ABSTRACT

Sounding Out the Stage:
Music and Sonic Design in Robert Wilson's Theater

Kamala Jacobs Schelling
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The American director Robert Wilson, a major figure on the international performing arts scene since 1968, is known for bringing his iconic visual style to a wide spectrum of the performing arts. Whether he is re-imagining canonic works of theater, staging operas, crafting newly-conceived multimedial productions, or advising Lady Gaga's performance at the 2013 MTV Awards, Wilson's starkly beautiful visual creations are impossible to ignore. Indeed, scholars have typically understood his work as a "theater of images." Yet the enduring focus on Wilson's visuals has come at the expense of other key elements of the director's theatrical imagination—especially music and sound, both of which have long played a crucial role in his work. Though he is best known in musical circles for *Einstein on the Beach* (the opera he created in 1976 with Philip Glass and Lucinda Childs), Wilson has collaborated with a range of musicians from the highest echelons of both popular and classical music. He has also developed a palette of sonic techniques no less recognizable than his stage designs.

This dissertation offers the first in-depth examination of sound and music in Wilson's theater. Approaching "sound" as a broad concept encompassing all elements of a production designed to be heard, it examines Wilson's recent productions in which sound effects, speech, and music all work together to create a richly textured soundscape. Live performances provide the bedrock of my analyses, which also incorporate production paratexts (including criticism and programs), archival materials, and conversations with Wilson and his collaborators. As such, the methodological roots of this dissertation lie in the performance-based scholarship

of opera and theater studies. These fields are brought into extensive dialogue with literature, visual art, architecture, performance studies, semiotics, and sociology, as well as interdisciplinary discourses such as media and sound studies, to develop an interdisciplinary framework for understanding sonic events in the theater.

Wilson often declares that properly structured images can help us "hear better," and that carefully deployed sounds may similarly help us "see better." Through this chiastic (and seemingly contradictory) sensory ideal, I explore not only how sound functions in Wilson's work, but also how Wilson's work illuminates broader trends in the use of sound. Chapter One introduces and interrogates Wilson's audiovisual aesthetic and sets up a central contention of this dissertation: that sound and image exist in a constant state of counterpoint, and must thus be examined together to achieve a full understanding of either. It also provides a brief overview of Wilson's history as a theater practitioner.

The dissertation then proceeds through four analytic chapters. Each begins by observing a single, idiosyncratically employed sound effect, then harnesses that very idiosyncrasy to study broader cultural conceptions of sound. Chapter Two considers a sound that we are acculturated to filter out: the crackling of a record. When elevated to a level of sonic prominence, this "noise" constructs a multiplicity of meanings that undermine what we see onstage by engaging the sound's historical associations. Chapter Three explores Wilson's frequent use of sounds to represent objects—specifically coins and doors—which are not actually present onstage. This chapter brings together scholarship on semiotics, sound, gesture, and architecture to craft a theory of sonic signification in the theater. Chapter Four adopts the concept of framing (as employed in art history and literary theory) to study how incidental music may render permeable the boundaries of a show's narrative, allowing the action "inside" the play to spill into the space "outside" of the stage and *vice versa*. Chapter Five focuses on

Wilson's *Lulu* (a 2011 production, with songs by Lou Reed, of Frank Wedekind's (in)famous play) and examines how interpolated songs disrupt the flow of a narrative, forge connections between disparate moments in the show, and even engage experiences external to the production itself. Finally, the dissertation concludes with a brief Epilogue that brings the idea of "sound" full circle, linking it to Wilson's use of silence and inviting the reader to reflect on how Wilson has taught us to "hear better," both in the theater and in the world at large. In opening our ears to Wilson's work, we stand not only to deepen our understanding of a much-discussed yet still enigmatic artist, but also to expand the horizons of theater scholarship, cross discursive boundaries, and holistically engage multimedial forms of expression in theater, opera, and art.

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Music and Sonic Design in Robert Wilson's Theater

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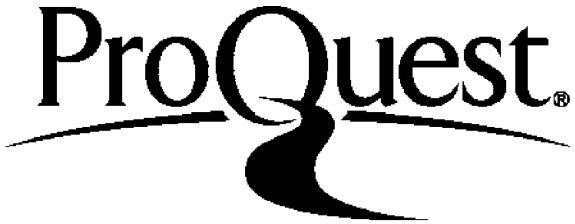

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INTRODUCTION

In November 2009, some forty artists from around the world gathered for an audience with the Pope. Among the participants was the American director Robert Wilson. As Wilson recalled a year later, during a public interview in Berlin, the Pope entered the room "walking very slowly, wearing a white cap, white robes, and"—Wilson smiled wryly—"red shoes." Benedict spoke for about forty minutes, during which time "he was inaudible." Yet Wilson's attention was drawn to the Pope's left foot, swathed in its "little red shoe" which, softly tapping, "kept time with the cadence of his speech."[1]

The softness of speech, the slowness of motion, the monochromatic costume with a single, shocking pop of color: all these elements could come from any of Wilson's works, which over the course of his half-century-long career have touched on almost every area of theater, opera, and the performing arts. To musicologists, he is above all associated with *Einstein on the Beach*, the opera he created in 1976 with Philip Glass and Lucinda Childs. To theater scholars, he is a purveyor of a "theater of images": monumental performance pieces defined by their surreal juxtapositions of objects and bodies, slowness of motion, and saturated lighting techniques. To the artistic community at large, he is the man who is equally comfortable directing Lady Gaga's performance at the MTV Awards, Marina Abramović's

[1] On September 23, 2015, *The Lost Paradise* (2015), a film by Günter Atteln documenting the making of *Adam's Passion*, was screened in Berlin at the Berliner Philharmonie. Following the screening, Wilson took part in a Q&A session with Atteln and Dr. Helge Grünewald; the anecdote and quotations come from this interview. The meeting of forty artists was a smaller session of a much larger audience that brought together around 250 artists and scientists; for more on the audience, see the liner notes to the DVD *The Lost Paradise: Arvo Pärt/Robert Wilson*, directed by Günter Atteln (Accentus Music, ACC 20321, 2015), 15-16.

"funeral," an installation for the luxury line Hermès, or a design workshop for Illy's Art Collection espresso cups.[2]

In each of these examples, a small figure sitting still and speaking inaudibly for forty minutes while tapping a red-clad foot would be right at home. Yet the story of the red shoe was, in Wilson's telling, not merely an anecdote about the charming sartorial tendencies of the pontiff. Instead, the story of the Pope's foot contains a much deeper lesson about how Wilson hears, how he sees, and how he conceptualizes the relationship between hearing and seeing. Wilson did not merely notice the foot tapping: he noticed it tapping in time with the cadence of the pope's speech. The interaction between visual detail and sonic event can, Wilson believes, facilitate a heightened awareness of both sound and image, and this ideal—of seeing and hearing as individual yet symbiotic sensory experiences—underlies all of his work. Whether staging a play, an opera, or an installation for one of the most rarefied luxury brands in the world, Wilson paradoxically seeks to create images that can help an audience "hear better" and sounds that can help an audience "see better."[3] Nevertheless, sound remains obscure in the image-based world of Wilson scholarship.

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[2] On Lady Gaga's MTV performance, see for instance Steve Dow, "Robert Wilson: the art my generation produced won't be seen in 50 years," *The Guardian*, December 28, 2016, https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2015/dec/29/robert-wilson-the-art-my-generation-produced-wont-be-seen-in-50-years (accessed February 12, 2017). *The Life and Death of Marina Abramović*, one of several similar works that the renowned performance artist has created in collaboration with various directors, was premiered on July 9, 2011, at the Manchester International Festival. I saw it at New York City's Park Avenue Armory on December 18, 2013. On the Hermès installation, see Rebecca Mead, "The Talk of the Town, Dept. of Hoopla: Had to Be There," *The New Yorker*, May 30, 2016, 21. The Illy espresso cups are sold as "The Watermill Center" collection, commemorating the performance art space Wilson founded on Long Island in 1992; for more on the Watermill Center, see José Enrique Macián, Sue Jane Stoker, and Jörn Weisbrodt, eds., *The Watermill Center: A Laboratory for Performance, Robert Wilson's Legacy* (Stuttgart: DACO-VERLAG, with The Watermill Center, New York, 2011).

[3] Robert Wilson, lecture address, "The Campbell Lecture Series: Robert Wilson," Rice University (Houston, TX), March 27, 2014, http://campbell.rice.edu/CampbellContent.aspx (accessed June 22, 2014). All Campbell Lecture transcriptions my own.

My dissertation therefore offers the first in-depth study of sound and music in Wilson's theater. Beginning with an examination of Wilson's aesthetic statements pertaining to hearing and sound, it demonstrates that sound and music offer vital insight into Wilson's "theater of images." Through analyses of live performances, programs and other paratexts, archival materials from Wilson's creative process, and interviews, I delve into Wilson's distinctive audio-visual language. "In my theatre," says Wilson, "all the elements are equal: the space, the light, the actors, the sound, the texts, the costumes, and the props."[4] This statement supports my assertion that sound, the as-yet ignored element of the list above, is a key piece of the Wilsonian puzzle. It also suggests that in order to understand Wilson's deployment of sound and sonic media, an interdisciplinary approach is necessary, one which can simultaneously and equitably engage the space, the light, the actors, the texts, the costumes, and the props. Thus, this dissertation brings together a wide variety of secondary sources, engaging work on theater, media, literature, visual art, architecture, semiotics, and sociology, to name just a few.

Since my analyses focus on productions which I have seen live, all major examples in this dissertation come from productions created in the last decade. As such, my dissertation also introduces a new repertoire to Wilson scholarship, which has traditionally focused on Wilson's earlier work. Although some critics and audience members have dismissed Wilson's recent work as merely recycling his own clichés, I suggest that these recent productions actually offer an opportunity for new insights into the work of a now-iconic artist. Wilson has typically been studied as a practitioner of "postdramatic" theater, a form of theater that eschews

[4] Quoted in Maria Shevtsova, *Robert Wilson* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), 48.

traditional narrative structures in favor of alternative modes of expression.[5] Yet the past two and a half decades have seen many of his most iconic techniques applied to more traditionally narrative productions as well. Sound, I argue, is optimally situated to reconcile these supposedly divergent genres: whether he is creating an original "postdramatic" production or a newly conceived staging of a pre-existing text, Wilson's distinctive vocabulary of sound effects and careful methods of musical interpolation are present across his oeuvre. More broadly, Wilson's use of sound and music challenges extant conceptions of theater as a multimedial art form. As the performing arts evolve in the twenty-first century, my dissertation offers new paths to cross traditional discursive boundaries and explore new trends in theater, opera, and multimedial art.

"The Theater of Images": A Bibliographic Sketch

Robert Wilson is, both artistically and geographically, a man on the move. Within a few months' space his schedule may include premieres of Goethe's *Faust* (Berlin, April 2015), a music-and-movement piece in collaboration with Arvo Pärt (Tallinn, May 2015), a theatrical rendition of Pushkin's fairy tales (Moscow, June 2015), a solo work for Mikhail Baryshnikov based on the diary of Vaslav Nijinsky (Spoleto, July 2015), and a staging of Verdi's *La Traviata* (Linz, September 2015) —and this does not include the plethora of performances, lectures, and videos that take place across the world every day.[6] Yet Wilson is not a chameleon: he does

[5] The term comes from Hans-Thies Lehmann's monograph *Postdramatic Theatre*, trans. Karen Jürs-Munby (London: Routledge, 2006). Similar issues are examined by Elinor Fuchs in *The Death of Character: Perspectives on Theater after Modernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996).

[6] Respectively: *Faust I and II*, premiered on April 22, 2015 at the Berliner Ensemble, Berlin, Germany; *Adam's Passion*, premiered on May 12, 2015 at the Noblessner Foundry, Tallinn, Estonia; Pushkin's Fairy Tales, premiered on June 16, 2015 at the Theater of Nations, Moscow, Russia; *Letter to a Man*, premiered on July 8, 2015 at the Caio Melisso Theater, Festival dei 2Mondi, Spoleto, Italy; *La Traviata*, premiered on September 19, 2015 at the Linz State Theater / Musiktheater am Volksgarten, Linz, Austria.

not change color to suit his surroundings. Rather, he molds any given genre to suit his own artistic ideals. "Pin down [her] genius," a critic once quipped of the pianist Martha Argerich, "and she walks away with the pin."[7] The same could be said of Wilson, although in his case it might be more appropriately formulated: "Shine a light on his work, and he takes control of the lighting panel and redirects the lights to illuminate something you would never have thought to look at in the first place." As a director and artist, Wilson defies conventions. Despite being a staple of theater scholarship for almost forty years, he remains an artist stubbornly hard to define.

The terms by which Wilson has most often been considered, however, were already apparent in the title of the first scholarly works in which he appeared: Bonnie Maranca's 1977 collection *The Theater of Images*, which featured a chapter on Wilson, and Stefan Brecht's monograph *The Theatre of Visions*, published in 1978 and dedicated solely to Wilson's work.[8] These books were followed by a 1980 exhibition, at Cincinnati's Contemporary Arts Center, titled "Robert Wilson: from a Theater of Images."[9] Such monikers were too catchy and too easily applicable to a body of work defined by a striking and instantly recognizable visual aesthetic—bold geometric shapes, mask-like costumes and makeup, stark spotlights against glowing backdrops—not to become the rallying cry of Wilson scholars and enthusiasts.

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[7] Gramophone Classical Music Guide, 2010; quoted in http://www.prestoclassical.co.uk/r/Ideale%2BAudience%2BInternational/3073428 (accessed March 9, 2017).

[8] Bonnie Marranca, ed., *The Theatre of Images* (New York: Drama Book Specialists, 1977; repr., Johns Hopkins Paperbacks, 1996, with a new afterword by the editor); Stefan Brecht, *The Theatre of Visions: Robert Wilson* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1978).

[9] The catalogue is available as Robert Wilson et al., *Robert Wilson: The Theater of Images: Exhibition*, The Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati, 16 May-29 June, 1980 (Cincinnati: The Contemporary Arts Center, 1980; reprint, Harper & Row, 1984).

Indeed, a strongly visual bent was to be expected in analyses of Wilson's early work. His reputation was built on a body of lengthy, silent performance pieces he created in the mid- to late-1960s, and his first major international success, *Deafman Glance*, was a seven-hour silent play that premiered in New York in 1970 and enjoyed astounding acclaim in Paris the following year.[10] In a now-famous letter to (the then already deceased) André Breton, the surrealist author Louis Aragon declared that *Deafman Glance* was "what we [Surrealists] dreamed would come after us and go beyond us." Calling the silence of the work a "miracle," Aragon observed that "Bob Wilson ... is a surrealist by his silence, and although one may pretend that this is true of all paintings, Wilson['s work] is the marriage of gesture and silence, of movement and that of which no one has ever heard [*l'inouï*]."[11] In the absence of sound, it was perhaps easiest to describe this unheard work as a series of images. More fancifully, in Wilson's as-yet-unheard-of theater (as Aragon described it), the imag(e)ination could run wild.

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[10] Stefan Brecht offers detailed accounts of many of Wilson's earliest productions in *The Theater of Images*. For Wilson's lectures recounting his early work, see for instance Robert Wilson, "The Campbell Lecture Series: Robert Wilson," Rice University (Houston, TX), March 26, 2014, http://campbell.rice.edu/CampbellContent.aspx (accessed June 22, 2014); for a print version, see Robert Wilson, *Lecture; mit einem Traum von Heiner Müller*, Nahaufnahme (Berlin: Alexander Verlag, 2007), 17-140. The most up-to-date *Catalogue raisonné* of Wilson's productions (through the anticipated 2012 revival of *Einstein on the Beach*) is available in Margery Arent Safir, ed., *Robert Wilson from Within* (Paris: Arts Arena, American University of Paris, 2011), 322-31. For a more complete list of performances of each production (through 2002), see Miguel Morey and Carmen Pardo, *Robert Wilson* (Barcelona: Ediciones Polígrafa, 2002), 217-30. For a list of productions including all major collaborators and actors (but not individual performances) through 2006, see Wilson, *Lecture*, 177-208.

[11] Except where noted, all translations in this dissertation are my own. The above quotations are excerpted from the following passages, respectively: "Tu me dis: 'Ecoute le silence,' et nous avons ri pour tous les chevaux absents de hennir à cette idée d'ecouter le silence... Eh bien, c'est là précisément que s'est passé le miracle. Le silence.... Bob Wilson qui nous vient vient d'Iowa n'est pas du tout *du* surréalisme, comme il est aux gens commode de dire, mais il est ce que nous autres, de qui le surréalisme est né, nous avons révé qu'il surgisse après nous, au-delà de nous.... Bob Wilson est, serait, sera (il aurait fallu le futur) surréaliste par le silence, bien qu'on puisse aussi le prétendre de tous les peintres, mais Wilson c'est le mariage du geste et du silence, du mouvement et de l'inouï." Louis Aragon, "Lettre ouverte à André Breton: sur Le Regard du Sourd, l'art, la science et la liberté," *Les lettres françaises*, no. 1388 (June 2, 1971), 3.

Yet the idea of a "theater of images" also represents a much more concrete aspect of Wilson's working process. Each and every one of Wilson's production begins with what he calls a "visual book," a series of images that motivate and structure all events that take place onstage.[12] Even as Wilson's theatrical language quickly expanded, in the 1970s and 1980s, to include the spoken word, the visual book remained the foundational "text" of a show; to this day, whether crafting an original multimedial production or staging a canonical opera, Wilson always begins with a visual book.

The images of Wilson's visual books are ideally suited to the pages of a catalogue or coffee-table book. They are less easily adaptable to prevailing categories of genre, structures of academic scholarship, or even the legal understanding of an original "work." For instance, *Einstein on the Beach*, Wilson's 1976 collaboration with composer Philip Glass, choreographer Lucinda Childs, and writer Christopher Knowles, is known by critics, scholars, and audiences (as well as by Wilson and Glass) as an "opera."[13] However, it is not a staged musical setting of a libretto, but rather a symbiotic feedback loop of stage designs, music, and choreographed movements motivated by Wilson's visual book.[14] The concept of a visual book as the "text"

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[12] For the best discussion of Wilson's visual books, see Marc Robinson, "The drawings of Robert Wilson," in *Robert Wilson from Within*, ed. Margery Arent Safir (Paris: Arts Aena, American University of Paris, 2011), 223-31.

[13] *Einstein* was revived in 1984, 1992, and in 2012. The 2012 performance at Théâtre du Chatelet in Paris was recently released as a DVD directed by Don Kent, the first recording of the entire production ever to be publicly available (*Einstein on the Beach*, directed by Don Kent (Telemondis OA 1178 D, 2014)). For a good overview of musicological approaches to *Einstein*, see Arved Ashby, "Minimalist Opera," in *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century Opera*, ed. Mervyn Cooke (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 244-66. On issues of authorship in the reception of the work, see Leah G. Weinberg, "Opera behind the Myth: An Archival Examination of Einstein on the Beach." (University of Michigan, Ph.D. diss, 2016); see also the documentary *Einstein on the Beach: The Changing Image of Opera*, directed by Mark Obenhaus (Direct Cinema, 2007).

[14] This visual book was published in 1976, with excerpts from Glass's score, Christopher Knowles's libretto, and de Groat's choreography diagrams, as Robert Wilson and Philip Glass, *Einstein on the Beach* (New York: EOS Enterprises, 1976). It was published again, now with photographs and Glass's

of an opera ran counter not only to how opera was defined for centuries—one wonders what musicologist Carl Dahlhaus would have made of the potent concoction cooked up from Wilson's visual book "recipe"[15]—but also to the legal understanding of text-based copyright: the Library of Congress has refused no fewer than four times to accept Wilson's drawings as the "text" of *Einstein on the Beach*.[16]

Despite Aragon's admonition that Wilson's silent images were not to be confused with the silent stillness of paintings, Wilson's inclusion in exhibitions at such august institutions as the Cincinnati Contemporary Arts Center—and the accompanying inscription of his work in the printed pages of a catalogue—helped cement his reputation as a visual artist. Moreover, his visual-book-as-production-text approach helped solidify the visual elements of his theatrical works as the central focus of study for Wilson scholars.[17] The idea of Wilson as a purveyor of a "theater of images" also had a practical side: if his work could be analyzed as a

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working notes, to accompany the 2012 revival of *Einstein on the Beach* (Robert Wilson and Philip Glass, *Einstein on the Beach* (Paris, New York: Éditions Dilecta, 2012)).

[15] In his book *Nineteenth-Century Music*, the German musicologist Carl Dahlhaus famously declared that, while the musical score of an instrumental composition by, say, Beethoven was a "work," the score of an opera was merely a "recipe" for a staged production. (Carl Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, trans. J. Bradford Robinson (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989), 9). For recent re-examinations of Dahlhaus's binary, see James Hepokoski, "Dahlhaus's Beethoven-Rossini Stildualismus: lingering legacies of the text-event dichotomy," in *The Invention of Beethoven and Rossini: Historiography, Analysis, Criticism*, ed. Nicholas Matthew and Benjamin Walton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 15-48.

[16] Wilson, "The Campbell Lecture Series," March 27, 2014. For more on the complicated history of copyright and opera, see Christy Thomas, "When Opera Met Film: Casa Ricordi and the Emergence of Cinema, 1905-1920" (Yale University, Ph.D. diss., 2016).

[17] For another catalogue that accompanied a Wilson exhibit in a renowned art museum, see Robert Wilson et al., *Robert Wilson's Vision: An Exhibition of Works by Robert Wilson with a Sound Environment by Hans Peter Kuhn* (New York: Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, in association with H.N. Abrams, 1991). Wilson's presence in art museums was not exclusively visual, however: in 1976, a work of his was included in a dance performance at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, part of a festival called *4 Evenings in 4 Days*. Claire Bishop, "The Perils and Possibilities of Dance in the Museum: Tate, MoMA, and Whitney," *Dance Research Journal* 46, no. 3 (2014): 70.

series of images, then even his work that existed as ephemeral performance could be reproduced on the printed page, and easily discussed by scholars at a distance. Thus, Wilson's visual output—whether the visual book or photographs of his productions—became a picture-based text to replace the word-based texts of more traditional scholarly focus, and the concept of Wilson as a visual artist, a purveyor of a theater of images, became a self-fulfilling prophecy.

In some ways, Wilson scholarship has expanded apace with Wilson's oeuvre. But the "theater of images" is never far away. As Wilson began adding speech to his productions (particularly after his early meetings with Christopher Knowles), for instance, theater scholars moved to discuss the breakdown or lack of traditional linguistic semiotics in Wilson's work.[18] Yet semantic breakdown is itself closely linked with visual effect, with the oft-used phrase "Wilson's visual language" expanding to include two meanings: the meaning generate*d by* images (i.e., when images are themselves a "language"), and Wilson's use of written word*s as* material for visual compositions (i.e., when Wilson or Christopher Knowles organize words so that their letters and shapes create a design). A similar tendency toward treating Wilson as predominantly a visual artist is evident in David Roesner's recent work on "musicality" in theater, an approach which explains theatrical praxis through metaphorical recourse to musical terminology.[19] Roesner sees the multiple elements of a Wilson production as existing in a

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[18] This is most clearly illustrated in Arthur Holmberg's *The Theatre of Robert Wilson* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), which categorizes Wilson's oeuvre by his treatment of language, dividing Wilson's development into "four major periods" that are all based on Wilson's interaction with language.

[19] David Roesner, *Musicality in Theatre: Music as Model, Method and Metaphor in Theatre-Making* (Farnham, Surrey, UK: Ashgate, 2014). In his earlier work, Roesner used the terms "Composed Theater" and "musicalization" to refer to the same phenomenon: see for instance David Roesner and Matthias Rebstock, eds., *Composed Theatre: Aesthetics, Practices, Processes* (Bristol; Chicago: Intellect, 2012); David Roesner, "The Politics of the Polyphony of Performance: Musicalization in Contemporary German Theatre," *Contemporary Theatre Review* 18, no. 1 (2008); David Roesner, *Theater als Musik: Verfahren der Musikalisierung in chorischen Theaterformen bei Christoph Marthaler, Einar Schleef und Robert Wilson* (Tübingen:

"polyphonic" relationship. Yet it is Wilson's visual book that is the governing "score," and thus it is clear that Wilson's visuals continue to exert a gravitational pull far too strong to resist.[20]

For his part, Wilson has never considered himself a strictly visual artist, and even if the visual book is the first step in his working process he does not consider the visual aspects of his productions to enjoy any sort of primacy or priority. In a 1987 interview for the German newspaper *Der Spiegel*, the journalist Hellmuth Karasek and the dramaturg Urs Jenny inquired of Wilson, "Your theater contains [*enthält*] architectural structures, images, speech, dance, music. To use a very German term, it strives to be a *Gesamtkunstwerk*. But what comes first? The images?" "I think," Wilson replied, "that everything should be equal. It always surprises me when people characterize my work as a 'Theater of Images,' since hearing is just as important for me. Hearing and seeing are our primary means of perception, of communication. Normally, in the theater, speech takes precedence, and what one sees is simply an additive, a doubling, an illustration. I would like to allow both hearing and seeing to come into their own."[21] This dissertation, too, aims to help hearing come into its own, not as

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Gunter Narr, 2003). Roesner's term "musicalization" is borrowed from Hans-Thies Lehmann's *Postdramatic Theater*, 91-93.

[20] Roesner, *Musicality in Theatre*, 214-17. See also Stefanie Fuchs, *"Alles begann mit Bildern und Rhythmen...": Visualität und Theaterraum in Robert Wilsons Theaterästhetik* (Marburg: Tectum Verlag, 2011), 123ff.

[21] "*DER SPIEGEL*: Ihr Theater enthält architektoniche Strukturen, Bilder, Sprache, Tanz, Musik; es will, mit einem sehr deutschen Begriff, ein 'Gesamtkunstwerk' sein. Aber was ist das Ursprüngliche, Erste? Die Bilder? / WILSON: Ich denke, es sollte alles gleichwertig sein. Es wundert mich immer, wenn man meine Arbeit als 'Bilder-Theater' charakterisiert, denn das Hören ist mir ebenso wichtig. Hören und Sehen sind unsere hauptsächlichen Mittel der Wahrnehmung, der Kommunikation. Im Theater herrscht gemeinhin die Sprache vor, was man dazu sieht, ist bloß Zutat, Verdoppelung, Illustration. Ich möchte, daß beides zu seinem Recht kommt, Hören und Sehen" ("Franz Kafka meets Rudolf Heß: Spiegel-Gespräch mit Robert Wilson über Hören, Sehen und Spielen mit Hellmuth Karasek und Urs Jenny," in *Der Spiegel*, October 1987, reproduced in Manfred Brauneck, ed., *Theater im 20. Jahrhundert: Programmschriften, Stilperioden, Kommentare* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, 1982, 2009), 205.)

an element of Wilson's theater but as an element of Wilson scholarship. But first we must examine Wilson's professed multimedial equality to determine what, exactly, this study of "sound in Wilson" will entail.

Gesamtkunstwerk? Understanding Wilson's Multimedial Approach

In referring to Wilson's work as a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, Karasek and Jenny touched upon an issue that has been a pebble in the shoe of Wilson scholarship for years: how, exactly, do the many elements of Wilson's theatrical productions work together, and how should his multimedial structure be described? Just as important, what is Wilson's role in relation to each of the elements listed above: he is often billed for "direction, stage, design, and lighting concept," for instance, but what about "the actors, the sound, the texts, the costumes, and the props," which he considers equally central to his theater? It is all well and good to declare a commitment to equality of theatrical elements; it is another thing entirely to achieve it. *Gesamtkunstwerk* is a loaded term, and scholars (and journalists) who apply it to Wilson wade into a prickly morass of ideological and terminological contention. Yet this is precisely why a consideration of the term—and an examination of why some scholars and practitioners embrace it while others reject it emphatically—is illuminating, both in understanding Wilson and in staking out the territory of this study.

Although the term itself dates back at least to 1827, when it was used by one Karl Friedrich Eusebius Trahndorff, *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or "Total Work of Art," is now inextricably linked with Richard Wagner.[22] In the middle of the nineteenth century, Wagner envisioned a new kind of "music drama" in which all artistic elements—libretto, music, stage design, even

[22] On the history of the term, see Juliet Koss, *Modernism after Wagner* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 13.

architecture—would contribute to a single, unified artistic goal; it was this singularity of artistic ambition that created the "totality" of the work. And how might they be unified? In his seminal essay "The Art-Work of the Future" (1849), Wagner suggested that all artistic elements (dance, music, architecture, painting and sculpture) should be subservient to Poetry, the great unifier of the musico-dramatic enterprise; two years later, in the monograph *Opera and Drama*, he slightly amended this position, declaring that music and poetry must work together in the service of Drama.[23] At heart, however, the two cases share an identical ideology: only in subordination to a greater artistic purpose could individual elements truly achieve their full potential. This apotheosis-through-abnegation stood in stark contrast to prevailing artistic norms of the day, at least as Wagner viewed them: in 1849, he decried the "mutual compact of egoism" of dance, music and poetry; in 1851 it was the artists themselves who suffered from a "maxim" of "egoistic severance" from their fellow artists.[24] And although Wagner admitted that, in principle at least, a poet and a composer could work together toward a perfect dramatic union, it was his blunt opinion that in a society (such as his), where every artist fought

[23] Respectively, Richard Wagner, "The Art-Work of the Future," trans. William Ashton Ellis, in *Richard Wagner's Prose Works*, Vol. 1 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1895); Richard Wagner, *Opera and Drama*, trans. William Ashton Ellis, *Richard Wagner's Prose Works*, Vol. 2 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1900). For a recent translation of "The Artwork of the Future"—indeed, the first since Ellis's translation of 1895, see Emma Warner, trans., "The Artwork of the Future," in *The Artwork of the Future: A Special Issue of the Wagner Journal* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 13-86.

[24] The quotations are from, respectively, Wagner, "The Art-Work of the Future," 153; and Wagner, *Opera and Drama*, 356. The prevailing conventions of opera composition at the time had libretto, music, and visual elements all created by different people: see for instance Philip Gossett, *Divas and Scholars: Performing Italian Opera* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006); Roger Parker, "The Opera Industry," in *The Cambridge History of Nineteenth-Century Music*, ed. Jim Samson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 87-117.

for their right to shine, a *Gesamtkunstwerk* could only be created (or, at least, conceptualized) by a single artist.[25]

As it happens, the multiple, mutually enhancing theatrical elements discussed by Wagner in "The Art-Work of the Future" are precisely those listed by Karasek and Jenny in their description of Wilson's theater: dance, "tone" (i.e., music), poetry, architecture, and the visual and plastic arts.[26] Yet Wilson, despite exhibiting a perfectionism which often comes across as downright dictatorial, has never sought control over all the elements of a production.[27] Instead, he prefers to allow each contributing member of the creative team relative freedom, so that when the various elements are finally brought together they do not merely "illustrate" one another but rather retain their individual identity. For instance, according to Jacques Reynaud, a costume designer who has worked with Wilson for many years, "One of the reasons for the success of our collaboration, I think, is that Bob and I never quite talk about the play we are going to do."[28] This independent construction is fundamental to creating the kind of visual and aural experience Wilson desires, in which both seeing and hearing are sharpened through exposure to independently expressive sights and sounds. In direct contrast to Wagner, who would have excoriated such an approach as encouraging the

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[25] Wagner, *Opera and Drama*, 355-56.

[26] Wagner, "The Art-Work of the Future," 100-81. (On "The Art of Dance," see specifically pp. 100-110: on "The Art of Tone," 110-131; on "The Poetic Art" 132-149; on "Architectural Art," 156-162; on "The Art of Sculpture," 162-174; and on "The Painter's Art," 174-181.)

[27] Wilson, like many directors, demands perfection from every performance, even for the elements that he does not directly create; after a performance of *Letter to a Man* at the Milan Triennale in September 2015, for instance, I overheard Wilson complaining to the sound technician that the sound was poorly mixed in the final scene.

[28] Jacques Reynaud, "A costume is an actor," in *Robert Wilson from Within*, ed. Safir, 245. For a series of interviews with Wilson's collaborators, see Laurence Shyer, *Robert Wilson and His Collaborators* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1989).

"egoism" of images and sound (or of the visual and sound designers), Wilson believes that each contributing factor of a theatrical production achieves its full potential when it retains its unique identity.

This equality-through-autonomy—for both theatrical elements and creative collaborators—underpins the admiration some of Wilson's fellow theater practitioners profess for his work. After seeing Wilson's *Death, Destruction and Detroit II*, which premiered at West Berlin's Schaubühne in 1987, legendary German director Heiner Müller (1929-1995) wrote (in a move very much reminiscent of Aragon) an open letter to Wilson describing the entrancing strangeness of the images in the work.[29] In broader terms, however, it was not merely the surreal beauty of Wilson's style that attracted Müller; it was also the simultaneous parity and individuality of "theatrical elements."[30] Müller considered Wilson's approach an antidote to the Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk*, which he saw as an undifferentiated "casserole" [*Eintopf*]. "Through this [Wilson's] splitting [of elements]," he told interviewer Holm Keller, "each viewer—and this is what is democratic about it—has the possibility to establish connections with the help of their own experiences."[31]

Müller's description of the "democratic" nature of Wilson's theater is no accident. Müller often described Wilson's work in strongly political terms. As a citizen of East Germany,

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[29] Heiner Müller, "Brief an Robert Wilson," in *Material: Texte und Kommentar* (Lepzig: Reclam, 1990), 51-54. The admiration was mutual: Wilson has stated that working with Müller fundamentally altered the way he understands speech as an element of theater. (Wilson, *Lecture*, 100.) Arthur Holmberg views Müller as the "muse" who, following his work on the Cologne section of *The Civil Wars* in 1984, inspired Wilson to begin directing classic texts. (Holmberg, *The Theater of Robert Wilson*, 22.)

[30] Holm Keller, *Robert Wilson* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1997), 87.

[31] "Die Trennung der Elemente, im gegensatz zum Mißverständnis vom Gesamtkunstwerk als Eintopf, oder als synthetischer Brei. Durch die Trennung hat jeder Zuscher—und das ist das Demokratische daran—die Möglichkeit, den Zusammenhang mit Hilfe siner eigenen Erfahrungen herzustellen. Das ist ein absolut anti-diktatorisches Theater." (Ibid., 87-88, emphasis in main text added.)

and subsequently as director of the Berliner Ensemble, he saw in Wilson not only the natural successor to Bertolt Brecht's ideal of an "epic theater," but also the greatest, most successful expression thereof, since Wilson's working process brought together professional actors and "lay" people and gave each contributing member of the creative team equal opportunity for their voice to be heard.[32] In fact, Müller's belief in Wilson as the heir apparent to Brecht even led Müller in the early 1990s to invite Wilson to direct the Berliner Ensemble with him; a postcard on sale at the BE gift shop depicts the two directors standing together outside of the theater smoking cigarettes. Wilson's response, as he later told an interviewer, was, "Oh no, I don't want that responsibility, I can't imagine doing such a thing!"[33] Nevertheless, Wilson openly acknowledges a similarity between his work and Brecht's, noting that "Brecht called his theater the 'Epic Theater,' where all elements are equally important."[34]

The contemporary German director Heiner Goebbels likewise sees in Wilson an heir to Brecht, declaring that Wilson's theater can achieve a unity of which Brecht could only dream. "Although Robert Wilson takes responsibility for all theatrical disciplines, he doesn't fuse [*verschmilzt*] them," he writes, "quite the contrary: he achieves this unity through a radical independence of theatrical elements. This would have been very correct for Brecht, who however—in *his* time—could only imagine but not yet *realize* it aesthetically, because the

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[32] Ibid., 89. See also the question-and-answer session with Wilson and Müller, following a lecture that Wilson delivered at the Akademie der Künste in East Berlin in January 1989 on the occasion of Müller's sixtieth birthday, in Wilson, *Lecture*, especially 146. It is worth noting that one of the "lay" people who often took part in Wilson's earliest performance pieces was Stefan Brecht, author of *The Theater of Visions* and son to Bertolt.

[33] Robert Wilson, inverviewed (with Rufus Wainwright) by John Rockwell at the BAM 2014 Next Wave Festival, http://www.bam.org/rwrw (accessed 21 February 2015). I was present at the interview; the transcription is my own, taken from the video posted online after the event.

[34] Wilson, "The Campbell Lecture Series," March 27, 2014.

gravitational pull of the theatrical disciplines still stood too much in his way."[35] Goebbels's choice of the verb "to fuse" [*verschmelzen*] is itself a none-too-subtle jab at Wagner, whose theory of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, as we have seen, has been derided for the way in which it melds all of the individual theatrical elements into an undifferentiated mess, the "casserole or synthetic mush [*synthetischer Brei*]" that Müller identified as the common "misunderstanding of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*."[36]

That Müller placed Wagner and Brecht—two of the most significant figures in German opera and theater of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, respectively—in direct opposition should be no surprise. Brecht himself saw his theater as a repudiation of Wagner's multisensory extravaganzas, and Kurt Weill, Brecht's famed collaborator, declared that his work with Brecht was "the most forceful reaction to Wagner[,] an utter destruction of the term 'Music Drama.'"[37] The Wagner-Brecht dichotomy has played out in the Wilson scholarship as well. For each scholar (such as, for instance, Franco Quadri) who sees in *Einstein on the Beach* "an indivisible totality" [*assieme indivisibile*], there is another for whom the opera is explicitly "not a *Gesamtkunstwerk* in which all is subordinated to a singular artistic vision, but a

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[35] "Obwohl Robert Wilson alle Disziplinen der Bühne selbst verantwortet, verschmilzt er sie nicht, ganz im Gegenteil: Er erreicht diese Einheit durch eine radikale Unabhängigkeit der Theatermittel. Das wäre Brecht sehr recht gesewen, der aber—zu *seiner* Zeit—nur so denken, es ästhetisch noch nicht *realisieren* konnte, weil ihm die Schwerkraft der Disciplinen noch zu sehr im Wege stand." Heiner Goebbels, "Im Rätsel der Zeichen: für Robert Wilson," in *Ästhetik der Abwesenheit: Texte zum Theater* (Berlin: Theater der Zeit, 2012), 107.

[36] "[Das] Mißverständnis vom Gesamtkunstwerk als Eintopf, oder als synthetischer Brei." Quoted in Keller, *Robert Wilson*, 87.

[37] "Diese Art Musik ist die konsequenteste Reaktion auf Wagner. Sie bedeutet die vollständige Zerstörung des Begriffes Musikdrama." (From "Kurt Weill, der Komponist der *Dreigroschenoper*, will den Begriff des Musikdramas zerstören," *Wiener Allgemeine Zeitung*, March 9, 1929; reproduced in Kurt Weill, *Musik und Theater: Gesammelte Schriften, mit einer Auswahl von Gesprächen und Interviews*, ed. Stephen Hinton, Jürgen Schebera, and with a foreword by David Drew (Berlin: Henschelverlag Kunst und Gesellschaft, 1990), 302.)

Brechtian coexistence of dialectical elements, each with a degree of aesthetic autonomy."[38] Of course, the Wagner-Brecht comparison need not be a zero-sum game, with a point for Brecht meaning a point against Wagner and vice-versa. For Matthew Wilson Smith, Brecht's belief that the multiple medial elements of a production must be kept separate (to avoid "degrading" them through "fusion"), and that actors and designers should be an integral part of shaping a show while painters and composers were given relative independence, amounts to nothing less than a "Brechtian" *Gesamtkunstwerk*.[39] Brecht's working process as Smith describes it seems to have been remarkably similar to Wilson's. And when the philosopher Miguel Morey and musicologist Carmen Pardo actually pose the rhetorical question "Should we think of Wilson's work as a *Gesamtkunstwerk*?" their answer, though in content similar to Müller's observation of Wilson's elemental equality, differs strikingly in tone. They feel no need to repudiate Wagner to spare or rehabilitate Wilson, but rather choose to slightly refine the concept of *Gesamtkunstwerk* so that they may fruitfully apply it to Wilson's work, which they see as "not so much ... an alchemical synthesis of the arts as of their perfect architectural balance."[40] Yet the very attempt to mend the *Gesamtkunstwerk* schism through an ecumenical understanding of the term brings us to a potential contradiction in studying Wilson's sound.

On the one hand, as I have suggested, Wilson's assertion that, in his theater, "all the elements are equal," almost begs for a study of sound in Wilson's work. On the other hand,

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[38] Respectively, Franco Quadri, "The Life and Times of Robert Wilson," in Franco Quadri, Franco Bertoni, and Robert Stearns, *Robert Wilson* (Firenze: Octavo, 1997), 19; Gerald Rabkin, "The Academy of Fashion: Beach Hits the Wave at BAM," *Performing Arts Journal* 9, no. 1 (1985): 48.

[39] Matthew Wilson Smith, *The Total Work of Art: From Bayreuth to Cyberspace* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 71-91. For more on Brecht's working process, see David Barnett, *A History of the Berliner Ensemble* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

[40] Morey and Pardo, *Robert Wilson*, 40.

however, this very insistence on equality through rigorous independence can obscure the object of study. Are we studying sound as a strictly independent element, or are we studying sound in relation to the visual elements? The latter risks falling into the standard trap of approaching Wilson through the lens of the "theater of images." Yet the former suggests that, perhaps, we should study sound as the artistic product not of Wilson but of his collaborators. Both sides of this conundrum are illustrated by the only book to date which specifically examines the sonic elements of Wilson's work, a collection of essays which focus not on sound in Wilson *per se*, but on the soundscapes produced *for* Wilson *by* Hans Peter Kuhn.[41] The very title of the book, *Im Hörraum vor der Schaubühne* ("In the Hearing-Space in Front of the Viewing-Stage"), seems to reify Wilson as a director of a theater "which is to be viewed" while his collaborator provides the separate material "which is to be heard." Moreover, the formulation suggests that "hearing" takes place in a space *in front of* the stage, specifically the acoustic space of the auditorium that surrounds the audience, and thus is spatially separate from the locus of Wilson's visual contribution.[42] If Goebbels observed that Brecht "could only imagine but not yet realize" the parity of theatrical elements he so desired "because the gravitational pull of the theatrical disciplines still stood too much in his way," then *Im Hörraum* suggests that the study of Wilson is still subject to the divisive pull of traditional theatrical disciplines.

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[41] Julia H. Schröder, ed., *Im Hörraum vor der Schaubühne: Theatersound von Hans Peter Kuhn für Robert Wilson und von Leigh Landy für Heiner Müller* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2015).

[42] The work thus re-inscribes a standard division between hearing and vision that Jonathan Sterne has dubbed "the audio-visual litany," which shall be examined at length in Chapter Two. (See Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 15; Sterne, "Hearing," in *Keywords in Sound*, ed. David Novak and Matt Sakakeeny (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 66-67; Sterne, "Sonic Imaginations," in *The Sound Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 9.)

As I begin to tease apart what, exactly, this dissertation's sonic object of study will be, it is advantageous to consider what a typical Wilson production "sounds like." Yet this statement demands that I address an even more fundamental question: may I speak of a "typical Wilsonian sound" at all? Scholars have noted that Wilson "has not been spared the common fate whereby … the theatrical means that had once, in their freshness, revealed an epochal theatre dream … become predictable," although by this they typically mean his now-familiar (yet still striking) visuals.[43] Disgruntled audience members have similarly accused Wilson of peddling in his own clichés; of particular interest for our purposes is a review written by a BAM audience member on the BAMBlog website, following the Next Wave performance of Wilson's *Shakespeares Sonette*.[44] The review, by one "Anonymous," included the following in a list of "low-lights" of the performance: "Overuse of Wilson's stock-in-trade clichés - loud buzzers, cracked whips, slo-mo, etc., etc. … All the grunting/Bronx cheers absolutely pointless and ridiculous. … Some music/sound effects nearly burst my eardrums, many in the audience literally jumped in their seats."[45] As pejorative as the label "cliché" may be, there is a marked benefit to the repeated use of signature techniques across an oeuvre: detailed studies of a few, carefully chosen scenes are likely to produce insights into a much larger swath of the artist's oeuvre as a whole. Thus, rather than dismissing Wilson's "loud buzzers, cracked whips," "grunting/Bronx cheers," and "sound effects" loud enough to "burst eardrums" as

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[43] Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theater*, 77.

[44] *Shakespeares Sonette*, with music by Rufus Wainwright, premiered April 12, 2009, at the Berliner Ensemble. The BE performed it at BAM's Next Wave Festival in October 2014. For more on the production, see the Appendix.

[45] Comment made by "Anonymous" on October 8, 2014 at 11:55 AM, "In Context: *Shakespeare's Sonnets*," *BAMBlog*, July 2, 2014, http://bam150years.blogspot.com/2014/09/in-context-shakespeares-sonnets.html (accessed February 12, 2017).

merely "stock-in-trade clichés," we may observe in the anonymous review an implicit statement about the kinds of sound effects one can expect to encounter in a Wilson show. Let's begin, then, with a few general observations.

First, all actors on Wilson's stages are always amplified. As a result, a wide range of vocal volumes and distortions becomes available. These distortions may include those produced by the actor (whispers, screams, quick repetition of small fragments of text or even fragments of words, which would be possible—but often less audible—without amplification) and those produced by mechanical or technological means (such as "moving" a single voice around so that it is projected through an ever-changing series of speakers).[46] As a result, voices are often observed to be split from their producing bodies, an effect that will be considered at length in Chapter Two. Separately, but relatedly, there is Wilson's interest in speech as a form of sound. As discussed above, texts are rarely employed for their semantic potential; rather, Wilson's frequent use of psittacism turns words into sonic patterns. When this psittacism is considered alongside the screams and grunting mentioned by "Anonymous," it is clear that, for Wilson, the human voice is as much a source of pure sonic events as it is a source of either speech or song.

Second, Wilson employs a recurrent body of sound effects that are artificially produced yet closely linked to gestures made by the actors onstage. These range from footsteps to slamming doors to piercing screams. At the Berliner Ensemble, all of these sounds are "performed" by a musician, Joe Bauer, who sits in the orchestra pit and "plays" the sound patches through an electronic keyboard: the B-flat above middle C corresponds to one sound,

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[46] On the use of microphones in Wilson's productions in general, see for instance Shevtsova, *Robert Wilson*, 76. On having a single voice projected through many speakers, see for instance Hans Peter Kuhn, "Über die Arbeiten mit Robert Wilson: Klang im Raum: Sprache, Musik und Geräusch als Teil der theatralen Raumerfahrung," in *Im Hörraum vor der Schaubühne*, ed. Julia H. Schröder, 51-70.

while the B immediately above it corresponds to a different sound. Since he can see the actors from the pit, Bauer can align the sounds precisely with the actors' bodies: an artificial footstep can sound at the very instant an actor's foot touches the ground.[47] On the other hand, Bauer does not "play" a footstep every time an actor takes a step; as such, the artificial noise is a special effect, applied only at precise moments, and thus completely different from the effect achieved by simply putting a microphone on the actor's shoe. Indeed, the fact that the sound is *not* generated by the actor's body but by a sound system is evidenced by the occasional misalignment of sound and step, such that the footstep itself is sometimes softly audible before the thunderous artificial footstep is heard. One particular application of this kind of sound effect will be the subject of Chapter Three.

Third, Wilson always employs music in his productions. This may be newly composed music (such as 2009's *Shakespeares Sonette*, with music by Rufus Wainwright), extant music collected by a music designer (such as 2015's *Letter to a Man*, with music organized by Hal Willner), or a combination of the two (such as 2011's *Lulu*, which featured both newly composed and pre-existent music by Lou Reed). Songs are sprinkled throughout a production, sung or played both during scenes and in the spaces between scenes. Two particular uses of song will be examined at length in Chapters Four and Five.

We emerge from this overview, then, with three broad categories of sound: those produced by the voice, those that are "sound effects," and music. Michel Chion, one of the leading scholars of sound in film, has repeatedly examined how these three forms of sonic expression interact in a cinematic context.[48] In the shadow of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* discussion

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[47] The descriptions of Bauer's sound effects are based on a conversation Bauer and I had following a performance of *Faust* at the Berliner Ensemble on October 1, 2015.

[48] Chion's work will be engaged repeatedly in this dissertation, especially his books *Sound: An Acoulogical Treatise*, trans. James A. Steintrager (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015); *Film, a Sound Art*, trans.

above, Chion's description, in his most recent monograph, of how early sound film attempted to disentangle (or not) these three forms of sound is both enlightening and pertinent. Between 1928 and 1934, he writes, attempts were made for speech, sound effects, and music—now, for the first time, all subject to the oversight of a single sound designer, or at least all subject to inclusion on a single recorded track—to subtly echo and reflect one another, creating a "unitary" symphony.[49] Speech, for instance, existed on a continuum of "verbal chiaroscuro," occurring not only as crisply clear dialogue but also as the murmuring noise of background chatter.[50] As the aesthetics of sound film developed, however, these three elements were soon separated, each to be treated as independent entities subject to their own rules: a Wilsonian independence of sonic elements rather than a Wagnerian melding.[51] The idea of "verbal chiaroscuro" is wonderful, because it asserts that vocal utterances exist on a sonic continuum: rather than differentiating between a black-and-white binary of "semantic content" and "noise," for instance, the sounds produced by the voice may be used for a variety of sonic effects. In Wilson's productions, I argue, this "sonic chiaroscuro" exists on a much broader scale, ultimately blurring the distinctions between artificially produced sounds, acoustically produced music, and the sounds produced by the human voice. Voices and instruments are both amplified and recorded, and hence subject to artificial manipulation. Sound patches such as faux-screams can tread on the territory of sounds that are typically produced by the voice

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Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009); *The Voice in Cinema*, trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); and *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

[49] Chion, *Sound: An Acoulogical Treatise*, 76.

[50] Ibid.

[51] Ibid., 77.

or (in the case of synthesizers) acoustic instruments. Instead of shades of grey on a single black-white spectrum, Wilson's sonic chiaroscuro is a colorful cacophony of sounds.

It is important to observe, then, that my definition of "sound" may encompass two of the elements listed by Wilson as central to his theater: "sound" and "text." For when a text is spoken, it becomes itself a kind of sonic event. Thus, a terminological distinction is necessary that can tease apart the many "theatrical elements" discussed by Wilson, Müller, and others while simultaneously bringing together the many elements that are experienced as sound. Throughout this dissertation, then, I employ the term "medial event" to mean any sensory occurrence produced as part of a performance that directly affects the senses of a viewer. (This is in contrast to a "technology," which, while producing these medial events, remains hidden behind the scenes, a distinction based on opera scholar Gundula Kreuzer's recent work.)[52] "Medial stream" I define as the sum total of all medial events affecting a single sense over the course of a performance, recognizing that these events may be continuous or discrete, related or independent. As such, we may speak of a "sonic stream" that includes speech and song, music, and sound effects; similarly, the "visual stream" includes stage design, lighting, costumes, etc.

My decision to group theatrical elements according to the senses they stimulate is motivated by how Wilson describes his work. For instance, he told Karasek and Jenny that he specifically wishes to amplify "hearing" and "seeing," participles relating to the reception of sounds and images rather than their production. Under the umbrella terms "sonic stream" and "sonic event," however, it will be expedient to be able to reference loose categories of sonic

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[52] See Gundula Kreuzer, "Introduction," *Curtain, Gong, Steam: Wagnerian Technologies in Nineteenth-Century Opera*, Berkeley: University of California Press, forthcoming. Note that this is how Kreuzer defines "medium." I have termed it "medial event" to distinguish it from the concept of "medium" discussed below.

events that correspond to usage in everyday life. "Music" includes both instrumental music and song, performed both live and via playback. "Speech" and "voice" include both semantic utterances and psittacism. And "sound effect" I use to label all artificially produced sounds meant to have a particular (if not necessarily singular) significance. As for the term "media," I follow Bolter and Grusin in defining "media" as "that which remediates," a concept explored at length in Chapter Two.[53] This re-casting of Müller's "theatrical means" as theatrical media opens a wide vista of scholarly discourses. As W.J.T. Mitchell and Mark B.N. Hansen point out, the subject of "media studies" can never be more precisely pinned down than the prevailing usage of the term "media" itself.[54] Yet the sheer variety of approaches to media, both performative and otherwise, in scholarship over the last two decades offers a rich intellectual and methodological foundation for my own work. Although some scholars, such as Arnold Aronson, have placed theater and media in a conflicting or inimical position, I argue that a broad understanding of media, one which re-casts the theater itself and all elements within it (and not just electronic or projected elements) as "media," strengthens our understanding of theatrical effects of all kinds.[55]

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[53] J. David Bolter and Richard A. Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: MIT Press, 1999), 65.

[54] W. J. T. Mitchell and Mark B. N. Hansen, eds., *Critical Terms for Media Studies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 2-3.

[55] The oft-cited view that "media" is somehow external to the "theater" is exemplified by the title of Arnold Aronson's essay "Can Theater and Media Speak the Same Language?" (in Aronson, *Looking into the Abyss: Essays on Scenography* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 86-96.) The article asserts that projections onto screens fundamentally disrupt the "real" time of the theater, pointing to the assumed primacy of screens in theatrical discussions of (multi)media.

Methodology

In some ways, Wagner's insistence on equality of all musico-dramatic elements was an *ex ante* repudiation of the idea, long held in musicological circles, that opera was unworthy of study. This rejection of opera was partly due to its reputation as frothy entertainment for the masses, and partly because, to cite once again Carl Dahlhaus's acerbic yet pithy assertion, an opera score was merely a "recipe" for performance.[56] In recent years, however, a number of scholars have taken the opera performance itself as a text to be studied, embracing the multimedial nature of opera as an opportunity rather than a liability.[57] One possible approach for studying sound in Wilson, then, would be to focus on Wilson's stagings of operas, to see what his particular treatment of canonical musical works can then tell us about his theatrical style in general.

Yet to study Wilson as an opera director in an effort to understand how music and sound are deployed in his work is to miss the forest for the trees. Opera stagings represent only one small portion of Wilson's overall output, and his treatment of music in these productions is far from typical. Consider the following examples, among the earliest of Wilson's opera stagings. In 1984, Wilson was hired by the Opéra de Lyon to direct both Marc-Antoine Charpentier's 1693 opera *Medée* and a version of Euripides' *Medea*; the two productions were performed concurrently in October-November 1984. In 1986, Wilson would direct another opera-play pair, this time Euripides' *Alcestis* for the American Repertory

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[56] Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, 9. For a brief history of opera scholarship, see Susan McClary, "*Cambridge Opera Journal* at Twenty," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 21, no. 2 (2009), 105–109.

[57] See especially David J. Levin's *Unsettling Opera: Staging Mozart, Verdi, Wagner, and Zemlinsky* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007); and Levin's article "Reading a Staging/Staging a Reading," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 9, no. 1 (1997). See also Eric Salzman and Thomas Dési, *The New Music Theater: Seeing the Voice, Hearing the Body* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

Theatre in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and Christoph Willibald Gluck's opera *Alceste* for the Württembergisches Staatstheater in Stuttgart. Below are the credits of each of these productions, as they appear in a recent *Catalogue raisonné*:

> ***Medée*** [opera] by Marc-Antoine Charpentier (1693). Text by Thomas Corneille [Charpentier's librettist].
>
> ***Medea*** [play] by Robert Wilson and Gavin Bryars. Based on the play by Euripides: music, Gavin Bryars; additional text, Heiner Müller and Vladimir Mayakovsky.
>
> ***Alceste*** [opera] by Christoph Willibald Gluck. Based on the play by Euripides; choreography, Suzushi Hanayagi.
>
> ***Alcestis*** [play] by Euripides. Adaptation, Robert Wilson; translation, Dudley Fitts and Robert Fitzgerald; additional texts, Heiner Müller; music/sound, Hans Peter Kuhn and Laurie Anderson; choreography, Suzushi Hanayagi.[58]

In the operas, Wilson treats the musical score as an immutable sonic structure; he neither adds to nor subtracts from nor changes any aspect of Charpentier's or Gluck's scores. Euripides' *Alcestis*, on the other hand, was "adapted" by Wilson and augmented with "additional texts" and "music/sound." The one addition that both productions had in common was choreography by Suzushi Hanayagi; as silent movement, the dance would have done nothing to alter either Gluck's score or Euripides' text. On the other hand, Wilson's adaptations and the extensive interpolations from multiple artists working in disparate fields and styles took Euripides' *Alcestis* and turned it into a rich, multimedial collage for which Euripides' play was the foundation and motivation, not the end goal. Similarly, in contrast to his staging of Charpentier's *Medée*, the "play" *Medea* had text by no fewer than four contributors, plus added music. Thus, for Wilson, an engagement with a pre-existent text neither necessarily nor exclusively means providing actors to speak written words and then creating sets and costumes for those actors to inhabit. Instead, Wilson seems to treat his sources—be they plays, stories, or a dancer's diary—as fonts of inspiration, rather than as a performance script.

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[58] Safir, *Robert Wilson from Within*, 326-27.

In the most recent monograph on Wilson, Stefanie Fuchs divides Wilson's work into two periods, the first defined by his original productions, and the second defined as the period when he was staging existing works; this distinction is due, in large part, to the fact that before the mid-1980s none of Wilson's productions were advertised as "based on" a pre-existing text at all.[59] It is an important distinction, yet one which utterly fails to account for the difference between, say, *Alceste* and *Alcestis*. Thus, I would like to suggest an alternate way to categorize Wilson's current productions, one that I find more reflective of Wilson's working process than that put forward by Fuchs. This categorization differentiates Wilson's multimedial shows (that may or may not be based on a pre-existing text) from his opera stagings; the difference, I believe, lies precisely in how Wilson treats sound. In an opera, Wilson respects the fundamental text (i.e., the score) to an extent not seen in his stagings of plays. The opera score is not changed, rearranged, abridged or otherwise manipulated. In non-opera productions, on the other hand, sound and music are, like any other of Wilson's "equal" elements, treated as objects that may be manipulated at will. In these multimedial shows, speech, song, and sound effects exist in a state of heightened contrast, presented in jarring juxtapositions and even crashing into or covering one another. Freed from the constraints of a continuous soundtrack (as in opera), Wilson experiments with the vast expressive possibilities of sonic media. And examining how these sounds are used can give us new insights not only into Wilson, but also into the role of sound and music in contemporary multimedial performance more broadly conceived. Thus, this dissertation shall focus on Wilson's use of sound in his non-operatic multimedial works.

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[59] Fuchs, *"Alles begann mit Bildern und Rhythmen,"* 91. See also Morey and Pardo, *Robert Wilson*, 37-38.

With few exceptions, the sound effects listed above rely on being heard in a live performance for their impact to be understood. Only in the space of the theater itself can one adequately hear the quality and type of sounds employed, as well as finer nuances such as the location from which sounds emanate, or the contradiction between noises produced by real bodies onstage and the sounds played over an amplification system. Hence, all of my analyses focus on productions I have seen live. This decision is as much technological as it is ideological: playback from recordings—even when not recorded monaurally—is usually experienced through headphones, especially when viewed in an audiovisual archive, thus making it impossible to experience the sound as it was originally conceived and perceived in the theatrical space of its performance. On the visual front, standard definition recording and playback equipment are typically distorted by a miasma of horizontal bands; in some cases, it is difficult even to ascertain *who* is speaking, let along how sound relates to the figures onstage.[60] Thus, when discussing questions such as vocal distortion or the location of a sound in the theater, it is impossible to make a solid or responsible observation from video. (It is also important to note that audiences have developed different viewing practices for the cinema and the theater, a fact which further distorts how sounds are seen in a recording as opposed to in a live theatrical performance; this complication will be discussed at length in Chapter Two.) Nevertheless, audio-visual recordings are invaluable when it comes to precisely describing many aspects of a scene; thus, in cases where videos are available I have used them for the sake of accuracy and fact-checking.

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[60] For a more detailed technological discussion of these difficulty of capturing Wilson's work on video, see Ali Hosseini, "New-Definition Television: Robert Wilson's Video Portraits," in Peter Weibel, Harald Falckenberg, and Matthew Shattuck, eds., *Robert Wilson: Video Portraits* (Köln: Walther König, 2011), especially 176-179.

In addition to the terminology of "medial streams" and "medial events" outlined earlier, then, another crucial set of terms underpins the analyses in this dissertation: "performance" versus "production." In this, I again follow Gundula Kreuzer, who defines "production" as the collection of all theatrical elements intended by the director, while "performance" refers to a single instantiation of that production.[61] In other words, the production is the abstract projection of the ideal performance, while a performance is a real-life presentation thereof. This is a crucial distinction. Since my analyses stem from my perceptions as an audience member, and since my descriptions are typically of "performances" which I have seen live, my analyses inevitably engage details unique to my own experience of specific performances. Nevertheless, I also attempt, wherever possible, to use this experience of the live performance to judiciously draw broader conclusions about the "production" as a whole.

My observations of live performances are augmented, however, by other, less ephemeral forms of text and paratext relating to each production. My analyses engage the "original" text on which each production is based, program books and publicity materials for each production, and critical commentary and interviews with Wilson and his collaborators.

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[61] Gundula Kreuzer, "*Wagner-Dampf*: Steam in *Der Ring des Nibelungen* and Operatic Production," *The Opera Quarterly* 27, no. 2-3 (Spring-Summer, 2011): 179-218. Erving Goffman employs similar definitions when he distinguishes between a "playing" ("one go-through from beginning to end of the play before a particular audience") and a "production" ("the effort of a particular cast on the occasion of any one run of the play, here defining 'run' as the full series of playing presented by one cast on the basis of one continuous period of preparation"); but whereas Goffman takes a group of *performers* as central to defining a production, my definition allows for the group of performers to change, as long as the original *directorial* intentions remain the guiding principle of the performance. (Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1974).) Note also that my usage of "production" and "performance" is in contrast with Milhouse and Hume's definitions, where "performance" indicates a specific historical staging, versus a "production," which is a horizon of possibilities opened by a text. (Judith Milhous and Robert D. Hume, *Producible Interpretation: Eight English Plays, 1675-1707* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1985).) For a more anthropological take on defining a "performance," see for instance Richard Schechner, *Performance Theory* (London; New York: Routledge, 1988, 2003), 66-111.

Although these paratextual elements are not, strictly speaking, part of any given production, they do play an important role in the experience of a performance. Some of these, such as the thick, glossy (and expensive) program books at the Berliner Ensemble, include reproductions of Wilson's visual books, a libretto-like printing of the entire spoken text of a production, and photographs of both rehearsal and the final production. As such, they offer an invaluable record of a production's preparation and performance.

This dissertation is structured as a series of particular scenes from a selection of Wilson's recent shows. It is through the act of delving into these scenes that the theoretical questions of the dissertation are generated, and answers are suggested. Thus, the success of the argument relies on the vividness and persuasiveness of how these scenes are rendered in my text. For each scene discussed I have provided a few illustrative photographs. These are meant to help the reader envision the scene I am describing, yet they are not, in and of themselves, the object of study. They are, rather, more like a visual Christmas tree on which the reader may then hang the ornaments of described sound.

Analysis of live sound, as technocultural historian Douglas Kahn has pointed out, is a difficult business because of the medium's inherent ephemerality.[62] Ignoring sound because of its ephemerality, however, sounds a lot like ignoring live performance because of its ephemerality. Yet it is this very ephemerality that theater scholarship has long engaged and embraced. Erika Fischer-Lichte's work on the performance as a performative act, akin to J.L. Austin's "speech acts"; Patrice Pavis's work on analyzing performance; and Wilmar Sauter's work on the performance "event" are among the major examples.[63] That being said, the study

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[62] Douglas Kahn, *Noise, Water, Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 5.

[63] Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics*, trans. Saskya Iris Jain (New York: Routledge, 2008); Patrice Pavis, *Analyzing Performance: Theater, Dance, and Film* (Ann Arbor:

of "presence" or "liveness" is more about what happens in the moment, and how a viewer reacts, than it is about the way in which a text is presented in performance; this is underlined by the focus on performance that does not rely on traditional scripting: the work of Marina Abramović, for instance. Yet the question of how to represent these events in the form that remains so central to the dissemination of academic study—writing—when the very events themselves often seek to eschew traditional "scripts" offers neither easy nor obvious solutions.

One of the most significant moments in Marvin Carlson's introduction to Erika Fischer-Lichte's *The Transformative Power of Performance* is little more than a byline. Although Fischer-Lichte's work relies heavily upon the experience of seeing a performance live, Carlson observes, her richly detailed descriptions of the scenes she discusses "provide an adequate understanding" of a given work such that the reader may follow Fischer-Lichte's argument.[64] This is a powerful claim, suggesting that careful description may convert a live performance into a text to be studied, an assumption that has long been foundational for scholarship on performance. Yet Carlson's comment glosses over the fundamental challenge posed by this kind of writing: how, exactly, is it to be done? A written description of a live performance is itself a kind of analysis, a translation from the space of the theater to the page of a book, that will inevitably produce its own modes of inquiry and suggest to the author as well as to the reader the most salient details and the relevant analytic tools. Yet neither Carlson nor Fischer-Lichte nor any of the numerous other scholars who use this approach (including, in the musicological realm, Carolyn Abbate and her call for a "drastic" musicology) say how they

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University of Michigan Press, 2003); Willmar Sauter, *The Theatrical Event: Dynamics of Performance and Perception* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2000); Jacqueline Martin and Willmar Sauter, *Understanding Theatre: Performance Analysis in Theory and Practice* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1995).

[64] Marvin Carlson, "Introduction: Perspectives on Performance: Germany and America," in Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance*, 5-6.

intend to *do* this.[65] Indeed, even as simple a statement as "I begin each chapter of this dissertation with a richly detailed description of a particular scene" requires non-trivial theoretical underpinning.

In 1973, in a now-classic essay, Clifford Geertz endorsed "thick description" as a mode of writing about real-life situations that could then be subject to ethnographic study at a time and/or place removed from the event itself.[66] For Geertz, "thickness" (i.e., an abundance of detail) was a necessary condition of analyzing "culture," the term he gave to the intangible layers of subtext in any interpersonal interaction. Since the vital elements of this "culture" typically pass unnoticed (they are what "goes without saying"), it is necessary to provide as many details about an event as possible rather than recording only those which seem "significant" to the ethnographer at the time. A live performance is not a culture to be elucidated, but it does take place in the (often unspoken) expectations and conventions of communication, perception, and reception between performer and viewer; therefore, my descriptions of individual scenes tend toward the "thicker" side of the spectrum.

From a stylistic perspective, however, the best methodology I have encountered is what Tom Wolfe lists as one of the "stylistic devices" central to the New Journalism, a style of journalism that, in the 1960s, adopted novelistic techniques to tell non-fictional stories.[67] According to Wolfe, this style relied on "the recording of everyday … symbolic details that

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[65] Carolyn Abbate, "Music—Drastic or Gnostic?," *Critical Inquiry* 30, no. 3 (Spring 2004).

[66] Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture," in *Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 3-30. Note that although the term "thick description" is most closely associated with Geertz, he borrows it from Gilbert Ryle (ibid., 6).

[67] Tom Wolfe, *The New Journalism*, with an anthology edited by Tom Wolfe and E. W. Johnson (London: Picador, 1996, 1973), 47. Other noted proponents of the style include Truman Capote, Norman Mailer, and Hunter S. Thompson. In fact, one of the best examples of the form is about a musician: Gay Talese's article "Frank Sinatra Has a Cold," published in the April 1966 issue of *Esquire* magazine.

[symbolize] people's *status life*, using that term in the broad sense of the entire pattern of behaviour and possessions through which people express their position in the world or what they think it is or what they hope it to be."[68] For the journalist describing real-life people and events, the list of potential symbolic details is both extensive and, often, mundane: "gestures, habits, manners, customs, styles of furniture, clothing, decoration, styles of traveling, eating, keeping house, modes of behaving toward children, servants, superiors, inferiors, peers, plus the various looks, glances, poses, styles of walking."[69] These "symbolic details" are precisely those elements of thick description that can convey the unspoken relations between people, the unspoken expressions of status and experience—in other words, of what Geertz would call "culture." Yet whereas for Geertz the effort lay in the observation, to be reported later, for Wolfe the important act was the writing thereof, the "relentless" and "meticulous" "piling up" of details that, in themselves and in concert, can convey precisely that *status life* without having to put it in explicit terms. What Wolfe does not mention is that the language itself is an active player in this device. Take this example (an excerpt included in Wolfe's anthology) by Rex Reed:

> She stands there, without benefit of a filter lens against a room melting under the heat of lemony sofas and lavender walls and cream-and-peppermint-striped movie-star chairs … Ava Gardner stalks her pink malted-milk cage like an elegant cheetah. She wears a baby-blue cashmere turtleneck sweater pushed up to her Ava elbows … and enormous black horn-rimmed glasses and she is gloriously, divinely, barefoot.[70]

It is the luxuriant maelstrom of delicious adjectives (lemony, lavender, malted milk) and the mélange of luxury-based nouns (movie-star chairs, a caged cheetah, cashmere), building in a crescendo to the god-like bare-footedness of this diva outside of the movie studio, that

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[68] Tom Wolfe, *The New Journalism*, 47.

[69] Ibid.

[70] Rex Reed, excerpt from "Do you sleep in the nude?," included in the anthology in ibid., 72.

conjures so much more than merely the scene described, so much more than merely the former Mrs. Frank Sinatra—the most beautiful woman in the world—standing in a hotel room. Similarly, my descriptions of Wilson's scenes employ a certain freedom with adjectives, sentence structure, and choice of details, in an effort (although I make no claims to success) to conjure the atmosphere of a scene, the significance of an action, or the effect of a sound. My descriptions are highly subjective; but it is a natural byproduct of "thick" description of any kind that is based on an individual's observations, and I have chosen to view and engage it as a benefit rather than as a detriment.

Chapter Outline

This dissertation offers four case studies that tackle the role of sound in Wilson's work and attempt to situate Wilson's sound and music in a wider theatrical context. Each chapter begins with an observation of a particular audio-visual effect in one of Wilson's shows, then uses this observation to pose a series of questions: how does a particular sound effect engage a work's production history? How does sound "create" a physical object which is not actually present onstage? How do sound and music frame a production and its individual scenes? And how does music help create an overarching structure for a show? Since Chapters Two through Four are built on detailed readings of multiple plays, an appendix provides relevant details of each of the productions examined in my dissertation, including major collaborators, and where and when I saw the production performed.

Chapter One returns to Wilson's professed equality of medial streams and delves into how, precisely, he attempts to "allow both hearing and seeing to come into their own." In particular, Chapter One focuses on Wilson's desire that images and sounds signify independently even when they are presented simultaneously, and examines how Wilson's

rehearsal process allows him to craft this aesthetic ideal. It also provides, in broad brushstrokes, a brief history of how Wilson's aesthetic has developed over time, and the role that both silence and sound have played in this development.

Chapter Two offers the first of the four large-scale case studies that make up the bulk of the dissertation. Built around a single sound effect that is used in a variety of ways across Wilson's productions—the popping, crackling sound of a record—it engages received wisdom about how Wilson splits voices from bodies. It looks at the history of recording media and the desire for ever more immediate (and thus ever less audible) recording technologies, and considers what happens when the "noises" of old recording media are used to dramatic ends. It also begins to interrogate how a single sound may signify multiple things simultaneously. Chapter Three continues the examination of sound as a form of theatrical signification, analyzing in particular two kinds of sound effects—doors and coins—that are used on Wilson's stages to stand in for props which are not physically present onstage. In doing so, it returns to Karasek and Jenny's list of contributing elements of Wilson's theater ("architectural structures, images, speech, dance, music") and examines how Wilson's sound effects relate to each of these in turn.

Chapter Four turns away from non-musical sound effects to begin considering how music functions in Wilson's work. This chapter focuses on music as a "framing" device, a sonic construction which draws attention to the spaces and behaviors *around* a performance and thereby reveals hidden layers and meanings within the production's story itself. And finally, Chapter Five uses music to engage a metaphor long applied to Wilson's work: Gertrude Stein's concept of "landscape theater." Chapter Five is unique in that it is the only chapter to focus on a single production (*Lulu*, which Wilson directed for the Berliner Ensemble in 2011),

and in doing so it considers how Wilson uses music to structure a production as a whole, rather than examining the role that sound and music play in discrete scenes.

The four case studies of this dissertation, then, progress across the sonic spectrum, from a noise-based sound effect in Chapter Two, to sound effects that evoke physical objects in Chapter Three, to songs and music in Chapters Four and Five. There is another, deeper structure underlying this dissertation, however. "To me," Wilson likes to say, "space is a horizontal line and time is a vertical line."[1] This orthogonal relationship of time and space guides his conception of theater; and sound, as an element which fills both time and space, seems ideally suited for excavating this aspect of Wilson's work. My four analytic chapters are divided into two sections of two, with each larger section containing one chapter that engages the issue of space and one chapter that engages the issue of time. Chapters Two and Three consider space and time within the world of the production itself: while Chapter Two examines how one particular sound effect—the crackle of a spinning record—complicates the temporal flow of a show, twisting the strands of what Carl Dahlhaus called "erzählte Zeit" and "Erzählzeit,"[2] Chapter Three interrogates how spatially significant objects and spatial locations are defined on Wilson's stages through the ephemeral building blocks of light and sound. Chapters Four and Five, meanwhile, engage the role of sound in structuring the time and space that surround and contain a production: the framing devices that define the "edges" of the production (Chapter Four), and the role that music plays in twisting the flow of the show as a whole (Chapter Five).

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[1] Robert Wilson, "The Campbell Lecture Series: Robert Wilson," Rice University (Houston, TX), March 28, 2014, http://campbell.rice.edu/CampbellContent.aspx (accessed June 22, 2014).

[2] Carl Dahlhaus, *Vom Musikdrama zur Literaturoper: Aufsätze zur neueren Operngeschichte* (Munich: E. Katzbichler, 1983), 25-32.

It would be difficult to neatly summarize the collection of secondary sources that have gone into these analytic chapters, as each chapter attempts to elucidate a different aspect of Wilson's theater with recourse to a non-theatrical, non-musicological body of work. Chapter Two focuses on scholarship in sound and media studies, while Chapter Three turns to theories of theatrical semiosis, mime, and architecture. Chapter Four, the study of music as a "framing" effect, draws on theories of the frame tale as a narrative device, as well as the more common notion of frames in the visual arts, and compares both of these to the narrative and spatial structures of the theater. Finally, Chapter Five, in its excavation of "landscape theater," turns to maps, travel, and the history of skyscrapers and flight.

The kind of journey considered in Chapter Five, that of a twisting, turning pathway rather than a linear, teleological path, is as good a metaphor for the development of this dissertation as any. "There are two kinds of travel," wrote the children's novelist William Pène du Bois in 1947. "The usual way is to take the fastest imaginable conveyance along the shortest road. The other way is not to care particularly where you are going or how long it will take you. … [The] second way of getting around has always been pointed out as the nicest for, as you can see, … you are able to see more of what is going on in the world and also how nature is getting along."[73] Rather than following a single disciplinary avenue toward any one analytic goal, this dissertation pulls pertinent literature from a wide range of fields, bringing disparate scholarly voices into dialogue. Thus, I do not systematically survey any given area, but rather utilize the most salient and productive secondary sources to craft analyses that are, in their structure, not unlike Wilson's theater: a little bit of this, a little bit of that, a juxtaposition of ideas that remain individually significant yet all contribute equally toward a common goal.

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[73] William Pène du Bois, *The Twenty-One Balloons* (New York: Viking, 1947), 3.

CHAPTER ONE

Point, Counterpoint: Robert Wilson's Audio-Visual Conception

O learn to read what silent love hath writ,
To hear with eyes belongs to love's fine wit.
—William Shakespeare, Sonnet XXIII;
Robert Wilson's *Shakespeares Sonette*, Act II Sc. 2[1]

Robert Wilson wants you to hear better. "My challenge as a director or designer," he told an interviewer in September 2014, is: "Can I give a space to hear music?"[2] He looked out over the audience, gathered in a small lecture hall in one of the most venerated musical spaces in the world: the Berliner Philharmonie, home of the Berlin Philharmonic. The occasion was a screening of *Adam's Passion*, a film by Günter Atteln of a production Wilson had created earlier that year with Arvo Pärt. *Adam's Passion* and a companion documentary (also by Atteln) about the Wilson-Pärt collaboration were the first events in a film series at the Philharmonie called *Musik bewegt Bilder*—"Music Moves Images." The season-long series included documentaries about a blind pianist and about a puppet-and-piano performance that interpreted the bitterness of Maurice Ravel's final illness.[3] In foregrounding the power of music to cross the boundaries of sight(lessness) and sound(lessness), the series might have seemed to barter in clichés about musical transcendence. Yet it was an uncannily appropriate

[1] Reproduced from the Berliner Ensemble program for *Shakespeares Sonette* (Berlin: Berliner Ensemble, Theater am Schiffbauerdam, Programmheft Nr. 111, 2009), 35.

[2] Q&A at the Berliner Philharmonie, September 25, 2015. Wilson participated in Q&A sessions on two separate evenings in Berlin, on September 23 and 25, following screenings of Günter Atteln's films *The Lost Paradise* and *Adam's Passion* (respectively) at the Berliner Philharmonie; both sessions were moderated by Dr. Helge Grünewald. All quotations from these two sessions are my own transcriptions. For more on *The Lost Paradise* and *Adam's Passion*, see the Epilogue of this dissertation.

[3] The films referenced here are, respectively, *Touching the Sound: The Improbable Journey of Nobuyuki Tsujii*, dir. Peter Rosen (2014); and *Konzert für eine taube Seele: Ein Spiel für Ragna Schirmer und Puppen über Maurice Ravel von Christoph Werner*, dir. Axel Fuhrmann (2014).

place for a documentary about Wilson's work. In the documentary and in the question-and-answer sessions (just as in many lectures, interviews, and written statements before), Wilson—that auteur of the so-called "Theater of Images"—would identify his directorial goal as the creation of a space where his audience could better *hear*.

"A space to hear." It is an invitation and an injunction, an aesthetic impetus and an artistic goal. It is a direction for perceiving and a directive for production, informed by Wilson's life experiences, structuring his rehearsal process, and resonating in the final product. Eighteen months before the Berlin event, Wilson had voiced the sentiment in more transparent terms at a lecture in Houston. He began by explicitly comparing the possibilities for hearing in his theater with the treatment of sound in more traditional productions—including, pointedly, opera. "It's very difficult to hear and see when we go to the theater," he explained. "Go to the opera tonight. … And try to listen to the music. Try to listen to the orchestra. Then close your eyes and listen. You will probably hear better with your eyes closed." He continued, "Even if I close my eyes right now, my hearing becomes more concentrated." Then, his speech unbroken, he veered into a familiar technological metaphor for the separation of seeing and hearing:

> If I want to see better, and I'm watching television, if I turn the sound off I become much more conscious of what I'm seeing than when I'm listening to the sound. [I] see the twitching of the news broadcaster's mouth. The twitch … of his nervous fingers moving: it becomes more apparent than when I'm listening to him speak. So my challenge as a director working in the theater: can I create something onstage that I'm seeing [that] can help me hear better than when my eyes are closed?[4]

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[4] Robert Wilson, lecture address, "The Campbell Lecture Series: Robert Wilson," Rice University (Houston, TX), March 27, 2014, http://campbell.rice.edu/CampbellContent.aspx (accessed June 22, 2014), 24:09-24:28. All Campbell Lecture transcriptions my own. See also Wilson's comments in the liner notes to the DVD of *Adam's Passion*, dir. Andy Sommer (Accentus Music, ACC 20333, 2015), 12-13, as well as his comments throughout *The Lost Paradise*, dir. Günter Atteln, available on DVD (Accentus Music, ACC 20321, 2015). Wilson often repeats the same anecdotes or aesthetic ideas in almost identical terms; in selecting quotations for this chapter, I have prioritized those that I have seen live or on video, as Wilson's method of delivery—pacing, pauses, and the string-of-consciousness way

In watching the broadcaster's subconscious twitching, Wilson saw nothing that was not already there to be seen. Rather, a change of circumstances had invited him to re-direct his attention to something that would otherwise have flown, undetected, under his visual radar. And this is what interests Wilson: a re-direction of the audience's perception. He does not seek to render suddenly visible something that was invisible before, but rather to change the circumstances of seeing and hearing so that visual and sonic events, re-framed, may be seen and heard in a new way.

The relationship between visual structures and auditory perception, and the potential energy latent in the friction between what is seen and what is heard, is a central tenet of Wilson's aesthetic. In 1980, he told journalist Franco Quadri that "theater is, above all, the attempt to push this discrepancy between seeing and hearing to its limit."[5] Today, this "discrepancy" remains a guiding principle of Wilson's work, as his comments in Berlin and Houston make clear. "What we see is what we see, and what we hear is what we hear," Wilson likes to say. "And in the theater I make, what we see can be one thing, and what we hear can be another."[6] This aesthetic tenet of audio-visual independence is key to understanding Wilson's current productions, and ascertaining the origins and the evolution thereof are vital

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he tends to piece stories together—often helps clarify what he means; in these cases, all transcriptions are my own. Otherwise, I have selected what I consider to be the clearest, pithiest, or most appropriate quotations for the main text, and have indicated in footnotes other places on video and in print where similar statements may be found. Of the many quotations taken from print sources, I have prioritized English-language quotations for the main text, since this is almost certainly the language in which the interviews took place; when citing quotations from non-English print sources, I provide both the printed language (in footnotes) and my own translation (in the main text).

[5] "Das Schauspiel ist vor allen Dingen der Versuch, diese Diskrepanz zwischen Sehen und Hören auf die Spitze zu treiben." In Franco Quadri, Franco Bertoni, and Robert Stearns, *Robert Wilson* (Firenze: Octavo, 1997), 36-37; also reproduced in Manfred Brauneck, ed., *Theater im 20. Jahrhundert: Programmschriften, Stilperioden, Kommentare* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, 1982; repr., 2009), 200.

[6] Wilson, "The Campbell Lecture Series," March 27, 2014, 19:12-19:21.

to understanding Wilson as an artist. From the earliest days of the rehearsal process to the premiere performance of a new production, the constructive tension between "what we see" and "what we hear" guides Wilson's directorial hand. This chapter examines this tension from two perspectives. First, it traces how this aesthetic developed across Wilson's half-century-long career. And second, it investigates how Wilson achieves audio-visual independence as he creates and rehearses each new show.

"There Must Be a Counterpoint"

When sounds and images are produced by two different sources (be they corporeal or technological), it is relatively simple to craft a misalignment between the two medial streams. It is more complicated, however, when the contradictory streams issue from a single source. "Normally, if you really want to express something, you have to combine—you want to combine—your thoughts with your movements," says Stefan Kurt, an actor with whom Wilson has repeatedly worked. "If actors hear music, we always try to illustrate the music. But Bob doesn't like that. He's always watchful that you don't see what you hear and you don't hear what you see: every time, there must be a counterpoint."[7]

When it comes to describing structural features of temporal art forms—a notoriously tricky thing to do—musical metaphors abound, and "counterpoint" seems to be a particular favorite. As the crafted concurrence of independent entities such that the entities will remain perceptibly independent, the term seems ideally suited to the multimedial art of the theater.[8]

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[7] Interview with Stefan Kurt, "In praise of emptiness [and Buster Keaton]," in Margery Arent Safir, ed., *Robert Wilson from Within* (Paris: Arts Arena, American University of Paris, 2011), 281.

[8] David Roesner, in his work on the "musicalization" or "musicality" of theater, uses the terminology of homophony and polyphony to discuss types of medial interactions. See David Roesner, *Musicality in Theatre: Music as Model, Method and Metaphor in Theatre-Making*, *Ashgate Interdisciplinary Studies in Opera* (Farnham, Surrey, UK: Ashgate, 2014), 36 for Roesner's general use of the term, and 213-19 for his application of the term to Wilson's work; see also Roesner, "The Politics of the Polyphony of

Moreover, the use of a sound-based metaphor is unsurprising since, as Jonathan Sterne has pointed out, sound is typically thought of as an immersive experience, of which the brain can simultaneously engage multiple events coming from different directions; this is in contrast to vision, which is usually described as unitary and unidirectional.[9] Moreover, by choosing the term "counterpoint," Kurt drew on a long tradition of artists considering the relationship of sight to sound in multisensory media: the great Russian filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein spoke of "contrapuntal" montage, for instance, and film theorist Michel Chion, who differentiates between five different "relationships between the said and the shown," dubs one of these relationships "counterpoint."[10] But as Chion has also observed, perceiving simultaneous audio and visual tracks as independent entities runs counter to a phenomenon he calls "synchresis": the instantaneous welding of sound to sight and the relation of the two as causative.[11] Modern viewers have learned to interpret simultaneous audio and visual information as issuing from a single source—even when the physical source of the sound and the image differ. A good example is an amplified voice: it emerges from speakers, but audiences typically attach it synchretically to the body that they see producing it.

Performance: Musicalization in Contemporary German Theatre," *Contemporary Theatre Review* 18, no. 1 (2008): 51. For more on Roesner's work and how he analyzes Wilson, see my Introduction, footnote 19.

[9] These descriptions make up part of Sterne's "audio-visual litany," discussed at length in Chapter Two. See Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 15; Sterne, "Hearing," in *Keywords in Sound*, ed. David Novak and Matt Sakakeeny (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 66-67; and Sterne, "Sonic Imaginations," in *The Sound Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 9.

[10] Michel Chion, *Film, a Sound Art*, trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 473. Eisenstein's interest in "counterpoint" will be discussed later in this chapter: see in particular footnote 63.

[11] Ibid., 492. An in-depth consideration of synchresis in the context of Wilson's work will be featured in Chapter Two.

Thus, for Wilson to achieve the independent signification of individual streams that is so foundational to his conception of theater, he must create a moment of slippage, misalignment, or incongruity that will draw the spectator's attention to each element's individuality. One way this can be achieved is through a rehearsal process designed to help actors embody the kind of counterpoint described by Kurt, where the voice and the body, sound and movement, function independently. Another possibility is more technological: for Wilson's production *Die goldene Fenster* (1982), for instance, the pioneering sound designer (and regular Wilson collaborator) Hans Peter Kuhn pumped the voices of four amplified actors to no fewer than thirty speakers distributed around the theater. In this way, he could force the audible source of each actor's voice to be constantly moving, thus making it impossible to "glue" the sounds onto any single visual source.[12]

In Wilson's theatrical lexicon, the opposite of "counterpoint" is "illustration," a visual version of "interpretation" (which he hates), and a dictation of the audience's visual experience (which he abhors). To Wilson's mind, interpretation—which he views as finding a single way to understand a text and then foisting that understanding on the audience—runs counter to his conception of art and its creation. The purpose of an artist, Wilson likes to say, is to ask *What is it?*, and not to dictate *This is what it is.* "That's not to say it doesn't have meaning," Wilson reminds us. "Of course it has meaning, it's full of meanings. But to attach an interpretation to it would deny all the other ideas of what it's about."[13] Thus, when Wilson

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[12] Hans Peter Kuhn, "Über die Arbeiten mit Robert Wilson: Klang im Raum: Sprache, Musik und Geräusch als Teil der theatralen Raumerfahrung," in *Im Hörraum vor der Schaubühne: Theatersound von Hans Peter Kuhn für Robert Wilson und von Leigh Landy für Heiner Müller*, ed. Julia H. Schröder (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2015), 57-60. Note that what Kuhn terms "Bauchrednereffekt" ("ventriloquist effect") is essentially the same as Chion's "synchresis." See also Julia H. Schröder's essay in the same volume, "Im Hörraum vor der Schaubühne: Theatersound für Robert Wilson (Hans Peter Kuhn) und Heiner Müller (Leigh Landy)," 16.

[13] Robert Wilson, "From Within," in Safir, *Robert Wilson from Within*, 317. One of Wilson's favorite examples is *Hamlet*; for instance, in 2014 he told a Houston audience that *Hamlet* is "full of meaning,

says that he actively avoids "illustrating" a text, he means avoiding a style of theater in which the images the audience sees and the spoken text, narrative, and/or music all align, which would be to impose a single perspective on all elements of the production. His interest lies rather in creating multiple points of view, both metaphorically and literally: in a 1986 production of Müller's *Hamletmaschine* at New York University, each act presented the stage set from a different angle.[14] Wilson asserts that his theater should, ideally, incubate an audience member's individual ideas and internal emotions, and use these as a medium for experiencing the external sensory stimuli. "The theater I'm trying to make," he told the audience in Houston, once again invoking the space of proper hearing, "is allowing that interior space for reflection, of freedom, and what we hear inside, what we see inside, as well as what we hear outside."[15]

The result is a working process that can seem to tiptoe toward the aleatoric. When Wilson staged Heiner Müller's prologue to his *Alcestis* at the American Repertory Theater in 1986, he actively avoided reading the text before designing the stage set. The similarities that Wilson ultimately saw between Müller's text and in his own design surprised him considerably; as he later told theater scholar Elinor Fuchs, "If I'd ever read it I never would have designed it this way. It is the strangest thing how many parallels are in that text and how many images are in this play. … It is just uncanny. I would have been afraid that I was illustrating his text,

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but to impose one meaning on it would negate all the other ideas." (Robert Wilson, lecture address, "The Campbell Lecture Series: Robert Wilson," Rice University (Houston, TX), March 26, 2014, http://campbell.rice.edu/CampbellContent.aspx (accessed June 22, 2014).)

[14] Marc Robinson, "Robert Wilson, Nicolas Poussin, and *Lohengrin*," in *Land/Scape/Theater*, ed. Elinor Fuchs and Una Chaudhuri (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 169.

[15] Wilson, "The Campbell Lecture Series," March 27, 2014, 23:13-23:34.

which I don't like to do."[16] (It will remain a question lost to history whether or not he would have seen these parallels had they not been placed in such close juxtaposition: the power of suggestion, even in Wilson's work, is strong.)

The split between sonic and visual streams is also embedded in how Wilson rehearses his actors. Even when producing a work that is, in its most recognizable form, all about the coincidence of music and stage action, Wilson splits the rehearsal process into two distinct parts. One part is dedicated to crafting the sounds of the production, while the other is dedicated to the images. For instance, Kurt Weill and Bertolt Brecht's *Die Dreigroschenoper*, which Wilson staged in 2007 for the Berliner Ensemble, was first rehearsed as pure movement and gesture. For five weeks, Wilson and the actors "staged the whole work silently … with *no* music of Kurt Weill, *no* text of Bertolt Brecht." (He readily concedes that many of the actors found it disconcerting.) Almost a year later he returned to the Berliner Ensemble and "turned all the lights out in the room," allowing (or perhaps forcing) the actors to experience the piece as pure sound as they recited their lines and sang their songs in the darkened space.[17] It is important to observe that while Wilson separates medial streams (i.e., visual stimuli from auditory stimuli), he does not single out individual signifying systems. Words and music, though they signify separately, are treated as part of a single sonic track, and thus rehearsed together. Wilson often uses words less for their verbal significance than for their sonic possibilities, and in separating words from the visual events to which they may refer or adhere, he gives his actors the freedom to experience the words as pure sonic events, detached from

[16] Elinor Fuchs, *The Death of Character: Perspectives on Theater after Modernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 98.

[17] Wilson, "The Campbell Lecture Series," March 27, 2014, 29:45ff.

both visible referent and semantic meaning. In each phase of the rehearsal process, he explains, the aural and visual imagination (respectively) are given "boundless" reign.[18]

Wilson's interest in the noticeable mis-alignment of seeing and hearing is a multi-sensory expression of a broader interest in surprising juxtapositions, which he views as a source of power and opportunity. This attitude is likely due to the time in the mid-1960s he spent in Sibyl Moholy-Nagy's History of Architecture class, a multi-year course at the Pratt Institute which Wilson frequently mentions. Moholy-Nagy, the wife of Bauhaus architect, painter, and theater designer Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, would arrive dressed entirely in black, and lecture while standing in front of three screens on which images were projected: "a Byzantine mosaic, a Frank Lloyd Wright Chair, a Renaissance painting, etc.," Wilson recalls.

> Images that, for me, in the beginning it was difficult to see any relationship they had with one another. And her lectures had nothing to do with what we were seeing. It was a real shock. And during the course of these five years, she never gave us answers. It was curious how, after seven or eight months, you began to make associations, with images you had seen and things she was saying.[19]

It was from Moholy-Nagy that Wilson took his most important lesson as an artist: "The reason to work as an artist is to ask questions."[20] Yet it seems that he also took from her lectures the idea that audio-visual disjunction could be more than merely two independent sources of information; rather, the very independence of these medial streams could reveal, create, or inspire connections in a viewer's mind.

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[18] Ibid, 29:12-29:34.

[19] Ibid, 11:30-12:20.

[20] Ibid, 17:50-18:05.

Wilson's Audio-Visual (R)evolution

Rehearsing a play without sound is one thing, but rehearsing an opera without sound seems utterly contradictory. How can one rehearse an opera without the element that determines not only the onset of events and actions onstage but also the duration and coordination of these actions? Footage from *The Lost Paradise*, the documentary about the making of *Adam's Passion*, offered one possible solution for how this might be done: "Take three minutes to walk two meters," Wilson tells a group of young women standing in a line on the stage in front of him.[21] Indeed, Wilson often instructs actors to walk for X counts, stand still for Y counts, and then take Z counts to complete an action.[22] This linkage of action to clock or counted-time, independent of the musical beat, is a standard aspect of Wilson's working method. This, combined with a quasi-mechanical repeatability of motions honed through exhaustingly repetitive and rigorous rehearsal, is one way that Wilson crafts the seeming independence of events onstage.[23] Yet *Adam's Passion*—a work which combines pure movement (and no speech or song or other form of vocal utterance) with Pärt's music—is fundamentally different from an opera, in which a performer's body and voice must both align with a musical score performed by others. Would Wilson still direct a singer to walk a given number of steps in so many seconds? How could he integrate this kind of movement with the

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[21] *The Lost Paradise*, dir. Atteln, 8:13-9:19.

[22] Of *Einstein on the Beach* rehearsals, Wilson told an interviewer: "This work is made up entirely of mathematical calculations. Every gesture is counted out, and the actor repeats it so often that they could ultimately do it entirely mechanically." ("Dieses Stück besteht ganz aus mathematischen Berechnungen. Jede Geste ist ausgezählt, und die Schauspieler wiederholten es so oft, daß sie es schließlich ganz mechanisch machten.") ("Gespräch mit Renate Klett anlässlich der Inszenierung von *Einstein on the Beach*," in *Die Zeit*, October 15, 1976, reproduced in Brauneck, *Theater im 20. Jahrhundert*, 198-99.) On the relationship between time and movement, and the role of counting in Wilson's rehearsals, see Stefanie Fuchs, *"Alles begann mit Bildern und Rhythmen...": Visualität und Theaterraum in Robert Wilsons Theaterästhetik* (Marburg: Tectum Verlag, 2011), esp. 76-77.

[23] See, for instance, Stefan Kurt, "In praise of emptiness," in Safir, *Robert Wilson from Within*, 281.

singing they would inevitably have to do, and which would have to line up with the sounds coming from the orchestra pit? So, when an opportunity presented itself, I asked. Wilson was present at the Berlin screening of *The Lost Paradise*, and following the film took questions from the audience. I raised my hand: how, I wanted to know, did these silent rehearsals really take place? What did it mean for him to rehearse a play, let alone an opera, "silently"?

Wilson is not known for terse answers. He can be maddeningly subtle, even obtuse, in responding to a query, and disconcertingly repetitive in describing his work, influences, and creative process. He draws on a body of anecdotes—the same anecdotes—in his lectures and interviews, and these anecdotes are themselves performances: crafted, rehearsed, and multi-sensory, relying as much on Wilson's pauses and gestures as on his words. Yet the roundabout way in which he answers questions is itself informative, revealing the influences and ideas that undergird his practices. Moreover, his reliance on anecdotes to explain even the most assertively stated points of his aesthetic agenda reinforces what Wilson himself has suggested: that his artistic idea(l)s grew out of activities in which he engaged and experiments he undertook, rather than an inherited or consciously constructed artistic vision. His style has developed outside the halls of the academy or conservatory, in many cases even outside the walls of the theater, and his aesthetic is as much an agglomeration of lived experiences as it is a honed artistic position. On the one hand, it is necessary to take Wilson's answers at face value: his interest, for instance, in deaf perception comes not from theorizing about what it is to interact with the world as a deaf person, but from his years as the adoptive father of a deaf boy. On the other hand, a careful examination of these quotations can reveal the gradual development of Wilson's thinking and the multiple facets of his style today.

Wilson's answer to my inquiry regarding silent rehearsals was no exception to the general tendencies sketched above. On the way to discussing his rehearsal process, he stopped

by two major life experiences that had proven influential on his art, as well as an anecdote about the universality of certain love stories and a reference to Wagner. Indeed, his answer—which included John Cage and Merce Cunningham, Raymond Andrews, a disenchantment with the inherited audio-visual language of opera, and an interest in "movement for movement's sake"—is as good a microcosm of Wilson's influences (as he expresses them) as any. Thus, let's look in more detail at Wilson's answer to my question on that autumn evening in Berlin. It will help us disentangle and understand the ways in which audial and visual streams may work together or against one another, in concert or in tension, in Wilson's work and elsewhere. Each of the following sections shall engage a portion of Wilson's answer in turn, tracing (as did Wilson's answer) the points in his artistic development that he saw as fundamental to understanding how an opera might be rehearsed silently.

"Listen More Carefully"

When Wilson arrived in New York City in 1962, he was not yet the *enfant terrible* of the downtown performing arts scene that he would soon become—nor was he involved in theater in any professional way. Not yet. Against the wishes of his archly religious family, he had, one year shy of his graduation from the University of Texas, decided not to become a lawyer and instead had moved to New York to attend the Pratt Institute.[24] At Pratt, Wilson studied architecture. His interest in the performing arts inevitably took him, however, to the shrines of the New York performance world: the New York Philharmonic, the Metropolitan Opera, the New York City Ballet.

The opera he did not like. When he first started going to the Met, he found the performances "grotesque," feeling that the way the singers moved onstage, the way they made

[24] Katharina Otto-Bernstein, *Absolute Wilson: The Biography* (Munich: Prestel 2006), 33.

music, was "distracting." The best way to listen to music, he found, was to close his eyes.[25] In closing his eyes, Wilson (unknowingly, in all likelihood) was participating in a tradition dating back to Pythagoras, where sources of visual information are consciously shut out to allow for greater focus on that which is heard.[26] As Brian Kane has recently shown, this ideal of "acousmatic" listening reached heights of sublimity in the Romantic period and would set the tone for listening through the present age.[27] Yet a subtle distinction between Wilson's closed-eye experience and that deified by the Romantics was already presenting itself: whereas the Romantics wished to avoid or forestall visual stimuli by which they could potentially be distracted, Wilson wished to shut out visual stimuli which were already distracting. This is an important point, since it implies that it is not necessarily vision *per se* which distracts, but rather the *kind* of visual elements presented. Thus, it is possible that another kind of visual track could result in a different experience, one which is not only not distracting but which, perhaps, can even heighten perception.

An initial indication of what, precisely, this kind of visual structure could be presented itself at just the time of Wilson's disillusionment with the New York opera scene: he "fell in love" with the New York City ballet.[28] The work of George Balanchine was particularly enthralling, especially the visual structure of Balanchine's choreography. In Balanchine's

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[25] Q&A at the Berliner Philharmonie, September 23, 2015.

[26] Brian Kane, *Sound Unseen: Acousmatic Sound in Theory and Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 4.

[27] Ibid., 97-113. Denis Diderot utilized the opposite form of sensory deprivation when attending the theater: according to Michael Fried, when Diderot "wanted to gauge the expressive power of actors' gestures he would attend a performance of a play familiar to him, sit far back in the hall, and stop his ears." (Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1980), 79.)

[28] Q&A at the Berliner Philharmonie, September 23, 2015.

dance, Wilson recalls, he saw "the forms of classical architecture,"[29] an economy and balance of shapes that appealed to the young architect-in-training who would later call the use of space "decisive" in his theatrical work.[30] He also liked how the dancers "danced for themselves" (as he describes it today), and especially the abstraction of Balanchine.[31] Yet Balanchine appealed to Wilson for more than just his "classical forms"; rather, Wilson felt that the structures he saw helped focus his listening.[32] Shortly after Wilson first attended the New York City ballet, he was introduced to the work of Merce Cunningham and John Cage, whose music-and-dance-based performances relied heavily on Cage's concept of "aleatoric" or chance-based performance: specifically, Cage's music and Cunningham's choreography were performed together without any previous coordination. While watching Cage and Cunningham's collaborative work, Wilson now says, he could—much like watching Balanchine —"listen more carefully." In other words, when it came to Balanchine's choreography or the Cage-Cunningham dance performances, Wilson had no need to close his eyes. Instead, the visual element actually helped him to listen. While the misalignment (or lack of any alignment at all) in the Cage-Cunningham collaboration is unsurprising, Balanchine, too, invested in the idea that a disjunction between audial and visual tracks could heighten not only the spectator's

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[29] Ibid.

[30] "Entscheidend für mich ist, wie der Raum genutzt wird." (Quoted in Holm Keller, *Robert Wilson* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1997), 104.)

[31] Wilson regularly cites Balanchine as a major influence during his early years in New York; in an interview with German newspaper *Der Spiegel* in 1987, however, he called Balanchine "an influence of which, at the time, I was totally unaware." ("Übrigens, denke ich heute, daß es doch einen Einfluß gab, der mir damals gar nicht bewußt war: Ich bin als Student oft in die Ballett-Aufführungen von George Balanchine gegangen." ("Franz Kafka meets Rudolf Heß: Spiegel-Gespräch mit Robert Wilson über Hören, Sehen und Spielen mit Hellmuth Karasek und Urs jenny," in *Der Spiegel*, October 1987, reproduced in Brauneck, *Theater im 20. Jahrhundert*, 201.)

[32] For more on Wilson's impressions of Balanchine, see Robert Wilson and Margery Arent Safir, "From a Distance," in *Balanchine: Then and Now*, ed. Anne Hogan (Lewes: Sylph Editions, 2008), 110-19.

interest, but also the spectator's awareness of both sensory streams. Balanchine's student Una Kai would recall that Balanchine often mixed up traditional "up-beat" and "down-beat" steps, and would even "invent a step in 2/4 time that took five counts. … He said this kept Mozart from becoming visually boring."[33]

To be sure, Wilson readily articulates the difference between the Cage-Cunningham performances and his own work, since he "consciously constructs" how the sounds and images will interact, rather than leaving the audio-visual coincidences to be just that: coincidences.[34] But Wilson's understanding of a visual structure or an audio-visual engagement that could render hearing more acute, rather than reducing sound to a subservient role, has remained deeply indebted to these early impressions. Even today, Wilson has not forgotten the distraction of those early opera performances, as his comment in Houston about "going to the opera tonight" confirms. For him, the avoidance of distracting visuals is the first step in creating a "space to hear."

"Free in the Body"

Wilson's first major works, as he put it in Berlin, were made "with a deaf man."[35] The deaf man in question, Raymond Andrews, figures prominently in the Wilson biography. Andrews was a deaf teenager in New Jersey when Wilson saw him being beaten by policemen; recognizing that Andrews was far from an imbecile (as Andrews' family had assumed), and

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[33] Barbara Walczak and Una Kai, *Balanchine the Teacher: Fundamentals That Shaped the First Generation of New York City Ballet Dancers* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2008), 238-39. Thank you to Kara Yoo Leaman for bringing this aspect of Balanchine's work to my attention.

[34] "But my work is different from what Merce and John did in that I—later, when I put the two together, I consciously construct them." (Wilson, "The Campbell Lecture Series," March 27, 2014, 20:20ff.)

[35] Q&A, September 23, 2015.

recognizing that the state's solution for Andrews would be institutionalization, Wilson adopted Andrews.[36] Interactions with Andrews gave Wilson an unusual level of insight into deaf communication, and "the two biggest things" Wilson recalls learning from Andrews had to do with the connection of sound and the body.[37] One day, Wilson was with Andrews in his New York loft. Andrews was on the other side of the room, facing away. Wilson knew that if he said "Raymond," Andrews would not respond. If he stamped, Andrews would feel the vibrations and turn. But this day, he tried something different. "Reeeh-maaahnd," he called, mimicking the speech of a deaf person. Andrews turned, and smiled, Wilson recalled, "like, 'Hey man, you're speaking my language.'" And, Wilson realized, "his body was hearing" the vibrations to which he was accustomed, so he could understand.[38]

Wilson's second major lesson from Andrews also had to do with the relationship between bodies and vibrations, movement and sound. One day, Wilson said to Andrews, "Put a sound with a movement." Andrews began to move back and forth, and finally emitted a high-pitched shout. Not, Wilson says, "the sound of a deaf person." But a sound that was "free, free in the body."[39] Wilson had worked with handicapped individuals before, and it has often been suggested that Wilson's own interest in slow movement stems from his childhood experiences with the dancer Byrd Hoffmann, whom Wilson credits with curing him of a speech impediment.[40] But the take-away from his time with Andrews was not how to use

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[36] On Andrews, see Otto-Bernstein, *Absolute Wilson*, 64-70.

[37] Q&A, September 23, 2015.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Otto-Bernstein, *Absolute Wilson*, 26; Stefan Brecht, *The Theatre of Visions: Robert Wilson* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1978), 15-20.

movement and sound to overcome handicaps; rather, it was an interest in movement as a form of expression on its own, and the way that that physical expression could interact with sound in both complementary and contradictory ways.

Deafman Glance, a seven-hour work which Wilson began after meeting Andrews (and the work which Wilson credits with kickstarting his career), is one of the outstanding examples of Wilson's so-called "silent operas." Wilson's use of the word "opera" was, according to Laurie Anderson, based simply on the word's meaning as "work," rather than a self-styled contradiction-cum-conscious attempt to forge a new genre of performance art.[41] Yet, at the same time, the generic moniker inevitably drew attention to the absence of sound: an audio-visual performance from which one sensory stream (sound) had been removed, rather than a silent performance to which sound had simply never been attached. In other words, it is specious to view Wilson's use of silence as *lack* of sound, and more appropriate to consider it as an attempt to focus attention through the awareness of *missing* sound. Andrews' sound-less perspective of the world forced Wilson to practice what vision could be like in such a context. "He was fascinated by the way Andrews perceived the world, picking up cues that hearing people missed amid all the chatter," theater critic Hilton Als wrote in a *New Yorker* retrospective after the *Einstein on the Beach* revival of 2012. "Wilson wanted to explore onstage what would happen to vision in the absence of sound."[42]

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[41] Laurie Anderson told Margery Arent Safir, "[W]e were always doing things that were very borderless, and everybody seemed to be working on opera. … It didn't mean traditional opera or anything particular; it was just a word, 'opera,' and I think that Bob took the word and ran with it… took and people were saying, 'Woah, look at this! What's this new multimedia opera?'" (Laurie Anderson, "I don't remember anything about it except his body," in Safir, *Robert Wilson from Within*, 119.)

[42] Hilton Als, "Slow Man," *The New Yorker*, September 17, 2012, http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/09/17/slow-man (accessed May 12, 2016).

Exploring what would happen to vision in the absence of sound was, even in Wilson's early work, combined with an interest in movement for movement's sake. This harnessing of the expressive power of motion (as both pure physical form and as communicative device) emancipated movement from its obligation to illustrate a text. This was also true of verbal and musical expression. In an interview for the German newspaper *Die Zeit* on the occasion of the *Einstein* premiere, Wilson said that, unlike traditional operas, he had no desire for his actors to express emotions. Instead, each action was an end in itself, and the actors were to "fulfill the task they have been given, nothing else. If someone raises up a pencil or leaves, … the spectator sees the action [itself] rather than actors expressing emotions."[43] It was not until a decade after *Einstein* that Wilson began staging pre-existing plays and operas. When he did so, he recognized the largely untapped potential of this type of physical expressivity. Having crafted a rehearsal process to separate audio and visual streams, he was in a position to apply it to more traditional genres of multimedial performance.

Silent Opera Rehearsals

Back in Berlin in 2015, when Wilson finally circled back around to my original question (how can one rehearse a traditional opera without sound?) the crafting of movement *qua*

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[43] "In traditional operas, one sings, one expresses feelings. We proceed differently. You sing the notes like they are written, you sing scales, sing numbers—you do the tasks you have set out for yourself, nothing else. If someone raises up a pencil or walks, we don't want to show an actor who is raising up a pencil or walking, but rather these performed actions, and this with the smallest possible use of energy. The spectator sees the action … rather than actors expressing emotions." ("In der traditionellen Oper singt man, drückt Gefühle aus. Wir gehen anders vor. Man singt die Noten so, wie sie geschrieben sind, man singt Tonleitern, singt Zahlen, man führt die Aufgabe aus, die man sich gestellt hat, sonst nichts. Wenn jemand einen Bleistift hochhält oder geht, so wollen wir nicht einen Schauspieler zeigen, der einen Bleistift hochhält oder geht, sondern diese gestellte Aufgabe erfüllt, und das mit einem möglicht geringen Energieaufwand. Der Zuschauer sieht das Verhalten … nicht Schauspieler, die Emotionen ausdrücken.") ("Gespräch mit Renate Klett anlässlich der Inszenierung von Einstein on the Beach," in *Die Zeit*, October 15, 1976, reproduced in Brauneck, *Theater im 20. Jahrhundert*, 196.)

movement turned out to lie at the heart of his system. "Movement for movement's sake" he said, was the goal of silent opera rehearsals: finding movements that could express and signify independently of the music the singers would have to produce. Singers are accustomed to using their voices to express, but that leaves an entire body that does not live up to its expressive potential, Wilson feels. "If Brunnhilde is gonna stand there, we work on how she is gonna stand," Wilson said. If she will project coldness or stillness, she will project it with her body, rather than with her voice; this allows her body and her voice, potentially, to project two different meanings—precisely the "counterpoint" of which Stefan Kurt speaks. Since, however, singers (and actors) are trained to link gestural and musical expression, the silent phase of the rehearsal is necessary. With the music already present, it is very difficult for singers to "execute" abstract movements, Wilson observed. Indeed, it is a challenge he himself faces as a director: "invariably, if I start with the music then I will tend to illustrate it," he says on *The Lost Paradise*.[44] Instead, with separated audio and visual construction, sound and image can "reinforce one another" without "having always to decorate one another."[45] "Later," he told the Berlin audience, "the music can come." But by directing it silently "the movement can be … very pure."[46]

How, exactly, this "pure" movement differs from more standard forms of gestural expressivity in theater is explained by Wilson's belief that movement is a universal language. As such, pure movement is different from gestures which rely on the spoken word for their meaning to be understood, another idea Wilson explained via an anecdote. The night before

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[44] Atteln, dir., *The Lost Paradise*, 32:50-32:57.

[45] Ibid, 33:33-33:24.

[46] Q&A, September 23, 2015.

the Berlin interview, Wilson said, he had been in Paris for a performance of his staging of Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*. There is a fourteenth-century Noh play, he told us, about a girl who falls in love with a boy; he leaves her, but she waits for him. "The same story as *Butterfly*," he observed, with so many of the same movements. Such a similarity—crossing two vastly differing theatrical styles, thousands of miles, and some seven-hundred years—is possible because two thirds of the movements in his *Butterfly* are "abstract." They do not "illustrate" or "decorate" the music or the text. It is no secret that attaining such an audio-visual disjunction is extremely difficult: of rehearsals for Wagner's *Lohengrin* at the Metropolitan Opera, Wilson recalled with a wry smile that "it was hell" to get 150 people to move against the beat of the music, to move slowly as Wagner's music was "rushing, and rushing, and rushing, and rushing..."[47] But the effect, for Wilson, is worth it: if Butterfly enters with her steps in time with the music, she'll look "like a high school marching band. There's no tension between what I'm seeing and what I'm hearing. But if she walks against the music she floats in. Therefore, ideally, I can hear the music playing because of what I'm seeing."[48]

Wilson does not see himself as unique in using independently signifying theatrical elements as the foundation blocks of his theater; in addition to Cage, Cunningham, Balanchine, and other artists of the twentieth century, he calls upon the figureheads of the Classical canon to justify his approach. "Wagner," Wilson told the Berlin audience, "would have music as one thing, and the text as another."[49] While the accuracy of this statement is questionable, it is

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[47] Q&A, September 23, 2015. For another description of directing the actors in *Lohengrin* at the Met, see Wilson, "The Campbell Lecture Series," March 27, 2014, 21:11-21:19.

[48] Commentary on the DVD Robert Wilson, *Madama Butterfly* (Opus Arte, Waldron, Heathfield, East Sussex, DVD OA 0937 D, 2005). Wilson's comment is in the track entitled "Introduction," part of the extra materials on Disc 1, circa 20:28.

[49] Q&A, 23 September 2015.

notable that Wilson views individuated components is not at all antithetical to the idea of a Total Work of Art. Indeed, it is this very individuality that makes the totality more than the sum of its parts.[50] But the *coup-de-grâce* in Wilson's response to my answer came, as it always does in Wilson's discussions of his work, with a technological metaphor. Returning again to his rehearsal practice of turning out the lights and running the text for freedom of imagery, Wilson compared the experience to that of watching television without the sound, a comparison he had employed in Houston (quoted above) and elsewhere. And then he added, "In an ideal sense, it's a little like putting a radio play with a silent movie."[51]

"Putting a Radio Play with a Silent Movie"

Wilson's invocation of silent films, radio, and muted television as a metaphor for his theater may seem trivial. But these very technologies reflect a non-trivial conception of the senses. On the one hand, technologies that capture and retain sounds and images reflect an understanding of the senses as receptive (i.e., that we receive and interpret external stimuli, rather than objectively observing the external world). On the other hand, technologies that capture images and sound individually rely on an understanding of the senses as separable. As art historian Jonathan Crary has argued, the nineteenth century saw a profound change in the medical, scientific, and even artistic understanding of the senses. Crary's primary focus is on the recasting of vision, but the new understanding of sight was but one element of a re-conceptualization of the sensory apparatus in its entirety. No longer were the senses viewed as a unified, objective perception of the "real" world. Once the senses were viewed as

[50] For more on Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk* and its relation to Wilson's oeuvre, see the Introduction to this dissertation.

[51] Q&A, September 23, 2015.

individually receptive, however, it became possible to imagine separating individual sensory streams from the other stimuli surrounding them, and then capturing and even retaining these streams by technological means.[52]

Crary's observation about the separability of the senses enjoys only a single paragraph in his book, but it has become one of the cornerstones of much recent historiography of audition, vision, and audio-visual media. In *The Audible Past*, Jonathan Sterne examines how this idea produced technological advances and, perhaps more importantly, the discourse surrounding those new technologies.[53] From a slightly different perspective, film historian Tom Gunning argues that the technological ability to split audio and visual memories, and retain them in recordings and photos or films of loved ones, naturally led to the desire to glue them back together.[54] For Gunning, this desire provided the major impetus for developing the technologies of sound film. Given the inherent un-naturalness of splitting voices and images from the bodies to which they were once attached, it is little surprise that a super-natural expression of such technologies was not far behind; as Gunning points out, Gothic novels are filled with instances of ghostly projections of moving images and bodies, a fictionalized expression of the hope for technological re-embodiment after death.[55]

The understanding of recording technologies as akin to capturing or reproducing individualized senses also resulted in the equation of these same technologies with bodies that

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[52] Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990), 89-90.

[53] Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction*, 60.

[54] Tom Gunning, "Doing for the Eye What the Phonograph Does for the Ear," in *The Sounds of Early Cinema*, ed. Richard Abel and Rick Altman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 16.

[55] Ibid., 13-31.

perceive either sounds *or* sights, but not both. Sometimes, these machines were understood as an aid to a body deprived of a sense, as Jonathan Sterne has shown with his history of phonographs, developed as machines "to hear for" and improve the hearing of the hearing-impaired.[56] (This tendency would be taken up in the strain of twentieth-century media theory that understands media as bodily extensions, most famously in Marshall McLuhan's pathbreaking book *Understanding Media*, tellingly subtitled *The Extensions of Man*.[57]) Alternately, the machines have been understood as analogous to sense-impaired bodies: silent film as "deaf" or "mute," and radio as "blind."

For Wilson, whose major influences include work with a deaf man, and who often describes his work as silent film or sound-less television, there seems to be a similar homology at play. Picking up visual cues that are typically missed in the midst of "all the chatter," as Als described Raymond Andrews' deaf perception, sounds a lot like the twitching of the broadcaster's mouth that becomes more apparent when the sound of the television is turned off. But, *pace* writers and thinkers such as Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, who once called the aim of television the "synthesis of radio and film," images that are naturalistically synchronized with sound are not necessarily equivalent to the simultaneous playback of a radio track and a silent film track.[58] In contrast to silent film, television without sound is missing a vital component of the original transmission, a transmission which was not designed to be experienced purely visually. Thus, the silent broadcaster does not draw on a visual lexicon like

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[56] Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction*, 31-85. For a brief history of discourses surrounding deafness, see Mara Mills, "Deafness," in *Keywords in Sound*, ed. David Novak and Matt Sakakeeny (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 45-54.

[57] Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964).

[58] Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 97.

that of the silent film actor. In the now-silent broadcast, visual attention is suddenly drawn to information that would originally have been overlooked, such as the broadcaster's twitching fingers and lips.

It is worth delving into how the radio play and the silent movie are different from a television with the sound turned off or a faulty television set which plays sound but has no picture. Both radio plays and silent films were crafted as single-sensory sources that could invoke multiple sensory stimuli and even impact multiple sensoria. Silent film was full of sound, observes Chion: clanging bells, discharging guns, factory sirens going off—even apart from the live sound effects that were often included in film screenings.[59] In silent film, the visual track drew on a carefully constructed lexicon of images that could invoke sounds, without sound itself ever being a part of the signifying track. This was especially true in the visual depiction of speech:

> the characters in deaf cinema were speaking, sometimes even more than they would speak in a sound film, since they had to make visible the activity of speaking.... [A]ll the gesticulating in the earliest fiction films... was not so much to translate through coded, mimed gestures the content of what was being said... [but] to show with the whole body that one was speaking.[60]

Mutatis mutandis, much the same could be said of radio's ability to tell a story without seeming "visually impaired." Indeed, in a recent article on sound effects in early film and radio, Carolyn Abbate reports that radio sound effect kits were inadequate for creating sounds in silent film

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[59] Chion, *Film, a Sound Art*, 4-5. I do not mean to suggest that sounds were only *implied* in the context of silent film performance. Rick Altman has clearly demonstrated that this was not so. (See especially Rick Altman, *Silent Film Sound* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).) Instead, I speak only of the sounds embedded in or implied by the purely visual track of the film strip. Moreover, when Wilson talks about silent film, he intends it as a purely visual form of storytelling, the films as they are received today, rather than the event of their screening in the first decades of the twentieth century.

[60] Chion, *Film, a Sound Art*, 4.

since (and here she quotes an article from the February 1924 issue of *Popular Mechanics*) with radio "it must be done through the ears alone."[61]

Wilson draws equally, and indiscriminately, on the silent film-cum-radio and silenced-television metaphors. Yet this apparently antithetical juxtaposition of technological metaphors indicates that motions in Wilson's productions need not be classified as either "individually significant," or "pure" and "abstract." Rather, they are both. The motions Wilson employs draw on a visual lexicon of physical meaning, but the alignment of audio and visual streams should inspire the kind of heightened attention to detail that one experiences when a stream has been removed.

Wilson is not alone in his interest in audio-visual disjunction. Technological determinism has long assumed that a "natural" alignment of sound and image was the primary purpose of synchronized film. "A common perspective, ... which might be called naturalist," writes Chion, "postulates that sound and images start in 'natural harmony,' whereas, in fact, the joining of sound and image is always conditioned."[62] Moreover, when technologies finally made the re-joining of separated senses possible, one could begin to ask if they *should* be rejoined; filmmakers greeted the advent of sound film with far from unanimous praise. Indeed, of all the artistic precursors to Wilson's audio-visual split, those whose statements on the subject most closely mirror Wilson's own are arguably the great Russian avant-garde filmmakers, who strongly, almost dogmatically, advocated that sound and image should not be in concert in film. In a famed statement, published in 1928 (the year after *The Jazz Singer*,

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[61] Carolyn Abbate, "Sound Object Lessons," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 39, no. 3 (Fall 2016): 818.

[62] Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 95.

considered to be Hollywood's first "talkie," was released), Sergei Eisenstein, Vsevolod Pudovkin, and Grigori Alexandrov declared that the adhesion of sound to image in film results in the film's inertia as a montage piece, and advocated only a "contrapuntal" use of sound.[63] Eisenstein elsewhere decreed that sound and image in film should have a "dialectical" relationship.[64]

Debates about cinematic naturalism also frequently invoked the theater: some critics declared that if cinema strove for naturalism, it would become "naturalistic theatre reproduced through a sound cinema [and] would soon be nothing but a copy of a copy of nature."[65] From the opposite perspective, Vladimir Mayakovsky declared that cinema could relieve theatre of naturalism just as photography had done for painting (i.e., theatre could give up on naturalism since film could always be more naturalistic, much as the naturalism of photography would always beat the naturalism of painting), and that "the only distinction between [theater] and

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[63] See Eisenstein, Sergei, "Appendix A: A Statement," in *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory*, ed. Jay Leyda (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1997, 259). The Russian filmmaker Andrey Tarkovsky (1932-1986) expressed a similar sentiment in his book *Sculpting in Time: Reflections on the Cinema*, trans. Kitty Hunter-Blair (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987), 162. For a discussion of these ideas in the secondary sources, see for instance Chion, "The Disappointed Fairies Around the Cradle," in *Film, a Sound Art*, 201-218; see also Douglas Kahn, *Noise, Water, Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 146ff.

[64] Kahn, *Noise, Water, Meat*, 146. Moreover, according to filmmakers such as Dziga Vertov, naturalistic sound that was produced artificially (as opposed to direct sound) was "deceptive" (ibid., 143.) Chion points out that many theorists, critics, filmmakers still consider sound in film as *manipulation*, especially when there is simultaneity between sound and images (Chion, *Film, a Sound Art*, 241.) Critics of early sound films also complained of the mismatch between the image of the characters' bodies spread across the screen and the source of the sound (a single loudspeaker hidden behind the screen). (Michel Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*, trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 11.) However, Douglas Kahn has pointed out that amid all the proclamations of aesthetic idealism, a more mundane economic concern may have influenced the Russian directors as well: it would be hard to sell Russian-language movies abroad, and the technology for simultaneous sound and image on film would likely not arrive in Russia until the Americans and French had already cornered the market on "talkies." (Kahn, *Noise, Water, Meat*, 146.)

[65] This is Douglas Kahn's wording (Ibid., 145.)

cinema—silence—has been removed."[66] The invocation of silence points back to Wilson's own experiments with imposing silence upon theater, a sort of inversion of Mayakovsky's assertion that silence was the only thing keeping film artistically separate from theater. Similarly, Mayakovsky's perspective is echoed in Wilson's intentional avoidance of "naturalism": his is a "formalist" theater, he likes to say, defined by distance, awareness, and especially artificiality. "My theater is not a naturalistic theater," he says. "To be onstage is something artificial, and if you try to be natural it always looks so artificial, so it's better to just accept it as something artificial, and then you can be more natural in what you're doing."[67] And this is where the nature of Wilson's audio-visual construction comes into play. In a single-sensory experience, it is often said, the imagination is free to fill in the missing images or sounds. And so it is for Wilson's actors who must first rehearse only the motions, and then only the sounds: in each case, they are granted "boundless" freedom to imagine what the accompanying sounds and images might look like.[68] For Wilson, the simultaneous individuality of audio and visual tracks not only allows each to speak for itself, but also allows two simultaneous spaces for boundless imagination. In other words, he gives a space not only to hear better, but also a space to see better.

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[66] Ibid. On particular examples of early cinema's theatricality, see the description of *L'Assassinat du Duc de Guise* (1908), in Martin Miller Marks, *Music and the Silent Film: Contexts and Case Studies, 1895-1924* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 50-51.

[67] Robert Wilson, inverviewed (with Rufus Wainwright) by John Rockwell at the BAM 2014 Next Wave Festival, http://www.bam.org/rwrw (accessed 21 February 2015). I was present at the interview; the transcription is my own, taken from the video posted online after the event.

[68] Wilson, "The Campbell Lecture Series," March 27, 2014, 25:45.

"Ready to See and Hear"

In stark white letters, on the final glossy black page of the *Shakespeares Sonette* program book, are four lines of text in Wilson's curvy, slightly off-kilter, all-caps hand.

> JOHN CAGE SAID:
> NOTHING HAS CHANGED BUT
> NOW OUR EYES AND EARS
> ARE READY TO SEE AND HEAR.[69]

It is a common trope: a journey that ends where it began, but with a new appreciation for the beauties, the particularities, the senses and sensibilities of one's point of origin. Dorothy returns to Kansas, and although the sparkling Technicolor of Oz has disappeared, she can now see the joys of her small farm. Alice, somnolent with boredom, falls down a rabbit hole into Wonderland, only to find herself back on the lawn with her sister, bubbling over with excitement. And Wilson, too, finds himself back where he started: fifty years after first seeing the works of Cage and Cunningham, after a lifetime of productions that have bent, broken, and redefined theater, dance, and music, he still returns to Cage. But where fifty years ago Wilson saw a performance that helped him hear, now he has developed his own vocabulary of sounds and images. He has, in short, created "a space to hear." Alice's adventures in Wonderland, Dorothy's Man behind the Green Curtain, and many more figures from the popular lexicon of the imagination will appear in the pages of this dissertation. They will help us investigate how Wilson's audio-visual split plays out in his work, and consider how (and if) Wilson achieves the sensory independence he so desires.

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[69] *Shakespeares Sonette* Program, 91.

Shakespeare was well aware that "hearing with the eyes" was part of the allure of love. As a young man, Wilson took Marlene Dietrich to dinner; he was 27, she was 71. "I took her to a restaurant," Wilson recalled to Margery Arent Safir, "and a man came to the table and said, 'Oh, Miss Dietrich, you're so cold when you perform,' and she said, 'But you didn't listen to my voice.' ... She could be icy cold with her movements, but the voice could be [Wilson's voice drops] very hot. That was her power."[70] As this dissertation aims to show, it is Wilson's power, too.

[70] Quoted in Margery Arent Safir, "Things have a life of their own, you only have to awaken their souls," in Safir, *Robert Wilson from Within*, 31. On Wilson's memories of Dietrich, see also Felix Burrichter, ed., "New York: Robert Wilson: Interviewed by Horacio Silva," in *Pin-Up: Interviews* (Brooklyn, NY: PowerHouse Books), 427-28.

FIGURE 2.1: Advertisement for *Die Dreigroschenoper*, south side of the Berliner Ensemble, May 27, 2014. Photograph by Kamala Schelling.

CHAPTER TWO

In Record Time:
The Phonograph as Sound Effect and Structural Device

> "And now Ella, and her fellas, We're making a record of Mack the Knife"
> —Ella Fitzgerald, singing "Mack the Knife," 1960

May 27, 2014. The Berliner Ensemble, Theater am Schiffbauerdamm, Berlin. I sit at the center of the second balcony and look at the white drop hanging from just behind the proscenium arch. The words *Die Dreigroschenoper* are written on it in Robert Wilson's distinctive, round hand. The lights in the auditorium begin to dim, and the white drop rises, revealing another drop, this one black. "*Sie werden heute Abend eine Oper für Bettler sehen*," thunders a voice over the loudspeakers. "*Weil diese Oper so prunkvoll gedacht war, wie nur Bettler sie erträumen, und weil sie doch so billig sein sollte, daß Bettler sie bezahlen können, heißt sie*: Die Dreigroschenoper."[1]

Out of total darkness a spotlight blinks on, illuminating a single actor standing before the black drop. He blinks at the audience. Grinding organ music begins to play, a looped

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[1] "Tonight you will see an opera for beggars. Since this opera was said to be so magnificent, as only beggars could dream up, and since it was so cheap, that even beggars could afford it, it is called: *The Threepenny Opera.*" (German text from the Berliner Ensemble program for *Die Dreigroschenoper* (Berlin: Berliner Ensemble, Theater am Schiffbauerdam, Programmheft Nr. 91, 2007), 7.) In general, citations of the German text will come from both the Suhrkamp edition (Bertolt Brecht, *Die Dreigroschenoper* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 1955)), and the Berliner Ensemble program, henceforth cited as "Brecht, *Die Dreigroschenoper*" and "*Die Diegroschenoper* Program," respectively. Note, however, that Brecht revised the text of *Die Dreigroschenoper* in 1931, creating a more "literary" version by removing most of the stage directions and some text, including the line quoted above. Today, Suhrkamp still publishes the 1931 edition, both individually and in their collection of Brecht's *Gesammelte Schriften*; the 1931 edition is also the basis of Manheim and Willett's translation. The program book for Wilson's show, however, reprints the text of the 1928 edition, which can also be found in Edward Harsh, ed., *Die Dreigroschenoper: Ein Stück mit Musik in einem Vorspiel und acht Bildern nach dem Englischen des John Gay*, The Kurt Weill Edition, vol. 1/5 (New York: Kurt Weill Foundation for Music; Valley Forge, PA: European American Music Corporation, 1996). In cases where there is a discrepancy between the 1928 and 1931 editions, I reproduce citations from the BE program and note the difference. For more on the history of the 1928 and 1931 editions, see my Appendix.

Die Dreigroschenoper premiered at the Berliner Ensemble on September 27, 2007; I saw it on July 5, 2013; May 27 & 28, 2014; and September 26 & 27, 2015. For more detailed information on the production, see my Appendix.

fragment of a few short chords, seemingly chosen at random—they are not from Kurt Weill's score. One by one, three more actors join, and the four actors parade across the bib of the stage. From offstage, someone begins to whistle a tune, drawn from the middle of Kurt Weill's "Moritat von Mackie Messer": *und Macheath, der hat ein Messer / Doch das Messer* (the whistling pauses) *sieht man* (another pause; the echoing sound of a drop of liquid comes from the speakers) *nicht.*[2] The four characters halt their procession and look around, listening. I glance to the right, to where the proscenium frames the stage, and see that an arm and hand have materialized. Clad in a black sleeve and glove and holding a long white cane, the arm protrudes coyly from the wings.

A few circles of light appear on the black drop. The whistling dies away and is replaced by a new sound coming through the theater's speakers: the quiet spin-and-crackle of a needle on a record. I watch the whirling wheels of light and parading actors for a moment, then glance back to the right, where, in lieu of a single arm, a full man now stands. He has sidled smoothly onto the stage, and now stands leering over the actors and audience. His black suit shimmers subtly; his platinum-blond wig grabs the light.

The needle catches its groove, and the record begins to play. A high-pitched, nasal male voice starts singing, "*Und der Haifisch...*" The record pops and crackles and the man begins to move, leisurely yet beguilingly, towards the center of the stage, his back to the audience. Both the scene and the song begin to pick up steam. More circles of light come to life on the black drop. The song gets louder, the instrumentation of the song gets denser. The

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[2] The first line of the song, which immediately precedes the line "whistled" here, is "Und der Haifisch, der hat Zähne / und er trägt sie im Gesicht." Ralph Manheim and John Willett translate this passage as: "See the shark with teeth like razors. / All can read his open face. / And Macheath has got a knife, but / Not in such an obvious place." (Bertolt Brecht, *The Threepenny Opera; Baal; The Mother*, trans. Ralph Manheim and John Willett, 1st Arcade pbk. ed. (New York: Arcade, 1993), 65; henceforth cited as "Manheim and Willett, trans., *The Threepenny Opera.*")

show's characters—beggars, prostitutes, and other low-lifes—parade across the front of the stage, left to right, crossing under the gaze of the man in black.[3] He surveys them with cool detachment, a slight smirk on his face. The lights spin faster, the stage gets lighter, and the crackling sound of the record slowly fades away. Then suddenly, as the song nears its climax, the music pauses and most of the lights on the backdrop go out. Now only two figures stand onstage: the man in black, tall and proud, still turned away from the audience, and a prostitute with a black bodice and fiery red hair, her head cocked quizzically to one side, facing the assembled spectators. In this pause, the crackling of the record resumes, and the man turns toward the audience, his face now in three-quarter profile. He sings the final two lines of the song over the crackling record: "*Wachte auf und war geschändet, / Mackie, welches war dein*"—he pulls a vampy face and bats his long eyelashes as he twists the final word into the rising intonation of a question—"*Preis?*"[4]

The record is a nice touch, I think to myself. It is like a voice-over, an omniscient voice that, by way of introduction, enumerates the murderous exploits of the man standing onstage before us. The most obvious candidate for the record now playing over the speakers would be the first recording, on which the Moritat was sung by Kurt Gerron.[5] Or might it be Brecht himself singing?[6] I think back to a tour I took of the Berliner Ensemble on June 14, 2013, which was led by an old, retired actor, Werner Riemann. During the tour, he recounted with

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[3] Throughout, "right" and "left" refer to the audience's perspective.

[4] The preceding lines are: "Und die minderjährige Witwe, / Deren Namen jeder weiß." (Brecht, *Die Dreigroschenoper*, 8; *Die Diegroschenoper* Program, 8) In English: "And the child-bride in her nightie / Whose assailant's still at large"; the section quoted above reads: "Violated in her slumbers— / Mackie, how much did you charge?" (Manheim and Willett, trans., *The Threepenny Opera*, 66.)

[5] Available commercially as *Weill: The Threepenny Opera — Berlin 1930* (Teldec, 1990).

[6] Brecht's own recording of the song is available on the album *Bertolt Brecht: Hommage* (Epm Musique, 2006).

a slight chortle that Brecht's voice was high-pitched and nasal—in contrast to the deep voice of Helene Weigel, the playwright's wife. Riemann recalled that Brecht would walk around the theater singing, then mimicked Brecht, singing the first few lines from the Moritat in a high, shaky voice, which the timbre of the record instantly brought to mind. Moreover, the current production took place on the very stage where *Die Dreigroschenoper* was premiered in 1928, inevitably inviting comparison with the long and storied history of this song and the opera as a whole.

I return to the theater the following night, to see the production again. The crackling sound of the record begins and the man in black appears. But wait! He faces away from the audience, yet when he turns slightly, just enough for the edge of his face to be visible from where I now sit,[7] I can see that his mouth is forming words, perfectly in sync with the sound. Is he lip synching? If so, he's very good: the alignment is flawless. But it sounds so like a record: the crackling, the slightly shaky quality of that high voice. As on the previous night, the pause before the final verse arrives; then the last lines of the song (now free from any crackling at all), the slow, languorous turn of the actor's head toward the audience, and the final question, sung in a strong, clear voice. This time it is clear that these final lines are sung by the actor, Stefan Kurt. But when, precisely, did he begin singing? The song's dramaturgical function in the show (as imagined by Brecht and Weill) is to introduce Macheath; it is not sung by him. Yet in singing the final lines of the song, Kurt had literally embodied the identity of the character described in the song's text. The voice had gradually become louder and stronger, as though moving spatially closer to the listener. At the same time, the sonic properties of the record had slowly disappeared. A transition from the material of the record to the material of

[7] For this performance, I sat in the center of the second balcony: row 4 left, seat 7.

the actor must have occurred, yet it had been so seamless, so smooth, a gradual sweep through time and space.

By the summer of 2014, I had seen the production three times, on each occasion experiencing the same strong conviction that a famous old recording of the Moritat was being played, and that, at some point, the singing of the song had been "taken over" by the actor.[8] Still unsure, however, how the transition from record to actor had been organized, I requested a video recording of the production. Would it be possible on the video to ascertain when the record stopped and when Kurt himself began singing? The video is a recording of a live performance, filmed in the Berliner Ensemble, but has been edited, with close-ups and shots filmed from different angles.[9] Of particular importance for my purposes was a close-up that began just as Kurt appeared onstage, which zeroed in on his face: from the very first note, Kurt himself seemed to be singing. Still not convinced, I compared the performance on the video to a slew of old recordings of the Moritat. When I failed to find a match, I was finally willing to concede that Kurt had been singing all along, and that the sound of the record must have been an added sound effect.

One mystery had been solved, but this only posed a new question: what had led me to believe so fervently that this production had begun with a historical recording? Why did the "record" seem to me a more likely source than the man clearly standing before me? The conviction was due to the particular sonic quality of the record—or, more accurately, the collection of sounds that had been artificially produced to sound like a record before Kurt

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[8] July 5, 2013; and May 27 & 28, 2014. I have since seen it two additional times, on September 26 & 27, 2015. All five performances were at the Berliner Ensemble.

[9] The video, undated, was given to me by the Robert Wilson Archive. It is the same cast as the performances I saw, and recorded at the Berliner Ensemble.

began singing: the popping and crackling that indicated a needle in a groove on a vinyl disc. This sound itself conjured times, places, and even earlier performances of the song, creating a powerful network of associations and interpretations that twisted and directed my understanding of the production and work.

In the video, the sound of Stefan Kurt's voice immediately "stuck" to his image, seeming to emanate from the man onscreen. This exemplifies the phenomenon, introduced in Chapter One, that Michel Chion calls "synchresis": "the spontaneous and irresistible weld produced between a particular auditory phenomenon and visual phenomenon when they occur at the same time."[10] Chion observes that when a visual event and a sonic event occur simultaneously, our tendency as viewers is to associate the sound and the image, typically identifying the image as the source or cause of the sound. This is vital to the "realism" of cinema, where sounds issue from speakers positioned at a distance from the screen but where audiences nevertheless connect the auditory events to the projected images. The fact that synchresis occurs despite this disjunction is another audio-visual phenomenon, which Chion terms "spatial magnetization": the magnetic attraction, in the mind of the receiver, of sound and image despite their spatial differentiation.[11] This mental magnetization enables the perception of audio and visual streams as originating in a single source. In the video of Wilson's *Die Dreigroschenoper*, the sound of the "Moritat" was "magnetically" attracted to Kurt's body, and I experienced the voice as Kurt's own. Yet as a viewer in the theater I found myself

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[10] Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 63.

[11] Michel Chion, *Film, a Sound Art*, trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 248.

incapable of reconciling the sound with the image to which it should have been "synchretically" welded.

This disjunction between the experience of live and filmed performance is significant, and not only because it points to the importance of seeing theatrical productions live. In cinema, where artificial sound effects are now a given, the effect of sonic events has been well theorized. Yet in the theater, different norms of sound and listening reign. In live performance, sounds come from a variety of sources, which may include loudspeakers, the orchestra pit, and the stage itself, not to mention the actors speaking or singing their lines either on- or offstage. Different seats in the house may result in strikingly different auditory experiences. Just as important, different seats in the house may result in strikingly different visual experiences, and experiences of the audio-visual relationship. On video, for instance, Kurt was often located at the center of the frame, with no other bodies in sight—and he would remain in the center of the frame no matter where one sat in relation to the screen. On the stage, however, Kurt was surrounded by a variety of other stimuli: different characters parading across the stage, lights flashing on the backdrop in changing patterns. Indeed, the fact that I "missed" his arrival onstage every single time I saw the show indicates how effectively my attention had been drawn elsewhere. As a result, I heard the sound of the record for several seconds before I even noticed Kurt onstage, during which time I strongly associated the sound with a recording of the Moritat. Hence, when the singing started, my perception of audio and visual streams as thoroughly independent prevented spatial magnetization from taking place.

Thus, a combination of audio and visual events actively disrupted synchresis in Wilson's staging of the Moritat. But such disruption occurs in the act of perception, and is enabled by the experiences and expectations that audience members bring to the theater. This chapter begins by delving into the history of *Die Dreigroschenoper*, both inside and outside the

Theater am Schiffbauerdamm, investigating how the history of the opera, as well as the history of the song itself, had rendered the "noise" of a recording medium significant in its own right. Yet suggesting that this noise was significant points to a set of more fundamental issues. First, how do sound effects signify in theater, and can they function as semiotic events independent of either visual stimuli or spoken text? Second, how has the historical discourse surrounding audio-visual technologies taught audiences to interpret the sounds of these media in the theater and elsewhere? Third, what does it mean when a sonic medium is employed *as* a sound effect, and vice versa? Using these questions to generate a theoretical foundation, I then examine how the noise of the phonograph record, employed as a self-referential yet ambiguous sonic event, creates an active engagement with both the temporal flow of a performance itself and the historical moment of a production at large.

Getting in the Groove: A Short History of "Mack the Knife"

In retrospect, the most striking thing about my mistaken interpretation of the sound of the record was not my awareness that it *might* be a recording; it was my conviction that it *had* to be. Not that there weren't hints that I was wrong. I might have observed, for instance, that when the Moritat begins to "picks up steam" it actually gets faster—an acceleration impossible to achieve on analogue playback devices without the pitch getting higher. I might have considered that, if the instrumentalists were playing live in the pit (and I could see that they were), it would have been difficult for them to accompany a recorded voice. Yet each time I saw Wilson's production I became more entrenched in the groove of my convictions. On the one hand, this groove which had been prepared by past experiences and expectations, including Wilson's use of the "crackling record" sound effect in many of his productions, and more general associations with this "noise." Just as important in preparing my experience,

however, was the historical connection between *Die Dreigroschenoper* and the house where Wilson's production was performed—a connection which is conspicuously prominent in the Berliner Ensemble's self-presentation today. By the time Kurt sidled his way onstage, the track record of the song, the history of the show, and the mythology of the theater already whispered in my ears like so many emcees guiding me through the sights and sounds of the opening moments of the performance.

Die Dreigroschenoper holds a special place in the history of the Berliner Ensemble, since it links the history of the ensemble itself to the theater which the group has long called home. In 1928, the actor and impresario Ernst Joseph Aufricht approached Bertolt Brecht, the budding genius-cum-*enfant terrible* of the Berlin theater scene. Aufricht had recently leased the Theater am Schiffbauerdamm, a gaudily neo-Baroque theater built in 1892 at the center of Berlin's pulsing theatrical heart. Aufricht was looking for a new show to open the season, ideally on his birthday (August 31) of that same year.[12] Brecht, meanwhile, was in the midst of writing an opera, *Der Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*, with composer Kurt Weill, and suggested to Aufricht that he and Weill collaborate on a new musical for the theater's opening.[13] Specifically, he pitched an updated version of John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera*, an eighteenth-century English popular opera which Brecht's then-girlfriend, Elisabeth Hauptmann, was translating into German.[14] Aufricht agreed, and *Die Dreigroschenoper* opened

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[12] For a history of the Theater am Schiffbauerdamm's first hundred years, including relevant primary source documents, see Christoph Funke and Wolfgang Jansen, *Theater am Schiffbauerdamm: Die Geschichte einer Berliner Bühne* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 1992).

[13] For more on *Mahagonny* in particular and the Brecht-Weill collaboration more generally, see for instance Günter Schnitzler, "Brecht und Weill," in *Verfremdungen: Ein Phänomen Bertolt Brechts in der Musik*, ed. Jürgen Hillesheim (Freiburg im Breisgau: Rombach, 2013), 285-315.

[14] For the final script, Brecht would bring together not only Hauptmann's translation of Gay's text and Weill's music, but also "interpolated ballads by François Villon and Rudyard Kipling," as the premiere playbill announced. (Reproduced in Funke and Jansen, *Theater am Schiffbauerdamm*, 106.) Brecht, whose writing process often fell somewhere on the spectrum between friendly collaboration and profligate

at the Theater am Schiffbauerdamm on the appointed date.[15] And what an opening it was! Commercial success was instantaneous, popular acclaim thunderous, dissemination of the tunes alacritous. Within a year alone, the opera would receive more than 4,200 performances across Europe.[16] Universal Publishing rushed to publish a libretto and a piano score, and the first recording of songs from the show was released by Deutsche Grammophon in December 1928.[17] By the time the cast recording of thirteen of the stage songs appeared two years later, over forty cover records had already been released.[18]

Brecht and Weill, like so many others, fled Germany in 1933. (Brecht's flight was occasioned by his left-leaning politics; unlike Weill, he was not a Jew.) Both ultimately arrived in America. But in 1948, the day after Brecht's hearing (as a "friendly witness") with Joseph McCarthy's House Un-American Activities Committee, Brecht boarded a flight and returned to East Berlin. Although Brecht had had few theater performances (and even fewer

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plagiarism, failed to credit the German translator of the Villon poems, one K. L. Ammer, who successfully sued Brecht for a tiny percentage of Brecht's *Dreigroschenoper* royalties. It is as much a testament to the extraordinary popularity of the show as it is to Ammer's litigious success that the royalties Ammer earned ultimately enabled him to buy a small vineyard near Vienna, the produce of which he dubbed "*Dreigroschentropfen*" ("Three Penny Drops"). (Stephen Hinton, *Weill's Musical Theater: Stages of Reform* (Berkeley: University of California Press), 112.) For a list of the borrowings from Villon and the (rather more distant) borrowings from Kipling, see ibid.

[15] On *Die Dreigroschenoper*'s creation and premiere, see especially Funke and Jansen, *Theater am Schiffbauerdamm*, 89-94, and 101-08 (for primary source documents). See also Stephen Hinton, "Introduction," in Edward Harsh, ed., *Die Dreigroschenoper*, The Kurt Weill Edition, vol. I/5, 17-35.

[16] Tony Rayns, "Doubles and Duplicities," in the liner notes to *Die 3groschenoper*, dir. G. W. Pabst (Warner Bros., in association with Tobis Filmkunst, 1931; Criterion Collection, 2007), 12.

[17] Edward Harsh, ed., *Die Dreigroschenoper: A Facsimile of the Holograph Full Score*, The Kurt Weill Edition, vol. IV/1 (New York: Kurt Weill Foundation for Music; Valley Forge, PA: European American Music Corporation, 1996), 2. For a more in-depth history of the libretto, scores, and publications of *Die Dreigroschenoper*, see Stephen Hinton, "Introduction," in Edward Harsh, ed., *Die Dreigroschenoper*, The Kurt Weill Edition, vol. I/5, 13-26.

[18] Tony Rayns, "Doubles and Duplicities," 20. The original cast recording was released in December 1930 by Telefunken; it is now available as *Die Dreigroschenoper: Berlin 1930 Songs & Chansons*, Teldec LC3706, 1990.

satisfactory ones) in the United States, he had spent the intervening decade-and-a-half developing and refining a theory of theater that he looked forward to implementing upon his return to Germany.[19] Two years before, he had expressed in a letter to his former collaborator and set designer Caspar Neher an interest in establishing a theater company in the Theater am Schiffbauerdamm, site of his first great success.[20] And in 1949, the year after his return to what was then East Germany, he founded a company of actors which he christened the Berliner Ensemble (BE), although he would have to wait another four years before the government of the German Democratic Republic finally gave him the Theater am Schiffbauerdamm—fortuitously located on the Eastern side of Berlin—as a permanent home for the troupe. From the earliest days of the new company, Brecht used the BE to bring his theories of theater to life. His wife, the actress Helene Weigel, was the general manager of the BE from its founding, and after Brecht's death in 1949, she worked to continue implementing his ideals. Similarly, after Weigel's death in 1971, subsequent directors of the BE took pains to keep Brecht's working practices, theories, and theatrical-artistic ideologies alive in "Brecht's theater."

As an audience member visiting the theater today, it is hard to miss this Brechtian aspect of the Ensemble's history, a vital element of their self-identification and one which is emblazoned upon the theater's public image. A statue of Brecht sits in the plaza in front of the main doors to the theater, and where the name Theater am Schiffbauerdamm once stood on the side of the building block letters now announce "Berliner Ensemble am Bertolt-Brecht Platz." A small room in the southern tower is dedicated to photos of Brecht, and a bust of the master stands in the lobby. Although changes in managerial structure and artistic direction in

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[19] On Brecht's theories, especially as he would apply them to the Berliner Ensemble, see David Barnett, *A History of the Berliner Ensemble* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 8-38.

[20] Ibid., 39.

the 1990s—not to mention the seismic political changes in the city after the reunification of Germany—would lead theater historian David Barnett to declare that by 1999 the Berliner Ensemble "was no longer the BE," the group continues to cultivate their connection to the legendary playwright.

Moreover, since the Berliner Ensemble's first production of *Die Dreigroschenoper* in 1960 brought the opera back to its inaugural home, audiences have flocked to see Brecht's most famous show in "his" theater. The BE has performed the opera nearly 900 times in the last fifty-five years; in November 2015, Wilson's production celebrated its 250th performance, indicating that the allure of seeing the work in the historical house has not waned.[21]

Sitting in the Theater am Schiffbauerdamm on that May evening in 2014, it would have been impossible not to hear this history echoing in any performance of *Die Dreigoschenoper*. But the crackling record which opened Wilson's production invoked another tradition as well, one which would also take part in the chain reaction of associations and assumptions I forged in the opening lines of the Moritat: record(ing)s of the song. In the decades after the premiere of *Die Dreigroschenoper*, the opera's most famous song would assume pride of place in the jazz and show-tune canon, and recordings by some of the biggest names in popular music appeared one after another. The most famous recording in German is likely that by Lotte Lenya, Weill's wife, an actress and songstress whose career as a femme fatale would reach from Jenny in the 1928 premiere of *Die Dreigroschenoper* to Rosa Klebb in *From Russia With Love* 35 years later.[22]

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[21] The first production after the founding of the BE, directed by Erich Engel, ran from 1960 to 1971 and was performed 497 times; it remains the third most-performed production in Berliner Ensemble History. The production led by Manfred Wekwerth and Konrad Zschiedrich was performed 118 times between 1981 and 1985. (Data available in ibid., 452-58.) The 250th performance of Wilson's production was advertised as such in the BE publicity materials.

[22] *From Russia with Love*, directed by Terence Young (United Artists, 1963).

On the other side of the Atlantic, it was Louis Armstrong and his trumpet that in 1956 blazed the trail of English-language recordings, re-christening "Mackie Messer" as "Mack the Knife." Bobby Darrin's 1959 record spent six weeks as number one on the Billboard Hot 100,[23] and in the same year Eartha Kitt brought her saucy purr to the enumeration of Mackie's exploits.[24] Ella Fitzgerald performed and recorded it in 1960,[25] and in 1968 The Doors performed and recorded it live in Stockholm.[26] Duke Ellington,[27] Frank Sinatra,[28] Lyle Lovett,[29] and even Sting[30] all brought their distinctive voices to the song.[31] In the meantime, a delightfully self-reflexive verse sprang up in the English text, naming Lotte Lenya alongside Jenny Diver, Sukey Tawdry, and Lucy Brown (three characters from the show), which suggests that Lenya's recording had become as significant as any character in the show itself.[32] And in 1960, when

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[23] http://www.billboard.com/archive/charts/1959/hot-100 (accessed 31 July 2015).

[24] *The Fabulous Eartha Kitt* (Kapp, 1959).

[25] *Ella in Berlin: Mack the Knife* (Verve, 1960; re-released Verve, 1993).

[26] At a live performance in Stockholm, The Doors merged this song with the "Alabama Song" from Brecht & Weill's *Der Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*, which they released as a single in 1967.

[27] Ellington performed it with Ella Fitzgerald on the album *Ella and Duke at the Cote D'Azur* (Verve, 1967).

[28] *L.A. Is My Lady* (Qwest, Warner Bros., 1984).

[29] For the soundtrack of the film *Quiz Show*, dir. Robert Redford (Buena Vista Pictures, 1994).

[30] Released on the album *Lost in the Stars: The Music of Kurt Weill* (A&M, 1985). Coincidentally, this album was produced by Hal Willner and Paul M. Young; Willner would compose and arrange the music for Wilson's productions *The Old Woman*, discussed later in this chapter, and *Letter to a Man*; he also provided musical assistance for *Lulu* and *Peter Pan*, which along with *Letter to a Man* will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

[31] Indeed, there have even been two CDs released that are nothing but collections of recordings of "Mack the Knife": *Just Mackie Messer: 19 Versionen, inkl. Originalaufnahme mit Bertolt Brecht* (EFA Medien, Frankfurt am Main. CD EFA 01616-2), and *More Mack the Knife: 20 Versionen* (EFA Medien, Frankfurt am Main. CD EFA 01610-2).

[32] Bobby Darrin sings the final verse: "Jenny Diver, Sukey Tawdry / Miss Lotte Lenya, and Ol' Lucy Brown / Oh, the line forms on the right, babe / now that Mackie's back in town." Armstrong's version

the ever-classy Ella Fitzgerald performed the song live in Berlin, she invoked the place of its performance, the recent spate of recordings, and the thunderous popularity that pushed her to sing it—all while forgetting most of the original lyrics:

> Oh Bobby Darrin and Louis Armstrong / They made a record, oh but they did
> And now Ella, and her fellas / we're making a rec-, a rec- of Mack the Knife.
> ...
> And so we leave you in Berlin town. / Yes we've swung ol' Mackie down
> For the Darrin fans, and for the Louis Armstrong fans, too,
> We told you to look out — look out — look out — look out ol' Mackie's back in town![33]

The success of "Mack the Knife" literally bought the song's independence. By 1960, the original text listing Macheath's exploits had been overwritten by a new text enumerating the successes of the song, essentially elevating the piece itself to the level of the character. Furthermore, these recordings do not appear on albums bearing the title *Die Dreigroschenoper* or *The Threepenny Opera*, but rather on collections of jazz favorites, divorcing the song from its original frame in the opera. By 1960, the song needed neither the story-line of *Die Dreigroschenoper* nor the figure of Mackie Messer for its significance; it was significant in itself. The recordings that Fitzgerald mentions, those by Armstrong and Darin, likely remain the most famous ones; both records, despite having been re-mastered and re-released, still pop and crackle, noisy with the sound of their original medium. Audience members who heard the crackle behind Kurt's voice in the Moritat could thus have associated Kurt's performance not only with Gerron's or Brecht's recordings, but also with the recordings by Armstrong, Darrin, and others. In other words, the crackle of the record pointed both to the history of Brecht

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is only slightly varied: "Sukey Tawdry, Jenny Diver / Lotte Lenya, Sweet Lucy Brown / Oh, the line forms on the right, dears / now that Mackie's back in town."

[33] Transcribed from *Mack the Knife: Ella in Berlin*.

and Weill's opera, and to the extensive recorded history of the song itself. But to understand how the crackling sound of a record, artificially added to the voice of a man singing live onstage, could turn that man into the signifier of a historical object, we must understand how that man onstage "signifies" at all.

Umberto Eco's Theory of Theatrical Semiotics

According to semiotician Umberto Eco, theatrical representation is an example of ostension, the "de-realizing [of] a given object in order to make it stand for an entire class."[34] Another way to put this is that a given set of attributes implies a collection of people (or things) which together form a general class defined by those attributes; what is signified by the ostensive sign is the mean average of this general class. As Eco points out, a focus on different attributes will project a different mean, and therefore a different referent, and it is up to the group of theater practitioners (director, actor, costume designer, and the like) to guide the audience's attention to the most significant attributes, a practice that Eco calls "framing."[35] If an audience is directed to focus on a text (or a song), then the ostended group is the class of all actors who recite that text, the mean of which class is "the character." If, instead, the audience is directed to focus on an actor's appearance (for instance, in the case of an extra who appears wearing raggedy clothes and carrying a sign asking for money), the ostended group is the class of people who *look* like the body onstage and who carry such a sign, and the mean would be, perhaps, a beggar. (Although Eco focuses only on human actors, a stage set falls into the same category: a space with a sink, a stove, an oven, and perhaps tables and chairs

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[34] Umberto Eco, "Semiotics of Theatrical Performance," *The Drama Review* 21, no. 1 (March 1977): 110.

[35] Ibid., 112-13, 116.

ostends a kitchen. A gesture, a manner of speaking—all of these project different classes, which are then "averaged" into the meaning of the singularity we see before us.)

In short, an *actor* represents a *class*, the mean of which is a *character*, which is projected back onto the body onstage. Thus, a circle of signification is formed which we as viewers read instantaneously, and which we may revise and update as new information becomes available. Generally, it is the actor's body that is viewed as the ostensive signifier, and a "believable" performance is one that convinces the viewer that the body we see onstage could credibly belong to that class, or even that the attributes of drunkenness, of fury, of sadness, of "the character" are all actually present in the body onstage.

But it is not only character that can be ostended through bodily or emotional attributes. Indeed, Wilson uses Kurt to ostensively represent the history and significance of the song and show, rather than just the character of Mackie Messer. This is evidenced by Wilson's staging of the song: in Brecht and Weill's original script, the Moritat is not sung by Mackie Messer; rather, it is sung about the infamous Macheath by a man grinding away at an organ. After the song is completed, the stage directions indicate, "The sound of laughter is heard from among the prostitutes on the left, and a man breaks free from among them and rushes away across the stage. All draw back," to which Spelunken-Jenny comments, "That was Mackie Messer [*Das war Mackie Messer*]."[36] Yet in Wilson's production, when Kurt finishes singing and stands

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[36] "*Unter den Huren links ein Gelächter und aus ihrer Mitte löst sich ein Mensch und geht rasch über die ganze Bühne weg. Alle weichen zurück.*" Program for *Die Diegroschenoper*, 8. (For the 1931 edition Brecht slightly revised this direction, changing "über die ganze Bühne" ["across the stage"] to "über den ganzen Platz" ["across the square"]. See Brecht, *Die Dreigroschenoper*, 8.) It is fun to note that the Moritat was a direct result of the sartorial inclinations of the actor Harald Paulsen, who played Macheath in the 1928 premiere and who (the impresario Aufricht would later recall) absolutely refused to appear onstage without a disconcertingly dapper outfit topped off by a "sky-blue tie." It was Brecht who found the solution: "Let's leave him as he is, oversweet and charming. … Weill and I will introduce him with a 'Moritat' that tells of his gruesome and disgraceful deeds. The effect made by his light-blue bow will be all the more curious." For the full quotation, as well as a recollection of the same episode by Weill's

facing the audience he is alone onstage with Spelunken-Jenny, who giggles and announces "das war Mackie Messer," implying that the man onstage is he and identifying Kurt as Mackie *ex post facto.* Although, until this point, it had not been made clear within the production itself that we were seeing Mackie and Jenny, it is worth noting that they were played by two of the more famous actors at the Berliner Ensemble, Stefan Kurt and Angela Winkler, who would likely be recognized by many theater-goers, and that an enormous picture of Mackie/Kurt hung from the street side of the Berliner Ensemble building, not only on the night of the production but also in the days leading up to the performance, as their major advertisement for the show. (Fig. 2.1) The man who had just appeared onstage was clearly the man in the picture. Thus, while the identity of these characters technically became clear only in retrospect (and, in the case of Jenny, Winkler is not identified as such until Bild 5, i.e., Act II Scene 2), it was clear to me—and likely to many other audience members as well—who the characters were. Yet the fact that Jenny used the past tense (*war*, instead of the present *ist*) to refer to Mackie, despite the fact that he was standing right next to her, suggests that Mackie is a figure of the past and that this production is a staging of the myth, not the man. (Indeed, the way he sidled, each night, onto the stage unnoticed, made him seem more like a ghost of the theater than a flesh-and-blood character.)

The cycle of ostensive signification discussed above is not only visual. If an actor *sounds* like a character (or like the audience assumes the character should sound), that is an attribute that will make the performance more believable. But just as the sound can signify a particular character, our example illustrates that the sound can also signify a tradition of performance, "sounding like" all those other performances of a song. This is precisely what Kurt's

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widow Lotte Lenya, see the Introduction to Edward Harsh, ed., *Die Dreigroschenoper*, The Kurt Weill Edition, vol. I/5, 20.

performance of the Moritat does. Details such as heavily rolled R's, the slightly elongated pronunciation of "ein" (in the line "Und Macheath, der hat ein Messer"), the pronunciation of "Ecke" are all reminiscent of Gerron's recording. Moreover, the shakiness of Kurt's voice in the early verses was a cultivated imitation of the sonic idiosyncrasies of early recording media, and the crackling sound of the record framed these attributes of Kurt's performance to ostend a specific recording medium. Thus, the sonic stream functioned as its own ostensive representation, and the *sound* of Kurt's performance acted entirely in line with Eco's vision-based theory.

But the two streams of medial representation here signify independently. Kurt's body represents the man onstage; the sound signifies a record(ing). In ostensive theatrical representations, the norm is for like to represent like. Without the crackling sound of the record, we would assume that Kurt was imitating Gerron. Yet at no point is one tempted to believe that Kurt is playing (i.e., performing the role) of a vinyl disc or a gramophone, as all of his other attributes suggest that he is playing a *man*. This is where the contradiction occurs, a contradiction which Wilson creates and curries by allowing the two medial streams to signify independently; it is thus our first major example of the aesthetic examined in Chapter One. The idea that a sound might "signify a recording," however, is far from trivial, and it is to the sound of the record that we now turn.

The Historical Record

In his 1936 memoire *Death on the Installment Plan* (*Mort à credit*), French novelist Louis-Ferdinand Céline recalls his childhood experiences at the Robert Houdin cinema. "We sat through three shows in a row," he writes. "It was ... one hundred percent silent—no sentences,

no music, no letters, just the whirring of the machine."[37] It is striking that, for a man in the 1930s recalling his early cinematic experiences, there is nothing contradictory about "the whirring of the machine" being a part of "one hundred percent silen[ce]." Indeed, the anecdote beautifully exemplifies the ability to listen "through" the recording media of one's own day. Writing about this sound almost sixty years later, however, Michel Chion identified "the whirring of the machine" as "the fundamental noise, in other words, the sound that refers ultimately to the projection mechanism itself."[38] This contrast illustrates that a sound which is, for one audience, only ambient noise to be ignored in favor of the "real" sonic information (or lack thereof) becomes, for another audience, not only audible but full of meaning *as* ambient noise.

The contrast between Houdin's childhood impressions and Chion's interpretation of the sound of the machine as significantly self-reflexive exemplifies how listening practices evolve alongside recording technologies. The commercial recording industry has, almost since its inception, advertised each new recording technique as less audible than the last. In the terminology of record advertisements, technological improvements offer an increase in fidelity, in a quality of sound that is "truer" to life. In other words, each new medium offers a more *immediate* sound. If one could, as advertisements claimed, believe that the caterwauling Caruso was standing in the same room with you as he sang, then fidelity was aurally akin to the absence of any recording medium at all. Yet as Jonathan Sterne, a historian of sound technologies, has pointed out, the myth of inaudible recording media and "the ideal state for the technology as vanishing mediator would continually be set in conflict with the reality that

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[37] Quoted in Chion, *Film, a Sound Art*, 8.

[38] Ibid.

sound reproduction technologies had their own sonic character."[39] The flip side of the ever-increasing inaudibility of recording media (or at least the marketing of new media as more faithful) was that each generation of listeners learned to hear the "audibility" of the previous medium, the sonic noise that stood in the way of an immediate experience.[40] Similarly, in the case of the movie theater, efforts were made in the early days of the "talkies" to seal cinemas from Céline's whirring of the machine.[41] Thus, for modern listeners, the whirring sound, when we hear it, is noticeable, drawing our attention "to the projection ... itself." As audiences learned to hear the medium itself, the material sound brought with it strong associations, particularly of previous films or recordings and the times and places of their making. For instance, to the modern listener the sound of a record would evoke the period of time when records were the primary means of recording and selling music to the public. More specifically, as in the case of the Moritat, it might bring to mind other recordings the listener has heard that were recorded on the same kind of material, such as the earlier recordings of "Mack the Knife" by Lotte Lenya or Louis Armstrong.

However, the noise that we, as an audience, choose to tune out is highly dependent on the context in which the noise is heard. This is illustrated by my experience in the theater of hearing the crackling record as a significant sound, in contrast to the way I ignored it in the film. The video contained its own noise, including the ambient sounds of the audience and

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[39] Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 225.

[40] Ibid., 215-25.

[41] Emily Ann Thompson, *The Soundscape of Modernity: Architectural Acoustics and the Culture of Listening in America, 1900-1933* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 256-85. Thompson has also carefully documented the rise of the ideal of the silent theater and concert hall, explored in Chapter Four of this dissertation.

the playback murmur of the equipment on which I watched it. First, these additional ambient noises obscured the pops of the record somewhat; the sounds of the live instruments were much more audible, perhaps due to the way the sound was mixed for the video during or after the performance. Second, and more significantly, I am accustomed to "tuning out" sounds of technology when viewing videos and films, and the sound of the record may well have been wiped away by the same mental process that removed the other noises from my perception. Indeed, it was not until a friend pointed out the ambient sounds of the video to me that I noticed even those.[42]

It is for this reason that the issue of recorded or mediated sounds in film presents a particular challenge for Chion. Generally, he categorizes sound in film as onscreen diegetic (part of the action and produced onscreen), off-screen diegetic (part of the action but not produced onscreen), or non-diegetic (not part of the action; a musical soundtrack, for instance). Yet this neat tri-partite division is complicated by "On-the-Air Sound," i.e., sounds over a radio or as play-back from a recording medium that are heard by characters within the action of the scene (and are hence diegetic) yet produced at a time and/or place distant from the action where the sounds are heard (and hence neither truly off-screen diegetic nor non-diegetic). Chion suggests that the interpretation of such sounds rests precisely on the audibility of the recording medium: "If the sound being listened to has technical qualities of directness and presence, it refers back to the circumstances of its original state. If it has aural qualities that highlight its 'recordedness,' and if there is emphasis on the acoustic properties of the place where it is being listened to in the diegesis, we tend to focus on the moment where the

[42] Many thanks to Annelies Andries for this important and insightful observation.

recording is being heard."[43] But in the theater, the sound of a record is not a sound we are trained to block out as "just so much more ambient noise." We hear it specifically because it is out of place. As long as live bodies stand before us, singing, there should be no such sound —unless a record is, somewhere, being played as part of the diegesis of the show. And in the case of Wilson/Kurt's Moritat, it is precisely "the aural qualities that highlight [the] 'recordedness'"—the crackling of the record—that problematize the identification of the sound's source.

If, as the advertisements for new technologies dictate, older media are "noisy," then it is worth meditating on what the word "noise" actually means. As technocultural historian Douglas Kahn has pointed out in his extensive history on noise in the arts, "noise" is a word used in computer and information science, where it means an excess of information that gets in the way of a clear understanding.[44] Mixing this technological view with recording industry terminology, composer R. Murray Schafer wrote of "Hi-Fi" and "Lo-Fi Soundscapes" as having favorable and unfavorable signal to noise ratios, respectively.[45]

Another interpretation of excess information was put forth by media theorist Marshall McLuhan a decade before Schafer's essay appeared. For McLuhan, media may be categorized as "cool" and "hot," where "cool media" contain less information and are therefore "high in

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[43] Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, 77.

[44] Douglas Kahn, *Noise, Water, Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 25-44.

[45] R. Murray Schafer, "The Music of the Environment," in *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music*, ed. Christoph Cox and Daniel Warner (New York: Continuum, 2004), 32-33. Schafer's anti-modern view, which espouses an entropic degeneration of ambient sound in the face of modern technologies, offers an antithetical history to that put forth by technological advertisements, which offer a teleological vector toward ever-higher fidelity recordings, thereby suggesting the tension that is created as new technologies make sound ever more readily available. Yet both come from a deeply held belief that excess noise is bad, that it should be eliminated; Schafer even invoked UNESCO, declaring a noise-free environment to be a human right. (ibid., 36-37.)

participation or completion by the audience," while "hot media" contain more information and "are, therefore, low in participation."[46] But in the case of the Moritat, it was precisely the "heat" of the performance, the informational (and sonic) noise of the record, that forced me to engage with the entire history of the song, not just the single performance I was seeing on the stage that evening. Similar cases of "high participation" have been observed by theorists of artificial effects (both sonic and visual) in the immersive contexts of both theater and cinema. In her work on Cirque du Soleil, Lynda Paul has argued that, during an immersive theatrical production, real world events such as the (potentially artificial) noise of "technical difficulties" draw and cross "meta-theatrical boundaries," reminding us that we are sitting in a theater.[47] A similar sentiment is expressed by film theorist Dan North in his book *Performing Illusions*. North argues that special effects are neither illusive nor deceptive. Rather, by presenting the viewer with impossible visuals, special effects "activate [the viewer] to seek and detect" the illusion.[48] This friction between real and not-real invites the viewer—who knows perfectly well, for instance, that the King Kong they see onscreen cannot actually be carrying Fay Wray to the top of the Empire State Building—to "critical engagement with the film on a

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[46] Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), 23.

[47] Lynda Paul, "Sonic Vegas: Live Virtuality and the Cirque du Soleil" (Ph.D. Diss., Yale University, 2012), 178-81.

[48] Dan North, *Performing Illusions: Cinema, Special Effects and the Virtual Actor* (London: Wallflower Press, 2008), 4. Note that North's defense of special effects is necessitated by the work of earlier theorists, such as Christian Metz, who viewed "realistic" film as lulling a viewer into a pernicious apathy. (Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977).) J. David Bolter and Richard Grusin's "logic of transparent immediacy" splits the difference: they remind the reader that immediacy "does not necessarily commit the viewer to an utterly naive or magical conviction that the representation is the same thing as what it represents," but the negative assertion that viewers are "not necessarily committed" lacks the positive subjectivity of North's "activation." (J. David Bolter and Richard A. Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: MIT Press, 1999), 30.)

technical level," enjoying the synthesis of truth and illusion.[49] Likewise, a sonic medium that draws attention to itself, even if it generates confusion, invites "critical engagement" from the viewer, in this case on the auditory plane.[50]

In the context of a performance of *Die Dreigroschenoper* at the Berliner Ensemble, the assertion that theatrical elements invite critical engagement begs the question: is Wilson's juxtaposition of the work's history with the moment of its performance a form of Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt*? Is it a form of alienation that will make the audience reflect on their identity as audience members, as Brecht theorized and advocated? Indeed, *Die Dreigroschenoper* has elsewhere been used as an example of historical sources being used on modern stages to curry audience self-awareness. The choice of re-writing *The Beggar's Opera* was part of a trend in Berlin in the 1920s to revisit old works. (The preponderance of updated Shakespeare performances, for instance, led one commentator to dub the fad "Hamlet im Smoking.")[51] Theater historian Michael Patterson sees in Brecht's later historical plays (such as *Coriolanus*) an effort to rewrite traditional scripts "in order that we may more objectively study the

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[49] North, *Performing Illusions*, 5.

[50] This engagement, however, is not always positive. In 2014, Christopher Nolan's film *Interstellar* was widely panned for its "poorly mixed" sound effects, which (intentionally) prioritized music and ambient noise over spoken dialogue and even left some viewers wondering whether the projection equipment and sound system in movie theaters were functioning correctly. See, for instance, Ben Child, "Interstellar's sound 'right for an experimental film', says Nolan," *The Guardian*, November 17, 2014, https://www.theguardian.com/film/2014/nov/17/interstellar-sound-christopher-nolan (accessed January 18, 2017); Nick Clark, "Interstellar: In space no one can hear you speak, if Christopher Nolan gets his way; Director has responded to the criticism by saying the sound was exactly how he wanted it," *Independent*, November 16, 2014, http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/news/interstellar-inaudible-in-space-no-one-can-hear-you-speak-if-christopher-nolan-gets-his-way-9864096.html (accessed 18 January 2017).

[51] Stephen Hinton, "*Die Dreigroschenoper*: The 1928 Full Score," in *Die Dreigroschenoper: A Facsimile of the Holograph Full Score*, The Kurt Weill Edition, vol. IV/1, 5.

relevance of a historical situation for our times."[52] Although Patterson does not specifically consider *Die Dreigroschenoper* (his focus being on German theater following the second World War), his analysis resonates well with the Brecht-Weill reworking of an eighteenth-century satire.

Wilson has clearly stated that he does not consider the theatrical stage to be an appropriate place to "educate" an audience, thereby indicating his ideological distance from Brecht's desire to harness the theater in the service of political action.[53] But this does not mean that Wilson's employment of a historical sound does not suggest and invite reflection and comparison. Rather, Wilson conjures in his viewer a more personal form of historical awareness, calling upon the audience's own experiences and associations to deepen their artistic engagement with the show. Investigating the nature of this engagement strikes at the very heart of how media are employed, deployed, and engaged in the present day—both in theater and elsewhere.

The Message of the Medium

A sunny balcony in a Manhattan apartment on the Upper East Side. A red-headed man, forty-something, skinny with a receding hairline and large glasses, asks the slender beauty standing before him if she took the photographs hanging on the walls. "Yeah," she replies. "I dabble."

"Photography's interesting," he tells her, "because, you know, it's a new art form, and a set of aesthetic criteria have not emerged yet."

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[52] Michael Patterson, *German Theatre Today: Post-War Theatre in West and East Germany, Austria and Northern Switzerland* (London: Pitman, 1976), 48-49.

[53] *The Lost Paradise: Arvo Pärt/Robert Wilson*, directed by Günter Atteln (Accentus Music, ACC 20321, 2015), 47:40 and after.

"Aesthetic criteria?" she asks, "You mean, whether it's good or not?"

"The medium enters in as a condition of the work itself," he attempts to clarify, furrowing his brows embarrassedly behind the thick frames of his glasses.

The real joke of this scene in *Annie Hall*, Woody Allen's iconic film of 1977, is the subtitles that appear on the screen below: "*I wonder what she looks like naked,*" Alvy's (Woody Allen) mental monologue whispers as he nervously slouches against the balcony railing. "*I'm not smart enough for him. Hang in there,*" thinks Annie (Dianne Keaton). "*I don't know what I'm saying,*" frets Alvy, "*she senses I'm shallow.*"[54] Yet Alvy's assertion that "the medium enters in as a condition of the work"—pseudo-intellectual pick-up line though it may be—cuts precisely and presciently to the core of scholarship that, over the last two decades, has grappled with the role of "media" in works of art. The humor of the scene is indebted precisely to the cinematic medium making its presence felt in the work: the subtitles (a medium of the written word) imposed over the audio-visual narrative, using a standard film technique to "translate" what the characters are thinking. Unlike a foreign-language film in which the subtitles are supposed to remain somehow transparent, aiding but not changing our understanding of the film, in *Annie Hall* the subtitles assert themselves and demand that we pay attention.

But what, exactly, do I mean by "medium," and how may its condition in art be analyzed? More specifically, when a recording medium is engaged *as* a sound effect (as is the case in Wilson's Moritat), how does this idea of "medium" intersect the idea of "medial stream" I put forth in the introduction? Above, I considered how we as audience members

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[54] *Annie Hall*, dir. Woody Allen (United Artists, 1977). The three subtitles correspond, respectively, to the three statements after "I dabble" that are transcribed above. Media theory is a recurrent theme in the film: in an early scene, in which Alvy and Annie wait in line at a Manhattan movie theater, there is a cameo appearance by none other than Marshall McLuhan.

have learned to hear the sound of media (or not). Now, we must consider media more broadly, and examine the role of the audience in constituting any medium as such.[55]

As the last millennium approached its end, media theorists J. David Bolter and Richard Grusin set out to examine a phenomenon they termed "remediation," "the representation of one medium in another."[56] On its surface, the concept relied on the assertion by media theorists such as Marshall McLuhan that "the 'content' of a medium is always another medium."[57] For McLuhan, this was, strictly speaking, an if-statement rather than a definition —*if* a medium has content, *then* that content is another medium—and the inverse was not necessarily true; a medium could be content-less.[58] Bolter and Grusin took this iconic statement and turned it on its head. "A medium," they declared, "is that which remediates," or in other words, a medium is that whose content is another medium.[59] At first glance, this definition is circular: remediation is defined as one medium whose content is another, while a medium is defined as that which remediates. Yet the significance of remediation is not so much that its *content* is another medium, but rather the *position* that the new medium takes with respect to the old medium or media. New media, Bolter and Grusin argue, define themselves

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[55] The word "medium" is notoriously fraught with popular, philosophical, and scholarly complications: recording media, television media, news media, mass media… the implications can range from a simple carrier of information to a diabolic instrument of hegemonic social control. For an exploration of the many meanings of the word, see W. J. T. Mitchell and Mark B. N. Hansen, "Introduction," in *Critical Terms for Media Studies*, ed. W. J. T. Mitchell and Mark B. N. Hansen (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), vii-xxii.

[56] Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation*, 45.

[57] McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 8.

[58] McLuhan gives the example of the electric light, which, though a medium, is "pure information" and thus content-less (ibid.).

[59] Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation*, 65.

in relation to those media which came before, and thus the old medium is, implicitly or explicitly, always part of the "message" of the new medium. Specifically, each new medium

> appropriates the techniques, forms, and social significance of other media and attempts to rival or refashion them.... A medium in our culture can never operate in isolation, because it must enter into relationships of respect and rivalry with other media.... If someone were to invent a new device for visual representation, its inventors, users, and economic backers would inevitably try to position this device over against film, television, and the various forms of digital graphics. They would inevitably claim that it was better in some way at achieving the real or the authentic, and their claim would involve a redefinition of the real or authentic that favors the new device. *Until they had done this, it would not be apparent that the device was a medium at all.*[60]

This is a powerful definition, as it encompasses technological innovation (this medium does what the old one did—only better!), cultural discourse (we understand this new medium according to the terms in which we discussed the old), and intuitive understanding (I don't know what a medium is, but I know it when I see it—because it does what I expect media to do). In Bolter and Grusin's definition, we see the necessity of advertisements that proclaim each new recording medium superior to the last, because in this act of comparison the function and proper use of the new medium is implicitly explained.

Bolter and Grusin's understanding of media as defined by comparison or contrast is reflected in much of the recent scholarship that engages "media" in the context of theater or live performance. For instance, Philip Auslander, in his work on "liveness," considers television an attempt to re-create the theatre in the home, and then considers what happens when the television screen appears in the space of the theater itself.[61] Similarly, and

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[60] Ibid., 65, emphasis added. For Bolter and Grusin's assertion that new media always define themselves in relation to old, see also ibid., 48, 54-55.

[61] "To move from a discussion of the early relationship between theatre and television to an examination of the current situation of live performance is to confront the irony that whereas television initially sought to replicate and, implicitly, to replace live theatre, live performance itself has developed since that time toward the replication of the discourse of mediatization," Auslander writes. (Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (London; New York: Routledge, 1999), 18-25,

appropriately for our discussion of recording media, writer and sociologist Sarah Thornton has pointed out that the term "live"—as in "live performance"—entered the lexicon only in the 1950s, after being coined by musicians' unions in the United Kingdom and United States in an effort to protect musicians from loss of concert ticket revenue occasioned by increasing access to records.[62] From a more negative perspective, but one which nevertheless illustrates the way that discourse inevitably positions new media against old, both theater historian Arnold Aronson and writer Susan Sontag have claimed that media (read: projections onto screens) and theater stand in fundamental conflict with another, essentially defining each element as that which the other is not.[63] Yet although titles such as Aronson's "Can Theater and Media Speak the Same Language?" suggest that media are somehow external to the theater or traditional theatrical project, Bolter and Grusin's definition deftly re-casts the role of the theater. If a medium is that which remediates, the theatrical performance itself, by displaying and inviting a comparison between the "media" inserted into the performance and the theatrical context that surrounds it, is necessarily a medium as well. This is particularly true

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quotation from 23-24.) Both Auslander and scholars of early cinema have noted that early films also attempted to reproduce the theatrical experience, leading Auslander to wonder why television should wish to reproduce the *theatrical* experience, rather than a cinematic one (ibid., 11-12). On early films recreating the theater, see for instance Martin Miller Marks, *Music and the Silent Film: Contexts and Case Studies, 1895-1924* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 50-51. Similarly, recent work by Christy Thomas considers what the advent of cinema meant for opera, and what opera meant for early cinema in Italy at the beginning of the twentieth century (Christy Thomas, "When Opera Met Film: Casa Ricordi and the Emergence of Cinema, 1905-1920" (Yale University, Ph.D. diss., 2016).) For a fascinating take on how recent film-making is influenced by video games, Skype, and other late-twentieth and early-twenty-first century aesthetics, see Raffi Khatchadourian, "Alternate Endings: Movies that allow you to decide what happens next," *The New Yorker*, Jan. 30, 2017, 46-55.

[62] Sarah Thornton, *Club Cultures: Music, Media, and Subcultural Capital* (Hannover, N.H.: Wesleyan University Press, 1996), 42-43; cited in Sterne, *The Audible Past*, 221.

[63] Arnold Aronson, "Can Theater and Media Speak the Same Language?," in *Looking into the Abyss: Essays on Scenography* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005); Susan Sontag, "Film and Theatre," *TDR: Tulane Drama Review* 11, no. 1 (1966); quoted in Auslander, *Liveness*, 20.

when the medium presented as part of a theatrical performance is immediately evident *as* a medium—a recording medium, say. The insertion of a recorded element into a live performance invites awareness of the remediating position of the theater. Interestingly, Wilson's production of *Die Dreigroschenoper* does not, strictly speaking, remediate any of the old records of the Moritat, since no recording is actually used. Yet by using the *sound* of the recording medium, the production invites a dual awareness of the live and the recorded, and thereby remediates the history of both the work and the space. Or, more accurately, it presents the accumulated layers of history that make up the audience's approach to the work—the slew of old recordings, the statue of Brecht in front of the Theater am Schiffbauerdamm—as forms of mediation, and invites us to consider them in the context of the live performance.[64]

Thus, the apparent contradiction between seeing a man performing live and hearing the sound of a record cuts to the core of remediation discourse. For Bolter and Grusin remediation is built on a foundation of two medial "logics."[65] On the one hand stands *immediacy*, the invisibility of the medium itself. This they view as intimately linked to the perceived "authenticity" or "reality" of a medium.[66] On the other hand is *hypermediation*, a collage or collision of medial technologies and streams that have been juxtaposed with the goal of drawing attention to them as media. This contradictory "double logic of remediation" works in constant tension between "the transparent presentation of the real and the enjoyment of the opacity of media themselves," and it is in this inherent contradiction that they see the

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[64] For more on a theory of "mediations as generating, refashioning, and transforming experiences," see Richard Grusin, "Radical Mediation," *Critical Inquiry* 42, no. 1 (2015): 124-48, quotation on 128.

[65] They use this term to indicate that these logics are not "universal aesthetic truths," but rather "practices of specific groups in specific times (Bolter and Grusin, 21).

[66] For Bolter and Grusin's extended discussion of "the logic of transparent immediacy," see *Remediation*, 21-31.

push-and-pull that generates the remediative discourse and new medial technologies.[67] Robert Houdin's "one hundred percent silen[ce]," examined by Michel Chion as "the fundamental noise, in other words, the sound that refers ultimately to the projection mechanism itself," is a perfect example: technological developments made earlier cinematic projection newly audible, highlighting both the silence of the new technologies and rendering the noise of the old newly significant.

While Bolter and Grusin see both of these logics dating back "at least to the Renaissance," they follow Clement Greenberg in asserting that only with modernism was the aesthetic principle of immediacy thoroughly challenged, and the visibility of the medium celebrated as an artistic statement.[68] It is well beyond the scope of this dissertation to either support or challenge Greenberg's claim. Suffice to say that for Wilson's staging of the Moritat, described above, the audibility of the recording medium was artificially imposed, was necessary for the effect, and that the phenomenon Bolter and Grusin observe in the logic of remediation provided a foundation for my ambiguous experience. The presumed immediacy of the live performance (the authenticity, we might say) was challenged by the suggestion that the song was *not* live, that it was a recording. This challenge was generated by the sound effect of the recording medium, rendering the song performance less "immediate" through the (created) opacity of the recording medium. This, in turn, demanded that I compare the "live" medium

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[67] See "The Logic of Hypermediacy," in ibid., 31-44. Again, a comparison with Auslander illustrates how well Bolter and Grusin's work exemplifies the media studies *Zeitgeist* of the 1990s and early 2000s: Auslander writes that "although the question of authentic television form remained unresolved, early writers on television generally agreed that television's essential properties as a medium are *immediacy* and *intimacy*." (Auslander, *Liveness*, 15, emphasis original.)

[68] Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation*, 21; Clement Greenberg, "Collage," in *Art and Culture: Critical Essays* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965), 70-74, cited in Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation*, 38.

of the performance to the recorded medium of the song, creating a "high-participation" medial situation.

Yet I would argue that the sound of a medium *as a sound effect*, i.e., as an independently significant sonic event, demands a more complex differentiation of remediation than that offered by Bolter and Grusin's immediacy and hypermediation. To illustrate this, I turn to another anecdote by another researcher, one who also experienced confusion between live and recorded sound in a Wilson performance.

Laughing and Crying

In 1985, Susan Letzer Cole, a theater historian working on a book about directors' rehearsal processes, attended a rehearsal of Wilson's *The Golden Windows*. As discussed in the introductory chapter to this dissertation, all of Wilson's actors are amplified, all of the time. As a result, actors' voices are projected into the audience through the same speakers that project sound effects, which may include voices previously recorded by the very actors who are now speaking live. *The Golden Windows* utilized just such an effect, combining pre-recorded and live vocal performance by the same actor, performed and played back simultaneously, to create the effect of multiple vocal tracks coming from a single body. Cole describes the confusion generated by this multiplicity:

> During rehearsal the next day, the actress [Jane Hoffman], her back turned toward David Warrilow as he delivers his lines while artificially amplified, asks if the actor is speaking live or if she is hearing his prerecorded voice on tape. Warrilow laughingly replies, 'Sometimes I don't know either!' But it is a genuine problem for actor and audience. Earlier I find myself asking Cynthia Babak which of the simultaneous sounds of a woman crying and a woman laughing for fifteen seconds is prerecorded. The actress is surprised that it is not clear to the auditor that her crying is live.[69]

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[69] Susan Letzler Cole, *Directors in Rehearsal: A Hidden World* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 157. The production she discusses is *The Golden Windows* [*Die Goldenen Fenster*]: a play in 3 parts, by Robert Wilson. German version with music by Tania Léon, Gavin Bryars, and Johann Pepusch; Premiere: Münchner Kammerspiele, Munich, 1982; performed Theater an der Wien, Wiener Festwochen, Vienna, 1983.

Like *Die Dreigroschenoper*'s Moritat, this example involves an audial ambiguity, enabled by recording medium: Cole (as an observer), and even Hoffman (as a participant), cannot identify which portion of the sound they hear is recorded, and which part is not.

To apply Bolter and Grusin's terminology, the scene is "hypermediated" because the medium of the actor's body and the recorded medium, each of which produce the same voice, are placed against one another, thereby inviting comparison and drawing attention to the artificiality (i.e., non-immediacy) of at least part of what's going on. Indeed, the multiplicity of voices upon which a listener may focus creates an effect similar to what Chion terms "polyrhythm and polytonality" of filmic sound, which creates "the presence of multiple centers of attention."[70] The idea of multiple sonic centers of attention is strikingly like Bolter and Grusin's description of "hypermediacy" as having no single point of view, in contrast to the careful perspective of immediate art.[71] Yet the scene actually requires the transparency of the recording medium for its effect. Without this, there would be no difficulty identifying the live crying from the prerecorded voice, and the simultaneity of the medial events would be less jarring. In the case of the Moritat, on the other hand, the confusion arises from using the sound *of a medium* forcing multiple perspectives onto a single live performance event.

Kammerspiele, Munich, 1982; performed Theater an der Wien, Wiener Festwochen, Vienna, 1983. United States Version, with music by Tania Léon, Gavin Bryars, and Hans Peter Kuhn, performed at BAM Next Wave Festival, New York City, 1985. Cole observed rehearsals for the BAM performance from June through October, 1985; the BAM premiere took place on October 22. For this chapter Cole also observed rehearsals of Wilson's *Hamletmaschine* at NYU's Tisch School of the Arts, May-June 1986. For Hans Peter Kuhn's own discussion of his work on *The Golden Windows*, see Hans Peter Kuhn, "Über die Arbeiten mit Robert Wilson: Klang im Raum: Sprache, Musik und Geräusch als Teil der theatral Raumerfahrung," in *Im Hörraum vor der Schaubühne: Theatersound von Hans Peter Kuhn für Robert Wilson und von Leigh Landy für Heiner Müller* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2015), 60-62. For more on Warrilow's work with Wilson, see Laurence Shyer, *Robert Wilson and His Collaborators* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1989), 16-21.

[70] Chion, *Film, a Sound Art*, 123.

[71] Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation*, 38.

This suggests an alternate categorization of remediation, and specifically of the "positioning" of one medial device against another, as either synchronic or diachronic. I do not mean for these terms to replace immediacy and hypermediation, nor do I intend for them to correspond bijectively with Bolter and Grusin's terms. Rather, they are meant to intersect Bolter and Grusin's "double logic," thereby creating a more nuanced understanding of recording media (whether audio, visual, or both) in live performance. By "synchronic remediation," I mean a hypermediated situation like that in the scene from *The Golden Windows*: audiences are invited to compare medial events to those occurring at the same time, in the same place. By "diachronic remediation," on the other hand, I mean a medium which is "positioned against" media and medial events that came before it or after it. For instance, the development of recording technologies detailed by Jonathan Sterne is a perfect example of diachronic remediation. Each new recording medium promised to be more faithful than the one that came before: a vinyl record was advertised as sounding "better" than a wax record, a magnetic tape "better" than a vinyl record, a CD "better" than a tape. In this case, Bolter and Grusin's claim that each new medium is marketed as "better … at achieving the real or the authentic" is spot-on, directly reflecting the commercial discourse that each new medium or technological iteration is a step on the path to a more perfect, more immediate representation.[72]

The Moritat, then, also offers a case of simulated diachronic remediation. While we are, on the one hand, invited to compare the "recorded" song to the live performance happening synchronically, the more profound comparison is with the histor(icit)y of the song

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[72] Here, I am discussing the teleological claims of advertisements for technology; Bolter and Grusin specifically look to avoid technological determinism in their analyses, and their section on technological determinism includes not only positive views of technological development but also negative ones (Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation*, 75-78).

(and the theater) that came before. It does not just highlight the difference between live and recorded sounds, between live and recorded performances. Rather, this remediation creates a temporal telescopic effect. The hypermediation of Stefan Kurt and the sound of the recording medium conjures eighty years of musical and theatrical history, leading at least this audience member to believe that the first performance of the song was still present, in recorded form, in the theatrical event taking place today. This effect was made possible by the audibility of a medium that, in its original conception, was supposed to have remained silent. In turn, it was the remediative context of the sound effect—a live performance in a theater with considerable history—that made the sound's significance so multi-faceted.

The sound of a record, however, does not merely signify "recording medium." Rather, the sound of a record can also be significant as precisely that: the sound *of a record*, the sound of a piece of vinyl into whose grooves music has been scratched. And this sound, in and of itself, can conjure powerful associations: the endless spinning of the plate of plastic; the time that elapses between when I drop the needle and when the music actually begins. In the remainder of this chapter, I shall focus on two other scenes in which Wilson uses the sound of a record as a sonic event significant in and of itself, thereby placing the theories of remediation outlined above with theories of both music and media in musico-dramatic contexts.

Setting the Record Straight

At the center of a darkened stage stand a table and two chairs. A small box and a large pile of sausages lie to their left, and a tall, thin doorway stands unobtrusively in the back right corner. All of the furniture is white, although the sausages are bright red. A writer (Willem Dafoe) sits in one of the chairs. His hair is black, his face is white; his eyes are dark and huge

and his tongue is bright red. In his hands, he holds a white tube with an orange end. The sausages, lying in their hulking pile behind him, are the focus of his muttered meditation: how, he wonders, should he eat the sausages—with vodka, or with bread? He pauses, and lifts the tube to his lips. At this very moment, the scratching of a record is heard over the loudspeakers. Music begins to play, a lilting piano accompaniment, soon to be joined by a violin tune, punctuated by the pops and crackles so typical of the recording medium. And, just as the piano accompaniment starts, the man removes the tube from his lips and blows out a puff of smoke: the tube, I now see, was an enormous cigarette, comically disproportionate (as so many props in this show are). Yet this retrospective recognition of the visual channel is also accompanied by a new, *ex post facto* identification and attribution of sound and sonic meaning: the scratching sound of the record was also the sound of the man's inhalation. It is a loud, absurd, artificial caricature of an inhalation, to be sure, but then, absurdity lies at the heart of *The Old Woman*, Wilson's production based on the writings of Daniil Kharms.[73]

Or at least that's how I (who at the time I saw the show was already deeply immersed in thinking about the sounds of records in Wilson) experienced the scene. Another description could go something like this: the writer sits at a table, holding a giant cigarette in his hand. He lifts it to his lips, and the (presumably artificial) sound of his inhalation—scratchy, crackly, emphysemic—comes through the speakers of the theater. He pulls the cigarette away, breathes out a puff of smoke… And the lilting sound of a violin, encrusted with the pops and crackles of a phonograph record, is heard through the speakers. At this instant, one realizes that the presumed sound of the inhalation was actually the sound of a record on which a needle was

[73] *The Old Woman* premiered at the Manchester International Festival on July 4, 2013. I saw it performed at BAM on July 29, 2014. The scene described here is identified in the *BAMbill* as Scene 7; in the video supplied by the Wilson archive, it begins at 01:04:53.

scratching at an empty groove, playing the audible sound of the "silence" before the music begins.

Ambiguity, the idea that identity is mutable—that one plus one may equal two, and two can itself equal one, as he likes to say[74]—lies at the heart of Wilson's theater. This is especially true in *The Old Woman*, which hinges on the idea that both Dafoe and Baryshnikov play two sides of the same character: even their wigs are designed to mirror one another. In a written comment for the Brooklyn Academy of Music's playbill, Dafoe directly addressed this ambiguity, and explained how it had underlain the creation of the show. "When Bob proposed *The Old Woman*," he writes, "it wasn't at all clear which character I would play. The text was divided simply between two performers, 'A' and 'B.' I asked Bob who was 'A' and who was 'B' and he told me he didn't know yet."[75] Wilson's confirmed Dafoe's story; on the same page of the *BAMbill* he comments, "I think of the two as one: the writer. And during the course of the play, they change: A becomes B and B becomes A, because A and B are one whole, not two."[76] At the moment of the record/cigarette sound, the idea of mutability and identity-through-duality was brought to life in the sonic realm. We should moreover observe that this variability of meaning offered a way for Wilson both to humorously accompany the drag on the giant cigarette and to avoid merely "illustrating" Dafoe's gestures, a central tenet of Wilson's aesthetic discussed at length in Chapter One, and a precursor to the sound effects that will be explored in Chapter Three.

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[74] Robert Wilson, inverviewed (with Rufus Wainwright) by John Rockwell at the BAM 2014 Next Wave Festival, http://www.bam.org/rwrw (accessed 21 February 2015), 12:16-12:30.

[75] "From Robert Wilson," in the program for *The Old Woman* (BAMBill: 2014 Winter/Spring Season, June 2014).

[76] "From Willem Dafoe," in the program for *The Old Woman* (BAMBill: 2014 Winter/Spring Season, June 2014).

Yet the power of the scene comes not merely from the ambiguity of the sound's significance. Rather, is comes from the fact that the single sound effect points in two directions at once, suggesting two different (yet simultaneous) relationships between sonic and visual medial streams. In the former description, where I heard the sound of the record before I heard the sound of the breath, the sonic and visual streams seem to function "polyphonically." Each medial stream (the scratching sound, the man placing the cigarette to his lips) functioned independently, and the sound gestured to a *later* sonic event rather than a simultaneous visual one. (Indeed, Ben Brantley in the *New York Times* described the show as "A 100-minute, *fugue-like riff* on a short story by the avant-garde Soviet writer Daniil Kharms."[77]) In the latter description, on the other hand, which first heard the sound as that of an inhalation, the audio and visual events related "homophonically," with the sound and image (both related to the writer taking a drag on his cigarette) signifying simultaneously and synchronically.[78] Whether it first sticks to the visual stream, and then later signifies "record," or first points to the record and only later sticks to the visual stream, it inevitably takes on a double meaning that crosses the audio-visual divide.

If the sound engages in two different temporal relationships with the visual events onstage, however, one is tempted to ask: might this use of the sound of the recording medium also engage my definitions of synchronic and diachronic remediation? And, is there something to be said about the fact that it is the sound of the human breath—that most immediate of

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[77] Ben Brantley, "A Duo, Dynamism and a Dead Body: 'The Old Woman,' With Willem Dafoe and Mikhail Baryshnikov," *The New York Times*, June 23, 2014, https://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/24/theater/the-old-woman-with-willem-dafoe-and-mikhail-baryshnikov.html (accessed January 17, 2017), emphasis added.

[78] For more on audio-visual "polyphony" in theater, see especially the work of David Roesner, cited in my Introduction, footnote 20. See also Michel Chion, "Lines and Points: Horizontal and Vertical Perspectives on Audiovisual Relations," in *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, 35-65.

events—that is represented by the sound of a medium? One of the defining features of the logic of immediacy is, in Bolter and Grusin's understanding, "some necessary contact point between the medium and what it represents." They clarify:

> For those who believe in the immediacy of photography … the contact point is the light that is reflected from the objects onto the film. This light establishes an immediate relationship between the photograph and the object. For theorists of linear-perspective painting and perhaps for some painters, the contact point is the mathematical relationship established between the supposed objects and their projection on the canvas.[79]

And for adherents of analog recordings, it is the relationship between the vibrations of a sound and the vibrations of a needle slicing that sound into a recording medium that render these recordings more "faithful" than their digital counterparts. This definition is remarkably close to a definition proposed by media theorist Friedrich Kittler a few years before Bolter and Grusin's book was published. "Media," Kittler writes, "correlate in the real itself to the materiality they deal with. Photo plates inscribe chemical traces of light, phonograph records inscribe mechanical traces of sound." (This is in contrast with "arts," which "entertain only symbolic relations to the sensory fields they presuppose.")[80]

Kittler's interest in the article quoted aboves lies in the interaction of medial streams in Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk*, and this definition of "medium" thus leads him to search in Wagner's libretti for a true dramatic justification for the sonic events (i.e., singing) of the music

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[79] Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation*, 30.

[80] Friedrich Kittler, "World-Breath: On Wagner's Media Technology," in *Opera Through Other Eyes*, ed. David J Levin (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 215-16. Compare this to *Optical Media*, the series of lectures Kittler gave five years after the World-Breath article appeared and where, following McLuhan, Kittler defines media as "the intersecting points [*Schnittstellen*] or interfaces between technologies, on the one hand, and bodies, on the other." (Friedrich A. Kittler, *Optical Media: Berlin Lectures 1999*, trans. Anthony Enns (Cambridge; Malden, MA: Polity, 2010), 29.) In both cases, an intersection is fundamental. But in *Optical Media* it has been expanded to include the interface between the technology and the receiver, whereas in "World-Breath" media is defined by a point of contact with that which the medium presents.

drama.[81] And where might this sonic justification, this point of contact between the medium and the materiality, be found? For Kittler, it is the breath, the warm wafting within ribcages that pervades Wagner's *Ring* cycle libretti.[82] Kittler's assertion that it was only Wagner's use of the breath that could link the dramatic and musical streams—or, more generally, could justify a sonic event through verbal means—is untenable as a historical position. One need only think of the singing birds of the troubadours, or the sighing "Ohi-mé's" of the great Renaissance madrigalists, or Goethe's comparison of Faust's "lisping song" to the vibrations of the Aeolian harp, to find a similar verbo-acoustic mutual justification.[83] Yet Kittler's idea that the breath offers a point of contact between individual media is tantalizing in the context of this scene from *The Old Woman*, where the sound of a breath is literally the sound of a medium.

If the power of the breath is its position between silence and sound, then the crackling of a record between the drop of the needle and the onset of the music is similarly positioned to mediate this continuum. And Wilson's scene is ideally poised to link these two media: the breath and the record. Indeed, the breath becomes, very literally, the medium of the music. Or, perhaps, the music becomes the medium of the breath. If the heart of remediation was a comparison, then what we have here is a loop of remediation, one in which a single sound points to two different potential media (the breath and the record), one of which attaches to a visual event (the cigarette) and one of which attaches to a sonic event (the music on the

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[81] Kittler, "World-Breath," 217-18.

[82] Kittler offers specific examples from the libretti of *Siegfried* (see 220), *Lohengrin* (222-223), *Tristan und Isolde* (228).

[83] "Es schwebet nun in unbestimmten Tönen / Mein lispelnd Lied, der Äolsharfe gleich," Goethe, Johann Wolfgang, *Faust: Eine Tragödie*, lines 27-28. (Available in Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust: Der Tragödie erster und zweiter Teil, Urfaust*, ed. Erich Trunz (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1996), 9.)

record). Thus, the result is a loop of synchronic remediation. The audience is asked to interpret a single sound, a single medium, that points in two directions at once.

In the scene from *The Old Woman*, the sound of the music ends abruptly, when Mikhail Baryshnikov's character knocks on a door (a sound effect that shall be considered at length in the next chapter). In more general terms, however, there is another form of ambiguity inherent in the popping and crackling sound of the record: the silence that occurs before the music begins also occurs at the end, after the music has stopped, and there is no way to know, based on the sound alone, which version of the sound one hears. This sound of silence, the "whirring of the machine," may be either beginning or end—and so we move to the final example of the chapter, one which will link the particular sound of a spinning record with the opening chords of Wilson's *Die Dreigroschenoper*.

Going in Circles

On a wide stage bathed in green-gray light are six figures. Five wear military uniforms, one the white robes of a doctor. One wears a sling around his arm. All stare out at the audience with vacant eyes, their skin ashen in the deathly pallor of the lights. They sway slightly back and forth, on their feet or in the seats where they sit. In the background low whirring sound whispers, a pop and a crackle repeating at constant intervals. It is a record that plays nothing but a single groove, devoid of music, like the empty whirring of a record after a song has long since ended and only empty space remains. We have seen this stage set before, as a train station filled with the infectious excitement of soldiers heading to war and the families who will see them off. But now, as Wilson's production *1914* draws to a close, the set has become the train

itself, carrying wrecked soldiers back from the front.[84] Each speaks only a short fragment of a sentence, over and over, but these fragments pile atop one another like so many lifeless bodies. "The shelling beat the crap out of my heart," says one. "I am dead, so I will not salute," says another. And still they sway, and still the whirring record spins.[85]

There is something hypnotic about this looped sound, about the mechanical insistence of the hushed whirring. The scene seems so long, and at the same time so short; so drawn out, yet also completely static. The figures onstage speak their lines, then repeat them, insistently, over and over. The whirring record ticks away time like a metronome; it marks the passing seconds, yet always returns to the same place. Such descriptions of Wilson's work have appeared elsewhere: repetitive, hypnotic, "a theater of the continuous present."[86]

Past, present, future. Time is everywhere in Wilson's work, and it is no coincidence that one of the characters in *1914* is named "Time." A tall, thin figure with long white hair and a black velvet dress, Time appears at irregular intervals throughout the show, reciting coldly distanced monologues about the historical events leading up to the Great War: a telegram from the Austro-Hungarian government to the Serbian government, 28 July 1914; the confiscation of horses as part of the mobilization efforts. Yet despite Time's enumeration of the events that push Europe forward into the apocalypse, the words of the first scene seem to

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[84] *1914* premiered at the Statskové divadlo (Estates Theater), Prague, on April 30, 2014; I saw it on September 18 & 19, 2015, at the Statskové divadlo.

[85] The scene described is from Scene 18; the Czech text, as spoken in the show, reads, respectively: "...z té palby mám srdce na maděru..." and "... jsem mrtvej, tak nebudu salutovat..." Translations by Howard Lotker, from the program sold at the theater (Prague: Národní divadlo, Činohra ND 2013-2014, 2014), 90, Czech, and 187, translation.

[86] Arved Ashby, "Minimalist Opera," in *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century Opera*, ed. Mervyn Cooke (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 251. For more on time in minimalist music in general, and Philip Glass in particular, see Tristan Evans, "Postmodern Unfoldings? Narrative, Temporality and Repetition in Postminimal Music," in *Shared Meanings in the Film Music of Philip Glass: Music, Multimedia and Postminimalism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2015), 53-81.

suggest that the more things change, the more they stay the same. "The end of the good old days," says the Pessimist (Vladimír Javorský), one of the two other figures, along with Time, who provide meta-narrative commentary on the events of the play. "Rite of Spring, In Search of Lost Time," says the Optimist (Václav Postránecký). And as the assembled chorus of voices begin shouting out their opinions on the possibility of war, Time rises from a trap in the floor of the stage and announces, "Wien bleibt Wien. [*Vienna remains Vienna.*]"[87] The world may be tumbling forward, caught in the grip of a river that would sweep an old world order into the brutality of the modern age, but Vienna remains. The spring bursts forth, a time of renewal; we look backwards to the time we have lost; but Vienna remains. Such circularity occurs on a much smaller scale as well, embodied in sound: the empty record, through its mechanical circularity, becomes the sound of the train on its track. Indeed, this sonic effect allows another repetition, this one visual, to be imbued with multiple meanings: the set, previously the train station, now suggests—thanks to the sound of the turning record/wheels—the train itself. This visual repetition creates another temporal cycle, much larger than the small circle that the phonograph stylus traces: the first year of the war has passed, soldiers are wounded or dead, but the visual space in which they stand keeps returning.

For musicologist Arved Ashby, Wilson's "hypnotic power … stems from the new relationships he effects between clock time, Aristotelian stage time (time as the characters on stage might feel its passing) and body time (the viewer's own breathing and heart-rate)."[88] The passage of time in the theater and our perception thereof has been much discussed; often

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[87] Scene 1. The Czech text, as spoken in the show, reads: "PESSIMIST: Konec starých časů. OPTIMIST: Svěcení jara, Hledání ztraceného času." The phrase in German is spoken in German in the show. Translations by Howard Lotker, from the *1914* Program, 36, Czech, and 134-35, translation).

[88] Ashby, "Minimalist Opera," 249.

scholarship focuses on large-scale temporal flow: the flow of narrative, the overall time of a performance.[89] Ashby, however, points to a much smaller time scale: breathing and heart-rate. We have already seen, in the scene from *The Old Woman*, above, an example of a record as the sound of breathing. And this scene, from *1914*, the hypnotically repetitive spin of the record could well correspond to the beats of a heart. The small-scale repetition of the record also has powerful resonances with other quintessential aspects of Wilson's soundscapes. His psittacistic speech consists of many tiny fragments of text, repeated over and over with only minimal variation. The opening moments of *Die Dreigroschenoper*, described on the very first page of this chapter, also utilize a tiny fragment of sound, repeated over and over: the looped fragment of grinding organ chords.

And so we arrive back where we began: at the beginning of *Die Dreigroschenoper*, but now with the live music coming from the pit rather than the (apparently) recorded voice on the stage. "The minimalists," Ashby writes, "foregrounded repetition in an attempt to annihilate ambiguity."[90] But in the multimedial space of a Wilson production, which harnesses the possibility for a sound to signify independently and ostensively as discussed above, no such annihilation takes place. Rather, it actually *creates* ambiguity: the sound of the record in *Die Dreigroschenoper*, far from a mechanical annihilation of multiple meanings, opens out a full vista of possibilities that would otherwise have remained, at best, fleeting fragments in the

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[89] One of the most famous examples is musicologist Carl Dahlhaus's distinction between *Erzählzeit* and *erzählte Zeit*, in *Vom Musikdrama zur Literaturoper: Aufsätze zur neueren Operngeschichte* (Munich: E. Katzbichler, 1983), 25-32. Dahlhaus's binary is taken up and complicated by Clemens Risi, who suggests a tripartite temporal division—the time of an opera plot, the history of the opera's composition, and the moment of performance—in his article "'Gefühlte Zeit.' Zur Performativität von Opernaufführungen," in *Möglichkeitsräume: Zur Performativität von sensorischer Wahrnehmung*, ed. Christina Lechtermann, Kirsten Wagner, and Horst Wenzel (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 2007), 153.

[90] Ashby, "Minimalist Opera," 247.

mind of select theater-goers. Even the sound of a record itself, so imbued with previous eras of musical performance, technologies, and cultures, invites a temporal reflection, comparing the old medium to the experience before us onstage. Appropriating Bolter and Grusin's terminology, we might call it a "hypertemporality," placing historical moments, mediated through our own experiences, in juxtaposition with the events onstage before us. Just as Wilson creates "new relationships" between Aristotelian and biological time, the sound of the record creates new relationships between historical and dramaturgical time in the meta-theatrical play of diachronic remediation.

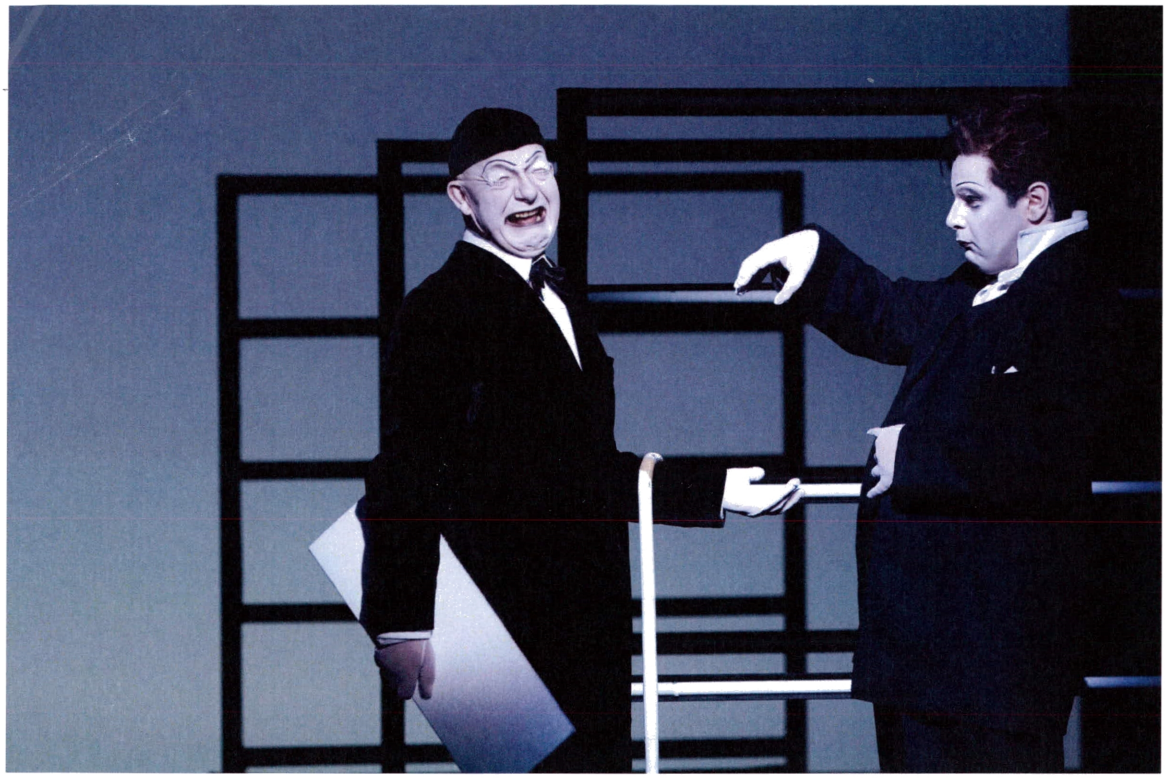

FIGURE 3.1: The beggar Filch (Georgios Tsivanoglou, right) pays Jonathan Jeremiah Peachum (Jürgen Holtz, left). *Die Dreigroschenoper*, Scene 1, Berliner Ensemble. Photograph by Lesley Leslie-Spinks.

CHAPTER THREE

Take Care of the Sounds, and the Sense Will Take Care of Itself: Sonic Props and the Properties of Sound

> "But how do you invent a sound?" Milo inquired. "Oh, that's very easy," [the Soundkeeper] said. "First you must decide exactly what the sounds looks like, for each sound has its own exact shape and size. Then you make some of them here in the shop, and grind each one three times into an invisible powder, and throw a little of each into the air every time you need it."
>
> —Norton Juster, *The Phantom Tollbooth*[1]

> *To combat the increasing callousness of mankind, Jonathan Peachum, a man of business, has opened a shop where the poorest of the poor can acquire an exterior that will touch the hardest of hearts.*
>
> —projected title, *Die Dreigroschenoper*, Act I, Scene 1[2]

The curtain rises on the first scene of Robert Wilson's *Die Dreigroschenoper*.[3] The prologue of the Moritat has ended, and the action of the opera is now set to begin. On the darkened stage, a single spotlight illuminates a single man. His white face bobs atop his black-clad body. "Awake!" he cries. "You ramshackle Christian, awake!"[4] Dawn's early light begins to creep up the black backdrop of the stage, turning the man's body into a dark silhouette in front of the cold blue glow. People, he pontificates, are hard-hearted. Sights and sounds that

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[1] Norton Juster, *The Phantom Tollbooth* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961; 1996), 155.

[2] "Um der zunehmenden Verhärtung der Menschen zu begegnen hatte der Geschäftsmann Jonathan Peachum einen Laden eröffnet, in dem die Elendsten der Elenden jenes Aussehen erhielten, das zu den immer verstockteren Herzen sprach." German text from the Berliner Ensemble program for *Die Dreigroschenoper* (Berlin: Berliner Ensemble, Theater am Schiffbauerdam, Programmheft Nr. 91, 2007), 8; and Bertolt Brecht, *Die Dreigroschenoper* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 1955), 9. In general, I will provide citations for the German text from both the Suhrkamp edition and the Berliner Ensemble program, henceforth cited as "Brecht, *Die Dreigroschenoper*" and "*Die Diegroschenoper* Program," respectively. Translation from Bertolt Brecht, *The Threepenny Opera; Baal; The Mother*, trans. Ralph Manheim and John Willett, 1st Arcade pbk. ed. (New York: Arcade, 1993), 67; henceforth cited as "Mannheim and Willett, trans., *The Threepenny Opera*." Throughout this chapter, translations of *Die Dreigroschenoper*/*The Threepenny Opera* are, except where noted, reproduced or adapted from Ralph Manheim and John Willett; all other translations are my own.

[3] *Die Dreigroschenoper* premiered at the Berliner Ensemble on September 27, 2007; I saw it on July 5, 2013; May 27 & 28, 2014; and September 26 & 27, 2015. For more detailed information on the production, see my Appendix.

[4] "Wach' auf, du verrotteter Christ!" (German text from Brecht, *Die Dreigroschenoper*, 9; *Die Diegroschenoper* Program, 8. Translation from Mannheim and Willett, trans., *The Threepenny Opera*, 67.)

once affected them quickly lose their power, and they develop a "frightening ability" to ignore, overlook, not see. Thus, the opportunistic businessman has made it his business to find that special something that can re-capture a spectator's gaze.[5]

The man sings, the backdrop brightens, and the set, such as it is, comes into view: more a jumble of black lines than any identifiable place. The lines slowly reveal themselves as nine black frames, each a square standing upright on the stage, about the height of a person, and divided into four equal stripes, horizontally or vertically. A silhouette in a long black dress and stubby high-heeled shoes hulks at the left rear corner of the stage, occasionally rattling a glass of ice cubes in her right hand. Then, from stage left, into this blue-black eternal dawn where the twilight of human feeling is belabored and the remnants of human sensibility besmirched, toddles a beggar.[6] He walks with a tenuous gait to the center of the stage, lifts his left hand in the air, and spins in a neat circle. The motion, on the almost empty stage, is accompanied by the long, high squeak of a door. Stopping in front of the man in black, he inquires politely, "Peachum & Co.?"

Bertolt Brecht was, like his character, a man who wanted to make people pay attention, a man aware of the power of the spectator's gaze. He was also a man who liked to spell things out. His stage directions for the Peachum's shop include all the necessary accoutrements of the trade.

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[5] "Ja, es muß etwas Neues geschehen. Mein Geschäft ist zu schwierig, denn mein Geschäft ist es, das menschliche Mitleid zu erwecken. Es gibt einige wenige Dinge, die den Menschen erschüttern, einige wenige, aber das Schlimme ist, daß sie, mehrmals angewendet, schon nicht mehr wirken. Denn der Mensch hat die furchtbare Fähigkeit, sich gleichsam nach eigenem Belieben gefühllos zu machen." (Brecht, *Die Dreigroschenoper*, 9; *Die Diegroschenoper* Program, 9-10.) ("Something new is needed. My business is too hard, for my business is arousing human sympathy. There are a few things that stir men's souls, just a few, but the trouble is that after repeated use they lose their effect. Because man has the abominable gift of being able to deaden his feelings at will, so to speak." (Mannheim and Willett, trans., *The Threepenny Opera*, 67.))

[6] Throughout, right and left refer to the spectator's perspective.

> Jonathan Jeremiah Peachum's Beggar's Wardrobe ... Everywhere crutches, wheelchairs, and old clothes. Also signs with biblical verses.[-]

It is a cluttered space, full of the material detritus that will make the members of Peachum's firm look like the dregs of society, and it is against this background that the scene of the play will be set: the cutthroat urges of capitalism that afflict even—or perhaps especially—the poorest of the poor. In Wilson's production, however, the stage itself is hardly set at all. Gone are the piles of crutches, wheel chairs, and old clothes that Brecht specified. Gone are the doors and walls of Peachum's enterprise and abode. Gone even is the money with which the beggar pays his dues to the firm. Gone, that is, *visually*. What remains is a handful of carefully selected, carefully crafted *sounds*—the jangling of coins, the squeak of doors—that, I shall argue, set the scene as powerfully as any physical object.

In fact, Wilson's translation of Brecht's visual directives into the sonic realm began before Peachum's spotlight had even been turned on. The projected titles specified by Brecht had, instead, been spoken aloud by a rich, shaky, guttural voice over the theater speakers. In a particularly deft touch, Wilson selected Jürgen Holtz, one of the most famous actors at the Berliner Ensemble and the man playing none other than Peachum, to read the line aloud. In other words, it is Peachum himself, that purveyor of appearances designed to catch the eye, who is now directing our attention *sonically*. "Hear, hear!" Wilson and Peachum seem to say. "You can't just see Peachum's shop: you'll have to listen for it." Yet, as I shall demonstrate, theater scholarship has often followed the notion implicit in Brecht's/Peachum's projection:

[-] "Jonathan Jeremiah Peachums Bettlergarderoben. ... Überall Krücken, Krüppelwägen und alte Kleider. Sowie Plakate mit Bibelsprüchen." (*Die Diegroschenoper* Program, 8.) Translation my own. This stage direction was excised for the 1931 "literary edition" of the play; on the discrepancy between the Suhrkamp edition (which prints Brecht's 1931 revisions) and the BE program, see Chapter Two, footnote 1, as well as my Appendix. The quotation cited here is reproduced from the program, and can also be found in Edward Harsh, ed., *Die Dreigroschenoper: Ein Stück mit Musik in einem Vorspiel und acht Bildern nach dem Englischen des John Gay*, The Kurt Weill Edition, vol. I/5 (New York: Kurt Weill Foundation for Music; Valley Forge, PA: European American Music Corporation, 1996), 66.

that it is the external appearance—and thus, the visual stream—that will touch the hearts of passers-by. As for the sonic stream, it is the job of speech, that purveyor of semantic meaning, to clarify what we see. Nor were Brecht and Peachum alone in suggesting that sound should be secondary to meaning. In *Alice in Wonderland*, a befuddled Alice tells a Duchess with a sharp chin and sharper tongue that she is having trouble speaking sensibly. "Take care of the sense, and the sounds will take care of themselves," the moralizing Duchess tells her.[8] *Pace* the Duchess, this chapter focuses on precisely the opposite: situations where one must take care of the *sound* to establish the sense.

The previous two chapters of this dissertation have dealt closely with Wilson's interest in splitting sonic and visual streams in his productions. Chapter One considered Wilson's statements on the topic, while Chapter Two began with an inversion of an oft-observed event in Wilson's work—that a voice seems split from its producing body—and examined how Wilson makes a voice seem not to be emanating from an onstage body at all. This chapter considers another type of audio-visual splitting: when a sound is used to "stand in" for an object that is not physically present on the stage, but which is nevertheless both comprehensible and even tangible because of carefully constructed sound effects. In particular, I focus on two physical objects which, on Wilson's stages, are often created exclusively through sound and gesture: doors and coins. The choice of these particular objects rests on four observations. First, both of these objects occur repeatedly in Wilson's productions, whether a narrative production (such as *Die Dreigroschenoper*) or a more "postdramatic" production (such as *The Old Woman*); in almost all cases the physical object is absent. Second, in all cases the "missing" object is evoked by a loud, distinctive, and obviously

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[8] Lewis Carroll, *The Annotated Alice, the Definitive Edition: Alice's Adventures in Wonderland & Through the Looking Glass*, ed. Martin Gardner (New York: Norton, 2000), 92.

artificial sound. Sometimes, the same sound patch is used repeatedly, and sometimes the sound patch is varied; both situations shall be examined. Third, the use of both doors and coins requires a bodily motion. In the case of coins, this is the relatively small motion of one person handing the coin to another; in the case of a door, it is the motion of going through (plus perhaps opening and/or closing) the door. Fourthly, doors and coins both come with deeply embedded and contingent meanings: inclusion versus exclusion, exchange and movement of goods, and the interpersonal relationships that these material objects create and perpetuate.

When a sound stands in for a material object, the visual and sonic streams are necessarily mismatched, since the audience hears a sound "caused by" an object which is not seen onstage. (In reality, it is a sound effect played on a keyboard by a single person in the orchestra pit.) On the other hand, these objects cannot be conjured with sound alone: the visual stream—in particular, the actors' gestures—is vital to the object's "legibility." Yet even discussing sound and gesture is not enough. In the Introductory Chapter, I quoted an oft-repeated observation that Wilson's theater "combines architectural structures, images, speech, dance, and music."[9] This chapter will engage each of these theatrical elements in turn, since, as we shall see, the sonic stream will interact with all of the visual elements (architectural structures, images, and bodily movement) listed here. (Note, however, that I shall consider "gesture" rather than the more formalized concept "dance," since I am especially interested in how bodily motion may point to and signify objects on stage. Following the general tendency of this dissertation, I shall also expand "music" to "sound.") The chapter is divided into sub-sections that each examine one element from the list above, placing Wilson's use of

[9] "Franz Kafka meets Rudolf Heß: Spiegel-Gespräch mit Robert Wilson über Hören, Sehen und Spielen mit Hellmuth Karasek und Urs Jenny," in *Der Spiegel*, October 1987, reproduced in Manfred Brauneck, ed., *Theater im 20. Jahrhundert: Programmschriften, Stilperioden, Kommentare* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, 1982, 2009), 205.

that element in dialogue with existing scholarship relating to the element in question. Through the lens of these various elements, this chapter shall investigate how the complex array of actions, sounds, and (some) physical objects that are present on Wilson's stages work together to create a network of associations, a network which allows each viewer to experience the production in a personalized way. Like Peachum, Wilson wants to push us to see, to listen, to perceive.

(Many More Than) Three Pennies

Let's return to the scene of Wilson's *Die Dreigroschenoper* described in the opening pages of this chapter. The beggar (played by Georgios Tsivanoglou) goes by the name of Charles Filch. He wears a long black coat and a starched, unbuttoned collar that stands out to the sides, and sports a bruised black eye staring out from the Wilsonian whiteness of his face, the result (we shall learn) of a beating by Peachum's goons. No one may beg in London without a membership in Peachum's company. Membership buys the right to beg on a few blocks of the city, and the necessary costume and accessories for the job. Membership in this venture does not come cheap, but as the black eye attests, lacking a membership costs more.

Peachum looks Filch up and down appraisingly. The two men haggle over the price of Filch's membership. A price finally agreed upon, Filch opens the left side of his coat (the side facing the audience), leans over, and pretends to dip his flat-open right hand "into" a pocket of his suit. (His hand never disappears; it always remains on the outside of his coat, although the coat has many pockets.) Pulling his hand "out," he forms a fist, which he brings to eye-level, then pulls it back as though operating a lever. The *DING* of an old-fashioned cash register rings through the theater. "*Bitte sehr*," Filch remarks, and opens his fist, releasing the sound of copious coins falling into Peachum's palm. The cascade of coins is enormous—it takes a full

fifteen seconds from start to finish—indicating a far larger collection of coins than could ever have been contained in Filch's fist.[10] As the coins jangle on, Filch stands with a smug expression on his face. Peachum stares intently into his palm. (Fig. 3.1) Then, as Peachum's hand, arm, and finally whole body begin to bend under the weight of the pecuniary deluge, he slowly turns his face to the audience. His features are broken by the motions of cackling laughter—excessive, grotesque, and completely silent. We, the audience, *see* (but do not hear) the mirth of a man who has just received a fortune while we *hear* (but do not see) the waterfall of coins. Filch again "pulls the lever" of the cash register (accompanied by the same *DING* we heard previously), the coin-fall stops, Peachum drops his face back into a frown and snaps his fist shut. He slowly lowers his hand to his pocket, and the sound of the coins—now falling into Peachum's pocket—begins its clamorous rattle once again. This time the thunderous coin fall takes eight seconds; Peachum uses the pause in the action to turn once again toward the audience and cackle—inaudibly—in glee. It is a chilling picture. And a picture, they say, is worth a thousand words.

Peachum begins explaining Filch's assignment as a new member of the firm. The hulking female figure in the stubby high heels, who has been lurking in the background, turns. She raises her right hand in a long arc to the level of the top of the frames, drags her arm from right to left between two of them—*WHOOSH*, imaginary curtain rings sound as they are "drawn aside." She steps forward, hiccoughs, turns, and again draws her arm between the frames, this time from left to right. *WHOOSH* go the curtain rings again. The "curtain" closed, she turns to face the audience and steps into the light, illuminating her face. Frau Peachum (Traute Hoess) —drunk, wobbling, still hiccoughing—has arrived. She hands Filch his new costume, a filthy,

[10] All timings are taken from the video recording made available to me by the Robert Wilson Archive.

dilapidated wool coat. He hesitates: this costume will come with no starched collar, let alone buttons therefor. Peachum pulls off Filch's own coat, a relatively good one—*RIIIPPP* we hear. Filch grimaces, then shrugs himself into the new coat, raises his right hand to chest level and pushes it to the side. The squeak of a door is again heard, and Filch steps out onto the street. Grinning, rubbing his thumb against his fingers in anticipation of the beggar's bounty that is about to befall him, he walks offstage.

If the picture of Peachum's glee speaks as loudly as any words might, it is partly due to the very real, and very loud, sound that has just occurred. The coins have rattled us all: the loudness of the sound, its artificiality, but also the web of associations—humorous, tragic, capitalistic—that the sound has conjured. Far more has been rendered with this money than simply service. The combination of sound and gesture create the virtual boundaries of Peachum's shop, but the way the door spins Filch around when he enters the shop (when he exits the shop, the door simply opens to the side), suggests that Peachum is about to take him for a ride. These two examples—Filch's coins and Peachum's door—will provide a point of comparison for the subsequent analyses of coins and doors on Wilson's stage. They also suggest a point of departure for our analysis: the gestures of the mime.

Gesture I: Mime(tic) Theater

"Pantomime is best described by the use of the object illusion," writes Leonard Pitt, an actor and mime. "The illusions created are of conventional objects we are all familiar with; rope, stairway, or door.... The pantomimist... create[s] a world out of nothing."[11] The

[11] Quoted in Annette Lust, *From the Greek Mimes to Marcel Marceau and Beyond: Mimes, Actors, Pierrots, and Clowns, A Chronicle of the Many Visages of Mime in the Theatre* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2000), 6. I use the term "pantomime" to refer to the type of physical silent theater practiced by, for instance, Marcel Marceau and described by Pitt. For more on the literary genre known as "pantomime," see

pantomimist describes, through silent gesture alone, objects which he holds and spaces through which he moves. Mimes, on the other hand, "use the actual object," but "only as long as it serves as a vehicle for the story. The object is never an end in itself. Rather than the spectators focusing on what is not there, they are allowed to focus on what is being communicated."[12] For Pitt, pantomime is best exemplified by Marcel Marceau, while he names Charlie Chaplin and Dimitri the Clown as practitioners of mime. An almost identical categorization was offered by R.G. Davis, founder of the San Francisco Mime Troupe, in a 1962 article titled "The Method of Mime." In describing the difference between pantomime and mime, Davis writes that Marceau, as a pantomimist, "deals with 'nothing there'; it is always an imaginary door, balloon, or ice-cream cone," while Chaplin, the consummate mime, "works with tangibles."[13]

The immediate difference, then, between pantomime and mime has to do with the existence (or not) of a physical object: pantomimes do not use a real object, mimes do. The more essential difference, however, has to do with the role that the object (absent or present, respectively) plays in the panto/mime's performance. For a pantomime, the focus is on creating the "illusionistic object," making it evident to the spectator. Thence Pitt's observation that pantomimes tend to work with conventional objects, and ones which may be communicated by basic patterns of gesture or behavior. The reason for this is obvious: a

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Hartmut Vollmer, *Die literarische Pantomime: Studien zu einer Literaturgattung der Moderne* (Bielefeld: Aisthesis, 2011).

[12] Quoted in Lust, *From the Greek Mimes to Marcel Marceau and Beyond*, 7. Pitt differentiates between "literal mime" (described in the main text) and "abstract mime." Since abstract mime "seeks to express the universals of human experience without referring to the specifics of character, plot, or anecdote," it does not represent the kind of gesture described in this chapter, I have thus exclude it from my discussion here. See also Patrice Pavis, *Languages of the Stage: Essays in the Semiology of the Theatre* (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1982), 56.

[13] R.G. Davis, "Method in Mime," *The Tulane Drama Review* 6, no. 4 (Jun. 1962): 62.

conventional object is more easily communicated than an arcane one when no object is present. When confined to gestures, it is easier to describe a door than a flying buttress, a balloon than a weathervane. Moreover, the audience is likely to interpret any given illusionistic object as a generic object, rather than as a highly specific one: all externalities being equal, gestures of eating with a utensil, filling a cup from a source with a handle, or hitting a ball with a mallet are more likely to read as "fork," "tap," and "croquet mallet," respectively, than as "runcible spoon," "samovar," and (*Wonderland* notwithstanding) "flamingo."[14]

For the mime, on the other hand, the object is already tangible. Thus, the mime can focus on *using* the object to evoke a variety of meanings. A prop's physical deployment may project meaning in two different ways. The first focuses on the physical properties—shape, size, resemblance to other physical objects—of the prop itself. The second uses the prop to invoke less tangible things. "A prop is itself plus the entire dramatic potential" thereof, Davis writes: "a malleable property such as the cane may appear as baseball bat, pool cue, nail file or Harlequin's slapstick." On the other hand, "the impossible Murphy bed in *One O'Clock* [in which an inebriated Charlie Chaplin haplessly attempts to access his bed at one o'clock in the morning] becomes an image of all spiteful opposition."[15] Chaplin's art as a mime lies in his ability to express the tribulation caused by the bed using only his own body (and his top hat), and the way his body interacts with the physical object of the bed.

Now recall the scene from *Die Dreigroschenoper*, described above, in which Filch pays Peachum. Filch reaches into the pocket of his coat, then pulls the lever on a cash register and

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[14] In Chapter 8 of *Alice in Wonderland*, Alice is memorably invited to play a game of croquet with the Queen of Hearts in which "the croquet balls were live hedgehogs, and the mallets live flamingoes." (Carroll, *The Annotated Alice*, 84.)

[15] Davis, "Method in Mime," 62. The film referenced, a 1916 Chaplin short, is usually titled *One A.M.*

releases a stream of coins. Peachum lets the coins fall into his open hand, and his arm begins to sink under the weight of the payment. Peachum drops the coins into his pocket. These gestures seem to fall into both and neither of the categories of mime described above. There is no prop onstage, suggesting the object illusion of the pantomime, yet the actors do not need to describe the physicality of the absent object with their motions. Thus, the gestures are not descriptive in the sense of pantomime. Rather, they are active. The actors "use" objects (pulling the crank of a cash register, dropping coins into a pocket), much like the mime. This is enabled by the sound effect: the cascading sound of coins allows Peachum's bodily response to the (nonexistent) coins to be read as such, even without the coin being physically described. Moreover, the coins represent not merely payment, but the vast dramatic potential of the act of payment: greed, usury, extravagance in the face of penury. In a more practical sense, Wilson's sounds are literally instigated by the actors' gestures, since the sound patch of the coin is "played" by Joe Bauer when he sees the actor make the relevant gesture.[16]

The existent- vs nonexistent-object binary that lies behind the pantomime-mime contrast provides both a foundation and an impetus for a more recent work on material objects and props in the theater. Andrew Sofer begins his 2003 monograph *The Stage Life of Props* with a specific rejection of Prague School semiotician Petr Bogatryev's assertion that anything can represent an object in the theater, including "the mimed gesture of the actor."[17] Sofer, in contrast, demands that a "prop" be able to be manipulated by an actor (i.e., picked up), and

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[16] For more on Joe Bauer, see the Introduction to this dissertation.

[17] Andrew Sofer, *The Stage Life of Props* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), 7-9. The article against which he argues is Petr Bogatryev, "Semiotics in the Folk Theater," in *Semiotics of Art: Prague School Contributions*, ed. Ladislav Matejka and Irwin R. Titunik (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1976), 33–50.

be able to be moved.[18] (The latter of these necessary conditions is meant to differentiate a "prop" from a "stage set," yet overlooks the fact that doors, although presumably part of a "set," are moved by actors when they enter and exit.) Sofer's specific goal, as he states it, is to "rescu[e] the material object from the dematerialized sign"[19]—and thus the necessity of rejecting Bogatryev's mimed gestures. Yet Bogatryev and Sofer share more than Sofer likes to admit: for Bogatryev, all objects and actions onstage are "signs of a material object's sign," representing not only the object itself, but also the abstract connotations of the object. Thus, a gesture representing a tangible object is significant because of the intangible associations of both gesture and prop; Sofer's interest, too, lies precisely in the intangible associations of props. The very first page of Sofer's book posits that props produce both intratextual and intertextual associations: a handkerchief, Sofer suggests, recalls Desdemona's fate even when not in the context of Shakespeare; similarly, a young man holding a skull reminds us of Hamlet (regardless of the play in which he finds himself).[20]

Let us, then, consider an alternate line of inquiry, one that cuts across the easy distinction of the existent-nonexistent binary. Instead of asking whether or not an object onstage exists we might consider how other elements play a role in the signification of the visible object—even when that object is present. Or, put differently: how do we make sense of what we see?

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[18] Sofer, *The Stage Life of Props*, 11-12.

[19] Ibid., 16. Indeed, Sofer's introductory chapter is tellingly titled "Rematerializing the Prop."

[20] Ibid., 1-2.

Sound: Rendering the Hyper-Real

"Take care of the sense and the sounds will take care of themselves." Like so many of the things Alice hears in Wonderland, the Duchess's nonsensical admonition is an ingenious variation on an English proverb of the day: *Take care of the pence, and the pounds will take care of themselves.*[21] But let's take the word play in another direction for a moment. We might observe that it is the weight—the "pounds"—of Filch's payment to Peachum that enable the event's physical expression: the depth of Peachum's sinkage under the weight of the money implies a great many coins. And, at the same time, the length of the coin fall, effected by the sound, implies that the single pound sterling Filch has payed Peachum must be made up of very many smaller pence coins, totaling a heavy weight (i.e., many pounds) indeed.[22] In taking care of the weight, the meaning of the coins has become clear. But "sense," of course, can have two significations: meaning, and also sensation. (Lewis Carroll himself might well have agreed: an author who writes of a "vorple blade" going "snicker-snack," and describes the homeward-bound march of a victorious youth with the verb "galumphing," must certainly have appreciated the rich significance of words that evoke sensations through their sound.[23]) I now focus on the second of these.

Film scholar Michel Chion's landmark work on cinematic sound grew out of an observation regarding the interaction of sonic and visual streams in cinema. Much of what we

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[21] Carroll, *The Annotated Alice*, 92n6.

[22] At the time both *Alice in Wonderland* and *Die Dreigroschenoper* were written, a single pound was comprised of no fewer than 240 pence.

[23] Both quotations come from the famed poem "Jabberwocky," from the first chapter of Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There*. (For the full text, see Carroll, *The Annotated Alice*, 148-50.) When Alice asks Humpty Dumpty to explain the poem to her, it is his attempts to intellectualize words that enjoy meaning as pure sound that make him sound pedantic and ridiculous. (See ibid., 214-216.)

believe we experience visually (and much of what we recall as being a visual experience), he asserted, is actually experienced only sonically: consider, for example, a punch, which occurs too fast for us to see, but whose sound lets us know not only *when* it has happened, but also a great deal about *how* it has happened. "Most falls, blows, and explosions on the screen, simulated to some extent or created from the impact of nonresistant materials, only take on consistency and materiality through sound," he writes.[24] Chion terms this audio-visual effect —or, more specifically, the effect of sound on visual perception—"added value," observing that "when sound adds meaning to the image, the meaning seems to emanate from the image itself."[25] In his conception of sound as supplying meaning for a (potentially invisible) image, Chion's work paves a pathway for understanding Wilson's sound effects for non-existent (and thus inevitably invisible) props.

Sound adds value in cinema, Chion contends, not by recreating the sound that would be produced by a particular event in the real world, but rather by relaying information that will be experienced (or perceived) multi-sensorially, as "clumps of agglomerated sensations" associated with the situation producing the sound.[26] In other words, the "thud" of a heavy falling object need not reproduce the sound of a real object of considerable mass striking a particular substance (grass, asphalt, a hard-wood floor). Instead, it should communicate the *idea* of heaviness, "the violence of the fall."[27] Similarly, the sound of an explosion need not be

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[24] Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 5.

[25] Michel Chion, "Audio-Vision and Sound," in *Sound*, ed. Patricia Kruth and Henry Stobart (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 202.

[26] Chion, *Audio-Vision*, 112.

[27] Michel Chion, *Film, a Sound Art*, trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 237.

a live recording of an exploding building, but instead a sonic projection of power, force, and enormity: Emily Ann Thompson recounts that early Hollywood sound technicians would tear a piece of paper in close proximity to a microphone to "represent the collapse of a building."[28] Similarly, sound designer Walter Murch gives the example of walking on cornstarch, which "records as a better footstep in snow than snow itself."[29]

"These effects do indeed have an audiovisual *cause*," Chion observes, "but the result of the combination does not consist in perceptions of sounds and images as such, but rather in perceptions of space, matter, volume, meaning, expression, and organization of space and time." Thus, these effects are predominantly the result of mental, physical, and emotional associations rather than the reality or verisimilitude of the sound itself. Chion, himself very much aware of this duality of significance, specified in a later work that such sonically added value implies a "form of listening," and is thus actually "somewhere between a code and a simulacrum," moving between "pure convention or even rhetoric" and "physically reproducing a direct effect."[30] This effect of sound on the senses, this auditory impetus to multi-sensory perception, is what Chion terms sonic "rendering."

The very title of Chion's chapter on rendering, "The Real and the Rendered," indicates that sonically-rendered events are not merely not identical to their real-world counterparts.

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[28] Emily Ann Thompson, "Effecting Sound," unpublished manuscript, quoted in Carolyn Abbate, "Sound Object Lessons," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 39, no. 3 (Fall 2016): 818.

[29] Walter Murch, "Foreword" to Chion, *Audio-Vision*, xix.

[30] Chion, *Film, a Sound Art*, 238. Indeed, Chion elsewhere comments that it is, perhaps, inappropriate to speak of *audiorisual* effects, and suggests instead the term "*audiorisogenic effects*." (Chion, "Audio-Vision and Sound," in *Sound*, 203.) For an approach to analyzing live theater that takes into account all five senses, see Steve Di Benedetto, *The Provocation of the Senses in Contemporary Theatre* (New York: Routledge, 2010).

Rather, they are actually capable of undermining The Real. "The new sound reality has *no difficulty supplanting immediated acoustical reality* in strength, presence, and impact," Chion writes.

> It's a form of listening that is no longer perceived as a reproduction, as an image (with all this usually implies in terms of loss and distortion of reality), but as *a more direct and immediate contact with the event.* When an image has more presence than reality it tends to substitute for it, even as it denies its status of image.[31]

Yet, at the same time, the sound will be remembered in a diminished form, as "merely" one element of the event witnessed onscreen. As such, Chion's rendered audo-visual effects strongly recall what semiotician Umberto Eco termed "hyperreality": the sound "suppl[ies] a sign that will then be forgotten as such."[32] In more general terms, hyperreality is (for Eco) a form of representation that promises, first, that the imitation is every bit as life-like as the original; and second, that it is actually even "more" so—brighter colors, richer textures, louder sounds.[33]

Although Chion's work focuses on the cinema, where sound and image are inevitably linked and where sound effects have been influenced by the power of sound systems such as

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[31] Chion, *Audio-Vision*, 103, emphases added. The sound of Peachum's coins helps create the sense of a tangible object because of the physical effect that such an object *would* have on the actor if the larger-than-life sound represented an object that really existed. For Rick Altman, a scholar of sound in silent film who can always be counted on for a Marxist reading, the "materiality" of sound is, in the modern age, intimately connected to commercial viability: "Consider the familiar Memorex commercial: the best sound is glass-breaking sound; sound quality depends on the ability to affect the visible. Concrete and comodifiable, the visible alone appears fully real." On the one hand, Altman's observation seems to offer an inversion of Chion's value-adding sound, suggesting that sound's value occurs only when it is added to an image of a tangible object. On the other hand, however, he seems to reinscribe precisely the image-based priority that Jonathan Sterne has observed (see below), and that Chion's work seeks to overturn. (Rick Altman, *Silent Film Sound* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 6.)

[32] Umberto Eco, *Travels in Hyperreality: Essays* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986), 7.

[33] In one particularly memorable passage, Eco describes a visit to San Simeon (William Randolph Heart's real-life Xanadu, although whether closer to the marvels of Kublai Khan's Pleasure-dome or Citizen Kane's mansion it may be hard to say): "It is like making love in a confessional with a prostitute dressed in a prelate's liturgical robes reciting Baudelaire while ten electronic organs reproduce the *Well-Tempered Clavier* played by Scriabin." Ibid., 23-24.

Dolby, a number of theater practitioners have expressed philosophies of theatrical representation that are strikingly reminiscent of Chion's rendering. Specifically, they observe that an event in the theater is constructed of a network of sensory associations rather than precise reproductions of the real world. Beverly Emmons, a lighting designer who collaborated with Wilson for thirteen years, has discussed the theater design as a form of emotional and sensory manipulation that will evoke a desired effect:

> It's all about what lands emotionally for the audience. If you want Niagara Falls, you've got to go make a movie. As soon as you're in the theater you can't have Niagara Falls precisely. But what is it about Niagara Falls that you're after: the thundering intensity of it, the vertical motion? In the theater that's what we're about—the essence.[34]

(At this point, Michel Chion would likely point out that even in a movie theater you can't "have Niagara Falls precisely": the Niagara Falls on the cinema screen is a combination of a moving photograph of the Falls and of sound effects designed to render the "thundering intensity" of the place.) In even more sweeping terms, the playwright Tony Kushner, in discussing the work of director Ivo van Hove, has stated that minimal staging

> make[s] the audience confront the failure to create completely convincing illusions—and the power of the theater *is* that failure to create convincing illusions. It is the creation of a double consciousness. Ivo's impulse is to take that very seriously, and to ask the audience to collaborate in making this thing real.[35]

In other words, while the impact of sound in cinema is overlooked because the illusion it creates may be perceived entirely passively, in theater it is an absence, a failure, that pulls the audience in as an active collaborator.

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[34] Interview with Emmons in Babak Ebrahimian, ed., *Sculpting Space in the Theater: Conversations with the Top Set, Light and Costume Designers* (Burlington, MA: Focal Press, 2006), 52. For more on Emmons's work with Wilson, see Laurence Shyer, *Robert Wilson and His Collaborators* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1989), 191-202.

[35] Rebecca Mead, "Theatre Laid Bare," *The New Yorker*, October 26, 2015, 54.

Wilson's sound effects discussed here do not have to "add value" to a visual event which they illustrate, since the prop to which the sound technically relates is not present. Yet the idea of a sound as "rendering clumps of agglomerated sensations" provides a powerful tool for analyzing the sounds that he employs. Or, to put it more strongly, it is precisely *because* Wilson is free from attempting to match a sound with an image that he is able to employ the sonic lexicon of rendered effects to represent not only an object, but also a web of associations surrounding the object. Peachum's cascade of coins (itself a Niagara of sorts) relays both clumps of sensations (the weight of the falling coins), and clumps of *associations*—greed, avarice, exorbitant usury. Moreover, it does so through the particular properties of the sound itself: the sound effect is very loud, and therefore brings with it a physical impact; it lasts a long time, not only rendering a large quantity but also creating a sense of discomfort when the audience begins to wonder "how much longer is this going to go on?" Yet the sound effect signifies more than just the currency that the sound renders: it also indicates a relationship between two characters. For instance, Peachum's bodily motions, bending under the weight of the coins, suggest that, figuratively as well as literally, he carries far more weight in this relationship. Thus, Wilson offers something akin to the Sound Keeper whom Milo visits on his journey beyond the Phantom Tollbooth, and who appears in the epigraph to this chapter: for each sound produced in the theater, one must begin by deciding what it "looks like." But for Wilson, who builds dramatic worlds on bare stages, there is more: he must also decide what visual events, emotions, and social interactions "sound like."

For Chion, then, the power of sound in a multimedial context is its ability to conjure a wide range of mental and emotional associations. For Andrew Sofer, the power of props lies in their ability to invoke intra- and intertextual associations. So what about when sounds *are* props, and vice versa? In Act V of Wilson's production of *Lulu*, for instance, the heroine

(Angela Winkler), now working as a prostitute in London, is approached by Jack the Ripper (Sabin Tambrea). A brief, tragically comic scene ensues as they bargain over the Lulu's price: first eight shillings, then five, then four, three...

> Lulu: Two ... come on — give me one shilling.
> Jack: [*gives her money*][36]

Lulu stretches out her hand, and Jack, raising one finger, traces a long arc in the air, finally letting his fingertip hang a few inches above Lulu's palm. As he does so, a *DING*, the sound of a bell on an old-fashioned cash-register till, is projected from the speakers. It is the sound (effect) of a single shilling, a single coin landing in Lulu's palm. Or, more precisely, it renders the *idea* of a coin landing in Lulu's palm: a single coin dropped into a hand typically makes no sound, and what sound it might make is certainly not that of a bell.

Lulu places the "coin" in her dress, bringing her hand to the left corner of her décolletage. "I must get change…" demands Jack. "For the bus!" Resignedly, Lulu reaches back toward her neckline, brings her fingertips together, raises her hand to about twelve inches above Jack's, and "drops" a handful of imaginary coins into Jack's palm. The action is accompanied by the jangling of small change, a stark contrast to the ringing of the cash register that represented the single, larger coin seconds before. At once, a comparison is invited: the resonant, almost "shiny" *DING* of Jack's coin, versus the slightly muffled clinking that marks

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[36] Reproduced from the Berliner Ensemble program for *Lulu* (Berlin: Berliner Ensemble, Theater am Schiffbauerdam, Programmheft Nr. 130, 2011), 107. The exchange is performed in English (Lulu is now in London); the stage directions are in German, and I have translated them here. As performed in Wilson's show, the scene is a heavily edited version of Act V Sc. 13 of Frank Wedekind's 1894 *Die Büchse der Pandora*, available in Frank Wedekind, "Die Büchse der Pandora (1894)," in *Frank Wedekind Werke: Kritische Studienausgabe*, ed. Hartmut Vinçon (Darmstadt: Jürgen Hausser, 1994), 303-08. The critical edition and the BE program will henceforth be cited as "Wedekind, 'Die Büchse der Pandora (1894),'" and "*Lulu* Program," respectively.

Lulu premiered at the Berliner Ensemble on April 12, 2011; I saw it at the Berliner Ensemble on June 8, 2013. For more on the production, see my Appendix.

Lulu's dispersal of change. The sparkling hopefulness of the first payment has given way to the dull realization that she has been swindled by her customer.

Yet this is not the only comparison—sonic or narrative—invited by the sound of Lulu's small change. Shortly before, the coins paid to Lulu by her client Mr. Hopkins had been expressed by the very same sound patch. (Fig. 3.2) Another example occurs in Act III: Schigolch (Jürgen Holtz), a pale, white-haired figure in Lulu's life who plays for her the roles of both father and pimp, appears at the home of Dr. Franz Schöning, Lulu's newest husband, to ask for a cash handout. He begins by observing that it has been long ere he last saw his Lulu, and reminisces over the old days. Lulu is unsympathetic. "Don't you remember," Schigolch demands, "how I pulled you naked from the dog-den?" I remember, she replies, "how you hung me from your hands and beat me with a belt until I bled, yes I still remember this as though it happened today." Her tone changes, from a false wistfulness to a blunt forcefulness: "How much do you want?" "Two hundred," he replies.[37] Resignedly, she raises her right hand to the left corner of her dress's neckline, brings her fingertips together, places her hand a few inches above his, and drops a handful of coins into his palm. The sound is precisely the same as that which will accompany Jack's change. The repetition of the sound patch—a sonic leitmotif of sorts—is both poignant and telling. Is Jack the Ripper really any different than this ghostly "father" figure who demands so much from her (including sexual favors)? She pays him with the same gesture, her coins make the same sound.

[37] "SCHIGOLCH: Weißt du noch wie ich dich nackt aus dem Hundeloch zog? — LULU: Wie du mich an den Händen aufgehängt hast und mir mit den Hosenträgern den Hintern zerbläut, dessen erinnere ich mich noch wie heute. Wieviel willst du?" (Quotation from *Lulu* Program, 55.) In Wedekind's play the exchange takes place in Act II Sc. 4; see Wedekind, "Die Büchse der Pandora (1894)," 187.

FIGURE 3.2: Mr. Hopkins (Alexander Ebeert) pays Lulu (Angela Winkler). *Lulu*, Act V, Berliner Ensemble. Photograph by Lesley Leslie-Spinks.

Moreover, for someone who has seen both *Die Dreigroschenoper* and *Lulu* repeatedly, as I have, the rendering of a coin through the confluence of sound and pantomimed gesture invites an intertextual comparison as well. Although Wilson does not use the same sound patches in *Die Dreigroschenoper* and *Lulu*, both productions use the sounds of coins as well as the sound of an old-fashioned cash register. Whereas Peachum, proprietor of a shop, would likely have a cash register, Lulu, working alone in a rooftop apartment in the seedy end of London, would have none. The scene between Peachum and Filch is played for comedy, but is accompanied by the non-too-subtle message that even the beggars' world is home to runaway capitalism and rampant corruption. The single "ding" of Lulu's single "coin" renders the fragility and vulnerability of the heroine, now nearing the end of her road.

Faust offers another case of using sound to link scenes within a single production; although it is not a coin that is exchanged in *Faust*, the idea of payment (and the human debts that payment can create) plays an important role. At the beginning of *Faust* (Scene 5 in Wilson's production), Mephistopheles demands a drop of blood—"a very special juice," he tells Faust —to seal the deal.[38] Faust traces his finger through a small arc (not unlike Jack the Ripper's, although Faust's action is considerably smaller, initiated at the wrist rather than at the shoulder), and flicks a "drop" of blood into Mephistopheles' outstretched palm. A *DROP* echoes through the theater. Two scenes later, Faust, hoping to woo the ill-fated Margarete, demands that Mephistopheles conjure a gift for her. Although Mephistopheles balks at first,

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[38] "Blut ist ein ganz besondrer Saft." (From the Berliner Ensemble program for *Faust* (Berlin: Berliner Ensemble, Theater am Schiffbauerdam, Programmheft Nr. 170, 2015), 38.) In Goethe's original, this is line 1740 of *Faust I*, available in Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust: Der Tragödie erster und zweiter Teil, Urfaust*, ed. Erich Trunz (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1996), 58.

Faust I and II premiered at the Berliner Ensemble on April 22, 2015; I saw it on October 1, and November 19 & 22, 2015, at the Berliner Ensemble.

when Faust holds out his hand Mephistopheles flicks his wrist and the same *DROP* sound is heard as he delivers a handful of jewels. In the first case, the sound is a heightened, artificial sound (a real drop of blood would make no sound) that defines the moment when the blood falls and the bargain is completed. In the second case, however, the *DROP* sound is not actually a sonic illustration of Mephistopheles' gift: he provides Faust with earrings and necklace, nothing liquid. But the sound links this transaction to the previous one. Faust signed the contract, now Mephistopheles has to pay up. Faust's drop of blood has become the jewels conjured by Mephistopheles. One sound patch has taken on a duel significance, linking the range of associations conjured by each scene. But to speak of sonic significance, we must engage an underlying question: how do actions in the theater signify at all?

Images: A Theory of Theatrical Depiction

According to Jorge Luis Borges, Averroës, the medieval philosopher of al-Andalus, once heard a traveler describe a performance he had seen in Sin-i Kalal [Canton]. In a house of painted wood, with many rows of balconies built one on top of the other, related the traveler, one abu-al-Hasan, a group of musicians sat on a raised terrace singing and playing the tambour and the lute. On this terrace were also "some fifteen or twenty" people, "who sang and conversed among themselves. [They] suffered imprisonment, but no one could see the jail; they rode upon horses, but the horse was not to be seen; they waged battle, but the swords were of bamboo; they died, and then they walked again."[39]

[39] Jorge Luis Borges, "Averroës' Search," in *Collected Fictions*, trans. Andrew Hurley (New York: Penguin, 1998), 238-39.

The traveler's audience, a group of sages, were skeptical. Immaterial imprisonment, invisible horses, inadequate weapons, and the walking dead: this was the realm of madness—or so one of the assembled philosophers suggested.

> "The acts of madmen," said Faraj, "are beyond that which a sane man can envision."
>
> "They were not madmen," abu-al-Hasan had to explain. "They were, a merchant told me, presenting a story."
>
> No one understood, no one seemed to want to understand. Abu-al-Hasan, in some confusion, swerved from the tale he had been telling them into inept explanation. Aiding himself with his hands, he said:
>
> "Let us imagine that someone *shows* a story instead of telling it—the story of the seven sleepers of Ephesus, say. We see them retire into the cavern, we see them pray and sleep, we see them awaken after three hundred nine years, we see them hand the merchant an ancient coin, we see them awaken in paradise.... It was something like that that the persons on the terrace showed us that evening."[40]

Showing a story instead of telling it. The idea, to us, seems simple enough. Yet, not understanding, not wanting to understand, not being able to understand (Islam having no tradition of drama or dramatic representation, Borges reminds us), the assembled sages flatten the theatrical event into incomprehensible—or, worse, senseless—balderdash. And how, really, to explain? The traveler himself does not quite understand it, and his attempts to enlighten are like the blind leading the blind.

> "Did these persons speak?" asked Faraj.
>
> "Of course they did," said abu-al-Hasan, now become the apologist for a performance that he only barely recalled and that had irritated him considerably at the time. "They spoke and sang and gave long boring speeches!"
>
> "In that case," said Faraj, "there was no need for *twenty* persons. A single speaker could *tell* anything, no matter how complex it might be."[41]

Showing instead of telling, seeing instead of hearing. These binaries lie at the heart of Keir Elam's theory of *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama.* For Elam, theater is precisely the showing of a story, while narration is the telling thereof. Or, to use Elam's terms, mimesis

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[40] Ibid., 239.

[41] Ibid.

(theater) is revealed, diegesis (narrative) is described.[42] Indeed, Elam's use of the verb "reveal" is no mistake: as a play begins, a veil or curtain (figurative or not) separating the imaginary world of the drama from the real world of the audience is lifted, so that the audience may *see* the "world" of the drama. Narrative, on the other hand, is written and, perhaps, recited; it strikes the listener's ear. This imaginary world of the drama, separate from yet recognizably close to our own, is the foundation for Elam's understanding of theatrical semiosis in a broader sense.

Before we continue, however, I should address a potential objection: Elam's theory was published in 1980, at a time when theater scholars and semioticians were primarily interested in "narrative" forms of theater.[43] In the intervening decades, scholarly focus has largely shifted to what Hans-Thies Lehmann has dubbed "postdramatic" theater, described by Lehmann's English translator as theater that "no longer represents the world as a surveyable whole" and which has abandoned an Aristotelian narrative arc.[44] Yet a long-standing focus on the "postdramatic" qualities of Wilson's work has led scholars to look away from not only the kinds of sounds discussed here, but also the narrative qualities of productions such as *Die*

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[42] Keir Elam, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* (London; New York: Methuen, 1980), 100-01. The great irony of Borges' story, the wrenching twist of the Borgesian knife, is that this dinner party, this conversation at which Averroës is present, occurs precisely as Averroës, immersed in writing his great commentary on Aristotle's *Poetics*, is struggling with the meaning of "two arcane words" that he finds "everywhere in the texts of the poetics": "tragedy," and "comedy." (Borges, "Averroës' Search," 236) Umberto Eco also invoked Averroës' confuson over "comedy" and "tragedy" at the beginning of his article on the "Semiotics of Theatrical Performance." Eco's article was published in 1977, three years before Elam's book; for Eco, the important thing is Averroës' inability to understand the concept of theatrical performance, rather than the showing-versus-telling binary that I am drawing out of it. (Umberto Eco, "Semiotics of Theatrical Performance," *The Drama Review* 21, no. 1 (March 1977).)

[43] For a good overview of the literature on theatrical semiosis, see Sofer, *The Stage Life of Props*, 6 and after.

[44] Karen Jürs-Munby, "Introduction," in Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, trans. Karen Jürs-Munby (London: Routledge, 2006), 12.

Dreigroschenoper and *Lulu*. Moreover, although this chapter focuses predominantly on Wilson's more recent narrative productions, these electronically-performed sounds that "fill in" for or complicate objects on Wilson's stages are used across his oeuvre, regardless of any given production's generic tendencies. Thus, by returning to the scholarship of a slightly earlier era, we may gain a greater insight into the dramatic world Wilson places on his stages today.

Elam draws on the "theory of possible worlds," a framework borrowed from logical semiotics and applied to literature and drama, which asserts that "credibly posited" theoretical situations (i.e., situations that, although hypothetical, are close enough to the real world that we may recognize in them certain governing principles) can be interpreted according to the rules of our own real-life world. Elam sees in the theatrical event just such a possible world: when the curtain rises (either literally or figuratively) on a performance of narrative drama, the audience "discovers" a dramatic world (which Elam abbreviates as Dw) "in medias res." No explanation is needed: the possible world is reliably close to our own, so we understand what we are seeing.[45] Since the world of the drama is immediately visible to the viewer, dramatic speech can be rich in deictic language: words that acquire precise meaning because they reference objects, bodies, and spaces in the dramatic world (for instance, "this, "that," "you," "him," as opposed to "the coin," "the man," "Filch").[46] Yet linguistic ambiguity is likely, and Elam observes that an "often crucial" element is gesture: for the deictic word "that" to be viable, characters must point (or otherwise gesture) to what, precisely, "that" is. Thus, for

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[45] Elam, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama*, 89-90. For an extensive analysis (that slightly precedes Elam's work) of this unveiling of the theatrical world *in medias res*, and the literary, performance, and audience-based conventions that enable and structure it, see Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1974), 138-44.

[46] Elam, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama*, 101-102, 128.

Elam, the visibility of the revealed world is of paramount importance. This is what makes theater a mimetic rather than narrative art form.

Gesture, as discussed above, is certainly a crucial element in Wilson's use of sound to render unseen objects. Yet this is not the form of gesture meant by Elam, who calls on gesture to elucidate spoken words that refer to a visible object onstage. Underlying Elam's binary is an implicit assumption about diegesis and mimesis: that diegesis (narrative) is audible, while mimesis (theatrical presentation) is visible. Yet the audibility of diegesis and the visibility of mimesis are neither necessary nor sufficient to explain Wilson's audio-visually defined, invisible objects. Indeed, in defining them thusly Elam implicitly partakes in what audio-visual historian Sterne has termed the "audio-visual litany," the "zero-sum game" that places vision and hearing in opposition to one another, and which has long relegated sound and hearing to a status below that of sight and vision.[47] (When Elam talks about Dw being "revealed," the curtain raised to show a lighted world in a darkened theater, Sterne would point out that the biblical connotations of "revelation" and "seeing the light" typically involve *hearing* the word of God.[48])

Let's return to Peachum's shop, and the scene of *Die Dreigroschenoper* with which this chapter began. Now, however, instead of considering Filch's payment, we will consider the door and curtains that define Peachum's establishment. In a more traditional set, where the doors described in Brecht's stage directions are visible, a knock may be heard on a door, a character may say "come in," and then the person knocking may simply open the door and enter without anyone having to say "he opens the door and enters." But what if there is no

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[47] Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 16.

[48] Ibid., 17.

door on a stage, as in the first scene of Wilson's *Die Dreigroschenoper*? Doors, walls, inside and outside do not—in this case—exist *a priori* at the moment the curtain is raised. The scene begins, as Elam suggests, "in medias res," just like any other production. But it is only when Filch enters, and his body and the attendant sound effect project the going-through-a-door-ness of his action, that the door "appears." It is important to observe that such a space *could* be defined entirely silently, without the sound effect. But in this case, the door would have to be described piece by piece, through gesture, in order for it to be readable. Consider a pantomime who wishes to depict that she is going through a door. It is not enough to simply walk from one side of the stage to another; she must pause, indicate that there is an obstruction, indicate that it is an obstruction that has, say, a door knob, indicate that she is turning the door knob, and finally that the door is opening on its hinges. *Then* she may go through the door. In contrast, Filch does not stop to describe the door before he goes through it. Instead, the sound that is produced, the squeaking of a door, allows us to interpret the door, its location on the stage, and Filch's passing through the door, at the very time that he goes through it. The door is given as an object, as presence, an object that is already there. An invisible object is thus functioning as an active part of Dw, even though it was not "revealed" at the moment the curtain was lifted. This function is made possible by the sound, which provides all the information we need to interpret Filch's gesture.

The pantomime's brand of visual/gestural description is also used extensively on Wilson's stages, and it is telling to consider an example that combines a door rendered through both sound and gesture with a space defined through bodily description alone. Consider, for instance, another scene in Wilson's *Die Dreigroschenoper*. Polly Peachum (Johanna Griebel), daughter to Jonathan, has stolen away to marry her suitor, the thief and murderer Macheath (Stefan Kurt)— who is also her father's arch nemesis and rival. Their marital bliss does not

last long. Betrayed by the prostitute Jenny (Angela Winkler), and victim to the machinations of Peachum, "Mackie" is arrested in the middle of the night from, of all places, a brothel. As Scene 6 (the scene of Mackie's imprisonment) begins, eight vertical tubes of fluorescent light stand on a blank stage. A shallow rectangle of turquoise light shines on the floor behind the fluorescent tubes: this is Mackie's cell. Footsteps are heard from offstage left. Mackie is marched onstage by the bailiff Smith (Uli Pleßmann). They walk a few steps across the stage, turn, proceed a few more steps toward the back of the stage, and pause. Smith raises his hand and pushes an imaginary button in the air; the mechanical sound of a heavy garage door is heard, and Mackie is thrown into his cell.[49] (Fig. 3.3)

Mackie, however, does not sit in his fluorescent prison for long. He will soon escape with the aid of Lucy (Anna Graenzer), a former flame and the daughter of Police Chief Tiger Brown (Axel Werner)—although not before a showdown ("Eifersuchtsduett") between Lucy and Polly. Just as Lucy springs Mack from prison, Smith enters from stage right, calls out to Mackie to "halt!," and rushes *behind* the space we have come to think of as Mack's cell to apprehend the escapee. Mack and Lucy look at each other and begin to walk quickly, stage left to stage right, in front of the cell, turning left when they get to the end of the row of lights, and left again after walking a few steps upstage. Smith follows them, and the three characters —Mackie and Lucy in front, trailed by Smith—repeatedly walk around the space we have come to think of as Mackie's cage. The chase defines the perimeter of the enclosure: the front and left sides (the door) has already been defined by the vertical bars of light and Smith's opening and closing of the (invisible) door. Now, however, the area of the cell is manifested

[49] The vertical bars of the cage are one of Wilson's basic visual structures for the piece, and it is perhaps it is a case of subtle, intra-textual commentary that such vertical bars also appear behind Mackie and Polly's bed in the scene of their wedding night, and in the Peachum residence: for Mack, marital life (and especially life in the bosom of his arch enemy-turned-bourgeois stepfather) is akin to a cage.

FIGURE 3.3: Macheath (Stefan Kurt, center) in his prison cell; the constable Smith (Uli Pleßmann, left) and the police chief "Tiger" Brown (Axel Werner, right) look on. *Die Dreigroschenoper*, Scene 6, Berliner Ensemble. Photograph by Lesley Leslie-Spinks.

by the free motion of the very man it is meant to contain. Yet Mackie's circumnavigation of the jail cell does not engage in the same kind of audio-visual rendering exemplified by the scenes where bodies go through doors. The jail cell scene has a sonic component—the tune of the Moritat plays during Mackie's promenade around the perimeter of the cell—but that sonic component is unnecessary in the inscription of the cell's shape and space. Rather, it is the repeated motion of Mackie's body that "describes" the cell, a visual event that can take place only through the passage of time.

In contrast, the combination of sonic and visual information—the squeaking of the door, and Filch's little pirouette in the center of the stage—allows Filch to immediately "use" a door which is not present. In the case of doors, then, just as in the case of coins examined above, it seems that a combination of sound effect with a visual event (specifically, gesture) enables actors to "use" doors which are not visible onstage. To continue this investigation, let's turn to another of Wilson's productions, *Lulu*, and examine how Wilson's staged world compares with the world laid out by Frank Wedekind, on whose 1894 play *Die Büchse der Pandora* Wilson's *Lulu* is based.

Gesture II: Setting the Stage

The way that Frank Wedekind describes the stage for the first act of *Lulu* is rich with objects and details, full of tangible and intangible signifiers of the artist's studio in which Act I takes place. There are easy chairs, Turkish pillows, a tiger pelt:

> Spacious studio.—Left rear entry door. Left forward side door to the bedroom. In the middle, somewhat to the left and to the back a podium. Behind the podium a folding screen [*spanische Wand*]. In front of the podium a rug from Smyrna. Right front two easels. On the rear easel, in a temporary frame, the pastel portrait of a forty-year-old woman in ball dress. Leaning against the front easel is an overturned canvas. To the left a few easy chairs. In front of the easels an ottoman with Turkish pillows. On

> top of these a tiger pelt. In the background, a tall stepping ladder. The studio window is presumed to be on the open side of the stage. Morning.[50]

This is the studio of a well-to-do bourgeois artist, not the starving Bohemian artist of Romantic ideals. It is a sumptuous interior, the kind of space in which a poor girl will be coddled, admired, married, destroyed. And it goes almost without saying that Wilson's stage design retains almost none of it. When the curtain rises on Wilson's production, the stage set consists of a podium, a few easels with some white rectangles (empty canvas frames) leaning against them, and a few chairs. No tiger pelt, no Smyrna carpet, no ottoman, no pillows. And, even more important, no doors.

Yet despite their absence doors are central to the drama of this scene. Lulu (Angela Winkler) has been invited to the studio of the artist Schwarz (Ulrich Brandhoff) so that he may paint her portrait, a painting commissioned by her husband, Dr. Goll (Georgios Tsivanoglou). Schwarz finds the young woman irresistible; tossing his paintbrush aside, he climbs the podium steps to where she stands, and is leaning in to kiss her, when—*BAM BAM BAM*, someone knocks at the door. "My husband!" cries Lulu in fright. Footsteps are heard, and a figure walks along the back edge of the stage, a portly silhouette crossing from right to left. He arcs his way back toward the right, passes behind the podium, and raises his fist to knock on thin air. *BAM BAM BAM* hear Lulu and Schwarz—and the audience—again. "Goll will

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[50] "Geräumiges Atelier. — Links hinten Entreethür. Links vorn Seitenthür zum Schlafcabinet. In der Mitte, etwas nach links hinten ein Podium. Hinter dem Podium eine spanische Wand. Vor dem Podium ein Smyrnateppich. Rechts vorne zwei Staffeleien. Auf der hinteren in provisorischem Rahmen das Pastelportrait einer vierzigjährigen Dame in Balltoilette. Gegen die vordere Staffelei lehnt eine umgekehrte Leinwand. Links einige Sessel [on Wilson's stage, the chairs are on both right and left]. Vor den Staffeleien eine Otomane mit türkischen Kissen. Darüber ein Tigerfell. Im Hintergrund eine hohe Trittleiter. Das Atelierfenster ist auf der offenen Seite gedacht. Vormittag." Wedekind, "Die Büchse der Pandora (1894)," 147.

FIGURE 3.4: Dr. Goll (Georgios Tsivanoglou, right) catches the artist Eduard Schwarz (Ulrich Brandhoff, left) and Lulu (Angela Winkler, center) *in flagrante delicto*. *Lulu*, Act I, Berliner Ensemble. Photograph by Lesley Leslie-Spinks.

beat me to death, he'll beat me to death," Lulu murmurs.[51] Goll takes a few more steps, emerging into the white spotlight, and he sees Lulu and Schwarz *in flagrante delicto*. Registering his shock with an action (arms and eyebrows raised), he falls to the ground in horror. (Fig. 3.4) Schwarz attacks him, beating him to death. The door both enables and exposes Schwarz's flirtation with Lulu. With the door closed, he is free to pursue her. When the door is opened, when the protective cocoon is punctured, he must kill Goll.[52]

Yet, as we have already observed, there are no actual doors on Wilson's stage. The intimate relationship between a physical prop and the gesture that defines a prop, however, is suggested by a particular feature of the *Lulu* program. Program books at the BE are glossy, full-color affairs, usually running around one hundred pages in length and around five euros in cost. For Wilson's productions, they typically include images from his visual book, as well as photographs of the given production's rehearsal and performance. BE programs also include the text as it is spoken in the production. In most productions at the BE, texts are revised and shortened; sometimes, the original play text is printed in its entirety, with lines striking out the words which are not to be spoken aloud. In the case of Wilson's productions, however, where the text as spoken by Wilson's actors is significantly pared down from the text written by the original author, the program books reproduce only the words that will be spoken by Wilson's actors.

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[51] "Goll schlägt mich tot!" (*Lulu* Program, 23; see also Wedekind's Act I Sc. 4, Wedekind, "Die Büchse der Pandora (1894),"171.)

[52] For a fascinating recent take on doors, and how they shape and are shaped by their cultural usage, see Bernhard Siegert, *Cultural Techniques: Grids, Filters, Doors, and other Articulations of the Real*, trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 192-206.

Yet the program book for *Lulu* had another remarkable element: Wilson's reproduction of "Wedekind's stage directions" [*Regieanweisungen von Wedekind*]. For Act I, we find this under the heading:

> Spacious studio: In the middle, a podium. Front right easels. On the rear-most of these, in a provisional frame, the pastel portrait. A few chairs.[53]

Wedekind's description has been stripped down to its bare bones, the program book mentioning only the set pieces that appear on Wilson's stage. This would not in itself be remarkable; what is surprising is what else Wilson includes under the "stage directions" heading. Following these few instructions for dressing the set, Wilson lists the entrances, exits, and *actions* of the characters. The first two indicate what we will see when the curtain rises: Lulu is already dressed as Pierrot, standing on the podium, while Schwarz paints her. The next few indicate the actions of the early minutes of the scene. Then comes a disturbance from outside: Lulu's husband, Goll, demanding entrance, "hammering against the door," and finally falling "with a crash" into the studio. From there, Goll's fate is sealed: crazed with his love for Lulu, Schwarz will beat Goll to death with a stick.

> Lulu as Pierrot — Schwarz painting — lets the brush sink — painting — tosses brush to the side and walks, excited, up and down — approaching the podium — embraces her — kisses her — Goll from outside — blustering against the door — the door falls with a crash into the studio — Goll, with dark red face and bloodshot eyes, darts at Schwarz with his walking stick raised — he trips and falls to the floor — Schwarz steps toward Goll — Lulu motionless — standing at some distance — Schwarz turning Goll onto his back — Lulu drawing back in horror — Schwarz turns his gaze on Goll.[54]

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[53] *Lulu* Program, 22.

[54] "Geräumiges Atelier: In der Mitte ein Podium. Rechts vorne Staffeleien. Auf der hinteren in provisorischem Rahmen das Pastellportrait. Einige Sessel. Lulu als Pierrot — Schwarz malend — läßt den Pinsel sinken — malend — wirft Pinsel bei Seite und geht erregt auf und nieder — zum Podium tretend — drängt sie — küßt sie — Goll von außen — gegen die Tür polternd — die Tür fällt krachend ins Atelier — Goll dunkelrot, mit blutunterlaufenen Augen, stürzt mit erhobenem Stock auf Schwarz los — er schlägt vornüber auf die Diele — Schwarz tritt an Goll heran — Lulu regungslos — in einiger Entfernung stehend — Schwarz Goll auf den Rücken wälzend — Lulu zurückschreckend — Schwarz die Blicke auf Goll gerichtet" (ibid.)

Two elements of these "Regieanweisungen" are particularly worth noting. First is the inclusion of the actions—which are the stage directions sprinkled by Wedekind throughout the dialogue of the act—as part of the paragraph setting the stage for the scene. It seems that it is not the stage design that constructs the place of the scene; rather, the stage is constructed by the characters' actions, their comings and goings, and their interactions with one another. It is also significant that these stage directions are not distributed through the spoken text in the program book (which is itself very minimized); they exist only on the introductory page, setting the stage (as it were) for what will come next. Quite literally, it is the actions of the scene that create the set. As a result, Wilson's staging of the scene is less about the bourgeois setting than about the interactions between Lulu and the men. It is also telling that, with two exceptions ("Lulu motionless," "Lulu drawing back in horror"), the scene is created not by the actions of Lulu herself, but rather by the actions of the men around her. She is a woman to be embraced and kissed, a woman over whom men will fight to the death. Her definition comes from how men behave around her, not from her own identity.

Second is the particular wording used by Wedekind to indicate Goll's presence outside the door, and his entrance into the scene: he is *outside*; he makes his presence known by "blustering" (*poltern* in German, a word indicating a general noisy ruckus and not typically associated with doors); and his arrival inside the studio is accompanied by a resounding *crash*. In other words, his movement from outside to inside is defined as much by sound as by the opening of any particular architectural element. But on Wilson's stage, where there is no door, Goll does not come "crashing" through. Rather, the sound made by his body is a *BOOM* when, horrified by what he has seen, he collapses to the floor. Architecture is defined by sounds, but sounds are created by bodies.

Architectural Structures: The Spatial Vectors of the Real

Outside of the theatre postmodern philosophers and cultural historians have studied the way that physical structures affect how individuals move. How does spatial layout create and reflect both micro-scale movement and macro-scale social structure? How, in turn, do these movements shape the layout of cities, societies, and cultures? If, as I suggested immediately above, on Wilson's stages it is bodies that create sound and sounds that create architectural features, might it be, via some property of multimedial transitivity, that bodies create architecture?

This is precisely what Michel de Certeau set out to examine in his essay "Walking in the City," from his book *The Practice of Everyday Life*.[55] In seeking to define how architectural features through which bodies travel differ from those through which no bodies travel, he offers a contrast between "place" and "space." A *place*, Certeau says, is an "instantaneous configuration" of positions in a given location at a fixed point in time, while *space* incorporates the vector of time and thus is defined by "the ensemble of movements deployed within it."[56] In the former case, no two different objects or bodies can occupy the same place because, place admitting no passage of time, one cannot be removed and replaced by the other (which would inevitably require a sequential, i.e., temporal, series of events). Space, on the other hand, not only allows re-configurations of the objects and bodies in an area, but relies on it. Space is "a practiced place," one which incorporates in its identity the way that bodies move through

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[55] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 91-110. See also Certeau's essay "Spatial Stories," in the same volume, 115-130. Certeau builds on work by Michel Foucault, in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 2nd Vintage Books ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1995). From the perspective of economics, Thomas C. Schelling also explores the connections and feedback loops between individual behavior and larger social behaviors in his book *Micromotives and Macrobehavior* (New York: Norton, 1978).

[56] de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 117.

and interact with physical structures.[57] Indeed, as Certeau considers the minor "subversions" that occur on the human level as individuals walk through the societally or bureaucratically defined spaces of the city, the movement of bodies through a space is perhaps its defining feature.

Taken from the theatre of human activity outside of the playhouse, and transposed to the theatrical stage, the terms are useful for understanding how Wilson structures his not-quite-empty stage sets. On Wilson's stages, the markers of *place* are minimal: when the curtain rises on *Die Dreigroschenoper*, we see only the nine black frames, Peachum, and (the silhouette of) Frau Peachum; they could be standing anywhere. The first indication we have as to the assumed markers of the place of the shop—walls, door—comes with Filch's entrance, when his bodily motion and the squeaking sound together "create" the door. When Frau Peachum joins the action (following the bargaining between Peachum and Filch) she "enters" by drawing aside a "curtain" that "hangs" between two of the frames, a curtain that is represented by her arm motion and a distinctive scraping sound. Similarly, when the curtain rises on the first act of *Lulu*, the boundaries and entrance-points of the studio are not (unlike in Wedekind's original description of the set) visible; the door only comes into existence when Goll raises his hand and knocks.

On Wilson's *Dreigroschenoper* stage, at the end of the first scene two markers of place have been offered: the door by which Filch enters, and the curtain through which Frau Peachum arrives. Extrapolating from these, and applying what we know of residential architecture and revolving doors versus curtains, we can imagine that the front and the left side of the stage comprise the street from which Filch enters, and that the back of the stage is

[57] Ibid.

another room in the Peachum home/company. Yet we can, at least initially, intuit these spaces only by the motions of bodies through the predominantly empty space we see before us and by the sound that accompanies these motions. Thus, in what is perhaps an inversion of the usual formulation, in which a place is activated by the temporal vector to become a space, here a space relies on "activation" by bodies, and especially the sounds they make, to become identifiable as a "place."

Certeau's distinction between place and space, and the role of bodies in creating the spaces in which humans move, live, work, and play, also offers a way to reconcile theatrical performances such as Wilson's—and especially narrative productions such as *Die Dreigroschenoper* or *Lulu*—with a tenacious belief held by some theater scholars that theater is an art form of the "real." Andrew Sofer is not alone in demanding the necessity of real props in the theater. An even more forceful expression of this axiom was asserted by Arnold Aronson in 2005. "Let me start," Aronson began an essay on the use of screen-based media in the theater, "with a fundamental truth about the stage: Theater is the only art form to use that which is signified as the signifier of that object." A person is a person, a chair is a chair, and while "a floor that is treated to look like tile may in fact be made of wood, … it still functions as a floor—it may be walked upon."[58] This "fundamental truth" is precisely what separates theater from other arts: "one cannot swim in a painting of an ocean or eat the fruit

[58] Arnold Aronson, "Can Theater and Media Speak the Same Language?," in *Looking into the Abyss: Essays on Scenography* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 87. Perhaps Aronson's need to define the theater in this way came from an honest fear about its effacement by screens. It is also possible that the statement reflects a desire to define theater in a way that would allow it to stand as an independent and integral artistic medium against the polemics of scholars such as Michael Fried, who in 1967 argued that theater was untenable as an art form because it mixed media, whereas all other artistic genres exist as pure media (Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood," in *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).).

in a still life."[59] For Aronson, this reality of objects onstage as the definition of the theatrical art form means that theater and media (i.e., projections on screens onstage) *cannot* "speak the same language," and it is this argument that is the focus of his essay. Yet Aronson's "fundamental truth," although little more than a throwaway line in the rhetorical scope of the article, deserves to be interrogated more closely.

Implicit in Aronson's description is the necessity of the actor's body in the ontology of the theatrical object: if a floor "functions as a floor [because] it may be walked upon," rather than it being the wood-ness or tile-ness or painted-ness of the object itself that designates it as a floor, then its definition lies in the passive action of being walked on. In the context of a (dramatic) performance on a proscenium stage, then, the actor(s) define(s) the object by walking on it. Aronson's explanation points directly back to Elam's possible world theory. "The actors we see are like us," Aronson writes. "They have volume, they move through space, and thus they move through time. In order to cross the stage, exit through a door, sit on a sofa, eat a meal, or engage in a sword fight, they will have to move across visible and knowable distances, and we can reasonably know how much time will elapse as they do so."[60] In other words, the way that the actors' bodies engage with the material objects onstage is close enough to our own experience with equivalent material objects that we may interpret their actions without difficulty. Similarly, the swords in abu-al-Hasan's story, which are made of bamboo, project "swordness," because they are used in the manner in which swords are used in real life—or, in Elam's terms, the way the bamboo "swords" are employed is close enough to the way "real" swords are wielded in the real world that they are plausibly posited as swords.

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[59] Aronson, "Can Theater and Media Speak the Same Language?," 87.

[60] Ibid., 88.

Aronson's assumption seems to be that without these material objects, we would be unable to interpret the actions onstage; but he forgets that it is *actions* themselves that indicate to an audience how to interpret objects, or at least the narrative significance thereof. Indeed, Aronson himself identifies actors "engag[ing] in a sword fight" as the sign of a sword fight, not the long, sharp pieces of metal they hold, suggesting that it is the *wielding* that is important, not the material. Wilson's actors may not have a door to open and close, they may not have a coin to hand to another person onstage, but they do have the actions and motions that would define these doors and coins in any case.

Thus, the assertions of "reality" by both Sofer and Aronson point to another application of the audio-visual litany, and how it affects our understanding of theater. If the coin drop involved a real coin but were silent, no one would say that the coin "didn't exist." Similarly, if the coin drop involved a real coin and an artificial noise, and some members of the audience were too far from the stage to see the coin itself but could hear the noise, no one would assert that the coin wasn't "real." But if the physical coin is invisible, no matter how accurate the sound is, the coin "doesn't exist." If instead, however, we accept that *either* a visual prop *or* a sonically rendered prop can have equal value in a production, vast new possibilities for exploring theatrical media are opened.

Indeed, I think that something more stands behind Sofer and Aronson's insistence on the "real" than simply the desire to re-inscribe long-held (if perhaps tacit) beliefs about the primacy of the visual in the theater. Both scholars seem to be tapping into a larger concern, expressed variously in social science, philosophy, media and culture studies and the like, that our modern, mediatized culture has resulted in an effacement of "real life" by a hyper-real (to use Eco's term) version thereof. The most widely recognized proponent of this view is likely the French cultural theorist Jean Baudrillard, who argued that modern society has (d)evolved

into a *simulacrum* whose artifice consists in hiding the lack of any reality underneath the surface.[61] The danger of such a simulacrum is that it holds a populace in thrall while meaning nothing. Disney Land, the Lascaux caves, even pornography: anything which, in the very essence of its believability, effaces its own unreality is the object of Baudrillard's concern and scorn.[62] Thus, we should not be surprised to see "the nuclear" as the final bomb (pun intended) dropped in Baudrillard's opening chapter. From *Dr. Strangelove*[63] to *Doctor Atomic*,[64] from the bombastic exploits of James Bond[65] to the marketing exploits of Penderecki's *Threnody to the Victims of Hiroshima*,[66] the nuclear weapon has loomed large in the public, artistic, and theoretical consciousness of the mid- to late twentieth century. According to Aronson, the power of the bomb, and the geo-political power that came with it, were never far from the minds of the American artistic and theatrical avant-garde.[67] But whereas for many post-war Americans political power was tinged by nuclear fear, in Baudrillard's eyes, the Pandora's Box of the atomic bomb was ultimately empty—and it was that very emptiness that pointed to the

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[61] Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994). Note that, whereas Eco's hyper-reality focuses on *reproductions*—for instance, a reproduction of the Oval Office in Texas, or paintings reproduced in wax dioramas in Los Angeles—Baudrillard describes *simulations*, which have no real to which they correspond. (See Eco, *Travels in Hyperreality*, 6.)

[62] For Baudrillard's reading of Disney Land, Lascaux, and pornography, see Baudrillard, *Simulacra*, 12-14, 9, and 28, respectively.

[63] *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*, dir. Stanley Kubrick, Columbia Pictures, 1964.

[64] Opera with music by John Adams, libretto by Peter Sellars, premiered at San Francisco Opera, 2005.

[65] See especially Ian Fleming's novels *Moonraker* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1955) and *Thunderball* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1961).

[66] Originally called *8'37*, the programmatic title was added later; see Alex Ross, *The Rest Is Noise: Listening to the Twentieth Century* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), 459-60.

[67] Arnold Aronson, *American Avant-Garde Theatre: A History* (London, New York: Routledge, 2000), 15-16.

true danger of the modern age. Simulation reached its apotheosis in nuclear games of deterrence because, according to Baudrillard, it is only ever *the game of deterrence* that is played, a "puerile game" that, if successful, involves no real bombs and hence is empty.[68]

From this perspective, then, Wilson's sonically-defined props are the theatrical equivalent of a simulacrum: all rendered clumps of sensation, no real content. But theories of nuclear deterrence offer a different way of thinking about Wilson's audio-visually rendered effects. More than a decade and a half before Baudrillard would publish his book, the economist Thomas C. Schelling, a Nobel laureate and one of the fathers of the game theory of nuclear deterrence, had shown that the deterrence game is far from empty threats. In the early 1960s, Schelling demonstrated that deterrence does not (as Baudrillard claimed) "preclude war."[69] Instead, deterrence is and demands a new set of rules, a new system of commitment, and new strategies of interpreting actions of potentially bellicose (or potentially pacific) players. The behaviors that are enacted around the desire to keep the reality of nuclear war at bay, while utilizing the possibility of nuclear war as a bargaining tool, are precisely the way power is gained. When technology changes, Schelling argued, it is not so much the capacity of the new technology but the discourse surrounding it, the traditions and taboos it engenders, and lines of communication relating to the technology that change.[70]

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[68] Baudrillard, *Simulacra*, 32. See also Baudrillard's chapter "The China Syndrome" in the same volume, 53-57.

[69] Ibid., 32.

[70] See especially Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966, 2008), 18-24; Thomas C. Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960, 1980), 257-66. This idea would late be the subject of Schelling's Nobel Prize acceptance speech, delivered on December 8, 2005 in Stockholm, and subsequently published as "An Astonishing Sixty Years: The Legacy of Hiroshima," afterword to Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 287-303. In fact, in Baudrillard's acerbic assertion that nuclear deterrence is a "puerile game," the joke is ultimately on Baudrillard himself. Schelling, a father not only to game theory but to four sons, repeatedly used "his own small children" as examples to illustrate the very power of puerility in bargaining situations. (See,

One of Schelling's major contributions to the field of game theory in general, and deterrence in particular, was his idea of "commitment," and, more precisely, how to communicate to a partner or adversary one's commitment to a course of action.[71] The relationship between the director and actors of a theatrical performance and the audience is not, in general, an adversarial one. But it does require an ability to communicate and a commitment to certain modes of communication. The necessity of this communicability is implicit in Borges' story of Averroës, where a lack of common language between the performers in Canton and the sages in Andalusia makes intelligibility impossible, and renders Faraj's attempts to explain what he had seen a source of scorn and derision. Yet the issue of communication and commitment looms large in the more particular case of Wilson's stages as well. Wilson's actors must commit to their gestures and the accompanying sounds in order to successfully communicate the meaning of these actions to the audience. They must also commit to the sounds that they have rehearsed, since the sound patches for each and every motion are pre-set; Joe Bauer, the man in the pit, can align sounds with actions, but he cannot change the sound in the moment. Moreover, when one actor initiates a gesture like, say, a payment, the actor "receiving" the payment must commit to the exchange as well. In the most literal sense, Lulu's coins, like the "monetary speculation" about which Baudrillard grumbles,

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for instance, Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict*, 6, 11, 17, 18, 83.) Schelling's progeny would themselves play a role in the creation of this dissertation: the third of Schelling's four sons is my dad.

[71] See especially Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict*, 21-52; Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 35-125. For a more recent essay reflecting on this earlier work, see Thomas C. Schelling, *Strategies of Commitment and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 1-24. It is worth noting in passing that Schelling's work was known to at least one member of the American artistic avant-garde: Richard Serra's 1973 video *Surprise Attack* shows a man's hands, tossing a metalic object from one hand to the other, while a voice recites a passage from *The Strategy of Conflict*.

lack a gold standard—but this does not make the exchange an empty gesture.[72] In fact, for one theater practitioner, the lack of signifying object that Aronson sees as antithetical to the theatrical medium is precisely what gives Wilson's work its particular impact.

Opening a Space

In a lecture on Wilson's work, printed in a collection titled (appropriately) *The Aesthetic of Absence*, German director and composer Heiner Goebbels discusses the "experience" of "the separation of sound and image, of listening and seeing, and the incredible use we can make and pleasure we have out of that free space between these two modes of perception—a space for our own imagination," which he considers to be one of the fundamental "characteristics" of Wilson's work.[73] In this space, he writes, "Robert Wilson opens to the viewer a multiplicity of impressions, evokes images and situations, a space of thoughtfulness, 'a mental space, a mental freedom.' … And we begin, perhaps, to hark back to our own—perhaps happy, perhaps unhappy—childhoods, perhaps to those of our parents, our grandparents, perhaps to those of our children."[74]

As discussed throughout this and other chapters, the mis- or dis-alignment between the audio and visual tracks is a central tenet of Wilson's aesthetic. Yet here Goebbels is pointing to something more than just a clarification of "what I am seeing" and "what I am

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[72] Baudrillard specifically compares nuclear deterrence ("the money of destruction") to monetary speculation. (Baudrillard, *Simulacra*, 33.)

[73] Heiner Goebbels, "Im Rätsel der Zeichen: für Robert Wilson," in *Ästhetik der Abwesenheit: Texte zum Theater* (Berlin: Theater der Zeit, 2012), 105. The first paragraph of the essay, from which this quotation is taken, is in English; in the second paragraph he switches to German. All subsequent translations of Goebbels' essay are my own, and the original German text will be provided in footnotes.

[74] "Eröffnet Robert Wilson dem Betrachter eine Vielfalt von Eindrücken, evoziert Bilder und Situationen, einen Raum des Nachdenkens, 'a mental space, a mental freedom.' … Und wir beginnen vielleicht damit, unserer eigenen—vielleicht glücklichen, vielleicht unglücklichen—Kindheit nachzuhören, vielleicht der unserer Eltern, Großeltern, vielleicht der unserer Kinder." (ibid., 106.)

hearing": he is pointing to the creation of another dimension entirely, an empty space in which our imaginations can run wild, in which Wilson gives us the impetus and the means to create our own stories, interpretations, connections. Indeed, it is a tenet of Wilson's that he never imposes a meaning on a text or an image; rather, he sees his role as an artist to ask questions that will allow his audience to find their own answers.[75] And this is precisely what he achieves with his sounds that have no correlating visible object: when we see a coin and hear the sound of a coin, the two are instantly fused, and the meaning of the sound is defined. When we hear the sound of a coin, but see no coin, the sound acts as a catalyst not only for imagining the coins themselves, but also for imagining the vast array of implications attached to the money. When a beggar goes through a door onstage and the door squeaks, we understand something about the physical property of the door (perhaps that the hinges need oil). When a beggar's body is buffeted by the motion of a squeaking door, and yet no door is onstage, we are invited to consider how architectural structures both impact and are impacted by his presence.

Wilson has said that he doesn't like to give his productions a specific meaning, because that denies all the other meanings in an image, in a text, in an action. By divorcing the sound from the image that will define it, he opens up sound as well to a plethora of meanings. Just as Peachum opens (in the sense of the German *eröffnet*) a shop to attract the attention of

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[75] Wilson has expressed a similar sentiment about his own work: "My work keeps a distance, in order to enable the viewer to have his own line of thought [*Nachdenken*]. I present various ideas, various meanings, various feelings, and various performance styles. But there is always this space. ... I try not to impose on the public. Interpretation is the concern of the viewer. It's not the responsibility of the directors, actors, outfitters, or writers. In my formal theater, meaning belongs to the public alone." ("Meine Arbeit hält Abstand, um dem Zuschauer eigenes Nachdenken zu ermöglichen. Ich gebe verschiedene Ideen vor, verschiedene Deutungen, verschiedene Gefühle und verschiedene Darstellungsstile. Aber es gibt immer diesen Abstand, der mich nicht zu sehr auf dem bestehen läßt, was wir sagen oder was wir tun. Ich versuche, dem Publikum nichts aufzudrängen. Interpretation ist Sache der Zuschauer. Sie fällt nicht in die Zuständigkeit des Regisseurs, Schauspielers, Ausstatters oder Schriftstellers. In meinem formalen Theater gehört die Deutung allein dem Publikum.") (Interview printed in Holm Keller, *Robert Wilson* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1997), 104.)

passers-by, Wilson opens a space to engage the audience's experiences and associations, eyes and ears. Lulu's coin, accompanied by the sound of a cash register, brings to mind her position as a cog in the grinding wheels of consumerism and capitalism, a purveyor of the world's oldest profession, her body a material to be bought and sold. When Filch pulls the handle of the cash register, the motion of his hand conjures the handle of a slot machine, gambling his position as a solo beggar for a place in Peachum's organization that may—or may not—cash out.

Indeed, the most important thing about coins is not that they are objects, but rather that they, as metal material, represent something immaterial: the value attached to them, the potential quantity of what you might buy with them, as opposed to the existent quantity of metal you can hold in your hand. This is perhaps a metaphor for the effect of Wilson's audio-visual split: in removing the material object, in instead allowing the sound to suggest a material object, Wilson enables an infinitely vast range of meanings and associations for this immaterial quality. It is this chance operation of free associations, this spinning roulette wheel of possible meanings, that allows each spectator to play her own interpretive card.

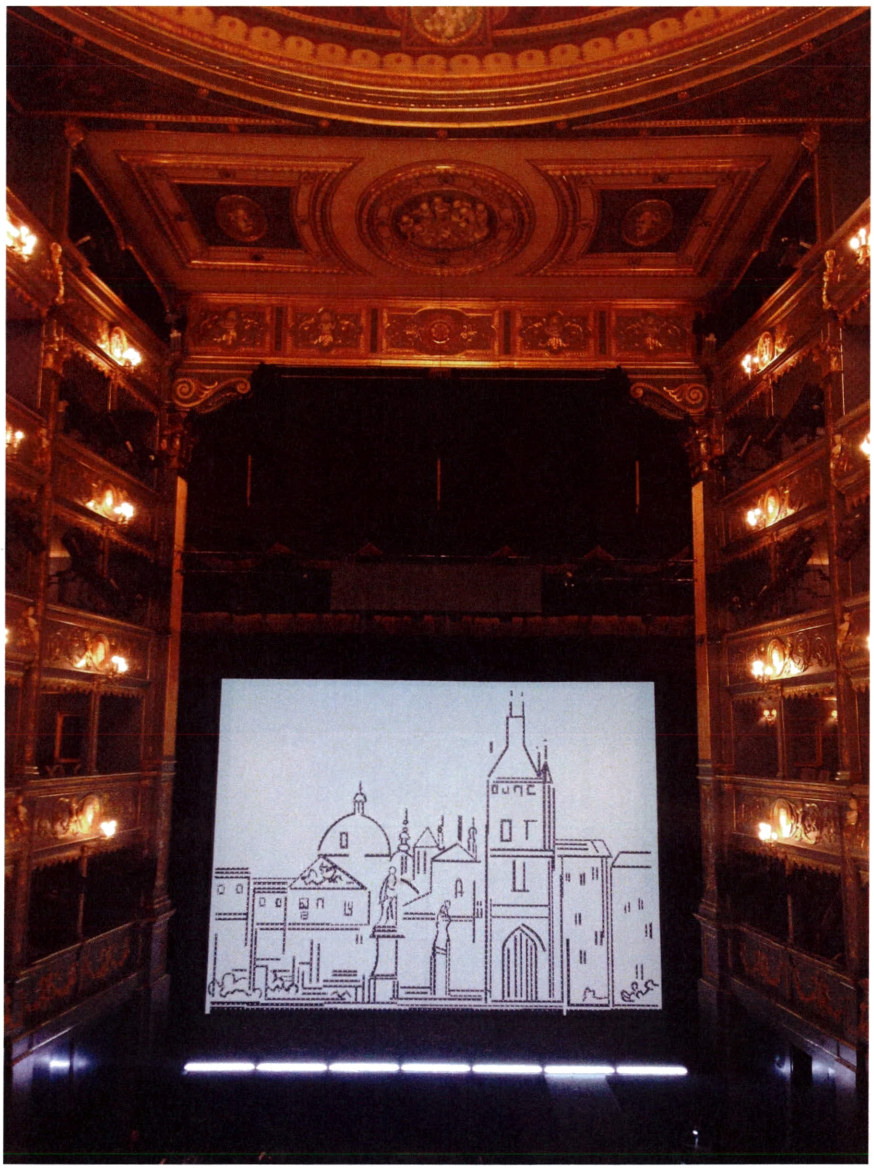

FIGURE 4.1: The ornate luxury of Prague's Stavovske divadlo (Estates Theater) frames the opening of *1914*, September 18, 2015. Statskové divadlo, Prague. Photograph by Kamala Schelling.

CHAPTER FOUR

Frames of Reference: Music and the Porous Thresholds of the Stage

> The story of the fisherman and the jinni appealed to him, not so much for its fantastic elements… but for its technical beauty, the way stories were enfolded within other stories and contained, folded within themselves, yet other stories, so that the story became a true mirror of life.
>
> —Salman Rushdie, *Two Years Eight Months and Twenty-Eight Nights*[1]

> Cézanne is my favorite painter….
> His images are not framed by the boundaries.
> —Robert Wilson[2]

The beginning of *Faust* is loud. Very loud. A few minutes after seven o'clock, a thunderous chord erupts from the Berliner Ensemble speakers, crashes through the theater doors, overwhelms the crowd of expectant theater-goers, and hangs—violent, vibrant—in the lobby air. The sound twists and curls, distorted by the overwrought amplifier, as patrons grab their coats, rush through the theater doors, race toward their seats…

But I'm getting ahead of myself. This production of *Faust* begins with a chord. But the performance actually begins several minutes before, with a quiet, firm statement from the ushers. "It isn't open yet," they tell the eager crowds approaching the theater doors. "The performers need a few more minutes to get ready. We'll open the doors soon." And so the act of expectant waiting begins: its stage the lobby of the Berliner Ensemble, where the large, gold-framed mirrors reflected the lazily kaleidoscopic circles of the milling crowd; its audience these same spectators, sitting on the red velvet benches, reading their programs, chatting with friends. The clock ticks inexorably forward—seven o'clock, seven-oh-five—and these passive actors, gathered for Robert Wilson's new show, have no choice but to wait. And then comes

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[1] Salman Rushdie, *Two Years Eight Months and Twenty-Eight Nights* (New York: Random House, 2015), 11.

[2] Quoted in Miguel Morey and Carmen Pardo, *Robert Wilson* (Barcelona: Ediciones Polígrafa, 2002), 52.

the chord, the jangling distortion of an overwrought amplifier. The theater doors open. And we rush in.[3]

The curtain of the stage is up. In fact, there are no drops on the stage at all, and one can see all the way back to the ash-gray rear wall, where the unadorned structural trappings of a fully-functioning theater are visible in the bright lights. The stage is a cacophony of frolicking bodies. Young actresses dance in filmy dresses, men and women cavort in tight black leather suits, thin actors with avuncular beards stroll sagely around the stage, and among the general chaos, darting back and forth through the mêlée, there is even a tall actor dressed like a poodle. As the audience rushes in, the actors turn toward the audience and begin, in boisterous unison, to sing:

Ihr wißt, auf unsern deutschen Bühnen	You know, upon our German stages
Probiert ein jeder, was er mag	Each man puts on just what he may;
Prospekte nicht und nicht Maschinen	So spare me not upon this day
Die schonet mir an diesem Tag.	Machinery and cartonnages.[4]

The audience continues to make their way toward their seats, to settle down, to settle in. The auditorium lights soon dim, but another group of lights quickly takes their place: around the doors of the theater, around the proscenium, across the front edge of the stage and along the

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[3] *Faust I and II* premiered at the Berliner Ensemble on April 22, 2015; I saw it on October 1, and November 19 & 22, 2015, at the Berliner Ensemble. For more detailed information on the production, see my Appendix.

[4] German text from the Berliner Ensemble program for *Faust I and II* (Berlin: Berliner Ensemble, Theater am Schiffbauerdam, Programmheft Nr. 170, 2015). Note that Wilson and his musical collaborator Herbert Grönemeyer altered the order of the lines quoted here; according to their appearance in Goethe's text, they are lines 231, 232, 234, and 233 (see Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust: Der Tragödie erster und zweiter Teil, Urfaust*, ed. Erich Trunz (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1996), 15, henceforth cited as "Goethe, *Faust*.") I have not changed the line order in the translation to match this adaptation. Translation from Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust: A Tragedy: Interpretive Notes, Contexts, Modern criticism*, ed. Cyrus Hamlin, trans. Walter Arndt, 2nd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001), 8 Except where specified, all quotations from *Faust* (including punctuation) are taken from the Program Book sold in conjunction with the performance at the BE, henceforth cited as "*Faust* Program"; these have been compared with the more scholarly edition of the text cited above (henceforth cited as "Goethe, *Faust*, ed. Trunz") and, where relevant, alterations have been noted. The translation will henceforth be cited as "Goethe, *Faust*, trans. Arndt."

edges of the balconies, rows of small, golden lights begin to flash, dancing in time to the music. The house is dark enough that my fellow audience members are now hard to see, but the space of the house, where we sit, has itself become an active participant in the goings-on, the shapes of the auditorium's architectural features inscribed in the darkness with these gold-colored lights. How appropriate, then, that the clamorous chorus has begun to sing of illumination, lighting effects, and the theatrical space:

Die Sterne dürfet Ihr verschwenden	[Even] the stars you may freely squander
Schreitet in dem engen Bretterhaus	In this narrow house of boarded space
Vom Himmel durch die Welt zur Hölle	From Heaven through the World to Hell
Den ganzen Kreis der Schöpfung aus.	Creation's fullest circle go to pace.[5]

Through ten stanzas—newly composed settings of Goethe's text by the German pop musician Herbert Grönemeyer—the actors sing of the joys and challenges of the theater, until, finally, the lights extinguish and the song recedes to a quiet whisper. Now, only three rows of light remain from the many chorus lines of little golden bulbs that, a few seconds before, had lit up the theater. One of these, a row of five fluorescent tubes placed end-to-end, runs across the front edge of the stage. Immediately behind this line runs a row of the tiny golden lights; and finally, another row of golden lights traces the outline of the proscenium.

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[5] For the entire text of Grönemeyer's song, see *Faust* Program, 29. The lines of the second stanza, quoted above, come from the end of Goethe's "Vorspiel auf dem Theater" (which will be discussed at length below). As excerpted by Wilson, Grönemeyer, and BE dramaturg Jutta Ferbers, the meaning of the stanza is rather opaque; in Goethe's text, it is not merely the stars but all of the lights of heaven, along with the entire expanse of geographic and zoological creation, that may be represented onstage: "Gebraucht das groß' und kleine Himmelslicht, / Die Sterne dürfet ihr verschwenden; / An Wasser, Feuer, Felsenwänden, / An Tier und Vögeln felt es nicht. / So schreitet in dem engen Bretterhaus / Den ganzen Kreis der Schöpfung aus / Und wandelt mit bedächt'ger Schnelle / Vom Himmel durch die Welt zur Hölle." (In English: "The great and little light of heaven employ, / The stars you may as freely squander; / Cliff-drops and water, fire and thunder, / Birds, animals, are in supply. / So in this narrow house of boarded space / Creation's fullest circle go to pace, / And walk with leisured speed your spell / From Heaven through the World to Hell.") For Goethe's poem in German, see Goethe, *Faust*, ed. Trunz, 15, lines 235-43; English translation from Goethe, *Faust*, trans. Arndt, 8.

Creation, we have long been told, began with separating the light from the dark, but there is also something to be said for separating light from light, and within the opening moments of the performance we may observe that light is employed in three distinct ways. First, there are the general lights of the auditorium, those typically lowered to signal the start of a performance, to quiet extraneous noise, and to invite the audience to adopt an attitude of spectatorship. Second, there is the row of white fluorescent lights delineating the front edge of the stage. And third, there is the string of golden lights that trace the front of the stage and the proscenium. Although the golden lights on the ground do not actually meet the lights attached to the proscenium, the general effect is that of an illuminated frame, akin to the wreath of gold that has so often been used to enclose and ornament paintings, photographs, mirrors, and other forms of two-dimensional representation. In a different sense, however, the line of white fluorescent lights is a frame, too, inscribing what sociologist Erving Goffman calls the frame of the theater: a line "maintained between a staging area where the performance proper occurs and an audience region."[6] This "theatrical frame"—whether literally inscribed in a space or not—encourages a certain kind of spectatorial behavior, one which acknowledges a line of distinction between audience and performer, between the space of the house, the space of the stage and the two worlds represented by each.[7]

It is significant that both the white fluorescent line and the golden frame shall remain lit for the entire duration of the performance. Like all frames, they reify the object of contemplation and remind us as spectators how to look, act, and engage with what we see. Yet if we take a broader view of Goffman's frame, the lowering of the auditorium lights, the

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[6] Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1974), 124-25.

[7] Ibid., 139.

first kind of lighting mentioned above, is also a powerful kind of framing. This lighting event creates a temporal frame, delineating when a viewer should adopt the behaviors of good spectating. As such, it frames the spectators as much as it does the show, turning what was once a crowd of strangers into a unified audience. Moreover, when the small golden lights began to dance around the auditorium in the opening minutes of the performance, it was the lowering of the house lights that made them conspicuously visible. The very act that had indicated that we, the spectators, should turn our attention toward the stage (and thus away from the distractions of the auditorium itself) was what had enabled the golden lights—the same kind of lights that are used to frame the space at which we "should" be looking—to extend beyond the architecture of the stage.

With its talk of stars and theatrical boards and what one might see on a German stage, then, the opening song had both supported and reflected the flashing frames of the theater. But a subtler parallel was also present between music and lights, when the first sound of the performance, the thunderous chord, had spilled out of the doors and into the lobby. In temporal terms, the framing represented by the lowering of the lights was preempted and superseded by the sound that could permeate the closed doors. In spatial terms, the performance had spilled out into the space reserved for the audience, the space where actors and diegesis never go, a space as heavily closed-off by Goffman's line and the differentiation it reifies as the stage is from the spectators. Or, one might alternately observe, the opening of the doors had enabled the audience to "spill into" a performance already underway onstage, a performance whose beginning had been signaled by the thunderous musical chord. And finally, as if all that spillage weren't already enough, the actors had turned toward us to sing, gazing out of the tacitly contained space of their dramatic world, acknowledging the viewers and our own voyeuristic position and announcing "you know, on our German stages…"

Music and sound have long been used to frame the time around a performance, from the chimes that announce the start of a show to the incidental music between scenes. Yet the opening scene of *Faust* represented something different: song was used to draw attention to the theatrical event, while sound was used to draw attention to the theatrical space. This observation, however, raises a host of questions, not only about the role of music in the theatrical medium, but about how theatrical spaces—diegetic and non-diegetic, stage and lobby, "make believe" and "real"—are mediated, problematized, punctured. If, as I suggested above, the music not only spilled out into the theater, but simultaneously allowed us, the audience, to "spill into a performance," might the characters onstage also be treated to a similar kind of self-awareness under the audience's gaze? Might "framing music" be used to explore the unplumbed depths and secrets of the play itself? And when does the frame, through its very identity as frame, become an indispensable element of theatrical expression?

This chapter represents a turning point in the dissertation, since the primary sonic object of study is music, rather than sound effects. Yet this chapter is not about individual songs, how they sound, or the history of their creation (all of which will be the subject of Chapter Five). Rather, this chapter investigates how the music traditionally conceived as external or "incidental" (and thus subservient to the "real content" of the production) is recast as an active player in the production, or in the story that the production seeks to tell. Most broadly, then, this chapter investigates music, theatrical frames, and the way that boundaries are and become porous over the course of a production. Yet the theories of framing I draw on—specifically, from scholarship on literature and the visual arts—do not investigate how frames reify an object of contemplation or guide the consumption of that object. Rather, I look toward theories in which the object itself acknowledges or creates the frame, and where the object's acknowledgement of the frame is a vital part of the framing process. Like the

Cézanne paintings that Wilson so admires, *Faust* was not framed by its boundaries. Rather, the frames—light-based, music-based, vision-based and hearing-based—overwhelmed their boundaries, pushed outward. And this centrifugal power changed the very shape of the show. Which brings us back to the beginning of *Faust*, not only as staged by Wilson, but also as imagined by Goethe.

Framing *Faust*

The opening of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Faust* is like a series of nested frames.[8] It begins with a thirty-two line dedication [*Zueignung*], a form long been employed as a rhetorical presentation of a work to a real or ideal audience (the dedication pages of Baroque books provide a good examples).[9] Yet Goethe's dedication is addressed not to any patron or person in particular, but rather to the "wavering apparitions" [*schwankende Gestalten*] of the poet's imagination, who now rise from the mists and haze of long-forgotten memory to compel him to set their story to paper. The space of the dedication, a space traditionally used for the presentation of a completed work, is thus commandeered to become part of the act of creation itself. Without the support of a patron, a dedicating poet might not have been able to afford to produce his creative work; without addressing these wavering apparitions, however, Goethe's poet could not create the work at all.

The next layer in the nested frame scheme is a "Prelude on the Stage" [*Vorspiel auf dem Theater*], in which a director, a playwright, and an actor [*lustige Person*, literally "merry person"

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[8] To avoid confusion, I shall, throughout this chapter, employ the phrase "Goethe's *Faust*" to refer to the text written by Goethe, and "Wilson's *Faust*" or "Wilson's production" to refer to Wilson's BE production thereof.

[9] Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 117-127.

or "clown"] prepare a production of the drama *Faust*—precisely the drama that will, in the pages of Goethe's tome, follow this "Prelude." The three characters debate, in comically hyperbolic terms, the commercial exigencies and artistic ideals of the theatrical work: for the director, spectacle is what will bring the crowds (and their money) rolling in; for the playwright, the true purpose of the theater is poetry; and for the merry theatergoer, entertainment is the name of the game. Cyrus Hamlin notes that "such ironic juxtaposition of opposing attitudes toward the theater" finds a precursor not only in Renaissance plays, but also in the fourth-century Indian poem *Sakuntala*, a German translation of which had appeared in 1791 and which had subsequently "attracted Goethe's interest."[10] Yet the humor of the scene comes not only from the opposing attitudes of the three characters, but also from the fact that that they themselves exist within a play, and thus embody precisely the art form over which they squabble. The Prelude is followed by the final layer of dramatic framing: a "Prologue in Heaven" [*Prolog im Himmel*] that depicts God and Mephistopheles, who bet, as the arch-angels Gabriel, Raphael, and Michael look on, that Mephistopheles cannot lead the god-fearing Doctor Faust astray.

By the time Faust appears onstage, then, his story has been presented through a series of frames that justify both the existence of the staged play and the events therein. Mephistopheles knocks on Faust's door because—the immediately preceding Prologue has shown us—he is trying to win a bet. The scene of the bet is itself a piece of theatrical spectacle, appearing in the play prepared (in the Prelude) by the director, the playwright, and the actor. The Dedication, meanwhile, has depicted the very activity of creation, the relationship between the author and those figures that, fully solidified, are about to be incarnated on the stage before

[10] See Cyrus Hamlin's notes to Goethe, *Faust*, trans. Arndt, 4n1.

us. And both the Dedication and the Prologue have been moved from behind the closed doors of the writer's study or the director's office to the performance space in which this play—imagined by a writer, produced by a director, and depicting a bet between God and Mephistopheles—will take place.

The opening of Goethe's *Faust* is thus a kind of frame tale on steroids. A frame tale is a story about storytelling; to be more precise, a frame tale is a narrative structure in which an encasing narrative (the "frame") features a character (or many) who tell(s) another story (or many stories). Giovanni Bocaccio's *Decameron* and Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* are two oft-cited examples, although the most famous is certainly that of Scheherazade, who, forced to marry the king Shahryar, tells him a story every night for one thousand and one nights and in doing so saves herself and innumerable other young women in her kingdom.[11] The general tendency when thinking of frame tales is, of course, to remember the stories told, rather than the frame. But for the philologist María Rosa Menocal, the true power of the frame tale lies as much in the frame as in the stories it contains. This is because, in addition to depicting the act of story-telling, the frame also depicts the act of listening. "Although it is widely recognized that the telling of a story is thematized in a frame—and it is," Menocal writes, "it is far less commonly observed that the listening to a story, its interpretation, … is

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[11] The most enjoyable histories of *The Thousand and One Nights* (alternatively known as *The Arabian Nights*) are to be found in the writings of Jorge Luis Borges: see Jorge Luis Borges, "The Translators of *The Thousand and One Nights*," in *Selected Nonfictions*, ed. Eliot Weinberger (New York: Penguin, 1999), 92-109; and Jorge Luis Borges, trans. Eliot Weinberger, "The Thousand and One Nights," *The Georgia Review* 38, no. 8 (Fall 1984): 564-74. Historical overviews are also available in many of the recent translations of the *Nights*, for instance Husain Haddawy, trans., *The Arabian Nights* (New York: Norton, 1990), xi-xxxvi. For an analysis of the *Decameron* and *The Canterbury Tales* as frame tales, see Salvador J. Fajardo, "The Frame as Formal Contrast: Boccaccio and Cervantes," *Comparative Literature* 36, no. 1 (1984): 1-19. For an analysis of Scheherazade's frame tale, see Eva Sallis, "Sheherazade/Shahrazād: Rereading the Frame Tale of the 1001 Nights," *Arabic & Middle Eastern Literature* 1, no. 2 (1998): 153-67; Bonnie D. Irwin, "What's in a Frame? The Medieval Textualization of Traditional Storytelling," *Oral Tradition* 10, no. 10 (1995): 27-53.

just as strongly brought to the fore."[12] Frame tales can be put to many uses—entertainment or edification or to delay the homicidal tendencies of a vindictive, heartbroken king for one more day—but, in all cases, the act of listening is as much a part of the work as the events of the individual stories.

When Wilson transposed *Faust* from page to stage, however, he altered the order of these framing scenes. Instead of beginning with the Dedication, Wilson's production begins with the Prelude (the conversation between the director, playwright and actor), the source of the text for the opening song. Of Goethe's original 210 lines of text Wilson and his musical collaborator, the German singer-songwriter Herbert Grönemeyer, retain only twenty-three, choosing the lines which refer specifically to the space of the theater and the boards of the stage. Since the text is sung by the entire ensemble, which had recently turned to face the audience, the comment "you know, upon our German stages…" could easily be interpreted (by Wilson's viewers) as being directed to the audience at large, rather than to two fellow interlocutors; given that the stanza was sung as the audience was entering the hall, it was almost impossible not to feel like the actors were singing to the assembled spectators. Moreover, the words of the song draw attention to the "machinery" and "backdrop" of the theater, two things that were both unusually conspicuous during the opening moments of the production: the former by its visibility, the latter by its absence—and therefore its inability to obscure the former. The Prelude, in the pages of Goethe's text, is an ironic conversation meant to reveal through self-referential speech the artifice of the theatrical performance. In Wilson's production, however, the audience was not merely invited to look on and laugh at the over-

[12] María Rosa Menocal, "Life Itself: Storytelling as the Tradition of Openness in the *Conde Lucanor*," in *Oral Tradition and Hispanic Literature: Essays in Honor of Samuel G. Armistead*, ed. Mishael Caspi (New York: Garland, 1995), 478-79. The "frame tale" as a formal category was first brought to my attention in a seminar led by Menocal at Yale University in the Fall of 2010.

the-top sentiments of the theater troupe; rather the audience, in its very effort to see the beginning of the show, had been forced to partake in the act of bringing it to the stage. Whereas Goethe's text reveals the narrative frames implicit in a work *for* the theater, Wilson's production reveals both the physical frames necessary for a performance *in* the theater and the behavioral frames that are constituted by the actions and participation of the audience.

When the Dedication arrives in Wilson's production, then, it does so in the shadow of this opening song. Although Wilson's production utilizes the entire text of Goethe's dedication, two stanzas stand out particularly strongly after the thunderous musical event that came immediately before. This, the audience learns in these stanzas, is not the first time the poet—a grizzled old man (in Wilson's production) in long black clothes and a white beard that reaches down to his knees—has "sung these songs." Earlier verses have come and gone, as have those who heard them. As he dedicates this work to the "floating figures," he cannot help but grieve for the "souls who heard the first songs [and] who will not hear those that now follow": those long-ago listeners have "scattered," and their earlier applause [*Widerklang*, translated below as "echoes and mementos"] has faded [*verklungen*] into silence. The applause of the current throng, makes his heart heavy, as his song plays only upon "indifferent ears."

Sie hören nicht die folgenden Gesänge,	They do not listen to the later cantos,
Die Seelen, denen ich die ersten sang;	The souls to whom I once intoned the first;
Zerstoben ist das freundliche Gedränge,	Long waned those early echoes and mementos,
Verklungen ach! der erste Widerklang.	The friendly multitude, alas, dispersed
Mein Lied ertönt der unbekannten Menge,	Indifferent ears my song of sorrow enters
Ihr Beifall selbst macht meinem Herzen bang,	Their very praises weight upon my heart,
Und was sich sonst an meinem Lied erfreuet,	And those my lyre might still have pleased and flattered,
Wenn es noch lebt, irrt in der Welt zerstreut.	If living yet, are swept abroad and scattered.[13]

[13] German text from *Faust* Program, 31; see also Goethe, *Faust*, ed. Trunz, 9, lines 17-24. Translation from Goethe, *Faust*, trans. Arndt, 3.

Taken on its own, in the pages of Goethe's printed play, this dedication lends itself nicely to a biographical-hermeneutic reading: according to Goethe's diary, the dedication was composed on June 24, 1797, over two decades since Goethe had first set aspects of the Faust story to paper. Thus, Goethe was quite literally returning to the "wavering apparitions" of his poetic past.[14] But in Wilson's production, the transformation of this Dedication from the very first event of the play to the second scene, after the Prelude, makes it seem less like an autobiographical confession than an event in the play produced by the Prelude's director, a play which is now taking place on the stage before us. Moreover, Goethe's dedicator refers not to his earlier lines of poetry, but to the "songs" [*Gesänge*] he once "sang." For Goethe himself, these songs could, of course, be more metaphorical than musical: what was Goethe if not a great composer of "lyric" verse? Yet on Wilson's stage, the "songs already sung" may enjoy a much more literal meaning: might not the song we (the audience) just heard be precisely one of those songs sung long ago to a crowd whose applause has now waned? The audience had not, of course, been scattered abroad; but we had, finally, become relatively invisible through the lowering of the lights. While we had scarcely had time to applaud anything, let alone have our applause die out, the quietness of Wilson's dedication scene did present a marked sonic contrast to the ear-splitting cacophony of the prelude's song, and since it had been widely advertised that Wilson's production would include songs by Grönemeyer, it only stood to reason that many more songs would "follow." (Indeed, for some patrons, the inclusion of songs by Grönemeyer might have been a far greater draw than Goethe's text, Wilson's direction, or even the Berliner Ensemble itself.) In switching the order of the Dedication and the Prologue, then, Wilson makes the Dedication part of a play already in

[14] Goethe, *Faust*, trans. Arndt, 346-47. See also the critical commentary in Goethe, *Faust*, ed. Trunz, 505-06.

progress, rather than an introduction. As a result, we the audience find ourselves in a position akin to that of the white-bearded poet who writes his dedication as the figures of his past and his future swirl around him on all sides: instead of going through the preliminary activities of sitting down *before* the play begins, we have to do it as the songs are *already* being sung.

Framing the Stage

As it happens, the framing of God's bet is not, in Wilson's *Faust*, merely the theatrical expression of a literary device and philological analytical tool. Rather, a frame quite literally takes part in the visual presentation of the scene. When the Prologue (the scene depicting the bet between God and Mephistopheles) begins, the stage is both empty and dark; there is just enough light that one can see stage hands pushing a tall platform to the center of the stage, then carrying onstage a woman dressed in a gown of silver sequins. The stage hands help her up a ladder to take her position on the platform, and as she climbs to her place, a giant gold frame descends from the rafters to hang just behind where she will stand. In the frame is a painting of blue sky and clouds: just the background on which we would expect God and angels to be depicted, were this a traditional painting.

But this is not a traditional painting. God stands *in front* of the painting, her legs clearly visible below the lower boundary of the frame (and her body blocking the piece of frame that runs behind her). And as for angels, they are even farther outside of the frame, standing on the ground below her with Mephistopheles. The spatial relationship between these angels (including the fallen angel Mephistopheles) is telling: they may see Her, but may not ascend to Her level. They speak with God, but they cannot enter Her space, cordoned off as She is by the golden frame. For the entire scene, this golden rectangle, complete with the frills and foliation of the best of its predecessors, sets God apart (and adds a certain campy flair to match

God's sequins and husky, Marlene-Dietrich-like tones).[15] It is a remarkable image in itself; it is also remarkable for how strongly it contrasts with what surrounds it. In general, such ornate frivolity has little place on Wilson's stages: his, as we have seen, is a world of blacks and whites; rich, cold blues; intense reds. And while visual structures that surround and define figures are everywhere, they tend to be part of the scenery (a window, a doorway), or defined by light (a spotlight that casts a stark line around a figure). Thus, in order to make more sense of this striking image, let's compare God's "portrait" to another kind of portraiture that looms large in Wilson's recent work: the video portraits. Specifically, let's consider how Wilson hung a collection of video portraits for exhibition at the Palazzo Madama in Turin between September 2012 and January 2013.[16]

None of Wilson's portraits, which are short video clips played on a loop on high-definition screens, have a frame in the sense that, say, an eighteenth-century portrait set in a carved rectangle of gold-painted wood does. The edge of the screen on which the video portrait appears is typically defined visually by a thin black band. In the Palazzo Madama, the screens were placed in architectural locations that would set off the screen and the video as the viewer approached them: behind a doorway, for instance, or in front of a darkened, slightly recessed window. Yet, in this particular museum, there *was* a way in which the portraits were

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[15] Note that although Marlene Dietrich is nowhere identified as the inspiration for this performance, the great German actress looms large in Wilson's self-defined mythology; for his recollections of meeting Ms. Dietrich when he was a young man, see for instance Margery Arent Safir, "Things have a life of their own, you only have to awaken their souls," in Margery Arent Safir, ed., *Robert Wilson from Within* (Paris: Arts Arena, American University of Paris, 2011), 31; Felix Burrichter, ed., "New York: Robert Wilson: Interviewed by Horacio Silva," in *Pin-Up: Interviews* (Brooklyn, NY: PowerHouse Books), 427.

[16] Images from the Palazzo Madama exhibit, as well as several other exhibits of the video portraits in Italy and New York, are collected in Franco Laera, ed. *Robert Wilson: Space/Time* (Milan: Silvano Editoriale, 2012); see also Peter Weibel, Harald Falckenberg, and Matthew Shattuck, eds., *Robert Wilson: Video Portraits* (Köln: Walther König, 2011).

set in a gold frame: specifically, the space around them. For instance, one portrait, that of Brad Pitt, hung in a dark, recessed window, surrounded on three sides (above, right, and left) by a wall covered in a light blue and gold design. Around the edges of the recess ran a band of patterned gold leaf. In other words, the museum itself and the space the spectator traversed in approaching the portrait created a golden frame for the video (exclusively black, white, and blue) of Pitt. Moreover, having seen the myriad other portraits in their own gilded frames that filled the museum, both the lack of such a frame around Wilson's portrait of Pitt, and the gilded frame created by the museum itself, impressed themselves upon the viewer even more strongly.[17]

A similar form of framing-through-placement occurred at the opening of *Faust*. Somewhat ironically (in view of its storied connection with Bertolt Brecht), the house of the Theater am Schiffbauerdamm is a gaudily neo-Baroque affair, with stucco figures of nubile young men and women, gold leaf, chandeliers, and red velvet seats. This stands in terrific contrast to the ash-gray space of the stage and the wall behind, visually marking the division between the "real world" and the world of the stage. (A similar effect occurs before Wilson's production of *1914*, at the Estates Theater in Prague; see Fig. 4.1) Normally, one passes through the lobby as a precursor to the theater itself, and then enjoys the decoration of the theater as a precursor to the production; when the lights go down and the curtain on the stage comes up, the focus shifts to whatever is inside the proscenium, not the surroundings. The beginning of *Faust*, however, allowed for no such linear progression from viewing the architectural "frame" to viewing the content of the show: for a few brief moments, the two coexisted, in stark juxtaposition, in the performance.

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[17] For a photo of Pitt's portrait hanging *in situ*, see Lacra, ed., *Robert Wilson: Space/Time*, 57.

Once upon a time, of course, it would have been entirely unremarkable for an audience to be bathed in the rosy light of a gold-leaf-encrusted auditorium as a performance began. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the rich and powerful went to the opera not only to see but also—even especially—to be seen. Patrons milled about the public spaces outside of the auditorium both before and during a performance, gossiping, flirting, sipping hot chocolate.[18] And when overtures provided a sonic announcement that the performance was about to begin or resume, attendees felt free not to heed what amounted to a sonic call to attention.[19] However, the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, saw a fundamental shift in what it meant to be a spectator at a theatrical or operatic performance. It would be difficult—and well beyond the scope of this chapter—to thoroughly examine the many influences that led to the immersive audience experience that remains the norm today, yet a brief overview is useful for the above analysis of *Faust*.[20] In the middle of the nineteenth century, technological advances changed the way light could be used in the theater, both in the auditorium and onstage,[21] and new theatrical architecture—especially exemplified by (but not exclusively indebted to) Richard Wagner's Festspielhaus at Bayreuth—enabled and

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[18] James H. Johnson, *Listening in Paris: A Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 9.

[19] Ibid. On audience behavior in Italy around the same time, see Philip Gossett, *Divas and Scholars: Performing Italian Opera* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 469.

[20] For a thoughtful and entertaining overview, Alex Ross's "Why So Serious?" (*The New Yorker*, September 8, 2008, http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2008/09/08/why-so-serious (accessed 22 January 2017)) combines a concise historical summary of each of these issues with a discussion of how they continue to structure concert hall etiquette today (and how some musicians and venues are working to change them).

[21] On the evolution of lighting practices (specifically, from candles and oil lamps to electric lights), see Gossett, *Divas and Scholars*, 469-70. On relationship between technological innovation and theatrical spectacle in nineteenth-century, see France John Tresch, "The Prophet and the Pendulum: Sensational Science and Audiovisual Phantasmagoria around 1848," *The Grey Room* 43 (Spring 2011).

fostered a more focused spectatorial practice.[22] Music and the other arts were increasingly viewed as the products of genius, and the rise of the canon reflected a sense that works of art were something to be revered, rather than a constant stream of novelties to be enjoyed and then disposed of. As such, the concert hall and theater became a kind of temple to the religion of art; when Mark Twain visited Bayreuth in 1891, he referred to the assembled spectators not as an "audience" but as a "congregation."[23] In this conception of the audience (as Beat Wyss has evocatively written of Bayreuth), "The public exists exclusively for the work of art, and in the auditorium, as a corpus it is literally extinguished."[24]

In the twentieth century, of course, theater practitioners began to challenge the aesthetic of absorption so prized in the nineteenth century.[25] Yet at the Berliner Ensemble and elsewhere, the quiet, absorbed, quasi-religious form of spectatorship is still the norm. It was for this reason that the opening chord of *Faust* was so surprising and so powerful. Rather than extinguishing the corpus of the audience, the beginning of the performance forced the

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[22] For more on the structure of Wagner's Festspielhaus and the impact it had on theater design, see especially Patrick Carnegy, *Wagner and the Art of the Theatre* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 69-106. For media theorist Friedrich Kittler, Bayreuth represents the beginning of the "cinematic" mode of viewing, in which audiences enter into a space designed to encourage, and take part in behaviors developed to facilitate, total absorption in the events shown. (Friedrich A. Kittler, *Optical Media: Berlin Lectures 1999*, trans. Anthony Enns (Cambridge: Polity, 2010), 170-73.) See also Rick Altman, "Film Sound–All Of It," *Iris* 27 (Spring 1999): 33-38.) For the impact of new listening practices on concert hall architecture and vice versa, see Emily Ann Thompson, *The Soundscape of Modernity: Architectural Acoustics and the Culture of Listening in America, 1900-1933* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), especially 45-51.

[23] Mark Twain, "At the Shrine of St. Wagner," in *"What Is Man?" and Other Essays* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1917), 212. On the relationship between silence and bourgeois respectability and social norms, see Johnson, *Listening in Paris*, 163-236. On the rules of good conduct for spectators in America around the turn of the twentieth century, see Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), 190-95.

[24] Beat Wyss and Denise Bratton, "*Ragnarök* of Illusion: Richard Wagner's 'Mystical Abyss' at Bayreuth," *October* 54 (Autumn, 1990): 72.

[25] See for instance Arnold Aronson, *American Avant-Garde Theatre: A History* (London, New York: Routledge, 2000), 42-75.

assembled spectators to become profoundly aware of their bodies, of each other, of the lobby and the auditorium and their space within it. And although Wilson crafted works for non-traditional spaces (such as a mountain in Iran) early in his career, for decades he has embraced the proscenium stage.[26] "I like the formal theater stage," he told Katharina Otto-Bernstein,

> because I think it's the best way to concentrate. You sit down, you've got something in front of you. I like the fact that it's two-dimensional. There's one side hidden. You've got a public here, but there's this other side in back of you. That's where the mystery is. That's where the power is. The great actor always says, "Awareness is the space behind." That's what makes the tension.[27]

Wilson's assertion that the theater is "two-dimensional" is unusual: theater is typically thought of as being a three-dimensional art form, in contrast to the two dimensions of the cinema or television or painting. I shall, later, offer a more nuanced interpretation of Wilson's statement. But, for now, we should see what a theory of framing in two-dimensional art work can tell us about Wilson's theater.

Transitive and Reflexive Representation

Let us begin by returning to Menocal's observation that a frame tale is both a story of storytelling and a story of listening. Let's formulate it slightly differently, however, and suggest that each story told in a frame tale is both the story of a particular person or event, and a story *qua* story. For the philosopher and art critic Louis Marin, a similar duality underlies every act of visual representation. In an essay titled—appropriately for our purposes—"The Frame of Representation," Marin lays out two conditions necessary for an act of representation to take place. On the one hand, he observes, "representation" is the term we give to an object standing

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[26] The production performed on an Iranian mountain was *KA MOUNTAIN AND GUARDenia TERRACE*, from 1972. For more on *Ka Mountain*, see for instance Katharina Otto-Bernstein, *Absolute Wilson: The Biography* (Munich: Prestel 2006), 94-109.

[27] Ibid., 70.

in for something absent: a replacement that, according to some set of culturally determined attributes, bears an adequate likeness to the absent body, and thus may, in a given context, function as equivalent to the original.[28] For Marin, interested in paintings, this equivalence was mimetic resemblance. In a frame tale, the mimetic representation would be the events of the framed story. And in the theatrical realm, we may say that the qualities of adequate equivalence are precisely those qualities that, as per Umberto Eco's theory of ostension, an actor ostends in representing a character.[29] (It is important to note that Marin examines exclusively paintings from the Renaissance and after; his descriptions of mimesis are deeply rooted in perspective, as we shall see.) On the other hand, however, a (successful) representation requires that the present object identify itself to a viewer *as* a stand-in for the absent object: the conditions surrounding its reception must indicate to the receiver that the representation should be understood as referring to or as a substitute for the absent thing. Otherwise, the viewer will not know to read it as a representation of the thing it represents, and the representation will be a failure. The former function, that of a present object standing in for an absent object, Marin terms the *transitive* property of representation; the latter, that of the self-identification as representation, he terms the *reflexive* property.

The power of Marin's definition is the observation that each successful representation must be both transitive *and* reflexive. Whether or not a painting actually depicts a painter painting (think of Diego Velásquez's "Las Meninas," a painting that memorializes the painter memorializing the little *infanta*), every painting must be identifiable *as* a painting for us to

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[28] Louis Marin, *On Representation*, trans. Catherine Porter (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 352.

[29] Umberto Eco, "Semiotics of Theatrical Performance," *The Drama Review* 21, no. 1 (March 1977). For more on Eco's work on ostension, see Chapter Two.

understand how to interpret it. Similarly, whether a story is enclosed in a frame or not, a story must reflexively present itself as a story for it to be interpreted properly. (Recent political events have shown how dangerous it is when fiction is draped in the cloak of "fact.") And for a performance to take place, it must be able to identify itself as a performance; often (but not always), it does so by being presented on a stage. "I can take any empty space and call it a bare stage," the director Peter Brook began his 1968 book *The Empty Space*, "A man walks across this empty space whilst someone else is watching him, and this is all that is needed for an act of theater to be engaged."[30] The action of the man on stage need only be something as simple as walking, since what turns this action from "a man walking" into "an act of theater" is a setup by which the action reflexively identifies itself as a performance in the presence of somebody witnessing the action. Although successful mimesis tends to be adjudicated as successful representation, it can only be so if it can identify itself as such.[31]

Yet there's the rub: the more successful the mimesis (i.e., the more assertive the transitive act), Marin observes, the more transparent the reflexive dimension becomes. Marin sees successful transitivity as utterly beguiling, capable of ensnaring the senses and rendering the intellectual interaction with a painting *qua* painting punch-drunk and impaired.[32] (This has

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[30] Peter Brook, *The Empty Space* (New York: Atheneum, 1968, 1982), 1.

[31] The fascinating (and not at all trivial) question of *how* a viewer recognizes the represented objected in the representation is beyond the scope of this chapter. Fortunately, it has been compellingly examined by Whitney Davis in his book *A General Theory of Visual Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011). Marin also proffers a theory, but his reasoning is essentially circular: we recognize that which the representation represents both transitively (its object) and reflexively (itself) because we recognize its transitive and reflexive functions. (Marin, 204.) He does offer a solution for how, once transitive and reflexive functions are recognized, we might identify the transitive object (for instance, with place names to mark the objects on a map, Ibid., 211), but leaves the underlying question essentially unexamined.

[32] Marin, *On Representation*, 353.

been, of course, a common complaint of media theorists across the ages.[33] Even the hapless Doctor Faustus, ensnared by the beauty of the face that "launched a thousand ships and burnt the topless towers of Ilium," fails to see that the Helen conjured by Mephistopheles is nothing but smoke and mirrors.[34]) Thus, Marin sees it as his task to "rescue three mechanisms for presenting representation," three mechanisms by which the reflexive property is inscribed.[35] All three are salient for our study as they have direct analogues to the theatrical stage and the nature of mimetic representation thereon. These are the background, equivalent to the backdrop of the theater stage; the front plane of the painting, equivalent to the invisible "fourth wall" of the theatrical cube; and the frame, the visible, non-diegetic structure that surrounds the painting, equivalent to the proscenium arch that defines the edge of the stage's presentational space.[36] Marin's particular discussion of the frame will be examined later in this chapter; here, however, I would like to consider his first two "mechanisms for presenting representation," and examine both of them as elements that also "frame" the performance.

Let us begin with the background. A painting lies, of course, against a piece of canvas. But techniques of perspective can make the scene depicted inhabit a three-dimensional space

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[33] In his view of the mimetic property as potentially ensnaring the senses, Marin waded into an ocean of misgivings about the seductive powers of media that flooded much of the discourse on media in the twentieth century, most notably in Adorno's Marxist critique about Wagner and hiding the means of production. (Theodor W. Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, trans. Rodney Livingstone and with a new foreword by Slavoj Žižek (London; New York: Verso, 2005), especially the chapter titled "Phantasmagoria," 74-85.)

[34] The famed description of Helen of Troy comes from Christopher Marlowe's play *The Tragical History of Dr. Faustus* (1604), Act V Sc. 1, lines 90-91 (see Christopher Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus and Other Plays*, ed. David Bevington and Eric Rasmussen, *Oxford World's Classics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 178.) Helen also appears in Goethe's *Faust II* (Act III, see Goethe, *Faust*, ed. Trunz, 257-303; Goethe, *Faust*, trans. Arndt, 241-285), and in Wilson's production thereof in Scenes 7 and 8.

[35] Marin, *On Representation*, 352-53.

[36] On the background, see Ibid., 353-35; on the plane of representation, 354; and on the frame, 354ff.

that recedes "into the far distance." Marin identifies the "atmospheric work of the horizon" as a painterly technique designed to push this "illusory depth … all the way to infinity, … a limit pushed toward the limitless."[37] And it is precisely the effectiveness of this technique, which mimetically recreates the vast space of the surface of the earth itself, that "cancel[s] out the very surface that allows it to operate."[38] Yet the opposite is also possible: a background that is painted to look flat and neutral, utterly lacking in depth. In this case, "the background appears as surface, and it is at this point that a painting presents itself as a painting."[39] In the theater, too, the ability to disguise the back wall of the stage, to make it recede into infinity, has long lain at the heart of "realistic" techniques of theatrical presentation. By the early seventeenth century, published books, written by engineers and stage designers, gave detailed methods for creating a stage that offered the illusion of depth: choosing a space, building the stage itself, finding the proper perspective points, even lighting the stage.[40] On the other hand, since the twentieth-century turn against illusionism, theater designers have also delighted in using backdrops that are monochromatic or otherwise "flat," luxuriating in the drop's identity *as* backdrop; Wilson's famed backdrops, which typically feature a single intense color, are as good an example as any.

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[37] Ibid., 353.

[38] Ibid., 424n10.

[39] Ibid., 353-54.

[40] See, for instance, the engineer Nicola Sabbatini's *Pratica di fabricar scene, e machine ne' teatri*, 2nd ed. (Ravenna: Gio. Battista Giovanelli, 1638). That this book was far from unique is attested by a subtle advertisement on an early page of the volume, in which the printer [*Stampatore*] suggests to the reader *Il Sesto Libro della Prospettiva* by Sig. Guido Baldo dei Marchesi del Monte, whom he identifies as Sabbatini's teacher, for "the most refined techniques of this practice" ["la più fina Teorica di questa Pratica"] (11).

The Prelude of Wilson's *Faust* revealed something different, however. As the assembled actors cavorted onstage, the audience could see all the way to the back wall of the theater itself, a wall painted dark gray—an apt, and very literal, expression of Marin's assertion that the backdrop of a canvas "surfaces as a wall or partition, as a black or gray surface." Wilson is not revealing stage craft as stage craft, as we might say if we were simply discussing a non-perspectival backdrop. Rather, he is turning the structural space of the building which houses the stage into part of the staged performance; it is less like a painting in which the background has been flattened into a single gray surface, and more like a painting on which the cream-colored canvas can still be seen. As we are invited to look at the material that holds the object of our attention, that material becomes part of the representation. This is significant because the very first musical chord—the thunderous sound that rattled the spectators and lobby mirrors alike—was also used to bring part of the building into the performance: to wit, the lobby. There is, however, a difference between these two uses of the theater building. While the back wall of the theater is a structure visible only to the actors and stage technicians during a performance, and thus remarkable because it is typically never visible to the audience, the lobby is always visible for the audience. (Indeed, the lobby is a space through which the audience *must* pass to be able to enter the theater.) Yet the lobby is, like the back wall, never visible to the audience during a performance because, for the performance to begin, we must leave it behind—unless the (sound of) the performance can itself spill out into the auditorium while the audience is still waiting.

Stepping Out of the Scene

The second of Marin's "mechanisms" is the impermeable plane which defines the front-most edge of the scene. For perfect mimesis, physical objects must not cross this plane,

for while a (perfectly mimetic) painted scene should recede into infinity, thereby denying the canvas on which the paint sits (and even the wall on which a painting hangs), to reach forward into the world of the viewer would be to shatter the sense that one views a self-contained world. Significantly, however, the awareness of the painted figures also should not cross this line. The two elements of this us-from-them, real-world-from-painted-world division—the physical bodies in the painting, and the awareness of its inhabitants—are both present in Erving Goffman's conception of the theatrical frame. For Goffman, a line (either explicitly defined or tacitly assumed) must not only physically divide the observer (the audience) from the observed (the actor), it must also inscribe or reflect a behavioral divide: the believability of the events onstage is possible if and only if the characters onstage act like nobody is watching, a pretense that is facilitated by the audience pretending that they cannot be seen.[41] Thus the so-called "fourth wall," the frontal side of the theatrical cube, should be treated as impermeable and opaque.

Depicting the reflexivity of this frontal plane in a painting usually requires that a painter make it appear "obliquely," by having some figure or object overstep or jut out through the implicit fourth wall; Marin gives the example of the "slightly obscene cucumber in Crivelli's *Annunciation*."[42] But an object that disrupts the smooth mimetic surface is not quite the same thing as something which *depicts* that surface and demands reflection on its role *as* surface. Before returning to Wilson, I would like to examine a painting not mentioned by Marin, one which, I believe, offers a more interesting perspective on reflexively depicting the fourth wall,

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[41] Goffman, *Frame Analysis*, 125.

[42] Marin, *On Representation*, 354; detail of Crivelli's painting available in ibid., 355.

and one which will provide insight into the space of the theater and Wilson's use of the proscenium stage.

Consider Canaletto's painting *Piazza San Marco* (c. 1758), which now hangs in the National Gallery, London.[43] The painting depicts Venice's famed *campo* from the North-West corner, looking through the colonnade that runs along the West side of the square. The North and South galleries frame the activities of the square itself, and the great Basilica hovers at the back. Groups of figures mill about the square. The skyline disappears in the distance, somewhere in the swirling sunlit clouds behind the imposing structure of San Marco, a perfect illustration of an "atmospheric … horizon" that pushes "the illusory depth … all the way to infinity." Indeed, the recession of the background is rendered even more starkly by the white lines in the paving stones and the rows of windows in the galleries on either side of the square, all pushing toward a vanishing point somewhere behind the Basilica. At the front of the painting is the shaded colonnade from which we, the audience, view the square; the single row of columns that reaches up to the arches "above our heads" stand between the viewer and the actions in the Campo. The lighting of the painting—in which San Marco and the far half of the square sparkle in the vivid sunlight, while the front half of the square, the half close to the viewer, disappears in darkness the closer it gets to the front plane—seems to highlight that it is on the other side of the colonnade that the true action of the painting is taking place. Of course, this is like another setting in which a transparent plane separates a brightly-lit scene of

[43] The date of completion given here is that published by the National Gallery, London. Note that this is just one of many paintings of Piazza/Campo San Marco by Canaletto. For a reproduction of the painting considered here, see the National Gallery's website (https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/canaletto-venice-piazza-san-marco, (accessed March 6, 2017)), or the catalogue by Charles Beddington and Amanda Bradley, *Venice: Canaletto and his Rivals* (London: National Gallery Company; distributed by Yale University Press, 2010), 98 (figure 31). A good reproduction can also be found in Octave Uzanne, *Canaletto*, trans. Barbara Cochran (New York: Parkstone, 2008), 59 (figure 32).

action from a darkened space that surrounds those who have assembled to observe, unnoticed by the figures in the scene or by one another, these goings-on. It is like a theater with a proscenium stage, a similarity likely not lost on Canaletto, who had trained as a stage designer.[44]

Despite its "externality" to the scene, however, the space in front of this colonnade is not bare. The metal rods supporting the columns and arches jut forward from this plane. On the one hand, this is a structural space, not an integral part of the action. On the other hand, its inclusion in the painting has turned it into an object of contemplation as well. In particular, it draws the viewer's attention to the row of columns that separates the dark colonnade from the brightly lit square, quite literally painting the "fourth wall" of the scene of the action. Yet there is an even more interesting depiction of the fourth wall in this painting, one which both reifies and subverts the idea that no figures within the painted scene should take notice of the viewer. In the darkened colonnade a solitary figure sits on a barrel, hat pulled low over his eyes, head bowed forward, deep in shadow, deep in thought. He pays no attention to the goings-on in the square, nor do they pay any attention to him. The colonnade is an impermeable plane, with one exception: a man peeps sneakily from behind the very same column that towers over the hunched man. This figure—inside the square, yet looking out—stares at the man who should, by his location on the forward side of the columns, be outside of the action.

Canaletto's painting was finished at precisely the moment that Michael Fried identifies as a "watershed" in the relationship between painting and beholder, when depictions of absorption became of prime concern because an absorbed figure paid no heed to the

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[44] Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990), 52. Jonathan Crary sees in the Canaletto painting discussed here an illustration of viewer-as-*camera-obscura* principle that he interrogates in the early chapters of his book.

beholder—which meant precisely that mutual recognition between painted and beholder was possible.[45] Thus the absorbed body language of the man under the colonnade. But unlike Fried's absorbed figures, who are typically alone with their absorption, Canaletto depicts the relationship between viewed and viewer that Fried sees as implicit in the paintings he examines: the man on the barrel avoids not only recognition of *us* the viewer, but of the man that we can see *looking at him.* We see him sitting outside of the realm of action, under the colonnade, and we recognize that he occupies the same space that we do. At the same time, we the spectators observe that he actively avoids our gaze, and we become aware of our voyeuristic position. When we see the man looking out from the square at this solitary figure on the barrel, we see our voyeuristic selves embodied in that character. And yet, since he is looking out of the square at someone under the colonnade, why should he not be looking at us as well?

Canaletto's shaded colonnade, with its solitary figure who is both internal to the painting and external to the scene, renders in paint a vital element of stage structure: the line of the front of the stage (or the front edge of the painting) is *not* spatially identical, or even necessarily equivalent to, the line projected onto the stage by the proscenium (or the arches that open onto the Campo San Marco). In Canaletto's painting, it is a cleverly reflexive move, since in painting the front plane of the action and the plane of the canvas are often the same. But in the traditional theater, there is typically a narrow space a few feet deep that stands between the two, the so-called apron of the stage.

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[45] Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1980), 69. For Fried's reading of the importance of absorption in Diderot's theory of theater, see also pp. 92-96. Fried's study focuses on French painting, but I believe that many of his observations translate easily to the Italian sphere as well. Erving Goffman also sees this kind of absorption as central to the theatrical frame, observing that "as a means of injecting the audience into the staged activity we employ the convention of opening up rooms so that they have no ceiling and one wall missing—an incredible arrangement if examined naïvely. The point here is not that the doings of the characters are exposed … but that no apparent protective and compensative adjustment is made by the characters for this exposure." (Goffman, *Frame Analysis*, 140.)

Does this space fall into the diegetic space, then, or into the audience's space, or somewhere between the two? The proscenium visually frames the action of the stage, the fourth wall drops down from this point, and it is this translucent wall that the diegetic action is not supposed to cross. At the same time, no one from the audience is supposed to climb the stage steps to stand on the apron, elevated above the heads of their fellow audience-members. It is like a demilitarized zone separating diegesis from non-diegesis. Of course, this diegetic/non-diegetic binary of theory is rarely so cleanly defined onstage, and the various uses to which this in-between space is put tend to inhabit a continuum between diegesis and "real" world, performer and audience. For example, when an important announcement needs to be made by theater staff or administration, this is typically the place from which it happens: in front of a curtain, yet still on the stage. So thoroughly engrained in audience's minds is this use of the front of the stage that, for instance, when a figure in business formal dress appears in front of the Metropolitan Opera's curtain before the beginning of a show, it immediately elicits groans from the audience: "Maestro Levine is unable to conduct tonight," we are certain to hear, "his replacement will be..."[46] This administrative use of the space requires distance from the audience (how else to gain both attention and authority?), but is emphatically not part of the performance proper. For another example that tends towards the "performance" side of the continuum rather than the "audience" side, one might think of the actor—"Prologue" personified—who appears at the beginning of Baroque operas to introduce, contextualize, and justify the staged events that follow.

Another example of a performer inhabiting this "in-between space" is the emcee in a cabaret, who typically appears at the front of the stage to crack jokes and speak directly to the

[46] I personally have seen this happen at least twice, always with the same audience response.

audience. S/he is not a member of the audience, of course, but the success of the performance depends on developing a relationship with the audience. For theater scholar Hans-Thies Lehmann, in fact, the role of the emcee goes one step further. "Cabaret and variety thrive on the principle of parabasis, the player's stepping out of character and addressing the audience directly," he observes. This parabasis both reflects and helps create what Lehmann sees as a fundamental trait of theater in the modern era: the audience recognizing itself. "Cabaret is based on the possibility of allusions to everyday reality shared by players and audience and hence contains a performance moment that is inseparably connected to urban life: a city culture in which jokes and information are immediately understood."[47] Similarly, Erika Fischer-Lichte sees the "creation of a community" between actors and spectators as central to her understanding of performativity.[48]

On Wilson's stages, the apron is usually full of action, and it is inhabited almost exclusively by diegetic characters. When actors appear on this front part of the stage, they do so between scenes, in front of a drop that conceals the rest of the stage from view. Yet it is not only spatial and temporal differentiation that places these scenes "outside" of the frame of the theater: it is also the content. If Denis Diderot believed that theatrical *tableaux* should be, in Michael Fried's words, "visually satisfying, essentially silent … groupings of figures" (and what could be more Wilsonian than that?), the figures that populate the spaces *between* scenes are exactly the opposite: single figures or small groups, traipsing from one side of the

[47] Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, trans. Karen Jürs-Munby (London: Routledge, 2006), 62.

[48] Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics*, trans. Saskya Iris Jain (New York: Routledge, 2008), 38, 40, 51-60.

stage to the other, singing, dancing, carrying on, and often making strange bedfellows.[49] The devil tap-dances (*Faust*), a constable is seduced by a prostitute (*Die Dreigroschenoper*), a pirate with a hook for a hand tangoes with his crocodilian nemesis (*Peter Pan*), and one very elegant female impersonator eats strawberries while taking a phone call from her manager (*Shakespeares Sonette*). If the pro-scenium is the line before the scene, then this pro-proscenium space allows characters not only to appear outside of the diegesis (while remaining in character), it allows all the rules of the diegetic world to be upended, to create the kind of collective joke between audience and performer that both Lehmann and Fischer-Lichte see as the bread and butter of modern theater. But unlike Lehmann's emcee or even the suited-up opera manager faced with disappointing a paying audience, these intermediary scenes are not used exclusively, or even predominantly, for direct audience address. Instead, it is often a way for the diegetic events to spill around the edges of the drop, to seep out from behind and tumble through the harsh division of the fourth wall, and then to reveal something otherwise invisible to the audience's eye. These scenes present unexpected emotions, sensitivities, and even comic strains that would otherwise be unacceptable in the dramatic arc of the production.

In her history of the curtain in nineteenth-century opera and theater, Gundula Kreuzer discusses the use of drops to hide scene changes from an audience. Feelings about this new practice were mixed, she says, because the very act of hiding the workings of the theater with a curtain meant rendering the fourth wall temporarily opaque, thereby disrupting the viewer's experience in a different way. "Directors had to decide," Kreuzer writes, "whether the exposure of the theater's internal mechanical workings was less disruptive than the use of a

[49] Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality*, 78. In fact, in a copy of Fried's book held by Yale University, a previous patron had penciled "Robert Wilson" into the margin next to this passage.

drop scene—i.e. an external technology."[50] For Wilson's characters, it is this very disruption by an external technology that makes their activities on the apron of the stage external to the diegesis. To take it a step further, it is as though the opaque drop, which marks the spatial division between the world of the diegesis and the world of the audience, can hide these subversive events from the prying eyes of the diegetic characters.

Sometimes, the time and space between scenes on the apron of the stage is where Wilson is willing to relax his famously dictatorial tendencies as a director. When Christopher Nell, as Tinkerbell in *Peter Pan*, appeared in front of the drop between scenes, lurching back and forth and jabbing wildly with his wand like a disgruntled fairy on speed, Wilson's directive had been, essentially, "You have two minutes. Do whatever you want."[51] Similarly, Georgette Dee, a well-known German female impersonator, had been given relative *carte blanche* for her scenes in *Shakespeares Sonette*; while certain elements must have been pre-planned, such as the strawberries she smashes in her hand and the asparagus that her assistant calmly peels while she talks (they appear in each performance of the show), other elements—such as her rumination on the unique uses of kale in Brooklyn—were tied to the place of performance and therefore changed with each performance or each performance space (in the case of the kale, the Brooklyn Academy of Music).

For Hans-Thies Lehmann the comic effect of an emcee's banter relies on successful engagement with an experience shared by a significant portion of the audience. Jokes tend to fall flat if only one person understands them. But this raises the question: where does this shared memory come from? Or, transposed to Wilson's stages, how do we the audience

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[50] Gundula Kreuzer, *Curtain, Gong, Steam: Wagnerian Technologies of 19th-Century Opera* (Berkeley: University of California Press, forthcoming).

[51] Personal conversation with Berliner Ensemble dramaturg Dietmar Böck, June 20, 2014.

recognize the comic aspects of these intrascenic moments? One way is the knowledge we bring to the show ahead of time: when Captain Hook appears onstage dancing with the crocodile, decades of immersion in the story of Peter Pan led the audience (or this viewer at least) to recognize the topsy-turvy humor of the situation. Another way is that we recognize the characters from the scenes of the production we have already seen: a chief of police pursuing a prostitute is funny because we know that, as the chief of police, he is supposed to be impounding prostitutes, not propositioning them.

Yet a more interesting and complicated—if also deeply personalized—case occurred when I saw *Shakespeares Sonette* in October 2014.[52] This is, in fact, a show that follows Diderot's ideal of many discrete tableaux to a T: each half features seven images, each image presenting one or a few of Shakespeare's sonnets. There is hardly any visual continuity from one scene to the next, except for the striking contrast between the characters' costumes (extremely stylized Elizabethan garb, with all actors cross-dressing as members of the opposite sex) and the minimalistic, modern stage design. Each and every one of the sonnets is sung, all appearing in new settings by the singer-songwriter Rufus Wainwright, and variety and unexpected juxtapositions reigned as strongly in the musical sphere as they did in the visuals.

In between each scene, the audience was treated to banter by Georgette Dee. The always-striking Dee, who strutted across the stage in her black gown and peroxided hair, wasted no time in calling attention to the many technological trappings of the stage ("mister Wilson is working with *sound effects*"), as well as to cracking jokes about her own fame (when a phone call from her agent interrupts one of her monologues she walks offstage, the train of

[52] *Shakespeares Sonette* premiered at the Berliner Ensemble on April 12, 2009; I saw it at the Brooklyn Academy of Music on October 8 & 12, 2014. For more detailed information on the production, see my Appendix.

her dress and the chord of the phone billowing behind her as her hapless assistant carries off the saddle of the rotary phone). At one point, near the end of the show, Dee appeared onstage humming a catchy tune, a tune which sounded vaguely familiar. I wondered if it might be by Kurt Weill, whose influence on the show's music Wainwright had acknowledged in an interview before the performance.[53] It was only during the curtain call, as the entire corps of actors reassembled onstage singing the same song, that I realized whence I knew it: Act II Scene 4, a scene in which Shakespeare (Inge Keller), Queen Elizabeth (Jürgen Holtz), and a woman (Christopher Nell) with a giant snake dangling from her neck and an apple in one hand sing Shakespeare's Sonnet LXVI ("Tired with all these for restful death I cry"). Nowhere else in the performance had Dee sung a song from outside the show. Yet the nature of her interaction with the audience, her parabasis that thrived on the shared jokes and experiences brought from outside the theater (kale, for instance) had made it seem possible—even, perhaps, probable—that she would. More than merely revealing the frame of the theater itself, Dee's parabasis had created the possibility that the doors of the theater might burst open, that the outside world might flow in.

Kreuzer observes that the dropping of a curtain between scenes could easily have been experienced by viewers unaccustomed to the system as the start of an intermission or the end of a show. As such, techniques were developed to signal that this curtain was *not* the main curtain, the one that signified the temporal boundaries of the performance as a whole; one of these techniques was the continued use of music (often a continuation of themes from the

[53] Asked to describe the style of the songs, Wainwright had replied "There's pop songs … there's operatic, uh, lieder-type music, there's, uh, some Kurt Weill-esque music, and, um, I dunno, I just — I let it do what it needed to do." (Rufus Wainwright inverviewed (with Robert Wilson) by John Rockwell at the BAM 2014 Next Wave Festival, http://www.bam.org/rwrw (accessed 21 February 2015), 34:34-34:39. I was present at the interview; the transcription is my own, taken from the video posted online after the event.

immediately preceding scene) to indicate that the performance was still happening.[54] In many ways, Wilson continues this tradition, by having music from the scene just concluded join a character in his/her activities on the apron of the stage: after the "Kanonenlied" in *Die Dreigroschenoper*, Police Chief Tiger Brown dances across the stage humming the same tune. But Georgette Dee represents something different, a collision of an external personage with an internal piece of music. Dee appears only on the apron between scenes. Yet when she does so, she adopts the music of *Shakspeares*'s diegetic spaces, adding comments and jokes the whole while. It is as though we are seeing how the song might be seen. And this brings us to Marin's final "mechanism," the frame.

Delegates of the Frame

Marin treats the frame as something special in his tri-partite exploration of the reflexivity of representation. This is partly because of the frame's visibility, partly because of its externality to the diegesis of the painting, and partly because it sets up a special relationship between the object of the painting and the viewer. His comparison of the term for "frame" in French, Italian, and English aptly illustrates the varied positions of the frame in the presentation of a painting: French's *cadre* (from *carré*, "square") "emphasizes the notion of edge"; the Italian *cornice* comes from the architectural term for "the projection that extends outward a building to protect its base from rain," suggesting both ornamentation and protection: and the English "frame" is "a structural element in the construction of a painting… that extends the canvas so it will be suited for receiving pigments."[55] Mapping these onto the theater, the frame-as-*cadre* would be the theater's proscenium, the frame-as-*cornice* the

[54] Kreuzer, *Curtain, Gong, Steam*.

[55] Marin, *On Representation*, 355-56.

apron of the stage, and the frame-as-structural-element everything going on behind the scenes: ropes, pulleys, scaffolds, and even stage hands moving pieces of scenery into and out of place. To return to the examples above, then, the characters on the apron of the stage appear *in front of*, *on*, and *in order to hide* the frame, respectively. This neatly summarizes their liminality in both the diegesis and the theatrical structure, and helps explain how they can exist inside and outside at the same time.

For Marin, too, the unique function of the frame is best explained by a figure in the representation itself "who, even as he participates in the action, in the story that is 'told,' … will utter by his gestures, his posture, his gaze, not so much what is to be seen … as *the way to see it*."[56] Marin calls this figure a "delegate" of the frame, and in it he observes "one of Leon Battista Alberti's precepts concerning the representation of the *istoria*, namely, that one of its figures should be placed in the position of a commentator, *admonitor* and *advocator* of the work."[57] In this *admonitor*, Marin sees not an "delegate of the viewer (and/or of the painter)," but of the frame of the painting as reflexive device. In one example, a tapestry drawn by Charles le Brun, the *admonitor* stands to the side of the scene, near the edge (the frame) of the tapestry. Although he views the scene from the side (as opposed to from the front, where the viewer stands), his distance and detachment reflect the viewer's position in relation to the activities in the painting.[58] The link with the frame is based on the figure's location: at the edge of the painting, the *admonitor* stands outside of the main action, looking in from outside. In

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[56] Ibid., 358, emphases original. In a later portion of the essay, Marin will examine abstract works by Paul Klee and Frank Stella in the context of how they frame themselves; since my interest is in how characters on Wilson's stages become part of the framing event, I shall focus here on Marin's analyses of figural painting.

[57] Ibid., 358 and 426n35. Marin takes the quote from Leon Battista Alberti, *De pictura*, bk. 2 (1453), ed. and trans. J. Spencer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1956), 78.

[58] Ibid., 354.

another example, however, it is not the figure's physical location that is significant, but his action: a frontispiece to the 1518 edition of Thomas More's *Utopia,* a man

> perched on a cartouche in which [the island Utopia's] name is inscribed, points out the island and/or its map to his companion, Thomas More: he is *recounting* his voyage to More, *showing* him the marvelous island, *making* him *see* it—but by his description in language. The third figure, a soldier, seen in profile … is listening to the conversation.[59]

The difference, then, between "delegate of the viewer and/or of the painter" and "delegate of the frame" lies in this: an advocate of the painter would invite the viewer to see what the painter sees, i.e., the mimetic content. An advocate of the frame, on the other hand, draws attention to the painting's identity *as painting.* An advocate of the painter asserts the transitive element, an advocate of the frame draws our attention instead to the reflexive element. But I would argue that the distinction is even more subtle. If our *admonitor* must show us *how* to see a painting, this suggests that there are multiple ways of doing so: meaning is contingent, which means that no purely mimetic transitivity is possible. In other words, the distinction between a figure indicating that there is something to see and a figure indicating the *way* that something is to be seen is that the latter suggests that an act of interpretation is necessary, an inherent property of the painting, and thus that the image transitively presented has already been interpreted once (by the painter) and therefore must be interpreted again (by the viewer). Like Menocal's frame tales, then, Marin's delegate of the frame is an embodiment of both the act of viewing and the act of interpretation. And, of course, interpretation necessitates the presence of a viewer, a listener, an audience.

Let us return to the Prologue of Wilson's *Faust*, with God standing in front of Her giant gold frame: is she a delegate? She certainly draws attention to the frame behind Her, but

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[59] Ibid., 362.

then the frame draws attention to Her as well. What about the angels and Mephistopheles scattered across the floor? They draw attention to the distinction between the woman "in" the frame and the space around the edges. Yet there is something else in this scene drawing attention not to the ornamental frame that is part of the scenery, but rather to the temporal frame around the scene and the structural frame of the theater: the stage hands that carried Her on and off. Instead of letting a drop descend to cover the scene, it was merely the frame and its little canvas that had descended—which promptly turned into a piece of scenery. Put differently, the visibility of the stage hands in this scene offered a human version of the visible back wall of the theater that marked the opening song, a willingness to rip away the covers that hide the mechanical goings-on in a theater and make these structures—both architectural and human—evident. The final example of this chapter will build on the idea that stage hands may become a visible portion of the theatrical frame. It will also engage all of the forms of framing discussed so far—the space of the stage, the space of the theater, the time between scenes—and in doing so offer a more focused hermeneutic reading of what this framing might "mean" in the context of a particular production.

Playing the Lunatic

There is another recent show of Wilson's that begins with a gaudy gilded frame: *Letter to a Man*, based on the diaries of Vaslav Nijinsky.[60] As the audience enters the theater, a simple gray drop hangs over the stage. Smack dab in the middle of it is a portrait of the great dancer, looking rather small against the tundra-like expanse of the drop, but glittering like an icon in his wreath of gold. He stares out from the drop, looking straight at the audience, challenging

[60] *Letter to a Man* premiered at the Spoleto Festival dei Due Mondi July 8, 2015; I saw it on September 11 & 12, 2015, at CRT Milano; and on October 23, 2016, at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. For more on the production, see my Appendix.

us to confront our preconceived notions of the legendary dancer with the flesh-and-blood representation about to walk onto the stage in front of us. In other words, he draws our attention to the theatrical representation *as* a representation, and in doing so becomes a delegate of the reflexive function of the theatrical frame. Moreover, the fact that the role of Nijinsky will be performed by none other than the great Mikhail Baryshnikov, a figure every bit as iconic as the dancer he is about to play, only serves to highlight the tension between "Nijinsky the man" and "Nijinsky the representation." As we shall see, this tension is a keystone of both Wilson's production and Nijinsky's diary itself.

Letter to a Man, like so many of Wilson's shows, is a joint production between a large number of theaters and festivals; as such, it has been performed in a variety of auditoriums, all of which boast different appearances, entrances, and other forms of theatrical paratext. When I saw it at CRT Milano in September 2015, the theater was a thoroughly modern one, featuring poured cement and plate glass instead of red velvet and gilded stuccos of semi-nude women. As such, the stage presented no stark contrast with the space that surrounded it, and the small portrait in its gilded frame seemed merely a quaint reference to the main character's historical status.

When I saw the show thirteen months later at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, however, I was struck by a completely different effect of the framed portrait. At BAM's Harvey Theater, the gold frame around the black-and-white picture was only one of many such antiquated frames in the space. The Harvey theater was built in 1904 as the Majestic Theater; its first performance was a production of *The Wizard of Oz* in which Toto was played by a cow.[61] In 1942, the theater was transformed into a cinema; in 1968, it was closed for two

[61] All historic information comes from an article written for BAM's website by Louie Fleck, director of BAM's archive: "The Majestic BAM Harvey Theater," *BAMBlog*, July 2, 2014,

decades and fell into disrepair. In 1987, however, BAM's president and executive director stumbled upon the theater; he broke into it and, deciding that it was the ideal location for an upcoming performance of Peter Brook's *Mahabharata*, he purchased it and set about restoring the old theater. Yet the restoration did not return the space to its original appearance. Rather, the chipped paint and decaying walls were allowed—to all appearances anyway—to remain; the chipped-ness is part of the theater's charm. Of particular note is the shimmering gold proscenium. The effect on the opening of *Letter to a Man* was thus a series of nesting frames, a visual version of the nesting frames at the beginning of *Faust*: a black-white-gray photo in a gold frame, on a gray drop, framed by a gold proscenium, sitting in a theater which mixed modern, gray-upholstered seats with the decaying splendor of a bygone era. How appropriate, then, that *Letter to a Man* is a meditation on the decline of a great performer, a representation both tragic and sympathetic of an early twentieth century icon falling into disarray.

Nijinsky's diaries were written in a feverishly manic six-week period in 1919, beginning on the date of his last ever performance, and ending with his institutionalization in a psychiatric hospital.[62] For thirteen months, Nijinsky had been living with his wife and children in St. Moritz, Switzerland, a sort of refuge to which he had been taken after a disastrous public performance in Montevideo, Uruguay. The Montevideo event, a benefit for the Red Cross on September 30, 1917 which also featured the pianist Arthur Rubinstein, would turn out to be the last public performance Nijinsky would ever give. According to Rubinstein's memoirs,

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http://bam150years.blogspot.com/2014/07/the-majestic-bam-harvey-theater.html (accessed February 2, 2017).

[62] For more on Nijinsky's life and madness, see Joan Acocella's excellent introduction to Joan Acocella, ed. *The Diary of Vaslav Nijinsky: Unexpurgated Edition*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999), vii-xlvi. See also Peter F. Ostwald, *Vaslav Nijinsky: A Leap Into Madness* (New York: Carol Pub. Group, 1991).

Nijinsky refused to come onstage, delaying until after midnight; when he did finally appear, he looked, Rubinstein would later recall, "even sadder than when he danced the death of Petrushka."[63] If this performance had been painful, however, it was nothing when compared to a private performance he would give a few months later, on January 19, 1919, for an invited audience at the St. Moritz hotel Suvretta House.

According to biographer Peter F. Ostwald, Nijinsky had told his wife Romola that he wished his dance at the Suvretta House to demonstrate "the pangs of creation, the agony an artist has to go through when composing."[64] When the performance began, Nijinsky took a chair, sat down and looked out at the audience. Romola wondered if he was "playing the 'lunatic' to impress her and the rest of the audience with his unique talent for mimicry." Nijinsky, however, was nervous. He wished to express to the audience through gesture his "oneness with the universe," the fusion of his soul with God. The audience grew uncomfortable and began to leave. So he began a "joyful, merry" dance; the audience began laughing, and he, too, felt the desire to laugh. His mood changed again, to a dark melancholy. He unrolled bolts of black and white velvet on the floor to form a cross, stood stiffly on top of it, and began to recite a sermon in broken French about the horrors of the war that had so recently ended. The public sat—in Romola's words—"breathlessly horrified and so strangely fascinated."[65]

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[63] Arthur Rubinstein, *My Many Years* (New York: Knopf, 1980), 16. The reference is to Igor Stravinsky's ballet *Petrushka*, the titular puppet was one of Nijinsky's most famous roles. A photo of Nijinsky in his *Petrushka* costume is available in Acocella, ed., *The Diary of Vaslav Nijinsky*, in the pictures included between pages 186 and 187

[64] Ostwald, *Vaslav Nijinsky*, 179.

[65] Description, and all quotes, from ibid., 180-82.

The chapter titles of Ostwald's biography are telling: "The Role of the Madman" soon becomes "The Leap into Madness."[66] For a time, Nijinsky could (at the very least) appear to be playing "the role" of madness—just as Romola thought he was attempting to do at the Suvretta House on that fateful January night. Yet by this time Nijinsky the performer had been taken over completely by Nijinsky the man. The madness was real, no longer an act, and in his performance Nijinsky tried to express his innermost feelings and most deeply held beliefs: joyfulness, melancholy, his oneness with the universe, the fusion of his soul with God. In her introduction to the unexpurgated edition of the diaries, dance critic Joan Acocella cites R.D. Laing's theory that schizophrenia is (in Acocella's words) "a strategy that people employed to shed the 'false self' that society had compelled them to adopt."[67] Nijinsky was torn between the self he had to "perform" to be declared sane, and what he might have declared to be his "true" self.

The diaries (the first entry of which dates to January 19, the day of the Suvretta House performance) are full of philosophy, paranoia, exhortations to vegetarianism, excoriating critiques of those around Nijinsky and those he had never met.[68] For a mere six weeks, the sheer quantity of writing is extraordinary—Nijinsky must have written manically, day and

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[66] Ibid., 178-203 and 25-49, respectively.

[67] Acocella, ed., *The Diary of Vaslav Nijinsky*, xxxix. For another reading of the diary through the lens of Nijinsky's mental illness, see Ostwald, *Vaslav Nijinsky*, 182-190. For a psychological reading of the diary as one of many first-person accounts of emotional distress and mental illness, see Alexandra L. Adame and Gail A. Hornstein, "Representing Madness: How Are Subjective Experiences of Emotional Distress Presented in First-Person Accounts?," *The Humanistic Psychologist* 34, no. 2 (2006): 135-58.

[68] It is perhaps unsurprising that Romola Nijinskaya felt the need to heavily expurgate it before releasing it to the press in 1936; her excisions removed approximately one-third of Nijinsky's original, and an unexpurgated version would not be published for six more decades. The original published edition is Vaslav Nijinsky, *The Diary of Vaslav Nijinsky*, ed. Romola Nijinsky (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1936); reprinted as Vaslav Nijinsky, *The Diary of Vaslav Nijinsky*, ed. Romola Nijinsky (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968). For more on Romola's edits, see Acocella's introduction to the unexpurgated edition, xxvi-xxx.

night.[69] "It is the writing of a man who is part lucid, part mad," wrote the author Henry Miller of Nijinsky's *Diary*. "It is a communication so naked, so desperate, that it breaks the mold. We are face to face with reality, and it is almost unbearable. … Had he not gone to the asylum … we would have had in Nijinsky a writer equal to the dancer."[70] Nijinsky's head had detached itself completely from the world that his family and friends called "real." When Nijinsky could no longer perform the role of a sane person, when the wild fantasies filling his head began to play themselves out in the world at large, he had to be locked away.

Or perhaps it was the other way around, and Nijinsky the man could never stop performing. Acocella is careful to place the diary in the context of intellectual, philosophical, and artistic movements at the time; while she declares that "however much these factors may have affected Nijinsky's thinking, they cannot have been responsible for the massive derailment that we see in the diary," she also observes that "many of the characteristics that seem bizarre in his diary—repetition, obsession, 'ugliness,' extreme states of mind—are what seem striking in his art."[71] But how to render this contradiction—between sanity and madness, between interior self and outward performance—onstage? Recall Wilson's observation, quoted above, that the theater is "two-dimensional," because "there's one side hidden." What, exactly, Wilson means by the "hidden" side is never made entirely clear; one obvious interpretation is that it is the space hidden behind the many drops and curtains that conceal the workings of the stage. Yet when it comes to putting Nijinsky's madness onstage, another,

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[69] The diaries comprise 314 handwritten pages in three school notebooks, a fourth notebook with letters, including the "Letter to a Man" of the show's title, and a number of drawings. For more on the diary manuscripts, now held at the New York City Public Library at Lincoln Center and the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris, see Acocella, ed., *The Diary of Vaslav Nijinsky*, 303-05.

[70] Henry Miller, *The Books in My Life* (New York: New Directions Pub. Corp, 1969), 108.

[71] Acocella, ed., *The Diary of Vaslav Nijinsky*, xl-xli.

tantalizing possibility interpretation itself: if framing can reveal the mechanical behind-the-scenes workings of a theatrical performance, then perhaps framing can also reveal what lies behind the mask of Nijinsky the performer, Nijinsky the man, Nijinsky the lunatic. And, indeed, Wilson's solution lies in the very incidental music that is supposed to be a frame but which, as in the inter-scenic moments described above, offers a space for secret and subversive moments of the diegetic world to play out onstage.

Let's return, then, to those spaces between scenes when characters may step to the front of the stage and dance and sing, where, in front of the lowered drop that hides the changing stage, they are outside the frame of the narrative, outside the frames of the individual tableaux, outside the frame of the proscenium, yet still within the frame of the production at large. In *Letter to a Man*, each such period is granted its own piece of music. No attempt is made to create a sense of continuity from the music of one tableau to that of the next, or even from one scene to the intermediary period (what Wilson calls a "knee play," because it is like a joint between scenes) immediately following it. From the Monkees' upbeat "Cuddly Toy," to Cole Porter's immortal "Let's Fall in Love," to the harsh, terrifying "They're Coming to Take Me Away" by Napoleon XIV, the songs are drawn from a wide variety of styles.[72] Moreover, the music of these knee plays is designed to create intense contrast with the (diegetic) scene that came before and that which will come after, shocking the system when they arrive, and shocking the system again when the next scene begins. There is, however, a slight connection to the music heard before the show began: "Tea for Two," which will later

[72] For more on Wilson's term "knee play," see Chapter Five. For a video of Wilson discussion the term, see Robert Wilson, inverviewed (with Rufus Wainwright) by John Rockwell at the BAM 2014 Next Wave Festival, http://www.bam.org/rwrw (accessed 21 February 2015), 13:33-13:40. I was present at the interview; the transcription is my own, taken from the video posted online after the event.

appear in the fourth knee play, is first heard as part of the soft music projected over the speakers as the audience enters the hall. Thus, these scenes are, through this musical link, expressed as strictly *not* part of the diegesis of the show.

The knee plays are not merely musical events. As in *Faust*, the front of the stage is lined with both a row of orange incandescent lights and a row of bright white fluorescent tubes. During each tableau, both white and orange lights are inert, tracing the line of Goffman's frame that separates the audience from the performer. When the music of each knee play begins, however, the row of lights suddenly comes to life, "dancing" (i.e., flashing back and forth) in time with the music. Even the stage scenery, it seems, wants to get in on the action, refusing to sit quietly by as the mad genius Nijinsky dances and frets his last hour upon the stage.

Contrasting music, contrasting lights: it would seem, from both visual and aural perspectives, that the diegetic scenes and the knee plays exist on two different planes. One is the frame, one is the performance. But it quickly becomes clear that the neatly divided worlds of Nijinsky and the knee plays are butting up against each other, even causing interference with one another. Although the term "incidental music" immediately establishes a hierarchical relation between the "real" events of a performance and the music that is there "on the side," scholars have recently pointed out that for some nineteenth-century theatrical traditions the diegetic portion of a performance often showed a certain respect to the supposedly subservient musical interpolations.[73] As incidental music became longer, the time between scenes in a performance often took longer than was strictly necessary for changing the scenes.

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[73] Kreuzer, *Curtain, Gong, Steam*; after Arne Langer, "Nur eine 'Gewohnheit'? Der Zwischenakt in der Schauspielmusik der 1820er Jahre," in *Weber-Studien: in Verbindung mit der Carl-Maria-von-Weber-Gesamtausgabe*, ed. Gerhard Allroggen and Joachim Veit (Mainz; New York: Schott, 2003), 241-54.

This was, in part, because the music, even as it helped "mark the edges of individual acts" and "reinforce the curtain's frame," could be used to sustain the emotion of the play and avoid abrupt transitions.[74] Moreover, the incidental music would help keep the transitional period "invisible," by covering up the sounds of the scenery being moved around. And by allowing the music to come to an aesthetically appropriate close, it avoided precisely the harsh transitions that incidental music was there to avoid in the first place.

No such respect is offered to the songs in *Letter to a Man*. Songs are abruptly cut off, often mid-phrase or even mid-word. In technical terms, the interludes need to last only as long as necessary to affect the scene change. In more dramatic terms, however, it would seem that Wilson wishes to avoid the kind of continuity that incidental music can enable. Neither continuity nor relaxation are hallmarks of the mind of the madman—rather, it is a mind marked by abrupt shifts and (to the outside, at least) illogical connections of disparate things. Moreover, the interruption of the knee plays' music both draws attention to and inverts the concept of the time between scenes as interrupting the flow of the diegesis: now, the scene interrupts the flow of the knee play. Thus, the diegetic and the extra-diegetic spaces are oddly equalized: the constant interruptions force us to recognize the frame, that space that we are supposed to engage with only by ignoring it, and to understand that frame itself as a significant part of the performance.

The first night I saw *Letter to a Man*, I wondered if there had been a technical glitch when the drop that had been lowered between scenes seemed to be raised prematurely, cutting off a song in a particularly jarring way; a repeated viewing, the following night, confirmed that it was not an error at all, but a carefully calculated effect. But another interruption, on the

[74] Kreuzer, *Curtain, Gong, Steam*.

second night I saw the show, did seem to be un-intentional. The spoken text of *Letter* consists of excerpts from Nijinsky's diaries read in English by Wilson and the choreographer Lucinda Childs (played back through speakers) as well as Baryshnikov reciting excerpts in both English and Russian, both via play-back and live. (It is a marker of how well suited Nijinsky's diaries are to Wilson's particular theatrical treatment that the shattered syntax, abrupt changes, and manic repetition that mark Wilson's spoken texts are all present in Nijinsky's volume.) These spoken excerpts often appear in the knee plays as well. In Milan, Italian supertitles were projected above the stage, displaying (as supertitles do) large chunks of text simultaneously; as is also typical with supertitles, the projected title appeared at the beginning of the text to be spoken. While I could not compare the Italian translations to the Russian texts, I could easily compare them with the English texts. During one knee play, a text to be spoken by Childs appeared on the small screen above the stage. The previous night, the text had been spoken in its entirety. On this particular night, however, the drop began suddenly to rise well before the projected end of the sentence, and the voice was cut off. Yet this glitch was remarkable mostly for how unremarkable it really was: given the tendency of the drop to interrupt the knee plays, I would not have noticed this glitch had the supertitles not specified in advance when the knee play was supposed to end.

There was, however, an even more pronounced intrusion from the world of the diegesis into the world of the knee plays. Several times, the curtain simply remained up, and as the little lights at the front of the stage danced with the incidental music, so too did Baryshnikov-Nijinsky dance with the stage hands. This is not, of course, the only production in which Wilson has made this human element of the stage machinery visible: the stage hands in *Faust*, for instance, have already been discussed in this chapter. But *Letter* seemed to take this tendency to a new level. Baryshnikov-Nijinsky dances with the stage hands, and they dance

with him; he helps them move scenery from place to place; he frolics and leaps in this world that is not his world. It is like a juxtaposition between Nijinsky's fantasies and the "real life" of stage-craft that happens around him. If the music of the knee plays highlighted the collision of these two planes of existence, the knee plays that featured Baryshnikov seemed to reveal a collision between Nijinsky's exterior, the performer, and his interior, the space behind the performer's mask. Earlier in this chapter, I suggested that the opaque drop between scenes allows characters on the apron of the stage to express sentiments and sensitivities away from the prying eyes of the other diegetic characters. Yet the characters reveling on the apron of the stage could still use the drop "as a mask," one that hid them from the inhabitants of their dramatic world. As Nijinsky slides ever further into insanity, however, his mask disappears entirely, leaving the man completely exposed to anyone who cares to look.

The Man Behind the Curtain

"Pay no attention to the man behind the green curtain!" It is an injunction familiar to all who have seen *The Wizard of Oz*, and, in slightly different guise, familiar as well to those who attend theaters regularly. For in the theater, the action that must remain invisible is often hidden behind just such a curtain (one that was, in fact, originally green instead of red).[75] Familiar, too, is Toto's desire to uncover the man behind the magician: the space behind the theatrical curtain is a forbidden space, a space of transgression; entering this space means entering another world. Stripped of his smoke and mirrors the Wizard is not, as Dorothy declares, "a very bad man!" He is a very good man, who just happens to be a very bad magician. And perhaps we—*pace* Adorno and his fears of Wagnerian phantasmagoria—want not the man, but the magician. The magician is fun, he is spectacular, the man considerably less so.

[75] Kreuzer, *Curtain, Gong, Steam.*

Yet this presupposes an easy split—what about when the magician and the man, the great and powerful Oz and the human of friendly face and stout stature unveiled by the clever little dog Toto, are less easily distinguished?

In 2010, the German photographer Klaus Frahm began photographing German theaters from the stage facing out.[76] The results are stunning, and the title of his project, "The Fourth Wall," is telling: his interest was in what the opaque fourth wall looked like from the other side, what it looked like to gaze from the stage itself into the auditorium. But Frahm's interest was not merely in seeing the auditorium from the stage; rather, his photographs include the structural trappings above and on either side of the proscenium. In other words, Frahm's photographs shows what the auditorium looks like when framed by the technical spaces of the theater, when the curtains can be revealed as just that: curtains.[77]

Wilson, by contrast, does not need to photograph the backs of the curtains to reveal the other side of the theatrical frame. Rather, it is the magic of Wilson's productions that his characters may inhabit both of these spaces, metaphorically and literally. Moreover, his incorporation of the public space of the theater into a performance allows the audience to inhabit both of these spaces when, as in *Faust*, the music turns the lobby into part of the performance space. The frames that Wilson reveals are many: the frame as storytelling technique; the frame as visual event; the frame as temporal event, filling the space between scenes with music and dance and subversive comedy. "'Letter to a Man,'" writes *The New Yorker*

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[76] For a selection of Frahm's photographs, see Klaus Frahm, "The Fourth Wall: Stages" at https://www.lensculture.com/articles/klaus-frahm-the-fourth-wall-stages (accessed February 2, 2017).

[77] "Die Kulisse wird als Kulisse entlarvt." Advertisement for an upcoming exhibition in *Die Welt*, June 14, 2016, available at https://www.welt.de/print/die_welt/hamburg/article156201473/Die-vierte-Wand-Theater-und-Opernhaeuser-von-hinten.html (accessed February 2, 2017).

dance critic Joan Acocella, "is a sort of vaudeville show, a series of acts, most of them featuring Nijinsky-Baryshnikov in a tuxedo and elaborate whiteface: the face of Pierrot, of Petrushka, of Joel Grey in 'Cabaret.'"[78] It is the face of an emcee, speaking to the audience. And it is *also* the face of a puppet, a clown, whom Stravinsky would depict in moments of deep sorrow and whom Picasso would paint in precisely the pose of absorption that Canaletto gave to his hatted man. For just as the emcee requires an audience for his job, so does the sad little puppet: a beholder is necessary for the character to exist. And for someone who exists only in the moment of performance, a moment of self-reflection is nothing more than representing the reflexivity of representation.

In the final scene of *Letter to a Man*, a full proscenium, complete with a rich red curtain, is lowered onto the stage, a piece of scenery echoing the proscenium of the theater at large. The curtain, then, has become the object of contemplation, the event "behind the curtain" (so to speak). The heavy red fabric parts to reveal Baryshnikov, facing away from the audience.[79] He turns and begins to walk slowly, serenely, self-assuredly toward the audience. "To Man," he says over the speakers, in Wilson's voice. "Within me lives God. I live in God." Perhaps it is, finally, here that Nijinsky can fuse his soul to God, as he so wished to do in 1919 in the last public performance he would ever give: almost one hundred years later, in the body of another man, standing in a proscenium within a proscenium. The little line of lights at the front of the stage dances happily. When he reaches the front of the stage, he pauses, then

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[78] Joan Acocella, "Mad Scene: Baryshnikov plays Nijinsky in the grip of insanity," *The New Yorker*, June 27, 2016, 66.

[79] A beautiful photograph by Sara Krulwich of this final scene was published with the *New York Times* review of the BAM performance: Charles Isherwood, "Review: Baryshnikov Explores the Troubled Mind of a Dance Genius," *The New York Times*, October 21, 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/22/theater/review-baryshnikov-explores-the-troubled-mind-of-a-dance-genius.html (accessed March 4, 2017).

turns around and walks back under the interior proscenium. From the other side of the red curtain, he looks back over his shoulder, smiles, says: "*Vaslav Nijinsky*." The music gains in strength, the lights of the theater house begin to glow, the red curtain falls shut, and then—blackness.

FIGURE 5.1: The men of Lulu's life. From left: Dr. Hilti (Jörg Thieme), Kungu Poti (Boris Jacoby), Mr. Hopkins (Alexander Ebeert), Dr. Goll (Georgios Tsivanoglou, on ground), Eduard Schwarz (Ulrich Brandhoff), Alwa Schöning (Markus Gertken), Dr. Franz Schöning (Alexander Lang), Schigolch (Jürgen Holtz), Jack (Sabin Tambrea). *Lulu*, Prologue, Berliner Ensemble. Photograph by Lesley Leslie-Spinks.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Landscape of *Lulu*: Musical Wrinkles in Theatrical Time

> "You see," Mrs Whatsit said, "if a very small insect were to move from the section of skirt in Mrs Who's right hand to that in her left, it would be quite a long walk for him if he had to walk straight across." Swiftly Mrs Who brought her hands, still holding the skirt, together. "Now, you see," Mrs Whatsit said, "he would *be* there, without that long trip. That is how we travel."
>
> —Madeleine L'Engle, *A Wrinkle in Time*[1]

Robert Wilson's *Lulu* begins at the end. More precisely, it begins at her end. "Ladies, and Gentlemen," booms a voice over the Berliner Ensemble speakers as the lights start to dim, "LULU'S DEATH."[2] An old man in an overcoat, leaning heavily on his white walking stick, slowly emerges onto the apron of the stage. He turns toward the audience and stands blinking into the bright spotlights. A large, rumpled chrysanthemum sits in his buttonhole, its droopy petals a botanical echo of the greasy, yellow-white hair that falls in lank strings from his bald pate. A piano plinks out a soft melody. The old man is joined on the apron by a tall, stately man with short-cropped hair who wears a reddish-silver dressing jacket with black velvet lapels. He strides onto the stage and stops near the old man. A strangled, disembodied scream is heard over the speakers. A pot-bellied man in pinstripes walks onto the stage and collapses—*THUD*—onto the floor. Then comes a young man, his black hair shiny with brilliantine, his pressed-velvet jacket sitting atop flowing red pajama pants. Somewhere distant, a voice begins to sing: *Sitting … in … a roof…top … garden … looking … down … below.*[3]

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[1] Madeleine L'Engle, *A Wrinkle in Time* (New York: Square Fish, 2007), 85-86.

[2] *Lulu* premiered at the Berliner Ensemble on April 12, 2011; I saw it at the Berliner Ensemble on June 8, 2013. For more on the production, see my Appendix.

[3] All songs in *Lulu* are sung in English, a point which will be considered later in this chapter. Lines of spoken text that are performed in German will, throughout the chapter, be translated into English in the main text with the original German in footnotes.

The men continue to appear. They are (we will later learn) Lulu's lovers, her protectors, her destroyers. In these opening moments of the show, however, they have no real identities. Indeed, they are little more than sartorial idiosyncrasies—a silver suit, a top hat, spats, orange hair, peach-colored pants and a hoodie—brought together to stand in statuesque stillness on the stage for a few brief minutes. Their relationship is one of proximity, not of interaction, potential energy rather than overt expression. (Fig. 5.1)

In fact, much the same could be said of the scene's sound. Thundering footsteps, a girly giggle, a whistled melody that hangs in the air as the lights get darker… the sounds, like the men, seem as yet to have no connection to one another. If we could look back on the scene after the fact, we would recognize these sonic events as the aural markers of Lulu's life. But for now, although we have been told that we are witnessing Lulu's end, we cannot yet comprehend what we see and hear. Like the line-up of men, the sonic effects find power through proximity, rather than significance through representation or semantic meaning. Yet through it all, there is a single melody, a single song: *Sitting in a rooftop garden…*

Lulu begins at its end; this dissertation, however, shall end by returning to its beginning. This final analytic chapter of the dissertation brings the dissertation full circle, returning to the two fundamental issues laid out in the opening pages. First, how may we talk about music and song in an oeuvre where composers are invited—even requested—to work independently from Wilson? And, second, how do music and song function as part of a broader conception of sound, one which treats sound effects, speech, and music as all existing on a single continuum? Beginning with an analysis of *Lulu*'s sonic collage, the chapter will then use *Lulu* as a lens to examine to broader questions about Wilson's use of music in a texted play. For instance, how does Wilson interpolate songs into an existing narrative structure? To what extent are the interpolations merged with the framing story, and to what extent are they

made to stand out, stand apart, assert their independent identity? To what extent does the collaborative process inflect the final production, and does the music in the play reflect the collaborative process? Although I shall briefly consider Wilson collaborative process, however, the more pressing questions are about the role of music in the narrative the production presents—specifically, what is the effect when a song that already possesses a strong individual identity is interpolated into a contrasting story? While this chapter shall depart from previous chapters in that it shall focus on a single production, it is not intended to be merely an analysis of a single work. Rather, I have chosen to examine *Lulu* because the idiosyncrasies of its musical treatment shine light on Wilson's work more broadly.

This chapter departs from its predecessors in one other fundamental way. Where Chapter Four considered how music (and sound, more broadly conceived) revealed the edges of a performance—by, quite literally, pointing to the spatial edges of the performance space and to the spaces between scenes—this one will consider how music shapes an entire production from beginning to end. Put differently, where Chapter Four examined how music constructed the space of a performance, Chapter Five shall consider how music structures and even distorts the time of a performance at large. The analysis of this show is, like the phenomenon discussed in this chapter, deeply indebted to a bifurcated form of viewing. On the one hand, the explanations of individual scenes describe the scene from the perspective of a viewer seeing it in the auditorium for the first time. My analyses, however, rely on repeated viewings of a video made available to me by the Robert Wilson archive, as well as paratextual materials such as the BE program book.

The analysis of music, moreover, shall both lead us to and ultimately benefit from a theatrical metaphor long applied to Wilson's work: Gertrude Stein's "landscape theater." While landscape theater has been used repeatedly as a lens for analyzing (or, at least,

explaining) Wilson's "theater of images," I shall argue that applying it over a larger time frame, and seeing how it plays out musically, will deepen our understanding of both Wilson's work and the concept more broadly. As such, this chapter shall suggest that even predominantly visual modes of analyzing Wilson's work may benefit from an engagement with sound. This being a chapter about landscape, however, it will not only draw on theories of visual arts and music; it will also bring to the table theories of cartography, histories of humanity's relationship with the earth and the sky, and literature that can facilitate a reading of individual song as well as *Lulu* as a whole. The first stage of this journey, however, takes us back in time, to the (many) birth(s) of *Lulu*.

Lulu Takes a Walk on the Wild Side

Lulu, much like the heroine after which it is named, has been subject to a long history of adaptation and re-creation. In 1892, the German expressionist Frank Wedekind began writing *Pandora's Box*, a "Monster Tragedy" about a young dancer who slowly works her way up the ladder of society, progressing through a series of lover-patrons before ultimately falling into a life of ill repute in London, where she is murdered, in a rooftop apartment, by Jack the Ripper. Wedekind completed the play in 1894, but would spend almost two decades revising and rewriting the play. He began by splitting it into a diptych, extracting the first part of the story and titling it *Earth Spirit*. Although all subsequent versions of the play, including the final version from 1913, retained this bipartite form, the two halves are now typically thought of (and sold) as the single *Pandora's Box* or *Lulu*.[4] The 1913 *Pandora's Box* was the version upon

[4] On early reception of Wedekind's play, as well as a good introduction to Berg's *Lulu*, see Alex Ross, *The Rest Is Noise: Listening to the Twentieth Century* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), 207-12. While it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to consider how Wilson's or Reed's knowledge of Berg's opera may have affected the BE *Lulu*, it is worth noting that Wilson would go on to stage Berg's opera (at the Teatro San Carlo in Naples) in 2013.

which Alban Berg based his opera *Lulu* (1928-1935). It also inspired the 1929 G.W. Pabst film *Pandora's Box*, in which Louise Brooks brought her dark bob and wide, heavily lined eyes to that most fatale of femmes. For the BE production, however, Wilson returned to the earliest text, that of 1892-1894. He then asked Lou Reed—to whom he had been introduced by Andy Warhol in 1965[5]—to write a set of songs for the play. Wilson and Reed's *Lulu* premiered on the stage of the Berliner Ensemble on April 12, 2011.

If ever Lulu were to feel at home in a rock musician's oeuvre, that musician would be Lou Reed. His subjects were prostitutes, heroin addicts, drag queens and anyone else struggling for dignity and identity in a world that wished to shut them out. They were Reed's muses; he gave them a voice. Thus, it is perhaps unsurprising that the songs Reed composed for *Lulu* soon took on a life outside the play. On October 31, 2011, Reed released a new album with the songs he had written for Wilson's production, newly recorded with Metallica. This Reed-Metallica collaboration was met with near-unanimous wrath by critics and fans (an issue which shall be explored late in this chapter). Indeed, the story of the album *Lulu* has all the makings of a great drama in and of itself: *Lulu* would be Reed's final studio album before his death in 2013, when the fact that the album had so nettled critics would be reinterpreted as a marker of Reed's enduring artistry and refusal to succumb to the exigencies of commercialism.[6] Yet

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[5] Robert Wilson, "Steel Velvet, Wonderful Fire: 1st draft of RW speech for Lou Reed's memorial at the BE. Jan. 2014," http://www.loureed.com/inmemoriam/img/Bob_Wilson.pdf (accessed 25 August 2015). It is worth noting here that one of Wilson's earliest musical collaborators was Laurie Anderson, who would later become Reed's wife. For more on Anderson's history with Wilson, see Laurie Anderson, "I don't remember anything about it except his body," in Margery Arent Safir, ed., *Robert Wilson from Within* (Paris: Arts Arena, American University of Paris, 2011), 115-23; as well as Laurence Shyer, *Robert Wilson and His Collaborators* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1989), 311.

[6] On 19 April 2015, Reed was posthumously inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. At the ceremony, his wife, Laurie Anderson, told the audience that David Bowie had told her that *Lulu* was "Lou's greatest work. This is his masterpiece. Just wait, it will be like [Reed's 1973 album] *Berlin*. It will take everyone a while to catch up." (Ben Beaumont-Thomas, "David Bowie: Lou Reed's masterpiece is Metallica collaboration Lulu," *The Guardian*, April 20, 2015, accessed August 30, 2015,

in the ensuing fuss the songs' role in Wilson's production was, to the annals of rock and metal criticism at least, essentially lost.[7]

This was not the first time that music written for a Wilson production had gone on to be distributed outside of the show. For instance, Tom Waits's album *The Black Rider*, which represents Wilson's 1990 collaboration with Waits and William S. Burroughs, is available for purchase on Amazon.com and other, similarly mainstream platforms. But this is not necessarily the norm: the music that CocoRosie wrote for *Peter Pan*, the BE production that Wilson created two years after *Lulu*, for instance, has never been sold on a commercial recording. Somewhere between these two extremes is the music that Herbert Grönemeyer wrote for *Leonce und Lena*, another BE production, released as an album by EMI but sold only at the BE gift shop.[8] Yet no matter how commercial either *The Black Rider* or the *Leonce und Lena* albums may be, Wilson's role in their inception cannot be overlooked, as the handwriting on both album covers is unmistakably his.[9] In contrast, *Lulu*, once it had been through the

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www.theguardian.com/music/2015/apr/20/david-bowie-lou-reed-masterpiece-metallica-lulu.) See also, for instance, August Brown, "For Lou Reed, 'Lulu' and 'Metal Machine Music' proved vision was pure," *Los Angeles Times*, October 28, 2013, http://www.latimes.com/ entertainment/music/posts/la-et-ms-for-lou-reed-lulu-metal-machine-music-proved-antagonism-was-true-20131028-story.html (accessed February 27, 2017).

[7] The best collection of *Lulu*-directed vitriol appears, perhaps unsurprisingly, as the opening gambit in a review that seeks to redeem the album: James Parker, "Metallica and Lou Reed's 'Lulu' Is Actually Excellent," *The Atlantic*, November 16, 2011 2017, https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2011/11/metallica-and-lou-reeds-lulu-is-actually-excellent/248574/ (accessed February 27).

[8] *The Black Rider: The Casting of the Magic Bullets*, Opera by Robert Wilson, Tom Waits [music], and William S. Burroughs [book]; premiered on March 31, 1990 at the Thalia Theater, Hamburg. *Leonce und Lena*, based on the comedy by Georg Büchner, with music by Herbert Grönemeyer; premiered on May 1, 2003 at the Berliner Ensemble.

[9] This is not, of course, to say that the handwriting on the two covers is identical. *The Black Rider* features tall, thin, all-capital letters, black on an off-white background, with layers of color peeping out from behind the black. (As such, it is almost identical to the cover of a catalogue sold by the Museum of Fine Arts Boston to accompany a 1991 exhibit of Wilson's work Robert Wilson et al., *Robert Wilson's Vision: An Exhibition of Works by Robert Wilson with a Sound Environment by Hans Peter Kuhn* (New York:

Metallica wringer and ended up on music store stands, bore no visual markers that would link it to Wilson or his production. The cover features the head and armless bust of a mannequin with the word *LULU* written, apparently in blood, in jagged letters at the top; the bloody handwriting bears no resemblance to Wilson's curvy hand. Indeed, if album reviewers mentioned the Wilson connection at all, it was either as a tangential side note, or as a sort of apology for the strangeness of the final musical product.[10] In addition, the music on the album bears almost no stylistic resemblance to the songs as performed in the show. Despite a common inception, then, the *Lulu* created by Wilson and Reed and the *Lulu* released by Reed and Metallica were not so much two sides of a single coin as they were two independent iterations of a common character.

When Wilson's *Lulu* premiered, and for six months thereafter, the ten songs in the production that came from the album would have been entirely unknown to audiences. Seven other songs, however—almost forty percent of the songs in the show—were already well-known examples from Reed's oeuvre. Some of them, such as the iconic "Sunday Morning" (from the 1967 album *The Velvet Underground & Nico*) count among the best-known songs in the great rock-n-roll songbook. (See Table 1: Source albums for songs in *Lulu*.) Thus, the music for Wilson's production was neither entirely new nor merely a collection of extant songs.

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, in association with H.N. Abrams, 1991).) The handwriting on *Leonce und Lena* is squatter and rounder, mixing upper- and lower-case letters.

[10] The current iTunes review is as good an example as any: "Originally conceived as a Berlin theater production by avant-garde director Robert Wilson, *Lulu* is an interesting collaboration between two iconoclastic rock acts." (https://itunes.apple.com/us/album/lulu/id467890760, accessed February 27, 2017) For another example of how Wilson's role in project was framed, see Ben Sisario, "Powerhouses of Rock, Unite: LouTallica," *The New York Times*, October 27, 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/30/arts/music/lou-reed-and-metallica-team-up-on-lulu.html (accessed February 27, 2017).

Songs in *Lulu* (2011), Robert Wilson & Lou Reed, Berliner Ensemble		
SONG	SOURCE	LOCATION IN SHOW
Rooftop Garden	***Legendary Hearts* (1983)**	Prologue (Death A); sung by Lulu
Frustration	*Lulu*, track 7	Act I; sung by Goll, then Goll and Schwarz
Rooftop Garden	***Legendary Hearts* (1983)**	Death B: London, "Dachkammer"; sung by Lulu
Cheat On Me	*Lulu*, track 6	Act II, Schöning
The View	*Lulu*, track 2	Act II, Jack
I Remember You	***Mistrial* (1986)**	Act III; sung by Lulu
Junior Dad	*Lulu*, track 10	Act III; sung by Schigolch
Mistress Dread	*Lulu*, track 4	Act III; sung by Countess Geschwitz
Caring (Dragon)	*Lulu*, track 9	Act III; sung by Schöning
A Gift	***Coney Island Baby* (1975)**	Act III; sung by Rodrigo
Leave Me Alone	***Street Hassle* (1978)**	Act III; sung by Alwa
Pumping Blood	*Lulu*, track 3	Act III; sung by Jack
Sunday Morning	***Velvet Underground and Nico* (1967)**	Following Act III, "on the way to Paris"; sung by "Ruth"
City Lights	***The Bells* (1979)**; also *City Lights* (compilation album, 1985)	Prologue B, "on the way to Paris"; sung by Rodrigo Quast
Rooftop Garden	***Legendary Hearts* (1983)**	Death C: London, "Dachkammer"; sung by Lulu
Vicious Circle	***Rock and Roll Heart* (1976)**	Act IV; sung by Geschwitz
Little Dog	*Lulu*, track 8	Act IV; sung by Lulu
Brandenburg Gate	*Lulu*, track 1	Between Acts IV and V; sung by chorus of men
Iced Honey	*Lulu*, track 5	Act V; sung by Jack
Little Dog	*Lulu*, track 8	Act V; sung by Lulu
Mistress Dread	*Lulu*, track 4	Act V, sung by Countess Geschwitz
Cheat on Me	*Lulu*, track 6	Act V, sung by Lulu and Mr. Hopkins
Rooftop Garden	***Legendary Hearts* (1983)**	Act V; sung by Lulu
Mistress Dread	*Lulu*, track 4	Act V; sung by Countess Geschwitz
Iced Honey	*Lulu*, track 5	Epilogue; sung by whole cast

TABLE 5.1: Source albums for songs in *Lulu*. Entries in bold are from earlier albums in Lou Reed's oeuvre.

Rather, it brought together unknown and well-known songs, songs that pointed toward Reed's musical future and songs that represented his musical past. (Indeed, the distinction between "old songs" and "new songs" is further complicated by the fact that, less than eight months after the production's premiere, even the songs on the *Lulu* album would join the ranks of songs that audience members might already know.) The intermingling of songs that are both old and new also has implications for the structure of the production itself. For instance, "Rooftop Garden," the song from the Prologue, was an extant work in Reed's oeuvre. As the Prologue looked decisively forward toward the denouement of the narrative, then, the song itself invited the audience to look backwards, to a moment in time almost thirty years before when it had first been released for public consumption on record.

The emerging pair of binaries—narrative versus music, looking forward versus looking back—can readily be complicated, even problematized. Yes, audience members could well have known Reed's song; they could also have already been familiar with Wedekind's story. If they had been familiar with the latter and not with the former, they might nevertheless also have known Alban Berg's opera of the same name; new musical interpolations could easily have suggested a tacit comparison between the music of Wilson's *Lulu* and the music of Berg's opera. Classifying the many ways that Wilson's show could have been experienced as a combination of "new and old," however, would not only be difficult—it would be, fundamentally, beside the point. The juxtaposition of disparate points in time is fundamental to *Lulu*, but it is the creation of the temporal loops within the production itself, the manufacturing experiences that can be lived, re-lived, and recognized within the four hours of the production that I wish to investigate here. Let's begin, however, by returning to the earliest stages of Wilson's conception, to his visual book.

Lulu's Not-Just-Visual Book

Wilson's sketch of the Prologue presents the general appearance of the scene: six men standing—as opposed to the eight in the production—plus one lying on the ground, in front of a white drop reading LULU. It also includes a series of bullet points. Of these, two points pertain to the narrative role of the scene ("Lulu's Death," "all the men of Lulu's life"), and one relates to the entrance of an actor/character ("Lulu only seen at the end"). Two more points clearly relate to sound: the scene will be very quiet, and Lulu's voice will be heard singing throughout. Finally, rather cryptically, there are the words "HAPPY PERFECT DAY!"

- Prologue
- Lulu's Death *(all the men of LULU'S LIFE)
- very quiet
- Lulu only seen at the end
- Hear Lulu's voice singing quietly thruout [sic]
- HAPPY PERFECT DAY!

How does this sketch compare to the Prologue as it was finally performed? The Prologue is, indeed, "very quiet." Instead of hearing Lulu's voice singing quietly throughout, however, the song that she will sing is distilled into a single, monophonic piano line that begins even before the lights dim and that continues, without pausing, through the scene. The melody even precedes the announcement made shortly before the lights in the auditorium begin to dim: "Ladies, and Gentle–[rising in pitch]–*men*? [dropping to a much deeper pitch] LULU'S DEATH. Prologue A." Following this, it is a pointillistic piano melody that accompanies the nine men as they walk onto the stage. Yet the melody is so slow (some eight seconds pass between each note in the performance on the video) that the effect is less that of a melody and more that of, say, a constellation of individual sounds: a few pinpricks of sound which it is up to the spectator to assemble, if they so desire, into a melody. (In fact, it was not until I had viewed the video several times that I recognized the melody as "Rooftop Garden.") The

stillness of the piano melody is occasionally broken by various sounds: that strangled scream; the *THUD* of a body falling and hitting the floor; echoing, artificial footsteps.

On the one hand, then, the melody is part of a sonic collage, a juxtaposition of unrelated sounds that overlap and collide and yet bear little connection to one another in the real time of the show. On the other hand, the melody played by the piano is one instantiation of a tune that will occur in (quite literally) a variety of voices across the prologue. Soon, a female voice (Lulu's voice, we shall later discover) is heard singing "Sitting in a rooftop garden, looking down below." Since the piano continues playing, the effect is like that of a fugal *stretto* (when two voices present the fugue subject simultaneously), but a *stretto* in which one of the melodies is extremely augmented. And when Jack the Ripper (or, more accurately, the man who will much later introduce himself as Jack) appears onstage—he is the tall, thin youth in the hoodie and peach pants—he whistles a fragment of the same song. Thus, in sonic terms, we have two different kinds of temporal relations at play: one is the simultaneous presentation of unconnected sounds, the other is a temporally disjunct presentation of the same melody, subject to a loose kind of imitative counterpoint (and thus beginning at different times) and augmentation/diminution (and thus unfurling at different speeds).

A third wrinkle is added a few moments later, when a cello enters the fugue, joining the piano, Lulu, and Jack. Now the female voice that has been singing "Rooftop Garden" is heard again: "Oh, what a perfect day!" she giggles. Intermingled with the song and the comments on the perfectness of the day, however, the same voice cries out "Mörder!"—"*Murder!*" Finally, at the end of the scene, the woman to whom the voice belongs (Angela Winkler, who plays Lulu) appears onstage; the three different versions of her voice are all still audible, but the body makes no verbal expression at all. Clearly, she has been recorded on three separate tracks, and her bodily presence—a fourth track of sorts—has turned this into a

polyphonic presentation of the character (or the actress) herself.[11] The song "Rooftop Garden" has thus been treated as a source of musical material to be mined, layered, patched together, perfectly embodying my assertion (in the Introduction) that music is, much like Wedekind's text, a source of inspiration for Wilson rather than a sacred object.

But what about "Happy Perfect Day," the final line in Wilson's annotations for the scene and the only line written entirely in upper-case letters? One possibility is that the comment simply refers to Winkler/Lulu's comment "Oh, what a perfect day!" Another possibility, however, is that the bullet point refers to the song "Perfect Day," from Lou Reed's 1972 album *Transformer*. At some point in the production process, we can therefore assume, "Perfect Day" was replaced by "Rooftop Garden," from the 1983 album *Legendary Hearts*.[12] (This reading is supported by the fact that, although "Rooftop Garden" is one of the major sources of sound in the scene, nowhere is it mentioned in the sketch.) While "Rooftop Garden" was likely chosen because of its allusion to the rooftop apartment where Lulu will meet her fate at the end of the show, "Perfect Day"—a love song about spending a "perfect day" with a lover, drinking sangria in the park, feeding the animals in the zoo—would have chimed with the cruel irony underlying Lulu's story.

Two important points thus reveal themselves. First, the words of the songs, the semantic content, will be an important player in the construction of Lulu's story. In contrast even to the non-sung words spoken in the Prologue ("Mörder!," "Oh, what a perfect day!")

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[11] For more on the effect of hearing a recording of an actor who is live onstage, see my analyses in Chapter Two under the sub–heading "Laughing and Crying."

[12] The albums are, respectively, *Transformer*, RCA (1972); and *Legendary Hearts*, RCA (1983). It is worth noting that the song "Perfect Day" represents not only Reed's past oeuvre, but Wilson's as well: Wilson and Reed had also collaborated on *Time Rocker* (1996), based on the stories of H.G. Wells, and on *POEtry* (2000), based on the writings Edgar Allen Poe. The songs for *POEtry* were, like those for *Lulu*, released as an album, titled *The Raven*. In addition to the songs from the Wilson production, two earlier Reed tracks were included, one of which was "Perfect Day."

which pile up on top of one another with little concrete meaning, the words of the songs help craft the mood and the meaning of the scene. Yet for this meaning to obtain, the song must be sung, at least in part, as it was written, rather than being pulled apart, dissected, and pieced back together into a Frankensteinian soundtrack. Second, the use of an extant song from Reed's oeuvre adds a form of temporal twisting to the scene, looking back to a time well before the performance of this show (several decades before, in fact) and bringing that point in time into the performance in the present day. (In fact, "Rooftop Garden" was not the only sonic event in the Prologue that gestured towards a previous time. Wilson's introduction to this scene of Lulu's Death—"Ladies and Gentle-*men*?" comes from the announcement that Wilson made, standing in front of the curtain at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, at the beginning of his 1973 production *The Life and Times of Joseph Stalin*.[13])

For productions at the Berliner Ensemble, Wilson's visual books are not an arcane piece of pre-production material, available only to the intrepid archivist. Rather, they are there for the perusing, printed (at least in part) in the program books alongside the libretto for the production. In fact, the *Lulu* program includes not one, but two drawings for each scene: one sketch, filling a whole program book page, precedes the printed text of each act, as well as each of the interludes Wilson inserts between acts. To see the complete collection of these sketches, one must flip through the many pages of the program book. The other set, however, is laid out in a single line, on the second page of the program book, where ten tiny rectangles are labeled according to their position in the production:

> Death A/Prologue "A" – Act I – Death "B" – Act II – Death C – Act III – Prologue "B" – Act IV – Death "D"/Act IV

[13] Robert Wilson, "The Campbell Lecture Series: Robert Wilson, March 26, 2014, Rice University, Houston, TX", 2014, accessed June 22, 2014, http://campbell.rice.edu/CampbellContent.aspx. 25:57-26:03.

– Death "E"/Epilogue[14]

The line-up of drawings that opens the program book thus recalls the line-up of men that parade across the stage in the opening moments of Wilson's production. Taken individually, the sketches represent the various stages of Lulu's life that shall play out across the narration. Taken together, however, they reveal in a single glance the structure of the play as a whole. In the case of *Lulu*, we see that her "Death" occurs not only at the beginning and at the end of the show, but rather that it is a point to which the production will return repeatedly. As mentioned in Chapter Four, Wilson has long called the spaces between individual acts "knee plays," because, like a knee, they connect the two halves of a single limb.[15] One might be tempted to thus describe the death scenes as the glue that holds the various acts together, but a more compelling reading takes the idea of a "knee" more literally: the interpolation of "knee plays" allows the linear flow of the intermediary acts to bend, to take on new angles with respect to one another. Indeed, the repeated return to a single point—Lulu's "death"—renders the production circular in nature, always returning to a single event, even as the time of the production and the course of the narrative both flow forward.

In broader terms, Wilson's visual book is a space to work out the dense filigree of relationships and resonances that he likes to craft between scenes. It is also a way to cleanly and clearly express that relationship in an instantly understandable form. When it comes to

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[14] Reproduced from the Berliner Ensemble program for *Lulu* (Berlin: Berliner Ensemble, Theater am Schiffbauerdam, Programmheft Nr. 130, 2011), 3. All of the sketches appear in the program on a single line. Quotation marks are reproduced here as they appear in Wilson's handwriting; the slash between, for instance, "Death A" and "Prologue 'A,'" indicates that the two labels were written on two separate lines, the first entry appearing above the second. The program will henceforth be cited as "*Lulu* Program."

[15] See, for instance, Robert Wilson, inverviewed (with Rufus Wainwright) by John Rockwell at the BAM 2014 Next Wave Festival, http://www.bam.org/rwrw (accessed 21 February 2015), 13:33-13:40. I was present at the interview; the transcription is my own, taken from the video posted online after the event.

any of his works, he told an audience in 2014, "I can diagram them, so I can tell you rather quickly what the picture is.... There is a cohesion because of the mega-structure."[16] And since this mega-structure both grows out of and results in a profound interconnectedness of the many tableaux that make up his works, he likes to describe his production as "theme[s] and variation[s] of time, space, and narrative."[17]

Perhaps this is also the reason that Wilson loves to begin his shows with a parade of characters. While describing the structure of *The Black Rider* at a talk in Houston in 2014, Wilson explained, "The whole company will come out of [a] box. We'll introduce them, like the circus. The circus is a very good form for theater: you have—you parade all the actors in the beginning, see the type of walkers, the animals, the clown, then you see the separate acts, and at the end they make a big parade again."[18] This is precisely the structure of the Prologue of *Lulu* (although *Lulu*'s quiet opening lacks the carnivalesque music that he employed for the parade in, say, *The Black Rider*); as we shall see, a parade of sorts will also occur in the Epilogue, "Death E."

In light of Wilson's interest in the circus format, it is significant that he chose to stage the earlier version of Wedekind's *Lulu* rather than the later revised edition. The 1913 *Erdgeist* begins with an animal tamer [*Tierbändiger*] carnival-barking the audience into his tent. As he lists the extraordinary animals that one might see inside, he calls offstage for an assistant to

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[16] Robert Wilson, inverviewed (with Rufus Wainwright) by John Rockwell at the BAM 2014 Next Wave Festival, 15:13-15:44. I was present at the interview; the transcription is my own, taken from the video posted online after the event.

[17] Robert Wilson, lecture address, "The Campbell Lecture Series: Robert Wilson," Rice University (Houston, TX), March 27, 2014, http://campbell.rice.edu/CampbellContent.aspx (accessed June 22, 2014), 1:17:00, also 1:09:33.

[18] Ibid., 28:30-28:54.

"bring out our snake" at which point the assistant carries out "the actress who will play Lulu."[19] The comparison between Wedekind's carnival-barking setup and Wilson's circus-inspired lineup, however, is illuminating as to each artist's conception of the play and its titular heroine. For Wedekind, *Lulu* is a woman of sexual appetites, and thus is an animal to be viewed and treated as such. Indeed, Wedekind takes pains to note that, as Lulu is carried offstage, the Animal trainer caresses her hips—or, in an alternate translation, pats her on the haunch ["tätschelt ihr die Hüften"].[20] Moreover, she is the very animal (a snake) that signals the weakness of women and the concomitant Fall of Man. As the on-looking audience, of course, we are complicit in her reduction to animal status—as is the manhandling animal trainer—but she is an animal nevertheless.

In Wilson's "circus," however, the focus is not on Lulu's animal sexuality, but on the men who made her thus. From the first moments of the production, when it is explicitly announced that we are about to see "Lulu's Death," the focus is on her destruction—a destruction not occasioned by her own, "unfeminine" sexuality, but by the men who demand such sexuality from her. Indeed, the line-up of no fewer than nine men in the Prologue suggests that it is not just one man who will kill her, but the cumulative effect of the many men in her life. "Lulu became the destroyer of all," the Viennese critic Karl Kraus famously remarked in 1905, "because she was destroyed by all."[21]

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[19] "Bring mir unsre *Schlange* her! (Ein schmerbäuchiger Arbeiter trägt die Darstellerin der LULU in ihrem Pierrotkostüm aus dem Zelt und setzt sie vor dem Tierbändiger nieder.)" Frank Wedekind, "Erdgeist (1913)," in *Frank Wedekind Werke: Kritische Studienausgabe*, ed. Hartmut Vinçon (Darmstadt: Jürgen Hausser, 1994), 405.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Karl Kraus, "Die Büchse der Pandora," in *Grimassen: Ausgewählte Werke*, vol. 1 (Munich: Langen Müller, 1971), 54. Quoted in Ross, *The Rest is Noise*, 206.

Through their inclusion in the program book, Wilson's sketches can be experienced either as an introduction to a performance, or as an *aide-memoire* viewed after the performance has ended.[22] For theater scholar Marc Robinson, Wilson's production drawings inevitably enter into a dance of anticipation and recollection with the final product, where, just as the drawings look forward to the staged performance, so too does the staged performance resonate with the memory of the drawings. "If, when we enter Wilson's theater, we remain haunted by the drawings," he writes, each production will begin to seem less a singular work than the second half of a diptych, or the second act of a two-part spectacle." The crucial aspect of this diptych is that both halves are equally significant.

> The first part, enacted alone over Wilson's drawing table for an audience of one, isn't merely preparatory, nor should its products be approached as mere records of the more fully realized theater. If anything, the reverse could be true. The productions can be treated as the memories of the drawings, recalling us to a period when the cool, idealized shapes onstage churned with unpredictable energy, each mark retaining something of the motion that made it."[23]

This is particularly true if, as in the case of *Lulu*, the drawings are explicitly made available to the audience. Indeed, we might take it a step further and suggest that the similarities between the layout of the drawings in the program book (first a line-up, then one at a time) and the exposition of Lulu's lovers onstage places the drawings and their performance into a mutually reinforcing relationship. Significantly, the sketches that appear at the front of the program seem to have been sketched earlier than those displayed throughout in the book. The later sketches include more details pertaining to the final stage set—a more accurate rendition of where lights will hang and how many, for instance. The earlier ones, on the other hand, are

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[22] Or, for a third possibility, viewed during intermission, where they are at once a remembrance of what one has already seen an introduction to what one will see.

[23] Marc Robinson, "The Drawings of Robert Wilson," in *Robert Wilson from Within*, ed. Margery Arent Safir (Paris: Arts Aena, American University of Paris, 2011), 223-24.

like a visual draft of an idea that will be developed and concretized later—in subsequent sketches; in rehearsal; in performance. Thus, even the sketches themselves invite us to look, both forward and back. The individual, more detailed sketches later in the book inevitably recall both the sketches that occurred earlier (both in Wilson's conception and in the layout of the book), but they also look forward to the act that is printed in the following pages and that will occur in performance onstage. Like the sonic collage of the Prologue, then, this production of *Lulu* can be experienced in both a single moment and over the four-hour duration of the show.

Looking Forward and Looking Back

At the beginning of Death B, between Acts I and II, the white drop hanging behind the proscenium has opened to form a small black square, under which sit an old man and a young man hunched against the glare of the spotlight. The old man's shoulders droop, as does his chrysanthemum. "Lulu, where are you?" he cries.[24] (Fig. 5.2) A thunderous screeching, the lights darken so that only the black square and the area immediately surrounding are illuminated; as the lights brighten again, the second man turns to face the audience. "She should have been the empress of Russia," he says. "There she would have been in her element. – A second Catherine the Great…" He trails off, and begins calling out, "Lulu! – Katja! – My wife! – My wife! – My wife!" He pauses and his brows furrow.

The text comes from Act V of Wedekind's play, in the attic apartment in London, specifically scenes 1 and 2; individual lines are cut out and glued together like a grotesque collage. In Wedekind's play, the men speak to one another and speak to Lulu, who enters and

[24] "SCHIGOLCH: Sie will uns erst die Zunge zum Hals heraus hängen sehen – Yes, yes, wo bleibst du – Lulu!" (*Lulu* Program, 30.)

FIGURE 5.2: "Death B." Lulu (Angela Winkler), Alwa Schöning (Markus Gertken, center), and Schigolch (Jürgen Holtz, right). *Lulu*, Berliner Ensemble. Photograph by Lesley Leslie-Spinks.

exits the scene repeatedly as they talk. On Wilson's stage, however, all of the relationship strings have been cut: there is no indication that they see or hear each other, or even that they exist within the same time or space. They do not interact. When Lulu appears onstage at the end of the scene, singing "*Sitting in a rooftop garden*" they take no notice of her, and she takes no notice of them. The characters and their lines have themselves become a collage, a visual and conversational analogue to the overlapping sounds described in the Prologue.

The idea that characters (or, perhaps, it is more accurate to say "actors") onstage share a space without interacting finds strong expression in Hans-Thies Lehmann's discussion of Wilson's work. It is worth quoting Lehmann's description of Wilson's theater at length, since it aptly describes the kind of non-interaction of characters described above, creates a richly evocative impression of Wilson's visual style, and links the visuals to the lack of dramatic direction. "The actors 'sharing' the stage often do not … enter into the context of an interaction of any kind," writes Lehmann.

> And the space of this theatre, too, is discontinuous: light and colours, disparate signs and objects create a stage that no longer signifies a homogeneous space: frequently Wilson's space is divided 'into stripes' parallel to the apron of the stage, so that actions taking place in different depths of the stage can either be synthesized by the spectator or be read as 'parallelograms', so to speak. It is thus already left to the constructing imagination of the viewer whether s/he considers the different figures on stages as existing within a shared context at all, or only as synchronically presented. It is obvious that the interpretability of the whole texture for this reason is close to zero. Through the montage of juxtaposed or imbricated virtual spaces, which – this is the crucial point – remain independent from one another so that no synthesis is offered, a poetic sphere of *connotations* comes into being."[25]

The effect is, at heart, a mise-en-scène that works like a montage. Lehmann relates this precisely to the much-discussed de-hierarchization of theatrical means in Wilson's theater, which is to say the removal of a (typically narrative) text as the foundation for the production and the impetus for all events taking place onstage. Yet, as with the other analyses of Wilson's

[25] Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, trans. Karen Jürs-Munby (London: Routledge, 2006), 79.

"postdramatic" work discussed in this dissertation, the analytical tools developed in this context provide important insight into Wilson's more recent "dramatic" work. The scene described here is intimately connected to a dramatic trajectory—that of Lulu's rise and fall. Yet it depicts that narrative using not only extended expressive means, but also a re-arrangement of the temporal flow of the show. Across the individual acts, Lulu undergoes dramatic transformation; in the "death scenes," a single moment is repeated over and over.

There is another fundamental aspect of this scene, however: the characters' relationship to time. Alwa thinks not only of how Lulu "should have been the Empress of Russia." He also thinks of his own past, and the role that Lulu played in shaping it:

> Oh, what she turned me into! When I think back – How sunny my existence was! – – the brightest future, on the best paths, to become one of the leading men of the time – – all spoiled – squandered – stubbed out![26]

To look back is to recall looking forward, the retrospective glance reveals the squandered present. But, in the young man's telling, it is not merely his future that was squandered, it is Lulu's future as well: she might have been the empress of Russia. Instead, they—Lulu, Alwa (the young man here, the son of the husband whom she killed immediately before fleeing for Paris), Schigolch (the old man, a father figure of sorts, who also acts as Lulu's pimp and her hit man)—find themselves in a rooftop apartment in London. It is not merely characters who inhabit the same space and moment without any real connection: it may also be thoughts and memories.

The placement of this scene within the space of the narrative demands a similar temporal engagement from the viewer. At this point in the production, neither Schigolch nor

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[26] Sie hätte Kaiserin von Rußland werden sollen. – Da wäre sie in ihrer Sphäre. – Eine zweite Katharina die Zweite… Lulu! – Katja! – Mein Weib! – Mein Weib! – Mein Weib! Was sie aus mir gemacht hat! Wenn ich zurückdenke – Wie sonnig mein Dasein war! – – die glänzendste Zukunft, auf dem besten Wege, einer der ersten Männer der Zeit zu werden – – alles vergeudet – verludert – verpafft! (*Lulu* Program, 30; in this and all subsequent quotations, punctuation is reproduced as in the program.)

Alwa have appeared in the narrative proper; the audience has seen them, but only in the line-up of men in the Prologue. Their relationship to Lulu is at least partially revealed by what they say: Alwa speaks of Lulu as "my wife," but also recalls the first time he met her, while she was still married to Dr. Goll, as well as his relationship to her (both motherly and sisterly) while she was married to his father.

For Lehmann, it is this synchresis-without-synthesis that makes Wilson the prime proponent of what the author and playwright Gertrude Stein called "landscape theater." Lehmann's analysis of Wilson's "landscapes" focuses on individual tableaux, rather than an overarching dramatic structure. Yet the content—indeed, the very existence—of this "Death B" suggests that to fully analyze the scene we must consider it in the broader temporal context of the production at large. Stein's theory, I argue, is optimally positioned to do so, but only if we can look at it from a new angle.

Syncopated Time, and a Theater of Timelessness

In a 1935 lecture on "Plays," Stein expressed her dissatisfaction with traditional drama through recourse to a musical metaphor. "The thing that is fundamental about plays," she claimed, "is that the scene as depicted on the stage is … almost always in syncopated time [with] the emotion of anybody in the audience."[27] Stein felt that, when viewing a play in real time, the spectator had no time to become "acquainted" with the characters before the narrative of the play had begun to churn inevitably forward. As a result, the viewer found

[27] Gertrude Stein, "Plays," in *Look At Me Now and Here I Am: Selected Works, 1911-1945*, ed. Patricia Meyerowitz (London: Peter Owen, 2004), 58. Due to the difficulty of Stein's prose, I have chosen to edit her quotes for readability in the main body text of this chapter. Where relevant, full quotes shall be provided in footnotes. The sentence quoted here is, in its entirety: "The thing that is fundamental about plays is that the scene as depicted on the stage is more often than not one might say it is almost always in syncopated time in relation to the emotion of anybody in the audience."

herself emotionally out of sync with the events of the play, a situation which made Stein "nervous." The solution to such asynchrony struck Stein while she was vacationing in the South of France: a play should be like a landscape.

The advantage of a landscape was that it overcame the syncopation which Stein so disliked. "A landscape does not move," she explained, "nothing really moves in a landscape but things are there."[28] A related issue had to do with how the eye moved across the space of the landscape: A landscape is always there, available to be seen, but imposes no teleological path by which to view it. It is perhaps unsurprising, given the overarching conception of Wilson's theater as a "theater of images," that he has often been held up as the greatest practitioner heir apparent to Stein's concept; two such examples will be offered below. The danger of this approach, however, is that it can flatten Wilson's work into a series of discrete visual events—a description that would have appealed to Denis Diderot, but one which does not capture how Wilson applies his visual language to larger temporal frames and to productions which follow a narrative (even a teleological narrative). Thus, I would like to suggest another mode of applying Stein's term to Wilson's work, one which takes into account a fundamentally temporal art form: music.

Stein never quite states, beyond evocative yet vague visual metaphors, what "landscape theater" should (or even might) look like in practice. What is clear, however, is what Stein did like about plays: she liked *reading* them. Plays could thus be experienced "as pure poetry," she believed, yet this was only one small part of the advantage that a play in book form presented. The more important issue was the kind of reading that the material of the book afforded. The characters of the play, Stein believed, and the narrative they created and embodied, could

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[28] Ibid., 80.

become clear only by moving back and forth between the poetry itself and the list of characters while reading. It was in this way that, from the poetry *and* from the paratextual materials—the table of contents, even the physicality of the codex itself with its flippable pages into which one could insert a finger as bookmark—that the portraits of individual characters could gradually emerge.[29] This experience of reading a play stood in stark contrast to the way one made an "acquaintance" with characters in a standard theatrical production, where actors constantly appear and disappear as a narrative rolls unceasingly forward.

An intriguingly similar solution can be found in the work of another author, a rough contemporary of Stein's. "One cannot *read* a book: one can only reread it," Vladimir Nabokov asserted in his *Lectures on Literature*. "In reading a book, we must have time to acquaint ourselves with it. We have no physical organ (as we have the eye in regard to a painting) that takes in the whole picture and then can enjoy its details. But at a second, or third, or fourth reading we do, in a sense, behave towards a book as we do towards a painting."[30] It is significant that Nabokov uses the notion of "acquaintance" to talk about engaging with narrative, since it was precisely the issue of "acquaintance" that so bothered Stein when viewing plays. It is also telling that the solution suggested by Nabokov—that, in a second reading, we may approach the novel like we would a painting, engaging with each detail while also keeping the whole work in mind—is one that attempts to equate a narrative art form with a piece of visual art. As such, Nabokov's fundamental observation—that it is in *returning* to a literary event that we may begin

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[29] "I very much liked reading plays. In the first place there was in reading plays as I have said the necessity of going forward and back to the list of characters to find out which was which and then insensibly to know. Then there was the poetry and then gradually there were the portraits." (Ibid., 68.) For more on paratexts, see Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

[30] Vladimir Nabokov, *Lectures on Literature*, ed. Fredson Bowers and with an introduction by John Updike (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanivich, 1980), 3. Emphasis original.

to approach it as we would a painting—can shed light both on Stein's concept of landscape theater and how *Lulu*, taken in its entirety, may be "like a landscape."

For Marc Robinson, Stein's landscape theater is fundamentally about a kind of seeing and attentiveness which leads "spectators [to] address and readdress the same beguiling scene in the hope of understanding it fully."[31] In the visual realm, Robinson's description reflects the slowly changing, apparently static yet persistently mutable appearance of the death scenes: a white drop opened slightly to reveal a black rectangle, the size and shape of which change with each iteration of the death scene. In the dramatic arc, we address and readdress Lulu's death repeatedly, each time with our understanding deepened by the act we have just seen. And in the sonic sphere, the same characteristics are present in each iteration of the death scene: quietness, stillness, and Lulu singing *Rooftop Garden*.

Let's return to my suggestion above that the line-up of men in the prologue is like a physical manifestation of the cast of characters. To take it from being merely a circus-inspired parade of figures, however, Wilson would need to find a way of "flipping back" to the cast of the characters *as* the performance—and, just as importantly, as the narrative—progresses. "Death B," then, is the first case of "flipping back" to the material and characters of the prologue.

"Looking Down Below"

"Sitting in a rooftop garden," sings Lulu, "looking down below.... Isn't it lovely watching a plane go by?" She lies on a low block, surrounded by the white drop. The empty black space—now long and low—fits around her body like a snug coffin. She sings in a wistful

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[31] Marc Robinson, "Robert Wilson, Nicolas Poussin, and *Lohengrin*," in *Land/Scape/Theater*, ed. Elinor Fuchs and Una Chaudhuri (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 159.

voice, as though recalling past times, and the lyrics of her song are evocatively romantic. From her perch on the roof, above the blinking lights of the urban expanse and away from the hustle and bustle of the city, she (and her lover) may savor the raindrops, watch a passing plane. Death C is the first time the audience hear the whole song, unabridged and uninterrupted:

Sitting in our rooftop garden
Looking down below
Sitting in our rooftop garden
Waiting for the sun
Isn't it lovely watching a plane go by
What a lovely couple are you and I

Sitting in our rooftop garden a few drops of rain
The lights in the city blinking on
Just the same

In our rooftop garden
In our rooftop garden
Up on the roof[32]

It is easy for the citizen of modern urbanity (a group which certainly included songwriter Lou Reed) to forget just how revolutionary a view from above once was. When Frank Wedekind first began work on *Die Büchse der Pandora* in 1892, the Eiffel Tower had stood, looking down on Paris for a mere three years. In New York giant edifices did not began scraping the sky with gusto until shortly after the turn of the century, more than a decade after Lulu was first set to paper. When Wedekind placed Lulu's death in an attic apartment, the highest floor in a building evidently signified squalor and poverty: only the poorest of the poor would have to trek the flights of stairs to their poorly insulated apartments top-floor walkups.

Skyscrapers, by contrast, were paragons of modernity and luxury, whisking wealthy residents and visitors to the upper reaches of urban topography with elevators. Such marvels of engineering forever altered the urban skyline. Even more important than their imposing

[32] From *Lulu* Program, 46.

addition to the appearance of a city, however, was the new perspective they offered *of* the city, one which encompassed more and more as one went higher. It is a remarkable fact, for instance, that when the Metropolitan Life Insurance tower opened on Union Square in Manhattan in 1909, viewers on the observation deck could see a full one-sixteenth of the population of the United States.[33] While this fact says as much about the condensed nature of urban living spaces as it does about the views offered by the tower's observation space, it also neatly encapsulates how a view from above changed humanity's relationship with the expansive spaces of the ground.[34] Yet these luxurious views also revealed the limits of the city. "Full of jaunty pride," F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote of his first trip to the top of the Empire State Building, "the New Yorker had climbed here and seen with dismay what he had never suspected, that the city was not the endless succession of canyons that he had supposed but that it had limits —from the tallest structure he saw for the first time that it faded out into the country on all sides, into an expanse of green and blue that alone was limitless."[35]

Implicit in Fitzgerald's description, however, was not merely a new relationship with the limits of the city and with the spatial expanse of the metropolis, but also a relationship between the expanse of the city and time. New York City, viewed from above, is no longer a succession of canyons, experienced in linear fashion one after another; rather, the vast, pulsing city—and its limits, and the limitlessness of what lies beyond—could all be taken in with a single glance. For Michel de Certeau, writing in the 1980s, the effect of gazing down on New

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[33] James Sanders and Pari Dukovic, "Top of the Town: A long ascent to Manhattan's observation decks," *The New Yorker*, May 2, 2016, http://www.newyorker.com/ magazine/2016/05/02/the-views-from-manhattans-observation-decks (accessed 25 January 2017).

[34] It is also worth noting that much of the population visible from the tower was still living in the crowded tenements, of Manhattan, suffering in living conditions more like Lulu's squalid abode than the rarefied luxury of the Met Life Tower.

[35] F. Scott Fitzgerald, "My Lost City," in *On Booze* (New York: New Directions, 2009), 76.

York City from the 110th floor observation deck of the World Trade Center echoed Fitzgerald's experience to a remarkable degree. Fitzgerald's "endless succession of canyons" became the "endless labyrinths" of Daedalus, and Fitzgerald's New Yorker, "full of jaunty pride," becomes the legendarily hubristic Icarus.[36]

By the early twentieth century there was, of course, another way to get higher than any skyscraper: flight. This is where our story returns to Gertrude Stein and her concept of "landscape theater." In 1935, during a lecture tour of the United States, Stein took her first airplane ride. She was awestruck by the view, one which she described through recourse to technologies then making their mark on the modern world. "One must not forget," she wrote,

> that the earth seen from an airplane is more splendid than the earth seen from an automobile. The automobile is the end of progress on the earth, it goes quicker but essentially the landscapes seen from an automobile are the same as the landscapes seen from a carriage, a train, a wagon, or in walking. But the earth seen from an airplane is something else. So the twentieth century is not the same as the nineteenth century.[37]

The essay quoted here appeared as an epilogue to *Picasso: The Complete Writings*, and it is thus unsurprising that she chose to compare to the lines she saw dividing the territorial expanse of the earth the lines of cubism: "I saw there on the earth the mingling lines of Picasso."[38] But for theater scholar Elinor Fuchs, Stein's description of the landscape-from-above provides the perfect exegetical model for Stein's landscape theater. "From a sufficient height, Stein

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[36] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 92. The one difference between the two descriptions is that while Fitzgerald's hubris was shattered by his encounter with the limitless "expanse of green and blue," Certeau's viewer acquired divine sight: "His elevation … transforms the bewitching world by which one was 'possessed' into a text that lies before one's eyes. It allows one to read it, to be a solar Eye, looking down like a god." (Ibid.)

[37] Quoted in Elinor Fuchs, "Reading for Landscape: The Case of American Drama," in *Land/Scape/Theater*, 47.

[38] Quoted in ibid.

perceived, even the greatest speed can be translated into the experience of space."[39] In other words, the sight line from the airplane crafted a new relationship between space and time, essentially minimizing the temporal component so that one may see and experience all (essentially) simultaneously. The effect is similar to what Madeleine L'Engle called in her eponymous novel (and in the epigraph to this chapter) a "wrinkle in time": When space is stretched out, it takes time to travel from one point to another. But when the fabric of space is folded, the journey is instantaneous.[40] Or, as the children's book author William Pène du Bois put it, when travel is instantaneous "you will hear of 'miles' and you will hear of 'hours,' but the expression 'miles per hour' will be most old-fashioned."[41]

Indeed, the idea that a view from an airplane would all but obliterate the linear qualities of travel is richly evidenced by literary efforts from the early years of flight. Well before Fitzgerald received the systemic shock afforded by his trek to the top of the Empire State Building, Rudyard Kipling, that supreme writer of the travel story, would see in the possibilities of airline travel precisely the kind of temporal shortening observed by Stein. A lecture Kipling delivered to the Royal Geographic Society on February 17, 1914 reads as a kind of eulogy to the linear experience of travel:

> Conceive for a moment a generation wholly divorced from all known smells of land and sea-travel—a generation which will climb into and drop down from the utterly odourless upper airs, unprepared in any one of its senses for the flavour, which is the spirit, of the country it descends upon! Everything that we have used till now has allowed us time for a little mental adjustment of horizons—time and contact with the changing earth and waters under us. In the future, there will be neither mental adjustment nor horizons as we have understood them: not any more of the long days

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[39] Ibid. Arnold Aronson explicitly compares Stein's landscape theater to changing concepts of space and time in a post–Einsteinian world. (Arnold Aronson, *American Avant-Garde Theatre: A History* (London, New York: Routledge, 2000), 22-23.)

[40] L'Engle, 85-86. See also Michel de Certeau's distinction between "maps" and "tours" in the chapter "Spatial Stories," in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 115-30.

[41] William Pène du Bois, *The Twenty-One Balloons* (New York: Viking, 1947), 4.

> that prove and prepare, nor the nights that terrify and make sane again, neither sweat nor suffering, nor the panic knowledge of isolation beyond help—none, so far as we can guess, of the checks that have hitherto conditioned all our travels.[42]

A similar notion that the deletion of the sensory aspects of travel (be they joyous or not) was inherent in the sped-up journeys of modern life had been expressed forty-two years earlier by Jules Verne. In 1872, the idea of a journey "around the globe in eighty days" was fantastical enough that, in Verne's oeuvre, it took its place beside a journey "to the center of the earth" or to "twenty thousand leagues under the sea."[43] And Verne took pains to stress that a circumnavigation of the globe in a mere eighty days was possible only because his hero, Phileas Fogg, took no time whatsoever to appreciate the sights and sounds of the places through which he traveled.[44]

While Kipling focused on the obliteration of the olfactory, however, it is the experience of individual horizons that lies at the heart of Stein's observation that "landscapes seen from an automobile are the same as the landscapes seen from a carriage, a train, a wagon, or in walking." Consider, by way of illustration, Mr. Toad, from Kenneth Grahame's beloved 1908 novel *The Wind in the Willows*, who sees in a glittering motor-car nothing less than "the poetry of motion."[45] The motor car is only one of many particular manias that Mr. Toad

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[42] Rudyard Kipling, "Some Aspects of Travel," in *A Book of Words: Selections from Speeches and Addresses Delivered between 1906 and 1927* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1928), 114. A compelling reading of how air travel has changed the human relationship with time and space is also offered by the novelist Nathan Heller in "Air Head: How aviation made the modern mind," *The New Yorker*, February 1, 2016, 64, http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/02/01/air-head (accessed 25 January 2017).

[43] *Le tour du monde en quatre-vingt jours* was published serially in 1872, and published in book form in 1873. Verne's novel *Voyage to the Center of the Earth* (*Voyage au centre de la Terre*) was published in 1864; his *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea* (*Vingt mille lieues sous les mers*) was published in 1869.

[44] See, for instance, Jules Verne, *Around the World in Eighty Days*, trans. Michael Glencross and with an introduction by Brian Aldiss (London: Penguin, 2004), 48.

[45] Kenneth Grahame, *The Wind in the Willows* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1991 (1908)), 44.

entertains over the course of the book, beginning with a "little cart" that he drives from place to place. "The open road, the dusty highway, the heath, the common, the hedgerows, the rolling downs! Camps, villages, towns, cities! Here to-day, up and off to somewhere else to-morrow!" he cries in jubilation at the thought of the cart. "The whole world before you, and a horizon that's always changing!"[46] It is precisely the succession of individual horizons that can be experienced one after another that excites him. But how different, really is Mr. Toad's cart (a slightly earlier enthusiasm) from his motor car? "Villages skipped, towns and cities jumped—always somebody else's horizon!"[47] Horizons come and go more quickly in a motorcar, which may allow one to "skip" villages and "jump" over towns and cities through sheer velocity, but the progression from one horizon to the next remains precisely that: from one to the next, never all at the same time. From a plane, in contrast, Kipling felt, "there will be [no] horizons as we have understood them."

What does all of this mean for Wilson's Lulu, then? On the one hand, Lulu develops by leaps and bounds: with each new city, even with each new husband, she takes on an entirely new identity, including a new name. Her identity is as mercurial and disjointed as her relationships, like a mirror reflecting the man who holds her destiny in his hands, and it is only by cracking this mirror that she may be free—a freedom which means moving on to the next man, moving on to the next cage. On the other hand, however, Wilson's production circles over and over again to a single point in time. *Lulu* begins with Lulu's death, *Lulu* ends with Lulu's death, and each act of *Lulu* commences and concludes with Lulu's death. If the character herself develops over the course of the play, the eponymous production keeps

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[46] Ibid., 35.

[47] Ibid., 45.

circling back around. Or, to put it another way: to traverse Lulu's journey as she does, in a linear order of days, nights, men, would be like walking or driving through the story, one horizon at a time. But to view it as Wilson presents it is, from the very first minutes of the production, to see the end. We hold in our minds the expanse of the play from its very first minutes.

As for the jetsetter Wilson, he also recognizes that the view from an airplane is remarkable. "Get in an airplane and look out the window," he told an audience in Berlin in 2015. "Wow. So much *space*." Yet he is also acutely aware of how the vision of that vast space affects the viewer's concept of time. Wilson often describes his theater as "formalist"; asked by Holm Keller what, precisely, "formalist theater" means, Wilson responded: "Formalism means observing things from a distance; like a bird, that looks upon the expanses of the universe from a branch on its tree—before him stretches infinity, whose temporal and spatial structure he can nevertheless recognize."[48] One might even say that, conceived in this way, the whole play could be sketched out on a single sheet of paper.

The visual book, reprinted in the program book, laid out the linear-yet-circular nature of Wilson's *Lulu*. To put it in the terms of a flight across a Lulu-ian landscape, the Prologue allowed us to "see" the entire expanse of the show from the very beginning: even before the lights dimmed, the denouement was already taking place onstage, and the acousmatic voice announced it as such. Then we "flew down" to ground level, to see the presentation of Act I. Following the Act proper, we "flew up" to the death scene again—now, however, looking not only forward (to the end of the story) but also backwards, to the beginning of the production.

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[48] "Formalismus bedeutet, die Dinge mit Distanz zu betrachten; wie ein Vogel, der vom Ast seines Baumes in die Weite des Universums blickt—vor ihm erstreckt sich die Unendlichkeit, deren zeitliche und räumliche Struktur er dennoch erkennen kann." (Quoted in Holm Keller, *Robert Wilson* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1997), 105-06.)

With each swoop down to ground level, we picked up new details, experienced a new horizon; each ascent allowed us to re-evaluate the landscape with our newly acquired understanding of the details "on the ground." In other words, the "Acts" were a horizontal walk across the surface of the earth, the "death scenes" a vertical journey that collapsed the time of the journey into a single instant. In the unfurling of *Lulu*, then, we see a metaphorical embodiment of the horizontal-vertical relationship that underlies Wilson's conception of the theater: that "space is a horizontal line and time is a vertical line."[49]

So far, in this chapter, this orthogonal relationship has been explored in terms of the production's narrative, with the linear expression of Lulu's life representing the horizontal line and her recurring death scenes the vertical component. In the remaining pages, however, I would like to consider how the songs effect a similarly bifurcated temporality. How do songs tie into the moment of the narrative where they occur, for instance, and how do they link disparate points in time together, using previous experiences of the song to influence how events onstage are experienced? And, even more broadly, how does the music link the time of the performance to previous experiences of the song outside of the theater? As such, this final section will return to many of the fundamental questions of Chapter Two, now explored from the perspective of song rather than through the lens of the noise of a record. In other words, it will enact a wrinkle not unlike that seen in the landscape of *Lulu*: a return to a previous point of inquiry, now to be considered with a new lens informed by everything we have seen in the meantime.

[49] Wilson, "The Campbell Lecture Series," March 27, 2014, 36:41-37:10.

Horizontal Narrative, Vertical Songs

Wilson's visual book for *Lulu*, printed on the opening page of the program, offered a visual version of Stein's cast of characters or Wilson's circus line-up. Yet the program also embodied, quite literally, the orthogonal relationship of Wilson's "space and time." In fact, the program sold alongside *Lulu* was not just one booklet. It was two. The thick, main "libretto" contained spoken text, songs, photographs from the rehearsal and the visual book sketches. The slim second booklet, however, contained only the songs (printed both in English and in German translation). The libretto was printed in horizontal format, the song booklet in vertical format. On the one hand, the inclusion of the songs in the libretto suggested that they were part of the narrative, which reflected how they were performed: by actors, in character, during the course of the performance. On the other hand, the vertical booklet proclaimed the songs' externality to the play. On the paratextual paper of the program the songs were both independent and embedded in the narrative, could be (in the vertical book) picked up and moved away from the narrative that, in the horizontal book, surrounded them.

Of course, this material expression of the songs' independence reflected the fact that the songs *had* an identity outside of the play. Moreover, the songs' externality was forcefully asserted in the production itself: the language of the songs, their style, and their lyrical content all diverged strongly from the spoken text of the play that surrounded them. At the same time, however, the very means by which the songs asserted their independence actually connected the songs to the narrative. Consider, for instance, the language of the songs: all of the songs are in English. This is not uncommon in Wilson's work, where characters and actors move seamlessly between languages, especially when new songs are involved.[50] If, for instance,

[50] Although Wilson's work tends to be multilingual, the seamless transition between English and German is particularly easy in Berlin, where most of the audience speaks good English.

CocoRosie writes a song for Peter Pan in English, there is no problem with Peter speaking in German and then switching into English as soon as he starts to sing. Yet in using English-language songs in *Lulu*, Wilson was in fact tapping into a significant artistic element of Wedekind's play: in Act V, which takes place in London, Lulu speaks with all of her customers in English. (The one exception is Dr. Hilti, the tutor from Switzerland, whose conversation with Lulu moves between English, French, and humorously accented Swiss German.)[51] In a sense, then, all of the songs, throughout the show (even the many songs that occur during the narrative, and not in the "Death" scenes) are linked to Lulu's death, the event that casts its long shadow over the entire production.

The spoken text of *Lulu* also differs from the songs in that it is, like so much of Wilson's texts, shattered into fragments of psittacism. The songs, on the other hand, are left relatively intact, and within the songs relative linearity reigns: characters may sing, more or less uninterrupted, from the beginning of a song to the end. Moreover, songs are often introduced by a screeching noise, a violent disruption of the sonic continuity of the show. On the one hand, then, the songs function as merely another piece of a general sonic collage, and their individual treatment serves to further differentiate them from the sonic material surrounding them. On the other hand, this fractured soundscape, which anachronistically combines newly composed pop music with a canonical work of theater, recalls a conversation between the opera directors Barbara Beyer and Sebastian Baumgarten. Beyer described a Handel opera with pop music interpolation:

> We interspersed several pop songs into the musical dramaturgy, an intervention that was of course justified by its relation to the work itself in terms of its content. In any case, the result was wonderful, principally because we were suddenly also hearing

[51] See *Lulu* Program, 105; and Act V, Sc. 11, in Wedekind, "Die Büchse der Pandora (1894)," in *Frank Wedekind Werke: Kritische Studienausgabe*, 298-301.

Handel's music quite differently.[52]

Baumgarten (who once worked as an assistant director to Robert Wilson) agreed, stating that such a disruption of "listening habits" can not only create an association in the listener's mind of the "different worlds" represented, but "if, for example, I am no longer forced to plow through a Handel opera from beginning to end but can bring in some other music, then the very distinctive musical characteristics of baroque opera gain new impetus."[53] Baumgarten feels that such an approach is not being explored in opera because of the ideal of musical continuity in Classical music: "this is exactly what isn't happening with opera, because the transition from C-sharp minor to G major won't work otherwise. It's unfortunate, because this mentality just reinforces the tendency to think in continuities rather than fractures."[54] Wilson, on the other hand, free from the constraints of the score, can manufacture sonic fractures and discontinuities, inviting the listener to find new relationships in the midst of the harsh juxtapositions. Since he is not forced to plow through Wedekind's text from beginning to end, he can bring in obviously external musical influences that give the play itself new impetus.

This multiplicity of sonic influences has a literary corollary as well. The Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin saw as the defining artistic trait of the novel a "diversity of social speech types (sometimes even diversity of languages) and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organized," a diversity which he termed *heteroglossia*.

> The internal stratification of any single national language into social dialects, characteristic group behavior, professional jargons, generic languages, languages of generations and age groups, tendentious languages, languages of the authorities, of various circles and of passing fashions, languages that serve the specific sociopolitical

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[52] Quoted in Gundula Kreuzer and Paul Chaikin, trans., "Interviews with Contemporary Opera Directors, Selected from Barbara Beyer's *Warum Oper? Gespräche mit Opernregisseuren* (2005)," *The Opera Quarterly* 27, no. 2-3 (Spring-Summer 2011): 7.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Ibid., 6.

> purposes of the day, even of the hour (each day has its own slogan, its own vocabulary, its own emphases)—this internal stratification present in every language at any given moment of its historical existence is the indispensable prerequisite for the novel as a genre.[55]

The description strikes at the very heart not only of *Lulu* (as imagined by both Wedekind and Wilson), but also of Lulu herself. She is a woman who, to survive, must learn to "speak the language" of "various circles and of passing fashions," who must move effortlessly through the "internal stratification present in every language" in order to move through the stratifications of the society in which she finds herself. For a woman whose very name—the linguistic marker of her identity—changes with each new man, her linguistic expressions must change as well.

In Bakhtin's eyes, the prevailing modes of literary analysis either flattened this heteroglossic cacophony into a single, overarching authorial style, or discounted the novel as an artistic work precisely because it lacked such a "style." Tellingly, the lack of a unifying "style" was also one of the most common criticisms leveled at the Reed-Metallica album. In fact, this particular charge was being leveled even before the album was released. "*Lulu* was first previewed with an especially repellent 30-second tract of 'The View' that confirmed everyone's worst suspicions of the project—namely, that Reed's crotchety, atonal poem-rants would be wholly incompatible with Metallica's fidgety riffage," wrote Stuart Berman in a review for *Pitchfork*. "For most of the record, Lou Reed and Metallica barely sound like they're on the same planet, let alone in the same room."[56] Even the positive reviews focused on the strange bedfellows of the two musical acts. *Rolling Stone*, in a short review that was far less excoriating

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[55] M. M. Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," in *The Dialogic Imaginatin*, ed. Michael Holquist and translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 262-63.

[56] Stuart Berman, "Review: Lou Reed/Metallica, *Lulu*," *Pitchfork*, November 1, 2011, http://pitchfork.com/reviews/albums/15996-lou-reed-metallica (accessed March 11, 2017).

than most (and even sometimes downright positive) described the album as "a collaboration that's less ridiculous than you might expect."[57] Yet for the artists involved, it was precisely the heterogeneity of the musicians' sounds that intrigued them. "We run parallel courses in how we relate to everything around us," Metallica frontman Lars Ulrich told *The Guardian*. "That's why it seemed so effortless. We've never been part of a particular movement or adhered to a particular style people want from us. Lou and [Metallica singer and guitarist] James [Hetfield] have different writing styles, but they still come from a sense of alienation, of being on the outside looking in."[58]

Wilson, who considers that individual theatrical elements can come into their own only when they can be crafted individually, would likely see a collaboration between such starkly different artists as exciting rather than off-putting. Were heteroglossia to reign supreme, however, it could result in an overwhelming centrifugal force, pushing everything outside of the narrative and shattering the cohesiveness of the production. Thus, we must ask ourselves: if the songs are so obviously different from everything around them, how can they be incorporated into both the narrative and the production? Some of the songs from the *Lulu* album need little explanation to merge neatly with the Wedekind story: *Cheat on me* (first line: "Why do you cheat on me?"), sung by a character on whom Lulu has cheated, is self-explanatory. Similarly, the song *Frustration* ("Frustration, in my lexicon of hate") fits well in the mouth of a jilted husband (Dr. Goll). Both of these songs come from the Reed-Metallica

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[57] Chuck Eddy, "Review: Lou Reed and Metallica: *Lulu*," *Rolling Stone*, November 1, 2011, http://www.rollingstone.com/music/albumreviews/lulu-20111101 (accessed March 11, 2017).

[58] Edward Helmore, "'It has so much rage': Metallica and Lou Reed talk about their new album," *The Guardian*, October 20, 2011, https://www.theguardian.com/music/2011/oct/20/metallica-lou-reed-lulu-interview (accessed March 11, 2017).

album, however, and a more interesting question is: why did Wilson and Reed select the extant songs that they did?

One possibility is that Reed and/or Wilson simply picked the songs in Reed's oeuvre that they found appealing. Yet subtle points of commonality between the various texts bely such randomness. Rather, the texts reify the very temporal circularity that Wilson's production as a whole seeks to express. "You're caught in a vicious circle," sings the Countess Geschwitz, for instance, "Surrounded by your so-called friends." A more accurate description of Lulu's position—both in general and in the particulars of this production—could not be found. Not only is Lulu caught in the vicious circle of seeking out friends and lovers who will ultimately destroy her, she is also literally caught in the loop of Wilson's production, returning over and over to the moment of her death even as her "so-called friends" drag her toward her untimely end. Yet when the lyrics of "Rooftop Garden"—that musical marker of Lulu's Deaths A, B, and C—contain no reference to death, to despair, to destruction. Thus, we should examine the collected songs for deeper connections, lyrical connections that can tie together songs that come not only from disparate moments of the show, but songs that come from across forty-five years of Reed's oeuvre. Such points of musical or lyrical commonality are further necessitated because, following intermission, the intercalation of deaths and Acts (i.e., the structure that defined the first half of the production) begins to break down.

When the audience returns to the hall after the intermission, before the curtain is raised on Act IV, the artist Rodrigo Quast steps on stage. Standing before the white drop, he addresses the audience from the apron. "Welcome back, ladies and gentlemen," he begins, "to the second half of *Lulu*." He then goes on to humorously highlight the very externality of the songs and the anachronistic tension between the date of the performance, the era represented

by Reed's pop music, and the time when Wedekind's *Lulu* takes place, that we saw discussed by Beyer and Baumgarten above.

> How nice that all—how nice that so many of you are back again… [The audience chuckles appreciatively.] I hope you had a nice intermission? [A few muffled "*ja*"s. Quast mimics them *jaaaaa*.] Me, too!
>
> This morning, Lou Reed surprised us with an e-mail. And in this e-mail there was an attachment, and in this attachment there was a new song. The song is actually for you, for Berlin, for the people of Berlin. And the song is called *Brandenburg Gate*.... But that comes later. Now we're going to sing you something else. Now, our journey takes us to Paris.[59]

He reaches down, picks up a suitcase sitting on the floor in front of him, and flips it around so that the word PARIS, emblazoned across the front, was visible. Then he begins to sing:

> *Don't these city lights light these streets to life*
> *Don't these crazy nights bring us together*
> *Any rainy day, you can dance your blues away*
> *Don't these city lights bring us together.*

Quast returns to the joke again after the first stanza. Waving his hand, he stops the musicians in the pit, and then look at the audience: "Yeah, yeah," he says, "that thing with the email was obviously a lie. I don't say that at every show."[60] He then dives back into the song.

> *Charlie Chaplin's cane, well it flicked away the rain*
> *Things weren't quite the same, after he came here*
> *But then when he left, upon our own request*
> *Things weren't quite the same, after he came here.*

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[59] Spoken in German: "Wilkommen zurück, meine Damen und Herren, zur zweiten Hälfte von *Lulu*. Schön, dass Sie alle—schön, dass so viele von Ihnen wieder da sind. Ich hoffe, Sie hatten eine schöne Pause? [A few muffled "ja"s. Quast mimics them: *jaaaaa*.] Ich auch! Heute morgen hat uns Lou Reed überrascht mit einer E-mail, und in dieser E-mail gab's einen Anhang, und in diesem Anhang gab's ein neues Lied. Dieses Lied ist allerdings für Sie, für Berlin, für die Menschen in Berlin. Und dieses Lied heißt *Brandenburg Gate*. … Aber das kommt später. Jetzt singen wir mal 'was anderes. Jetzt geht die Reise erstmal nach Paris." I transcribed the quotation from the audiovisual recording on file at the Robert Wilson Archive. It is not published in the libretto in the *Lulu* program.

[60] "Ja ja, das mit der Email war natürlich gelogen. Das war nicht bei jeder Show." (Ibid.) In fact, the anecdote about the email was essentially true. Berliner Ensemble dramaturg Dietmar Böck told me that one day, shortly before the scheduled premiere, a song from Lou Reed *did* arrive via e-mail, and Wilson, his production staff, and the actors had to find a way to integrate it into the production. (Personal communication, June 20, 2014.)

In the general conception of the production, this should have been "Death D," a scene preceding Act IV. Instead, Wilson labeled it "Prologue B," without any indication of death whatsoever. The connection between this second Prologue and the preceding Death scenes was effected, however, by the words of the song. In Death C, it was the "lights in the city blinking on" that could be seen from Lulu's "rooftop garden," a garden in which the singer felt a "few drops of rain." Now, both the city lights and the rain have returned. And, in the same wicked twist of fate we saw in "Rooftop Garden," the city lights express the joy of togetherness while the rain washes away the blues and pain—experiences diametrically opposed to Lulu's own. Moreover, while *City Lights* shares no overt lyrical similarities with, say, *Vicious Circle*, the subtext is one of revisiting old times, looking back and observing the small yet irrefutable changes after someone has come and gone. In this, it perhaps reflects the structure of *Lulu* even better than *Vicious Circle* does: Lulu's repeated deaths, as I have argued above, do not take us back to an unchanging point in time. Rather, they take us back to (and invite us to look forward to) a point that is inflected and impacted by what we have already seen.

If we return to the opening page of the *Lulu* program, to the line-up of deaths and acts, the lack of a "Death" scene preceding Act IV is surprising, but the location of "Death D" is even more so. Rather than appearing between Acts IV and V, as we would expect, "Death D" *is* Act V. To put it in the terms of this chapter, then, Act V, the act in which Lulu dies in the narrative, is where the "view from above" joins and becomes "the view from the ground." In a rooftop chamber on the seedy side of London, a young woman invites a string of men into her room. The first is tall, with a top hat and curly yellow hair. The second also wears a top hat and a wide smile. The third is short, with curly orange hair and shiny knickerbockers. The fourth wears peach-colored pants; the hood of his sweatshirt hangs down his back, as his

silver hair gleams in the light. (Fig. 5.3) Each character appears in the narrative for the first time, yet all have appeared on the stage before. One at a time they appear, speak with her, disappear with her, then melt into the inky darkness at the back of the stage, where Lulu's previous husbands now wait, like so many ghosts surveying the scene. The back of the stage is like a grim catalogue of Lulu's conquests. As a final scream rips through the speakers, the lights slowly begin to brighten, and there, lined up across the back of the stage, are all of the men of Lulu's life. From a strictly narrative perspective, the line-up of men is exactly like that in the Prologue. Yet from the perspective of the audience, the effect is completely different. Instead of being, for the audience, the collection of men whom Lulu *will have* encountered at the time of her death, they are the men that *we have encountered* as her story has unfurled.

For many artists, a death would be viewed as an ending. But in *Lulu*, Wilson saw that death was an opportunity: for memory, yes, but also for rebirth, recreation, redefinition. In the landscape of the Berliner Ensemble production, Lulu's final death scene was the point when the view from above merged with the view from the ground, a destination reached and acknowledged. When Lou Reed himself died in 2013, Wilson wrote him a short memorial statement. "Lou," it begins, "you taught me how to appreciate the loudness of sound and at the same time your soft quiet voice always makes me cry."[61] It is this clash of sounds, of styles, that continues to bring their Lulu to life.

[61] Robert Wilson, "Goodbye, Lou Reed," http://www.robertwilson.com/news/2013/11/7/goodbye-lou (accessed February 24, 2017).

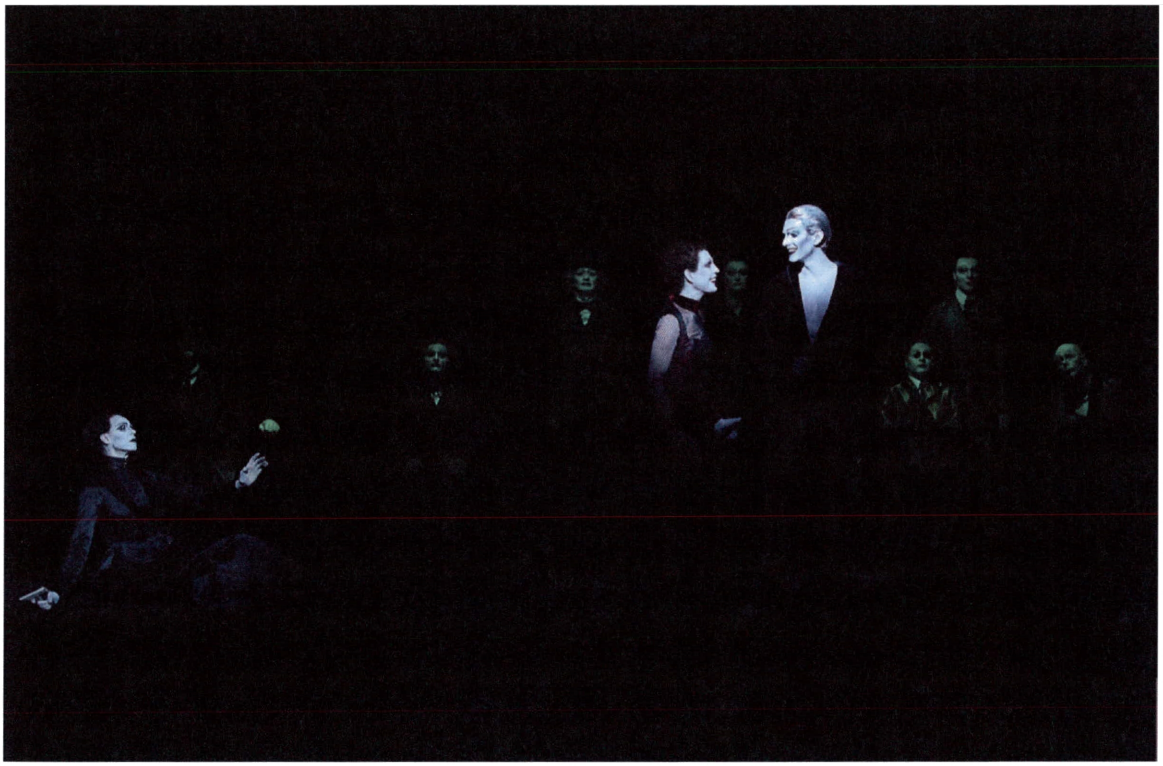

FIGURE 5.3: Act V/"Death D." In the foreground are Countess Geschwitz (Anke Engelsmann), Lulu (Angela Winkler), and Jack (Sabin Tambrea); in the background are Lulu's lovers and husbands. *Lulu*, Berliner Ensemble. Photograph by Lesley Leslie-Spinks.

EPILOGUE:

A Crescendo into Silence

> "Have you ever heard the wonderful silence just before the dawn?" she inquired. "Or the quiet and calm just as a storm ends? Or perhaps you know the silence when you haven't the answer to a question you've been asked, or the hush of a country road at night, or the expectant pause in a roomful of people when someone is just about to speak, or, most beautiful of all, the moment after the door closes and you're all alone in the whole house? Each one is different, you know, and all very beautiful, if you listen carefully."
>
> —Norton Juster, *The Phantom Tollbooth*[1]

> "Have you ever heard a whistle, just before the dawn?"
> —CocoRosie, "Dark Angel Song,"
> opening line of Robert Wilson's *Peter Pan*[2]

This dissertation began at the red-clad foot of the Pope, and with something that could not be heard: the Pope's speech, you will recall Wilson saying, "was inaudible." In other words, the dissertation began much like Wilson's career: with silence, an image, and an idea of how those two things might interact. Wilson's evolving conception of sound—through the glance of a deaf man, through the unattached sounds and images of George Balanchine and Merce Cunningham and John Cage—was explored in the first chapter. Chapter Two took a whisper of sound, the popping and crackling of a record (which, in its supposed ideal state, would have disappeared into silence entirely) and placed it in the sonic spotlight. Chapter Three saw the expansion, through artificial means, of, first, a sound that is as tiny as the objects producing it (the jangling of coins) and, second, a sound which, in the everyday world we inhabit, is often viewed as a mechanical or social failure ("Grease those hinges!" one might hear, or: "Don't

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[1] Norton Juster, *The Phantom Tollbooth* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961; 1996), 151-152.

[2] Reproduced from the Berliner Ensemble program for *Peter Pan* (Berlin: Berliner Ensemble, Theater am Schiffbauerdam, Programmheft Nr. 147, 2013), 20, henceforth cited as "*Peter Pan* Program." Throughout the program, the "Dark Angel" is charmingly misspelled as "Dark Angle"; since the printed German translation ("Dunkler Engel") leaves no doubt as to the intended meaning, I have corrected the spelling throughout this Epilogue without recourse to square brackets.

slam the door!"). Chapter Four began with an explosion of sound in the very place where no performative music is supposed to be heard at all—the lobby—and then posited that musical "frames" create a space for thoughts, feelings, and ideas that would otherwise remain hidden behind the scenes. And Chapter Five expanded the lens of investigation to include music across the entire expanse of a production, and to suggest that song could, at least metaphorically, lift a production and its story off the ground. Viewed as a unified structure, rather like the view of the bird on a branch considered in Chapter Five, this dissertation is one long crescendo, from Wilson's early "silent operas" to his thunderously resonant *Lulu*.

Inevitably, a piece of writing that declares itself "the first in-depth study of sound and music in Wilson's theater" implicitly suggests the onset of something new, a transition from silence to sound. Yet in these concluding pages I should like to suggest that studying sound in Wilson—that famed director of "silent operas"—does not require a fundamental re-conception of Wilson as an artist or director. The same ideas and aesthetic principles underlie his deployment of both silence and sound, and just as sound was inseparable from Wilson's "theater of images," so too is silence inseparable from his theater of sounds. Similarly, incorporating sound into the theatrical discourse does not inherently change the object of study. Indeed, as I shall argue, sound has always been important, and has always been present, in Wilson's work.

While Pope Benedict himself may have been inaudible, Wilson's visit to Rome would produce a markedly audible result. Seated to Wilson's left at the audience (as Wilson recalled some years later) was the composer Arvo Pärt. Wilson looked at him and winked. After the address, Wilson suggested that they make a show together. This, in Wilson's telling, is how their production *Adam's Passion*—which brought together four extant works by Pärt and

Wilson's signature visuals—was born.[3] In Pärt, Wilson found a kindred spirit, a composer whose work, in Wilson's view, embodied the director's own interest in silence. Wilson told the filmmaker Günter Atteln during the creation of the production, "Part of the brilliance that Arvo Pärt has in his compositions is that he writes silences. So the conductor has to respect the space before and after the musicians have played."[4]

And, indeed, *Adam* begins not with a burst of creation, but rather with a gentle, almost imperceptible crescendo: music slowly emerges from silence, as darkness turns by imperceptible gradations into light. A single man stands naked onstage, a dark silhouette facing away from the audience. Mist swirls around his feet, and the backdrop glows with a dark blue light. Slowly, the man turns and begins walking toward the audience, across the black stage and across a long runway that projects out into the audience. At the end of this strip of stage sits a single tree branch, illuminated from above by a single, stark white light. The man walks toward this branch, bends, picks it up. He looks at it, then places it on his head, and walks back toward the main stage. Now a white-clad woman appears; both move with a graceful slowness bordering on stillness. Whether it is effortful or effortless is impossible to say. The first forty-five minutes of this hour-and-a-half long work are dedicated to the movements of these two bodies and the light that illuminates them. Over the course of the production, more figures slowly join them: two men dressed in puffy suits. A young boy. An old man. A little

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[3] Q&A at the Berliner Philharmonie, September 23, 2015. Wilson participated in Q&A sessions on two separate evenings in Berlin, on September 23 and 25, following screenings of Günter Atteln's films *The Lost Paradise* and *Adam's Passion* (respectively) at the Berliner Philharmonie; both sessions were moderated by Dr. Helge Grünewald; for more on the Q&A's, see Chapter One. All quotations from these two sessions are my own transcriptions. The four Pärt works that make up the musical score for *Adam's Passion* are "Sequentia" (which is dedicated to Robert Wilson), "Adam's Lament," "Tabula rasa," and "Miserere."

[4] Transcribed from *The Lost Paradise: Arvo Pärt/Robert Wilson*, directed by Günter Atteln, DVD (Accentus Music, ACC 20321, 2015), 7:13-7:29.

girl. A forest of women in black holding tree branches. Over the course of the performance the light on the stage slowly increases—to a rich, cool white—and the collection of bodies expands to include many spinning figures. When the music finally fades to silence, we are left, mesmerized, with this living forest of bodies and images still spinning, the vibrations still ringing in our ears.

In other words, *Adam's Passion*, like Pärt's music, began and ended with constructed silence. Yet for Wilson the silence that bookended the production was not merely an absence from which the presence of sound could emerge or into which sound could ultimately retreat. A few months later, he again expressed how important it was that *Adam* began with silence. But this time, he suggested that Pärt's music suited his own work not because Pärt constructs silence *like* sound, but rather because silence and sound are inextricably linked. When *Adam* begins, he said, one finds oneself "listening to that silence, and then [when] you start the strings, it [i.e., the silence] only continues."[5] Wilson made this comment following a showing of *The Lost Paradise*, a documentary about *Adam's Passion*, in Berlin.[6] Two nights later, a film of *Adam's Passion* was also shown; on the second night, Wilson expressed a similar idea, but now in precisely inverted terms. Instead of declaring that music emerged out of stillness, he asserted that music was already and inherently a part *of* silence: "You can't *make* music," he told the audience. "It's already there."[7] An axiom of mathematical logic holds that if A is a subset of B and B is a subset of A, then A must equal B. Similarly, if the silence remains when the music

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[5] Q&A at the Berliner Philharmonie, September 23, 2015.

[6] For more on this screening, and the subsequent screening of *Adam's Passion*, as well as the interviews that followed each, see footnote 3 (above) and Chapter One.

[7] Q&A at the Berliner Philharmonie, September 25, 2015.

begins, and if the music is always present in silence, then silence and music must be fundamentally equal.

The opening moments of *Adam's Passion*, however, were not only marked by the unfolding of music from silence. As described above, the sonic expansion was matched by a parallel transformation of darkness into light, and of stillness into motion. This parallel construction, whereby the budding of silence into sound is matched by the unfurling of stillness into gesture, is fundamental to how Wilson understands movement on his stage. As Atteln's camera rolled, Wilson compared Pärt's composition of silence to the movements of "a good actor: if you're aware of the inner movement that's in stillness, when you move outwardly the line continues." Then, without so much as pausing, he returned immediately to the silence-sound continuum: "And it's the same with if you speak or sing, if you're listening to the silence, and if you're conducting, if you're playing a musical instrument—as Cage said, 'There's no such thing as silence'—that when you make an outward sound the line continues."[8] While Wilson illustrates the link between silence and sound through recourse to movement, he also understands "inner movement" as akin to an inner silence. The circular explanation demonstrates just how intertwined the two forms of sensory experience are.

Wilson, as we have seen, constructs images that will ideally create a "space to hear."[9] Pärt expresses his admiration for Wilson's work with recourse to the same sensory chiasmus. "Robert Wilson sees the music, [and] his specialty is light. And that light is almost certainly eternal. For us it is something that seems to stand still and at the same time it is life, it is

[8] *The Lost Paradise*, dir. Atteln, 7:13-8:03

[9] Q&A at the Berliner Philharmonie, September 25, 2015.

movement. The link between stillness and movement."[10] In fact, both the ideas of darkness turning into light and silence turning into sound reflect Wilson's understanding of the extended gesture and movement for which he is so well known. Wilson's work is often described as slow, a claim which he takes care to repudiate, often by asserting that his work is emphatically "*not* in slow motion, [but] in natural time. Most theatre deals with speeded-up time, but I use the kind of natural time in which it takes the sun to set, a cloud to change, a day to dawn."[11] But in the *Lost Paradise*, he offered another explanation, one which related to the idea that music is always present in silence: slowness, he said, "is an intellectual construct." He is interested, rather, in the "potential energy" present in stillness.

Indeed, Wilson sees not only a link between stillness and sound, but between stillness and hearing. He once described a visit he had made to the Berlin zoo, where he had stood still, watching the wolves, who stood still, for ten minutes, listening: "For ten minutes or so, we were like one entity here, the way they were listening. And I've often thought if we could have the same thing happen in the theater, where everyone is listening—the technicians, the actors, the conductor, together—you'll have one entity."[12] This dissertation began with Wilson's ideal that all theatrical elements and contributors should be equal; this equality is attained, it seems, through the act of hearing.

Yet, at the same time, one might observe that there had never been complete darkness, stillness or silence in the opening moments of *Adam's Passion*. The bright spotlight had, in the

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[10] Quoted in the liner notes to *The Lost Paradise*, dir. Atteln, 28.

[11] Quoted in Laurence Shyer, *Robert Wilson and His Collaborators* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1989), xvi.

[12] Robert Wilson, lecture address, "The Campbell Lecture Series: Robert Wilson," Rice University (Houston, TX), March 26, 2014, http://campbell.rice.edu/CampbellContent.aspx (accessed June 22, 2014), 45:00-45:46.

darkness, illuminated the single tree branch at the end of the runway; the swirling mist onstage had always been moving; and before the orchestra began playing the audience had made their own rustling sound. The difference between emptiness and presence was a matter of where one looked, where one listened, where one's attention was turned at any given moment.

Let's re-examine, then, the crescendo of the dissertation, considering not the volume of sound *per se*, but rather how each sound relates to silence. In Chapter Two, we considered how the sound of a medium—the sound that, culturally, is often treated as inaudible—might be not only rendered audible, but is significant precisely because of its acculturated inaudibility. In fact, as we saw, the sound of the record was not unlike the sound of another technology of audio-visual reproduction—the "whirring" of the cinematic machine—which, for one listener, was synonymous *with* silence.[13] Yet, from another perspective, the noise of the record became evocative because of the advent of new recording media, each of which promised to be more silent than their noisy predecessors. Through the lens of remediation, it was the persistent hope (and the inevitable failure) to achieve perfect fidelity that made the "noise" of the record significant at all. Moreover, although the crackling of the record is defined as neither silence nor sound, it actually signifies both, existing before the object of our aural attention begins while suggesting that a song is about to arrive. In *The Old Woman*, the crackling of the record was used to signify an inhalation; in both cases, then, this "noise" represents a liminal moment, the space between silence and sound, a sonic event that points in two directions at once.

The crackling of the Moritat simultaneously brought attention to the song's history *in the show*, thereby engaging the space of the performance, and to the history of the song *as record*, evoking the audience's previous experiences with the song. In this, then, Chapter Two looked

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[13] Quoted in Michel Chion, *Film, a Sound Art*, trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 8.

forward to Chapter Four (where music from inside the performance drew attention to the space of the theater), and also to Chapter Five (where music from outside the theater twisted the temporal flow of the show's story). Moreover, Chapter Four shares with Chapter Two an interest in sounds that are not supposed to be heard. On the one hand, the incidental music in Chapter Four was supposed to be "overlooked" by the audience because it existed outside of the diegesis, and thus should have been "silent" to the characters. Instead, however, this very incidental music became a platform for the diegetic characters to express feelings and ideas that would otherwise have remained unspoken.

The sound that drew attention to the frame of *Faust* was thunderously loud, but even a very small sound may limn the transition from the time before the performance to the time of the performance itself. "Have you ever heard a whistle?"—quoted as an epigraph above—is the very first line of *Peter Pan*, sung in the darkness of the theater as the lights of the performance begin to glow, and thus it is the sound that turns the space and time of an audience-filled auditorium into the space and time of a performance. The rest of the song's lyrics wonder what, exactly, that "whistle just before the dawn" might be, suggesting finally a "dark angel."

Have you ever heard a whistle
just before the dawn
when the calm of night is calmest
before the morning yawns

a whistle cold and clean
which cuts through the window
and slips between your rib cage
like an arrow towards an apple

rosy and serene
it's nothing like a bird call
from the forest of the sea

it's something other worldly
a dark angel it may be.[14]

Indeed, a sound that occurs before the dawn, in the inky blackness of night, is so powerful precisely because the body which produces it cannot be seen, or can be seen only unclearly. Thus, to understand what the sound signifies, a listener must utilize other senses ("cold," "rosy," "serene," the space "between your rib cage") and common associations (bird calls, the anthropomorphically gaping "yawn" of the morning). In this, it is like the sounds in Chapter Three, which must stand in for an absent object and render the object through "clumps of agglomerated sensations" (as Chion says).[15]

An additional layer of meaning is added to Chapter Three's squeaking hinges and slamming doors when we look back at my first epigraph. We have already met Norton Juster's Soundkeeper who, at the beginning of Chapter Three, declared that to make a sound one "must decide exactly what the sound looks like." For her—a fictional character in a children's novel, with whom Wilson might have a good deal in common—the most beautiful silence of all is "the moment after the door closes." When we compare her comment with Wilson's doors, which are rendered present through the noise of their opening and closing, we come upon another tenet of Wilson's theater: silence is more profound when juxtaposed with noise, dark is more profound when broken by a tiny bit of light—not unlike the darkness at the beginning of *Adam's Passion*, which is broken by the single spotlight shining on the tree branch.

In all cases, then, Wilson harnesses sound to draw our attention to spaces, images, gestures—even sounds—that would otherwise remain unnoticed. This dissertation fills a

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[14] Reproduced from *Peter Pan* Program, 20.

[15] Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 112.

similar sonic void, examining the work of an artist for whom sound is not only significant, but for whom the sound and silence are inextricably joined. Yet this was possible only by considering all other elements on Wilson's stage (the text, the lights, the gestures, the images) and examining how what we hear affects what we see and vice versa. More broadly, Wilson's work illuminates how what we hear and see affects what we do not or cannot hear and see. When Louis Aragon wrote his famous open letter to Wilson, he called Wilson's silent work "that of which no one has ever heard." For almost half a century now, Wilson's work has not only been heard-of, it has been feted, critiqued, and analyzed. Now, it may also be heard in a deeper way.

APPENDIX

Production Details

1914, Statskové divadlo, 2014

Original idea by Soňa Červená, Aleš Březina
Based on *The Good Soldier Schweik* by Jaroslav Hašek, and *The Last Days of Mankind* by Karl Kraus

Direction, Stage, and Light Concept: Robert Wilson
Lighting design: A.J. Weissbard
Costumes: Yashi
Co-direction: Ann-Christin Rommen
Music: Aleš Březina
Libretto and dramaturgy: Marta Ljubková
Dramaturgy: Marta Ljubová
Video design: Tomek Jeziorski
Assistant set design: Karel Kut
Assistant Costume Design; Lucie Loosová
Assistant video animation: František Pecháček

Premiere: April 30, 2014, Statskové divadlo, Prague
I saw the production on September 18 & 19, 2015, Statskové divadlo

DIE DREIGROSCHENOPER, Berliner Ensemble, 2007

Book by Bertolt Brecht
Music by Kurt Weill

Direction, Stage, and Light Concept: Robert Wilson
Costumes: Jacques Reynaud
Music direction: Hans-Jörn Brandenburg and Stefan Rager
Co-direction: Ann-Christin Rommen
Co-design scenery: Serge von Arx
Co-design costumes: Yashi Tabassomi
Dramaturgy: Jutta Ferbers, Anika Bárdos
Lighting: Andreas Fuchs and Ulrich Eh
Sound: Axel Bramann, Afrim Parduzi

Premiere: September 27, 2007, Berliner Ensemble
Dates and locations where I saw it performed: July 5, 2013; May 27 & 28, 2014; September 26 & 27, 2015 (all at the Berliner Ensemble)

FAUST I AND II, Berliner Ensemble, 2013

By Johann Wolfgang von Goethe
Book prepared by Jutta Ferbers

Direction, Stage, and Light Concept: Robert Wilson
Music and Songs: Herbert Grönemeyer
Costumes: Jacques Reynaud
Co-direction: Ann-Christin Rommen
Dramaturgy: Jutta Ferbers and Anike Bárdos
Co-design scenery: Serge von Arx
Co-design costumes: Wicke Naujoks
Music direction: Hans-Jörn Brandenburg and Stefan Rager
Lighting: Ulrich Eh
Sound design: Axel Bramann, Afrim Parduzi

Premiere: April 22, 2015, Berliner Ensemble
Dates and locations where I saw it performed: October 1, and November 19 & 22, 2015, Berliner Ensemble

LETTER TO A MAN, Spoleto Festival dei 2Mondi, 2015

With Mikhail Baryshnikov
Based on the diaries of Vaslav Nijinsky

Direction, Stage, and Lighting Concept: Robert Wilson
Text by Christian Dumais-Lvowski
Dramaturgy: Darryl Pinckney
Music: Hal Willner
Costumes: Jacques Reynaud
Collaboration to movements and spoken text by: Lucinda Childs
Sound design: Marco Olivieri
Lighting design: A.J. Weissbard
Associate set design: Annick Lavallée-Benny
Sound desigh: Nick Sagar and Ella Wahlström
Video design: Tomek Jeziorski
A Change Performing Arts and Baryshnikov Productions project, commissioned by Spoleto Festival dei 2 Mondi, BAM, Cal Performances University of California Berkeley, Center for the Art of Performance at UCLA in collaboration with Teatros del Canal Madrid, Les Ballets de Monte-Carlo/Monaco Dance Forum and CRT Teatro dell'Arte

Premiere: July 4, 2013, Manchester International Festival
Dates and locations where I saw it performed: September 11 & 12, 2015, CRT Milano;

October 23, 2016, Brooklyn Academy of Music

LULU, Berliner Ensemble, 2011

Based on the 1894 edition of *Die Büchse der Pandora* by Frank Wedekind

Direction, Stage, and Light Concept: Robert Wilson
Music and Songs: Lou Reed
Costumes: Jacques Reynaud
Co-direction: Ann-Christin Rommen
Text preparation and Dramaturgy: Jutta Ferbers
Co-design scenery: Serge von Arx
Co-design costumes: Yashi Tabassomi
Music direction: Stefan Rager
Co-direction music: Hal Willner, Ulrich Maiß, Sarth Calhoun
Sound design: Axel Bramann, Afrim Parduzi

Premiere: April 12, 2011, Berliner Ensemble
Dates and locations where I saw it performed: June 8 2013, Berliner Ensemble

PETER PAN, Berliner Ensemble, 2013

by James Matthew Barrie, translation by Erich Kästner

Direction, Stage, and Light Concept: Robert Wilson
Music and Songs: CocoRosie
Musical assistance: Hal Willner, Ulrich Maiß, Sarth Calhoun
Costumes: Jacques Reynaud
Co-direction: Ann-Christin Rommen
Dramaturgy: Jutta Ferbers, Dietmar Böck
Co-design scenery: Serge von Arx
Co-design costumes: Yashi Tabassomi
Music direction: Hans-Jörn Brandenburg and Stefan Rager
Music arrangements: Doug Wieselman
Lighting: Ulrich Eh
Sound design: Axel Bramann, Afrim Parduzi

Premiere: April 17, 2013, Berliner Ensemble
Dates and locations where I saw it performed: June 26, 2013; June 21 & 22, 2014; all at the Berliner Ensemble

SHAKESPEARES SONETTE, Berliner Ensemble, 2009

Book prepared by Jutta Ferbers; translations by Christa Schuenke and Martin Flörchinger
Direction, Stage, and Light Concept: Robert Wilson
Music: Rufus Wainwright

Costumes: Jacques Reynaud
Co-direction: Ann-Christin Rommen
Co-design scenery: Serge von Arx
Co-design costumes: Yashi Tabassomi
Dramaturgy: Jutta Ferbers
Music direction: Hans-Jörn Brandenburg and Stefan Rager
Lighting: Andreas Fuchs
Sound: Alexander Bramann, Jens-Uwe Neumann

Premiere: April 12, 2009, Berliner Ensemble
Dates and locations where I saw it performed: October 8 & 14, 2014, Brooklyn Academy of Music

THE OLD WOMAN, Manchester International Festival, 2013

with Mikhail Baryshnikov and Willem Dafoe
Written by Daniil Kharms
Adapted by Darryl Pinckney

Direction, Stage, and Lighting Concept: Robert Wilson
Music: Hal Willner
Costumes: Jacques Reynaud
Lighting design: A.J. Weissbard
Associate set design: Annick Lavallée-Benny
Sound design: Marco Olivieri
Produced by: Manchester International Festival, Spoleto Festival dei 2Mondi, Théâtre de la Ville-Paris/Festival d'Automne à Paris, and deSingel Antwerp; executive producers: Change Performing Arts in collaboration with Baryshnikov Productions and CRT Centro Ricerche Teatrali (Milan)

Premiere: July 4, 2013, Manchester International Festival
Dates and locations where I saw it performed: July 29, 2014, Brooklyn Academy of Music

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