, given that

⁴ Grundberg, ‘As It Must to All, Death Comes to Postmodernism’, *New York Times*, 16 September 1990.

⁵ Castorf, quoted in Kahle, ‘“Vom Erschöpften und Vergnügten”’: So hieß in München eine der beliebten Podiumsrunden zum allgemeinen Zustand des deutschsprachigen Theaters. Wie nicht anders zu erwarten, wenn kluge Köpfe aufeinandertreffen, fallen ein paar starke Sprüche ab’, *Theater heute*, 3 (1998), 78.

⁶ Heiner Müller, quoted in ‘“Die Wahrheit, leise und unerträglich”’: Ein Gespräch mit Heiner Müller’, *Theater heute Jahrbuch* (1995), 16.

⁷ See Chapter 2, 48 .

those are precisely the traits that characterise it, or the fact that the particularly postmodern notion of performativity has vehemently taken over and still reigns over any concept of the (merely) 'theatrical', it remains worth stressing that the proclaimed disappearance of multimedia, self-referential projects from the artistic sphere has yet to manifest itself in the wider context of postmodernity, for they still very much constitute an integral part of everyday life. Arguably, one might consider whether the postmodern has 'advanced', in much the same way in which capitalism has progressed to 'late' capitalism, or 'post-industrial' capitalism. Yet no progressive alternative to the postmodern has been devised so far. The tempting option to add even more prefixes (by considering the notion of 'the post-postmodern') would surely lead to more confusion, and is perhaps best left as a threatening possibility for Baudrillard's future publications.

Such aesthetic and philosophical criticism has found its specific theatrical and *Volksbühne*-related counterpart. On the one hand, Castorf himself has recently admitted to his own fatigue and tedium with the concept he so vigorously introduced. He claimed that 'ich mache jetzt 20 Jahre Destruktion, ich möchte wieder Geschichten erzählen, eine Erkennbarkeit von Haltung liefern'.⁸ He also confessed that 'ich habe meine Polemik verloren. [...] Ich habe nichts zu sagen. Ich merke, daß es mir ganz gut geht. Dann ist es schwer, weiter den Straßenkämpfer zu spielen, das wird etwas bigott, wenn man ein paar Immobilien zuviel hat'.⁹ On the other hand, theatre critics appear to be equally aware of Castorf's apparent slip into a comfortable, well-rehearsed and no longer radical theatrical style:

⁸ Quoted in Kahle, ' "Vom Erschöpften und Vergnügten": So hieß in München eine der beliebten Podiumsrunden zum allgemeinen Zustand des deutschsprachigen Theaters. Wie nicht anders zu erwarten, wenn kluge Köpfen aufeinandertreffen, fallen ein paar starke Sprüche ab', *Theater heute*, 3 (1998), 78.

⁹ Quoted in Kohse, 'Zeichen sind für alle da. Zum fünfjährigen Jubiläum der Berliner Volksbühne inszenierte Subcomandante Castorf Hauptmanns "Weber". Es ist lustig. Man lacht. Aber irgendwie unfroh.', *die tageszeitung*, 9 October 1997.

Der Chef hat seine DDR-Reserven aufgebracht, blankgescheuert und kaputtgespielt. Ihm fällt zur Weltliteratur außer der Kommunismus-Kapitalismus-Verhöhnung nichts mehr ein.¹⁰

Mit den 'Webern' führt Castorf den Beweis des schon Erwiesenen. Daß die Deutschen blöde sind, hatte schon Heiner Müller gemerkt. Und vor ihm etliche andere.¹¹

An der Berliner Volksbühne wird dramaturgisch höchst geistesgegenwärtig disponiert, in Castorfs Inszenierungen sieht man immer mindestens zwanzig hinreißend gute Minuten, aber im ganzen, zwischen Bühne und Publikum: auch keine wirkliche Konfrontation. Wenig Nachdenklichkeit, viel leerlaufende gegenseitige Bestätigung. Also Affirmation.¹²

Somewhat typically, Castorf has reacted to such criticism by polemically protesting (too much) that the *Volksbühne* does remain innovative: interviews with the director, which are significantly becoming rarer and rarer, strike one for the contradictory nature of his statements, and tempt one to argue that his self-criticism is not open to a criticism by others. It is worth pointing out that the latter is only apparently similar to the accusations that Castorf had grown accustomed to during his guest productions in West Germany and Switzerland, which I tackled in Chapter 7. The lukewarm reception of the productions he has staged between 1997 and 1999 do not rely on the condemnation of a westernised style that has become old-fashioned, but, rather, on a notion of self-plagiarism which, as I argued in Chapter 7, had already emerged seven years earlier. It would appear that, after half a decade characterised by artistic successes, the *Volksbühne* now risks falling into the same repetitive pattern.

Amongst the theatre critics intent on prognosticating the future direction of Castorf and his theatre is Martin Linzer, whose analysis of the present *Volksbühne*-situation appears to me to be particularly useful. Linzer recognises that Castorf (and

¹⁰ Wirsing, 'Miich hingert. Frank Castorfs Paraphrase auf Gerhart Hauptmanns "Die Weber" in der Volksbühne', *Theater heute*, 11 (1997), 12.

¹¹ Merck, '5 Jahre Volksbühne Berlin: Frank Castorf inszeniert Hauptmanns "Die Weber"', *Theater der Zeit*, 6 (1997), 31.

¹² Von Becker, quoted in ' "Die Wahrheit, leise und unerträglich": Ein Gespräch mit Heiner Müller', *Theater heute Jahrbuch* (1995), 16.

Marthaler) seem to have exhausted their artistic potential, but also stresses that their recent productions, far from being 'künstlerischen Katastrophen', could be viewed as 'vielleicht (vorläufige) Endpunkte von Entwicklungen, die ins Abseits abzurutschen drohen'.¹³ By implying that Castorf's recent work does not equal artistic failure, Linzer has taken the notion of originality at all costs off the pedestal of theatrical judgement: after all, the merits of a production cannot be reduced to its sheer novelty-value — just as, incidentally, the work of a director who has been theatrically active for over twenty years ought not to be judged in terms of (lack of) constant originality. I agree with Linzer that Castorf's recent productions may represent the natural ending of a line of artistic development; indeed, I would argue that Linzer's wish for a progression and/or transformation of sorts, which he formulated in 1997, remains equally, if not more dramatically, justified and legitimate in 1999. Castorf's latest work has in fact suffered from a number of 'borrowings' from his own repertoire, and has originated an artistic scenario not dissimilar to the one in which he found himself entrapped in West Germany and Switzerland. His production of Hauptmann's *Da Weber*, staged on the occasion of the forty-eighth birthday of the GDR and the fifth of the *Volksbühne* under his artistic direction (7 October 1997) still capitalised on Castorfian slapstick techniques: envisaged as an attempt to portray the history of the workers' movement, the production depicted today's working-classes preferring a lazy afternoon in front of the television screen to politically active 1 May demonstrations, planning holidays to Majorca (which they made abundantly clear by stating that what they wanted was 'Unger' not 'Hunger'), quite plainly refusing to work ('Ich will nicht arbeiten, ich will Karriere machen') and ultimately proving that the slogan 'Alle Menschen sind nicht gleich' — borrowed from a Mercedes advert — refers not to class consciousness but the 'Klasse' of their cars. The production that followed, Strauß' *Die Fledermaus* (première

¹³ Linzer, 'Castorfs Problem', *Theater der Zeit*, 6 (1997), 103.

10 December 1997), erroneously led one to believe that the 'transformation' of Castorf's aesthetic style was about to begin with a detour into music-theatre. Yet the operetta, badly sung and mostly spoken by the ensemble, resembled a continuation of Castorf's own production of Jelinek's *Raststätte oder Sie machen's alle*, characterised as it was by an abundance of flesh, lessons in lap-dancing and smearings of pig fat. It was followed by Sartre's *Die schmutzigen Hände* (première 26 February 1998), which Castorf had planned as an epilogue to the Balkan civil war. The production turned into an embittered commentary on the disappearance of truly revolutionary actions, shown by Castorf's clear preference of Hoederer over Hugo — again, in a dichotomy not dissimilar to that of Rimbaud and Verlaine in *Das trunkene Schiff*. The staging of *Krähwinkelfreiheit* (première 20 June 1998), a collage of Nestroy's *Freiheit in Krähwinkel*, *Der alte Mann und die junge Frau*, and *Häuptling Abendwind*, especially reminded one of Castorf's West German and Swiss guest productions, in view of the director's emphasis on the geographical milieu in which he was working (the Viennese *Burgtheater*): the production included extracts from Elisabeth Spira's television documentary on Austrian everyday life and from the speeches of right-wing Austrian politician Jörg Haider, and it turned the Prater into a guillotine device. In true Castorfian spirit, it also systematically refused to portray the *Volksstücke*'s happy endings: revolution failed, the escaped convicts were killed and acts of cannibalism took place. Other favourite themes in the works of Castorf were recaptured in the productions that followed. *Terrordrom* (première 12 November 1998), Tim Staffel's best-selling novel, based on a futuristic Berlin characterised by random acts of violence, was turned by Castorf into the more familiar portrayal of a city still suffering from GDR lethargy. *Richard II* (première 4 February 1999), staged in a mock Globe theatre built in the Berlin Prater, and subtitled 'Das Eigentum', was reduced to an ironic portrayal of the evils of capitalism — further intensified by copies of Marx's *Das Kapital* which

were distributed to the audience — and to a self-parodying portrayal of theatrical props, achieved by turning *Pension Schöller: Die Schlacht*'s potato salad into vegetable soup. Finally, Dostoyevsky's *Dämonen* (première 19 May 1999) concretised Castorf's renowned postulates on the end of the Russian empire, and, generally speaking, Eastern European communism, in the way that the production was made relevant to a present-day Russia ruined by imported Western standards and values.

* * *

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It would appear, then, that the theatrical transformation wished for by Linzer has not yet taken place, and that it is not yet possible to speak of, or even envisage, a new chapter in Castorf's theatrical career. Rumours of an opera debut in Basel (with Verdi's *Otello*) have been silenced, the brief interlude with operetta remained strongly anchored in the 'theatrical' rather than the 'musical', and a further renewal of the *Intendantz*-contract at the *Volksbühne* points to a confirmation and continuation of the present scenario. It is precisely in this context, however, that Müller's warning about Castorf needing 'dialogue' assumes relevance. Given that Castorf's main task at present would seem to be the attempt to avoid the pitfall of self-plagiarism, and that the *Volksbühne*'s main preoccupation is a lack of artistic competition, the changes that are about to be introduced in the Berlin theatrical landscape should prove beneficial on both accounts. The *Berliner Ensemble* will be given new impetus with the arrival of Claus Peymann, the *Deutsches Theater* will have to artistically reposition itself after the departure of Thomas Langhoff as *Intendant*, which has been announced for the year 2001, and, most significantly, the *Schaubühne* has been awarded a chance to conquer the crisis started by the departure of Andrea Breth, thanks to the decision to appoint former *Baracke*-director Thomas Ostermeier as *Intendant*. In other words, Castorf and his theatre will

soon be located in a more theatrically competitive (hence productive) environment — one which will provide him with, metaphorically speaking, artistic ‘Feindbilder’ (hence partners in the ‘dialogue’ envisaged by Müller) against which to set himself. Equally relevantly, the *Volksbühne* is also undergoing a series of changes: both Castorf’s chief dramaturge Matthias Lilienthal and Christoph Marthaler have left Berlin for Zurich, thus opening up possibilities for a structural and artistic renewal in the theatre. It will be of great interest to observe the effect that the above-mentioned alterations will have on Castorf’s work, as, one can reasonably hope, productive competition should come from within the *Volksbühne* as well as from other theatres.

In conclusion, I would argue that Castorf’s temporary lapse of originality and radicality need not threaten the concept of postmodern political theatre as such, which I believe remains both valid and necessary. After having overcome ‘die Mühen der Gebirge’, which presented themselves in different forms in the former GDR, the former FRG and the newly unified Germany, Castorf is now faced with ‘die Mühen der Ebenen’, characterised by the potentially stifling artistic and financial successes of the *Volksbühne*. While it is unquestionable that the regurgitation of well-rehearsed, already tested and immediately recognisable modes of performance remains highly un/counter-productive, however artistically and politically valid they may originally have been, it is to be hoped that the new political and theatrical reality of Berlin will provide Castorf with new ‘Gebirge’, and that the confrontation of the *Volksbühne* with an altered social and artistic environment will enable him to test and further elaborate on his aesthetics. ‘Der Weg ist nicht zu Ende, wenn das Ziel explodiert.’

Appendixes:

1. Chronology of all Castorf's premières to date (1999)

- OH — BRECHT-EINAKTER (Bertolt Brecht)
Theater der Bergarbeiter Senftenberg
6 April 1978
- TÜCHTIGE LEUTE (Wassili Schukschin)
Theater Greifswald
29 September 1978
- GOLDEN FLIESST DER STAHL (Karl Grünberg)
Brandenburger Theater
5 May 1979
- DIE FORSCHUNGSREISE DES PROFESSORS TARATOGA (Stanislaw Lem)
Brandenburger Theater
25 January 1980
- DIE NACHT NACH DER ABSCHLUSSFEIER (Wladimir Tendrjakow)
Theater Anklam
9 October 1981
- DIE SCHLACHT (Heiner Müller)
Theater Anklam
3 April 1982
- OTHELLO (William Shakespeare)
Theater Anklam
6 November 1982
- DER AUFTRAG (Heiner Müller)
Theater Anklam
2 July 1983
- TROMMELN IN DER NACHT (Bertolt Brecht)
Theater Anklam
7 April 1984 (dress rehearsal)
- NORA (Henrik Ibsen)
Theater Anklam
16 February 1985
- CLAVIGO (*Johann Wolfgang Goethe*)
Greiz / Gera
15 February 1986 / 11 April 1986
- DER BAU (Heiner Müller)
Städtisches Theater Karl-Marx-Stadt, Schauspielhaus
27 June 1986
- BERNARDA ALBAS HAUS (Federico García Lorca)
neues theater halle
13 November 1986

- **EIN VOLKSFEIND (Henrik Ibsen)**
Städtisches Theater Karl-Marx-Stadt, Schauspielhaus
12 February 1988
- **WOLOKOLAMSKER CHAUSSEE I – III (Heiner Müller)**
Kleist Theater Frankfurt/Oder
29 April / 4 May 1988
- **DAS TRUNKENE SCHIFF (Paul Zech)**
Volksbühne Berlin, 3. Stock
9 September 1988
- **PARIS, PARIS (Michail Bulgakow)**
Deutsches Theater Berlin
17 September 1988
- **HAMLET (William Shakespeare, Heiner Müller's translation)**
Schauspielhaus Köln
8 April 1989
- **AIAS (Sophocles)**
Theater Basel
14 September 1989
- **MISS SARA SAMPSON (Gotthold Ephraim Lessing)**
Prinzregententheater München
22 October 1989
- **STELLA (Johann Wolfgang Goethe)**
Deutsches Schauspielhaus Hamburg
29 April 1990
- **RÄUBER VON SCHILLER (Friedrich von Schiller)**
Volksbühne Berlin
22 September 1990
- **JOHN GABRIEL BORKMAN (Henrik Ibsen)**
Deutsches Theater Berlin, Kammerspiele
21 December 1990
- **WILHELM TELL (Friedrich von Schiller)**
Theater Basel
18 May 1991
- **TORQUATO TASSO (Johann Wolfgang Goethe)**
Residenztheater München
26 October 1991
- **HERMES IN DER STADT (Lothar Trolle)**
Deutsches Theater Berlin
16 February 1992

- **KÖNIG LEAR** (William Shakespeare)
Volksbühne Berlin
7 October 1992

- **RHEINISCHE REBELLEN** (Arnolt Bronnen)
Volksbühne Berlin
22 October 1992

- **FREMDE IN DER NACHT** (Jochen Berg)
Volksbühne Berlin / Kino Babylon
9 November 1992

- **CLOCKWORK ORANGE** (Anthony Burgess)
Volksbühne Berlin
25 February 1993

- **ALKESTIS** (Euripides)
Wiener Festwochen / Volksbühne Berlin
26 May / 4 June 1993

- **FRAU VOM MEER** (Henrik Ibsen)
Volksbühne Berlin
10 December 1993

- **PENSION SCHÖLLER : DIE SCHLACHT** (Carl Laufs, Wilhelm Jacoby, Heiner Müller)
Volksbühne Berlin
21 April 1994

- **DIE SACHE DANTON** (Stanislawa Przybyszewska)
Volksbühne Berlin
27 November 1994

- **RASTSTÄTTE ODER SIE MACHEN'S ALLE** (Elfriede Jelinek)
Deutsches Schauspielhaus Hamburg
27 January 1995

- **NIBELUNGEN — BORN BAD** (Friedrich Hebbel)
Volksbühne Berlin
27 / 28 May 1995

- **PELMENI** (Wladimir Sorokin)
Prater Berlin
23 June 1995

- **GESCHEITERTE VORSTELLUNG** (Daniil Charms)
Prater Berlin
23 June 1995

- HOCHZEITSREISE (Wladimir Sorokin)
Prater Berlin
2 November 1995

- HERR PUNTILA UND SEIN KNECHT MATTI (Bertolt Brecht)
Deutsches Schauspielhaus Hamburg
10 January 1996

- GOLDEN FLIESST DER STAHL : WOLOKOLAMSKER CHAUSSEE I-III (Karl
Grünberg, Heiner Müller)
Volksbühne Berlin
5 April 1996

- STADT DER FRAUEN (Federico Fellini)
Volksbühne Berlin
14 May 1996

- DER AUFTRAG (Heiner Müller)
Berliner Ensemble
5 June 1996

- DES TEUFELS GENERAL (Carl Zuckmayer)
Volksbühne Berlin
17 October 1996

- DER MARQUIS DE SADE (Charles Mere)
Schauspielhaus Bochum
29 December 1996

- SCHWARZE FAHNEN (August Strindberg)
Stadttheater Stockholm
8 March 1997

- TRAINSPOTTING (Irvine Welsh)
Volksbühne Berlin
26 April 1997

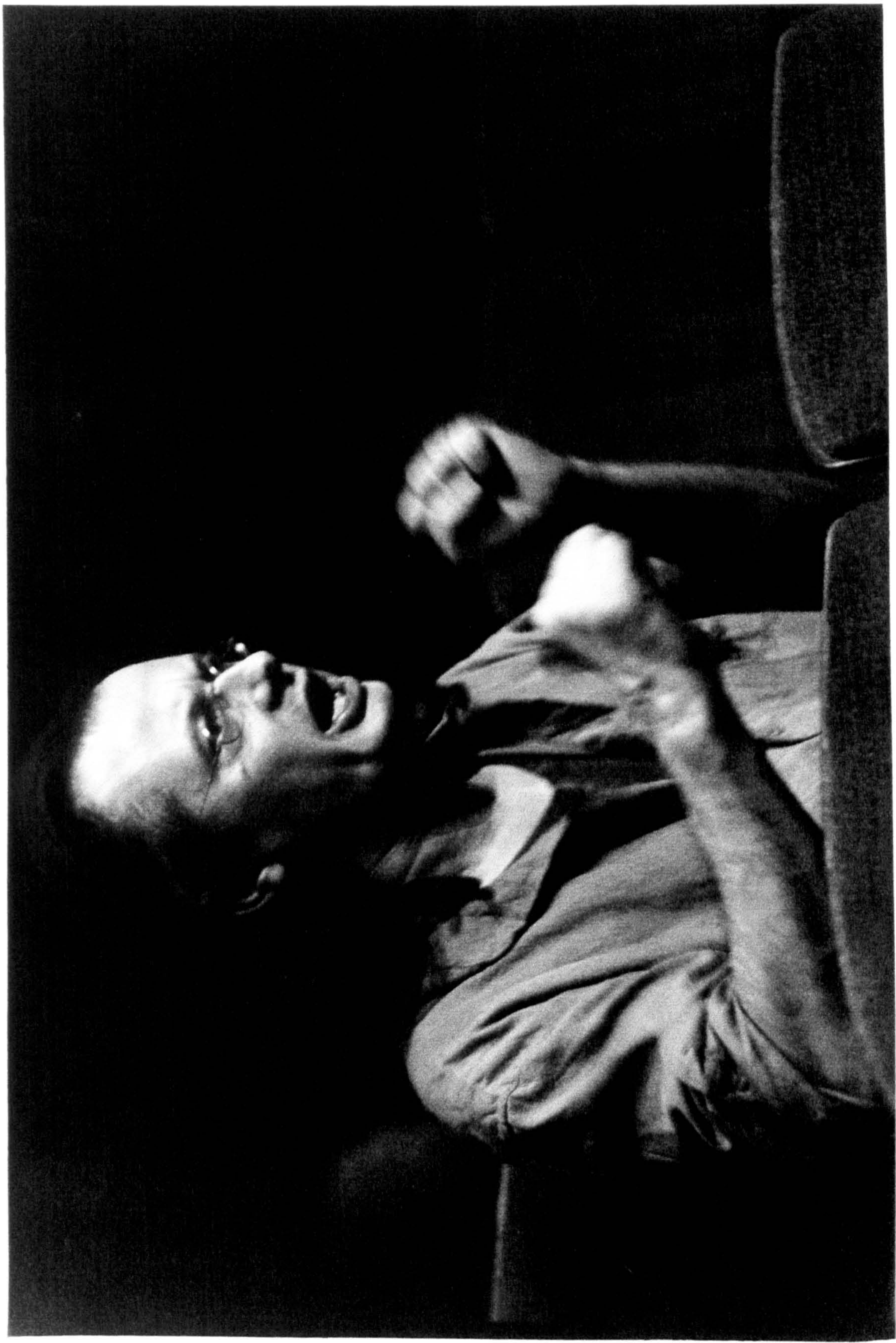
- DIE WEBER (Gerhart Hauptmann)
Volksbühne Berlin
7 October 1997

- DIE FLEDERMAUS (Johann Strauß)
Deutsches Schauspielhaus Hamburg
10 December 1997

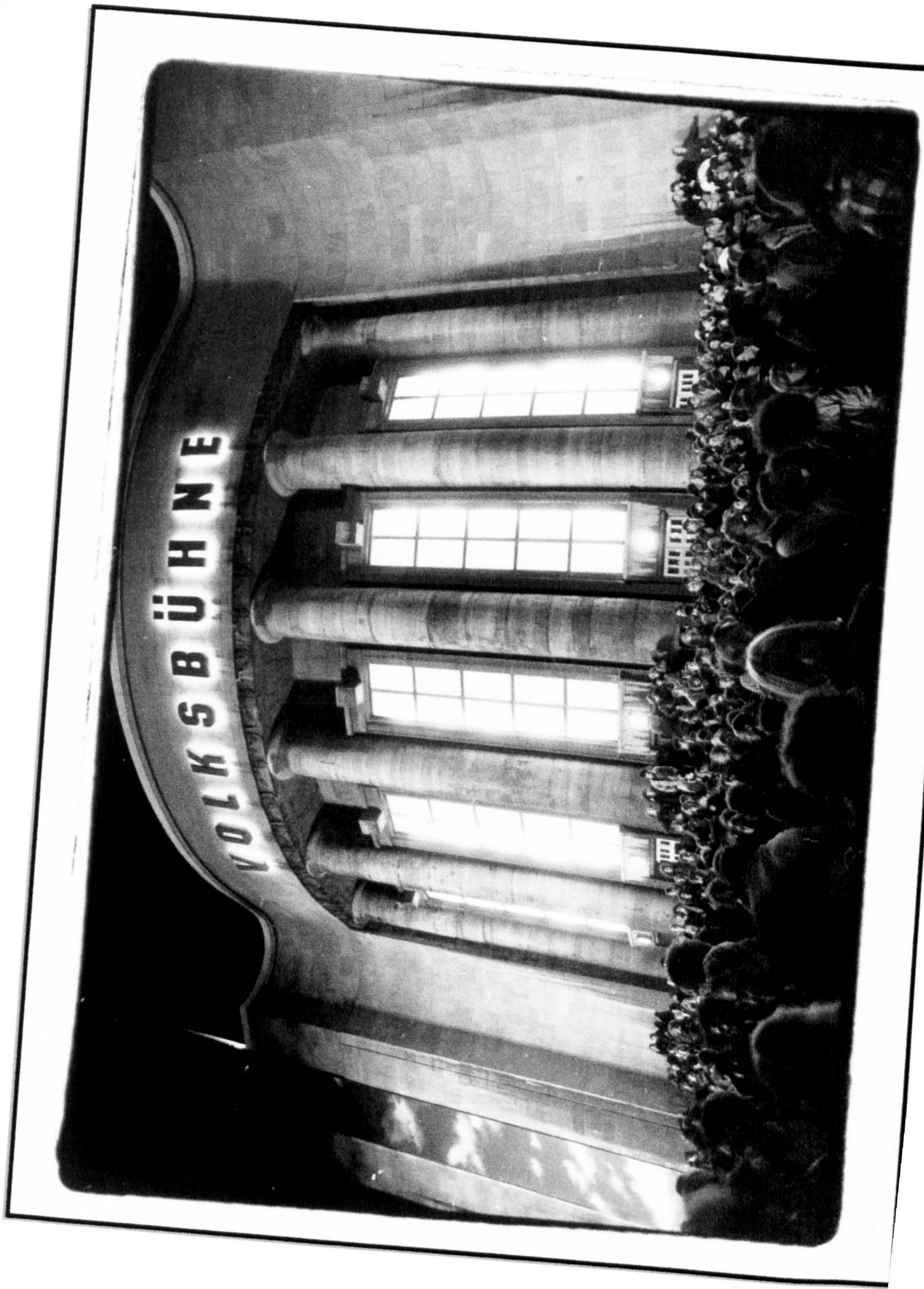
- DIE SCHMUTZIGEN HÄNDE (Jean-Paul Sartre)
Volksbühne Berlin
26 February 1998

2. Photographs

a. Frank Castorf



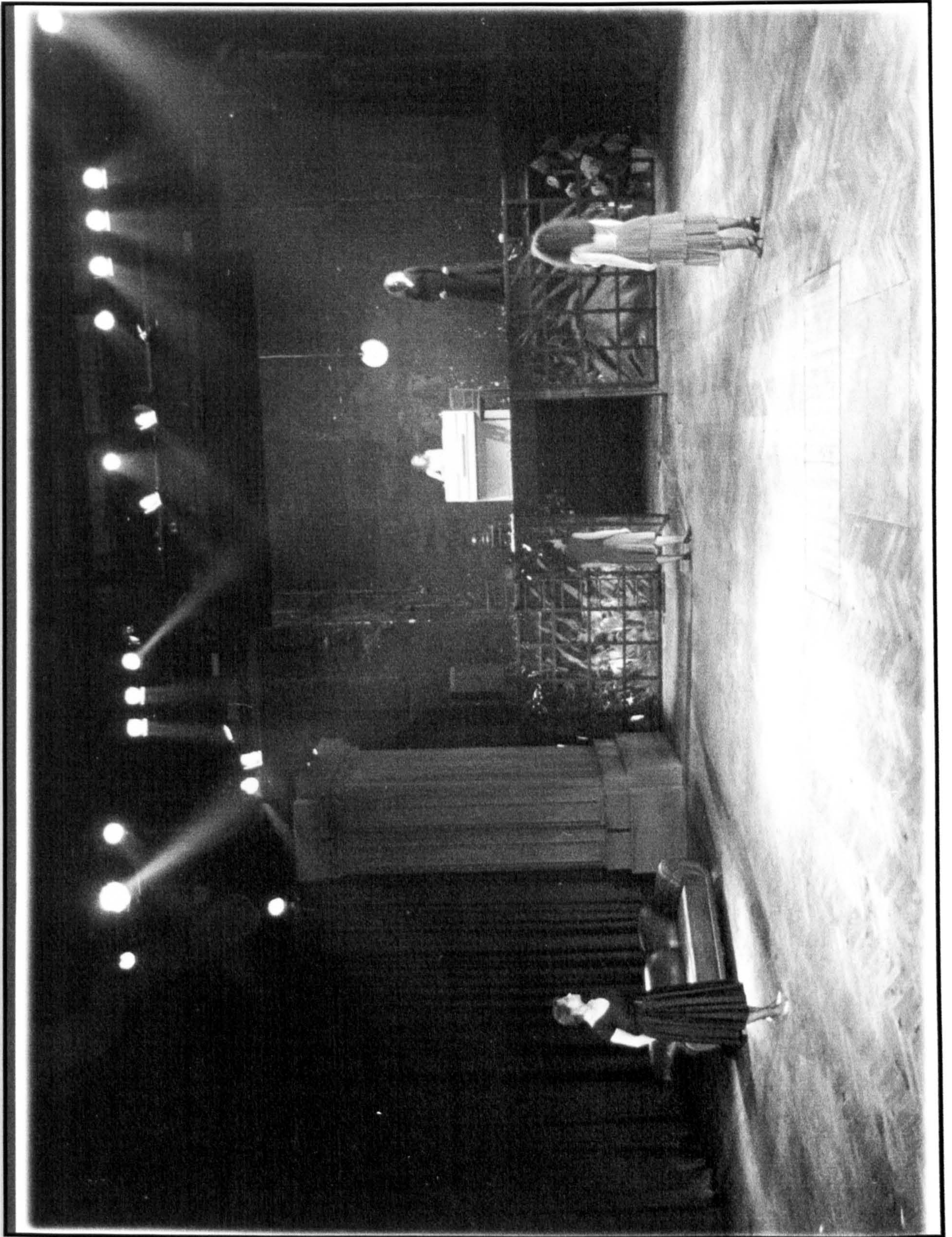
b. *Volksbühne*

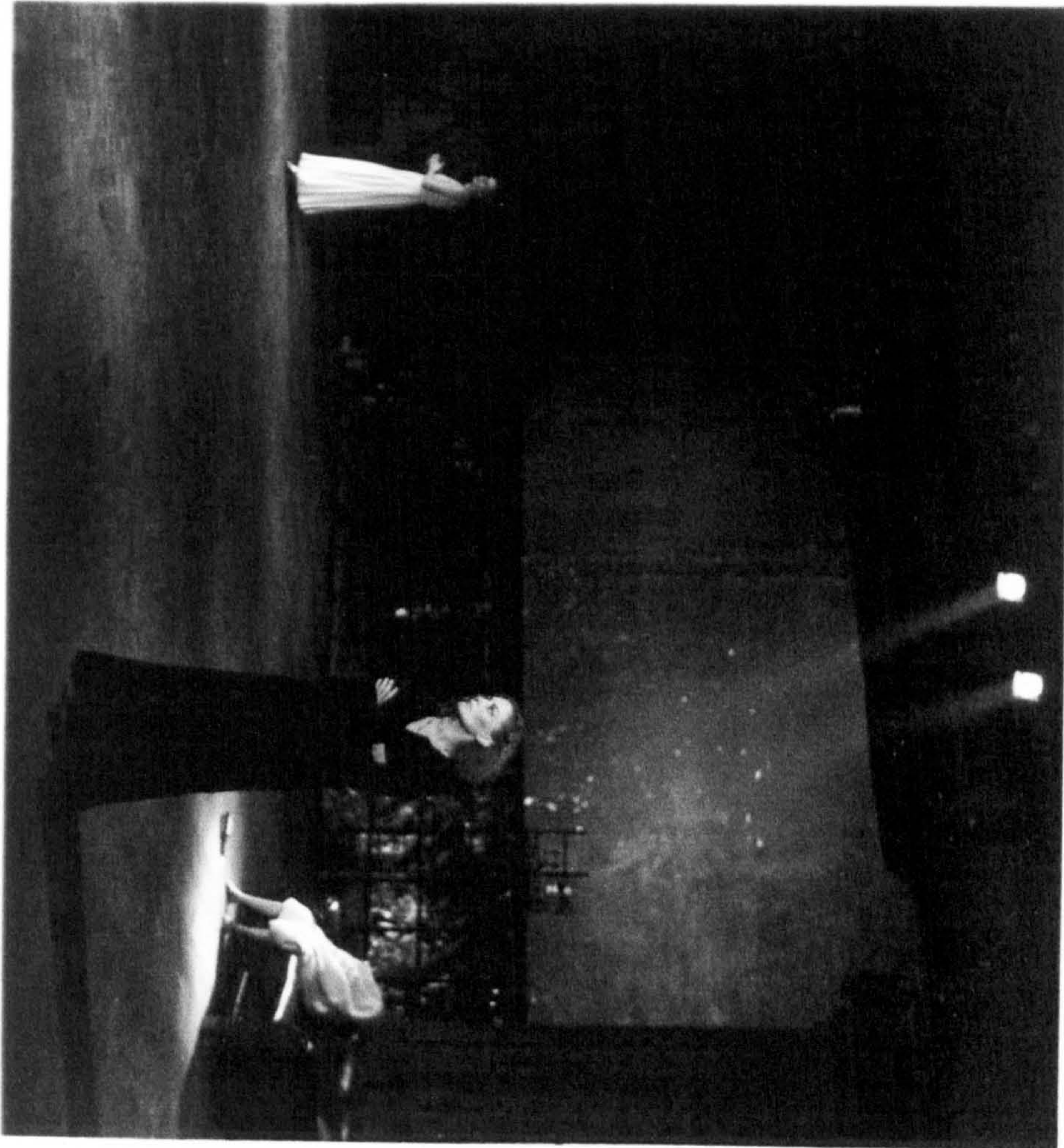


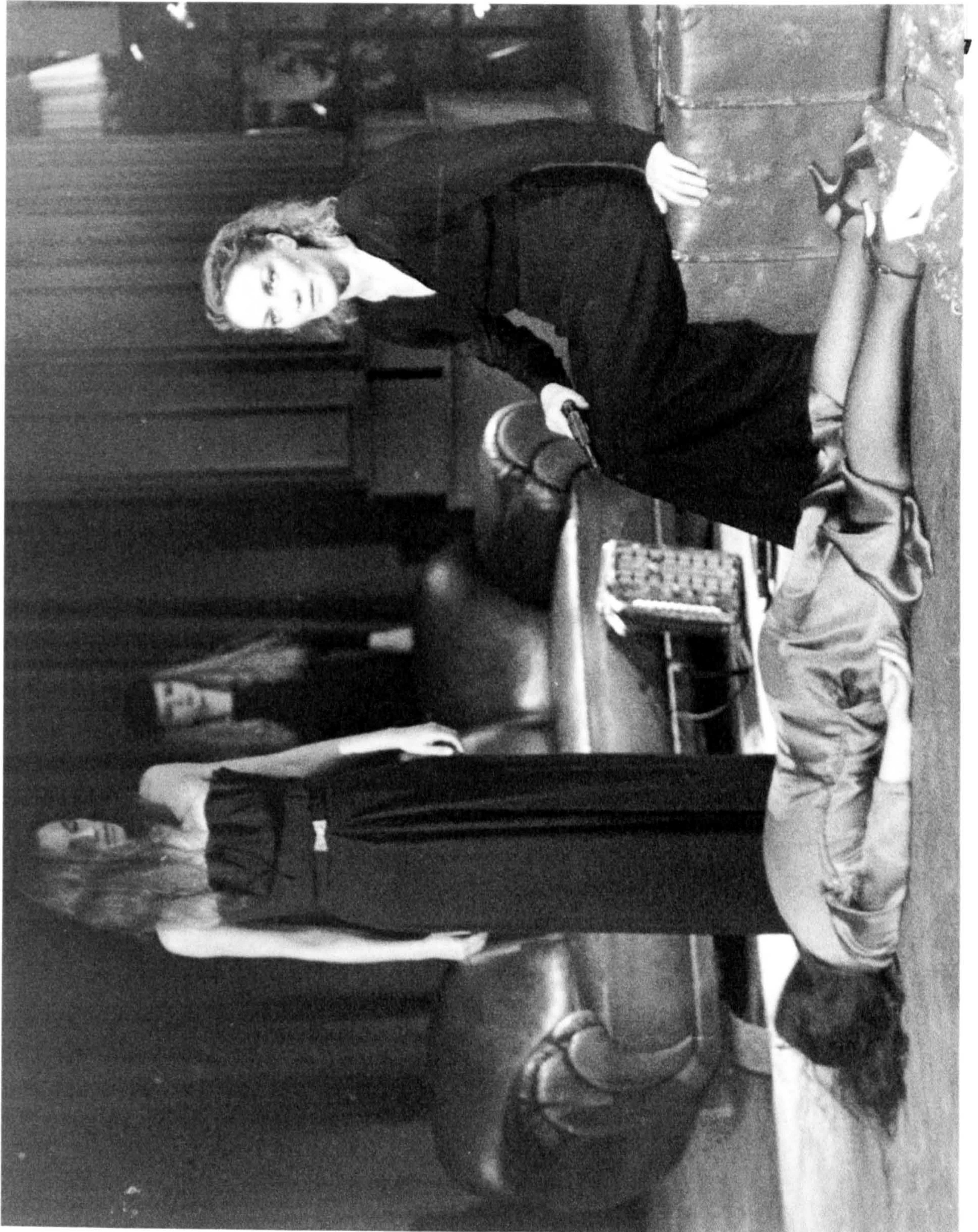


c. *Bernarda Albas Haus*

1. Centre stage
2. Bernarda Alba
3. The shooting scene
4. Mother and 'grandmother'









d. *Aias*

1. 'Schlaf in himmlischer Ruh ...hu'
2. The suicide scene
3. The chorus
4. Tecmessa



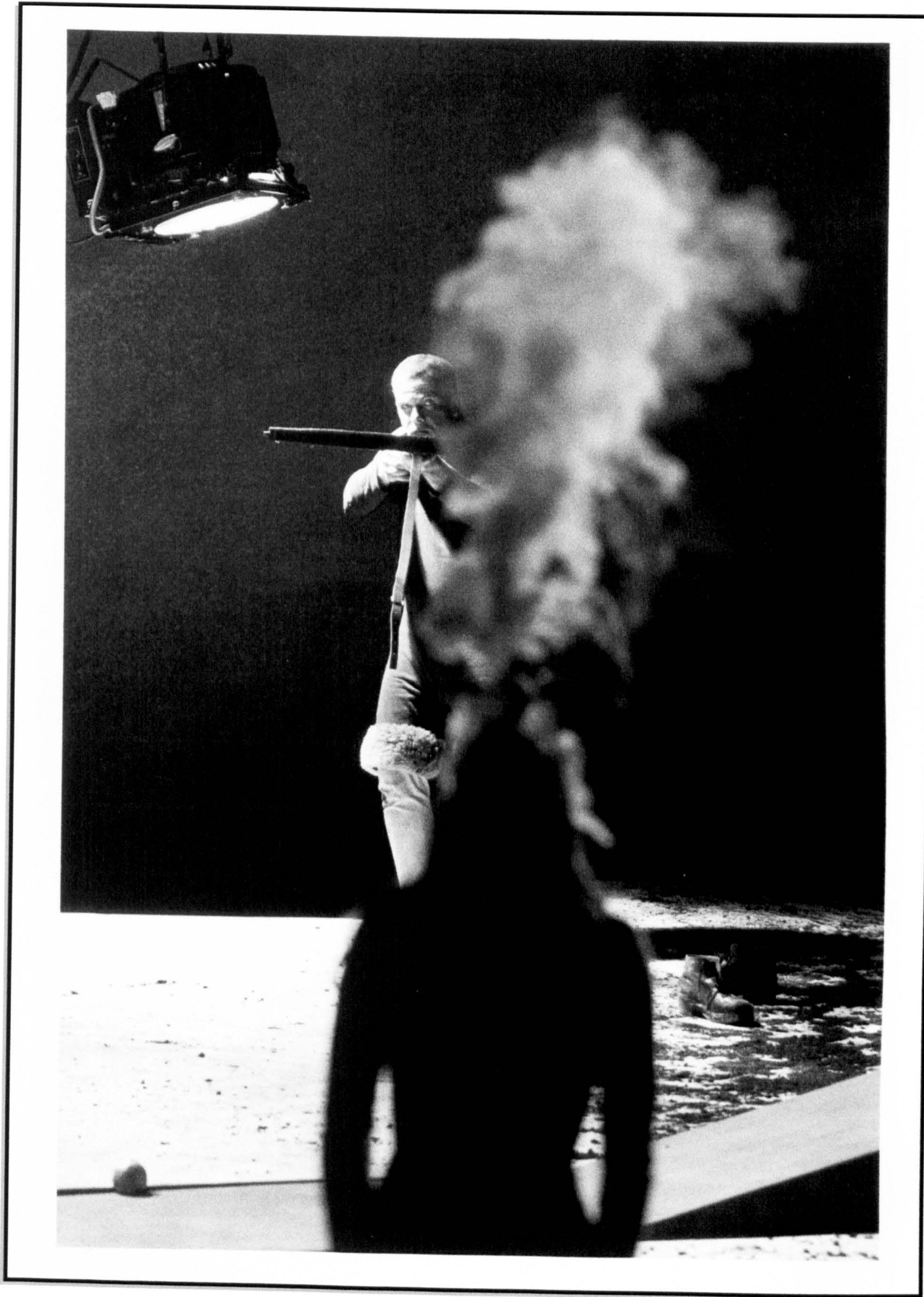




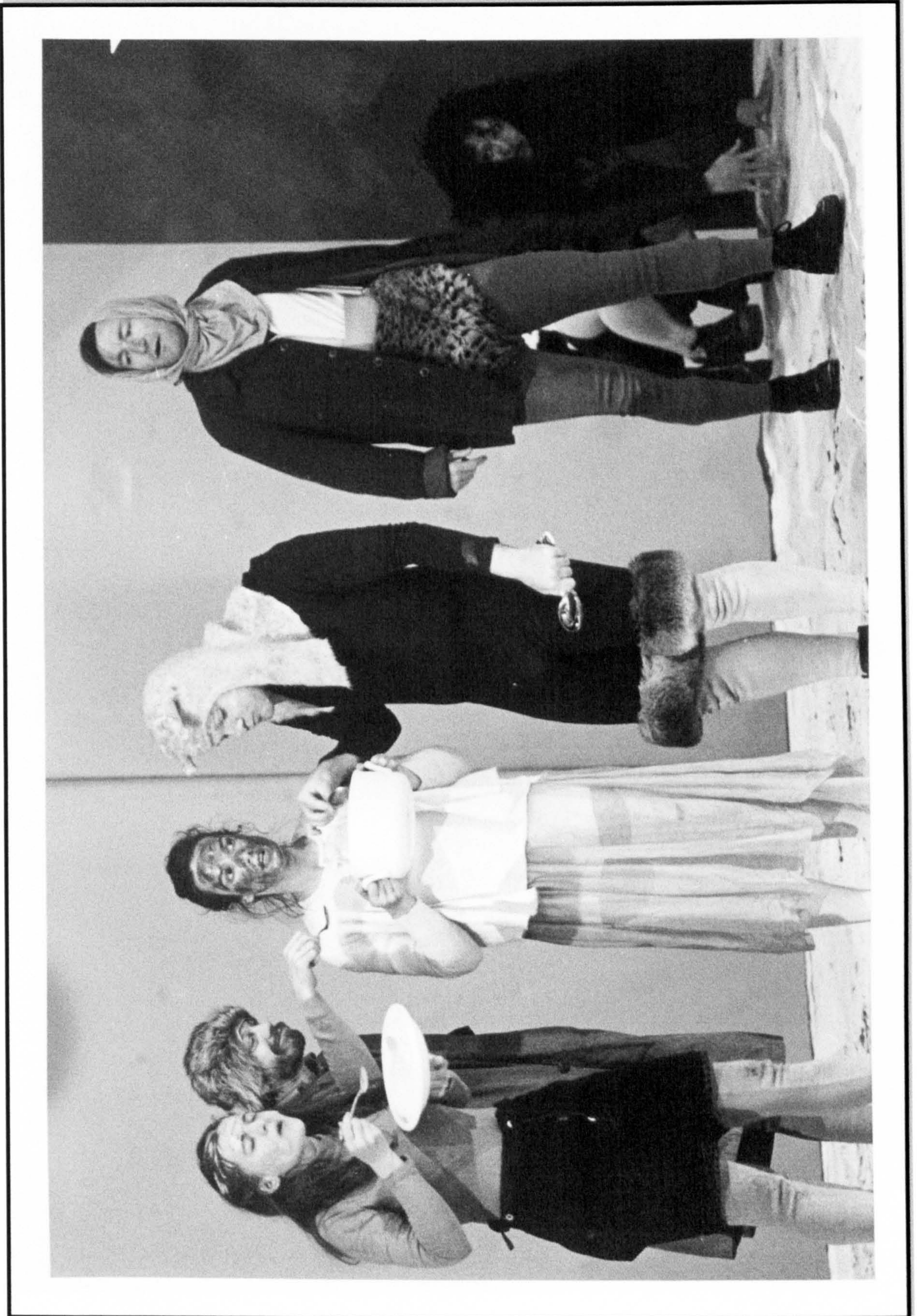
e. *Wilhelm Tell*

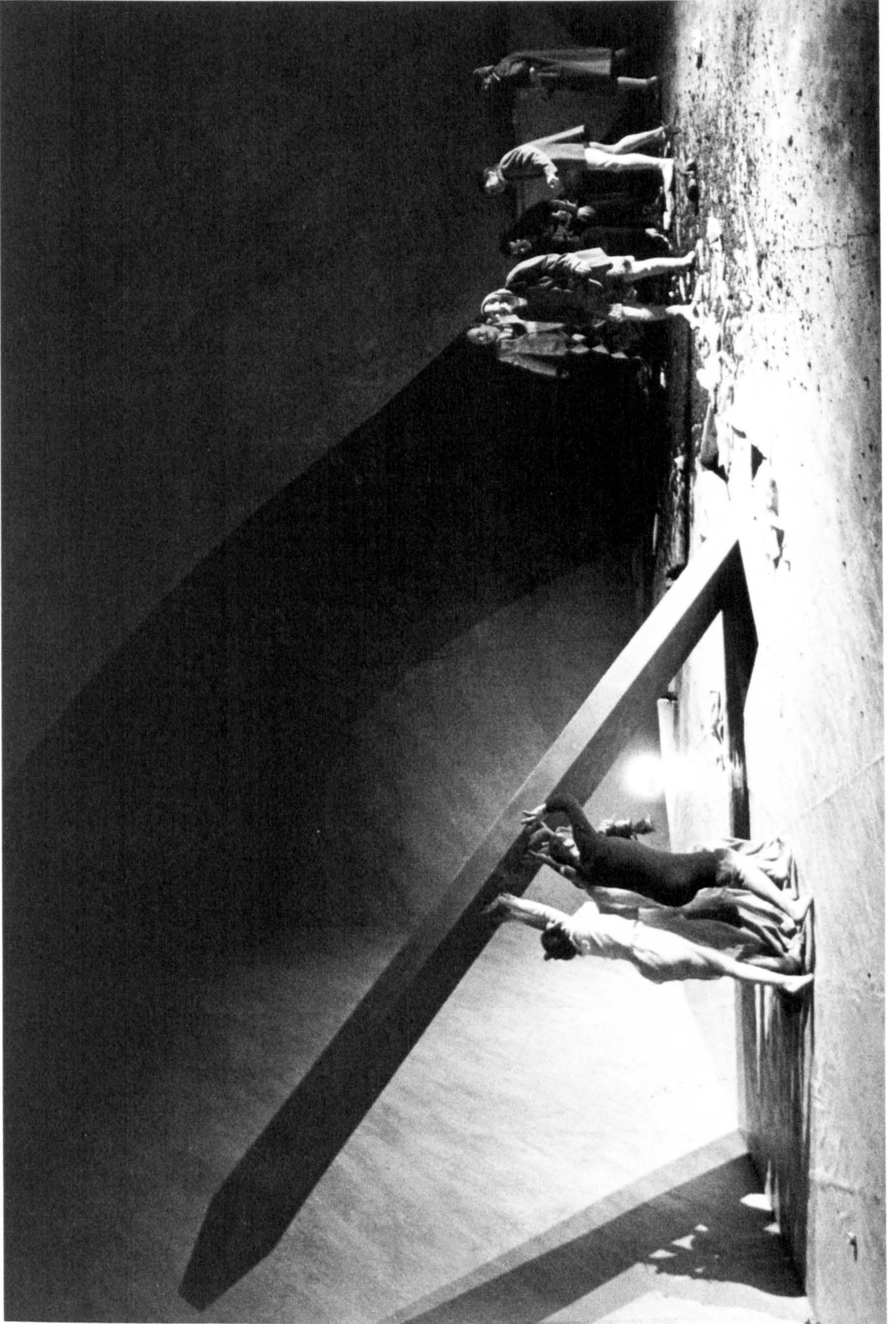
1. The shooting of the apple
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Stauffacher, von Melchtal and Walter
5. The past Swiss population
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. The 'Stange'
10. Tell and Gessler
11. Gessler

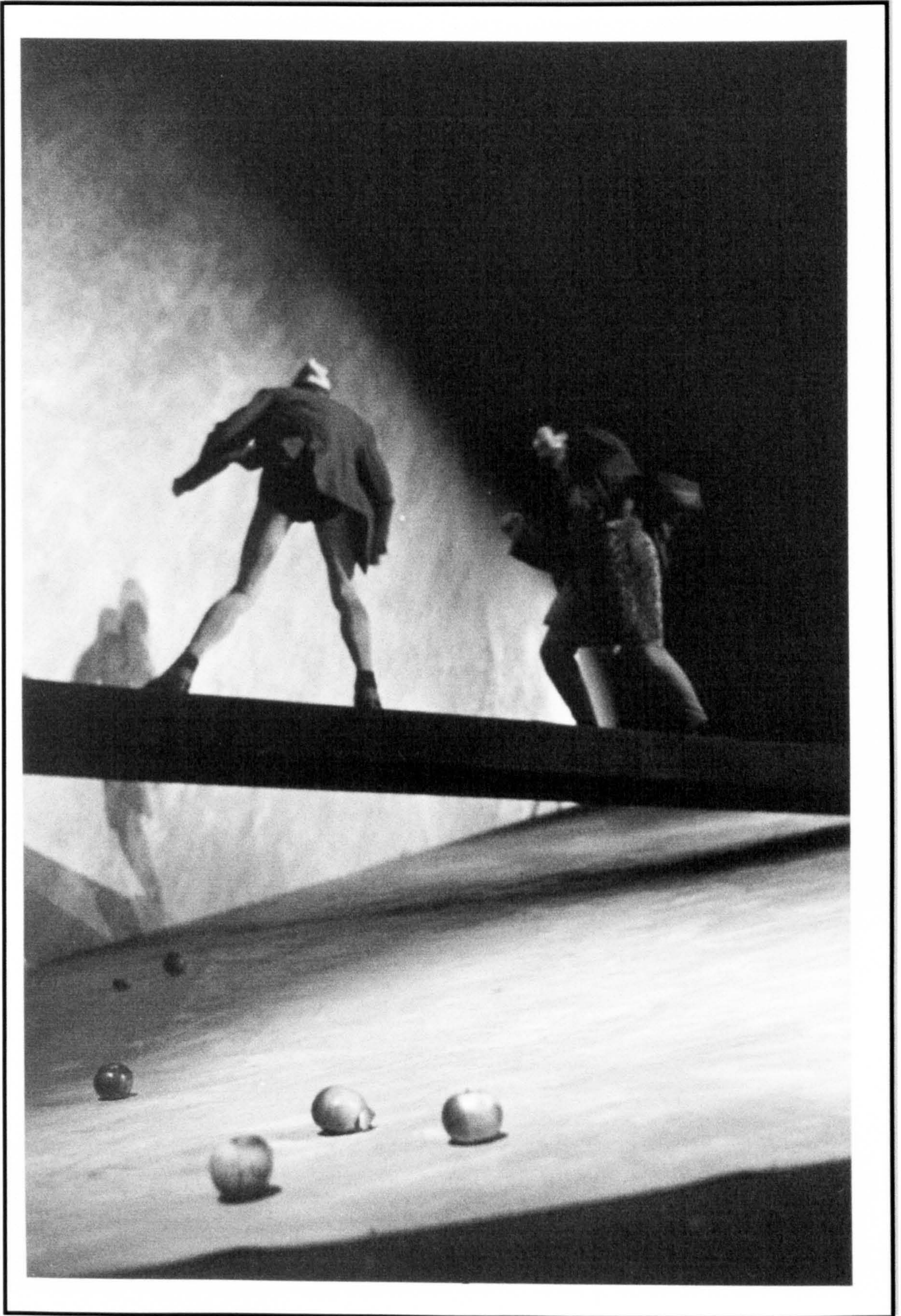


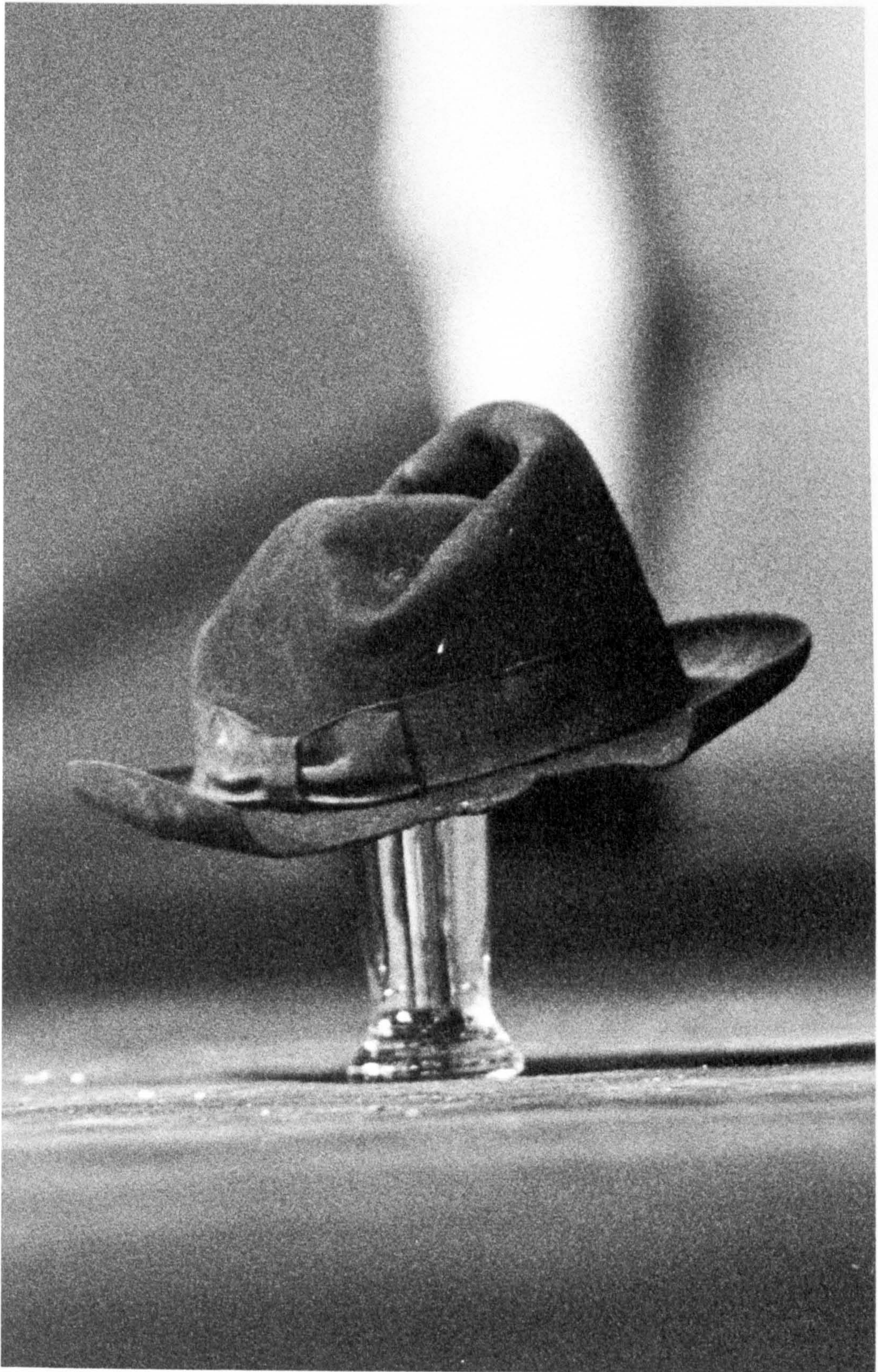


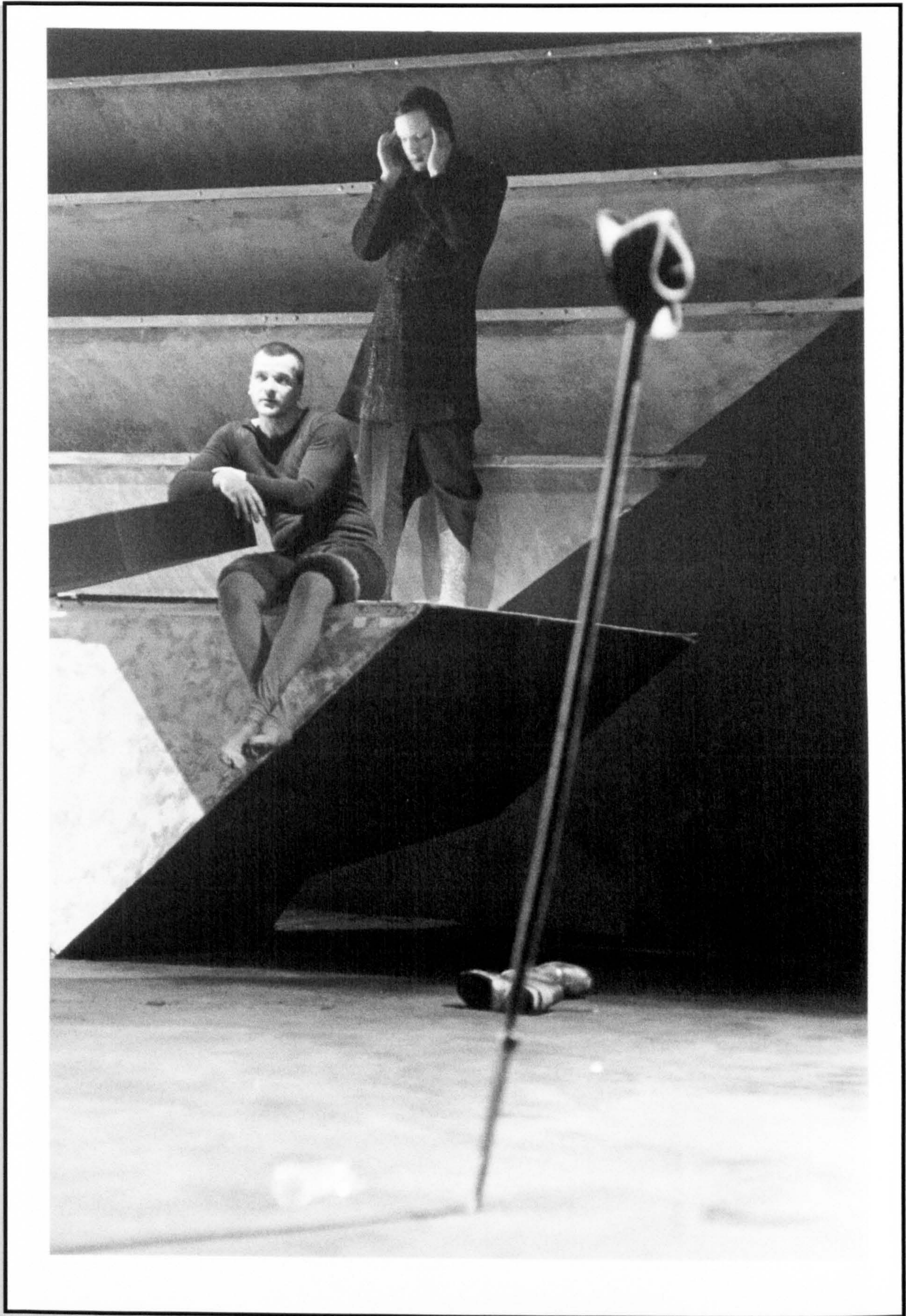














f. *Pension Schöller: Die Schlacht*

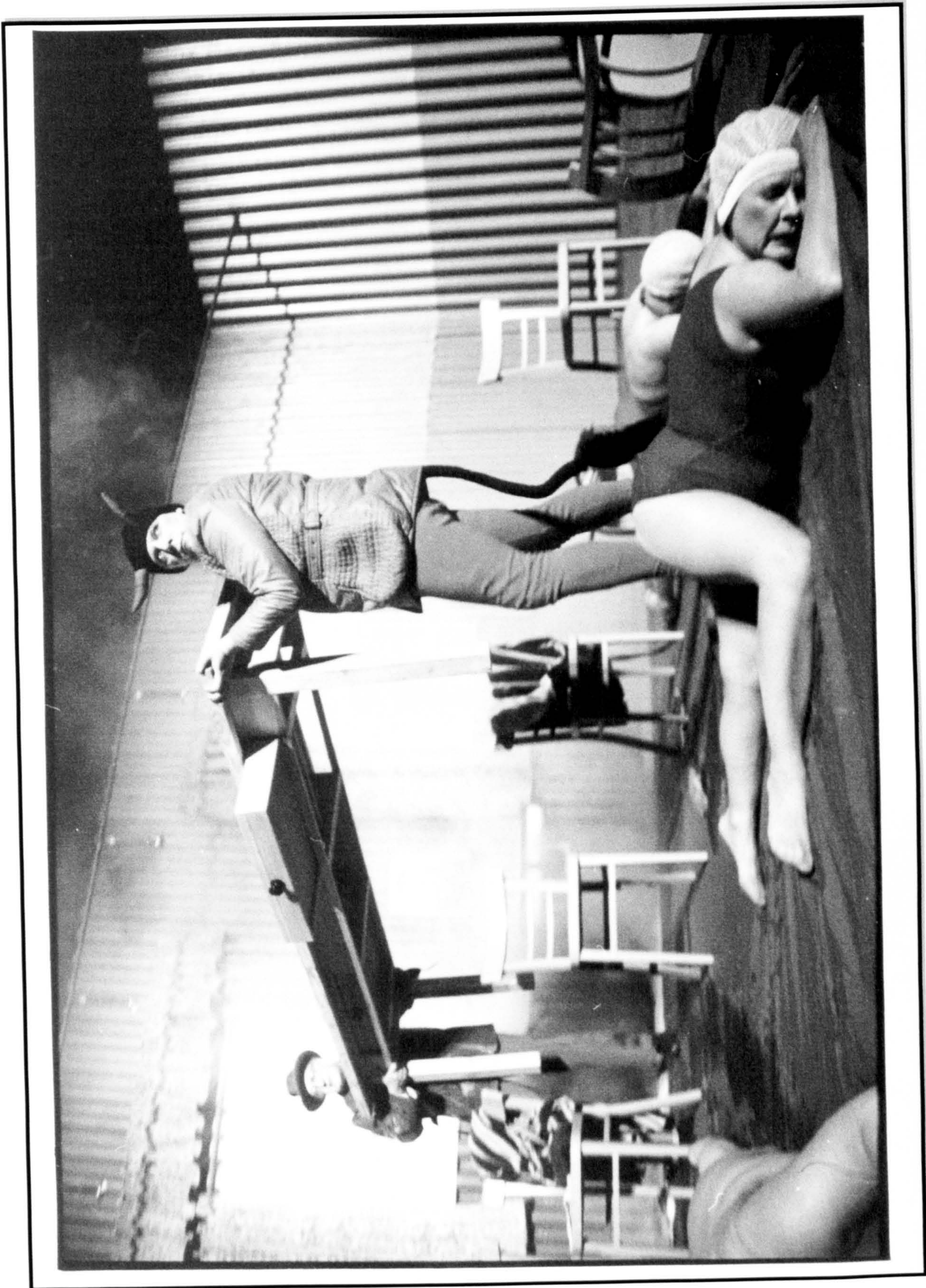
1. The two brothers



g. *Golden fließt der Stahl: Wolokolamsker Chaussee*

1. Eva and Kilian
2. Mutter Schreivögel's shower scene

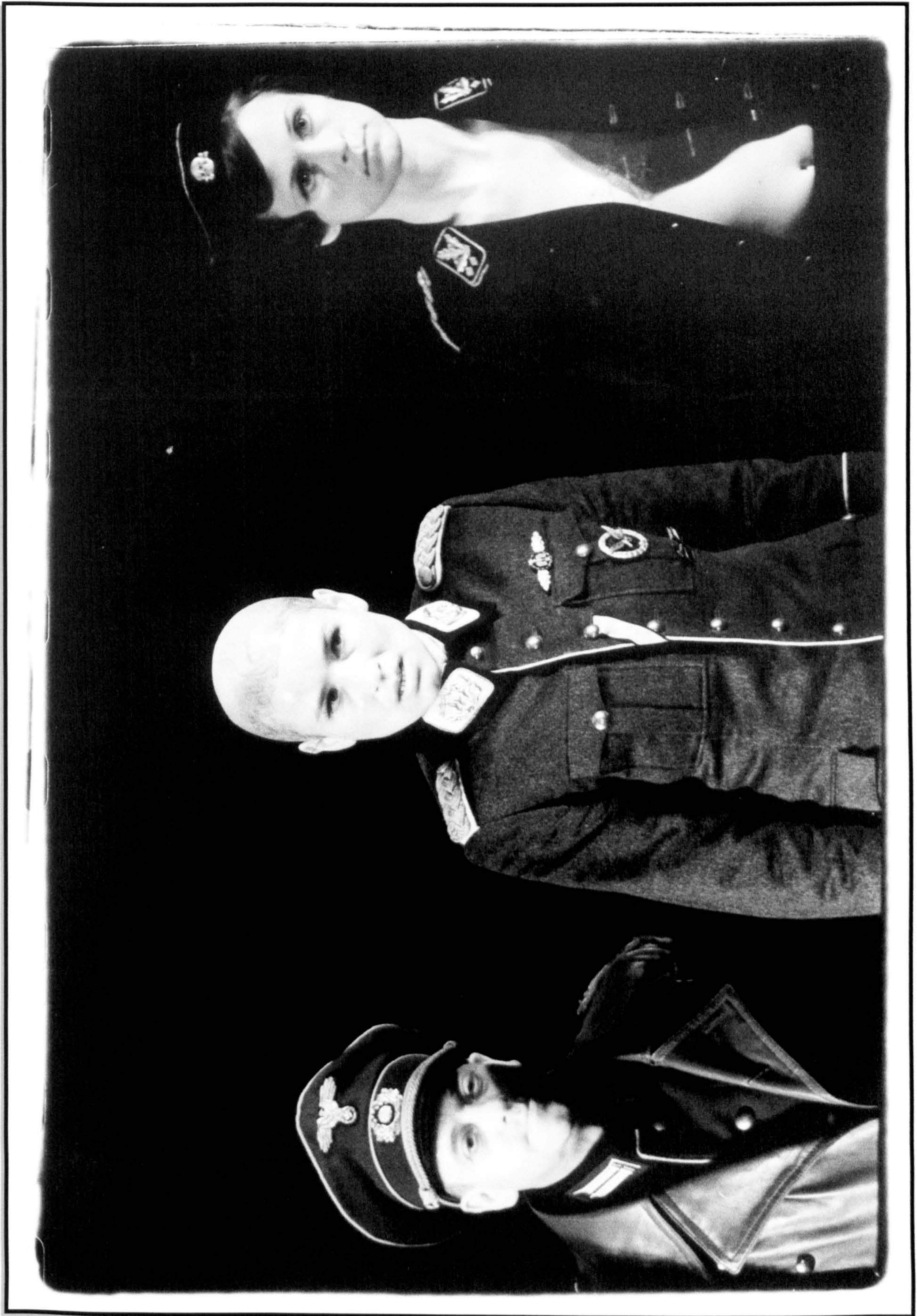




h. *Des Teufels General*

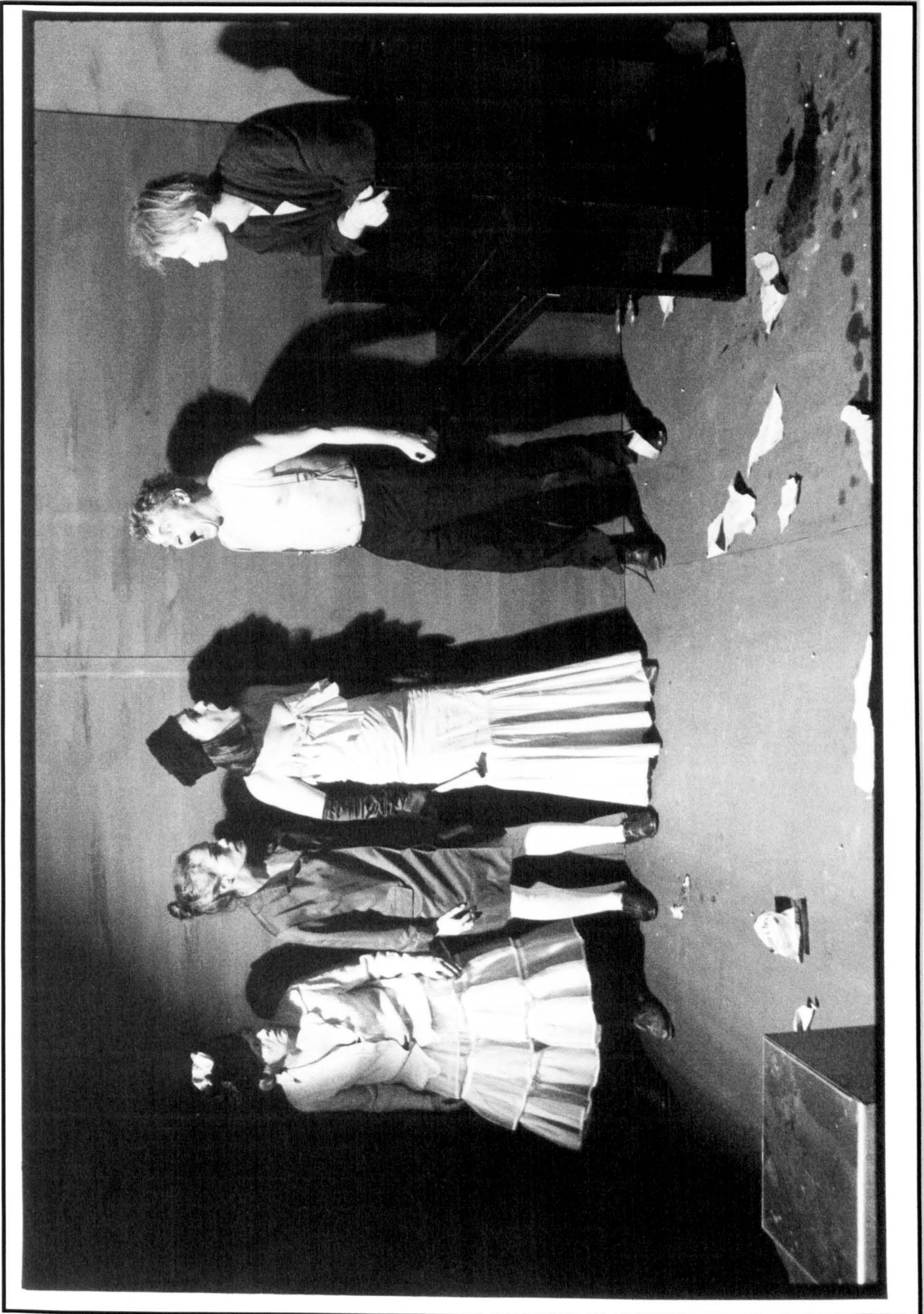
1. Centre stage and globe
2. Korrianke, General Harras and
Dr. Schmitz-Lausitz





i. *Das trunkene Schiff*

1. Mother, Isabella, Mathilde, Verlaine and Rimbaud
2. Remembrances of the wedding meal





j. *Trainspotting*

1. Centre stage
2. Heroin addiction





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The following is a selective bibliography only. It comprises complete information about the video, audio and printed material which has been both consulted and quoted for the purposes of this thesis, but it has no claim to be definitive in any specific area. It is divided as follows:

1. The first part includes material related to Castorf and / or the *Volksbühne*. Its subsections are divided firstly according to the nature of the sources and only then alphabetically;
2. The second part includes material related to Castorf's productions, which are ordered chronologically;
3. The third part includes material related to other (Berlin) theatres and directors, as well as to the development of (GDR) theatre history and its present situation, particularly in Berlin;
4. The fourth part includes material related to German unification and its consequences, particularly in a cultural context;
5. The fifth part includes material related to postmodernism and, generally, speaking, contemporary culture and aesthetics;
6. The sixth part includes material related, more or less directly, to the theory of 'political theatre', and it comprises information on Piscator and on the *Volksstück/Volkstheater* tradition;
7. The seventh part includes the works of reference I have employed.

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2.15 Hamlet

Theatre programme

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- BUSCH, Frank, 'Eine Tragödie zum Totlachen: Frank Castorfs Kölner *Hamlet*-Zirkus', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 22 April 1989

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2.16 Aias

Theatre programme

Prompt-book

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2.17 Miss Sara Sampson

Theatre programme

Prompt-book

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2.18 Stella

Theatre programme

Prompt-book

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2.19 Wilhelm Tell

Theatre programme

Prompt-book

Video

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2.20 Torquato Tasso

Theatre programme

Prompt-book

Video

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2.21 *Pension Schöller: Die Schlacht*

Theatre programme

Prompt-book

Video

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2.22 *Raststätte oder Sie machen's alle*

Theatre programme

Prompt-book

Video

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Theatre-programme

Prompt-book

Video

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Theatre programme

Prompt-book

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Theatre programme

Prompt-book

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2.26 Trainspotting

Theatre programme

Prompt-book

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Theatre programme

Prompt-book

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